

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Southwest Wisconsin Technical College

Project Details			
Title	Strengthen Program Outcome Assessment	Status	COMPLETED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated	09-13-2010
Timeline		Reviewed	10-25-2010
	Planned Project Kickoff 08-25-2008	Created	11-24-2009
	Actual Completion 01-11-2012	Version	2

1: Project Goal

A: The goal of this project is to establish a uniform college-wide process to assess learning outcomes at the program level to ensure that students leave the college with the skills critical to success in a variety of life roles.

2: Reasons For Project

A: In the past decade, there has been a continued demand for increased accountability in education. Students and employers alike are demanding assurance that successful completion of a training program provides the skills needed for success in a variety of life roles. In 2001, the 16 Wisconsin Technical Colleges in cooperation with the Wisconsin Technical College System, adopted a continuous improvement quality review program evaluation process. Also in 2001, formed a Forward to Excellence team which sought acceptance into the Academic Quality Improvement Project for accreditation. Most recently, reauthorization of the Carl Perkins Act of 2006 calls for a higher level of accountability in the assessment of skill attainment at the postsecondary level. These three drivers; the adoption of a continuous improvement program review, the implementation of the AQIP accreditation process, and the accountability requirements within the Perkins IV legislation led SWTC to select program outcome assessment as a priority for the 2008-2010.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: The over 40 academic programs and related staff at SWTC will be most involved in this activity. The Center for Learning Innovation and the Institutional Advancement Department will provide direction and leadership in this effort.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: The organizational processes that will be most directly impacted through this program outcome assessment activity include both program and student assessment and curriculum development.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: Success in implementing a program outcome assessment process involves many dimensions. The quality of the curriculum influences the quality of learning. The importance of designing performance expectations and assessments grounded in industry cannot be overstated. An effective process requires assessment that involves critical thinking, problem-solving, and performance while limiting the use of lower-level testing of knowledge to short-term formative feedback. The use of rubrics, checklists, and scoring guides is central to the validity, reliability, and fairness of assessment. Program outcomes must be measurable, observable, field-specific skills mastered by the learner completing a program or major course of study. Program Outcome Assessment has been identified as an area of focus for the program Quality Review Process (QRP). Implementation of a program outcome plan do check act process has achieved varied success. Some programs embrace this theory and have completed the process, whereas other programs need additional help and guidance in this process. The component most lacking in this process is the qualitative assessment; i.e., how well do the assessment instruments measure program outcomes? Currently, Southwest Tech is lacking an uniform process for "closing the loop."

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Currently Southwest Tech has a checklist of program outcome assessment indicators, but the process does not measure the quality of use of the data. The checklist only measures the completion of the step. Success will be determined when we have established a documented plan for program outcome assessment that is adopted by the faculty.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: This project will be considered successful when program outcome data is being used by the advisory committee, faculty, and staff when determining changes in program curriculum, outcomes, and student success.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Southwest Tech continued working on a local and state level for program outcome assessment (Technical Skill Attainment, TSA), taking leadership roles for two state aligned program outcome projects. Following the advice of the AQIP on-site review team, we returned to a manual green folder, paper process; dismissing TracDat as the storage, reporting tool. Programs identified the assessment tools they would use and submitted samples to the CLI. The Curriculum Specialist and Instructional Technical Support Specialist, participated on the state level with the design of the new WIDS, World Wide Instructional Design relational database tool that will be used to store program outcome, course competencies, and rubric assessment linkages. Faculty have used WIDs for approximately 12 years and the new design incorporating the Program Outcome assessment piece will assist with the goal of documenting the data.

2: Institution Involvement

A: On a local level, part of a college initiative day (inservice) was dedicated for the programs to review program outcomes and course competency linkages. All of the faculty were available for discussion. All programs also could work with the Center for Learning Innovation (CLI) team for assistance. The Curriculum Specialist and Instructional Technology Support Specialist, participated on a state level with the design of the new WIDS, World Wide Instructional Design relational database tool that will be used to store program outcome, course competencies, and rubric assessment linkages. Faculty have used WIDs for approximately 12 years and the new design incorporating the Program Outcome assessment piece will assist with the goal of documenting curriculum, program outcomes, and assessment as a single focal point and not as three different program Quality Review Process (QRP) indicators.

3: Next Steps

A: The next step, which will be a major improvement, will be the design of a sharepoint website for instructors to document the following questions.

- Identified assessment tool(s) used for assessment.
- Criteria indicator(s) for success.
- Include sample of tool if possible.
- Number of students participating in outcome assessment.
- Number of students passing assessment.
- Advisory committee comments and recommendations.
- Plans for improvement.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Making program outcome assessment part of a college initiative day, resulted with 100% of the programs submitting required documentation. Evaluations indicated the instructors like the dedicated time to discuss assessment techniques and work with peers. They commented on they knew everyone was available to track down data that may be needed. When the CLI requested summary data, not part of a CI day, only 50% of the programs submitted data.

5: Project Challenges

A: Southwest Tech faces three major challenges with Program Outcome Assessment.

1. The WIDS relational database program is going into its third of development. We are not efficient with our manual paper and pencil reporting.
2. State reporting guidelines are not finalized. Instructors would like to see state-wide data.
3. Program Instructors are not always sharing the data with advisory committees for recommendations. We need to do more to involve our advisory members or external evaluators.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Fantastic! This project has been an excellent representation of Valuing People (AQIP Category 4), Leading and Communicating (AQIP Category 5), Measuring Effectiveness (AQIP Category 7), Planning Continuous Improvement (AQIP Category 8), and Building Collaborations (AQIP Category 9). The collaboration of Wisconsin Technical Colleges and the use of WIDS are clear examples of your Collaboration, Involvement, Leadership, Agility, Foresight, Learning, and Information—all Principles of High Performance Organizations! Especially laudable is the use of a tool which faculty has been using for quite some time (12 years). This demonstrates your care for them, and your desire that they be able to understand the process in an immediate fashion. Well done!

2: Institution Involvement

A: Taking a portion of the In-Service Day to work on your action project was a great idea. It proves that success is important to the entire college. The goal of the AQIP program is to help institutions develop a culture of institution-wide continuous quality improvement and Southwest Wisconsin Technical College is a model institution!

3: Next Steps

A: SharePoint is an excellent collaborative tool for use in all institutions of higher education, but it has been known to be clunky. It may be advantageous to look at other potential software solutions (TaskStream, TK20, LiveText, etc.) and to involve individuals from your Information Technologies department to look at the best solution.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: This small, simple assessment is yet another proof of the institutional learning that has taken place at SWTC. A next step in the process may be to change the program submissions—just because you had 100% participation does not mean that 100% of those submissions were valid and/or valuable. Perhaps this could turn into the subject of your next project.

For other potential action projects, see the Innovations Exchange (<http://www.aqip.org/InnovationExchange/>) or the AQIP Resources for Institutions (<http://www.hlcommission.org/information-for-institutions/resources-for-institutions.html>).

5: Project Challenges

A: Inherent in these challenges could be the subject of your next action project, too! No matter which way you go, if you continue to espouse the Principles of High Performance Organizations and follow the AQIP Categories, you will stay on the track of an institution-wide continuous quality improvement culture.

Congratulations on achieving an exceptional accomplishment through this project! You should consider writing up the results of your project and sharing them with the membership at a future Higher Learning

Project Outcome

1: Reason for completion

A: We have our new web-based version of the Wisconsin Instructional Design System (WIDS) installed, tested and it was rolled out to instructors at our January 11, 2012 Inservice. Southwest Tech was one of three colleges in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) to pilot this system-wide initiative during the Summer of 2011. It will now be easier to link all of our program outcomes to the new WTCS Technical Skill Attainment outcome measures using the new web-based version of WIDS. The Center for Teaching and Learning at Southwest Tech will work with instructors during the spring semester 2011-12 in groups and individually to move and update data from the old non-web-based WIDS system. Students will be assessed annually by program and awarded a "pass" "not pass" or "not assessed" code. We will then have data to review individual students in programs to help strengthen our program outcome assessment process. This data is reported to the WTCS and used for program accountability tracking for Perkins requirements on a state-wide basis.

2: Success Factors

A: The Center for Teaching and Learning team at Southwest Tech had an excellent working relationship with the state WIDS team. By offering to be a pilot College, we were able to assist with all facets of implementation, which allowed us to be sure that our systems and needs were met with the new WIDS-2-Web state project. We now have a much more user-friendly way to assess program outcomes and create reports. This information will be shared with the program advisory committees as they review outcomes on an annual basis.

All 16 colleges in the WTCS came together to identify common program outcomes that will be assessed at each college offering any specific program. This activity alone took leadership by the state WTCS as well as collaboration among a wide variety of instructors. This was very successful. Each college agreed to assess a standard number (usually three to four) of program outcomes.

Instructors may assess additional outcomes by college to fit specific needs. This allowed for a certain amount of uniformity, while still allowing each college autonomy over their curriculum. Again, this model was extremely successful.

We had been assessing program outcomes using paper that instructors submitted to our outcomes assessment team for input into our system. This new system will improve our program outcomes assessment process and help us move away from a paper-driven system.

The new web-based version was introduced to instructors at the January 11, 2012 In-Service and was well received. Our team has a plan to work with instructors on a case-by-case and group basis to be certain that each instructor will be comfortable accessing the new version. This new system will also create uniformity in data reporting to the WTCS for program accountability.

3: Unsuccessful Factors

A: It took us about six months longer to bring the new web-based version up (summer 2012), test it and then roll it out to instructors. However, when working with any new technology, this lag happens. We anticipated introducing the new version to instructors in October 2011; however, when a new semester begins they are usually very busy so the January roll out actually worked better for everyone concerned. We have a good product and will now use it to strengthen our program outcome assessment process.