
Action Project

Institution: Blackhawk Technical College
Submitted: 2008-02-27 **Contact:** Ms. Kedron Wiersgalla
Email: kwiersgalla@blackhawk.edu **Telephone:** 608-743-4404

Timeline:

Planned project kickoff date: 02-28-2008

Target completion date: 03-01-2011

Actual completion date: --

A. Give this Action Project a short title in 10 words or fewer:

Assessing Core Abilities in Career and Technical Education Programs

B. Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer:

The major goal is to have Academy of the Assessment of Student Learning (AASL) design, plan, implement, and evaluate a data-driven approach to assessing BTC's core abilities. The team for this action project will work with faculty, instructional staff, and student services personnel to implement the plan, to collect and analyze assessment data, and to develop plans for the improvement of student learning, related to BTC's seven core abilities. A secondary goal is to engage faculty in the assessment of student learning at the program, course, and curricular level.

C. Identify the single AQIP Category which the Action Project will most affect or impact:

Primary Category: Helping Students Learn

D. Describe briefly your institution's reasons for taking on this Action Project now -- why the project and its goals are high among your current priorities:

The AASL is a four-year project committed to assessing student learning. The first year of this project will end in June 2008 with much work to be completed. If BTC is to collect and analyze assessment related data that will be used as a foundation to develop improvement plans for student learning, the AASL will need the support of an action project team to meet its goal.

E. List the organizational areas - institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units -- most affected by or involved in this Action Project:

The following divisions/departments will be involved: Academic Support; Business and Information Technology; General Education; Health, Human, and Protective Services; Manufacturing, Construction, and Aviation. In addition, IT will be utilized as support for assessment software such as Worldwide Instructional Design (WIDS) and data infrastructure such as storage, security, and other future technology needs

F. Name and describe briefly the key organizational process(es) that you expect this Action Project to change or improve:

This project would generate data that shows how well students are learning, related specifically to BTC's seven newly-revised core abilities. The data would help to create improvement plans for students to learn these important core abilities. The project not only would engage the faculty

in the design and the development of assessment tools but also would support the administering and scoring of assessment-related activities.

G. Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):

This project aligns with BTC joining HLC's AASL in 2007, a four-year participation.

H. Describe how you plan to monitor how successfully your efforts on this Action Project are progressing:

The AASL has a four-year program designed for each cohort group. Its time-tested approach includes frequent and routine progress reports. The cohort teams support each other and follow a pre-planned format. Designated HLC/Academy staff members are available to consult and advise. BTC's AASL team is required to have its plans in place to monitor progress and to ensure a successful outcome.

I. Describe the overall "outcome" measures or indicators that will tell you whether this Action Project has been a success or failure in achieving its goals:

The overall measure of success will be to demonstrate a completed assessment cycle: Plan, Do, Check, Act. The focus is on the core abilities because of their over-arching impact on all students and faculty. Successful project outcomes will be student learning improvement plans that use data collection and analysis information as a basis for improvement. The AASL team's vision is that faculty "Plan" learning, "Do" learning activities related to the core abilities, "Check" how effective the learning was, and finally, "ACT" on that analysis with improvement plans that result in greater student performance. In addition, BTC will be able to celebrate its areas of student success.

J. Other information (e.g., publicity, sponsor or champion, etc.):

Dr. Sharon Kennedy - Vice-President of Learning

K. Project Leader and contact person:

Contact Name: Regina Arbisi-Ebert, Instructor

Email: rarbisi-ebert@blackhawk.e

Phone: (608)757-7694 Ext.

Annual Update: 2009-09-07

A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

The accomplishments of 2008-2009 were many. First and foremost was the development of a writing rubric to help assess student writing. After an in-service activity involving several interested faculty across the school, the assessment team decided that "focus," "development," "fluency," and "mechanics" should be the key criteria that drive the rubric. Once the rubric was finalized, the "Writing Professionally" core ability team piloted it in the fall semester by assessing two sets of writing samples from the Accounting program. The first sample came from that program's first-year students while the other sample was the work of its second-year students. The writing rubric was employed by three different reviewers (the program instructor and two assessment team members) to assess each of these writing samples. The results were varied enough that the team decided to recruit another faculty member to serve as a statistical

analyst in order to ascertain the data's validity. This person agreed to stay on, even creating a database to assist with the recording and analysis of incoming samples. In the spring semester, the team continued to seek out faculty willing to participate in this project and gathered more writing samples for the database. As of this writing, five programs from three different departments have submitted samples to be reviewed and recorded by the assessment team.

Review (09-11-09):

You currently are working on developing a writing rubric that can be used by faculty to measure writing outcomes. In your project description you state that this project will generate data that shows how well students are learning, related specifically to BTC's seven newly-revised core abilities. The seven core abilities are not defined, but it is assumed that one of the abilities is writing. It would be helpful to show more clearly how the writing rubric is linked to these 7 core abilities. In addition, you describe the use of WIDS to drive the process, including using the WIDS assessment process of Plan, Do, Check, Act to demonstrate the outcomes of this project; however, there is no demonstration of how the writing rubric project is utilizing this process. As a beginning step under the Plan step, there should be a clear demonstration of outcomes, which is assumed to be the 7 core abilities, which should then be aligned with assessments that will demonstrate the achievement of these 7 core abilities. From there you would develop specific rubrics to assure that assessments focus on the outcomes of the program of study. You may want to consider articulating the steps that you are using as you develop your plan for assessing core abilities in Career and Technical Education programs to more clearly demonstrate how your project is helping students learn.

B. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

From this project's beginning, emphasis has been on a faculty-led assessment team over an administration-led one. As such, it is the hope of all involved that faculty recruitment might meet with a little less friction than it would otherwise for such an important undertaking. Initially, two writing instructors, one from the General Education department and one from the Academic Support division were asked to lead the team. This team consists of six members with representation from general education, academic support, health and protective services, business, and administration. It is important to note that administration has been extremely supportive of this project from the outset, lending both time and resources to its development. Not only the assessment team, but faculty in general have been offered numerous training opportunities in the assessment process over the course of the last year.

Review (09-11-09):

Faculty involvement in the assessment process is important and it is good that you are using a cross functional team to work on this project. It is also important that you have the buy-in of the administration to provide resources and support. Training is a critical part of being able to develop a process that can be implemented consistently across all programs. There is no mention of the type of training that is being provided, but if you are using the Plan, Do, Check, Act process, this would be an excellent source of training to provide a consistent process as you develop your process for assessing all 7 core abilities in Career and Technical education Programs.

C. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

The assessment team will continue to utilize the writing rubric and collect additional data through the targeted groups of Student Success classes and second-year Capstone courses. This

will allow for better school-wide coverage, more generic writing samples, and an easier measurement of students' writing improvement as they advance through their programs. Assessment of the second core ability, "Solving problems efficiently" will be implemented in Fall 2009 following a similar pattern of data collection through the use of another rubric. Additional core abilities will then be assessed in a more accelerated time frame, with the third core ability coming in perhaps the Spring of 2010. A change in the leadership and structure of the faculty-led assessment team will also be forthcoming. Creating subdivisions according to core ability and involving faculty members from the various departments to serve as assessment liaisons should greatly improve the efficiency of this project.

Review (09-11-09):

It appears that you have a process in place for building out all 7 core abilities. There is no mention of the specific process that you are using, which would be beneficial to understand more clearly how you are developing out each core ability in a consistent manner. Again, a more clear understanding of how you are using the Plan, Do, Check, Act process to demonstrate a complete assessment cycle would be helpful. In addition, it would be helpful to know if you are using WIDS to collect and analyze assessment data.

D. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.

The assessment team's relationship with the Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning (AASL) has remained strong, making them an excellent support system to this project. On-going dialogue with the AASL as well as various faculty members throughout the school has helped the team to zero in on the key components in finalizing the writing rubric. Most of the program instructors who have been introduced to this tool have indicated they will implement it or at least adapt their own assessment tools to address some of the rubric's criteria. Another by-product of this project is that it has helped to forge stronger relationships between faculty members of different departments-- in a few cases, faculty who otherwise would rarely interact over the course of their normal weekly routine. This, in turn, has helped to promote participation in other important school-wide initiatives, such as the Placement Test Score Committee.

Review (09-11-09):

It is not clear what the tool is that you are discussing as an effective practice, so it is difficult to comment on the use of effective practices as a result of your work on this Action Project. It is excellent that you are helping forge stronger relationships between faculty [AQIP Category 9 – Building Collaborative Relationships], which has helped promote participation in school-wide initiatives.

E. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?

Involving ALL faculty remains a challenge. The team was pleasantly surprised by the number of instructors who enthusiastically greeted this project. Many felt that it might help improve the quality of their students' writing and, at the same time, make their own assessment of that writing less subjective. But that number still needs to grow. Everyone needs to be on board with this in order for it to be successful. So that's still the biggest challenge here. Getting faculty to "buy in" is only part of the equation. Additional reviewers are needed to help share the workload of this assessment process. It's one thing for faculty to see how this might help their students (and ultimately themselves) if implemented correctly, but getting them to commit their time away from the classroom, their personal time, to assess students who are not their own, is not easy. The hope is that the reorganization of the leadership structure will include faculty from all

departments to make the implementation of future core ability assessments less difficult.

Review (09-11-09):

You state the challenge of getting faculty “buy-in” well, which is critical for the success of this Action Project. Improving the assessment of student learning is central to any college’s or university’s mission and fits well with AQIP’s Category 1 - Helping Students Learn. If the faculty have an understanding of the importance of being able to demonstrate learning outcomes, there may be greater success in getting buy-in. Building faculty knowledge and understanding of this Action Project and the processes you are using to assure that the 7 core abilities are aligned to assessment measures is important to the success of this project. Rather than focus on getting buy-in for a grading rubric for a single core ability, you may want to consider helping faculty understand at a higher level the importance of being able to demonstrate that students are achieving the intended outcomes of the 7 core abilities through a robust assessment process that aligns outcomes to assessments, which are demonstrated using standardized grading rubrics. In addition, you may want to consider alternative ways of being able to collect data on the success of your assessment initiative to help reduce the workload of a few individuals. In your project description, you state that you were considering the use of WIDS, which can work with assessment software, enterprise systems, e-portfolios, etc. to help you systematically collect and analyze data regarding outcome achievements.

F. If you would like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help to stimulate progress on this action project, explain your need(s) here and tell us who to contact and when?

The project is making good progress, so as of now, we're not seeking additional assistance.

Review (09-11-09):