1:

CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

A:

Project Title: Increasing Graduate Degree Access and Options
- Planned kickoff date - September 1, 2012
- Target completion date - August 31, 2015
- Project Status – In Progress

The Increasing Graduate Degree Access and Options AQIP Action Project is making steady progress and has achieved some of the initial goals. The primary aim of the project is to increase availability of and access to Missouri Western’s graduate programs. Over the past two years new graduate programs have been developed, serving new interests and expanding opportunities for potential students. Additional course sections and more regular course offering are helping to provide greater flexibility for planning and scheduling. New policies have been developed for the benefit of both students and faculty, and enrollments and credit hours are increasing. Overall, the primary goals of this action plan are being accomplished.

R:

The current status of the Action Project appears to be on track with the original three year project. The status section could also describe the connection of the Action Project to the institution’s Strategic Plan Steering Committee. This would demonstrate an understanding and commitment to HLC Criterion 5, Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness.

2:

ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES

A:

The purpose of this AQIP Action Project is to increase access to Missouri Western graduate degree programs for a variety of potential students and stakeholders. Increasing access requires expanding the array of options available to potential graduate students including
increased course offerings and expansion of degree programs to address the needs of students and employers. Increasing access also involves improving awareness of available programs and recruitment of graduate students locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. All of these efforts should support Graduate School enrollment growth and increase the number of options available and the overall accessibility of Missouri Western graduate programs to potential graduate students.

Measureable outcomes to be used for assessing success of the action project:
- Program enrollment and degree completion
- Student enrollment in graduate courses and credit hours generated.
- Course offerings - frequency and enrollment
- Development of new degree programs
- Development of formal agreements with outside stakeholders
- Survey of community leaders and employers for graduate education needs.
- Post-graduation survey of graduates
- Post-graduation survey of graduate employers

• R:

The outcomes described in this section align with the original project declaration. In general, the outcomes are clear and measurable in quantitative terms demonstrating Fact-based Information Gathering (a Principle of High Performing Organizations). Some of the outcomes, as currently listed, are focused more on process than measurable outcomes. For example, for the outcomes “post-graduation survey of graduates” and “post-graduation survey of graduate employers,” is the outcome merely to complete the survey or to utilize survey results for the improvement of the Action Project? Further, if the Action Project is successful, what types of data would demonstrate this in these surveys? Setting objectives for the types of survey outcomes expected would exhibit a greater alignment with HLC Criterion 5 Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness.

• 3:

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

• A:

New Graduate Programs
The close of the 2013-2014 academic year marks the completion of the seventh year for the MWSU Graduate School since it began offering graduate coursework and degrees in 2007. A specific goal of this action project was to develop new graduate programs that would serve the needs of the community and provide new opportunities for the university. With regard to this particular goal the Graduate School developed and approved the curriculum for four new graduate programs over the 2013-2014 academic year. The four new programs are
- Master of Applied Science - Industrial Life Science Option
- Master of Information Management: Enterprise Resource Planning Option
- Master of Science in Nursing - Nurse Educator Option
- Nurse Educator graduate certificate
These four programs were approved by the Graduate School’s governing body (Graduate Council) and were submitted to and approved by the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE) during the 2013-2014 academic year. The Industrial Life Science option accepted its first students and began offering classes in January 2014. The other three programs will begin offering courses for their first students during the fall semester of 2014. A fifth program, Master of Science in Information Technology Assurance Administration, was approved by the Graduate Council, and will be submitted to CBHE during the fall of 2014 with an expected starting date for implementation in the fall of 2015. Along with the two new programs offered during the 2012-2013 academic year (MAS Sport and Fitness Management, Professional Skills graduate certificate) the Increasing Graduate Degree Access and Options AQIP Action Project has already reached the goal of initiating six new graduate programs during just the first two years of the Action Project.

**Graduate Student Enrollment**
The data below provide an objective overview of student trends and graduate school performance in terms of recruitment, enrollment and graduation trends

**Average number of graduate students enrolled (fall & spring semesters)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>2012-2013</th>
<th>2013-2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>172 (+4%)</td>
<td>178 (+3.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total number of graduate school applicants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Applications</th>
<th>New Students Enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2012 (as of July 31)</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>50 (28.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2013 (as of July 31)</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>54 (22.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2014 (as of July 28)</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>52 (24.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total number of credit hours generated**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>2012-2013</th>
<th>2013-2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credit Hours Generated</td>
<td>2395</td>
<td>2517 (+5.1%)</td>
<td>2742 (+8.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of enrollment trends:** From the data above the average graduate student enrollment has continued to increase by 3-4% annually over the past two years. Although this growth is very modest it is notable that the enrollment has held steady even with a large increase in graduating students (>50 students) in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 academic years.

The number of applications for graduate admission has increased significantly during the past two years (+37% for fall 2013, +21% for fall 2014) in comparison to the number of applications submitted for fall 2012 before the AQIP Action Project began. The growth in applications submitted may be due to an increased investment in advertising regionally over the past two years. However the number of new students enrolling has remained flat. We
hope to increase the number of applicants who ultimately enroll in the Graduate School by pursuing those applicants more aggressively. This is a goal that has been discussed between the Admissions Office and the graduate program directors. The Admissions Office will be implementing new CRM (customer relations management) software and coordinated efforts will help graduate program directors develop follow-up routines for contacting applicants in a more systematic manner to assist in recruitment.

Although enrollment has increased modestly, the credit hours generated from the graduate school has increased more significantly. This suggests that more graduate students are enrolling in more course work, and perhaps more graduate students are enrolling as full time students as compared to part time students.

**New Graduate School web site**
The Increasing Graduate Degree Access and Options AQIP Action Project report for 2012-2013 indicated that updating the Graduate School web site was an important next step. A new web site was developed and launched in March of 2014. The new web site utilizes WordPress for easy design and maintenance. The new web site is easier for users to navigate and conforms more to the university’s general web site template making it more consistent for users. Time and attention are being applied to provide more information for current and potential students.

**Graduate Course Offerings**
One aspect of Increasing Graduate Program Access and Options relates to course delivery and flexibility. As program enrollment has grown demand for courses in some areas has increased. Some stand-alone programs are able to manage their course offering with little concern other graduate programs. However, the six different programs under the Applied Science umbrella all require a common core of professional courses to be completed by all graduate students in this degree. Enrollment in the Applied Science programs have increased significantly, more than doubling since the Fall 2012 semester (30 students) to 70 students in the spring of 2014. Prior to the fall semester of 2013 these core course courses were only offered once per year. During the 2013-2014 academic year the Graduate School requested that all of these core courses be offered at least twice per academic year to allow for the increased demand and to assist with scheduling issues for students.

In addition, plans are being developed to establish a rotation of the Applied Science core courses that is predictable and reliable for students and the departments offering these courses. This plan will allow students and faculty advisors to chart out a plan of study. Many of the graduate students are working adults. Having a known, consistent course offering schedule has been requested by graduate students to help manage work schedules with their class schedules. It will also help departments and faculty as they plan for scheduling graduate courses each year.

**R:**

Missouri Western State University (MWSU) is making very good progress toward meeting the outcomes of the Action Project. With a year to spare, MWSU has already had four new graduate programs approved by the Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education (the target was for three-five new graduate programs to be approved within the three year timespan of the Action Project). This accomplishment indicates that MWSU has put sufficient resources toward Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support (HLC Criterion 3) in an effort toward Helping Students Learn (AQIP Category 1). In addition, the
institution provides clear quantitative data and analysis of those data to support increased enrollments, applications, credit hours, and degrees conferred in graduate programs since the implementation of the Action Project. These actions represent Principles of High Performing Organizations, Fact-based Information Gathering, and Foresight to Plan Proactively. Further, qualitative data describe the implementation of the new graduate school web site which addresses AQIP Categories 1, Helping Students Learn, and 2, Meeting Student and Other Key Stakeholder Needs.

4: 

INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

A:

Completion of the second year of this action plan also coincides with the Graduate Dean, Dr. Ben Caldwell, completing his second year leading the Graduate School. The Graduate Dean serves as a member of several standing committees and groups listed below.

- **Graduate Council** – The Graduate Dean serves as the recording secretary and ex officio member along with graduate faculty who oversee review and development of Graduate School policies and issues.
- **Graduate School Office** – the Graduate Dean oversees all aspects of the Graduate School in regard to admissions, marketing and program promotion, curriculum development, scholarships and assistantships, student academics and support, student issues and concerns, graduate faculty issues, and any other Graduate School related areas.
- **Deans Council** – made up of the heads of units supporting the Office of Academic Affairs (Student Success, Center for Academic Support, Admissions, Library, Registrar, academic deans, Western Institute).
- **Academic Deans** – made up of deans for all of the academic schools and colleges. The Graduate School has programs or course work across each of the various schools and colleges at the university including the colleges of Professional Studies and Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the School of Fine Arts and the Craig School of Business.
- **College Completion Team** – members include academic deans, faculty, and staff that support student admissions, advising, retention, academic support and student services.
- **Governance Advisory Council (GAC)** – members come from the major units overseeing academic affairs, student affairs, financial aid, admission, academic records, athletics, financial planning, public relations, physical plant, and faculty, staff and student governance associations. GAC serves as a communication hub for reviewing proposed policies before final approval and implementation
- **International Student Enrollment Management** committee – members includes academic deans, student affairs, residence life and admissions staff. The group oversees various aspects of campus life related to international students including recruitment, student life, articulation and partnership agreements, and new student orientation. Other groups and individuals across the university campus play key roles in the delivery of graduate programs.
- **Graduate faculty** – any faculty involved in the development, support and delivery of academic graduate programs.
- **Graduate Program Directors** – faculty who oversee day to day operations of individual graduate programs and advising of graduate students. Graduate Directors are responsible
for coordinating admission review of applicants, recruiting and marketing efforts, advising students and serving on Graduate Council. Some program directors oversee more than one graduate program. For instance, the MAS Assessment programs in Autism Spectrum Disorders and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages are coordinated by a single program director within the Department of Education.

With the end of the 2013-2014 academic year there has been a significant turnover of program directors. Of the twelve graduate program directors seven will be brand new to their positions in the fall of 2014. Of the remaining five program directors only two have more than a year of experience in their position. Due to the large number of new or newer program directors a training program was put in place during the summer of 2014 to help transition and train the new programs directors for the duties of their positions, and to familiarize them with Graduate School policies and practices. The Graduate Dean and program directors with more experiences worked extensively with the new program directors, and the training program was favorably received. This should aid the ability of the program directors to begin their duties in the fall semester with greater understanding and confidence.

- **Graduate Students** are the main beneficiaries of the Graduate School and the actions of each of the groups above. The students are the primary driving force for most of the activities undertaken by the groups and individuals with interests in supporting the Graduate School, the particular graduate programs and the students enrolled in graduate programs. One area that requires attention is reviving the Graduate Student Association (GSA). The GSA was established in 2008 by some of the very first graduate students enrolled in the Graduate School. As these students completed their programs and graduated there was little interest by the following students in maintaining the GSA as an active organization. In order to have a stronger voice at the university the GSA should be re-established. In addition the GSA elects a student representative to the Graduate Council so that students may have a voice in Graduate School matters and policies. GSA representatives would also automatically participate in the Governance Advisory Council (GAC) and the Missouri Western Strategic Plan Steering Committee.

**New or revised policies** were approved over the past academic year that will hopefully have a positive impact on the Graduate School and its students. Development of these policies were initiated in Graduate Council:

- The definitions of graduate faculty were amended in an effort to recruit more faculty to participate in graduate programs. As programs have grown more faculty are need to deliver course work and to supervise theses and capstone projects and internships. Additional language was included that should allow faculty with specialized training or certifications to work with graduate students. These changes required a vote of the entire graduate faculty since these definitions are outlined in the Graduate School Constitution. The changes were strongly endorse with a 94% approval by the graduate faculty.
- Workload for supervising theses and capstone projects and internships was increased in recognition of the effort made by faculty in overseeing theses and projects. This change was initiated in Graduate Council, but required cooperation and approval by the academic deans. Implementation begins in fall 2014.
- A pilot program was approved all graduate program directors to receive reassigned time in their workloads to allow them perform such as recruitment, curriculum development, advising, seek out internship opportunities and other related activities to help the programs succeed. This change was initiated in Graduate Council, but required cooperation and approval by the academic deans and is being implemented in fall 2014.
- Change of student status – Prior to a new policy developed this past year, currently enrolled non-degree seeking students wishing to formally enter a graduate program were required to go through the entire admissions process. A new process for changing from non-degree seeking to degree seeking was developed to facilitate the transition to degree seeking status. This change was initiated in Graduate Council and required cooperation between the Graduate School, Registrar’s and Admission offices to work out the details and procedures.

- Change of Program – Some graduate students have requested to either change their current graduate program to a different degree program or to add a second degree or a certificate to their program of study. In response to these types of requests a process was created to allow students to request a change in their program of study. This change was initiated in Graduate Council and required cooperation between the Graduate School, Registrar’s and Admission offices to work out the details and procedures.

Summary of campus involvement – A variety of groups exist to assist students, faculty and staff in a variety of different areas. Graduate faculty and Graduate School staff work with these different groups to address graduate student and faculty related issues. In most cases changes in one area require cooperation from multiple offices. Fortunately, units and offices at Missouri Western work well together and are supportive of efforts to assist and improve the academic experience of students enrolled in the Graduate School.

**R:**

Through institutional involvement in this Action Project, MWSU has demonstrated several Principles of High Performing Organizations including Focus on Stakeholders (student learning is clearly at the center of institutional involvement), Broad-based Involvement (including, among others, students, faculty, shared governance bodies, and the Strategic Plan Steering Committee), and Respecting People (e.g., with a high turnover in graduate program directors, MWSU has committed to additional training for these staff members to assist them in doing the best they can for their students). This last item also exemplifies AQIP Category 3, Valuing Employees. Further, another Principle of High Performing Organizations, Leadership Support, is reflected throughout this section on institutional involvement, including, but not limited to, solid leadership from the Graduate Dean.

**5:**

**EFFECTIVE PRACTICES**

**A:**

One area that can be cited as a best practice within the Graduate School has been in curriculum development. During the two years of this AQIP Action Project development of new graduate degree programs has been approached very methodically. In each case the sponsoring academic units have researched the needs of the community and supporting stakeholders (locally, regionally and nationally) to determine the market needs and demand. Constituents who would be on the receiving end of new programs as potential employers of the graduates were surveyed and consulted to determine their needs and how their needs can be met through the curriculum development process.
Most of the new graduate programs mentioned previously are in response to requests for specific issues. For instance, the new MAS in Industrial Life Science degree was developed in response to the life and animal science industry in the St. Joseph region. Faculty in the chemistry and biology departments visited with local companies to seek their input on industry needs before designing a curriculum. Two other programs were developed by identifying areas of demand within the community. The Department of Nursing and Allied Health has observed a shortage of nursing educators for many years. Although the original Master of Science in Nursing degree focused on Health Care Leadership, the Department of Nursing received numerous requests from potential graduate students with an interest in nursing education. The new MSN Nurse Educator option will assist in the continuing education of clinically based nurse practitioners as well as those nurses who might be interested in working in higher education.

- **R:**

The institution rightfully highlights curriculum development as an effective practice from the Action Project. MWSU has demonstrated HLC Criterion 5, Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness in its methodical and inclusive approach to curriculum development. Moreover, several Principles of High Performing Organizations are exemplified by MWSU in their curriculum development including Broad-based Involvement, Promoting Collaboration, Agility and Responsiveness to Change, and Foresight to Plan Proactively.

- **6:**

**ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS**

- **A:**

Funding for the Graduate School has remained flat for the past two years, and since the Graduate School began in 2007 the overall Graduate School budget has decreased by 35% from its original budget. It should be noted that Missouri Western preserved its graduate staff and programs despite severe budget shortages in state support. In addition, as student enrollment has increased the available funding for scholarships and graduate assistantships has not increased. Providing increased financial assistance for students is a known challenge.

As graduate student enrollment has increased there is a larger demand for faculty involvement in graduate education. Most faculty at MWSU are heavily involved in undergraduate teaching and research. So, there is competition for faculty resources and availability. As programs grow more sections of some courses will be needed, and supervision of capstone projects or internships will require additional faculty participation. Thus, there is a competition for faculty to teach in both the undergraduate and graduate curricula.

- **R:**
MWSU has identified two anticipated challenges to project success, funding and faculty resources. Despite ongoing budgetary issues, MWSU has maintained Graduate School funding levels, indicating Leadership Support, a Principle of High Performing Organizations. That said, both funding and faculty resources will need to be maintained going forward. The institution may need to look at ways to combine or promote greater synergy among resources, through processes demonstrated in Principle of High Performing Organizations, Promoting Collaborations and HLC Criterion 5 Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness.

7:

PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIME LINE

A:

Below is a list of action plan goals for the final year of this project. The list represents several areas submitted with the initial Action Project as well as some new goals.
- Track student accomplishments
- Survey employers for impressions
- Develop new partnerships for internships, student participation
- Targeted recruiting efforts
- Raise funds for student support – scholarships/assistantships – Centennial Capital Campaign

The first three items on the list were part of the original action plan. Tracking student accomplishments will focus on activities that students participated in both before and after graduation. This will include participation in discipline specific activities such as presentations and/or publication in peer-reviewed or professionally related journals or venues or participation in practicums or internships. We will also attempt to track the employment of graduates and professional accomplishments such as promotions or change of positions, acceptance to advanced degree programs – i.e. PhD programs. This is very challenging at the undergraduate level; however, we may have greater success with graduate students since there is a much smaller group to follow, and they tend to be more responsive to their graduate advisors due to the close relationships developed during their graduate programs. We also hope that employers will be more receptive to responding to questionnaires since some employers participate in supporting their employees through tuition reimbursement or similar programs as students move through their graduate programs. We hope the employers have observed improvement of knowledge and skills that have translated to the workplace, but the response rate to these types of surveys tend to be very low.

As mentioned, there is an intentional strategy to develop partnerships involving companies and employers in the curriculum development process. We hope this leads to stronger ties with companies and employers that may lead to partnerships for internship or practicum-like opportunities. We will continue to pursue these types of partnerships. Missouri Western has also entered into a partnership agreement with Xi’dian University in China in which Xi’dian graduate students come to Missouri Western to participate in the MAA Written Communications degree program. The MAS Engineering Technology Management program has also expressed an interest in expanding this agreement to include its program.
Missouri Western will also continue to pursue partnerships with international institutions and programs. Missouri Western has become a host institution for the Brazilian Scientific Mobility Program (BSMP) in which Brazilian undergraduate students from science, technology, engineering and math (aka STEM) areas come to US institutions for a study abroad experience. The Graduate School intends to apply to become a host institution for Brazilian graduate students to earn a Master’s degree in an Applied Science area. It is not yet clear how effective the increased efforts in marketing and advertising Missouri Western graduate programs has been. There has been a significant increase in admission applications submitted; however, the number of new students enrolling has not increased markedly since these marketing efforts were initiated. There may yet be an increase of enrolled students for the fall 2014 semester as applications continue to be processed at the time of this report submission. Based on the conflicting ratio of increasing applications to student enrollment program directors will be developing plans for program promotion and advertising efforts that are more directly targeted to increase the yield of new students in their programs.

There is a need for greater financial support for graduate students. Fortunately, the timing is right to seek out new potential sources of funding for graduate students because Missouri Western is set to celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2015. This will coincide with a Centennial Capital Campaign, and the Graduate School will work with the Office of University Advancement to seek possible sources of funding for new scholarships and graduate assistantships.

R:

The planned next steps and timeline for the Action Project are reasonable and represent a mix of originally planned activities and some new activities that have emerged over the course of the Action Project. The ability of MWSU to identify these key activities that have emerged over the life of the project speak well of the institution’s Agility and Responsiveness to Change (Principle of High Performing Organizations). In addition, the planned steps take into account the need to raise funds for student support (one of the challenges identified earlier in the update). These planned activities resonate strongly with AQIP Categories 1 Helping Students to Learn and 4 Planning and Leading. The institution may also want to include some activities that will address the other key challenge identified which was to increase faculty resources available for the graduate programs.

8:

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS

A:

Establishing the Graduate School at Missouri Western was a goal of the past Missouri Western State University President, Dr. James Scanlon, and the current President, Dr. Robert Vartabedian and a direct result of the strategic planning process. Since its inception in 2007, the Graduate school has grown in the number of programs it offers and the students it serves. While several graduate programs have grown into a mature state and have strong, stable enrollments, others, both older and newer programs, continue to require more cultivation to become well established. As the Graduate School has grown and evolved
we have also continued to discover areas requiring attention and development of policies that that had not been foreseen. However, the Graduate School and its faculty and administrators are trying to be as responsive as possible to all of its constituents. The first group of graduate programs was developed primarily from faculty input and speculation of need. Now, the Graduate School’s approach to new program development is much more industry and market driven. We seek input from community members and local industry and companies to help design programs and curricula that meet and serve their needs. Most graduate programs also require a capstone experience that attempts to provide students with training or other practical experience that will translate to the next level as students graduate and move into the workforce. This corresponds with Missouri Western’s applied learning mission. Employers have communicated that they want employees who can step directly into a position with minimal training. The intent of Missouri Western’s graduate programs is to provide the type of applied education that will make graduates more highly trained and marketable and allow them to step into the next phase of their careers with the hands-on knowledge that will immediately benefit their new employers.

• R:

Thank you for your comprehensive update.