The Increasing Graduate Degree Access and Options AQIP Action Project had a variety of goals identified in the initial AQIP Action Project Declaration Form. The main goal was to increase graduate degree access and options at Missouri Western State University. The Graduate School was started in 2007. Graduate programs are relatively new and growing, and a major goal of the AQIP Action Project is to support increased access to and growth in the Graduate School and its programs.

In order to grow it is necessary to market Missouri Western graduate programs and increase awareness of graduate programs and their benefits to the local community, the greater region from which Missouri Western draws students, northwest Missouri and the Kansas City metro area, as well as nationally. The first area of focus was to increase advertising in the local community and region. During the Fall of 2012 planning was done to increase print and cable television advertising. Two advertising campaigns were planned in the Fall, 2012 and initiated during the Spring of 2013.

- **Television Commercials** - A faculty member in Missouri Western’s Digital Media program helped prepare five commercials for the Graduate School as well as several individual graduate programs - Health Care Leadership, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (AKA: TESOL), Forensic Investigation, Digital Media, and the technical programs in Chemistry, Information Technology Management, Engineering Technology Management and Human Factors and Usability Testing. These commercials began running on a consistent rotation on the local cable network in March 2013.

- **Newspaper advertising** was planned during the Fall 2012 semester and initiated in March 2013. Print advertisements for each of the individual graduate programs were run in the *Kansas City Star* newspaper at a rate of two ads per week, and have run consistently through the spring and summer. Print ads were also taken out in special editions of the Kansas City Star newspaper (January, June).
• **Periodical advertisements** were purchased in *Newsweek* (November 2012) magazine and in the regional business journal *Ingram’s Kansas City Business Magazine* (July 2013).

• **Google Adwords** had been used by the previous Graduate Dean, and those ads were continued throughout the year. This was not an area of focus, but will be an area to examine more closely in the upcoming year (see planned next steps).

• **New program recruiting materials** (brochures) were developed for several graduate programs whose recruiting literature were out of date or had not been developed.

• **Overall advertising expenditures** were increased by nearly 37% during the 2012-2013 academic year compared to the previous academic year.

**Determining advertising effectiveness** - Several possible measures of advertising effectiveness included: 1) number of applications submitted, 2) overall and new student enrollment, and 3) credit hours generated. It may be too premature to know if the increased advertising has been effective at the time of this report, however the tables below provide some baseline data for continuing comparison and evaluation.

• **Student enrollment and credit hours generated**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2011</th>
<th>Spring 2012</th>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
<th>Spring 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit Hours Generated</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>1,045</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall growth is increasing and the Graduate School would like to see more significant growth and will continue to monitor these factors.

• Application and Admissions data from the Admissions Office for the Fall 2013 semester is incomplete at the time of this report submission; however the most recent report (as of July 31, 2013) gives the following information in comparison to Fall 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2012 (as of July 31)</th>
<th>Fall 2013 (as of July 31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Applications</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Students Enrolled</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*An obvious increase in the total number of applications can be seen (27.5% increase)*, whereas the relative increase in new students enrolled is only 7.4%. However, it should be noted that some applications for Fall 2013 admission are still being processed and some students have not enrolled for Fall classes. In particular, some international students...
who have been accepted have not enrolled at the time of this report submission and it is hoped that the total enrollment will continue to grow. It might be suggested that the increase in overall applications submitted is due to the increased advertising described above. This remains to be proven, but a survey of incoming students may provide some evidence of advertising effectiveness.

Several other goals were indicated in the AQIP Action Project Declaration. The project title includes two specific goals: **Increasing Graduate Degree Access and Options**. The Graduate Council and Graduate Dean took several actions to increase options available to current and future graduate students at Missouri Western including:

- **Increased course offerings.** The Masters of Applied Science (MAS) degree includes several degree options which utilize a common core of six business courses. In the past core courses were offered in a set schedule of fall and spring courses. This limited the number of courses available as well as the number of seats available for students. In the Spring of 2013 nearly all core courses were either nearly filled to capacity or over-enrolled so that students could continue their programs in a timely manner.

- The Graduate Dean requested that **all core courses be offered in each semester** to increase the overall number of course options, to increase flexibility in scheduling for students, and to provide an increase in available seats.

- **New MAS core courses** were developed through the Graduate Council curriculum process to increase course selection for MAS students. Two technical writing courses were introduced as options to the communication course required for MAS students. This should increase course options and increase flexibility and customizability for degree for students.

- **Two new graduate programs were introduced in 2013**

  - **Masters of Applied Science: Sport and Fitness Management Option.** This new option was approved by Missouri Department of Higher Education (MDHE) for implementation in January 2013. This degree is aimed at those working in health and fitness areas who want to increase their business and leadership skills to advance in their careers.

  - A new certificate program in **Professional Skills** was approved by MDHE for implementation in January 2013. This certificate is primarily aimed at working professionals in technical areas who want to increase their understanding of professional skills (management, communications, and marketing) without a full Master’s degree.
• **New student recruitment** is an area of great emphasis. The Graduate Dean and two graduate program coordinators attended a graduate student recruiting workshop in the Spring of 2013. The workshop provided information to assist individual faculty as well as Graduate School recruiters and admissions personnel to become more efficient in recruiting processes.

• **Development of new programs of interest to local and regional community stakeholders.** St. Joseph contains a large number of animal and life science companies. During the Fall of 2012 and Spring of 2013 Missouri Western faculty from the Biology and Chemistry departments conducted interviews with several local companies to assess their interest in the development of a new Master’s degree to support the local life science companies. Missouri Western faculty and administrators met with scientists, managers, human resource and production personnel to identify areas of need for current and future employees. Based on the interviews and comments received Biology and Chemistry faculty have been working on developing a curriculum for a new graduate program to serve the needs of local life science industry. A proposal for a new graduate degree program is expected to be presented to Graduate Council for consideration within the 2013-2014 academic year.

• **A new partnership with Xi’edian University in China** was finalized during the past year. This partnership was designed to align Missouri Western’s Masters of Applied Arts in Written Communication with a corresponding graduate program at Xi’dian University. The coordinated program allows Xi’dian University graduate students to attend Missouri Western after completing one year of graduate course work at Xi’dian University. The students complete a year of course work in the Written Communication MAA program at Missouri Western. Graduate students then return to China for one semester to complete their thesis which is also reviewed by Missouri Western. If the thesis is accepted Xi’dian University students receive the MAA in Written Communication from Missouri Western State University. This agreement also contains an agreement for faculty exchange between Xi’dian University and Missouri Western faculty.

R:

MWSU Graduate School has made good progress on its Action Project. The work supports Criterion 5 Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness as the university endeavors to increase graduate school degrees and options. The graduate school addressed this goal by increasing awareness of degree offerings, expanding access to courses through different course scheduling model, and developing new degree programs based on feedback from community stakeholders. These changes demonstrate AQIP Category 3 Understanding
Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs. A great deal of change has been accomplished in a short time.

Going forward, metrics to measure success will be vital. A great deal of money was spent on advertising, including on print media, television, and social media. The report does not mention how lead generation is tied to these different advertising campaigns. Each of these approaches should be evaluated to determine which is most effective. As younger people rely more on their various hand-held devices for information, it would be important to know if advertisements in newspapers or journals are reaching the desired audience. Including coding options on all inquiry, lead, and application materials will help the graduate school determine how best to deploy resources, and also help determine if different programs should advertise differently. The fact that the conversion rate has dropped should prompt some review of the kind of lead generation underway. It might be important to shift some additional focus to training the recruiters once the conversion rate is thoroughly explored.

With several new programs launched or ready to launch, taking these next steps now is crucial in order to get data to help future decisions.

2: Institution Involvement

A:

The MWSU Graduate School is led by the Graduate Dean and the Graduate Council which is made up of 20 faculty representing all of the departments offering graduate course work. The Graduate Dean is the primary person responsible for overseeing this AQIP Action Project. However, the Graduate Dean could not coordinate all of the activities covered in this project without the assistance, advice and input from a much larger group across Missouri Western’s campus. The Graduate Dean works closely with the University Provost, the Academic Deans, the Graduate Council, and graduate faculty teaching and advising graduate students, as well as a variety of offices and personnel across the campus (e.g. Registrar, Admissions, Financial Aid and Business office).

The Graduate Dean coordinates new curriculum offerings and changes with Graduate Council and individual departments, academic Deans and the Registrar’s Office.

The Graduate Dean coordinates new program submissions to the state with the Provost and Associate Provost.

The Graduate Dean coordinates Graduate Assistantships with a variety of academic and service units including Human Resources, Financial Aid, and Business offices.

The Graduate Dean coordinates new student recruitment with individual graduate programs and academic departments and the Admissions and International Student Service offices.

The Graduate Dean monitors various factors to assess graduate program performance including enrollment and admissions, credit hours generated, degrees awarded and other factors with assistance from Academic Affairs, Admissions, Registrar’s, and Institutional Research offices.

R:
The MWSU Graduate Dean has a lot of responsibilities that must be coordinated across a great many departments. It is not clear that the Graduate Dean has any assistant or associate deans to help with these large projects. Certainly the Graduate Dean is involved with appropriate parties across the university. It is not clear from this description what kinds of committees are established that would assist in the communication and project management of the work of the Graduate School. It is also not clear how the university marketing department is engaged with this work.

3: Next Steps

A:

The Graduate School Office needs to determine which interventions implemented in the past year are having an effect on applications submitted, student enrollment, student performance and degree completion. The Graduate School Office will continue to monitor enrollments, admission applications, and related data.

To assess the effectiveness of advertising on recruitment and applicants, new students need to be interviewed or surveyed to determine which recruiting methods were influential in their decision to apply and enroll at Missouri Western.

Analytics will be used to trace web site “hits” and patterns. The Graduate Dean will work with the Public Relations and Marketing Director who has a strong background in marketing and web based media to analyze the past history and effectiveness of Google Adwords, as well as current advertising methods for advertising current graduate programs.

The use of internet advertising is currently being planned to reach those who use the internet to search for graduate programs. The use of targeted marketing with analytics to identify specific types of internet users with interest areas that match Missouri Western’s graduate programs will be explored.

The Graduate School web site needs to be redesigned to be more user-friendly for both current and potential students. The Graduate School’s web site needs to be “optimized” and key words suggested for internet search engines to increase the probability of search engines identifying Missouri Western for students looking for graduate programs.

The use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc…) as potential recruiting mechanisms will be explored in the upcoming year. The use of social media was highly encouraged as an effective mechanism for getting information to potential graduate students.

Faculty, program directors and admissions personnel will be encouraged to attend graduate student recruiting workshop provided by GAPSEMC (Graduate and Professional School Enrollment Management Corporation). It may be possible to invite the recruiting consultant to Missouri Western so that more faculty could participate in a site-based workshop.

Data from the Admissions Office indicates that Graduate School applications have increased by 27.5% over the past year. However, student enrollment has only increased modestly (7.5%). Conversations with graduate program directors and Admissions staff indicate that many initial applications are not completed. The Graduate School and graduate program directors and faculty need to develop plans for sustaining contact with applicants to encourage those students to complete the application process. The Admissions Office is reviewing software that will allow for greater control of applicant information and development of systematic contact plans with applicants. Admissions staff have invited the Graduate School Dean and Council to assist in this review.
International student recruitment could be another means for growing Missouri Western’s Graduate Program. The Graduate School will work with the International Student Services office and the Admissions Office to examine strategies for attracting high quality international students to Missouri Western.

One area of challenge created by the increasing graduate student enrollment is the supervision of theses and capstone projects. More graduate faculty are needed to supervise these projects or serve on graduate student advisory committees. The Graduate Dean will work with department chairs to recruit more faculty to apply for Graduate Faculty status. The Graduate Council will be reviewing the criteria for Graduate Faculty to determine if adjustments can or should be made to facilitate the recruitment of graduate faculty.

Low faculty load for program directors or supervising theses and capstone projects was also raised as an issue by Graduate Council during the past year. The council will be working with the Deans and Provost to evaluate current policies and determine if and how faculty load policies might be adjusted. Adjustments to these policies might help in graduate faculty recruitment.

R:

The focus for this ongoing project is evaluation. A principle of high performing organizations is fact based information gathering, and MWSU is following this principle as it anticipates next steps. As to the project itself, major projects are planned on several fronts. It could be easy to get overwhelmed, so perhaps the best place to begin this process is to design several separate projects that can be worked separately and with different teams or committees.

One area of focus is current advertising. The next steps indicate working with the Admissions Office on a CRM. This would be a wise first step. With a CRM, the graduate dean and admissions staff will be able to generate and analyze the analytics about enrollment patterns. Investigating the various CRMs available will take some time and a good CRM will take fiscal and training investment, but over the long run, MWSU will be able to deploy staff time effectively. As MWSU looks, very wisely, into making greater use of social media for recruiting purposes, a CRM will help greatly in tracking how leads are being generated and which leads are converting. Because a CRM can be an expensive supplement to the current tools, a strategic plan that addresses the cost of implementation should be designed.

Before more investment is made in the current advertising campaigns, MWSU will want to develop the mechanisms for tracking the results of these investments. Developing methods to learn how current applicants learned of the program is a good step and should be designed in a way to continue to implement over a longer period of time. Reviewing inquiries that did not apply and those who completed, even partially completed, applications would be an important step to include in this plan. Finding out why people did not complete an application will provide valuable information about how the programs are being perceived. It may be possible to determine what programs inquiries are choosing instead of the one at MWSU. When reviewing this information, the admissions office should also look at incomplete applications. It would be important for the graduate school and admissions staff to know the barriers that seem to keep potential students from completing an application.
GAPSEMC will undoubtedly offer some good suggestions to faculty, admissions, and program directors. Looking at other consultants who can help design a Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan might be advantageous for the entire university. Other consultants might be able to offer very specific training to help recruiters market the programs and convert inquiries to leads.

MWSU has wisely identified the need to address the faculty responsibility for theses and capstone work. It could have been easy to realize there was a problem when students were in need of thesis guidance. Because there could be budgetary implications, workload and recruiting decisions need to be addressed sooner rather than later.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A:

Effective practices that resulted from this Action Project revolve around building effective relationships with internal and external groups. For example, the Graduate Dean has worked to develop a positive relationship with several campus resources in the development of new recruitment and advertising materials and media (print and video). The Dean will continue to work with individual graduate programs and the Public Relations and Marketing Office to create advertising materials and to target those materials toward each program’s target audience. It is hoped that new video/TV commercials similar to those developed in the past year can be created for other programs.

The Graduate Dean has also worked to establish a positive relationship with several advertising media suppliers. The Dean will continue to work with these suppliers if the methods appear to be beneficial. The Graduate School intends to increase marketing in the North Kansas City metro area, which is seen as a good target area for recruiting due to the relatively close proximity to St. Joseph and the demographics of the population in that area. The Graduate Dean has identified several advertising outlets to increase Missouri Western’s exposure in North Kansas City. Television advertising may also be considered, although the cost in the Kansas City region is considerably more expensive than in the St. Joseph area.

The graduate student recruiting workshop offered by GAPSEMC was an extremely valuable resource that covered recruiting materials, pamphlets, advertising (print/video/TV/internet/) using mobile technology (cell phone/tablets/apps), web site design for best recruiting, and methods increasing for increasing admission application completions, and effective recruiting methods. Graduate faculty and program directors will be encouraged to attend a meeting or the Graduate School will consider bringing the recruiting specialist to Missouri Western so more faculty can take advantage of the workshop.

The Graduate School and individual graduate programs need to continue to reach out to local stakeholders in the community. Interaction developed with local life science companies have established some good relationships for understanding the needs of local life science companies and what the university can provide. This has spurred faculty to begin developing a new graduate program. Closer interaction with the St. Joseph School District and/or Heartland Health Medical Center could provide similar results within the Education and Nursing departments’ graduate programs. Continued interaction could also lead to possible internship opportunities for graduate students.
The Graduate Dean has expended a lot of energy in building relationships across the campus and throughout the community. His willingness to do so, and his understanding of the value of collaboration, should become a model throughout the university. Every college or university can be prey to silo-ed thinking and acting. The engagement with multiple stakeholder groups demonstrates AQIP Categories Category 4 Valuing People, Category 5 Leading and Communicating, and Category 6 Supporting Institutional Operations. The Graduate Dean has also demonstrated the value of looking for partners outside the university. Often it is far more effective to outsource, such as working with advertising media suppliers, than to attempt to do all the work internally. Likewise, looking to consultants for guidance to think of new approaches. The Graduate Dean clearly sees the value of connecting new degree programs to community and industry needs. This could lead to internship opportunities and new avenues for joint research projects. If other MWSU colleges are not following this example, they could. Perhaps either an article in a university publication or a lunch time workshop could be developed to share these approaches.

5: Project Challenges

A:

Increasing awareness of Missouri Western and its graduate programs as a regional option for potential graduate students is a work-in-progress. Advertising in its many forms will continue to be an area of focus. Plans for recruiting internationally need to be developed. International recruiting is relatively new to Missouri Western and mechanisms for identifying possible partner institutions or recruiting need to be developed. The Graduate School staff is limited in size to the Graduate Dean and a single administrative assistant. This makes a great deal of work for a very small staff, and people who specialize in in specific areas of need (recruiting, admissions, marketing, technical issues, etc...) are housed in other units with their own responsibilities and duties. Continuing to improve workplace processes so all demands are met in a timely manner is a challenge for next year.

R:

MVSU Graduate School is to be commended for moving forward on many aspects of this AQIP project with a lean team to accomplish the work. The need to improve workplace processes sums up the challenges succinctly. Two recommendations are to assess what is already in motion before doing anything more and develop a strategic plan that identifies specific projects over a period of time. Most universities struggle with tight budgets, so it will be crucial to see a return on the advertising campaigns. Hiring a consultant for a brief period of time to help design the mechanisms to determine the ROI could be more profitable than moving forward at this time with all the current advertising projects.
Many universities are looking overseas for new student markets. Careful planning will help. This AQIP report mentions the value the dean and others found in attending a conference or workshop on recruiting. It might be worthwhile to find a workshop to help provide some basics on how to develop this new market. In the meantime, there is still potential to be explored in the outreach to more regional and national markets. Gathering information and developing a three year strategic plan will provide a blueprint that will keep the momentum going, allow for some opportunities to make changes as appropriate, and help the graduate school dean manage the many demands on his time.