

Career Services Action Project 2009 Update and Review

Annual Update: 2009-09-14

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

The Career Services Action Project Team began meeting semi-monthly in August 2008. Over the course of the past year, the team has met 12 times. Members of the committee include representatives from student services, faculty members, community education, workforce services and academic department heads. Three team members take turns providing leadership for the meetings. Activities to date have focused primarily on gaining “an understanding of current services and resources”. To this end, the team has accomplished the following tasks. First it created a comprehensive documentation of Heartland’s current career service offerings. This document is organized by the department providing each service/activity (who?) and it includes what service(s) is/are being offered, for whom, and answers the questions how, when, where, and why. How services are or can be integrated with other services is also listed. Second, the team worked with staff from the College’s Institutional Research department to develop a baseline survey and distributed survey via email to all faculty and staff. The purpose of the survey was to assess the internal understanding, knowledge of and utilization of current career services. The team intends to analyze survey results to assist in identifying current gaps in services being offered and those perceived to be needed or desired, as well as to develop marketing plans and enhance future communication and information sharing. Finally the team visited with career services staff at a neighboring community college in order to identify some possible best practices.

Review (09-16-09):

This institution is definitely on the right track in involving numerous stakeholders within the campus community and assessing current services and knowledge of services. It would be beneficial to include students in this project to assess their knowledge/usage of current career services as well and more clearly reflect AQIP Category (3) Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs. Once baseline survey results are obtained from faculty, staff, and students, a next step might be to develop an employer survey to administer to local employers to determine if their priorities in employee skills match those perceived to be important by internal stakeholders. This would address AQIP Category (9) Building Collaborative Relationships.

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

The College holds the Action project team accountable through requiring regular updates to the AQIP Coordinating Committee and at an AQIP Conversation Day held in the spring. Team members were solicited from across the campus and involve a mix of folks from career services, advising, other student services areas, faculty, and administration. People with an interest in career services were the ones who joined the team.

Review (09-16-09):

Again, the inclusion of students (initially) and local employers (as the project progresses) in both the meetings and the AQIP Conversation Day would validate the information gained, guide the future plans for career services, and establish the College as a career service/placement community resource (5) Leading and Communicating.

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

To move the Project ahead it is critical that the team members be able to make their participation a priority. Meeting dates have not yet been set for the current fall 2009 semester due to staff changes and competing priorities. The team needs to regroup and refocus on accomplishing the project's goals. The first step will be for the three team leaders to meet. Additional next steps include the following. First, the team must identify a plan and timetable for completing project activities. Second, the team must develop and implement a survey of students to assess their understanding, knowledge of and perceived need for career services. Finally, the team must analyze survey results and research information to identify gaps between current services being offered and those services required for comprehensive career services.

Review (09-16-09):

Are there specific "perks" (such as release time, stipends, campus recognition) that would appeal to the committee members and encourage their participation and commitment to the project? Perhaps the three team leaders could consult supervisors of committee members to determine the feasibility of some type of "rewards" for participation. Dependent upon budgeting issues, the team leaders might also consider incorporating breakfasts or luncheons into the meeting schedule to encourage/reward participation in the committee meetings.

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

Effective practices that may result from this Action Project are yet to be determined, as it is very much a work in progress.

Review (09-16-09):

It is apparent that the team has identified roadblocks and senses that the project is losing momentum. Perhaps if the team can garner support from key administrators and offer various rewards for faculty and staff participation, the project will gain momentum. The inclusion of students in the committee work may also serve to re-invigorate the project.

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

The team faces two primary challenges. First is the ongoing challenge of being able to devote the time needed to the project and arrange meetings to fit various busy schedules of team members. Second is the challenge of maintaining teams' motivation and focus in order to meet the long term project goals.

Review (09-16-09):

Release time, breakfast or luncheon meetings, and participant recognition may help with both of these identified challenges. The addition of students and local employers may also help to refocus the team and move the project forward.

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 (09-16-09):

Although the institution made some reasonable progress in its initial year, the project seems to have lost momentum this year. Perhaps a mechanism for maintaining contact over the summer (newsletter, email correspondence, etc) would keep committee members focused from year to year. Gaining the support of key administrators, providing appropriate rewards for participants, scheduling meetings as breakfast/luncheon get-togethers, and including students and employers in the project should also help to refocus and motivate participants.