Action Project Update & Review:

College-wide assessment of MCTC's general education core competency in communication

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Prepared by:

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Action project Title:
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Overview

Primary AQIP Category: Helping Students Learn

Reason for Action Project: To know if it is meeting its mission of educating students and to ensure that it offers responsive and effective programs, MCTC must collect and respond to data on how well students are gaining the skills and competencies identified by faculty as vital to the successful education of students both in their chosen program of study and in their core general education.

Annual Update: 2008-09-10

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

 The academic year 2007-08 was the second year in which the focus of this ongoing Action Project was on the general education competency of critical thinking instead of communication. This year's project had four goals: GOAL 1: Embed the assessment of critical thinking skills into 30 courses. RESULT: 20 instructors from 15 fields (10 Liberal Arts and 5 Technical/Career) attended monthly training sessions and assessed 649 student performances in Critical Thinking in 20 different courses, with 70% of the scored samples being rated at College Level or higher. GOAL 2: Administer a nationally-normed critical thinking assessment to a representative sample (determined to be 200) of sophomore level students. RESULT: 166 students who had completed at least 24 college-level credits took the College Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), with the mean MCTC score of 62.3 slightly above the national average of 60.9. GOAL 3: Continue instructor-training in critical thinking skills. RESULT: Dozens of instructors (the exact number is difficult to track because many instructors attended multiple sessions) received 646 person-hours of training. GOAL 4: Continue working through Academic Council (AC) to assist instructors in developing critical thinking assessment tools for their courses. RESULT: All AC approved courses that indicated they addressed Critical Thinking included a plan for assessing student learning. Accomplishments outside of the explicit goals included the fact that MCTC was selected to participate in a Lumina-funded consortium organized by Alverno College called Innovation and Inquiry for Student Learning and the fact that, in order to prepare for the next Action Project on Social Responsibility, a team from MCTC participated in an AQIP Workshop: Making a Difference in Student Learning—Assessment as a Core Strategy.

AQIP Review (09-28-08):
This action project started in 2004 when MCTC focused on implementing an "intentional, specific, and explicit" campus-wide assessment of the gen ed core competency in communication. Succeeding in that accomplishment, MCTC has expanded their efforts to a campus-wide assessment of the gen ed core competency in critical thinking. They had 4 goals with measurable and achievable outcomes. While they did not achieve the specific numbers they hoped to in some areas, this institution has shown that it is serious about these activities. Each goal has measures, data, and evidence of institution-wide effort, interest, and involvement. This institution's activities incorporate the principles of Helping Students Learn (Category 1), Leading and Communicating (Category 5), Measuring Effectiveness (Category 7), and Planning Continuous Improvement (Category 8). MCTC was recognized by their peers by being invited to present on their innovation in student learning and assessment, progress they have made through their commitment to this action project. MCTC has been exceptional (1) in their accomplishment in this action project. Their outstanding practices should be shared.

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

 This project involved many people at the college: the Critical Thinking Caucus; embedding instructors; the Faculty Development committee; many faculty members, staff and students; and the Academic Council. The Caucus

consisted of 13 faculty members from across the curriculum who met once a month to engage in dialogue about critical thinking and to plan for assessment activities. As noted above, the embedding project involved 20 instructors and 649 students. The CAAP project involved 166 students, as well as staff in Institutional Research, the Testing Center and the Business Office. The Faculty Development Committee provided 5.5 hours of training in critical thinking best practices to 198 attending instructors; 27 instructors completed a survey on the ways they teach and assess critical thinking in their courses. And the Academic Council, consisting of 10 faculty, 5 administrators and several staff members, continued to work with faculty to ensure that critical thinking is taught and assessed in new and altered courses and programs.

AQIP Review (09-28-08):

MCTC created innovative campus-wide systems to address the specific nature of this action project (Critical Thinking Caucus), and incorporated action project activities and dissemination of information through current campus, faculty, staff, students, and administration committees and training procedures. This broad-based approach provides evidence that this institution is committed to using systems-thinking for sustainable change. In the previous year, MCTC mentioned that they started a Critical Thinking Advocate Team, and they anticipated that this team may serve as a model for other institutions who want to embark upon and find as great of success in this type of comprehensive competency assessment. Is this team the same as the Critical Thinking Caucus? If not, what happened to this team this year? MCTC has successfully developed a model for moving forward campus-wide student assessment of general ed core competencies. First, they undertook communication. Second (this year), they undertook critical thinking. They train faculty and staff. They create a committee for driving the action steps forward. They use existing systems to raise awareness, deliver training, implement assessment activities, and compile data and communicate findings. They investigate and choose a nationally normed test to measure their success in student outcomes. They alter and adapt courses in order to better meet student learning and experiential needs to obtain desired competence. They have had success with communication, and recognize the stability that another year will bring to the systems in accomplishing the campus-wide assessment of critical thinking.

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

We plan to continue with the successes from our first two years of assessing critical thinking and to move forward with data collection. We will target embedding the assessment of critical thinking skills into 30 courses (with a benchmark of having 75% of assessed performances being rated at College Level); we will continue instructor-training in critical thinking skills, as well as working through the Academic Council to assist instructors in developing critical thinking assessment tools for their courses. In addition, we will take specific steps in preparing for our Action Project for 2009-10, the assessment of our last two general education competencies: Social Responsibility and Personal Responsibility/Life Skills: convening two new caucuses, reviewing existing nationally-normed tests, and requiring new/altered courses and programs to teach and assess these competencies.

AQIP Review (09-28-08):

The campus plans to undertake the campus-wide assessment of two additional general ed core competencies: Social responsibility and personal responsibility/life skills. MCTC will follow their model for initiating action in these two new areas as well, beginning with campus-wide caucuses that have broad representation from various programs. MCTC is clear in their next steps. Their success in the past supports their ability to broaden their efforts in assessment of core competencies.

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

The Critical Thinking phase of the Action Project builds on several effective practices first implemented in the Communication phase. First, this effort has been faculty led, driven and implemented: assessment coordinators in charge are members of the faculty; training is provided by faculty for faculty; participants in the embedding were volunteer faculty members. Second, intentional, specific, and explicit processes that involve stakeholders

from across campus have been established and followed: AC forms require general education assessment plans; reporting mechanisms allow for the collection and aggregation of data; and existing channels have been connected to achieve goals, for example, the conflation of assessment and faculty development efforts. Finally, the Project reflects the maxim that MCTC funds what it values and values what it fund, for considerable administrative support has been given to this effort: assessment co-coordinators receive significant release time; faculty embedding critical thinking assessments or delivering faculty development sessions receive stipends for their efforts; the CAAP test was paid for; responsibilities for these efforts have been identified in specific processes and job descriptions.

AQIP Review *(09-28-08):*

This institution's use of systems-thinking is incredible. Obviously, MCTC has had committees in place for communication and decision-making activities, but their ease of incorporating action project activities into their existing structures, and their foresight for seeing the need for a Caucus for ongoing action, is impressive because it works. It reflects their culture of continuous quality improvement, as well as valuing the input of faculty and staff, and the administration's shared governance of the institution's operations. This reflects a confidence in their direction (improvement, they are unafraid of facing weakness in order to improve), a clarity in their goals (student competence), and a dedication to evidence-based practices through their emphasis on using nationally-normed assessment tools.

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

The greatest challenge was the administration of CAAP: How to recruit and motivate students to take the test? How to motivate participating students to take the test SERIOUSLY? How to fund the project? When, how and where to administer in a secure fashion a pencil and paper test? In fact, despite repeated efforts to attract students, we were, in the end, only able to have 166 students, although our goal had been 200. These challenges proved so great that MCTC has determined NOT to repeat the CAAP again in 2008-09, although we had originally hoped to do so to gain some comparative data. A second challenge was that we had, in this second year of the project, hoped to increase the number of courses involved in the embedding from 20 to 30. To that end, we initially identified (and found funding for) 30 instructors; however, due to a variety of factors, only 20 were able to complete the training and actually implement assessments. Nonetheless, we have optimistically set our target at 30 again for 2008-09.

AQIP Review *(09-28-08):*

MCTC identifies the administration of the nationally-normed College Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) as their greatest challenge. This institution has determined that they do not have the capacity to repeat the CAAP in AY 2008-2009. Student assessment is always difficult, and self-selection of participation in the CAAP may be a limitation to their findings. This institution may want to investigate other options for the administration of the CAAP, such as included in some final course in multiple programs, or computerized administration to make it more accessible for students. The existence of 2007-2008 baseline data will be useful for future comparisons.