

# The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

## Southwest Wisconsin Technical College

Project Details		
<b>Title</b>	Develop a Method for Disseminating Information; Improve Communication Processes.	<b>Status</b> COMPLETED
<b>Category</b>	5-Leading and Communicating	<b>Updated</b> 02-27-2012
<b>Timeline</b>		<b>Reviewed</b> 03-14-2012
	<b>Planned Project Kickoff</b> 08-25-2008	<b>Created</b> 11-24-2009
	<b>Actual Completion</b> 06-25-2013	<b>Version</b> 3

### 1: Project Goal

**A:** The goal of this project is to define what, to whom, when, and how to communicate. The project will allow SWTC to begin the process of cultivating a campus culture that fosters open, ethical, and professional communication.

### 2: Reasons For Project

**A:** -AQIP feedback -PACE (Personal Assessment of the College Environment) survey results completed by all part- and full-time employees. -The President's Cabinet identified the need to further discuss and learn of areas of concern by employees regarding the extent to which decisions are made at the appropriate level. -Communication channels are not clearly defined. We need to find out how employees want to be communicated to regarding various issues.

### 3: Organizational Areas Affected

**A:** The entire college including adjunct instructional staff

### 4: Key Organizational Process(es)

**A:** -The process by which information about decisions is shared needs to be better defined, understood and used. -Understanding the communication needs of all employees.

### 5: Project Time Frame Rationale

**A:** \*Examine ways the campus communicates \*Identify existing communication systems (what works, what doesn't) \*Define open, ethical, professional communication as it relates to our campus culture \*Conduct a survey to document the communication process and identify gaps  
Timeline: November 2008 – administer survey January 2009 – tabulate survey April 2009 – identify gaps and make recommendations August 2009 – provide feedback to entire college August 2010 – implement processes January 2011 – conduct post survey

### 6: Project Success Monitoring

**A:** -Monthly updates -Analysis of survey results -Identification of strengths, weaknesses, gaps -Regular team meetings -Identify the number of processes developed or improved -Consider conducting periodic "how are we doing" surveys

### 7: Project Outcome Measures

**A:** -Improved employee satisfaction measured by post survey -Greater awareness of institutional issues measured by post survey - Implementation of processes -Completion of identified projects -10% increase in positive responses measured by post survey -Higher score on PACE Survey of 2011

## Project Update

### 1: Project Accomplishments and Status

**A:** This project began in December 2010 after the College completed the PACE (Personal Assessment of the College Environment) with all staff. A cross-departmental committee was formed to (1) identify existing communication systems, and (2) define open, ethical and professional communication as it relates to campus culture. The committee first identified the current communication systems on campus and took the following actions:

- Created academic division newsletters to share highlights, accomplishments, events and staff accomplishments with the College via our new Intranet SharePoint software site. Committee work, program curriculum changes, new policies and announcements are posted. Each division and department has a page to post items for internal viewing.
- Media monitors in all buildings were updated
- Fiber optic connections were updated
- An outdoor, electronic media billboard was installed on the highway to highlight current events, new programs, accomplishments
- Two internally published newsletters, The Great College News and the Blue & Gold, were revamped and updated
- An Electronic *Suggestion Box* was developed with suggestions to the Human Resources Department that are reviewed by the President's Cabinet
- A traditional suggestion box was also installed outside of the Human Resources Department for those not comfortable with technology
- In-service events now include time to share college-wide news and updates
- Our new Continuous Improvement (CI) Log morphed into an electronic "*Ideas Page*" where any staff member can post an idea or suggestion for process improvement without the systematic information required for the former CI Log.
- The number of press releases were increased
- Facebook pages for programs were created and the Southwest Tech Facebook page was expanded
- The "You Matter" site was developed to acknowledge staff who go "above and beyond" their normal tasks on our SharePoint site

We are currently reviewing this project to determine whether to focus the scope more clearly or retire the project.

### 2: Institution Involvement

**A:** The committee working on this project was a cross-departmental team of instructors, staff and administration. A survey was sent out to all employees of the College asking for input in three areas of communication: professional, ethical, and open communication. A large number of surveys were collected and the committee believed that they had collected enough information to make judgments on how to make improvements. Many departments were involved in the actions that resulted from this committee including: marketing, information technology, all academic divisions, student services, institutional advancement, human resources and physical plant. Information is gathered through suggestion boxes that are reviewed weekly.

### 3: Next Steps

**A:** We plan to continue building trust and open communication across campus under the leadership of our new president who began July 1, 2011. We will:

- Change completion date to June 30, 2012 due to challenges completing the Action Plan
- Review and adjust the membership of the Communication Team due to retirements and reassignments
- Determine a new communication focus for the team or retire the project
- Continue to expand the scope and usage of the SharePoint Intranet site
- Create a formal orientation process for adjunct instructors

### 4: Resulting Effective Practices

**A:** Using SharePoint software, we have developed an effective practice to convey and gather information that enhances communication across the College. We have embedded SharePoint into the College's communication environment. We now have an effective practice

using our *Idea Page* and Suggestion Box that has been used by staff. All suggestions and ideas receive a response and many ideas have resulted in process improvement.

## 5: Project Challenges

**A:** In spring 2011, the State of Wisconsin implemented a budget readjustment act that resulted in changes in union representation and the need for employees to add more to their benefit packages. The resulting budget cycle created a lack of trust and tense communication since the College did not really know specifics of the state budget cuts. Everyone at the College was unsure of the status of their job creating a very stressful and anxious environment for everyone.

Our president and vice-president both retired in June 2011 creating a major change of leadership. Our new president started on July 1, 2011 and has been very open and communicative. We believe that this change of leadership at the top will result in a more trusting, open and ethical environment.

Finally, our union contract with instructional and support staff expires on June 30, 2013. We are beginning a process to develop an Employee Handbook with input from the faculty, support staff and administration. This process will be completed with work teams and review of several drafts by all employees before implementation.

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## Update Review

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### 1: Project Accomplishments and Status

**A:** 1. Good work! The institution has made a considerable amount of progress on this project in 3 years and is to be commended for improving its communication system. It is especially noteworthy that the institution has considered gathering feedback from stakeholders in a more real-time manner (suggestion box and CI Log). This demonstrates both a commitment to Category 3 (Understanding Students and Stakeholders' Needs) and Category 4 (Valuing People). Also noteworthy is the You Matters site which aligns with the intent of Category 4. It is clear that the institution has made great strides in establishing a 2 way communication system. Three years is a long time for an action project. The institution should consider celebrating joyfully all its success and retire this project. It could declare another action project to focus on further improving processes in Leading and Communicating (Category 5), if needed.

### 2: Institution Involvement

**A:** The institution is to be commended for creating a cross-departmental communications committee with broad representation from all parts of the campus. Fostering broad-based involvement and building collaboration are key principles of high performing organizations which are demonstrated through this project. Also beneficial is the gathering of survey data from stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of the communication processes, which aligns with another key principle of high performing organizations (fact-based information gathering). The institution may want to consider a second action project focusing on communication with external stakeholders and assessment of those efforts.

### 3: Next Steps

**A:** Building trust is essential for any organization and this institution is clearly committed to building trust and respecting people. As mentioned above, this project could be completed and a new one declared as needed. Retiring this project at this time, considering the change in leadership and membership of the committee may be especially appropriate. Be sure to celebrate all the hard work and accomplishments made.

### 4: Resulting Effective Practices

**A:** Good work! The institution has effectively used technology to improve its communication process with its internal stakeholders. It is especially noteworthy that it was able to use the technology as a tool and part of the solution instead of using technology as the sole solution with focusing on process. The institution may want to consider assessing the effectiveness of the tools and the ways stakeholders are able to submit suggestions and feedback. This assessment of the process may suggest improvements to the

process itself.

## 5: Project Challenges

A: The budget cuts and other economic and political issues in WI this year are a tremendous challenge for an institution of higher education. In addition to this, a change in leadership (which can be a significant challenge by itself) does indeed represent a substantial challenge to the culture of trust, respect and open communication that the institution has worked so hard for the past 3 years. It is truly a hopeful sign that the new President started his/her tenure by being open and communicative. The leaders of this action project may want to consider sharing with the President in an open and frank fashion, the impact this project has had at the institution and the importance of keeping the momentum going. The development of an employee handbook with input from internal stakeholders is a wonderful, proactive step to addressing the upcoming union contract negotiations. Good luck!

## Project Outcome

### 1: Reason for completion

A: We have accomplished the objectives.

### 2: Success Factors

A: Identification of technologies to better communicate internally as well as externally. The college is using Constant Contacts as method of disseminating information from key departments such as Human Resources.

### 3: Unsuccessful Factors

A: The use of constant contact as a communications tool.