

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Southwest Wisconsin Technical College

Project Details		
Title	Expand sources of benchmarking data beyond the Wisconsin Technical College System	Status REVIEWED
Category	Any Category	Updated 06-29-2013
Timeline		Reviewed 07-15-2013
	Planned Project Kickoff 01-10-2011	Created 12-08-2010
	Target Completion 06-28-2013	Version 2

1: Project Goal

A: Southwest Tech has numerous sources of data available for benchmarking to other Colleges in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS). Such benchmarking is a common practice in all areas of the College operations. Benchmarking needs to be expanded beyond this geographic area to aid in the growth of the continuous improvement culture of the College.

HLC Review from 7-12-12 noted that this project is nearing completion. The project remains active at this time pending an update report from the Institutional Advancement Office staff. HLC review noted that there is "an opportunity for additional reflection on the data needs of the college and how those data will support the attainment of institutional objectives." This feedback will direct us as we move to completion of the project on or before June 2013.

2: Reasons For Project

A: Southwest Tech submitted its Systems Portfolio in June, 2010. After reviewing the Feedback Report that we received in September, 2010, it is obvious one of our most significant areas for improvement is benchmarking beyond the WTCS colleges. Benchmarking is the only strategic issue identified by the portfolio review team. Discussions with the College Continuous Improvement Team and the District Board of Directors led to the decision to add this Action Project at this time.

We have identified 20 community colleges to compare ourselves to nationally in relationship to IPEDS data: 3 Iowa colleges, 5 Illinois colleges, 4 Minnesota colleges, 2 Michigan colleges, 2 Ohio colleges, 1 Kansas college, 2 South Dakota colleges and 1 Wisconsin college that is not a member of the Wisconsin Technical College System. In addition, we will also benchmark ourselves against 5 WTCS colleges: Nicolet TC, Indianhead TC, Mid-state TC, Blackhawk TC and Lakeshore TC. We identified these 25 colleges based on the following criteria: similar or equal size, rural location, similar programming, as competitors for our students. The Institutional Advancement Office will collect data and lead the review.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: The key institutional departments, programs, divisions, and/or units that will be affected by this Action Project include Learning Services, Students Services, Support Services, Human Resources, Institutional Advancement and Workforce Training and Economic Development. Results of this Action Project will impact all College departments to some extent.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: The goal of this action project is to improve the benchmarking processes at the College. Improvement of other individual continuous improvement processes are anticipated, but will not be identified until new benchmarking tools are chosen and implemented and until comparable educational institutions are identified.

Comparable educational institutions have been identified. New benchmarking tools need to be identified.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: The target completion for this project is three years. The following activities are included in the project timeline.

01/10/11: Introduction of new Action Project to faculty and staff at College Initiative Day

By 06/30/11: Survey instruments and data sources currently used by the College identified

By 09/30/11: Data gaps identified

By 12/30/11: Decision made as to which current survey instruments will be replaced with those providing national norms. Decision on which data gaps need to be addressed.

By 06/30/12: Nationally normed instruments and data sources chosen for implementation in 2012 - 2013 academic year.

This timeline will allow all-staff input and specific research concerning data collection instruments and data sources available to expand benchmarking.

07/01/12 - 06/30/13: Begin implementation

The Executive Team is finalizing the measures of significance for each item in our Strategic Plan. Once those are identified, we will benchmark with our identified colleges.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Progress of the Action Project will be assessed based on the completion of activities included in the timeline above.

The Institutional Advancement Office is leading and monitoring the completion of activities included in the above timeline.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: By the end of the Action Project, at least four additional benchmarking opportunities to colleges beyond the WTCS will be ready for implementation. At that time, actual gathering and analysis of new data may be an appropriate new Action Project.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: This year's accomplishment was the completion of the Noel-Levitz Institutional Priorities Survey (IPS) by college personnel. This survey allows Southwest Tech to better align college personnel's perspective on student satisfaction. By analyzing the comparative data, Southwest Tech can address gaps in understanding between college personnel and students' perceptions. This can provide opportunities to identify further action projects to address these gaps.

Southwest Tech also became a member of the Community College Leadership Forum (CCLF). This resource provides access to research completed in other two-year colleges that can allow us to learn from institutions similar to us. We are accessing research completed by other institutions and making decisions on how best to implement these practices within our organization.

This year was a year of transition for Southwest Tech. A new Vice President for Student and Academic Affairs was hired and started his year on August 15, 2012. During the first year he also served in the role of Dean of Industry due to reorganization that predated his hire. In January 2013 he assumed the role of ALO as one of his responsibilities is to lead the AQIP process. Given these new roles, familiarizing himself with the past accomplishments, and planning for the writing of the 2014 Systems Portfolio created some challenges from an organizational point of view. In May, a new Dean of Industry was appointed with a start date of July 1, 2013 and this has allowed the Vice President to focus more attention on the AQIP processes. As a result of these changes, monitoring of the progress of this action project has been a low priority. This will change in the months ahead but contrary to earlier projections, this project will not be considered complete.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The administration has discussed methods of collecting feedback from faculty & staff that can be compared with other organizations. This year, in addition to the student administered SSI from Noel-Levitz, we also included the Institutional Priorities Survey (IPS) to gain college personnel's perspective. Noel-Levitz is able to provide comparative data from other institutions. The results have been returned to the college and the Student and Academic Affairs Council (SAAC) has reviewed the results. The SAAC is comprised of the Vice President of Student & Academic Affairs, Dean of Business & Management, & General Education, Dean of Health, Education & Public

Safety, and Dean of Agriculture, Industry & Trades, Director of Student Services, Director of Institutional Advancements/Grants, & Director of Teaching, Learning, & Academic Outreach. These results will be shared with faculty and staff during fall In-Service Day.

3: Next Steps

A: The intent is to complete the identification of institutions we will benchmark results against outside of the state of Wisconsin. We have identified perspective institutions but need to finalize the list and analyze the data.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Perhaps the most compelling change to emerge from this action project is identification of institutions that are enough like the Technical Colleges of Wisconsin to provide meaningful comparisons. Since we do not have a liberal arts focus, Southwest Tech is different from typical comprehensive community colleges. While General Education is an important component of the education process in attaining a technical education the lack of typical liberal arts courses creates unique differences. When comparing ourselves to institutions out-of-state, we need to identify institutions with similar missions or we risk comparisons that lack compatibility with our educational objectives.

5: Project Challenges

A: Our biggest challenge has been the transitioning of a new lead into the AQIP process. The Vice President for Student & Academic Affairs has been involved with two other AQIP institutions. While this was good experience there were significant differences between involvement and leading a process. He has attended listening sessions and knows that the Higher Learning Commission is aware that transitioning new ALO into their role and creating professional development processes for new Presidents and senior administrators will be important improvements to the process.

Another challenge for Southwest Tech is the development of a better transitional process related to AQIP. Had the new Vice President not had the AQIP experience elsewhere our outcome would have been significantly different. The ALO will be discussing ways to transition leadership of AQIP so that the institution has intact processes.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The institution is making progress in broadening associations and expanding benchmarking opportunities and, in doing so, has realized potential benefits that will serve the college. The time spent in analysis of the data demonstrates a commitment to AQIP Categories 7 Measuring Effectiveness and 8 Planning Continuous Improvement, along with the Principles of High Performing Organizations Learning-oriented and Fact-based Information Gathering. The review aligns with AQIP Category 3 Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs.

The challenge of newly positioned leaders has slowed the progress of this action project. The institution is encouraged to focus on its mission and on the intended outcomes for this action project, supporting HLC Criteria 5 Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness.

Though the action project will not be completed by the target date, the intent to see it through to completion shows a commitment to the Principle of High Performing Organizations Integrity in Words and Deeds.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The institution is commended for the inclusion and involvement on the Student and Academic Affairs Council, reflective of the Principle of High Performing Organizations Broad-based Involvement. Representation appears to be reflective of the broader campus and includes the appropriate stakeholders. Sharing the results of the surveys and data analysis, as it applies to the institution, supports AQIP Category 5 Leading and Communicating and strengthens inclusion across campus through the involvement of faculty and staff.

3: Next Steps

A: The stated next steps are logical and work towards the completion of the action project goals. The membership in the Community College Leadership Forum and the subscription to Noel-Levitz may assist in the identification of like-kind institutions for benchmarking purposes. The comparison of the institutional performance measures to those of similar, external institutions will serve the college to better understand areas in which to concentrate improvement efforts, aligning the institution with AQIP Category 7 Measuring Effectiveness.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The acknowledgement of the institution's uniqueness with the effective practice to identify other institutions with comparative data is reflective of the Principle of High Performing Organizations Agility and Responsiveness to Change. The institution is encouraged to continue to identify those institutions in order to see the action project to completion. The effective use of comparison data reflects HLC Criterion 5 Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness where "the institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness."

5: Project Challenges

A: The stated challenges involving change of leadership and the experience with AQIP are not unique to this institution however, if not addressed, they might impede timely progress and completion of the action project. The institution is encouraged to elicit help by consulting with AQIP, or by requesting a mentor from an institution that has experienced similar transitions. AQIP Category 9 Building Collaborative Relationship and the Principle of High Performing Organizations Promoting Collaboration encourage institutions to make best use of associations with other educational organizations. The broad-based involvement of others across campus throughout the action project should assist with the transition of those in leadership and serve to keep the project moving forward.