Action Project

Institution: Missouri Western State University
Submitted: 2007-04-13
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Timeline:
Planned project kickoff date: 04-12-2007
Target completion date: 09-14-2009
Actual completion date: --

A. Give this Action Project a short title in 10 words or fewer:
Building Graduate Programs

B. Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer:
Western will develop the infrastructure and curriculum for the Master of Applied Science and the Master of Applied Arts degrees. Students will be admitted beginning the fall semester of 2007. A continuous improvement model will be applied to the degree programs, the support services, and the administrative processes associated with graduate program offerings at Western. This Project has received external review from the Provost at Southeast Missouri State University. The Project will receive $100,000 Strategic Planning Implementation Funds (SPIF) for each of three years. The institution has also committed $100,000 in scholarship funding for graduate programs.

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:
On August 28, 2005, Missouri Western State College became Missouri Western State University. The change to university status was strongly supported by students, graduates, faculty and staff, Western’s Board of Governors, regional businesses and industries, the St. Joseph Area Chamber of Commerce and local governments. Changing the status of Western from an undergraduate college to a university was a top priority for each of these groups. The legislation that authorized the name change also authorized Western to offer masters degree programs and gave the institution a statewide mission in applied learning. The Higher Learning Commission extended the accreditation of Missouri Western State University to include the Masters of Applied Science and the Masters of Applied Arts in December 2006. The visiting team that recommended that extension suggested that Western develop an Action Project in Graduate Programs. The Master of Applied Science degree with options in Chemistry, Information Technology Management and Human Factors and Usability Testing was approved by the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education in December 2006. With an established reputation for quality undergraduate programs that emphasize applied
learning for our students and faculty involvement in applied research, Western’s graduate programs will continue to emphasize applied research and applied learning. The initial degree offerings, the Master of Applied Science and the Master of Applied Arts, are interdisciplinary professional masters degree programs designed to respond to changing workforce needs and to prepare graduates for present and future professional opportunities. The degrees will provide graduates with the appropriate knowledge and skills required by the professions and industries. These degrees have been developed in concert with practicing career professionals and will prepare graduates for work in various professional fields. The emergence of Western as an institution of higher education offering graduate programs will have a strong impact on the region. Through the development of graduate programs, Western is better able to share our intellectual resources and to respond to regional educational needs. Individuals, organizations and business/industry will benefit from the opportunities that advanced education presents. Western currently contributes an economic impact of about $161 million per year to the region; the economic impact with the expansion of graduate programs will be significantly greater.

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

The departments and units most affected by this project include: the academic departments offering the degree programs, support units (such as Admissions Office, Financial Aid, Grants and Sponsored Programs, Institutional Research Office, Instructional Media Center, Library Services, Registrar’s Office, Student Development, Student Services), and the administrative offices of the Graduate Dean and the Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs. The Graduate Council at MWSU is responsible for developing and recommending University policy and procedures for graduate study; establishing standards and criteria, and approving graduate curriculum in accordance with existing University policies; and, through the Graduate Dean, for advising the administration on matters affecting the administration of graduate education. This includes graduate offerings, student policies, and graduate faculty appointments.

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

Processes for the administration of graduate programs at Missouri Western State University will be developed. These processes include Selection, Admission, Registration, and Progression of graduate students Development of Graduate Curriculum Functions of the Graduate Council Graduate Student Support Services

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

(April 2007 September 2009). This project is designed as a three-year project with annual goals. Rationale for Length of Time: Three years will be needed to fully implement the assessment plan. Goals and Mileposts: April 2007 September 2007 1. Form Graduate Council 2. Establish Graduate Council Bylaws 3. Form Graduate Council Standing Committees 4. Work with the support areas (admissions, financial aid, registrar, library, business office) to establish effective policies and procedures for graduate students 5. Secure sufficient resources for the graduate programs 6. Complete the development of the Graduate Web site 7. Develop a plan for publicizing the available programs 8. Develop a schedule of courses 9. Admit students to begin fall semester of 2007 10. Develop a comprehensive assessment plan for graduate education at Western September 2007- September 2008 1. Implement the assessment plan 2. Continue to respond to regional needs
in the development of additional graduate programs 3. Secure funding for graduate scholarships and graduate assistantships 

September 2008  September 2009 1. Develop additional graduate programs that respond to regional needs 2. Develop a graduate student association 3. Continue to assess and improve the quality of graduate education at Western

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

A Strategic Plan Implementation Team has been established to monitor and report on the progress on Building Graduate Programs. This team will report quarterly to the Strategic Plan Steering Committee. In addition, the Graduate Council and the Graduate Dean will have responsibility in monitoring the quality of graduate programs and the associated policies and procedures.

I. Describe the overall "outcome" measures or indicators that will tell you whether this Action Project has been success or failure in achieving its goals:

1. Assessment plan will be fully implemented. 2. Students are enrolled in the degree programs, progressing, graduating, and securing jobs. 3. MAA degree will be implemented.

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

K. Project Leader and contact person:

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Annual Update: 2008-08-27

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

The first Missouri Western State University graduate students were admitted for the fall semester of 2007. These students were enrolled in the Chemistry option or the Information Technology Management option of the Master of Applied Science degree or the Graduate Certificate in the Teaching of Writing program. The Master of Applied Science in Assessment program enrolled students beginning with the summer 2008 semester. As stated in the Building Graduate Programs Action Project proposal, the goals for the second year of this action project included: 1. Implement the assessment plan, 2. Continue to respond to regional needs in the development of additional graduate programs, and 3. Secure funding for graduate scholarships and graduate assistantships. These three goals were met along with many other accomplishments. Results for Goal 1: The first-year assessment is in progress for the programs that have been implemented. This assessment will be completed by the academic unit and reviewed by the graduate council, the graduate dean, and the provost during the fall 2008 semester. Results for Goal 2: Over the past year, Western received approval from the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education for the following new degree programs: Master of Applied Science (MAS) in Assessment with options in Learning Improvement and Writing; Master of Applied Arts (MAA) in Integrated Media with options in Applied Integrated Media Convergent Media; and Master of Applied Arts (MAA) in Written Communication with options in Writing Studies
and Technical Communication. Students have been accepted into the MAS in Assessment options and the MAA in Integrated Media options. The MAA in Written Communication will enroll students beginning with the Fall 2009 semester. Results for Goal 3: The institution has committed $100,000 per year for graduate scholarships. Additional scholarships have been acquired through private gifts in the amounts of $25,000 and $19,000. Twenty-eight students received a total of $58,000 in scholarships and five students have been awarded graduate assistantships at $11,000 per academic year.

Review (10-03-08):
Missouri Western State University is now in its second year of curriculum delivery for graduate students in two separate programs. Having received permission to develop additional programs, MWSU has committed funding for scholarships. All three of the goals outlined for this project have been achieved. The University will now focus on continued development as well as the important simultaneous project of assessing the program internally. It is not clear from this statement what kind of assessments have been conducted, but the University should ensure that different measures are being used—for example: student, faculty, and community surveys; continued evaluation of progress made on the strategic plan; and various forms of assessment of student learning (which should focus on program outcomes as well as course outcomes). As you continue to grow and expand your programs, you will want to focus on the Processes and Results sections listed under AQIP Category #3, Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs. After you complete your fall 2008 assessment, do you have a plan to make ongoing reviews of the program? As you pilot new initiatives associated with the program, be sure to institutionalize the procedures (such as internal review) so they become part of the campus culture and your annual planning and budgeting cycles.

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

The Graduate Council includes a voting representative from each academic unit with a graduate program or course and the academic deans, a faculty senate liaison and the graduate dean as non-voting members. The Graduate Council at MWSU is responsible for developing and recommending University policy and procedures for graduate study, establishing standards, criteria, and approving graduate curriculum in accordance with existing University policies and, through the Graduate Dean, for advising the administration on matters affecting administration of graduate education. This Council has been very active in establishing graduate studies at Western. In addition to the faculty members who serve on the Graduate Council, other faculty members have assisted with the establishment of graduate programs through course and program development. Other individuals and departments who have contributed significantly include staff members from admissions, the Registrar’s office, the library, financial aid, the business office and student affairs. Graduate students have provided valuable feedback about processes, scheduling and curriculum. Scholarships for graduate students have been acquired from private gifts through the work of individuals in University Advancement.

Review (10-03-08):
As in last year’s review, MWSU continues to demonstrate attention to the inclusion of various
constituencies in processes that involve significant changes for everyone on campus (AQIP Category #4, Valuing People). Of critical importance as you move forward, however, are the processes you are establishing to ensure accurate and prompt communication across departments, programs, and offices. It might be useful to prepare and publish (internally) a document that describes the communication cycle at the institution, especially as it relates to the development and assessment of program effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

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

The planned next steps for this project for September 2008 through August 2009 include the following: 1. Develop additional graduate programs that respond to regional needs 2. Develop a graduate student association 3. Continue to assess and improve the quality of graduate education at Western 4. Develop and implement program-specific recruiting strategies

Review (10-03-08):
These seem like natural directions for the future. Item #3, of course, continues to be critical as you move forward. Be sure to involve marketing and recruiting people early in the process so they can engage not just with the "product" and its promotion but also with the processes that were followed and what those processes say about the culture of MWSU.

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

Following the tradition at Western of faculty working with students on projects and applied research, graduate faculty members have been working with graduate students on joint projects that enhance the learning and experience of the students. We are beginning to see the positive results of these experiences. A MWSU graduate student in the Information Technology Management option of the MAS earned second place in the Business Intelligence competition at the national collegiate conference for the Association of Information Technology Professionals in Memphis Tennessee. A graduate student in the Chemistry option of the MAS was selected to present her research titled, Spectroscopic characterization of RTIL-solvent interactions via T1 and NOE difference measurements at the American Chemical Society 236th National Meeting in Philadelphia in August 2008.

Review (10-03-08):
These are excellent testimonials to your early successes and should be promoted by marketing and development offices. The University might also want to draft a statement about the role of research at MWSU - how faculty mentors facilitate learning outside the classroom, etc.

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

We still have work to do to manage the needs of international students during admission and progression processes. This past year we hired an international student coordinator who has been very helpful in developing policies and processes for the admission and support of international students. Another challenge is to develop effective student recruiting practices for specific programs.

Review (10-03-08):
These are normal "speed bumps" rather than major concerns. Other offices will likely experience similar challenges as students progress through these programs. It will be good to have a cycle of internal unit reviews that will help departments, programs, and offices identify strengths, weaknesses, and other trends that will affect the unit. These reviews should be monitored by senior administrators who can also look for patterns across units. You may want to consider hiring consultants who can help you with specific concerns regarding international students and recruiting.

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 (10-03-08):
The institution is making reasonable progress toward completion of the project.