

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Northeast Iowa Community College

Project Details			
Title	Develop and implement a college-wide assessment plan	Status	COMPLETED
Category	7-Measuring Effectiveness	Updated	09-14-2010
Timeline		Reviewed	09-23-2010
	Planned Project Kickoff 10-01-2007	Created	11-24-2009
	Actual Completion 08-01-2011	Version	3

1: Project Goal

A: The goal of this Action Project is to develop an assessment plan that integrates our strategic plan (Vision 7 or V7) into a formal assessment strategy. We will establish appropriate benchmarks that will allow us to chart progress in meeting the goals in the strategic plan. The benchmarks will allow us to use both internal and external comparisons.

2: Reasons For Project

A: We developed a new strategic plan in 2005, with the goal of having a plan that would be used, not just sitting on a shelf. The plan was based on numerous data sources and input from all members of the College. Since then, most College employees have become familiar with the plan, and the plan is used for all annual planning and budgeting. Developing and implementing an assessment plan is high on our list of priorities for the following reasons: (1) No assessment plan for V7 - Developing a strategic plan was an important step forward. The plan includes seven vision statements (V7), and each of these has a number of goals and objectives. However, the plan, in its current form, is general in nature. It does not include benchmarks or measurable outcomes. In order for the plan to be meaningful, we need to develop an assessment plan that will allow us to chart progress towards goals. (2) Limited use of available data - The need to develop an assessment plan comes at a good time. Over the last few years, we have implemented Datatel and established an Office of Institutional Research. This means that we are better able to collect, analyze, and use data. We have completed an environmental scan by Clarus, conducted our first Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), and joined the National Community College Benchmark Project. We are in a good position now to come up with benchmarks and outcomes for our strategic plan. (3) Limited communication of results - Because of broad goals and limited use of data, we have had limited experience with communicating results. In the past, we have communicated results without a context. We are now primed to collect and publish information about benchmarks and outcomes, and we will be able to provide both internal and external comparison data. We need to communicate these results to both internal and external stakeholders in order to improve accountability.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: All employees will be affected by the development and implementation of a college-wide assessment plan. However, certain committees and departments will be more involved than others in developing and implementing the plan. They include: (1) Quality Council - The newly established Quality Council will oversee the development and implementation of the assessment plan. (2) Quality Council Subcommittees - The Quality Council will maintain seven subcommittees, one for each area of the strategic plan. The subcommittees will be responsible for collecting and reporting data related to their area of the strategic plan. (3) Departments - Department supervisors and academic deans will be responsible for collecting and forwarding data to the Quality Council subcommittees. (4) Institutional Research - Our Institutional Researcher will also play a key role in collecting and analyzing both internal and external data. (5) Marketing - Marketing will communicate benchmarks and outcomes to internal and external stakeholders.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: The Action Project will have a positive impact on a number of organizational processes: (1) Data collection and analysis - Data collection will be targeted and meaningful. Instead of collecting a lot of data with no stated purpose, we will collect and extract data that measures progress towards specific goals in the strategic plan. (2) Strategic planning - Having meaningful data will improve the strategic planning process. As we monitor benchmarks and outcomes, we will make adjustments to the strategic plan. We will identify which strategies are effective in meeting goals, and which strategies need to be altered or, perhaps, completely eliminated. (3) Marketing - By having access to results, we will be able to improve our marketing efforts to both internal and external stakeholders.

This will assist in building improved accountability and is likely to have a positive effect on recruitment, retention, new program development, program licensing and accreditation, and funding.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: It will take several years to complete this Action Project because it is so comprehensive. However, after we develop, implement, and revise the assessment plan, we expect it to have a profound impact on the College and how we do business. The expected completion date of June 2010 is based on the following considerations: (1) The Quality Council was established during fall 2007. The Quality Council has already adopted bylaws and is now meeting on a regular basis. (2) The Quality Council will be trained in quality improvement principles, starting in January 2008. Training will continue during the spring months. (3) The Quality Council will establish a subcommittee for each area of the strategic plan in spring 2008. The subcommittees will receive training in quality improvement principles. They will become familiar with the goals in the strategic plan and will start the process of reviewing available data sources. (4) The seven subcommittees will draft assessment plans for their respective areas of the strategic plan during fall 2008. (5) The Quality Council will integrate these plans into an overall assessment plan by December 2008. (6) From there, the plan will be tested and implemented. The initial assessment will be completed by June 2009. (7) Marketing will promote the results to internal and external stakeholders by August 2009. (8) The Quality Council will monitor the initial round of data collection and analysis to see if any adjustments need to be made to the assessment plan. Following these revisions, the assessment plan will be implemented again, with the second round completed by June 2010.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: The Chair of the Quality Council will provide a progress report to the President and Board of Trustees twice a year. The Quality Council will have overall responsibility for developing and testing the assessment plan, with input from the seven subcommittees. The subcommittees will meet monthly to discuss their assigned goals, collect and analyze data, review current initiatives, and establish new initiatives to meet the strategic plan goals.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: The following indicators will document success in achieving the goals of this Action Project: (1) Establishment of a college-wide assessment plan based on the goals in the strategic plan (V7) (2) Designation of responsibility for data collection for each area of the assessment plan (3) Timely data collection for each area of the plan (4) Timely reporting of data for each area of the plan (5) Annual comparison of data with both internal and external data (6) Documentation of communication methods used to communicate results to internal and external stakeholders (7) Revisions made to assessment plan

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A:

- Each sub-committee created an assessment plan for its work and collectively the plans form the college-wide assessment plan. The plan was submitted to the Cabinet for review and then onto the Board of Trustees for consideration. The plan was approved for implementation.
- The Institutional Research Office helped to review the plan and it will support the data need of the Quality Council subcommittees.
- The IR director now sits on the Quality Council so that she has a more intimate role in helping to create key performance indicators from the assessment plan.

2: Institution Involvement

A:

- The assessment plan continues to receive input from and collaborate with stakeholders who are not serving on the subcommittees. This prevents the duplicating of efforts across the College.
- From the subcommittees to the Trustees, the involvement of various stakeholders ensures that the assessment plan is aligned with the strategic directions of the College.

3: Next Steps

- A:
- The Institutional Research Director will continue to work with each sub-committee to refine data identification and collection.
 - The Board of Trustees desires the creation of key performance indicators for their use. We are deriving them through our work on the assessment plan.
 - Given the implementation of the assessment plan, the sub-committees are more aware of the feasibility of the time line they set. We will continue to adjust the plan through this learning process.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

- A:
- The development and use of commonly understood terms enhances the communication among the sub-committees and with the stakeholders.
 - The creation of measurable goals is essential.
 - The greater involvement of the Institutional Research director allows the Quality Council to have a stronger assessment plan.
 - The implementation of the assessment plan also brings the reality of the scope of the assessment plan. It is easy to want to do too much all at once.

5: Project Challenges

- A:
- Creating a realistic assessment plan is a learning process. We need to remember that we don't have to do everything all at once.
 - The development of key performance indicators for the Trustees from the assessment plan will be another learning opportunity. The Trustees meet monthly and so data collection and reporting will be important.
 - Since this is our first assessment plan, we continue to develop and refine the baseline and time-line for some of our goals.
 - Our target completion date was summer of 2010. We have to move this to 2011 because of our better understanding of the assessment process and purpose.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Northeast low a Community College's Action Project update on the project entitled "Develop and implement a college-wide assessment plan" shows that *progress has slowed* toward completion and toward the creation of an institution-wide continuous quality improvement culture. The project contributes to the accomplishment of several processes under AQIP Category Seven: Measuring Effectiveness. The creation of a campus-wide assessment plan informed by and informing strategic planning models an accepted best practice. It also is no easy task to accomplish, in particular if it is the institution's first effort at comprehensive planning. There is no doubt that NICC is committed to creating an institution-wide continuous quality improvement culture. However, there is some concern and a resulting opportunity for NICC to bring this Action Project to closure: given that the Project is now nearing the beginning of its fourth year and that assessment measures have still to be finalized, something that was planned for Fall 2008, NICC needs to make a major push to create the key performance indicators and its definition of goals.

NICC has a strategic plan organized around seven vision statements. It has been designed through a Quality Council and various subcommittees, each of which is charged to develop key performance indicators that align with the vision statement and strategic plan (7P1, 7P2). A reasonable process of implementing systematic assessment is envisioned. The university community has learned about the process and participates in it in various ways. Each sub-committee has created an assessment plan, which the Cabinet and Board have reviewed and approved. Institutional Research and its director have played key roles in this process (7P3). However, there is now a call from the Board of Trustees for key performance indicators (see Question 3), which is a concern given that "the baseline and time-line for some of our goals" remain undeveloped or in need of refinement (see Question 5).

2: Institution Involvement

A: NICC indicates that the assessment plan receives input from stakeholders throughout the College who are not on the Council subcommittees and that the Trustees and other stakeholders are involved and provide input. Clearly NICC has involved the entire institution in this Action Project. The update also indicates that the Office of Institutional Research has perhaps the major role in facilitating data-related needs. Development of system-wide and systemic assessment measures via subcommittees is a reasonable approach, but the working groups themselves may need training in how to design measures, indicators, benchmarks, etc. for their vision statement, and/or they may need the assistance of experts in this type of undertaking, as in an external consultant. IR may be overburdened and/or require additional resources to amass and distribute the needed data on a regular and timely basis.

3: Next Steps

A: NICC indicates that the IR Director will continue efforts to improve and enhance data collection. The Board of Trustees request for key performance indicators will be a priority item for the Action Project's next phase. NICC also indicates that it will work to make the subcommittees adhere to timelines. All of these steps, in particular the last, will be important for culminating the Project successfully.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: NICC indicates several candidates for effective practices associated with this Action Project. First, the creation of "commonly understood terms" to facilitate communication; it would be good to have some examples of these terms and a bit more detail as to their efficacy for communication purposes. The other three items do not seem to be stated as effective practices: creation of measurable goals seems (which still is in process); involvement of IR, and implementation of the plan. These are really necessary conditions for a college-wide assessment plan, rather than effective practices.

5: Project Challenges

A: NICC notes and is correct to say that a realistic assessment plan is a learning process and that the development of key performance indicators is part of this process. It notes that the timeline for the Action Project is being moved to 2011, but there is no specific month or period of the year indicated for completion. The institution is encouraged to reflect carefully on the significance of this delay. There may be need for increased staffing of sub-committees or IR as well as additional training or work with consultants to avoid stagnation of the effort. The Trustees' request seems logical, but it is unclear why the plan did not already state indicators that would provide the information desired. Progress to completion should be quickened at this point in time.

Project Outcome

1: Reason for completion

A: The goal of this Action Project was to develop an assessment plan that would establish appropriate indicators to allow us to chart progress in meeting the goals in our strategic plan. The Quality Council partnering with our Institutional Research director has developed our first assessment plan. Our next step is create a new action project to track the ongoing implementation of the assessment plan and work with our various stakeholders, especially the Board of Trustees, to fine-tune the set of indicators.

2: Success Factors

- A:
- The College has embarked on a "culture of evidence and accountability."
 - We have a better understanding of data already collected through our Institutional Research Office and the IR director is involved in developing the assessment plan.
 - The data collected enabled our Marketing department to share our stories with our stakeholders and assisted our grant writer in providing evidence in our applications.
 - The IR director assisted each sub-committee of the Quality Council in deriving their key indicators for assessment.
 - The Board of Trustees is supportive of our work and we will continue to provide appropriate and timely data for their decision making process.

3: Unsuccessful Factors

A:

- The project took longer than expected due to an inadequate understanding of assessment, of how to partner with our Institutional Research Office, of the data we already collect and those we do not, and of the time needed to cultivate buy-in from various stakeholders about the importance and value of assessment.
- The assessment plan is a living tool that will change with the College over time. We need to continue to communicate with our stakeholders that our work is not done simply because we have a plan.
- The assumption at the beginning of the project that everybody understood the terminology used in assessment isn't correct. That led to some talking past each other. We finally developed a glossary of terms for all to use.
- Some considered assessment as a fad. "People know we are doing good things." Is one of the comments in questioning the assessment effort. Why the need to prove to others now? We will continue to advocate for the need to be more evidence based.
- Trying to develop a one-size-fit-all assessment plan that will be informative to our Board of Trustees and to our department supervisors. Since some stakeholders are looking at the College at a macro level and others at a micro level, we need to be sensitive to what evidence is meaningful to whom.