

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Northeast Iowa Community College

Project Details			
Title	Develop and test assessment plan for 12 common learning objectives	Status	COMPLETED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated	09-14-2010
Timeline		Reviewed	10-04-2010
	Planned Project Kickoff 01-01-2008	Created	11-24-2009
	Actual Completion 08-01-2011	Version	3

1: Project Goal

A: The goal of this Action Project is to develop and start implementing an assessment plan for the College's 12 common learning objectives. The plan will allow us to measure how successfully we are graduating students that have met these common learning objectives.

2: Reasons For Project

A: Our Institutional Effectiveness and Outcomes Committee developed the 12 common learning objectives in 1997. In our recent systems portfolio review, the reviewers identified the objectives as "clearly defined" and "comprehensive." However, they pointed out that we do not currently have a plan for measuring the objectives. They also stated that "the absence of comparative data minimizes the institution's understanding of student learning and efforts to enhance learning." This Action Project is high on our list of priorities for the following reasons: (1) Limited awareness (a) Although the 12 common learning objectives have been in place for some time, many faculty and administrators are not aware of them. We do not currently include them as part of our new faculty orientation. We need to educate both current and new faculty and administrators about the 12 common learning objectives and their central role in our educational programs. (2) Limited role in curriculum and program development and review (a) Course guides include a matrix linking courses to the 12 common learning objectives. However, many departments are not aware of the matrix, and some are unsure how to fill it out. We need consistency in using the matrix across all departments so that all efforts to review and improve curriculum are tied to the 12 common learning objectives. (b) We conduct a program review of all vocational and technical programs every five years. Currently, the program review process does not include an assessment of the 12 common learning objectives. We need to integrate the learning objectives into the program review process. (c) We also need to expand the program review process to include all arts and science programs. They, too, need to demonstrate how they meet the 12 common learning objectives. (3) No assessment plan (a) Currently we have no assessment plan for the 12 common learning objectives, leaving us without comparative data. We need to develop an assessment plan for the 12 common learning objectives and start collecting data for comparative analysis.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: The following will be involved in implementing this Action Project: (1) Quality Council – The Quality Council will develop the assessment plan, with assistance from the Vice President of Academic Affairs. This will include review and modification of the program review process to include all academic departments, not just vocational-technical programs. (2) Quality Council Subcommittees – Two subcommittees will play an especially important role in designing the assessment and working with academic departments on data collection: Student Access and Success and Teaching Excellence and Innovation. (3) Academic Departments – All academic departments will be responsible for tying program evaluation to the 12 common learning objectives and for collecting data to show success in meeting these objectives. (4) Office of Institutional Research – The Institutional Researcher will be in charge of data analysis and reporting.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: The project will have a positive impact on the following organizational processes: (1) Faculty orientation and professional development - We will incorporate a training module on the 12 common learning objectives into our new faculty orientation and orientation for new administrators. We will also develop and implement a college-wide plan to increase awareness of the 12 common learning objectives. (2) Curriculum and program development and review - We will tie all curriculum development and review to the 12 common learning objectives. Program reviews will include an assessment of how successful programs have been in meeting the 12 common learning

objectives. Finally, we will expand the program review process to include all academic programs, not just vocational and technical programs. (3) Assessment of student learning - We will develop an assessment plan to measure our success in meeting the 12 common learning objectives.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: We expect this Action Project to be completed by June 2010. This estimate is based on the following considerations: (1) We will develop the awareness plan by summer 2008. This plan will include information on the history of the 12 common learning objectives and its implementation at NICC. (2) We will develop a training module on the 12 common learning objectives and include it in our new faculty orientation scheduled for August 2008. We will provide the same information to all new administrators hired after that date. (3) We will develop a process to tie the 12 common learning objectives to program assessment by December 2008. The process will be tested with programs due for review during spring 2009. (4) We will test the assessment process with all programs due for review during the 2009-2010 academic year.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: The newly established Quality Council will review progress on this Action Project on a quarterly basis. This will include reviewing that the project has met clearly established benchmarks. Two subcommittees of the Quality Council will play an especially important role in monitoring and supporting this project: Student Access and Success and Teaching Excellence and Innovation.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: The following will serve as indicators of success in achieving the goals outlined in this Action Project: (1) Establishment of a training module incorporating the 12 common learning objectives (2) Delivery of the training module to all new faculty and administrators (3) Post-test determining knowledge of the 12 common learning objectives (4) Completed program review folders that link the 12 common learning objectives to the program and curriculum (5) Establishment of an assessment plan to document success in meeting the 12 common learning objectives (6) Completed program review folders for the 2009-2010 academic year, pilot testing the new assessment plan

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

- A:
- Met at least once or twice a month as a group.
 - Revised the 12 common student learning objectives
 - Implemented and mailed a copy of 12 common learning objectives to all new incoming students. This was done for awareness.
 - Developed a capstone 1 credit course to assess the 12 learning objectives.
 - The course will help students gather together materials and papers that demonstrate student has learned or observed the 12 learning objectives.
 - A rubric was developed to help students and teacher see progress in the 12 learning objectives
 - Course is currently being taught or will be shortly
 - The course was open for any to enroll, but primarily for general education students.
 - A rubric was also developed to help assess whether programs were assessing the 12 learning objectives. It was to be used during program evaluations.

2: Institution Involvement

- A:
- The capstone course was developed by a specially formed group of faculty from multiple departments.

3: Next Steps

- A:
- Continue to mail 12 learning objectives to all new students.
 - Continue to assess the 12 learning objectives during program evaluations and continue to offer the capstone course.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

- A:
- The collaboration of faculty across disciplines in the creation of the capstone course.

5: Project Challenges

- A:
- The assessment of the 12 common learning objectives need more attention during the program review process.
 - The capstone was offered but the students were not interested in enrolling in it. We need to help students understand the importance of this course.
 - The initial completion date of this project was summer 2010. We will need to extend this to 2011 in order to measure the success of the 12 common learning objectives.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

- A: The College is to be commended for taking an inclusive approach to sharing the 12 common objectives with students and the campus community, thus addressing AQIP Category 1, Helping Students Learn. In particular, reaching out to all new incoming students means that these students would be aware of what they should know and be able to do on graduating from their programs. Having a rubric to assess the learning of these students is exemplary. The team applied AQIP Category 7: Measuring Effectiveness by evaluating and revising the 12 common student learning objectives. Having a rubric will also mean that the College is taking a consistent approach to assessing the 12 learning objectives.

2: Institution Involvement

- A: The College has adopted a good approach to the assessment of student learning by using a capstone. The Higher Learning Commission understands that such a capstone requires collaboration across multiple departments. (AQIP Category 9: Building Collaborative Relationships). The College may want to consider a communication plan that includes the celebration of any success with the capstone course or related assessment activities. For example, showcasing those programs and departments that have made progress towards the assessment of these programs would certainly highlight the importance of this project on campus and the importance of the general education courses.

3: Next Steps

- A: Reaching out to all new students is a good thing. (AQIP Category 5: Leading and Communicating) The College may want to consider evaluating the ratio of the number of new students that are aware of these 12 learning objectives versus the number of all new students. This figure will illustrate whether efforts should be increased with this strategy of reaching out to new students. (AQIP Category 7: Measuring Effectiveness) The College may also want to consider surveying the continuing students to see if they still remember these 12 learning objectives that they read during their first semester.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

- A: The College has accomplished a difficult task--the creation of a capstone course across disciplines. (AQIP Category 8: Planning Continuous Improvement, and AQIP Category 9: Building Collaborative Relationships) The collaboration of faculty across disciplines means that these faculty are holding dialogues regarding AQIP Category 1: Helping Students Learn. This is a very good thing. Assessment of student learning is a continuous process and the College is doing an exemplary job of reaching out to its students and

faculty towards achieving the goals of this Action Project.

5: Project Challenges

A: The Higher Learning Commission recognizes that the College is experiencing the normal challenges of implementing an assessment culture. If the difficulty of encouraging students to enroll in the capstone continues, the team may want to consider the feasibility of embedding the 12 learning objectives in the relevant general education courses. The College may also want to consider celebrating the success and progress made so far in this journey of assessment culture. Such celebrations will highlight those faculty members, programs and departments that have embraced the assessment of student learning (AQIP Category 1: Helping Students Learn) as well as promote the culture of continuous improvement. (AQIP Category 7: Measuring Effectiveness, and AQIP Category 8: Planning Continuous Improvement). Such celebrations will also encourage other faculty members, programs and departments to participate in these assessment activities and to seek assistance from those who have experienced success with their efforts. (AQIP Category 9: Building Collaborative Relationships)

Project Outcome

1: Reason for completion

A: The 12 student learning objectives action project proved to be too big in size and scope for NICC to accomplish. With the advice of HLC mentors at the Assessment Workshop (February, 2011), and after visiting with other institutions which admitted to similar experiences, we decided to reframe the action plan and pursue one of the student outcomes; that being written communication.

2: Success Factors

A: The success in the 12 student learning objectives was the cross college dialogue around our teaching and learning values. However, NICC failed to gain traction on this action plan due to the large scope of the project. The lesson learned here is how much effort, time, and hard work it takes to effect meaningful change in institution. With the concentration upon just one student learning objective NICC has a better chance of creating a culture which supports students in developing their writing skills.

3: Unsuccessful Factors

A: NICC could not get traction on the 12 learning outcomes because of the scope and size of the project. Assessment data gathered from every department, every program, every class became challenging to gather and evaluate.