AQIP Update: Assessment

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

In 2007, Southwestern College became part of a national assessment initiative known as Transparency by Design which served as the impetus for a renewal of the assessment efforts based on student learning and achievement. Using Transparency by Design as the newest assessment vehicle and the vehicle most capable of providing institutionally comparable results, Professional Studies has actively engaged in data collection and analysis since July 2008.

The decision was made to repurpose the common course BQM 425, Research Project as a capstone class to serve as the basis of evaluation for individual undergraduate learners. The foundation of the process lies in the institutional outcomes of: career preparation, leadership, critical thinking, communication, and ethical behavior. The institutional outcomes appear on every syllabus for every course and are the foundation of curricular decision making.

Major reviews were conducted to develop program outcomes consistent with institutional outcomes and then rubrics were developed to determine adherence with institutional and program outcomes.

An outside evaluator (who had been used previously to review Prior Learning Credit Portfolios) was trained to assess individual learner projects. The Blackboard gradebook in BQM 425 was redesigned to accommodate project components for ease of access by the evaluator.

Beginning in July 2008, projects in three of Professional Studies largest majors (Business Administration, Human Resource Development and Operations Management) were evaluated as part of this newest assessment endeavor. The first session was considered a pilot session and the rubrics were evaluated for effectiveness of review and wording was changed to reflect more of a global approach to a learner's cumulative learning in a particular major. Additionally a reflection piece was added to the project to allow learners to better articulate the learning that has occurred for them as they have progressed through the major, and to allow them to reflect on the significance of that learning both personally and professionally.

Projects are scored as distinguished, proficient, basic and unacceptable. All submissions for the three majors were evaluated in the fall of 2008 and trial run data for these three majors has been submitted to Transparency by Design for inclusion on the website launch for late March 2009.

Going forward, a subset of all projects from these three majors will be evaluated. In January 2009, institutional enrollment data was used to identify 10% of each major for evaluation in the spring, 2009. Assessment will be expanded to additional majors for evaluation in the fall of 2009.

In addition to the major outcomes assessment (as delineated above) Transparency by Design institutions are collecting and aggregating data in three other areas. Professional Studies has been responsible for reporting "Institutional Information and Student Demographics", "Student Satisfaction" (we're using primarily NSSE data – coupled with FSSE data) and "Alumni Outcomes" data (this is a direct assessment of alumni with five Transparency by Design common questions).

All of this data will be released in the initial Transparency by Design website launch in March 2009.

Assessment for the graduate degrees follows the same basic process as undergraduate assessment. Program outcomes emanating from institutional outcomes are the foundation of the assessment plan. Instead of taking a common course, learners complete a portfolio class for their degree with the requirement of submission of a professional portfolio addressing the competencies and skills they have achieved as a result of their graduate studies in a particular program. The purpose of the portfolio is twofold: to serve as a professional tool for the learner and to provide valuable guidance in helping the learner document achievements and knowledge gained through the completion of the program. It also serves as our primary assessment tool to ensure the currency and relevancy of the curriculum. The course should be taken after completion of at least 30 hours in the program.

Learners are introduced to the requirements of the portfolio in the graduate orientation program and are expected to accumulate projects throughout their course of study to be utilized in the document. A template is provided for their use, and all documents will reside in the Blackboard environment for ease of posting by the learner and ease of access by the evaluator. Each session, projects to be evaluated are identified and submitted to the evaluator. Results are tabulated, recorded and used for future faculty development and curricular decision making.

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

The primary load for assessment this past year has rested at the administrative level with participation from key affiliate faculty members and an external evaluator. Both the Vice President for Professional Studies and the Director of Special Projects have continued to participate in the leadership group and the working group meetings for 'Transparency by Design'. The Director of Academic Affairs has also been involved as well as a lead faculty member to facilitate many of the administrative functions.

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

Professional Studies will focus this next year on the expansion of the evaluation process to include additional majors. Once the Transparency by Design website is launched, Professional Studies will develop a complimenting website and/or link to the Transparency by Design site.

Professional Studies personnel will continue to participate as presenters at professional conferences about the process and outcomes of Transparency by Design. To date, Professional Studies personnel have presented at the annual WCET meeting as well as the Council for College and Military Educators (CCME) annual meeting. A proposal has been accepted for presentation at the upcoming DoD Worldwide Symposium in July. Additionally, proposals have been submitted to USDLA (United States Distance Learning Association) and ACHE (Association for Continuing Higher Education).

Professional Studies will also use the comparative data available via Transparency by Design to assess our strengths and weaknesses. Our individual assessment outcomes along with this comparative data will serve as a foundation for faculty development initiatives and major reviews in 2009.

D. Describe any 'effective practices' that resulted from your work in this Action Project.

Aligning ourselves with a national initiative like 'Transparency by Design' has provided a timeline and framework in which to operate. Clearly reporting data in a transparent manner across institutions will provide Professional Studies with excellent benchmarking data in which to better understand our academic operation.

Stepping onto a national stage in terms of participation of personnel at professional conferences speaking on Transparency by Design has elevated Southwestern College on the national stage.

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

Outcomes assessment in Professional Studies is really a full-time job and currently we don't have a full-time person to devote to assessment.

ADDENDUM:

Assessment Update from Main Campus:

It is important to note that the Vice President for Academic Affairs has been fully aware of the initiative by the Vice President of Professional Studies to join Transparency by Design. In their joint opinion, that project is necessary and vital to our assessment agenda as it will provide Professional Studies with meaningful, comparative data that is useful to the systematic improvement of that educational unit of the college. The steps that Professional Studies has undertaken are detailed above.

The main campus has continued working toward a rubric approach to assessment. Per the last AQIP update relative to 1P6b; 1P9; 1P11; 1P12 and 1P13 we can now report the following.

1. As noted before, we did draft rubrics to assess each of the 7 institutional outcomes. Since then:

    a. The Chair of the Faculty assigned the rubrics to the Assessment Committee per the governance procedures set forth in the policy manual.
    b. The Assessment Committee of the Faculty surveyed faculty to test both their knowledge of assessment and their perceptions of the project
    c. The Assessment Committee undertook a process to edit and revise three of the rubrics (Critical Thinking; Communication; and Ethical Behavior)

2. We reported that the Director if General Education would convene faculty and prepare syllabi for alignment with outcomes.
    a. The meeting took place and the syllabi were aligned.
    b. The Director of General Education reports that relevant artifacts have been identified
    c. The information from the Director of General Education is being passed to the Assessment Committee

3. We projected that the first round of assessment would be done by the start of the spring semester
    a. The Chair of the Assessment Committee has revised this target date to March 1
    b. Once the rubrics have been applied to the artifacts, the number will be reported to the Office for Institutional Research
    c. Upon acknowledgment of receipt of the data, the Assessment Committee will turn its attention to a revision process for the remaining rubrics
    d. Once the rubrics are set, the Committee will pass the rubrics to Professional Studies for them to consider and deploy as they see fit.

AQIP Update: Professional Studies Retention

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

In the last several months, Professional Studies actively engaged in a number of activities to set in motion the foundations to positively impact on the persistence rates of Professional Studies learners. In particular, a focus has continued on both the macro-level and the micro-level.

Our search for a Director of Academic Advising and Learning Engagement became a bit more protracted than we had hoped. In early December, Bryon Bailey joined Professional Studies. Byron's professional background includes both executive and student coaching, as well as sales and marketing experience. This newly-created position will focus on the factors that help learners successfully complete degrees through Professional Studies. Bryon is implementing a comprehensive Learner Success Coaching model. For us, Learner Success Coaching will take the form of proactive, positive, regularly scheduled outreach on the part of the advisor, for the purpose of engaging in meaningful ways to ensure student success. The primary concept behind this can be expressed in a simple formula:

Student Engagement=Student Success=Student Retention.

What we have realized is that we have many of the systems, processes and reports in place to actively monitor learner enrollments/re-enrollments, guest learners, at-risk learners, advisees and stop-outs, but we needed to transform the advising team into a Learner Success Coaching team.

With that said, Bryon has engaged a number of training sessions to include monthly one-on-one professional development meetings with advisors, bi-weekly advisor training calls (to discuss success coaching best practices that can be combined with relevant learner issues in an effort to provide continually high and proactive levels of service) along with the scheduling of the first bi-annual advisor training retreat (February 13, 2009).

In transforming the advising culture within Professional Studies, a series of key proactive "touch points" have been delineated for all new learners (e.g., Welcome Call – the week before Entrance Seminar, Week 2 call), as well as current learners (e.g., Early Alert issues, drop/withdraw requests, 100 hour degree checks, open enrollment – weeks 4, 5 and 6 of each session). So, each session, each learner receives at least one call from a Professional Studies advisor.

We understand that this is a transformative process that will require ongoing training, shifting of priorities and workloads as well as development of new and different tracking and reporting systems.

In addition to the above organizational shifts in thinking and working, the project to redesign the Entrance Seminar is now final. After two pilot projects were facilitated (one with military learners and one with civilian learners) the newly designed Entrance Seminar Blackboard shell has been created, tested and launched. In addition to refocusing and redesigning the Entrance Seminar assignments, readings and outcomes; another major change was to deploy both an Entrance Seminar Facilitator (faculty role) in addition to an Academic Advisor. The 2 on 1 environment is intended to provide learners multiple resource persons as they begin their studies at Southwestern College. Staff training occurred on February 6, 2009. Fundamental to the training was a clear understanding of the key competencies of Entrance Seminar Facilitators and Academic Advisors. This training was deployed as a competency-based certification for personnel in order to serve in one of these two roles.

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

This action project has had a major impact on Professional Studies leadership and staff. Of greatest impact are academic advisors and personnel involved in either the Entrance Seminar facilitator or academic advisor roles.

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

Of primary interest will be the:

a. Integration of new energy and direction provided by the Director of Academic Advising and Learner Engagement into existing practices and training strategies. For example this will include:
    - Continued one-on-one professional development meetings, bi-weekly advisor calls as well as bi-annual advisor training retreats
    - Further efforts will be engaged to actively reach learners who have "stopped out"
b. Provision of tools to ease Success Coaching Transition
    - Purchase high quality, hands-free, telephone headsets
    - Engage better learner contact reporting and tracking methods via a single data source
    - Deploy better reporting and progress measurement tools from a systems perspective as well as an individual accountability perspective
    - Engage in greater advisor cross-training for each academic program offered
    - Complete an advising "Systems and Procedures" training manual to include all best practices of learner success coaching.
    - Develop an electronic newsletter and/or other engagement vehicles for learners.
c. Develop additional systematic approaches in which to engage learners and link them to appropriate Professional Studies resources and personnel.
d. Identify additional web resources that would be beneficial to learners and implement as part of the master plan for our website redesign.

D. Describe any 'effective practices' that resulted from your work in this Action Project.

This action project is causing us to totally rethink and retool an existing operation (which historically served classroom-based learners) into one that is responsive to learners at a distance who have more choices when it comes to their education. While we consider ourselves a 'nimble' and 'agile' organization, transformation takes time.

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

As we continue to explore best practices in learner engagement and success coaching, we may find that our existing staff levels may be inadequate and/or require shifting. In a highly interactive environment where expectations of accountability and subject-matter competence are clearly delineated, advisee-to-advisor ratios tend to be lower than what we currently experience. We may need to rethink our staffing levels in order to achieve more effective and sustained retention outcomes.

AQIP Update: Student Information System

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

The initial goal of this project was to identify and correct of key SCT problems/processes, with planning for related training of key personnel.

During the "Define" stage of the DMAIC process, we identified the following tasks as critical to the achievement of the long term purpose, mainly the ability to CONTINUINGLY identify and correct key Information System issues. In other words, a one-time accomplishment of solving this issue is not enough because we need to solve the larger issue of continual improvements in the area of Student Information Systems.

During the "Measure" stage, the project team identified the following issues that must be measured; "Problems", "Projects" and "Training Requirements". These items are now captured in our tracking system using MS Sharepoint. Issues and Projects are separately identified to help facilitate prioritization. Training issues are routed through the VP of IT so that separate requests can be coordinated for optimum training solutions.

During the "Analysis" stage, the project team identified the following:

1) A "problem" is something that needs to be attended to immediately. This is a break-fix issue basically involving a process or function that was working before but is now no longer working.
2) A "project" is something that has work involved but is not something that is "broken". These projects needed some way of being prioritized.

The solution for the above analysis resulted in the creation of the APUG (Applications Power User Group). The project team formed APUG to be in charge of the continuation of the process. This team was provided with a basic team charter and will also form the basis for the "Control" stage.

All Projects are entered into the tracking system and monthly meetings are conducted where all participants can discuss the merits (or lack thereof) of each project and prioritize as needed. APUG also helps decide when an issue should be a project or should be categorized as "training required".

During the "Implementation" stage, the Sharepoint site was created and began to be populated. As well, APUG formed and completed their charter document to govern their members and their actions.

IT also implemented periodic technology training. At this time, the training has been in progress roughly once every week in the Fall 2008 semester and is yet to restart for the Spring 2009 semester. The "Lunch Bytes" training are provided by different individuals with expertise in each topic. The topics are identified through periodic surveys of the staff and faculty.

We are currently in the "Control" stage. APUG is functioning smoothly and the project and problem lists are being reviewed by the VP of IT on a consistent basis. All members of APUG have full access to both those lists and can request a review and reprioritization at any time. APUG also has a Sharepoint site to document all their activities.

We will continue to monitor the "Control" phase for another semester to ensure that the project has achieved its goals of continually identifying issues and has a smooth process for prioritization and implementation of the solutions.

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

This action project involved nearly everyone in the organization that touches the Student Information System. APUG is composed of different individuals from all parts of the college. Each has the responsibility to obtain input from their department, collaborate and share with other APUG members and communicate upwards to their department heads. Everyone in the college has access to view issues and projects (although not everyone can see all the details or make changes). This visibility has allowed better prioritization. As an example, we have seen a project (Integrating Nel-Net) dropped in importance when the project for upgrading the core SIS was inserted. This is significant in that we would have had to do twice the integration work needed if the original project was pushed through.

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

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The next stage is just “Control”, to monitor and make adjustments to the process through the work of APUG.

D. Describe any ‘effective practices’ that resulted from your work in this Action Project.

This project demonstrated the DMAIC method as a valid project methodology for our institution. Secondarily, this project has created visible results in these areas:

1) Transparent methods to request, review, prioritize and execute on problems and project requests.
2) Easily measure performance to plan of projects and requests.
3) Prevent requests and issues from falling through the cracks.
4) Allow consolidation of issues or projects with other related projects.
5) Streamline the status-ing of projects.
6) Clear understanding and agreements between all parties
7) Provide better corporate-wide decision making.
8) Help focus resources on critical or high ROI issues.

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

As we continue to monitor this process, we might need to ensure that turn over in the team do not result in the loss of knowledge. Finally, we need to continue to control the process to ensure that those results above are continual rather than just a one-time fix.