AQIP Action Project Update, Review and Closing

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

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MCTC participates in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) of the Higher Learning Commission 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.

AQIP Action Projects are designed to be the kickoff for a continuous series of projects aimed at quality improvement. MCTC is expected to have at least three action projects in progress at all times. For more information on Action projects, visit the AQIP website.

Title:	College-wide assessment of MCTC's general education core competency in critical thinking
Version:	5

Institution:	Minneapolis Community and Technical College	**Status:**	Completed
Submitted:	2009-11-24	**Category:**	1-Helping Students Learn

Timeline

Planned project kickoff date: 2004-02-11
Target completion date:
Actual completion date: 2009-09-30

Project Detail

Project Goal
Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer

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.

Reasons For Project
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

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

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

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

Project Time Frame Rationale
Explain the 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

Project Success Monitoring
Describe how you plan to monitor how successfully your efforts on this Action Project are progressing

- 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.

Project Outcome Measures
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

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

Annual Update – September 2009

Project Accomplishments and Status
Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project

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. Also, 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.

Institution Involvement
Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project

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.

Next Steps
Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project

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.

Resulting Effective Practices
Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project

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.

Project Challenges
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.

Outcomes – Closing of Project

Reason for completion
What is the primary reason for closing this project?

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.

Success Factors
What aspects of this project would you categorize as successful?

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.

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

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.