

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Southwest Wisconsin Technical College

Project Details			
Title	Develop and Implement a Strategic Planning Process	Status	COMPLETED
Category	5-Leading and Communicating	Updated	09-13-2010
Timeline		Reviewed	09-19-2010
	Planned Project Kickoff 01-01-2005	Created	11-24-2009
	Actual Completion 12-08-2010	Version	2

1: Project Goal

A: Develop a new three-year strategic plan for Southwest Tech via a cross-College team of employees, students, and a Board member.

2: Reasons For Project

A: In June, 2008, we completed the last year of our three-year Strategic Direction cycle and we needed to draft new directions. We wanted to incorporate the AQIP Common Values: Focus, Involvement, Collaboration, Information, and Foresight into our new process. We did this through establishing a cross-College Team that met monthly for six months to review data, develop SWOTs, and draft Strategic Direction Statements. In addition, we wanted to add specific measures and targets for each Strategic Direction Statement to improve accountability.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: This project will affect all departments, divisions and units in the College. We have representation from each department and division on our team and each person in the College will use the new Strategic Directions as they develop their personal goals for the 2008-09 Academic year.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: This process will improve two key organizational processes: 1) How reporting on the Strategic Directions is done 2) How data is collected to track the Strategic Directions

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: The length of time planned for this Action Project was six months to develop the Strategic Directions Statements, January - June, 2008. It will take an additional three months to finalize measures and targets and have staff use them to create their own goals. It will take three years to meet all of the targets for each Strategic Direction.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: We plan to track each Strategic Direction using an electronic process. Data from that process will be collected into reports that will be shared with all staff and the District Board. With six Strategic Direction Statements, we hope to generate reports bi-monthly, one Strategic Direction every two months.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: The Strategic Direction cross-College team suggested from one to four measures, each having targets for each year of the next three years. The College Leadership Team refined the measures and targets. Both the measures and targets are observable and measurable so the success or need to evaluate and adjust the targets will be easily determined.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Activity continued on the 6 strategic directions which were established through this action project. These directions include: (1) Optimize Technology to enhance services to the SWTC Community; (2) Increase flexibility and accessibility of course program offerings through nontraditional delivery methods, (3) Create career pathways to increase seamless transfer opportunities with other educational systems, (4) expand outreach and programs to enroll more learners into higher education, (5) maintain high service standards and professional development to continually enhance the teaching, learning, and working environment, and (6) Market programs to reach, enroll, and retain students. The Leadership Team was again reminded that all staff should address at least one Strategic Direction statement/measure when developing their individual Professional Improvement Plans for the 2009-10 year. In May, 2010, the Board of Directors was provided a summary of 2009-10 strategic directions – staff accomplishments. We are currently gathering the data for comparing actual achievements to targets for each indicator.

2: Institution Involvement

A: All staff reviewed the strategic directions when completing their Professional Improvement Plans for the 2009-10 year. The Strategic Directions were discussed at Leadership Team meetings and District Board Meetings. The Strategic Directions are posted on the college's intranet and have been printed in colored pamphlets and distributed throughout the campus.

3: Next Steps

A: We are in the 3rd year of a three year strategic plan. We have begun the strategic planning process for the next three years and have completed the first of 4 focus group meetings. The college's strategic planning process will continue, however, we will be retiring strategic planning as one of our college's action projects.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Setting annual targets of achievement for the strategic directions has enabled our college to quantify success. In addition, we are excited about the use of Sharepoint as our Intranet platform that may help us manage our Strategic Direction process. Implementation of this system has been slower than anticipated, however, as the College has converted to a new ERP system. As the ERP system is implemented, we will have a better opportunity to concentrate on tying Sharepoint to the tracking of our strategic directions. If we are able to implement this as we expect, it will be a process improvement practice that others might be interested in. Since this software is a common Microsoft software that others may not have considered using for process improvement.

5: Project Challenges

A: The collection of the data related to achievement of strategic directions remains a cumbersome process. Large scale ERP and fiscal management system changes have postponed advancing data collection for strategic directions until these large scale projects are complete. As these new IT systems become integrated into the college, we can refocus efforts on automating strategic direction data collection.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Efforts by the institution to implement a cyclic strategic planning process that includes measuring the effectiveness of the strategic planning for different units in the organization are commendable. This project was initiated in 2008 to guide the 2009-2011 academic year strategic planning process. The 6 directions were influenced by AQIP Common Values, which also is a great way to focus strategic planning using best practices. It would be helpful to describe in future updates the strategic directions summaries that were provided to the Board and how this information relates to ongoing data collection. The project aligns well with AQIP Categories One:

Helping Students Learn (through the examination of process as part of realizing the Strategic Directions); Three: Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs; Five: Leading and Communicating; Six: Supporting Institutional Operations; and Seven: Measuring Effectiveness.

2: Institution Involvement

A: Having staff and faculty incorporate strategic directions as part of their Professional Improvement Plans and as part of their annual evaluations is a sound practice. This ensures that the faculty and staff community are aware of the directions and can align their priorities with the strategic directions. It is not clear that faculty members are part of the described involvement. The institutional leadership could consider other ways that awareness of strategic directions can be brought to students – perhaps through student clubs, new papers, or as parts of syllabi in the alignment with course outcomes, among others.

3: Next Steps

A: It appears that the institution has been through two strategic cycles and focused its efforts in 2009 to create the strategic direction for 2009-2011. It appears that retiring this action project will soon be warranted, and the reviewer would encourage the institution, before retiring it completely, to fully realize the last part of the project that is probably quite challenging – using institutional data to demonstrate effectiveness of the strategic plan in achieving the desired outcomes. There may be challenges that present opportunities to gain additional guidance and input from the Higher Learning Commission.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The reviewer agrees that the use of Sharepoint could be considered a best practice in strategic planning. As institutions struggle with large amounts of information, your use of the intranet and Sharepoint could form the basis of a presentation at the annual HLC conference. One suggestion is to develop a thorough timeline and implementation plan for maximizing use of Sharepoint in the ways described here, given the complexities of information management and technological limitation.

5: Project Challenges

A: This is indeed a challenge. Given that these kinds of processes take time and resources, creating an implementation timeline that incorporates timelines for ERP and fiscal management implementation will help the institution to remain on track; lack of such a plan presents the risk that the integration won't happen or will get "lost" or "pushed back" in the sea of shifting priorities. Bringing data to demonstrate success of the strategic directions is critical to completion of the action project. The institution appears to have taken a very thorough approach to strategic planning, and the data collection and analysis related to success of the strategic plan could become the basis of another action project.

Project Outcome

1: Reason for completion

A: Through this project, the College developed a strategic planning process. We are in the final year of our three-year strategic plan and are applying the process to our next three-year strategic plan.

2: Success Factors

A: The project was very successful. Data were collected and compared to targets set for measures in each strategic direction. Periodic presentations were given to the College Board of Directors as part of our accountability process. All staff now include at least one goal in their Professional Improvement Plans that directly impacts one or more of the strategic directions.

3: Unsuccessful Factors

A: Several of the measures were not quantifiable and several became moot due to changes in other college systems.