



AQIP Action Project:

**COLLEGE-WIDE ASSESSMENT OF  
MCTC'S GENERAL EDUCATION CORE COMPETENCY  
IN COMMUNICATION**

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*MCTC is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission and a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, North LaSalle St. Suite 2400, Chicago, IL 60602-2504; Phone: 800-621-7440 / 312-263-0456; [www.ncahlc.org](http://www.ncahlc.org).*

*MCTC is a participant in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) which emphasizes two purposes for accreditation: **assuring quality** and **stimulating improvement**. AQIP infuses the principles of continuous quality improvement and systems thinking into the academic culture.*

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## **MCTC Action Project:** ***College-wide assessment of MCTC's general education core competency in communication***

### **Overview**

**Project Dates:** 2008-09

**Primary AQIP Category:** Helping Students Learn

**Objective:** To improve students' communication skills by developing strategies that collect, disseminate and respond to data on student mastery of the general education core competency of communication—including the implementation of broader college-wide tools, the embedding of assessment strategies into individual courses and the training of faculty in the assessment of communication skills across the curriculum.

**Objective:** 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.

### **Organizational areas - institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units -- most affected by or involved:**

- Divisions, departments and programs that provide direct student instruction
- Faculty development and orientation
- Academic Affairs and Standards Committee
- Deans/Academic Affairs

### **Key organizational process(es) expected to change or improve:**

- Faculty development and orientation
- New course proposals, course alterations and program development
- Annual Academic Program Reviews
- Instructional approaches and strategies

### **Rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):**

- Involve faculty from across the curriculum through Faculty Development
- Celebrate in-house experts through Faculty Development
- Involve faculty through work with Coordinators
- Involve faculty through college-wide assessment tools
- Increase resources and time for Assessment of Student Learning
- Implement a clear model and assessment process
- Require the embedding of assessment activities into courses through Course Alteration and New Course Proposal Forms of the Academic Affairs and Standards Committee
- Require Programs/Divisions to report on assessment activities in Annual Program Reviews
- Recognize and celebrate increased student mastery of communication through all-college events and publications

### **How progress will be monitored:**

- The number of Programs/Divisions assessing communication skills at the course level
- The number of students involved in assessment activities
- The number of faculty participating in assessment activities
- The percentage of full-time faculty attending Faculty Development activities
- The number of faculty responding to assessment surveys and questionnaires

**Outcome measures or success indicators:**

- Results of college-wide Core Competency assessment activities
- Results of Program/Division activities assessing Core Competencies

**Other information:**

- Collect information from 50% of full-time faculty on their perceptions of student communication needs—both in terms of what they believe students should be able to do and what they believe students are most deficient in
- Have 50% of full-time faculty attend Faculty Development workshops on the assessment of communication skills
- Embed the assessment of communication into 20 courses across the curriculum.
- From those courses collect data that indicate that 60% of participating students are communicating at a satisfactory level or higher
- Incorporate the reporting on the assessment of student communication skills into the Annual Program Review of ALL Programs/Divisions across the college
- From assessment tools not linked to specific course, collect college-wide data that indicate 60% of participating students are performing in speaking and reading at the appropriate college level.
- Embed the assessment of communication into 30 courses across the curriculum
- From those courses collect data that indicate that 70% of participating students are communicating at a satisfactory level or higher
- Incorporate the reporting on the assessment of student communication skills into the Annual Program Review of ALL Programs/Divisions across the college
- From assessment tools not linked to specific course, collect college-wide data that indicate 70% of participating students are performing in writing and information literacy at the appropriate college level

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## ***Annual Update & Review: September / October 2009***

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

***MCTC submission:***

2008-09 was the third year in which the focus of this ongoing Action Project was on Critical Thinking (CT) instead of Communication, with four goals:

***GOAL 1: Embed the assessment of CT skills into 30 courses***

RESULT: 28 instructors from 18 fields (10 Liberal Arts and 8 Career/Technical) attended training sessions and assessed 823 student performances in CT in 30 different courses, with 78% of the scored samples being rated at College Level or higher (surpassing the benchmark of 75%).

***GOAL 2: For the second year in a row administer a nationally-normed CT assessment to a representative sample of sophomore level students***

RESULT: After many difficulties and great expense with the first administration in 2007-08 (in which MCTC's mean was slightly above the national), the CAAP test was NOT repeated this year.

***GOAL 3: Continue instructor-training in CT skills***

RESULT: Dozens of instructors attended multiple Faculty Development sessions held throughout the year.

***GOAL 4: Continue working through Academic Council (AC) to assist instructors in developing CT assessment tools for their courses***

RESULT: All AC approved courses that indicated they addressed CT 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.

In order to prepare for the next Action Project on Social Responsibility (SR), a group of faculty and staff, the SR Caucus, met monthly to set goals for the three-year focus on that competency. The work of the Caucus resulted in a set of activities for faculty and staff at the two Opening Days in Fall, 2009, focused on “The Engaged Campus.” Additionally, a team from MCTC will present at the Fall AAC& U conference: “Educating for Personal and Social Responsibility.”

Also, during their Quality Checkup visit in Spring, 2009, the Site Team commended MCTC for its assessment efforts. Finally, a team from MCTC presented a session on assessment at the HLC Annual Meeting in Spring, 2009.

**AQIP Review (10-07-09):**

Originally, the institution's action project focused on assessment of communication as part of its general education core competency in order to help students learn. This action project evolved as part of an ongoing process which involved an expanded effort to assess and improve student learning in the area of the general education core competency in critical thinking. MCTC established four measurable and achievable critical thinking outcomes. Numerous successes were achieved in the critical thinking.

Plans now include moving to an examination of social responsibility as a core general education competency in 2009-2010. The institution is to be commended for its commitment to continuous quality improvement of student learning as it relates to the general education competencies of its students.

In addition to affecting how students learn, MCTC's action plan is making a positive impact on leading/communicating, measuring effectiveness, and planning continuous improvement.

The institution has achieved exceptional campus-wide success over the past several years and is continuing to make reasonable progress toward completion of its action plan as it evolves over the various academic years.

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

**MCTC submission:**

This project involved many people. As noted above, the embedding effort involved 28 instructors and 843 students. The Faculty Development Committee provided training in CT practices to dozens of attending instructors. The Academic Council, consisting of 10 faculty, 5 administrators and several staff members, continued to work with faculty to ensure that CT is taught and assessed in new and altered courses and programs. The Social Responsibility Caucus, which consisted of 15 faculty and staff members from across the curriculum, met once a month to engage in dialogue about social responsibility and to plan for assessment activities, which involved ALL the staff and faculty in discussions in the Opening Days of Fall 2009.

**AQIP Review (10-07-09):**

MCTC developed a campus-wide system to address its concerns about specific student competencies in the general education core relating to communication and critical thinking. As noted above, MCTC's action plan for 2009-2010 is to assess social responsibility.

The institution has an ongoing program of continuous improvement which has and continues to involve numerous faculty and staff. The leadership at MCTC has made appropriate efforts to promote this action project and they have included various activities toward goal achievement including dissemination of information through current faculty, staff, students, and administrative committees. Many of those involved have received appropriate training to ensure achievement of the institution's goal to help students learn. MCTC's action project is broad-based and reflects the institution's commitment to using a system-wide process for sustainable ongoing change in the general education core.

The institution has made exceptional progress in the past and it is poised to continue to make reasonable progress toward the completion of this action plan.

Everyone at MCTC is to be commended for the success of this action project - students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

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

### **MCTC submission:**

2009-10 marks the first of three years in which MCTC will focus its efforts at assessing general education competencies to Social Responsibility. In 2008-09 the SR Caucus laid out its goals for this year:

- (1) conduct Opening Days activities,
- (2) distribute a survey on SR activities and perceptions to faculty and staff,
- (3) embed SR assessments into 10 courses,
- (4) identify a nationally-normed instrument to assess students' SR skills,
- (5) conduct Faculty Development sessions on SR,
- (6) work with the AC on SR,
- (7) revise the existing SR competency language,
- (8) increase MCTC's impact regionally and nationally.

### **AQIP Review (10-07-09):**

The institution has clearly identified its focus for the 2009-2010 academic year. As part of the first of three years dedicated to this aspect of the action plan, MCTC plans to focus its efforts on assessing general education competencies in the general education core related to social responsibility. This effort is based on a caucus' efforts which laid out goals for the year. The goals include conducting opening days activities, distributing a faculty/staff survey concerning social responsibility activities and perceptions, embedding assessments in 10 courses, identifying a nationally normed instrument to assess social responsibility skills, conducting various faculty development sessions, working with the academic council, revising the existing competency language, and increasing the institution's impact regionally and nationally.

Given the institution's past successes with communication and critical thinking, it appears the institution has a well thought out plan which will provide reasonable progress toward the improvement of student learning.

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

### **MCTC submission:**

The CT and SR phases of the Action Project built on several effective practices initially 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 are 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; nationally-normed tests are paid for; responsibilities for these efforts have been identified in specific processes and job descriptions.

### **AQIP Review (10-07-09):**

The initial efforts concerning the MCTC action plan dealing with general education core competencies related to communication were exceptional. The efforts laid a solid foundation for success in the area of critical thinking. It would seem reasonable to think the social responsibility phase of the action plan which is based upon several of those practices will also be effective in helping students learn.

The faculty at MCTC are to be commended for undertaking this faculty-led effort to help students learn inasmuch as they have implemented, assessed, and coordinated the action plan. The institution as a whole is to be commended for its intentional, specific, and explicit processes reflecting a campus-wide effort to help students learn. It is heartening to know the MCTC leadership is willing to provide the funds necessary to ensure the ongoing

success of this project.

MCTC is making reasonable progress toward continuous quality improvement as it moves into this third phase of the action plan.

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

The greatest challenge is the administration of nationally-normed tests:

- How to identify a test that reflects what we teach?
- How to recruit and motivate students to take the tests?
- 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 test which may be pencil-and-paper?

In fact, despite repeated efforts to attract students, in 2007-08 we were, in the end, only able to get 166 students, although our goal had been 200. These challenges proved so great that MCTC determined NOT to repeat the CAAP in 2008-09, although we had originally hoped to do so to gain some trend data.

We are particularly concerned about the possibility of finding a national instrument that can provide us with comparable data for Social Responsibility, especially since faculty are interested in assessing not only attitudes and beliefs in this area, but skills and competencies.

#### **AQIP Review (10-07-09):**

Assessment of programs is often among the most difficult challenges an institution faces, especially when dealing with a competency such as "social responsibility." Identifying and funding normed tests can be a daunting task for any leader at any institution. Certainly this situation is not unique to MCTC.

Additionally, involving serious-minded students to participate in assessment testing is another often encountered difficulty that impedes the program assessment efforts of an institution. 166 students, even though the goal was 200, do not reflect failure in MCTC's assessment efforts.

Perhaps the CAAP should be continued in order to provide the institution with the desired "trend" data. Leadership at MCTC may want to reconsider the "need" for a national instrument. Instead, the institution may be better served by consulting with assessment experts in an effort to develop and norm an instrument that fits MCTC.

### 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?

#### **MCTC submission:**

If you are aware of any national tests that assess students' SKILLS and COMPETENCIES (not only attitudes, habits, beliefs and emotions) in social responsibility, please let us know.

#### **AQIP Review (10-07-09):**

Note the suggestion in "E" to develop and norm an assessment instrument specific to the needs of MCTC.

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## **Outcomes: September / October 2009**

### What is the primary reason for closing this project?

#### **MCTC response:**

Minneapolis Community and Technical College identified four general education competencies for all graduates of programs of one year or more in length. We initiated the assessment action project to identify the framework and process for assessment of those competencies - starting with communication. The communication general education competency assessment project was three years in duration as it encompassed both the definition of the competency and the development of strategies to collect, disseminate and respond to data on student mastery. We utilized the same framework, activities and strategies as we expanded the action project to include

the core competency of critical thinking. We were advised by the Action Project appraiser to retire the original action project and initiate a new one when we moved to the core competency of social responsibility. Thus we are closing this project in order to initiate a new action project on the assessment of social responsibility.

**What aspects of this project would you categorize as successful?**

***MCTC response:***

All facets of this project were successful - including a significant change in faculty attitudes towards the acceptance of assessment of student learning and the development of an implementation model that has proved very effective in assessing student learning, incorporating faculty development, and embedding the core general education competencies into coursework across the curriculum.

**What aspects of this project would you categorize as less than successful?**

***MCTC response:***

We lack an effective knowledge management tool for ease of reporting and aggregation of data. This is primarily due to the cost of the technological applications that could facilitate this for us.