The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Joliet Junior College

Project Details			
Title	Coordinating Academic Committees to Integrate the Student Learning Process	**Status**	COMPLETED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	**Updated**	09-14-2012
Timeline		**Reviewed**	09-23-2012
Planned Project Kickoff	12-01-2011	**Created**	11-21-2011
Actual Completion	09-27-2013	**Version**	1

1: Project Goal

A: Currently, JJC has three major academic committees that all meet at the same time and work in relative isolation: Curriculum, Academic Standards, and Student Learning (assessment). The goal is to research best practices and determine a structure that will refocus these committees on student learning and make the process of student learning seamless. If these committees continue to work in isolation, the overarching concerns of student learning are not coordinated in ways that foster improvement. The cycle of developing and approving curriculum needs to be integrated with assessment activities, and the regulations for academic progress and success need to be woven in the curriculum and assessment processes.

2: Reasons For Project

A: In the process of researching the committee structure at JJC for the current QAP on shared governance, the researchers identified 88 college committees. Some were defunct, some overlapped or duplicated efforts, and most met in isolation with very limited sharing of information, clear charges, or documented and assessed procedures. For this project, the three primary standing committees charged with the cycle of curriculum approval and assessment and related elements of student success and completion were identified as a strong starting point for restructuring to improve student learning and success. Historically, these committees have met on the same dates at the same time, and each had a separate administrative liaison. Membership is primarily faculty: one representative from each academic department. Information is shared within department meetings but not among the committees themselves. Bringing these committees together in a more integrated model should allow the college to address the improvement phase of assessment in a logical and coherent manner. In addition, JJC student development educators and program staff, who are critical to supporting the academic integration and success of students, would be included as a part of a more integrated model.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: Curriculum Committee
Academic Standards Committee
Student Learning Committee
All faculty
All areas of Academic Affairs
Identified Student Development Departments and Staff

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Developing curriculum
Assessing student learning
Determining student placement, measures of progress, student milestones, and successful completion

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: The current committee structure is complex, and the issue of restructuring could be sensitive if decisions are made hastily or without

sufficient research and input from all constituencies. Therefore, a full three years will be needed to complete this project.

YEAR #1:

1. Hold joint meetings of the full membership of all three committees to prepare AQIP documents and determine tasks.
2. Form task groups to conduct research, as follows:

- AQIP leadership team to facilitate procedures and reporting
- Identify and disseminate all existing documents for each current committee: mission, procedures, charges, etc.
- Research best practices among other, similar institutions; conduct site visits
- Prepare a recommendation for restructuring by May 2012

1. Conduct training as needed on essential tools and procedures, such as CurricuNet
2. Disseminate the annual QAP update report to all constituencies; share the feedback report and act upon any recommendations

YEAR #2:

1. Share recommendation with all academic departments; discuss within department meetings and at Chairs Council
2. Refine and approve the recommendation
3. Prepare documents for the new committee model: mission, procedures, membership, etc.
4. Share documents with all academic departments; discuss within department meetings and Chairs Council
5. Conclude the approval process; prepare any documentation needed for faculty contract (e.g., memorandum of understanding).
6. Identify membership by May 2013, before the school year concludes.
7. Prepare to implement the new model by August 2013
8. Continue to conduct training on tools and procedures
9. Disseminate the annual QAP update report al all constituencies; share the feedback report and act upon any recommendations

YEAR #3:

1. Implement the new committee structure beginning August 2013
2. Determine a method for assessing and improving the operations of the new committee structure
3. Refine and modify as needed

6: **Project Success Monitoring**

A:
1. Form and maintain an AQIP leadership team to organize meetings, prepare documentation, communicate the timeline, and maintain records
2. Maintain a regular schedule of meetings and document all progress
3. Collaborate in preparing the annual updates to assure that all constituencies are kept involved and engaged

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7: **Project Outcome Measures**

A: The project should conclude with a revised committee structure that has successfully integrated the curriculum, assessment, and student success processes.

Project Update

1: **Project Accomplishments and Status**

A: This project has been slower than expected for several reasons. During this past year:

- The College transitioned from an Interim President to a new permanent President;
- The academic vice president was the only non-interim vice president of the College;
- There were some College structures and customs that needed to be resolved to support this project; and
- Faculty members did not have as much understanding and experience with program review as was originally assumed.

However, within this year we completed the following:

- Held one joint meeting with the members of the key committees involved to discuss the need for the project: Student Learning

Committee (SLC), Academic Standards, and Curriculum

- Reviewed each committee's charter and membership and updated if needed;
- Discussed the path that curriculum should follow with the academic deans and chairs;
- Discussed the process for program reviews and how this information would be used to improve or eliminate programs with Curriculum committee and with academic deans;
- Discussed the connection of new academic program with the budget, facilities, IT, personnel, and student support services with SLT;
- Changed the college calendar so that each of the key committees now meets on different days (in the past each met on the same day and time) allowing individuals to attend all three meetings;
- Changed job responsibilities of two positions to consolidate the work of course and program approvals and of program review within the direct reports of the Vice President of Academic Affairs. Now all of this work belongs to the Coordinator of Curriculum and Academic Effectiveness and the Curriculum Specialist.

2: Institution Involvement

A: During this year, there was only one person driving the project, who was the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA), partly because the need for the project was not understood by the stakeholders who would address the solution, positions needed to be re-structured to better support the work of the key committees, and the meeting times of the three committees hampered communications.

Yet, the VPAA was able to communicate the need and keep discussion of the project going throughout the College. This year, involvement from the chairs of each of the committees and from other faculty who have expressed an interest in working on the project can be expanded. Also, the College now has permanent vice presidents of administrative services and student development, which will allow the work of SLT approval of new programs and integrating this process into other college processes (budgeting, etc.)

3: Next Steps

A: The following are the next steps:

- Provide training and support for preparing program reviews to all relevant stakeholders.
- Facilitate discussions at each of the three key committees to determine the role of each committee within the course and program approval and revision processes.
- Determine the approval path for new and revised courses and programs.
- Determine how data gathered within program reviews will be shared with the three key committees and within the college governance structure and committees.
- Use any new courses or programs proposed this year to pilot the new process. Refine the process as needed.
- Distribute data from the program reviews of 2012 to pilot and refine this process.
- Incorporate new processes into the operations of each of the three key committees and into the College's annual planning and budget process; the facilities and equipment project plan; and the technology plan.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The purpose of this project is to design a process for JJC that fits our governance and committee structure. While we are still in the initial stages, it appears that our work may be useful to other colleges. We are not ready to share at this point, but when our model is completed and tested, we will be willing to share our work.

5: Project Challenges

A: This project is difficult because it requires us to think differently about work that we already do and that "we have always done this way." Redesigning these processes cannot always occur in a linear fashion. As we have looked at the parts, we have changed our perspective of what is needed with the whole or in the redesigned processes. The blocks and gaps that we discovered were addressed, but it took much time and discussion to make changes. For example, to simply change the time and date that committees customarily meet took several months because of conflicts with teaching schedules and other responsibilities. In addition, we spent time understanding how program reviews were completed in the past and what changes were needed within this process. Our strategy is to encourage open communication and have a willingness to change and reconsider our work. In this way, the problems

are actually useful to refining our processes and to determining the changes needed.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Joliet Junior College has not made the degree of progress that was originally planned and has not moved forcefully toward the development of a broad-based continuous improvement culture. However, preliminary discussions have begun with the effected academic committees in that mission, charter and membership of committees have been updated, and college calendars for these committees have been changed to allow individuals to attend all three meetings. These are foundational first steps in allowing more integrated and broad-based involvement throughout the curriculum review and updating process. The changing of job responsibilities and the consolidation of course and program approvals under two direct reports of the Vice President of Academic Affairs should help further operational support of coordinated and integrated work among the involved committees that impact improvement in student learning directly. However, in order to complete the project on time in 2014 and achieve its goal of creating a more integrated structure for the continuous improvement of student learning, Joliet will have to have broader and more active participation.

2: Institution Involvement

A: One of key principles of the AQIP process is broad-based involvement. As Joliet has identified, the lack of broad-based involvement in this Action Project has slowed progress and put this project behind schedule. However, now that key executive leadership positions have been permanently filled, committee chairs and faculty are available to contribute, and obstacles related to conflicting committee meeting times have been addressed, Joliet appears ready to move forward more effectively. An integrated process to support the continuous improvement of student learning is an essential part of the AQIP process and is an area that needs to be collaboratively addressed at Joliet by all involved constituents.

3: Next Steps

A: Joliet appears to have a sound plan for moving forward with this Action Project. If the college has not already done so, it may be beneficial to assign owners (leaders) for each of the objectives that have been identified and establish timelines for completion to ensure these tasks are completed in a timely manner. With broader executive support, and the involvement of key constituents, the college appears well positioned to build upon the foundational structures that were put in place over the past year to support a more integrated process for the continuous improvement of student learning. Per Joliet's original Action Project Plan, it may be helpful to review student learning continuous improvement systems at peer institutions to determine best practices and potentially provide external benchmarking opportunities in the future. These integrated processes are complex and it is a challenge at most institutions to ensure institutional alignment. In this regard, and in support of the AQIP principle of being Learning-Oriented, the development of a collaborative commitment and culture to optimize continuous improvement in student learning among all involved constituents is required to ensure effective alignment of these complex processes. It is evident that Joliet is working toward this important end.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Joliet should be commended for working through the required changes in governance and committee structures to support an integrated continuous improvement process for student learning. Improvement of integrated processes often requires changes in organizational alignment and decision making systems. Joliet should be commended for working toward the development of an integrated continuous improvement process for student learning and making the structural changes required to support its success. This Action Project may provide valuable experience for Joliet in how to facilitate these organizational alignment changes in relation to future projects.

5: Project Challenges

A: As Joliet continues to work to develop an integrated continuous improvement process for student learning, it is also learning and expanding other key principles of high performing organizations that are foundations of the AQIP process. These principles include broad-based involvement, promoting collaboration, and agility and responsiveness to change. Through this Action Project it is evident that Joliet is building both individual and institutional capacity in relation to these principles. Although progress during the first year was

not as strong as intended, participants involved in this Action Project should be commended for their continued commitment to the development of these important tenets.

Project Outcome

1: **Reason for completion**

A: This action project has served its purpose to review our academic committees in order to clarify and improve their function. In addition, this project overlaps the work of our Governance action project, so it will be addressed there. The college will continue to redefine committee roles, develop working relationships between committee, and determine connections to emerging governance processes.

2: **Success Factors**

A: The project reviewed all "committees" in order to discern their role as "standing" or "ad hoc." In general, task forces and teams are used to address immediate issues and solve problems, on a temporary basis. Standing committees are used to make recommendations on specific processes or decisions. Many ad hoc committees had continued to meet and experienced mission creep, which may have obscured decision-making processes. Clarifying each committee's role and work processes also supports our concurrent governance action project.

This project revealed that decisions about academic programs were rarely reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The gap in information was problematic because the plan for new academic programs could not be integrated into other planning efforts, such as the budget, planning for future personnel, and the Master Plan for facilities. It also became clear that there was little relationship between the academic committees. The review of committees led to an initiative to coordinate the work of the academic committees and refocus on student learning. The goal is for these committees to assess data on student learning and to determine changes that may be needed in curriculum, student learning outcomes, and academic policies. A secondary goal is to ensure that this work informs the work of the SLT and the other units of the college including Student Development, HR, Administrative Services, and IT.

3: **Unsuccessful Factors**

A: The work did not proceed as quickly as hoped. The intention to hold regular meetings, and collaborate to produce an annual update fell victim to scheduling issues and changes in institutional leadership.