

Action Project

Title: Defining, describing, measuring, and tracking student success at Heartland Community College.

Version: 2

Institution: Heartland Community College **Status:** Completed

Submitted: 2009-11-24 **Category:** 1-Helping Students Learn

Timeline

Planned project kickoff date: 2006-05-19
Target completion date: 2008-12-19
Actual completion date: 2008-12-19

Project Detail

Project Goal

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

Although it's committed to helping students learn and succeed, the College has never engaged fully in a discussion of precisely what "success" means, nor have we settled upon ways to measure it. In this project, the College will engage in a discussion of what constitutes student success, collect individual student goal information during registration periods, and track how individual student goals may evolve during the student's career at the college. Finally, the college will gather baseline data about student experiences and conduct follow-up studies with students that are designed to improve recruitment as well as the intake processes of advising, registration, and course placement.

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 topic was prominently mentioned during Heartland's Campus Conversation. In addition, this action project seems like a good place to start a broad based conversation about student recruitment and retention issues preliminary to developing more refined retention plans.

Organizational Areas Affected

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

The Student Services area, the developmental education curricula, and Institutional Research will all be directly affected by this Action Project.

Key Organizational Process(es)

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

We expect to impact registration and advising (including course placement), and Institutional Research.

Project Time Frame Rationale

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

We think approximately one year will be sufficient to define student success and other terms, acquaint the College with the purposes of this action project, and engage student and faculty support in the endeavor. Also, during the first year we will collect baseline data relevant to student success and will continue to collect such data during the second year of the project and beyond. We expect that some trends will emerge during the second year of the project that will assist us in planning a next series of action projects related to student success.

Project Success Monitoring

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

An AQIP Coordinating Committee will be formed to monitor all projects and inform the campus community of progress. Data will be collected and disseminated regularly throughout the College.

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

We will develop and disseminate a definition of student success and collect data from students about their educational goals and plans. The appropriate measure is, "did this happen and were the results communicated effectively?" In particular, student data will be collected concerning individual goals for at least 80% of incoming students and data will be organized electronically and shared with advisors and retention personnel. Additionally, some broad measures of this action project's success include: Has appropriate data on student achievement been collected and analyzed?; Have process revisions suggested by the data and analysis led to improved student success data?; and Are these outcomes useful in planning a subsequent series of action projects relevant to student success and student retention?

Annual Update

Project Accomplishments and Status

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

The Student Success Action Project team was charged with the task of defining student success for the college in an effort to inform specific programming concerning student retention and student success. The team conducted focus group with students in order to solicit their definitions of success and the team reviewed the existing academic literature covering student success to further refine a working definition for the college. Next, the

team produced a model rooted in the literature that defined student success using a number of criteria. Finally, the team conducted a data audit to see which specific measures of which specific variables were currently available, which were available but not complete, and which were not currently available. More specifically, the model organizes student outcomes, which themselves are based on student inputs such as academic readiness and personal issues, and on college process such as curriculum and instruction and academic support, into four broad categories: academic outcomes, learning outcomes, personal outcomes, and student satisfaction. While the data for many academic outcomes such as GPA, retention rates, transfer rates, and graduation rates are available, there is relatively little if any data available at the college for learning outcomes, personal outcomes/personal goal achievement, and individual level student satisfaction measures. It is hoped that the articulation of this model along with the data audit will inform future projects related to student success concerning what data needs to be collected and what hypothesized influences on student success should be investigated sooner rather than later in order to inform possible programming.

Institution Involvement

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

Rather than have a committee chair who was eligible for course release from our VP of Instruction and a vice-chair who was not, the team decided to have two team co-chairs who would share the release time. The VP of Instruction also provided some food and drink for the team. Finally, the team was made up predominantly of faculty and academic support staff and administrators whose regular job expectations caused them to be very interested in this topic. The team also broke into two subgroups based on the interests of participating members. One subgroup focused on student success from the perspective of the institution, for example retention rates, while the other subgroup focused on student success from a student perspective such as personal goals of students.

Next Steps

Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project

The team decided that presenting an organizing model of student success and performing a data audit was about as far as it could go. Consequently, this specific Action Project will be retired and a second action project that begins to look at possible programming options in support of student persistence will be up and running during the Fall 08 semester. It was suggested that the team make a recommendation to the next student success project that covers what the team learned from students, what it learned from the data audit, and what it learned from identifying the student success model that it ultimately chose. This will serve as a formal handoff to the members of the next action project related to student retention.

Resulting Effective Practices

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

Interviewing students in order to go beyond more traditional definitions of student success such as retention rates is a good thing to do. Students were able to talk about personal issues they experienced that hindered their ability to achieve success, they were able to articulate more specific goals and expectations they had when they entered college they

sometimes went beyond simple graduation rates, and they were able to talk about how they did or did not use existing student support services.

Project Challenges

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

The challenges associated with this project have been many. The main frustration has been that the team's charge, define student success, was too broad and too vague. Consequently, the team struggled for many months just to clarify what they were supposed to accomplish and how they might do that. Another problem the team faced was that one of its original co-chairs left to take a position at another institution midway through the first year of the project. This leadership change set the team back a bit as well. Finally, the fact that about half of the variables in the student success model are not currently measured at the college makes any future testing of the model in the near future very problematic.

Annual Update

Reason for completion

What is the primary reason for closing this project?

The team identified a student success model to replicate at Heartland.

Success Factors

What aspects of this project would you categorize as successful?

The creation of a success model based on research and other college models was successful.

Unsuccessful Factors

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

The reality that the data needed to apply the model at Heartland were not always available, reliable or clean.

Close Window