

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Minneapolis Community and Technical College

Project Details		
Title	College-wide assessment of MCTC's general education core competency in social responsibility	Status REVIEWED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated 09-13-2010
Timeline		Reviewed 09-22-2010
Planned Project Kickoff	08-01-2009	Created 03-05-2010
Target Completion	05-31-2010	Version 1 of 1

1: Project Goal

A: To improve student mastery of student learning outcomes in social responsibility by responding to data collected both from tasks embedded into courses and from indirect indicators (such as student attitudes and beliefs) as measured by national instruments such as the CCSSE and ACT.

2: Reasons For Project

A: Helping students learn is the primary goal of the College. MCTC has identified four general education competencies, and improving student mastery of each is vital to ensuring that the College is fulfilling its mission to educate students. To improve learning requires that the College put into place mechanisms for collecting and responding to data on mastery. This project allows for such data collection and closing of the assessment loop around one of the four competencies: social responsibility, which is the focus of the next three years. (Communication and Critical Thinking have each already had a three-year focus.)

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: Assessment Coordinator
Office for Planning, Strategy and Accountability
Academic Affairs
Academic Council
Faculty Coordinators
Social Responsibility Caucus
Social Responsibility Embedding Group
Faculty Development

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Curriculum Procedures
Assessment Procedures
Program Review
Faculty Development Procedures

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: The College is on a twelve-year cycle with its assessment processes, spending three years on each of the four general education competencies. The academic year of 2009-10 (the first of the College's three years on Social Responsibility (SR)) will constitute this Action Project because each year of the three-year focus has specific targets set for the number of activities to take place, as well as for the results of those activities (the metrics). For 2009-10 the goals are as follows: (1) conduct Opening Days activities on engagement, (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) via Academic Council forms identify courses with an SR component and collect assessment data from instructors teaching those courses, (7) revise the existing SR competency language, (8) increase MCTC's impact regionally and nationally.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: This Action Project replicates the successful model implemented for assessing Communication and Critical Thinking. The Assessment Coordinator will monitor efforts and will ensure that all involved stakeholders (mostly faculty and academic affairs) will remain focused on goals. Clear structures and timelines exist to permit such monitoring and focus: established committees, regularly scheduled meetings, appropriate forms and processes, proven methods for connecting efforts and promoting communication. Responsibility for completing each aspect of the project has been placed with the appropriate personnel.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: As part of a larger plan, the success of this Action Project is linked to the overall success of the three-year focus on SR, which will be measured by an increase in student mastery of social responsibility learning outcomes. As this Project is, however, limited to the first year, the leading indicator for success of this particular Action Project will be the establishment of baseline data as collected from the first round of embedded assessments as well as the initial numbers produced by student responses on the selected national instrument(s). Subsequent years can provide comparative and trend data to allow for the measuring of final success or failure. Additional process measures to be produced this year will include the number of faculty development sessions held, the number of conference sessions delivered, the information collected on surveys and the successful reshaping of the competency language.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: 2009-10 was the first year of three in which the focus of this ongoing Action Project on Assessment was on Social Responsibility (SR), the third of four General Education Competencies in our assessment cycle.

This project was given eight goals last year:

1. Conduct Opening Days activities.

RESULTS: Assessment Coordinator spoke to entire faculty, and several sessions were held with focus on SR issues, with the average evaluation rating being 4.35 of 5 ("very good")

2. Distribute a survey on SR activities and perceptions to faculty and staff.

RESULTS: All programs/departments/disciplines were surveyed.

3. Embed SR assessments into 10 courses.

RESULTS: SR outcomes were assessed in 18 courses.

4. Identify a nationally-normed instrument to assess students' SR skills.

RESULTS: 3 SR questions were added to the ACT given to students (to be repeated in 10-11 on the CCSSE).

5. Conduct Faculty Development (FD) sessions on SR.

RESULTS: Over 39 hours of training were provided to over 442 participants on several FD days.

6. Work with the Academic Council (AC) on SR. RESULTS: Assessment Coordinator was member of AC and reviewed all AC documents.

7. Revise the existing SR competency language.

RESULTS: New language has been drafted and will be submitted to the AC in Fall, 2010.

8. Increase MCTC's impact regionally and nationally

RESULTS: A team from MCTC presented at the Fall AAC& U conference, "Educating for Personal and Social Responsibility," and MCTC faculty and staff presented on SR at several conferences run by Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

Faculty involved in the embedding process were very enthusiastic about the experience:

"I have wanted to include community interaction from the start of my teaching here, but it always seemed so daunting. This assessment gave me the 'excuse' to just try it."

"These students took what they learned in the classroom, went out and helped others, and came back to tell us all about. . . . All in all, this project was so powerful I plan to keep it in this class and will likely add it other classes as well."

"I had many students express 'life-changing' experiences as a result of this paper."

"The greatest challenge was in defining and measuring social responsibility outcomes."

"I found that when I took the time to explain the rubric and the idea of our class as a community . . . I got better results."

"These results suggest that this skill needs more focus, modeling, and practice in our classes."

2: Institution Involvement

A: This project involved many people. As noted above, the embedding effort involved 18 instructors and 556 student performances. The Faculty Development Committee provided training in SR 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 SR is taught and assessed in new and altered courses and programs. The Social Responsibility Caucus, which consisted of 20 faculty, staff and students 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.

3: Next Steps

A: 2010-11 marks the second of three years in which MCTC will focus its efforts at assessing general education competencies on Social Responsibility. In 2009-10 the SR Caucus laid out its goals for this year:

1. Offer Faculty Development sessions on SR, including a working group during Opening Week.
2. Embed the assessment of SR into 20 courses.
3. Have Academic Council and Cabinet approve changes to SR Competency Language.
4. Develop a "snapshot" assessment tool to assess the SR abilities/knowledge of a selected group of students.
5. Repeat the three questions for students on CCSSE.
6. Develop a handbook on SR at MCTC for all stakeholders.
7. Develop a web page that makes all SR resources available and acts as gathering point/central location for various social justice initiatives at MCTC.
8. Develop other means of showcasing effective SR work being done on campus.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The SR phase of the Action Project built on several effective practices initially implemented in the Communication and Critical Thinking phases.

First, this effort is 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 SR 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.

5: Project Challenges

A: 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?

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. For now, we are opting to measure students' attitudes and beliefs, though we plan to continue seeking an instrument that assesses learning outcomes.

Other challenges exist: establishing a central party responsible for providing coordination and oversight for all the SR and related activities that take place on campus (service learning, civic engagement, climate commitment, etc.); creating effective means of teaching SR in both our online courses and our developmental courses.

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.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: MCTC is to be commended for exploring and implementing strategies that enhance online distance learning. This is an important Action Project that not only deals with AQIP Category (1) Helping Students Learn, but also (2) Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objective, (3) Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs, (6) Supporting Institutional Operations, (7) Measuring Effectiveness, (8) Planning Continuous Improvement, and (9) Building Collaborative Relationships. The project advocates appear to have a reasonable understanding of the challenges, the importance, and outcomes necessary for the improvement of social responsibility as an outcome for their general education program. The College writes that the project's goal is to develop improved student mastery in social responsibility. The College appears to want a process that would allow the institution to measure effectively this general education outcome. Thus, the College's program to date provides an important venue, where students, faculty and staff can form important learning communities that support critical learning activities. The team is making reasonable progress as noted by this year's activities toward both completion of the project *and* the development of an institution-wide continuous quality improvement culture.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The College appears to have ensured that a shared vision and plan for implementation of the social responsibility project involved dialogue among faculty and staff. The College is to be applauded on their creation of meetings and presentations to faculty and staff to make sure there was a demonstrated effort to ensure the best possible instruction to their students. The College strengthened this Action Project considerably by forming the Faculty Development Committee, the Academic Council, and included students in The Social Responsibility Caucus that engaged in communication and dialogue. This communication was between and among groups that may traditionally not interact with one another, and this process provides additional support for AQIP Category (5) Leading and Communicating.

3: Next Steps

A: Implementing improved benchmarking of general education outcomes such as social responsibility involves many tasks and the participation of many stakeholders. The College identified the myriad tasks, activities, and projects that are required as next steps. No doubt, the institution will need to continue to engage stakeholders and resources in dialogue to ensure that each of the component parts of this Action Project are in harmony with the overall College mission and values. The College has a number of "next steps" that include increased faculty development, development of a social responsibility handbook, as well as developing tactics to showcase social responsibility. The College may well want to reflect on the overall outcomes desired with the implementation of each of these steps to measure how these efforts align with the institution mission, values and strategic plan.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The College writes that the "Project reflects the maxim that MCTC funds what it values and values what it funds, for considerable administrative support has been given to this effort." The College reflects that best practices are those projects where institutional values intersect with the appropriate levels of human capital and financial resources. No doubt, the institution will need to continue to engage stakeholders and resources in discussion to ensure that each of the component parts of the project integrate with the overall mission, values, processes and procedures of the College. The College should consider the systems methodology used in this Action Project as a best practice coupled with an adequate amount of time allocated to complete these tasks.

5: Project Challenges

A: The College may have considerable resources at its disposal to support its planning process. The project committee may nevertheless want to reflect upon resources similar to the following to assist the institution in its next steps.

Innovation Exchange: <http://www.highereducationinnovation.org/InnovationExchange/>

Action Project Directory: http://www.ncahlc.org/component/option,com_apdsearch/Itemid,217/

League for Innovation in the Community College: <http://www.league.org/>

The project committee may want to reflect on one or more of the following items, as the committee considers the next steps as it expands this project over the next several years.

- The College may want to consider specifically articulating its desired outcomes as a result of this Action Project. There are several definitions for social responsibility. Social responsibility is commonly written in context of corporate behaviors. Does the College have a specific definition or set of meanings? Is the current definition measurable even with internal surveys?
- The College suggested embedding assessments into coursework. The College could consider the acquisition of social responsibility from the measurement of component pieces based on a set of meanings rather than necessarily relying on one overarching, national test.
- The College may have internal information about itself and could have conducted environmental scanning activities through functional areas such as Institutional Research. What, if any, information could be folded into the College's planning and measurement of outcomes social responsibility that could be used as an initial benchmark?
- Has the College anticipated the continuing financial and human capital resources to fully implement this plan that will be required to provide to your students an ability to acquire increasing levels of social responsibility?
- Has the College reflected on how these measurements will be stored (manually or electronically) so that a useful trend analysis may be performed over time.