

Faculty Academy 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.

To briefly recount the history of “Faculty Academy” here at HCC, it was begun in Fall 2006 as a means of systematizing faculty training and instructional development. Initially modeled after a program offered at Parkland Community College, it has become something uniquely our own. During its three years of existence, it has grown and expanded. Though it will be retired as an AQIP project this year, it will remain an ongoing component of faculty development for the College under the direction of Instructional Development Center (IDC) staff. The Fall 2008 Faculty Academy I consisted of six sessions held over a 12 week period of time. New and newer faculty attended these sessions which featured a variety of topics (e.g., teaching philosophies, strategies for helping students learn, techniques for measuring student learning, ways of engaging in scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning) and presenters (e.g., experienced faculty, Academic Support staff, Student Services staff, and IDC staff). At the close of each session, attendees were asked to project at least one way they would apply and use the content of the session. When the series concluded, attendees expressed satisfaction with what they had gained from attending. As a result of successful Faculty Academy I offerings on three occasions (Fall 2006, 2007 and 2008), another six-session series has been planned for Fall 2009. As a precursor to the Faculty Academy I experience, new faculty participate in early August orientation sessions. Human Resources, IDC, and Information Technology staff organize and deliver this offering. New faculty are appreciative of the opportunity to enjoy a light supper together, receive a complimentary book about teaching and/or assessment, and to gain helpful insights about syllabi construction and classroom management from experienced faculty. Faculty Academy II was created in Spring 2008 primarily for experienced faculty, though new faculty can partake in it as well. This faculty development offering involves participants reading a common book (e.g., *The Courage to Teach*, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, and *Teaching to Transgress*) and then gathering together on multiple occasions throughout the semester to discuss the book’s contents and its applications for their own classroom teaching. In addition to face-to-face discussion, dialogue sometimes takes place via WebCT. As a result of the popularity of this program, two groups were organized for Faculty Academy II in Spring 2009, a group was convened in Summer 2009, and yet another group will soon get underway for Fall 2009. In Fall 2008, a new director began providing oversight of the IDC. As she met one-on-one with new and ongoing faculty, both adjunct and tenure track, she became aware of special interests (e.g., peer mentoring and observation; service learning and community outreach; and developmental education trends). Based on such input, the new director initiated Faculty Academy III offerings in Spring 2009 to focus on these special topics. For one of these programs, three webinars were purchased, shown, and then discussed by interested attendees. Faculty Academy III will continue during Fall 2009. Among the foci are online survey construction and administration; use of human subjects; helping students manage their studies when crises complicate their lives; and the “slow education” movement.

Review (09-19-09):

Valuing People (AQIP Category 4) is the central theme of the Faculty Academy action project recently concluded by Heartland Community College. Their work also supports the AQIP

Categories: Helping Students Learn (AQIP 1), Planning Continuous Improvement (AQIP 8), and Building Collaborative Relationships (AQIP 9). The importance of faculty and academic staff meeting to share and discuss the myriad aspects of teaching cannot be overstressed. While there is a plethora of research to support such action projects, few colleges or universities seem to seriously take advantage of it. Heartland Community College had not “reinvented the wheel.” They used best practices from a similar institution and availed themselves to the fabulous work of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. In this reviewer’s estimation, Heartland Community College should be commended for their vision and for their implementation.

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

The initial planning and development of Faculty Academy was undertaken by a diverse steering committee composed of faculty, staff and administrators. As the program stabilized and expanded, oversight for the program shifted to the Instructional Development Center staff. The director of the IDC turns to members of a faculty advisory committee for ideas, recommendations, and suggestions. Similar kinds of input are gathered more broadly from face-to-face conversations and surveys the director conducts with a wide variety of faculty. Since its inception to the present, Faculty Academy has benefitted from the support of central administration and ancillary units (Academic Support, Student Services, etc.), as well as from members of the AQIP Coordinating Committee. While IDC staff members organize and publicize Faculty Academy offerings, they invite faculty and staff members to serve as presenters and facilitators. On occasion, persons volunteer to be presenters or facilitators of a Faculty Academy series or session. It has always been and continues to be important that Faculty Academy be faculty driven.

Review (09-19-09):

The institution’s commitment to this action project can be seen in multiple ways. First, their involvement of faculty, staff, and administration was critical to the program’s success. The administrative and staff involvement included members of both the academic and student affairs communities. Furthermore, the project leadership changed over time, yet the program continued and thrived. This is now a project that will outlive any particular leader or committee; it has become part of the college fabric.

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

This project is being retired. With its success has come sufficient commitment and momentum to keep it functioning for some time to come.

Review (09-19-09):

The institution wrote, “This project is being retired. With its success has come sufficient commitment and momentum to keep it functioning for some time to come.” This reviewer concurs and has every confidence that the program will remain and will provide quality opportunities for new instructional staff to share and learn from one another.

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

As previous reports have documented, several practices have proven effective in developing and maintaining this successful project. Most Faculty Academy offerings are not provided in “one shot” formats. Instead, they are typically provided as a series of sessions attended by a consistent group of participants who build rapport with each other over time that contributes to a willingness to openly share ideas and experiences. Another practice that has been shown to be

effective is that of encouraging diversity...diversity in presenters/facilitators and faculty attendees. The best outcomes result when Faculty Academy participant groups are a mix of adjunct and tenure track, part-time and full-time, and new and experienced faculty from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds.

Review (09-19-09):

Heartland Community College has appropriately identified two “effective practices” that have come forth from this action project. First, their activities are not “one shot” deals. Rather, the sessions are presented in a series of events and meetings. This provides opportunity for reflection, practice, and refinement coordinated in a collaborative fashion. This allows for the building of collegial relationships among faculty members and a comfort level which permits additional collaborative reflection, such as can be found in the practice of peer observations. Second, the institution has identified diversity as an effective practice emerging from this action project. In particular, they have found a “diverse mix” of presenters and participants.

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

Identifying and using practical, efficient methods of tracking the impact of Faculty Academy programs is an ongoing challenge. In addition to collecting evidence of participants’ satisfaction with their Faculty Academy learning experiences, the goal is to determine the ways participants apply what they have learned and with what degree of success for themselves and their students. Promoting the use of WebCT as a means of enhancing participants’ interaction and discussion also remains an ongoing challenge. The College will make a transition from WebCT to Blackboard this year. This will be a major adjustment for many. One need that surfaced during AQIP Conversation Days was expressed by adjunct faculty, especially those that teach primarily at night because they have other professional obligations and responsibilities elsewhere during the weekday. They would like to have more faculty development offerings provided on week nights and on Saturdays. An online survey has been recently been administered to adjunct faculty regarding time, topic, and format preferences. As results are analyzed, it will be determined whether Faculty Academy can be delivered in a manner that can meet their expressed need.

Review (09-19-09):

As with so many projects of this kind, the institution has identified the challenge of assessing its effectiveness. While measuring participant satisfaction is relatively simple to do, measuring the impact on student learning is much more difficult. AQIP’s Resource Library might be very useful to the institution. Another challenge identified by the college relates to changes in its instructional format. They will be moving from WebCT to Blackboard. This reviewer is confident that Heartland Community College will be successful in this change, and it will have no impact on continuation of a very successful Faculty Academy model.

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 (09-19-09):

As this action project has been “retired,” no assistance is needed. In this reviewer’s estimation, this institution has achieved an exceptional accomplishment in completing this project. ID #9992