Action Project
Mobilize the College to Achieve Key Financial Outcomes

Institution: Southwestern College
Submitted: 2003-12-01
Status: Retired

Description of this Action Project's goal:

This project's goal is to build support for effective execution of an extant educational and business plan designed to ensure the financial viability of Southwestern College. The project focuses on implementing a plan to balance the college's operating budget with an endowment draw of 5% by the end of fiscal year 06-07 while preserving the quality of our educational and co-curricular offerings and our service to students and learners. The project will adapt and employ Balanced Scorecard techniques and other tools to design management metrics, monitor achievements, and foster buy-in by key groups and by all employees.

Identify the single AQIP Category which the Action Project will most affect or impact:

Primary Category: Leading and Communicating

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:

Taking effective steps to sustain the financial viability of Southwestern College is the paramount challenge facing the college and its people. The college's board and senior administrative leadership have put in place an achievable plan for attaining financial viability. Leadership, understood as effective communication and effective work to foster buy-in and execution by all college constituents, is critical to the success of the plan.

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

Institutional Research, Business Office, Administrative Council, Academic Affairs, Academic Division Chairs, Enrollment Management Team, Institutional Advancement Office, Finance Committee, College Board of Trustees.

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

Enrollment management; financial management (budget and costs); development/institutional advancement; performance planning and evaluation for the enterprise, its units, and individual employees.

Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):

These goals were presented and discussed during an all-employee forum on improvement on January 13, 2003. These goals are included in the college's strategic plan, which connects to performance planning and evaluation processes for many employees. The college's administration will commit to Trustees, in multi-year budget approval process, to meeting these targets and being accountable for performance. A scorecard indicating results will be distributed to all college employees and Trustees each year.

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

Enrollment Management: financial aid expenditure projection, main campus admissions measures (applications, acceptances, deposits), retention measures (semester to semester, six year cohort graduation rate), professional studies and graduate studies enrollment and revenue measures; Financial Management: costs for each academic program and co-curricular program, tuition and other revenue as return on investment, cash, program enrollment and staffing trends; Institutional Advancement: cost per dollar raised, total dollars raised, Annual Fund dollars raised, dollars raised as total percentage of revenue, alumni participation percentage, future value of new planned gifts. Human Resources: percentage of employees with accurate and current job descriptions; percentage of employees with written performance plans; percentage of employees whose performance is evaluated on the basis of written performance plans.

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:

Enrollment Management: new main campus students, new professional studies and graduate students, main campus tuition discount rate, main campus cohort graduation percentage; Financial Management: endowment draw, total budget compliance (with goal of no annual overages of greater than 1%), CFI score per NACUBO measures; Institutional Advancement: annual fund giving, total giving, giving to Builders of Excellence Campaign; Human Resources: employee satisfaction; extent of employee attainment of performance plan objectives.

Other information (e.g., publicity, sponsor or champion, etc.):

January 2004 through December 2004.

Enrollment Management: enroll 235 new main campus students in fall of 2004 with 45.5% discount rate; achieve main campus retention rates as described in retention action project.

Institutional Advancement: achieve total of $19 million in campaign gifts and pledges million by December 31, 2004, secure $500,000 in Annual Fund gifts toward FY05 Annual Fund goal of $750,000.

Financial Management: adopt and execute FY05 budget with endowment draw of $2 million, achieve budget compliance: 1% or less deviation from budget, CFI score = 1

Human Resources: goals stated in Human Resources action plan January 2005 through December 2006.

Enrollment Management: enroll 240 new main campus students in fall of 2005 with 45% discount rate, achieve main campus retention rates as described in retention action project.

Institutional Advancement: achieve total of $22 million in campaign gifts and pledges by December 31, 2005, secure $550,000 in Annual Fund gifts toward FY06 Annual Fund goal of $800,000.

Financial Management: adopt and execute FY06 budget with endowment draw of $1.2 million, achieve budget compliance: 1% or less deviation from budget, CFI score = 2

Human Resources: goals stated in Human Resources action plan January 2006 through December 2006.

Enrollment Management: enroll 250 new main campus students in fall of 2006 with 45% discount rate, achieve main campus retention rates as described in retention action project.

Institutional Advancement: reach campaign goal of $24 million in campaign gifts and pledges by July 31, 2006, secure $600,000 in Annual Fund gifts toward FY07 Annual Fund goal of $850,000.

Financial Management: adopt and execute FY07 budget with endowment draw of $700,000, achieve budget compliance: 1% or less deviation from budget, CFI = 3

Human Resources: goals stated in Human Resources action plan

Last Action Project Update: 2007-09-11

A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

Enrollment Management: The project's enrollment management goal was to recruit 250 new main campus undergraduate students for the fall of 2006 with a discount rate of 45%. The college recruited 221 new students with a discount rate of 46.9%. Institutional Advancement: The college's institutional advancement goals were to reach a campaign total of $24 million in campaign gifts and pledges by June 30, 2006 and to secure $825,000 in unrestricted annual fund gifts by the June 30, 2007 end of the 07 fiscal year. The campaign exceeded its goal by $2 million, with pledges and gifts topping $26 million. The annual fund did not reach its goal, securing gifts of $685,000. Financial Management and Outcomes: The college's financial outcome goals were to balance the college's operating budget with an endowment draw equaling 5% of the value of the endowment, achieve compliance with the approved expenditure budget, and increase the college's CFI score to 3. The college's endowment draw was 5%, expenditures for FY 07 were 1.8% below the approved expenditure budget, and the college's CFI score was 1.4. These financial outcomes are very significant for the college and indicate improving financial health. The college has devised and successfully executed a plan to achieve financial viability.

B. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

The college's work to achieve financial health involved many members of the college community, notably: the college's Board of Trustees, the college's Finance Committee, the college's Planning Council, the enrollment management staff, the institutional advancement staff, and the staff of the business office. The college's senior administrators have been very diligent about keeping the financial situation of the college in front of all members of the college community, documenting and celebrating progress, and working to show employees the connection between their performance, the completion of key items in the college's strategic plan, and achievement of the institution's financial goals.

C. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

This is the third and final year of the project and, from an AQIP point of view, it will be retired. The college, of course, will continue to actively pursue steps to ensure its financial viability and build its financial strength. One significant aspect of the project that was not successful with the planned effort to integrate Balanced Scorecard techniques into the college\'s management practices. The recent completion of the college\'s Systems Portfolio helped underscore, yet again, that the college\'s approach to performance planning and measurement is weak. A project focused on outcomes measurement and improvement is on the institution\'s list of possible future AQIP action projects. Decisions about these projects will be made at a Strategy Forum in November of 2007.

D. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.

The college's work to achieve financial viability was greatly aided by the development by the college's Vice President for Finance of a powerful spreadsheet-based financial model that has allowed the college's leaders to work through "what if?" scenarios. The model has made the college's finances transparent and allows for multiple course corrections, as needed, during each fiscal year.

E. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?

Our primary challenge is to maintain disciplined adherence to the lessons learned in recent years: control main campus discount rates, aggressively seek philanthropic support, and capitalize on the very favorable cost structure of part-time educational offerings for adults. Also, see C above.

Action Project
Improving Student Retention and Graduation Rates

Institution:	Southwestern College
Submitted:	2003-12-01
Status:	Retired

Description of this Action Project's goal:

The goal of this three-year project is to achieve increases in inter-semester and inter-year student retention rates that, projected forward, will lead to achievement of a 60% six-year graduation rate for the freshman cohort that enters Southwestern College in the fall of 2004.

Identify the single AQIP Category which the Action Project will most affect or impact:

Primary Category: Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs

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:

Understanding students' and other stakeholders' needs is primary to student retention because it underscores the need for responsiveness to students', and their parents' concerns and satisfaction.

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

Office of student life, plant operations, academics, advising, enrollment management, financial aid, athletics, admissions.

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

Campus life activities, new student orientation, career planning services, academic support programs (i.e. student success center, essential skills class, tutoring), admissions, recruitment, advising, curriculum development, assessment, institutional research, financial aid awards and packaging, strategic planning, residence life programming, budgeting and resource allocation, early alert system, technology enhancement, integrative studies, extracurricular activities.

Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):

Scheduling as plenary session item at Board of Trustees meeting, standing agenda item for Enrollment Management Team (EMT) meetings, periodic report item for Administrative Council meetings, linkage to Planning Council via strategic plan goals, agenda item for division chair training, agenda item for new employee orientation, monthly meetings of retention task force, liaison of task force with faculty Admissions/Retention committee, visible link between pay raises and increased enrollment/retention success, a half-day devoted each semester to a retention summit that involves division chairs, administrative cabinet and EMT.

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

Percentage of students who take the College Student Inventory; percentage of advisors who review the College Student Inventory with advisees; percentage of students who complete the Student Satisfaction Inventory; number of early alerts received concerning students at risk to depart; number of focus groups completed; number of students participating in student focus groups; percentage of students who complete residence life evaluations; percentage of students who fail to meet financial aid deadlines; number of student activities sponsored by Student Activities Association; percentage of students at New Student Orientation; number of hours of tutoring provided; number of students taking essential skills class; students with a D or F at mid term; students with low attendance at week 4; percentage of students who fail to meet housing sign-up requirements; percentage of students who drop out of extracurricular activities; percentage of departing students who complete a student exit interview; student satisfaction with integrative studies courses; student satisfaction with integrative studies courses compared to satisfaction with courses in their major field of study; number of students who complete an advisor satisfaction evaluation.

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:

Higher student satisfaction with new student orientation; lower dropout proneness scores on College Student Inventory; improved inter-semester and inter-year student retention rate; improved six year graduation rates; improved scores on the Student Satisfaction Inventory; improved student satisfaction with integrative studies courses; improved satisfaction with integrative studies courses compared to satisfaction with courses in their major field of study; improved student satisfaction with advisor; NSSE scores indicating high level of engagement in active learning.

Other information (e.g., publicity, sponsor or champion, etc.):

Year One: January 2004 through December 2004.

January through July:

AQIP retention working group completes focus group assessments with students, gathers and responds to actionable suggestions for improvement; completes review of second year of data on Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, responds to actionable opportunities for improvement; completes work to put in place tracking of process measures listed in G. above; finalizes plans with Enrollment Management Group for monitoring of process measures and outcomes measures by the Enrollment Management Team.

August: 2004 entering freshman cohort arrives. January 2005 through December 2005.

January through December:

Enrollment Management Team actively monitors process and outcome measures and responds to opportunities for improvement.

January through July: Enrollment Management Team completes focus group assessments with students, gathers and responds to actionable suggestions for improvement; completes review of third year of data on Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, responds to actionable opportunities for improvement.

January: Achieve 88% retention of 2004 entering freshman cohort from first to second semester.

August: 2005 freshman cohort arrives; achieve 72% retention of 2004 freshman cohort January 2006 through December 2006.

January through December:

Enrollment Management Team actively monitors process and outcome measures and responds to opportunities for improvement

January through July: Enrollment Management Team completes focus group assessments with students, gathers and responds to actionable suggestions for improvement; completes review of fourth year of data on Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, responds to actionable opportunities for improvement.

January: achieve 90% retention for 2005 freshman cohort.
August: 2006 freshman cohort arrives; achieve 74% retention of 2005 freshman cohort; achieve 62% retention of 2004 freshman cohort. Beyond the scope of this timetable: the college's goal is to increase the six-year graduation rate for the 2004 freshman cohort to 55%. That would represent a 7 percentage point increase over our current six-year graduation rate of 48%. The college's ultimate goal is to increase our six-year graduation rate to above 60%.

Last Action Project Update: 2007-09-11

A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

The data-driven decision making system implemented to address retention issues continues to direct the work of the retention task force. Because of feedback given to us by stakeholders, the college implemented several new steps for the retention program. One success was the creation of a new strengths-based curriculum for the course that is taken by all conditionally-admitted students. Part of the evaluation of the success of this new curriculum will include persistence rates of students in this class. Official reports will not be available before this report is due. In other activities, the retention task force publicly acknowledged all activity directors who reached 100% retention of their students from the fall to the spring semesters. In addition, the committee coordinated with the faculty admissions and retention committee to begin discussion about the need for a learning center on campus in which our student success support services

would be housed, such as a writing center, math lab, disability services, peer tutoring, etc. To support students with learning disabilities, we received a grant to buy computers and assistive technology. To increase the focus on retention activities, a new position of Associate Vice President for Retention and Student Success was created under the Vice President for Academic Affairs that focuses on academic advising and student success services. Sophomore students remain a retention risk for SC. To learn more, high achieving sophomores were interviewed to determine what leads to their academic success. In addition, sophomores were surveyed to determine their levels of academic engagement and its contributors. We hired a new football coach who understands the importance of retention and how a team the size of his influences retention in any given year. Finally, we added a focus on academics to our freshmen orientation, discussing with students the issues of faculty relationships, academic integrity, and the value of higher education.

B. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

Reports are given at each Board of Trustees meeting to update them on retention rates and activities. At new faculty orientation, the new associate academic vice president responsible for retention activities speaks with new employees about the early warning system for struggling students. She also describes how all employees play a role in retention. The new football coach was added to the retention team. The admissions and retention committee of the faculty works alongside the AQIP retention task force to study trends and best practices. Several college offices worked together to develop a student exit communication strategy that involves financial aid, housing, registrar, technology services. Retention issues are also discussed with advisors via the use of the College Student inventory, admissions staff through an early alert system, students in focus groups and parents in newsletters and orientations. Finally, campus wide information is shared via an enrollment management team.

C. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

This is the third year of this project and it will be \"retired\" as an AQIP Action Project. Obviously, a great deal of work is underway and will be completed. An overhaul of the academic advising system has begun with focus groups with students, parents and advisors on the current state of advising. Work has begun to identify possible appropriate models for a new advising system. In addition, the college joined the professional organization for academic advising. We also have created a work group of faculty and students for decision making about our future advising system. We have also started the process of creating a student success center. So far, we have benchmarked other learning centers to identify needs, staffing patterns, costs, etc. We have selected a site for the learning center and have had initial conversations with faculty responsible for the writing center, math center and athletics to determine the best approaches for proceeding. Initial work has begun on the development of a first year experience program, taking inventory of component programs that could be combined in a formal FYE program. We have also triaged the development of additional components needed to complete a full scale FYE. As this project has progressed, the college\'s administrative leadership has given special attention to identifying the characteristics of programs that \"work\" from an academic and retention perspective. Lessons learned have prompted the college to place a focus on program-related retention on its list of possible AQIP Action Projects to be discussed at the November 2007 Strategy Forum in which its will be participating.

D. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.

To magnify the importance of the role that academics plays in successful retention of college students, the creation of a new position that is tasked with managing retention activities on campus shows promise. While the person in this role primarily resides on the academic side of the institution, great care was taken in the development of this role to be sure that part of job responsibilities belong to the student life department. The person in this role has daily interaction with both student life and academics regarding student concerns, early alerts and system wide challenge that impact persistence.

E. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?

We continue to be challenged by the prominent role that athletic recruiting plays in our approach to recruiting students. This recruiting approach brings the college some of our very best and most disciplined students, but it also brings us students who are not committed to the work needed to achieve academic success and who are inclined to judge their college experience in terms of their individual athletic success or the success of their team. If a particular athletic team encounters difficulties, it impacts the college's retention numbers very dramatically. In addition, restricted financial resources sometimes limit our ability to quickly create and implement key student success strategies.

Action Project
Improving Methods of Assessing Academic Programs and Student Learning Outcomes

Institution:	Southwestern College
Submitted:	2003-12-01
Status:	Retired

Description of this Action Project's goal:

The goal of this project is to establish and implement a system for consistent data collection, measurement, analysis, and improvement of educational outcomes.

Identify the single AQIP Category which the Action Project will most affect or impact:

Primary Category: Helping Students Learn

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:

Our Baldrige-based self-assessment identified evaluation and outcomes assessment as an area of considerable frustration at Southwestern. This frustration reflects the widely held perception, among faculty and administrators, that while the college has invested considerable energy in outcomes assessment, the work has not led to actionable findings that lead to improvement. A key group of college faculty have recently completed a grant-supported project related to assessment and have developed a plan of work to capitalize on the current momentum for improvement.

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

Academic Affairs, Academic Planning Council, instructional technology, student life office, faculty, academic division chairs, Integrative Studies Council, Institutional Research, Professional Studies Academic Council, Academic Technology Committee, Finance Committee

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

Advising; curriculum development; course evaluation; technology purchasing and development

Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):

This effort has been initiated with and through the involvement of the academic division chairs; department chairs and faculty members will support division performance goals. The underlying assumption in this project is that by constantly improving the teaching and learning process the college will both attract and retain students. Consequently, this project supports both the AQIP retention and financial goals of Southwestern College.

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

Outcomes of student advising surveys; percentage of curriculum validated by discipline; standardized measures of teaching and learning performance(e.g. IDEA); curriculum changes in both courses offered and the content of courses

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:

Student engagement as measured by National Survey of Student Engagement; outcomes in General Advising Survey; outcomes in major field examinations; outcomes in IDEA evaluations

Other information (e.g., publicity, sponsor or champion, etc.):

January 2004 through December 2004.

Establish and state desired institutional outcomes; establish and state performance-based outcomes for each academic program area; align program outcomes with institutional outcomes; develop consistent data collection mechanisms January 2005 through December 2005.

Establish data archive; begin data collection; begin data reporting January 2006 through December 2006.

Analyze data; 90% of core main campus academic units will have demonstrated changes and improvement on basis of data.

Last Action Project Update: 2007-09-11

A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

Per our plan, the college completed a full reform of the general education curriculum. Faculty and administrators used guidelines from American Association of Colleges and Universities to clearly define content areas (disciplinary perspectives) and to structure learning outcomes that are aligned with institutional learning outcomes. The bulk of the spring semester of 2007 was spent building the two-year course rotation that met the demands of the new curriculum structure and entering those courses into the catalog for freshman matriculation. The faculty is very proud of having undertaken a full reform of the general education program and essentially completed it in the course of one academic year.

B. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

To complete this project the faculty gathered early in August of 2006 and set two deadlines. First, we set the Faculty Senate meeting of October 9 as the deadline for adopting the framework for our new general education program and charged a sub-committee with the task of developing and explaining the structure. Second, we agreed that general education curriculum proposals for fall semester 2007 would be submitted to the faculty curriculum committee by November 2006. By using the existing faculty governance, we were able to ensure broad participation, maximum 'buy-in' from colleagues, and a timely response for getting the work done.

C. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

On August 14, 2007 the faculty gathered and set a new agenda for our outcomes project. With the new curriculum in place, we agreed to charge the Assessment Committee with a three-part agenda: 1) identify assessable artifacts for each outcome; 2) recommend the best method for data collection, and 3) present the faculty a timeline for these activities by the September meeting of the Faculty Senate. The faculty also agreed that our first round of data collection on our outcomes will be April 9, 2008, a special day reserved specifically for assessment.

This is the third year of this project and it will be \"retired\" as an AQIP Action Project. Obviously, a great deal of work remains to be completed and patterns for sustained work, over a number of years, will need to created and adhered to. A focus on academic outcomes assessment for the college\'s undergraduate and graduate programs for adults, in a college unit called Professional Studies, will be considered for selection as a new AQIP Action Project at the November 2007 Strategy Forum in which a college team will be participating.

D. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.

In formulating the charge for the Assessment Committee we discovered that our governance system did not have a regulation for ensuring that the data collected would be fed back to the faculty. Thus, while the Assessment Committee is working to operationalize our assessment plan, the Chair of the Faculty will be working to re-draft committee descriptions for both the Curriculum Committee and the Assessment Committee that: 1) obligate the Assessment Committee to report data to the Faculty Senate and, 2) obligate the Curriculum Committee to use the same data to guide the curriculum decision making process.

E. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?

Once we complete this phase of our project, we will need to make sure that we have aligned upper division programming with the institutional outcomes. We expect that this will be administrated best through the college's divisional structure.

Action Project
Human Resources and Employee Development

Institution:	Southwestern College
Submitted:	2003-12-10
Status:	Retired

Description of this Action Project's goal:

The goals of this action project are:
1) to create a competent professional office of human resources, and
2) to develop and execute plans to motivate and empower employees to maximize institutional performance.

Identify the single AQIP Category which the Action Project will most affect or impact:

Primary Category: Valuing People

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:

The college's employees are our most valuable asset. They are committed to improving their performance and the performance of the college. However, the college currently does not have systems and programs in place that capitalize on the college's human resources by facilitating and rewarding employee development and growth that is aligned with program, department, division, and institutional objectives.

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

Human resources office, business office (payroll and benefits administration), Administrative Council, academic affairs, Administrative Forum, Staff Forum, Faculty Personnel Committee, Faculty Development Committee

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

Performance planning, employee performance evaluation, compensation and reward systems, new employee orientation, exit interview process, and employee training and development

Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):

The implementation of this project is intimately connected to the implementation of the college's action project related to financial viability. This connection to another key project will help assure energy and attention. Moreover, the college's employees very much want to achieve these changes in human resources policy. Much of the work will be led by a project-specific working group, but they will interact with standing committees -- the faculty personnel committee, the faculty concerns committee, the Administrative Forum, and the Staff Forum - that are well-established, integral to governance, and vital.

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

Percentage of departing employees who participate in an exit interview; number of new employees who participate in an orientation program; percentage of employees who complete an employee satisfaction assessment; percentage of employees with a current and accurate job description; percentage of employees with a current performance plan; percentage of employees who participate in a performance evaluation based on a performance plan.

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:

Employee satisfaction; extent of completion by employees of objectives in performance plans; extent of alignment of employee effort/training opportunities with program, department, division, and institutional objectives.

Other information (e.g., publicity, sponsor or champion, etc.):

January 2004 through December 2004.

Conduct new employee orientation, secure evaluations from participants. Gain Board of Trustees approval for a series of revisions/clarifications of employee policies. AQIP human resources working group studies Balanced Scorecard and other means of aligning employee performance plans and evaluation processes with program, department, division, and institutional objectives (including study of revising job descriptions). Identify and employ an appropriate instrument for assessing employee satisfaction. Complete work underway with Administrative Forum and Staff Forum to develop compensation plans and targets for administrators and hourly employees. Implement improved exit interview system. January 2005 through December 2005.

Conduct new employee orientation, secure evaluations from participants. Conduct second annual assessment of employee satisfaction. AQIP human resources working group finalizes selection/design work and begins implementation of plans to align employee performance plans and evaluation processes with program, department, division, and institutional objectives. Implement appropriate supervisor training for performance planning and evaluations. Assess employee training needs related to performance planning and evaluation processes; implement new compensation plans for administrators and staff; AQIP human resources working group reviews possible reward and recognition programs. Conduct new employee orientation, secure evaluations from participants. College conducts third annual employee satisfaction assessment. 100% of college administrators and hourly employees receive performance evaluations based on performance plans; college implements reward and recognition programs.

Last Action Project Update: 2007-09-11

A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

In accordance with the goals of this Action Project, the director of human resources conducted exit interviews with 90% of individuals who left the employ of the college in the past benefit year. The college continued its program of new employee orientation, with 32 administrators and staff taking part in the past year (the Vice President for Academic Affairs provides orientations for new members of the faculty). The college administered its third annual employee survey, using an instrument based on the "Baldrige Are We Making Progress?" survey. 53% of employees participated, a slight increase from the previous year. The college provided training, led by consultant John Jasinski, for supervisors on how best to conduct effective performance evaluations that align employee performance plans with institutional goals. The college completed performance evaluations for all full-time employees. The college benefits committee worked effectively to review options for renewal of college health insurance benefits. The college continued its annual program of employee recognition.

B. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

Through participation in the annual employee survey, participation in supervisor training, or service on the college benefits committee, most employees of the college participated in work on this Action Project in the past year.

C. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

This is the third year of this work and the college plans to retire this as an AQIP Action Project. Several key tasks require continuing work. Work to create a college culture of measurement and improvement through the use of Balanced Scorecard techniques was not successful. A new and successful approach to performance planning and outcomes assessment is needed. The college has made progress in evaluating compensation and determining whether and how we are out of step with compensation offered in local, regional, and national markets, but we have not yet put in place clear compensation plans for staff, administrators, and faculty.

D. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.

The use of an adapted version of the "Are We Making Progress?" survey has been useful for us. We now have three years of responses, allowing us to evaluate the success of efforts to "move the needle" on some key issues. Moreover, because the survey has been used broadly outside higher education it gives us a comparative perspective that is often hard to attain.

E. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?

See C above.

Action Project
Analysis of Main Campus Admission and Retention Issues

Institution:	Southwestern College
Submitted:	2008-02-17
Status:	Completed

Description of this Action Project's goal:

The goal of this project is to better inform the college's efforts to increase selectivity and "fit" in freshman admission processes and, ultimately, to improve freshman retention rates, by identifying segments of the freshman cohort recruitment pool that are particularly poor retention risks. At the end of the project the college will create one or two new action projects to develop and implement policies that respond to this project's findings.

Identify the single AQIP Category which the Action Project will most affect or impact:

Primary Category: Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs

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:

In the past three years the college has experienced declines in retention rates for freshmen from first to second semester, and from second semester to third semester. These declines have occurred in spite of enhanced orientation and support programs for students. The college needs to sharpen its understanding of "who will persist," "who will persist, if properly supported," and "who ought not to be admitted because they are unlikely to succeed and persist.

The college has anecdotal evidence concerning students who are a "good fit" or a "bad fit" for Southwestern, but little data analysis has been done. This project will examine admission and retention data from 1996 through 2003 about four groups of students: those who are first generation college students, those who arrive at Southwestern undecided about an academic major, those who are admitted conditionally because of concerns about their academic ability and preparation, and those who have not received an activity grant related to participation in an activity or varsity sport.

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

Enrollment management, institutional research.

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

Marketing, recruitment, and admission; freshman orientation, advising, student life support services and academic affairs support services.

Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):

This is a straightforward research project designed to stimulate consultation and decision-making about admission and retention efforts. A project duration of 3 1/2 months is ample.

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

The college's vice president for enrollment management and director of institutional research will report findings to the president.

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:

Key indicators of success will be: 1) identification of one group of prospective freshmen who will be the focal point for programs designed to improve group retention, and 2) identification of one group of prospective freshmen whom the college regards as poor prospects for retention and, hence, not suitable prospects for recruitment and admission.

Last Action Project Update: 2008-09-14

A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

The first accomplishment related to this action item was its success as a data-driven project. Using a survey of the retention literature, four high risk retention areas were studied and a major focus – those admitted conditionally – was identified.   With this focus in mind, all parties participating built a process that documented all tasks, timelines, and assignment involved in evaluation of the applications of those who were candidates for conditional admission. With this process in place, the college attained its goal of having fewer than 10% of its fall 2008 freshman class conditionally admitted. Further, a process that connects these conditionally admitted students to academic and social support services was established. This project is considered complete.

B. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

The project involved the director of institutional research, the director of admission, the associate vice president for advising and student success, the chair of the faculty admission and retention committee, and the faculty coordinator of academic advising. These individuals gathered data, and reviewed and revised the college's conditional admission process.

C. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

Our next step is to monitor the retention rate of this year's conditionally admitted students and compared this rate to those observed in previous years. We will take measurements at the beginning of the spring semester in 2009 and the beginning of the fall semester in 2009, and then compare them to previous cohorts. We will also evaluate the effectiveness of the college's developmental class – Essential Skills – and the college's new student success center. As the college's new admission director begins work, this person will be thoroughly briefed on the conditional admission process.

D. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.

The addition of a secondary admission essay specific to candidates for conditional admission was helpful for gauging students' intentions to graduate as well as any circumstances that might have hindered their earning good grades or higher ACT/SAT scores. Another effective practice was the development of a process map for the conditional admission process. Doing so allowed us to identify gaps in our knowledge about potential students. It also helped us improve our communication between members of the conditional admission team. Before each new year of reviewing conditional student applications, we will revisit the process map to remind ourselves of key processes and make needed adjustments.

E. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?

The college is in the process of hiring a new director of admission, so we are challenged to make sure we do not lose ground gained since undertaking this project. A further challenge will be evaluating the discrete impact of this project, since it is one of many retention-related efforts underway at the college.