
Action Project

Institution: Indiana University
Northwest

Submitted: 2007-04-09 **Contact:** Kwesi Aggrey

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Timeline:

Planned project kickoff date: 04-09-2007

Target completion date: 12-31-2009

Actual completion date: --

A. Give this Action Project a short title in 10 words or fewer:

Centralizing Student Learning Outcome Assessment

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

The primary goal of this project includes creating a centralized assessment system to conduct descriptive analysis of current practices and policies, collect current data from divisions, develop and implement direct and indirect measures of student learning outcomes, and analyze the data for these outcomes. In addition, the goal of this project necessarily includes the development of processes that utilize the data for continuous improvement related to student learning outcomes. As a part of this system, a website should be created to archive the data, analyses, and assessment documents related to student learning outcomes. The data collection necessary to reaching these goals includes the campus-wide collection of General Education and discipline-specific practices, policies, and student learning outcome assessment data as well as data on student learning outcomes in co-curricular programs and benchmarks for incoming students.

C. Identify the single AQIP Category which the Action Project will most affect or impact:

Primary Category: Helping Students Learn

D. 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:

IU Northwest has been committed to revising its General Education Program, it is has made significant progress in this effort, and the assessment of student learning outcomes is a part of this reform effort. At the same time, discipline-specific units have been assessing student learning outcomes and collecting their data for some time. In IU Northwest's System Appraisal Feedback Report (April 11, 2006), reviewers noted the need for centralization of data collection and analysis as well as some gaps in our documentation in this area and in our implementation of such assessment: "IUN's portfolio reveals considerable variation in the approach to learning assessment by the different colleges across the university. Centralized deployment of a learning assessment model could serve to guide more uniform quantitative and qualitative development of aligned measures in this critical area. IUN should consider a strategic initiative to reach agreement across the institution on a unified conceptual framework and approach for learning outcomes measurement" (7). And "Although IUN does obtain some discipline-specific information within the various units, it does not currently have a system documenting common outcomes across the units. IUN has an opportunity to provide results for the common and program-specific learning outcomes"(15). We are committed to continuous improvement in all facets of the University, and we feel that this project is integral to our success at our most fundamental function, helping students learn. Based on IU Northwest's Systems Appraisal Feedback Report (April 11, 2006) and the information gleaned at the 2007 AQIP Strategy Forum, the

Strategic Planning Team and the AQIP Team has realized the opportunity the campus has for developing centralized student learning outcome assessment and using the data collected to improve student learning.

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

Academic Affairs and every academic unit, department, division, and program as well as Student Affairs (co-curricular outcomes) will be affected by this Action Project, as our efforts will extend across the campus.

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

This Action Project will change and improve the process of collecting, analyzing, and assessing data related to student learning outcomes.

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

• Create a centralized assessment system to conduct descriptive analysis of current practices and policies (2007-09-01), • Create a website to archive the data, analyses, and assessment documents related to student learning outcomes (2007-09-01), • Collect current data from divisions (2007-12-31), • Develop and implement direct and indirect measures of student learning outcomes, collecting and analyzing the data for these outcomes (ongoing; 2008-01-01 to 2009-12-31 and beyond), and • Develop processes that utilize the data for continuous improvement related to student learning outcomes (2009-12-31).

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

We will monitor the campus's progress in terms of the creation of a centralized system and plan for assessing student learning outcomes and the construction of a data and assessment archive.

I. 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:

The outcome measures include • the development of a centralized plan, • the development of a web-based archive, • the implementation of centralized data collection, analysis, and assessment of student learning outcomes, and • the use of this assessment data to continuously improve our efforts to help students learn.

J. Other information (e.g., publicity, sponsor or champion, etc.):

Note: This Action Project was a small component of a retired Action Project that was too broad. In addition, the assessment of student learning outcomes deserved the attention of its own Action Project.

K. Project Leader and contact person:

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Annual Update: 2007-09-12

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

The SPT charged a task force with making recommendations for a continuous improvement structure that includes the areas of measuring institutional effectiveness and assessing student learning outcomes. This group recommended a two-sided structure reflecting student learning outcome assessment on one side and institutional effectiveness on the other with both reporting their data analysis and targets for improvement collaboratively to the SPT. Within the area of student learning outcome assessment, the

task force recommended that a) the campus create a position of Assessment Director or Coordinator reporting to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and b) implement a structure with a campus-wide Assessment Committee made up of unit assessment professionals, faculty, and staff. Within that structure, the task force also recognized the need for an individual responsible for assessment within the College of Arts and Sciences parallel to the faculty and staff currently responsible for assessment in the other academic units. The Cabinet has expressed its support for the task force recommendations, and the College of Arts and Sciences is in the process of filling this position, but the campus has not yet been able to address the need for such a campus-wide assessment coordinator. Because we recognized the need to move forward in a timely fashion to meet our student learning outcome assessment needs while the campus continues deliberation on its ability to fill this position, the Vice Chancellor commissioned a summer working group comprised of the co-coordinators of our campus AQIP efforts and the co-chairs of the General Education/Assessment Committee of the Faculty Organization to develop a campus assessment plan that included not only structure but policies, procedures, templates, and data collection cycles. That group has completed a draft of an assessment plan that begins with the campus Mission, reports the current state of assessment on campus, delineates the roles and responsibilities from the Chancellor to the individual faculty member, develops the plan for General Education outcome assessment, and provides a template and data reporting cycles. The group also has asked the deans and directors of the academic units to report their unit assessment plans, policies, processes, and reporting cycles. These unit-specific documents will be incorporated into the campus assessment plan when they are received on September 17th. This final piece accomplishes our first step of providing a descriptive analysis of current policies and practices. The comprehensive plan also sets the stage for each successive step that we have outlined in the Action Project.

Review (09-27-07):

The institution has made considerable progress in a short period of time. The summer workgroup was a positive step in lieu of an assessment director on board college-wide and in the College of Arts & Sciences. This demonstrates the institution's willingness to move forward and demonstrates the importance of the assessment process. The institution should be commended for the thoroughness of the project. The timeline is ambitious. The process may be expedited by creating the proper report forms that unify the data. With the inclusion of assessment review and feedback loop (how do you use the data collects) the institution can show effort in AQIP category seven, measuring effectiveness. Tying the assessment project to the Strategic Plan and mission is an excellent way to insure consistency and unity. The document that the summer group produced should serve as the guide for the institution's next steps.

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

First, the SPT (comprised of faculty, staff, and administrators) has been involved in the discussion of how best to centralize our student learning outcome assessment. Next, the task force commissioned by the SPT consisted of individuals from the various academic units across campus as well as the Institutional Researcher, who chaired the group. At the same time, our reform efforts in the area of General Education have extended our attention to student learning outcome assessment even further, including individuals from

every academic unit in training sessions with Dr. Barbara Walvoord on assessment. Communication has occurred via the SPT website, the AQIP website, the faculty and staff listserv, Faculty Organization meetings, and Deans' Council meetings. As student learning outcome assessment is integral to comprehensive and coherent improvement in academics, individuals from Academic Affairs and the Office of the Chancellor have consistently kept student learning outcome assessment efforts at the forefront of discussions, reminding campus leadership of the need to move forward to meet the deadlines we have set for ourselves.

Review (09-27-07):

The strong connection to the Institutional Research department will advance the project. It is commendable that the institution has provided training and a common repository for the assessment process. The leadership should be commended for their support and praise.

C. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

The next step necessary to centralizing our student learning outcome assessment consists of gaining feedback on our proposed assessment plan from the various campus constituents, incorporating that feedback into our plan, and gaining acceptance and shared responsibility for its implementation. Furthermore, we are working to develop a website that will house and archive assessment documents related to student learning outcomes and eventually aggregated student learning outcomes assessment data. In addition to the current data collected at the unit level, we have proposed that the Assessment Committee of the Faculty Organization act as the body that works with the Assessment Coordinator to analyze aggregated assessment data and propose campus-wide improvement initiatives related to student learning. Once we have completed the assessment plan and the descriptive analysis of current practices, this group will necessarily address what further centralized direct and indirect measures of student learning outcomes need to be added to our approach.

Review (09-27-07):

Course assessment is a continuous process. You are encouraged to develop the website and continue the search for an assessment director. A committee of faculty is a good interim solution. Tying the assessment projects to a centralized repository supports AQIP category 7, Measuring Effectiveness. The faculty committee will help insure a successful plan for continuous improvement (category 8).

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

Although our approach to centralizing student learning outcome assessment is neither novel nor radical, it incorporates best practices observed in the approaches of our peer institutions and other national leaders in the assessment arena. One technique for gaining faculty buy-in was to invite a national expert on assessment who had previously addressed this very issue in her day-long workshop at the Assessment Institute. This expert espouses a no-nonsense approach to assessment that makes it 'do-able' and understandable within the context of traditional faculty duties and values. As a result, individuals who had previously been hostile or resistant actually have agreed to develop assessment plans for their units.

Review (09-27-07):

Introducing the faculty to an expert was a first-rate idea. The new challenge will be to sustain the enthusiasm generated by the invited expert. The Assessment Committee of Faculty may want to develop a plan to continue the elevated faculty buy-in level.

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

A continuous challenge has been articulating the difference between AQIP as an accreditation approach and assessment as not only a way to provide data for accreditation but also (and more importantly) a method for improving student learning for its own sake. We make every effort to explain how accreditation and assessment are connected, yet distinct. In other words, we are an AQIP institution, which means that we have committed to data-driven continuous improvement process, yet our assessment needs predate and extend beyond being an AQIP institution. In campus discussions of institutional needs, the leadership decided to create a traditional office of institutional research that would be centered on measures of institutional effectiveness other than the assessment of student learning outcome assessment. The director is committed to helping collect necessary data related to student learning outcomes; however, it is not her responsibility to coordinate the assessment of student learning outcomes or to do the actual analysis and reporting of that data.

Review (09-27-07):

AQIP is often confused with learning outcomes assessment for those not directly involved in the accreditation process. The combined center should assist in clarifying the confusion. Educating the campus will better serve the institution. It is imperative to charge someone to lead the effort. This effort speaks well to category 5, Leading and Communicating by thoughtfully planning to educate the campus in the accreditation process. The institution is encouraged to continue to develop a plan to inform the campus. It is unclear who is responsible to conduct the data analysis if the IR director is not.

F. If you would like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help to stimulate progress on this action project, explain your need(s) here and tell us who to contact and when?

Review (09-27-07):

9815. The institution does not need assistance at this time.