Action Project

Institution: Missouri Western State College
Submitted: 2004-02-13
Email: crain@mwsc.edu
Contact: Jeanie Crain
Telephone: 816-271-5997

Timeline:
Planned project kickoff date: --
Target completion date: --
Actual completion date: --

A. Give this Action Project a short title in 10 words or fewer:
   Applied Learning

B. Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer:
   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

C. Identify the single AQIP Category which the Action Project will most affect or impact:
   Primary Category: Helping Students Learn

D. 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:
   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.

E. List the organizational areas - -institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units -- most affected by or involved in this Action Project:
   School of Professional Studies   School of Liberal Arts and Sciences   Student Development
Western Institute  Public Relations and Marketing  Admissions

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

- 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

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

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.

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

- 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

I. 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:

- 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 from the Fall 2004 semester with the same assessment for the Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 semesters

J. Other information (e.g., publicity, sponsor or champion, etc.):
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 AY 2003-2004. 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 AY 2003-2004 graduation data, and begin developing cost estimates of the staffing and other resource needs associated with these increases (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 (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 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.

K. Project Leader and contact person:

Contact Name: Robert R. Klostermeyer, Acting Dean of Student Development
Email: kloster@mwsc.edu
Phone: 816-271-4432 Ext.

Annual Update: 2005-08-01
A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

This Action Project focused on assessment. Having met our goal to have 75% of graduates having participated in credit-bearing applied learning (it is now 78%), we turn to focus on documenting the quality of these experiences: o In November 2004 a proposal for $100,000 in funding from the college’s Strategic Plan Implementation Fund (SPIF) was prepared, and funded. o A first qualitative assessment was completed in February 2005, with the report from that assessment posted on the Academic and Student Affairs website in March. This semi-structured interview methodology targeted academic department chairs. o A second qualitative assessment finished in June. A more elaborate interview based on literature review targeted faculty the department chairs identified as involved in applied learning. The report will be posted in July 2005. o The first Applied Learning Poster Session was held on April 28, 2005 to showcase faculty work funded in 2004. This also provided a venue to communicate new funding opportunities for applied learning travel and research. o Two travel and five research projects related to applied learning were funded using the SPIF dollars for the summer and fall terms. o A Campus Compact Institution-Wide Grant to study service-learning was funded in May 2005.

Review (08-28-05):
Western has exceeded the original goal of 75 percent of graduates participating in credit-bearing applied learning. This project came out of the 5 year strategic plan and focused on using applied learning to prepare students for the workforce. Western is now concentrating on documenting the quality of the applied learning experiences through qualitative assessment using interview methodologies with department chairs and faculty. Western should be proud of the progress you have made on this project. Helping to prepare students for what comes after graduation is a worthy goal. You are communicating results and raising awareness through showcasing faculty work along with travel and research projects. To further assess the quality of the student experience, it seems a reasonable next step to expand the assessment to include feedback from students who are involved in the applied learning experience, and from those individuals the students work with.

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

The very nature of the assessment methodologies employed in the Spring 2005 included a large percentage of the faculty involved in applied learning. All 18 department chairs completed an interview in February, and later during that semester and early summer at least 50 additional faculty members were interviewed as well nearly 40% of the faculty between the two interview projects together were involved. Secondly, the Applied Learning Poster Session was a campus-wide event. This session gave faculty an opportunity to see what sort of travel had been funded by Applied Learning SPIF dollars in the past calendar year, and to talk with the new Applied Learning Director about upcoming funding opportunities. Approximately 40 faculty attended. Finally, we continued to use formal meetings as a mechanism to involve both faculty and staff. One meeting of the full Action Project committee was held in the Spring Semester, and two meetings of a subcommittee charged with evaluating internal travel and research
funding applications were also held. Asynchronous e-meetings of the co-
curricular evaluation committee were held throughout the fall and spring to
review applications, as well. There is no overlap between the two evaluation sub-
committees composition, allowing for wider involvement.

**Review (08-28-05):**
Western has done a fine job of involving faculty and staff in this Action Project. Using different methods you have included all 18 department chairs and nearly 40 percent of the faculty. This is very close to another goal of the project. It is unclear if full-time and part-time faculty are included in these numbers. Many schools must depend on part-time faculty and it may be important to include them in the further expansion of this Project. Often part-time faculty come from careers in the workforce and can help add another dimension to the quality and richness of the applied learning experience.

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

First, based on the interviews described above, a quantitative tool for assessing the quality of credit-bearing applied learning activity will be developed and used for the first time in the Fall 2005 semester. This tool will be validated against subject matter expert rankings, and refined for continued use. It will provide the basis for a systematic and continuous assessment of credit-bearing applied learning to be tracked in a database over time. We will also seek to increase the participation rate in credit-bearing applied learning from 78% to 90%. Once that process is in place, qualitative assessments of complementary co-curricular applied learning will begin so that a corresponding assessment program of those activities can be developed. The Campus Compact Grant described above will fund an assessment that contrasts outcomes from volunteer service to those of service learning activities, as well. Additional SPIF dollars will be sought to continue funding faculty development activities such as: (1) travel to applied learning conferences, (2) conducting research on applied learning, and (3) bringing keynote speakers to grow the previous year’s poster session into a symposium. Finally, to better establish applied learning as signatory to Western, a stronger web-presence related to applied learning will be developed.

**Review (08-28-05):**
Western is combining both qualitative and quantitative assessments to evaluate the results of this Action Project. This provides a balanced assessment that can be tracked over time and will provide valuable information to your institution. You have attended to the resource issue by supplying funding for multiple aspects of the project to ensure success and continuation. Faculty have been well represented in the development and implementation which provides legitimacy and bringing in keynote speakers for a symposium this year will add that external expertise. The web-presence featuring applied learning will further institutionalize this Project. Your next steps are well founded and laudatory. Finding other universities or colleges with related Action Projects would give you one more method to compare your progress and perhaps generate even more discussion or ideas for Project participants. The AQIP Action Project website is searchable and may supply you with other information.

D. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.
Once the quantitative assessment tools described in #2 have been developed and validated, dissemination of the development process and the tools themselves will occur. First, they will be submitted for presentation at the National Society for Experiential Education’s Annual meeting. Based on any feedback received at that event, submission for publication will occur. Additionally, as the poster session grows into a campus-wide symposium, we hope to transform it into a national conference focused on Applied Learning within 2-3 years. Then, we aim to use that conference as a platform to launch a peer-reviewed journal, *Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education*. This journal will be a unique outlet for the variety of applied learning activities that tend to be treated in different sources in spite of their commonalities. It will provide an outlet for any best practices Western develops, as well as an outlet for other applied learning scholars across the country.

**Review (08-28-05):**
Western has made excellent progress with this Action Project and your plans for dissemination through presentation and publication are exciting. As you move closer to this portion of the Project please consider sharing your effective practices with AQIP; opening another venue for additional higher learning institutions.

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

Faculty involvement in applied learning activity hovers at approximately 50%, which is lower than ideal for an institutional signature. This has been evidenced by fairly low response rate to internal RFPs for applied learning travel and research funds (we received only 13 applications during the spring RFP for summer and fall funding), as well as lower than desirable turnout for the Applied Learning Poster Session. Increasing involvement of faculty will be a continuing challenge as departments struggle with how to deal with faculty load related to applied learning. Institutionally, we need to begin to address this challenge to dramatically affect faculty involvement. More modest effects will hopefully result from smaller workshops that target particular areas of applied learning more specifically. A second challenge will be to focus more heavily on external funding sources. Although a Campus Compact Institution-Wide Grant has been secured, identifying larger and more long-term funding sources will be important to the long-term success of applied learning as Western’s signature. This is related to the faculty load issues, as many faculty report a lack of available time for writing such large-scale grants.

**Review (08-28-05):**
The challenges you identify for this Action Project are not surprising considering faculty work load and funding issues. Again, using the searchable AQIP Action project website to identify how other institutions achieved higher rates of participation may be beneficial. Be sure to celebrate and broadly publicize the faculty participation you currently have including testimonials from students and applied learning sites. Those faculty members who are mildly resistant may respond to the good news approach identifying positive student impact. It may also help faculty involvement if Western is able to offer some assistance with writing grants either through external or internal experts. Many individuals are not comfortable with grant writing on
their own, but may be able to complete a proposal with assistance.

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 (08-28-05):**