**Action Project:** Applied Learning  
**Institution:** Missouri Western State College  
**Contact:** Jeanie Crain --  
[crain@missouriwestern.edu](mailto:crain@missouriwestern.edu) -- 816-271-5997  

**Annual Update:** 2004-09-13

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**Description**

The goals of this project are: • To increase the percentage of graduates involved in credit bearing applied learning activities to 75% • To increase the opportunities for credit bearing applied learning activities • To improve the quality of credit bearing applied learning activities • To expand the range of complementary co-curricular applied learning opportunities • To improve the quality of complementary co-curricular applied learning opportunities • To make applied learning signatory to Western

**Related AQIP Criteria**

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<td>1-Helping Students Learn</td>
<td>3-Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs</td>
<td>8-Planning Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>9-Building Collaborative Relationships</td>
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<td>None</td>
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**Related AQIP Principles**

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<td>A - A mission and vision that focus on serving students and other stakeholders</td>
<td>D - A learning-centered environment</td>
<td>F - Collaboration and a shared institutional focus</td>
<td>H - Planning for innovation and improvement</td>
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**Rationale for Action**

- This project emanates from goals established in Western’s five-year strategic plan. Western’s plan identifies the importance of utilizing applied learning to develop students for their lives following graduation. Students need generally to be able to integrate classroom learning with their daily lives and with life and career goals. Research
has also shown that students who are engaged in their own learning and able to use the knowledge base, critical thinking abilities, and skills they acquire in the classroom in applied learning opportunities gain a better understanding and appreciation of what they are learning and have learned. Western is committed to developing “citizen-scholars” who have acquired the tools and skills necessary to be engaged members of society. Thus, the further development of applied learning opportunities at Western will strengthen the bridge that helps students develop these tools and skills prior to graduation.

**Areas Affected**

- School of Professional Studies • School of Liberal Arts and Sciences • Student Development • Western Institute • Public Relations and Marketing • Admissions

**Processes Affected**

- Communicating learning expectations to students • Identifying departmental strengths and institutional capabilities • Evaluating instructional structure and mentoring relationships • Promoting collaborative relationships among academic departments • Promoting collaborative relationships between academic departments and student development, including student government and student organizations • Promoting collaborative relationships between academic departments and external stakeholders • Improving communication between academic departments and college relations and marketing • Strengthening cooperation between academic departments and admissions

**Process Measures**

- Annual quantitative and qualitative audits of credit and non-credit bearing applied learning opportunities • Annual quantitative and qualitative audits of new and continuing internship, practicum, service learning and volunteer service relationships with external stakeholders • Periodic surveys of students to evaluate their awareness of and interest in credit bearing applied learning opportunities • Periodic surveys of students to evaluate their awareness of and interest in on campus co-curricular programming and opportunities • Periodic surveys of external stakeholders, such as community leaders, parents, counselors/teachers, community members and prospective students to determine their awareness of and interest in Western’s credit and non-credit bearing applied learning opportunities • Semester-by-semester student course evaluations in all credit-bearing applied learning courses for the period Fall 2004 through Spring 2006

**Outcome Measures**

- Compare the percentage of Western graduates participating in credit bearing applied learning activities (grouped by type, i.e., internships, practica, faculty/student independent study projects, etc.) in AY2005-2006 with the average percentage for the three-year period AY2001-2002 to AY2003-2004 • Compare the number of students who participate in co-curricular programming (grouped by type, i.e., lectures, events, volunteer projects, etc.) in AY2005-2006 with the number who participated in such programming in AY2003-2004 • Compare the number of co-curricular events and programs (grouped by type and number of participants) organized in AY2005-2006 with the number organized in AY2003-2004 • Compare qualitative assessments of credit and non-credit bearing applied learning activities
learning activities from the Fall 2004 semester with the same assessment for the Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 semesters

### Performance Targets

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Quantitative and Qualitative Stretch Targets</th>
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<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>(Nov. 2003-Sept. 2004) • Get at least forty percent of faculty (with representation from every academic department) to attend campus-wide forums to be held in late March and/or early April 2004 to complete the process of establishing consensus on the specific credit and non-credit bearing activities being used in this action project to determine baseline and target percentages and numbers of students participating in applied learning activities • Identify (or develop) by Sept. 1, 2004 an instrument (or instruments) acceptable to all academic units that can be used for the qualitative assessment of credit bearing applied learning activities • Identify (or develop) by Sept. 1, 2004 an instrument (or instruments) that can be used for the qualitative assessment of non-credit bearing applied learning activities and develop a system for tracking and evaluating the effectiveness of all co-curricular programming • Determine by Sept. 1, 2004 the “stretch target” for increases in the number of students attending campus co-curricular events in the third year of the action project compared to AY 2003-2004 • Determine by Sept. 1, 2004 the “stretch target” for increases in the number of students participating in campus and community volunteer service projects in the third year of the action project compared to AY2003-2004 • Determine by Sept. 1, 2004 alternative “stretch targets” for annual increases (by type, e.g., internships, practica, faculty/student independent study, etc.) in the percentage of Western graduates participating in required or elective credit bearing applied learning activities for each of the next five years based on an analysis of AY2003-2004 graduation data, and begin developing cost estimates of the staffing and other resource needs associated with these increases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>(Sept. 2004-Sept. 2005) • Determine by Dec. 31, 2004 specific “stretch targets” for annual increases in the percentage of Western graduates participating in different types of credit bearing applied learning activities for the next five years with specific recommendations for obtaining the funding needed, including private and external support, to meet these targets • Get at least forty percent of faculty (with representation from every academic department) to attend at least one of several campus-wide workshops to be held throughout the Fall 2004 term for the discussion of specific topics related to improving the quality and/or increasing participation in credit and non-credit bearing applied learning activities, e.g., “best practices” for internships and practica, networking with external stakeholders to establish higher quality internship and practicum opportunities, comparing quality standards for faculty/student independent study in different academic fields, “best practices” for successful and effective co-curricular event programming, etc. • Continue sponsorship of workshop events during the Spring 2005 semester with similar participation goals</td>
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<td>Three</td>
<td>(Sept. 2005-2006) • Meet or exceed the “stretch target” for the increases in the number of students attending a campus co-curricular event established at the beginning of year two • Meet or exceed the “stretch target” for increases in the number of students</td>
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participating in community and campus volunteer service projects established at the beginning of year two • Meet or exceed the “stretch targets” for increases in the percentage of Western graduates participating in different types of credit bearing applied learning activities established in year two

Keeping Focus

Western seeks to establish “applied learning” and “service to the region” as its institutional signatures. As such, much institutional energy is being directed to initiatives, such as this project, which support this effort. All of the specific initiatives identified in this action project are also closely aligned with the goals enshrined in the college’s five-year strategic plan, which has been developed with broad input and the support of representatives from all areas of the college, as well as with considerable input from the community.

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Annual Update: 2004-09-13

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

This Action Project focuses on increasing the number of students involved in credit and non-credit curricular and co-curricula applied learning experiences and improving their quality. Western prepared this Action Project in fall 2003. Activity since January 2004 has focused on: • re-establishing the 18–member Strategic Plan Applied Learning and Student Development Implementation Team • preparing proposals and securing $50,000 in funding from the college’s Strategic Plan Implementation Fund (SPIF) for the implementation of key elements of the Action Project • reviewing and revising the Action Item documents of the college’s Strategic Plan relevant to the Action Project • sponsoring two forums during summer 2004 primarily for faculty to inform them of current plans for the implementation of these goals and to solicit feedback. Western is now identifying a consultant who, with input from faculty and staff, will assist in the development of processes to assess the quality of applied learning activities. Last year, 78 percent of Western students participated in applied learning experiences. Records at Western indicate we will substantially fulfill the goal for increasing the percentage of students who will participate in an applied learning experience prior to graduation.

Review (11-19-04):
The original project plan was extraordinarily ambitious, so planning and reflection on its scope have been important for the College, which has taken some important first steps. However, since 78% of students already participate in applied learning experiences, how is the target for improvement being set? If “records” can show that the goal will be met, what is the point of the project? Also, consultants can be very useful in assisting
institutions; at the same time, however, the assessment of learning should become a core competency of the institution—especially if the learning is to be “signature”. How is the College insuring that it will learn from this process?

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

During summer 2004, the Applied Learning and Student Development Team held public forums and discussions with faculty and staff to encourage and assist them in the preparation of applications for funding for co-curricular events programming. The Team met either formally or in work sessions approximately ten times between mid-January and mid-May 2004, including meetings with the deans of both academic schools and the Vice President for Academic and Student affairs. Over sixty faculty or staff (representing sixteen of the college’s eighteen academic departments) attended the two 90-minute luncheon forums held in June and July; twenty-seven of these individuals returned brief questionnaires distributed at the forums. In AY 2004-2005, the Team will host similar forums focusing on specific areas of applied learning. Additionally, the Team co-chairs have met with key faculty—especially faculty active in the applied learning initiatives areas of internships and practica, independent research/study projects and travel/study programs—to inform them of the Action Project’s goals and to solicit their advice.

Review (11-19-04):
The Team has provided for communication through forums and meetings. However, since this project is strategic, might additional ongoing communication and involvement—perhaps leveraged by technology—be considered?

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

First, work must be completed on all of the “annual stretch target” goals included in planning for Year One and Year Two, including the development of specific methods for compiling base-line data, the development of an instrument (or instruments) acceptable to all academic units for the assessment of the quality of specific credit and non-credit bearing applied learning activities, and setting the “stretch targets” for annual increases and/or the third year of the project. Second, working groups must be re-established, recognized, or formed. These groups will have planning/oversight responsibilities in each of the four areas of credit-bearing applied learning, i.e., internships/practica, independent research/study; travel/study programs and service learning. Specifically, the academic deans will reconvene the existing Internships/practica Committee to work with the selected consultant. Faculty involved in campus-wide coordination of undergraduate research initiatives will be identified. The faculty Travel/Study Committee, currently chaired by the Director of External Campus, will be strengthened and a Service Learning Committee will be formed.

Review (11-19-04):
The activities specified around measures, tools and techniques are important. There will naturally be discernment across the College on academic matters. However, much of the project is framed as committee formation, consultant selection, etc. Is there sufficient disposition to action for this project? Is there commitment, enthusiasm about making this a “signature”?

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

A campus-wide evaluation of multiple measures of quality of all applied learning opportunities at
an institution of higher learning is relatively unique. Western plans to make its Applied Learning Project a model and best practice it can share with other institutions. Following the completion of this Action Project, the findings and data can be published to allow other institutions to evaluate their programs. This Action Project supports Western’s goal to make applied learning as a signatory to the institution. Western plans, implements, and reports progress on the Applied Learning goals established in its Strategic Plan at six meetings during the year. Western also publishes an annual Progress Report on the Strategic Plan.

**Review (11-19-04):**
The goal of creating best practice is admirable. The completed project may provide a useful model to others.

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

Each year, Western’s strategic planning teams must reshape action items for the implementation of the goals and objectives in the seven areas of planning. New implementation team co-chairs were appointed at the beginning of fall 2003, and the 18-member Implementation Team was reestablished at the beginning of spring 2004. Important among the accomplishments of the past year have been the securing of SPIF funding for implementing key elements of the Action Project, the revision of the strategic planning action items, and the sponsoring of two forums held during summer 2004. Some Year One projects have fallen slightly behind schedule. The main challenge will be to identify individuals responsible for establishing baselines for the assessment of applied learning. Developing multiple instruments for assessment of quality will be the primary challenge faced in completing this Action Project.

**Review (11-19-04):**
With so much preliminary work, the project's communication plan will be critical in maintaining focus and support across campus.

**F. If you would like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help to stimulate progress on this action project, explain your need(s) here and tell us who to contact and when?**

**Review (11-19-04):**

Back to Action Project list...