### Project Details

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<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Category</strong></td>
<td>3-Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Updated</strong></td>
<td>08-06-2014</td>
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<td><strong>Reviewed</strong></td>
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#### CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

**A:**

The Baccalaureate Degree Completion Initiative AQIP Action Project was created on 9/1/2012 and is projected and anticipated to be retired on 8/31/2015. The project is progressing well on all goal areas and has positive results that impact not only the institution but stakeholders and the regional community.

The Baccalaureate Degree Completion Initiative is part of the Missouri Western Strategic Plan *Achieving Excellence, Transforming Lives 2012-2015* and is directly linked to AQIP Category 3 Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs. The University seeks to provide pathways and support to encourage degree completion for citizens who have some college credits and who desire to complete a degree.

**R:**

Missouri Western State University indicates progress has been made in achieving project goals, and the University is on track to complete the project in August 2015. The University also acknowledges the link between this action project and AQIP Category 3 Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs and the University's strategic plan. The University may also benefit from reviewing the latest Systems Appraisal to see if this project positively impacts any of the Strategic Challenges identified by the Higher Learning Commission’s review team at that time. If there is a link to one or more of those Strategic Challenges, it may be helpful to revisit and leverage the reviewers' comments from that time in order to drive greater improvement.

#### ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

**A:**

The six goals of the project and the progress of achievement of these goals follow:

1. **Recruit back to baccalaureate study citizens who have dropped out of college while in good standing, focusing on adults with substantial prior college credit.**
In addition to the information following, Goal 1 will be further accomplished by the completion of goals 2 through 6. Specific marketing and implementation steps to recruit back citizens to baccalaureate study include:

2. Created Degree Completion Web site [http://www.missouriwestern.edu/completion/bgs.asp](http://www.missouriwestern.edu/completion/bgs.asp)

1. Created billboards to market Back to Western and online course offerings.
2. Developed online versions of all courses required for minor in business.
3. Developed online versions of all courses required for minor in psychology.
4. Cross-marketed Back to Western, the Bachelor of General Studies (BGS), the Buchanan County Degree Attainment Initiative (BCDAI) and the MWSU-Heartland partnership to expand the success of each program.
5. Sent post cards to MWSU former students encouraging them to complete their degree. Approximately 3000 cards were sent to former students who had at least 75 completed credit hours and had current addresses.
6. Marketed Back to Western, the BGS and online courses in various print and electronic venues (e.g., multiple interviews on local TV stations, Kansas City Chiefs’ and Kansas City Royals’ souvenir programs, hand fans at Chiefs’ Summer Camp, electronic billboard on primary highway in the region, billboard on major interstate between Kansas City and St Joseph, ads in St Joseph News Press, stickers on front page of St. Joseph New Press, mailing and e-mailings to hospital employees, flyers at Family Day at National Air Guard base, table and flyers at regional entertainment events, etc.).
7. Continued growth of inventory of online courses and resulting growth in online enrollments (see below).

2. Help participants develop appropriate degree completion programs of study related to career goals, focusing on the use of Missouri Western’s Bachelor in General Studies and Bachelor of Science in Technology.

*Back to Western* is the tag line for the initiative aimed at encouraging adults to return to the university to complete degrees begun at MWSU or other colleges. The Back to Western marketing campaign was begun during the summer of 2013, after a new completion degree was approved by the faculty, the university Board of Governors and the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education. This completion degree, the Bachelor in General Studies (BGS), was viewed as the key to the potential success of Back to Western. While those returning to Missouri Western or coming to Missouri Western from other universities may pursue any MWSU degree, the BGS provides the curricular flexibility many returning students need to complete a degree in a reasonable amount of time making appropriate use of prior coursework.

Following the marketing of the BGS in summer 2013, a number of students enrolled in this degree for Fall 2013. To date, over 200 individuals have made serious inquiries about the BGS with staff in the Western Institute (WI). WI staff have maintained a database of those they have advised. In addition to BGS students advised in the WI, some adults seeking the BGS have sought advisement from academic departments.
Of the 200+ potential BGS students who have been advised in the WI, approximately 75% are adults who were not current students at the time of inquiry. Currently there are 53 declared BGS majors and another 20 graduated in 2013-2014. Interest continues to grow, and many of the adults whose files are currently in process will formally enroll in the BGS or other majors for Fall 2014.

3. Develop and offer courses to meet the needs of recruit-back participants, using delivery methods that meet participants’ needs and good pedagogical practice

Most adults recruited through Back to Western wish to take most, or all, of their courses online. MWSU continues to expand its inventory of online courses, but the university needs to add a few courses in select areas (e.g., lab sciences, humanities) to more fully respond to the needs of citizens in the region. Since an initiative to build the inventory of online courses began in Spring 2009, the inventory has grown from 32 course titles to 264. Fall 2013 online enrollments exceeded 3000 credit hours.

4. Increase the proportion of Buchanan County citizens with baccalaureate degrees

The majority of adults enrolling in the BGS degree are from Buchanan County, and the marketing focus of Back to Western is Buchanan County.

In addition to the Back to Western initiative, there are three other new MWSU initiatives that will grow the number of baccalaureate degree holders in Buchanan County.

In Fall 2013, a new partnership was created between MWSU and Heartland Health – a large hospital system with its primary site nearly adjacent to the university. Full-time and part-time Heartland caregivers who were eligible for tuition reimbursement from Heartland were also provided a 20% tuition discount by MWSU. Over $54,000 in scholarships (tuition discounts) were awarded to 94 caregivers in 2013-2014. Twenty of these caregivers were not enrolled at MWSU in the two terms prior to receipt of the scholarship, suggesting that the initiative is encouraging adults to seek degrees or complete previously started degrees. Funded by a $1,000,000 grant, the Buchanan County Degree Attainment Initiative (BCDAI) provides up to $7500 in scholarship support to employees and interns of “high impact” (as defined by the state of Missouri) businesses. The goal of this program is to help working adults complete a baccalaureate degree that will assist them in developing their career. At least 51% of the participants in each participating business must be members of low or moderate income families. Participants must be endorsed by their employer, receive mentoring by their employer, and be eligible for a promotion after completing a degree. Of the minimum 126 slots available in this program 23 participants have been recruited to date.

MWSU is actively partnering with the 139th Air National Guard Airlift Wing. The Airlift Wing has sought assistance from the University in providing opportunities for enlisted personnel to complete associate degrees, and eventually baccalaureate degrees. For promotion within the Air National Guard to ranks above sergeant, enlisted personnel must have at least an associate degree. Advanced ranks require a baccalaureate degree. For Fall 2014 there are 37 members of the Guard signed up to take a MWSU math preparatory course as many members of the Guard seek to refresh their mathematics knowledge before enrolling in a college level math course required for an associate degree from the College of the Air Force. Following the preparatory course, MWSU will offer college level math courses to Air National Guard members. Other Air National Guard members are already taking a wide array of courses from MWSU and those taking the preparatory math course will also begin to take an array of courses from the University. There are also ongoing activities with the
Air National Guard to move enlisted personnel into baccalaureate degree programs as they complete their associate degrees. Many members of the Airlift Wing reside in Buchanan County, the home of the Airlift Wing.

*Back to Western*, the BCDAI, a significant portion of the MWSU/139th Air National Guard Airlift Wing partnership, and the MWSU/Heartland partnership are all housed in the Western Institute, allowing significant cross-over between the initiatives and cross-marketing. For example seven of the 23 BCDAI participants are Heartland caregivers who are also receiving a 20% tuition discount, and at least six of the 23 are pursuing a BGS degree.

**5. Positively impact the regional economy and improve the fiscal status of project participants.**

There are countless studies that provide data illustrating the economic impact of a college degree. While the economic value of a baccalaureate degree varies widely by discipline (e.g., early childhood education - $36,000 per year vs petroleum engineering - $120,000 per year), a 2014 report by the Pew Foundation listed the average salary for 25-32 year olds with only a high school education as $28,000 per year versus $45,000 for those with a baccalaureate degree – see http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/02/11/the-rising-cost-of-not-going-to-college/.

Business and industry partners of the Buchanan County Degree Attainment Initiative that endorse employees or interns for scholarships must indicate the salary the participant is likely to earn after completing a baccalaureate degree vs the salary the participants currently earn, with the former exceeding the latter.

The MWSU/Heartland Health project was based on the premise of Heartland Health that employees who earn a degree will become more effective employees of Heartland Health and will help Heartland Health to grow its revenue via enhanced patient care. To the extent this is true, the wages of Heartland employees who complete a degree will be enhanced.

**6. Advertise the successes of the project to recruit additional participants and grow the positive impact of the program.**

*Back to Western*, the BGS, the MWSU/Heartland Health partnership, the MWSU/Air Guard partnership and the BCDAI routinely are the topics of TV and print interviews with the Dean & Executive Director of the Western Institute, are featured in general interest stories in regional media, and are shared by word of mouth within participating organizations and by individual participants. The evidence of the awareness of the initiatives and their value is the enrollment growth in these initiatives. See numbers cited previously.

Metrics and measures used to determine progress include:

**1. Recruit back to baccalaureate study citizens who have dropped out of college while in good standing, focusing on adults with substantial prior college credit.** The number of citizens enrolled in BGS, BCDAI, MWSU/Heartland Health partnership, MWSU/Air Guard partnership who were not enrolled at MWSU prior to enrolling in initiatives will provide a rough estimate of the impact of *Back to Western*. However, some individuals impacted by *Back to Western* marketing might return to the university without being identified as a product of *Back to Western*.

**2. Help participants develop appropriate degree completion programs of study related to career goals, focusing on the use of Missouri Western’s Bachelor in General Studies and Bachelor of Science in Technology.** The number of declared BGS and BST majors, and the number of BGS and BST degrees awarded are measures of appropriate degree completion advisement.
3. Develop and offer courses to meet the needs of recruit-back participants, using delivery methods that meet participants’ needs and good pedagogical practice. The growth of online courses and enrollment in online courses are measures of this goal.

4. Increase the proportion of Buchanan County citizens with baccalaureate degrees. BGS and BST graduations by Buchanan County residents not enrolled at MWSU prior to advisement for the BGS or BST are measures of this goal.

5. Positively impact the regional economy and improve the fiscal status of project participants. Surveys of BGS and BST graduates could provide data on the economic impact of Back to Western. Collection of these data has not yet begun.

6. Advertise the successes of the project to recruit additional participants and grow the positive impact of the program. A survey of participants could ask them to indicate how they became aware of Back to Western. In addition, an inventory of success stories could be created.

R:

Missouri Western State University has identified six goals as originally declared in version 2.0 of this action project. Metrics/measures have also been identified for four of the six goals. The University has an opportunity to solidify measures/metrics for assessing progress toward project goals five and six. By identifying the project’s economic impact and which marketing efforts and degree plans are yielding the best results, improvements could be made to allow the University to have an even larger impact on current and potential students in Buchanan County.

3:

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

A:

As noted in question 2 above, there have been over 200 serious inquiries to the Western Institute (e.g., potential BGS student made an appointment and submitted transcripts and/or plans of study, or sought assistance in developing plans of study). For this new program, there are 53 current BGS majors at MWSU and 20 students graduated with a BGS in the past year.

The previously existing BST had only two majors in 2013-2014. However, a revised BST curriculum was drafted and approved. We anticipate increased enrollments of new students in 2014-2015.

During the past year, the online course inventory grew by 45 course titles to 264. Online enrollments grew over 14% from 2631 to 3005 from Fall 2012 to Fall 2013. Spring 2013 to Spring 2014 online enrollments grew by about 5% from 2759 to 2890.

In the past year, the MWSU/Heartland Health scholarship program grew from zero to 94 caregivers, with over $54,000 in support provided.

The BDCAI grew from one participant to 23 in the past year, with $17,381 in scholarships provided.
The MWSU/139th Air National Guard Airlift Wing partnership began during the year and 37 Air National Guard members are signed up for a preparatory math course.

R:

The University has made good progress to date in achieving its mileposts and intermediate objectives as listed in the action project declaration: to have at least 140 inquiries since program inception, at least 40 program participants, and at least 18 graduates by August 2015. To date, there have been more than 200 serious inquiries, 53 current students who have declared a BGS major, and 20 students who have graduated with a BGS in the past year. While recent improvements have been made to the BST program, this program has not yet realized comparable increases. The University has an opportunity to closely monitor the BST program to see if further improvements are needed to allow for even greater impact for Buchanan County students. Additionally, while mileposts/objectives have been achieved, the University may also benefit from determining whether those in the reported results were part of the cohort as identified in project goal one: "citizens who have dropped out of college while in good standing, focusing on adults with substantial prior college credit." By determining whether inquiries/students/graduates meet this definition, the University may glean a better picture of the impact of the Baccalaureate Degree Completion Initiative.

4:

INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

A:

The recruitment, processing and support for the Baccalaureate Degree Completion Initiative is primarily housed in the Western Institute and multiple WI staff are engaged in advising students and marketing the program – Dean & Executive Director, Assistant Dean, Program Coordinator, Program Development Liaison, two Marketing Coordinators, multiple Administrative Assistants.
All of the academic deans, many department chairs and many faculty have been involved in advising students and approving programs of study.
Many faculty have developed and offered online courses.
The President, Provost and other administrators have participated in meetings with initiative partners (e.g., Heartland Health, the 139th Air National Guard Airlift Wing).
Admissions and Financial Aid have been very involved with these initiatives, especially because they are new and policies and procedures needed to be devised.
The Instructional Media Center has been very involved in training faculty to use distance learning technologies and in developing web sites for the initiatives.
Public Relations & Marketing have been involved in setting up media and print interviews regarding the initiatives.

R:
Missouri Western State University has involved many stakeholders in this action project, demonstrating its commitment to the following Principles of High Performing Organizations: Broad-based Involvement and Leadership Support. These efforts have served the University well in achieving the project's goals. In addition to these efforts, the University may also benefit by involving BGS and BST graduates to assist in measuring success of project goal five as well as surveying participants to assist in measuring project goal six. Involving these two groups may position the University to better achieve these Principles of High Performing Organizations: Focus on Stakeholders and Foresight to Plan Proactively.

| 5: | EFFECTIVE PRACTICES |

- **A:**

Online courses and new students recruited through *Back to Western* have increased university revenue. As a rough estimate, assuming that 75% of the 73 2013-2014 BGS students were new students recruited by *Back to Western*, and assuming these students averaged 12 credit hours for the year, the new revenue would be in the range of $200,000. As *Back to Western*, the BCDAI, the partnership with Heartland Health and the partnership with the 139th Air National Guard Airlift Wing grows, so too will revenue. A reasonable assumption is that in 2014-2015, the combination of these initiatives will enroll 200 new students. At an average of 12 credits per year, this would generate about $550,000 in revenue.

While MWSU has always included a large percentage of non-traditional age students, *Back to Western* and related initiatives are bringing more students aged 25 and above to the University. An increase in “adult” students will impact courses and the campus in general in a number of ways.

The success of *Back to Western* reminds the University that if we attend to the needs of the citizens in our service area they will come to the University.

- **R:**

Throughout this project, Missouri Western State University has demonstrated its commitment to AQIP Category 9 Building Collaborative Relationships. Partnerships with Heartland Health and the 139th Air National Guard Airlift Wing are meeting students' needs and positively impacting the University as a whole. Consequently, the University is enjoying increased revenue and new markets in the form of non-traditional students. These positive relationships are a win-win situation for students, the University, and these organizational partners. Creating such relationships is an effective practice that the University may wish to expand to other areas of the institution. Doing so may reap even greater benefits for all involved.

| 6: | ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS |
A:
The inventory of online courses, even at 264, does not contain several courses that would be of benefit to returning students. Efforts to provide these courses in an online format continue. Additionally, as more adults come back to MWSU to complete their degrees and as these adults share their experience, other adults may come to MWSU expecting a wider array of options within the BGS and BST. For example, potential students may ask, “why does MWSU not offer X as an online major” or “why do I have to have a completed applied associate degree for a BST, versus a significant number of hours of applied associate degree level coursework”. It is a priority to develop sufficient degrees options for students. As BGS enrollment increases and as enrollment in related initiatives increases, there may be a need for a modest increase in staffing in the Western Institute.

R:
MWSU cites challenges in offering some key courses online, developing sufficient degree options, and the potential need for increased staffing in the Western Institute. While these growing pains are common to a project of this nature, the University is encouraged to expand upon its proven success with collaboration and involvement (Principles of High Performing Organizations: Promoting Collaboration and Broad-based Involvement) to garner faculty support in expanding online options and in developing degree options to meet students' needs. Further analyzing project progress by identifying and measuring success of project goals five and six may assist in growing these options by allowing students' stories to demonstrate these needs. These stories and measuring the overall achievement of project goals may also provide a means to justify additional staffing in the Western Institute.

7:
PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIME LINE

A:
The BGS, Back to Western, the BCDAI, and the partnerships with Heartland Health and the 139th Air National Guard Air Lift Wing are proceeding well and hopefully all are largely institutionalized already. The primary goals for next year include (1) increased marketing of the initiatives, (2) expansion of the BCDAI through more assertive and out-of-the-box exchanges with potential corporate partners to increase the number of scholarships awarded, (3) continued efforts to develop online courses; increased development of courses and offering times to meet the needs of Air National Guard members. Each of these goals has an ongoing timeline.

R:
The University has outlined appropriate next steps for project work during the next year. While MWSU indicates timelines have been established for each of the three items, these were not included. Ensuring these timelines are clearly established will assist all
involved in achieving goals for the year. In addition, ongoing assessment of the six project goals as a part of those timelines will help maintain the momentum that has already been established for this project.

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<tr>
<td>MWSU’s work on the Baccalaureate Degree Completion Initiative is showing positive results for students in Buchanan County. Leveraging collaborative relationships by expanding partnerships to meet student and community needs is commendable, and the University may wish to replicate such win-win partnerships across the institution.</td>
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