**Action Project**

**Institution:** Missouri Western State University  
**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
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 successful 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 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. 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. 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@mwse.edu
Phone: 816-271-4432 Ext.
A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

Based on qualitative assessments from 2005, we identified areas for faculty development in applied learning. Using these to guide keynote speaker invitations, we hosted a statewide Conference on Applied Learning in Higher Education on February 10-11. Approximately 28 institutions of higher education sent representatives to this conference, with 58 of the presenters coming from outside of Western. Over 25% of Western faculty/staff members also presented. This Action Project continued its emphasis on assessment. As suggested by previous reviewers, we developed a quantitative tool for assessing student perceptions of the quality of their applied learning experiences. This tool was distributed to every student enrolled in a credit-bearing applied learning experience during the F2005 and S2006 semesters, yielding nearly a 60 percent response rate. Student ratings were overwhelmingly positive exceeding scale midpoints. In addition to progress on these fronts, we presented the results of early assessments at the NCAHLC Annual Meeting. A related publication appeared in the conference proceedings. A publication of the quantitative student tool developed is also in progress, as adequate psychometric data now exists on the instrument. Finally, we continued to fund faculty travel and research related to applied learning, and saw an increase in the request for such funds.

Review (10-23-06):
Missouri Western State has developed a systematic process for incorporating applied student learning into their curriculum. An assessment process and instrument have been developed whereby the student’s applied learning can be quantitatively evaluated. Psychometric data has been collected and a data base now exists. Funding has been provided so that faculty can travel and conduct research in applied learning. Missouri Western State has made significant progress on this action project addressing AQIP Category I, Helping Students Learn. This is consistent with the college’s commitment to the development of a culture of quality.

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

The assessment focus of the project, again, involved a large number of persons. Faculty supervising applied learning experiences cooperated to disseminate the assessment tool to students enrolled in their courses. Over 2,000 questionnaires were distributed during the Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 semesters to students enrolled in applied learning courses, with over 1300 questionnaires returned. This number represents over 20 percent of Western’s student population. Second, the Conference on Applied Learning in Higher Education was a state-wide event. Fifty-one faculty and staff members from Western presented their work at the meeting, and 28 institutions from across the state were also represented. This venue represents significant progress compared to the previous year’s campus-wide poster session, including both internal and external participants from higher education as well as individuals from the workforce. Finally, we continued to use formal meetings to involve faculty and staff. Subcommittees charged with evaluating internal travel and research funding met three times throughout the year, and asynchronous e-meetings of the co-curricular evaluation committee were held as needed. Because the membership on the subcommittees does not
overlap, it maximizes faculty involvement.

**Review (10-23-06):**
Broad participation has come from both inside and outside the college community. Students and faculty input is vital to the success of the program. Other educational institutions have been incorporated into the project through the Conference on Applied Learning in Higher Education sponsored by Missouri Western State. Applied learning also means that an environment is provided for the student to learn. In some situations, this may be an employer or community organization. The college may also want to assess, if they are not already doing so, the perceptions of those working with the students in an off campus environment. As a result, both the student's perceptions of their learning and the employer's perceptions can be evaluated and compared.

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

Having successfully developed a quantitative tool to assess the quality of credit-bearing applied learning, we aim to disseminate this tool through conference presentations and publication. We will use the results of this tool to continue to develop a database to track the quality of our applied learning activity. Second, we aim to transform the statewide Conference on Applied Learning into a regional, and ultimately, a national event. The regional status should be achieved by February 2007, and national status should be reached by 2010. Once national status is established, we intend to launch a Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education that will be published quarterly. Third, we will begin to develop mechanisms for assessing co-curricular activity related to applied learning. This includes both a quality assessment, as well as a co-curricular transcript. Finally, we intend to seek funding through new sources. This action project has received three years of Strategic Planning Implementation Funds, and is now in its final year of funding. Although the project will continue to be supported, now through base funding, finding external sources of support will be increasingly important to its visibility and success on a national scale.

**Review (10-23-06):**
Plans are in place to move the action project forward. The application of this action project to a broader audience is significant. External educational institutions and their students can benefit from applied learning. The dialogue generated can enrich both Missouri Western State's program as well as those of outside groups. The statistical database can provide comparative quality comparisons across various institutions.

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

We have already begun to share our results on the national stage. This spring, we presented results from assessments collected during the early part of 2005 at the NCAHLC Annual Meeting in Chicago. This presentation focused on the use of qualitative assessment strategies in conjunction with quantitative tools, and how institutions can manage and use qualitative data. A related publication was included in conference proceedings. Furthermore, the development of the quantitative tool for assessing student perceptions of quality was completed this spring, and will be submitted for presentation at a national meeting during 2007.
A related publication is in preparation. Finally, we have made significant strides by moving in a single year’s time from a campus-wide poster session to a statewide conference, with an eye to going regional by February 2007, and national by 2010. This conference, also the launching pad for the Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education, provides a unique outlet for the variety of applied learning activities that tend to be treated piecemeal at most institutions. The conference provides (and the journal will provide) an outlet for our own, as well as colleagues’, best practices.

**Review (10-23-06):**
Missouri Western State should be very proud of their applied learning program. In particular, the program has demonstrated the use of qualitative assessment data in association with quantitative assessment tools. This will have application beyond applied learning to other forms of creative student experiences.

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

Although student involvement has reached its 75 percent goal, we aim to increase that involvement to 90 percent. This represents a large stretch goal and will be challenging to meet as Western moves forward. Additionally, we continue to strive to increase faculty involvement in the applied learning initiative beyond the 50 percent mark. We hope that the conference will provide some support to faculty interested in the applied learning initiative who have not yet joined in. Certainly the feedback from our assessment processes continues to be that the institutional strategies for calculating workload functions as an impediment to faculty involvement, and this issue will need to be addressed either through incentive funding (which we have begun to attempt) or through policy change. A second challenge will be developing the parameters of the co-curricular transcript. The variety of activities that might be included in this document are many, and we must work together as a faculty and staff to define what activities count, and will be certified by the institution. Achieving consensus on these matters is often difficult, and will involve a great many people. Finally, we continue to struggle to increase the number of external funding sources to support the applied learning initiative.

**Review (10-23-06):**
Challenges still face this action project mostly in the form of increased workload for faculty. Financial incentives may motivate the faculty to participate in the applied learning program. Intrinsic incentives will provide a longer and more sustained involvement by the faculty. External development of the program is positive but internal factors such as faculty buy in have to be addressed for continued success and growth of the program.

**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 (10-23-06):**
Missouri Western State should be very proud of the work that they have done. This is a very creative and positive action project in their continued effort to Help Students Learn.