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## Action Project

### Student Retention and Success

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**Annual Update: 2006-09-12**

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

Several student focus groups were conducted last fall to help identify barriers that may affect student success. Many of the issues involved advisement, financial aid, childcare, and transportation. In addition the students were asked to identify possible solutions to the problems they identified. This information has helped in the development of the strategic plan for the college and provided a focus for our operational plan. Financial aid processes have been reviewed and changed to provide an easier application process and a earlier award process. The college is also piloting learning communities and pairing courses that provide support. Several developmental courses have been paired with a college success class with very promising results in retention and success. While it is too early to determine how much of a difference the learning communities make, the college will continue the courses through the spring semester.

**Review (10-11-06):**

It's good to see the use of student focus groups – when their input is properly solicited and managed, the “end users” of your program can provide invaluable aid and direct feedback. Be sure to keep tabs on the pilot communities, and the results you get from them. Take plenty of data, to verify that the purpose the communities serve is really in line with your stated goals.

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

Students, faculty and staff have been involved in determining the needs, collaborating, and providing financial support for training and additional workload to pilot the learning communities. A group meets on a monthly basis to discuss the communities and share their experiences.

**Review (10-11-06):**

Again, it's good to see a cross-disciplinary, cross-functional approach to project work. This is very much in the AQIP spirit.

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

Data and information will be collected and analyzed from the learning communities. The student cohorts will be tracked and compared to similar students to determine retention and success in future courses. A group of faculty interested in learning communities will attend a professional development workshop to expand the knowledge on campus and to provide the ability to train other faculty members during the upcoming year.

**Review (10-11-06):**

I'm pleased to see a focus on data collection and analyzing in your listed next steps. The “systems thinking” approach of AQIP places strong weight on early acquisition and evaluation of hard data about the project, so having solid protocols in place when the time comes for that effort will certainly make things easier. Additionally, putting interested faculty into workshops is a very smart play – it not only paves the way for rolling out the program if the pilot proves successful, but also gives those who are interested the chance for professional development.

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

The development of the learning communities themselves, the cross-discipline approach, and the selection of classes are all in pilot stages. Policies in workload compensation are currently being developed and piloted with the support of administration.

**Review (10-11-06):**

You've realized the impact on faculty from the project – an important “lateral thinking” impact, and are taking steps to be proactive about managing their workload. This bodes very well for the acceptance and retention of the program; if the faculty feels that the AQIP project team is taking steps to assist them, they will be more likely to follow the project team's lead. It's also good to see administrator buy-in this early in the project. Your administration's progressive approach and early adoption of the values of the project have probably paved the way for your success so far in many subtle ways.

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

This is a broad and far reaching project that involves many different areas on campus. This project is part of the new strategic plan for the college which is directly supported by annual operating budgets. This will allow the project to move forward in incremental stages as other components begin to get implemented.

**Review (10-11-06):**

Coordinating cross-campus, all-inclusive efforts like this can be difficult, but the solid framework and proactive approach you've shown so far will help to defuse some of that risk. I feel it's a smart play tying phases of rollout to the annual operating budget – this ensures that nothing gets implemented ahead of time. The downside is that if project efforts progress faster than anticipated, there may be a longer lag time or bottleneck before spin-up of the next phase. However, there may be conditions in place for that contingency. If you have been as proactive in profiling the associated risks of tying it into the budget as you've shown in other areas of the project, you shouldn't have any difficulty overcoming whatever related obstacles may come up.

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?

**Review (10-11-06):**

My overall feeling about the status of this project is very positive; the team seems to be making all the right moves and working on a solid, stable plan to implement the project. I'm enthusiastic about the progress being made, and feel that if you continue in the practices you've described here, the project will almost certainly yield some tangible benefit to your organization, regardless of its specific outcome.