The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Northeast Iowa Community College

Project Details		
Title Written Communication	**Status**	COMPLETED
Category 1-Helping Students Learn	**Updated**	09-25-2013
Timeline	**Reviewed**	10-02-2013
Planned Project Kickoff 10-01-2011	**Created**	09-29-2011
Actual Completion 10-01-2013	**Version**	2

1: Project Goal

A: The goal of this action plan is to improve student written communication and to establish services that support and enhance student writing.

2: Reasons For Project

A: NICC has selected written communication as an action project because of the importance writing skills are in relationship to college success; to the life-long skills of critical thinking and communication; and to success in the work-place and quality of life. We have chosen to improve our students' written communication through the implementation of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC).

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: WAC is primarily a faculty development endeavor, with an intended college-wide outcome of improved student writing. However, all college personnel have been made aware of WAC and its progress and are invited to support the effort.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: This project will have a positive impact on: (1) Faculty development. The quality of faculty training on WAC will be evidenced in the improved quality of student writing. (2) Academic program review. Annual academic program review should confirm the progress of WAC and provide direction for activity improvements. (3) Support Service Satisfaction. Satisfaction with support services (Learning Center, Writing Center, on-line writing tutoring) should be evidenced through use and satisfaction surveys.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: NICC is entering its second year of implementing WAC, with the expectation of having this action plan to be well established in the NICC culture by June of 2015. This estimate is based on the following considerations: (1) Since January 2012, we have used new faculty orientation and faculty development to build awareness and training for WAC; (2) As of Fall 2012, on-going improvement is established through a rubric revamp, cohort size reduction, simplified data reporting, and review of effectiveness; (3) Next improvement focuses will be on infrastructure (coordination of WAC) and expanded marketing and communication.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Currently, this action project is monitored by a WAC Committee which a subcommittee within our Quality Council structure. Measurements for this action project include using a common rubric which allows for faculty uniformity in scoring and comparing pre and post writing samples from each program. Measurements will also include usage of the writing centers and online writing tutorial help, faculty and student surveys, and workshop evaluations.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: The indicator of success in achieving the goals outlined in this action project will be district-wide improvement in student writing as evidenced by established improvement goals from pre and post writing sample rubrics.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: In January 2013, faculty continued with the assessment of writing skills of students at all program levels at the college. The rubric revision was in progress with final revision ready for faculty in August 2013. Revisions and updated materials to the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) toolbox were presented to faculty during faculty development workshops. Revised materials were added to the WAC toolbox, which is available to all faculty. The WAC assessment piece is easily identified as a source of assessment utilized by faculty. At the completion of the second academic year of implementation WAC, it is evident that faculty are using the assessment tool and incorporating this as part of the learning objective for courses. The current states is that WAC is becoming part of the culture but communication will need to continue in order to ensure that new faculty are aware of the initiative and that continuing faculty can access resources as necessary.

2: Institution Involvement

A: Writing Across the Curriculum continues to be a faculty development endeavor, which involves the College administration, academic Deans, the Learning Centers, the WAC committee and faculty and students as participators.

3: Next Steps

A: The next planned step for this action project is to close this as an action project and continue enhancement with the new Institutional Effectiveness office to improve the data analysis of the writing assessments to use as a relevant measure in program evaluation. The current process provides an oversight of pre and post assessment of writing but the assessment for improvement of writing does not differentiate between career and technical program versus general education courses or other program areas. By being able to focus on assessment and results in program or divisional areas, faculty can best identify the skill level needed for written communication in a given area. To complete this, the data will need to be sorted by area and results communicated to faculty and Deans.
The WAC committee will be asking for inclusion of assessment of communication skills in the syllabus template that is scheduled for revision in 2013-2014.
At the college level, the Deans are updating new faculty orientation materials and writing across the curriculum will be included in the training of new faculty.
The final planned step is to identify a course of action to keep Writing Across the Curriculum initiatives available to faculty. This will include a continued effort to publish a newsletter and explore other media to increase the awareness of WAC on campus. And finally, it will include continued "brush up" workshops at Faculty Development Days and use of the Learning Center Writing faculty as a common resource for questions.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The use of a common rubric for assessment of writing in pre and post test provides a foundation of measure for assessment. The rubric covers the essential elements of writing that will build skill. The second effective practice is consistency in implementation. Faculty is aware of the writing across the curriculum initiative and reporting guidelines.

5: Project Challenges

A: Our current challenge will be making the assessment data easily accessible and personalized by department, program, etc. Northeast Iowa Community College is exploring tools to accomplish this, including a statewide Curricunet system.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Northeast Iowa Community College is making good progress on this project. Now that a revised rubric is available, faculty can all be using the same static version that can provide data on student attainment of written communication goals. Maintaining momentum will be critical, with using the rubric only being half of the equation. The other, and more important half, is actually using the data to drive improvements. When faculty see that this project is making a difference, the process will be fully embedded in the culture.

2: Institution Involvement

A: It is great to see that NICC is involving students in this project. Having student voices as part of the process will help the institution understand how students are perceiving the effort and better understand how it is impacting them. Having broad involvement from faculty, administration, and Learning Center staff will help this project reach its stated goals.

3: Next Steps

A: With target completion being July 2015, closing this project now may be a little premature. At this stage of the project, data analysis has been identified as an issue, but there is no indication that any results have been used to drive change. Keeping this an Action Project may provide focus and sustain momentum until collection, analysis, and improvements are taking place on a regular basis. Sorting the data by area is extremely important, as is faculty training. With all faculty using a common rubric, inter-rater reliability will also be critical, so the continued training that NICC identifies is critical.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Creating and using common rubrics is a great effective practice. Once this practice is assimilated into the culture of the organization, it can be used with other common learning outcomes. Consistency in implementation is also significant, since collecting consistent data is a critical step in continuous quality improvement.

5: Project Challenges

A: Providing accessible and personalized data is an important, but difficult step. There are many tools available that can provide the data in easy to understand charts and graphs. NICC is doing the right thing by exploring the options that are available. Another challenge that may be encountered is using the data to drive change. If the data is not used, faculty may eventually see WAC as a burden.

Project Outcome

1: Reason for completion

A: This project has not really closed, but has moved under the new action project, Measuring Student Learning Outcomes. This project was meant to serve as a pilot and model for other forms of college-wide assessment, and therefore, has met its purpose and will now be a springboard for similar endeavors.

2: Success Factors

A: Through this project, NICC has collected 3 semesters of pre- and post-test assessment data on student writing college-wide. In addition, the project has established the use of a common rubric for assessment of writing. The rubric covers the essential elements of writing that will build skill. The second effective practice is consistency in implementation. The College is well aware of the "writing across the curriculum" initiative and reporting guidelines and participation is consistent among many programs. At the completion of the second academic year of implementing the project, it is evident that faculty are using the assessment tool and incorporating this as part of the learning objective for courses. The project is becoming part of the culture, but communication will need to continue in order to ensure that new faculty are aware of the initiative and that continuing faculty can access resources as necessary.

3: Unsuccessful Factors

A: NICC still struggles with having full buy-in for use of the rubric among all programs. Another area that the College hopes to improve upon will be consistently analyzing and making the assessment data accessible to departments, programs, initiative committees, etc. Northeast Iowa Community College is exploring tools to accomplish this, including a statewide Curricunet system.