The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Baker College

Project Details			
Title	AIM – Academic Improvement Model	**Status**	COMPLETED
Category	8-Planning Continuous Improvement	**Updated**	09-28-2011
Timeline		**Reviewed**	10-04-2011
Planned Project Kickoff	12-15-2009	**Created**	02-25-2010
Actual Completion	12-31-2013	**Version**	2

1: Project Goal

A: 1. An institutional definition of what quality teaching and learning looks like.
2. A plan that shows what processes need to be put in place to enact this definition across the institution.
3. Processes, policies and procedures in place for those areas defined in goal 2.

2: Reasons For Project

A: Because of the rapid growth of the college and subsequent infrastructure changes, the institution can benefit from centralized understandings that drive decisions. Defining actions on the key questions sets the stage for streamlined processes and decisions in every functional area in the coming years.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: Academics – all areas including Effective Teaching and Learning, Instructional Design, Assessment

All academic personnel –including CAOs, deans, system staff, faculty, library, counselors, advisors and LSS staff

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A:
- Professional Development
- Instructional Design
- Program Assessment
- Faculty Development

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: A process for defining quality teaching and learning is in place, and is ready to kick off on December 14, 2009. This process involves campus and system-level input, and should be complete by mid-March. Compiling and condensing the information will take until mid-April. Then information will be communicated across campuses. Simultaneously, phase 2 will be completed. The final year of the project will be spent taking those pieces identified in Phase 2 and revising them to be integrated with our new definitions.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: The project has been set up in three consecutive phases. These phases will provide shorter term goals to ensure the project remains on track. The project will be overseen by a steering committee chaired by the Associate V.P. for Academics who will report quarterly to the AQIP Council on the project's progress.
Phase 1: Defining Quality Teaching should be completed and communicated across the system by June 30, 2010
Phase 2: Identifying and aligning processes should occur in parallel with Phase 1 – from April 1 – June 30, 2010
Phase 3: Developing procedures and processes for faculty evaluation, determining professional development needs, revising program assessment, finalizing instructional design processes should be complete by June 30, 2011.

7:	Project Outcome Measures
A:	The project is intended to create the foundation for an infrastructure to promote quality teaching. Question #1 above defines three sets of products that the project seeks to implement. Once these products are in place, the project will be deemed a success. However, the work at that point will only be at a beginning stage, because ongoing assessment of the policies and procedures with updates based on collected data will be necessary to develop an efficient and effective system across time.

Project Update

1:	Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The team overseeing the Academic Improvement Model project has been very busy translating ideas into actions over the past year. This has led to accomplishments in two areas.

First, by exploring our own beliefs and understanding of quality teaching and learning, the college has made a renewed commitment to Learner-Centered Instruction. This is demonstrated through activities including a leadership summit where all academic leaders met for a retreat to engage in learning activities based in a learner-centered model. This retreat provided a common experience to grow understanding about learner-centered instruction among the academic leadership team. To support the implementation of this model across the Baker College system, each of our ten campuses developed an action plan detailing steps and timelines that would occur locally to help faculty understand and embrace the learner-centered model, and to develop skills to implement the model in their classroom. Some campuses have brought in guest speakers and held workshops, while other campuses have created learning communities with ongoing support across time. Further, the Effective Teaching and Learning department has focused on the development of support materials and training opportunities that build on this model. Materials have been posted online for easy access, and workshops and demonstrations have occurred on campuses across disciplines and in discipline meetings with cross-campus representation.

A second area of work has centered on faculty evaluation and development. Recognizing that there is a direct link between behavior and reward structures, a task force has been working to re-work the faculty evaluation process to focus on the issues that are most important to us as an institution that wants to consistently promote learner-centered instruction. This process is ongoing and it is anticipated that during the current academic year, new processes will be ready to implement.

Finally, the owners of the project met as a team to carefully review accomplishments in relation to the original project declaration. It was determined that in some areas, the project should be refocused. A new project declaration was drafted. This was reviewed and adopted by the AQIP Council and serves now as the driving document for this project.

2:	Institution Involvement

A:

This project is overseen by the AQIP Council. The AQIP Council includes key leaders from the academic arena, as well as the system president and the Vice President of Information Systems. This oversight council ensures that knowledge and support of every project exists at the highest administrative levels of the organization.

The project work is conducted by ad hoc committees that are formed and overseen by the System Vice President of Academics. These committees bring together individuals from across campuses and from varying levels including deans, directors, faculty and support individuals. A broad based committee structure helps to ensure that voices from across the institution and at every level are heard.

Implementation has focused on reaching out to every faculty member to involve them in workshops, retreats, professional training, and through online support. These steps help ensure that each person is aware of the college's commitment to learner-centered instruction and have access to support that will allow him or her to implement the learner-centered model in their classroom. The work of individuals to implement this model is reflected in the evaluation process such that feedback is available to improve practice and reward success.

3: Next Steps

A:

The next big goal of the project is to finish work on the faculty evaluation materials and processes. It is important to align these processes with the commitments to learner-centered instruction that the college has made. Current practices do not provide appropriate assessment and feedback nor reward the behavior and activities that we seek to promote- the behaviors that we believe will lead to the highest possible student learning outcomes. It is anticipated that this is a process that will take until March of 2013. During the current academic year, work will continue on the development of tools that support the learner-centered model, and are constructed in a manner that provides feedback to faculty that is useful in their professional development. Training on a new model of faculty evaluation will begin toward the end of the 2011-2012 academic year. It is anticipated that training and mentoring of administrative personnel will be an important component of the process. Finally, during the 2012-2013 school year, the new process can be tested, revised as necessary, and prepared for full implementation by spring, 2013.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A:

This project has helped clarify the systemic nature of needed changes. Focusing on clarifying what "effective teaching" is has led the college to explore processes from preparation of students before they enter the classroom, to helping mentor deans and other administrators in the supervision and evaluation process. Changes cannot be thought of as single focused or impacting only a single group within the institution. While faculty do control their classroom, success will depend on changes in structures across the institution. This recognition of the breadth of change we believe will help this project be more successful.

A second practice with this project was a return to the original declaration for review and revision. The project looks different today than when it was originally developed. This is in part because of other quality work that is ongoing at the institution. But it is also because we know more today about the challenges the institution faces, and our ability to respond. By revising the project declaration, we are in a better position to stay focused on solutions that match our current ability to understand needs. If the project were shorter, than revisions may not be necessary, but on a long term project that spans so many aspects of the institution, the effort to return to the beginning and modify goals and expectations has been helpful.

5: Project Challenges

A:

As alluded to in #4 above, keeping ongoing projects focused remains a challenge. At Baker College, this challenge is currently addressed by requiring all projects to regularly update the AQIP Council, and providing opportunity to revisit and revise the project declaration.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: This Action Project began with an attempt to craft an institutional definition of quality teaching and learning, determine which processes needed to be in place to enact the definition across the institution, and assure that the processes, policies, and procedures identified are put into place. One of the most impressive and important outcomes of the first year of the project was the College's renewed commitment to being a Learning-oriented institution, one of the Principles of High Performing Organizations. Ten Baker College campuses have developed various ways to assist faculty and staff in embracing this learner-centered model (including bringing in guest speakers, creating learning communities, and developing training materials.) This understanding that different campuses have different cultures shows that the Baker system Understands Students and Other Stakeholders' Needs, Valuing People, Supporting Institutional Operations (AQIP Categories 3, 4, and 5, respectively). Furthermore, this allows each campus to adjust his processes and policies to support the Mission and Integrity of all (HLC Criterion 1).

2: Institution Involvement

A: By making every effort to include staff and faculty from across the institution and from every level, Baker College ensures Broad-based Involvement and a Focus on Stakeholders, shows Respect for People, and Promotes Collaboration--all of these are Principles of High Performing Organizations. Also, by offering professional development to all faculty members, the College is showing the Foresight to Plan Proactively (Principle of High Performing Organizations) as well as Planning Continuous Improvement, Building Collaborative Relationships, and Leading and Communicating (AQIP Categories 8, s Integrity in Words and Deed9, and 5, respectively). To encourage faculty to take advantage of the training that is offered, Project leaders might want to consider offering some time of reward for participation or tying participation to merit or promotion decisions. Either or both of these would increase faculty buy-in.

3: Next Steps

A: Baker College demonstrates an understanding of the value of linking the learner-centered philosophy to professional development activities and to faculty evaluation materials and processes. Equally perceptive is the understanding that administrators, who will be evaluating those faculty using different tools, will also need training. Project leaders' ability to view this Project from various perspectives and through different stakeholders' lenses shows that the College Values People (AQIP Category 4) and Understands Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs (AQIP Category 3). This Foresight to Plan Proactively (Principle of High Performing Organizations) and ultimate focus on Student Learning and Effective Teaching (HLC Criteria 3) show that Baker College has Integrity in Words and Deeds.

4:	Resulting Effective Practices

A: This Action Project exemplifies the notion that effective teaching can occur only in a culture of support and understanding of the entire college community's role in effective teaching. In other words, everyone on a campus - not just faculty - plays a role in a campus's ability to promote effective teaching. The college also understands that in a long-term effort such as this, it is important to reflect upon the original goals and determine what revisions need to be made based on changes on the campus as a result of a change in student population, faculty attitudes, a change in leadership, and/or statewide initiatives. These behaviors demonstrate that Project Leaders possess Agility and Responsiveness to Change, one of the Principles of High Performing Organizations, and are continuously preparing for the Future, HLC Criterion 2. Both are important to keeping the college and the Action Project on track.

5:	Project Challenges

A:

Project leaders are aware of the difficulty inherent in keeping long-term projects on track and are making reasonable progress in implementing the Action Project. Requiring regular updates to the AQIP Council and incorporating opportunities to reflect and revise the project goals as necessary are effective methods of assuring that the Project remains focused. To identify ways in which other institutions have handled this issue, Project Leaders could review current systems portfolios at http://www.hlcommission.org/aqip-systems-appraisal/systems-portfolios-links.html.

Project Outcome

1:	REASON FOR COMPLETION

A: The AIM project was intended to accomplish three objectives:
  1. An institutional definition of quality teaching
  2. A plan to implement the definition
  3. Processes and policies to support the plan

Goal 1 in this process was relatively easy and achieved as expected. However, the other goals led to a number of additional projects. The two most important of these were the Faculty Growth and Evaluation Project, and the Assessment Achievement Level Project. The Faculty Growth and Evaluation project was a necessary step because once the College had clearly defined our vision of quality teaching, that vision had to become integral in the work done with faculty in terms of growth as well as evaluation. Similarly, once a definition had been developed, it had to be used as a foundation in the development of assessment to achieve a match. Since these two major extensions of the project have been achieved, the AIM project can be viewed as institutionalized and ongoing. Therefore, it can be closed as a project.

2:	SUCCESS FACTORS

A: The project achieved each of its primary goals. To this extent the project was extremely successful. It is clear that since the inception of this project, the discussion about teaching and learning at Baker College has changed. While concepts like "quality teaching" have always been around, previously there was no institutional commitment to what the phrase meant. Therefore, while it was used, it clearly did not communicate the same thing to each person. By having a clear and explicit definition, the College has been able to build policy and procedure to support this vision.

A prime example between the definition of quality teaching and learning and practice is seen in the Faculty Growth and Evaluation Process. Without a clear institutional definition of quality teaching, the evaluation process was forced to remain vague. The result was that the process did not provide meaningful feedback or collect reliable data that could be used for decision making. However, once an institutional understanding of Quality Teaching was enunciated, then the Faculty Evaluation process could be shaped in response to the definition. Data can now be collected that allows individuals to develop professional goals and the institution can target specific gaps between practice and vision.

The tie is now also clearly made between teaching and assessment. We believe that quality teaching and learning requires certain behavior from both instructors and students. Assessments can be built in a manner that assess in ways that are parallel to the

manner in which teachers and students behave. No longer will students be expected to demonstrate knowledge in ways that are in conflict with the manner in which they have been taught.

The same idea applies to the curriculum development process. By having an explicit definition of quality teaching, curriculum can now be developed in a manner that explicitly supports this definition.

As can be seen, the project has resulted in a framework that is being used across academics as a defining force for a wide range of activities.

3: UNSUCCESSFUL FACTORS

A: Overall, the College did not realize when it began this process what a large undertaking it was. As a result, the project was likely understaffed and over-committed from the start. In the past several years, the College has become much better at recognizing the scope of projects as they are launched and a project such as this would be launched differently than occurred in the past.