

## Action Project

**Title:** Defining a Comprehensive Career Services/Placement Process

**Version:** 3

**Institution:** Heartland Community College

**Status:** Completed

**Submitted:** 2010-12-13

**Category:** 3-Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs

### Timeline

Planned project kickoff date: 2008-09-01

Target completion date: 2011-07-01

Actual completion date: 2011-11-30

### Project Detail

#### Project Goal

Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer

The team will regularly meet to: 1. examine the mandates, required credentials of staff and theoretical basis and delivery models involved in career counseling and placement services. 2. review what career and/or placement services are currently being provided, by whom, for whom; 3. assess the internal understanding, use, and promotion of current services; 4. make recommendations to staff on improved promotion of services, if appropriate; 5. research and define the requirements of a comprehensive career/placement process; 6. analyze any gaps between current and comprehensive processes; 7. identify resources required to develop the comprehensive process.

#### Reasons For Project

Describe briefly your institution's reasons for taking on this Action Project now -- why the project and its goals are high among your current priorities

This project was originally Identified as an area of importance by faculty and staff participating in the college's first Campus Conversation Day held on April 28, 2006. The community college Career/Placement Center is partially mandated by the Illinois Community College Board, serving a diverse cross section of internal as well as external stakeholders and providing critical connections among those stakeholders and requested services. An understanding and promotion of current services and resources will better serve students' and other stakeholders' needs. The second part of this project will be to research and define what a comprehensive career/placement process is, analyze the gaps between comprehensive and current practice, and identify resources required to meet the ideal.

## Organizational Areas Affected

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

All academic divisions, Enrollment Services, Workforce Services, Personal Development & Advising, Community Education, Perkins, Adult Basic Education, and English as a Second Language

## Key Organizational Process(es)

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

This will strengthen communication and connections among stakeholders and ultimately improve services provided.

## Project Time Frame Rationale

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

Plans included dividing into three sub-committees, the *student survey sub-committee*, the *research sub-committee*, and a *portfolio subcommittee*, to begin meeting during the Spring 2010 semester. A fourth sub-committee, the *marketing subcommittee*, is planned to begin by the end of the spring semester. The goals for each committee are as follows:

1. Student Survey –To develop and implement a survey to students. The objective of the survey is to assess students' knowledge of and perceived need for available career services
2. Research –To gather information on state mandates, required credentials of staff, theoretical basis for career development and best practices in the field of career services, and use this information to develop a list of desired services and resources needed for our ideal "career placement process"
3. Portfolio – To receive information from other sub-committees and team meetings and develop a portfolio of accomplishments
4. Marketing – To assess the promotion of current services, make recommendations on improving promotion of services, and develop future marketing plans including identification of resources needed

After Fall 2010, the team has identified these goals to be completed by July 1, 2011.

The action project team will complete a final report that will

1. provide a summary of what the team has accomplished,
2. include gaps between current services and ideal comprehensive services, and
3. provide recommendations to move us towards the ideal

This report will address both our visible presence/services on campus and our Internet presence/services on the HCC website. Two potential campus locations have been identified for a Career and Transfer Center.

The action project team will also request a meeting with the Cabinet to present the final report and discuss our findings and recommendations.

## Project Success Monitoring

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

The action project team will meet monthly, or as otherwise determined by the team, with regular reports to the Coordinating Committee.

## Project Outcome Measures

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

Internal pre- and post-surveys of knowledge of current career resource services offered have been conducted. An indicator of success will be an increase in knowledge of services and resources. The team goal will be accomplished with the delivery of a report addressing what a Comprehensive career/placement center looks like, what gaps exist between current practice and the ideal, and what resources may be required to move forward.

## Annual Update

### Project Accomplishments and Status

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

The past year has been spent developing a final report outlining the project's activities and findings. The report is designed to do four things that reflect the overall work of the committee to date. First, the report will review the current status of the career services function at Heartland. Specifically, it will identify which offices and which personnel support the career services functions and how they do it. Second, the report will summarize the way a couple of comparable community colleges handle their career services functions as well as look at the career services best practices literature overall. Third, the report will present and interpret the results of the team's three more specific data gathering projects: a survey of the college's faculty and staff regarding their awareness of career services functions; a survey of the college's students doing the same thing; and two student focus groups designed to understand more completely how students think about and utilize career services at the College. Finally, the report will make recommendations to campus decision makers regarding the size, scope, logistics, and budgets related to career services at Heartland in order to improve this function at the college.

The report is very close to being completed, but is still missing some important elements. Development of the report has progressed slower than anticipated due to team members having many competing priorities that have had to take precedent over working on the project.

### Institution Involvement

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

This is the third and final year of the project and participation has fallen off. Three years ago the team was much larger and included participants from around the campus who had a keen interest in the delivery of career services on campus. Faculty, staff, and administrators all participated. As the project moved forward and the workload for the team increased, many people stopped participating. By the current year, the team was down to a core of about six to eight people who were completing the majority of the tasks. Not surprisingly, the people whose jobs are most impacted by the career services function were the people who stayed the most active and engaged with the project.

Consequently, the team has drawn the following lessons from its collective experience with involving people. First, after an initial burst of energy and enthusiasm a fall off in participation is going to happen. This suggests have a shorter project time frame to enhance focus and it suggests that identifying a “bench” or a collection of substitutes who can be tapped to join the team should be done early on. Second, the people who will work hardest on the project are those with a clear stake in the project’s completion. This means that the team has to work harder to convince more people that they are, in fact, impacted by the results of the project; and it means that the team should ask the institution to build in project release or other compensation time for those who are most directly impacted by the project. Finally, the team should anticipate fluid participation and create a series of small or smaller tasks that can be done by those whose participation is more fleeting.

## Next Steps

Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project

Completing the final report is the last step for this action project. Once the report is completed, the team will present it to the college’s cabinet both in written form and in a brief oral presentation. The team will specifically ask that the cabinet to implement its recommendations for the career services function as outlined in the report regarding increased budget authority, increased staff, and increased visibility and physical space.

In addition, the report will have recommendations for the current career services team regarding its outreach and internal marketing efforts so that students especially have a clear understanding of the career services available to them at HCC, why these career services are important to utilize, and how they can go about accessing them. There will also be recommendations about internal marketing and awareness for faculty and staff so that they can better direct students and community members to the career services area.

## Resulting Effective Practices

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

With respect to the specific area of career services, the team identified several best practices in the literature and from other institutions. The team also identified several opportunities for improvement in current career services practices at HCC. First, more effectively integrating the several actors and offices that deliver career services is key. Academic advisors, college faculty, high school counselors, and college community education personnel should all be aware of what HCC’s career services function can and does do. Second, a one stop shopping locale that is clearly identifiable for students and other consumers of career services is desirable. Third, building up increased awareness of and services and building up increased referrals to use career services should mean a need to keep pace by hiring more career services experts for the campus and affording them more resources. Finally, career services should be systematizing the kinds of data collection processes done by the team such as student and faculty surveys, student focus groups, and visits to other campuses in order assess and improve their practices.

## Project Challenges

What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project? This is an opportunity to get constructive, actionable feedback and advice

from our review process. Use this question to specify where your blocks, gaps, sticking points, or problems are. If you have already fashioned strategies to deal with any challenge you face, share both the challenge and your strategy for meeting it. If you would like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help beyond the review process, explain your need(s) and tell us whom to contact and when.

The primary challenge we currently face is quite simply completing the final report, which is needed to conclude the project. Although the report is close to being completed, it is missing key elements needed to accurately convey the team's activities and final recommendations. Making time to finish the final document has proved difficult.

Additionally, the college has restructured many of its student services functions as this project has been in progress. Making sure that the final report takes into account the now newly changed landscape of academic advising, student services, high school outreach and career services is causing a delay.

Finally, once the report is completed and delivered to the Cabinet, the team will need to follow up with them and with other campus actors involved in career services to be sure that the team's recommendations are fully considered and hopefully acted upon.

## Annual Update

### Reason for completion

What is the primary reason for closing this project?

The Career Services/Placement Action Project at Heartland is nearing completion. The team needs only to complete its final report. As noted in our last Action Project Update, the final report will:

1. provide a summary of what the team has accomplished,
2. include gaps between current services and ideal comprehensive services, and
3. provide recommendations to move us toward the ideal

Furthermore, the report will address both our visible presence/services on campus and our Internet presence/services on the HCC website. Two potential campus locations have been identified for a Career and Transfer Center. The action project team will also request a meeting with the Cabinet to present the final report and discuss our findings and recommendations.

### Success Factors

What aspects of this project would you categorize as successful?

The team identified several best practices in the literature and from other institutions as well as opportunities for improvement in current career services practices at HCC. These recommendations will be provided to our Guided Path to Success Action Project leaders, and include:

- more effective integration among the several actors and offices that deliver career services, notably academic advisers, college faculty, high school counselors, and community education personnel in order to promote awareness of HCC's career services functions

- a one-stop shopping locale that is clearly identifiable for students and other consumers of career services
- an effort to build up awareness of services and increased referrals to use career services
- the systematizing of data collection processes within Career Services

## Unsuccessful Factors

What aspects of this project would you categorize as less than successful?

The primary shortcoming of the Action Project has been the completion of the final report and delivery to the campus community. Although the report is, at present, close to being completed, it is missing key elements needed to accurately convey the team's activities and final recommendations. Making time to finish the final document has proved difficult.

Additionally, the college has restructured many of its student services functions as this project has been in progress. Making sure that the final report takes into account the structural changes in academic advising, student services, high school outreach and career services is causing a delay.

Finally, once the report is completed and delivered to the campus community, the team may not be in a position - that is to say, intact - to fully integrate its recommendations with other campus actors and initiatives involved in career services (like the recently deployed Guided Path to Success Action Project).

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