



AQIP Action Project Report

Type of report (check the appropriate box): Annual Final

Action Project Name: First Year Initiative: Welcoming Culture at SCC

Action Project Purpose –

A priority for South Central College is to continue to improve persistence and completion. South Central College recognizes that one contributing factor that impacts persistence and completion is the degree to which the college encourages and practices a welcoming culture on our campuses and enhances student engagement, especially for first year students. There is opportunity to provide a welcoming atmosphere beginning with the students' first interactions with our campus, from the first encounters with the physical environment and the cyber-environment, to the first interpersonal interactions with faculty and staff.

Action Project Membership – John Engquist (Director of Admissions), Christina Hinz (Nursing Academic Advisor), Lori Hood (English Instructor), Shelly Megaw (Marketing and Public Relations Director), Elaine Hardwick (College Lab Assistant), Kurt Dershem (Philosophy Instructor), Candy Laven (Placement Coordinator)

Action Project Start Date: 2014-10-01 Action Project End Date: 2015-4-15

1. List the project goals along with the metrics/measures you used for assessing the goals.

Objective 1/Measure/Criteria for Success Objective: Investigate student experiences and interactions at South Central College that helped the students feel welcome and informed at South Central College. Measure: Quantitative data from measures such as surveys and analytics from predictive models that analyze various data points on recent first-year SCC students and qualitative data from measures such as focus groups and individual student interviews. Criteria for Success: The team is able to make recommendations to inform the steps in a Phase II project and the team is able to create a crosswalk to results of other measurement tools.

Objective 2/Measure/Criteria for Success – Investigate faculty perceptions of how South Central College welcomes and informs first year students. Measure: Quantitative data from measures such as surveys and qualitative data from measures such as focus groups and individual interviews. Criteria for Success: The team is able to make recommendations to inform the steps in the follow-up project, Phase 2; the team is able to create a crosswalk to results of other measurement tools.

Objective 3/Measure/Criteria for Success – Investigate staff perceptions of how South Central College welcomes and informs first year students. Measure: Quantitative data from measures such as surveys and qualitative data from measures such as focus groups and individual interviews. Criteria for Success: The team is able to make recommendations to



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inform the steps in the follow-up project, Phase 2; the team is able to create a crosswalk with results of other measurement tools.

2. Describe what was accomplished, referring to the quantifiable results that show progress. (If necessary, clarify how the original goals and anticipated outcomes may have shifted.)

This action project was intended to determine whether SCC provides a “welcoming” environment for incoming students. During Fall semester 2014, a survey was administered to over 300 South Central College (SCC) students in a variety of different classes. Roughly 1/3 of students identified themselves as Associate in Arts (AA) or transfer students, and 17% identified Faribault as their home campus. In Spring 2015, a similar survey was administered to faculty and staff to ascertain their perception of students' views. Thirty-six percent of the respondents were Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) faculty, 22% were technical faculty, and 35% were staff (roughly half of which were from Student Affairs). According to the student survey, 92% of students find SCC's website somewhat or very easy to use; faculty/staff estimated that 62% of students would hold that view. Eighty-five percent of students found the Student Advising and Registration (STAR) sessions somewhat or very helpful; 92% of faculty/staff estimated that students would hold that view. Student comments on STAR were overwhelmingly positive, although some said the sessions included too much information and not enough hands-on assistance. Faculty/staff were similarly positive but offered some suggestions for improvement including additional staff to assist students, less information to avoid overwhelming students, and adjusted structure to have student work in smaller groups to enable individual attention. Only 1% of students reported that they don't buy the required books for classes; faculty/staff estimated that 33% fail to buy required texts. One percent reported that they fail to complete their financial aid applications. One percent of the students reported being unable to find their classrooms for the first class session. Forty-eight percent of students in technical programs report that faculty advisor help enabled them to achieve their goals; 29% report that advisors did not do these things. Fifty-four percent of technical program students agreed that it was easy to schedule a meeting with their advisor; 20% disagreed. Forty-six percent of technical program students reported that faculty advisor had spent sufficient time with them; 31% reported that advisors had not spent sufficient time with them. Forty-three percent of students report that the professional advisors assisted them with admissions and enabled them to achieve their goals; 34% reported that the advisors did not. Forty-three percent of student reported that it was easy to schedule a meeting with their professional advisor; 24% of student reported that they did not. Thirty-six percent reported that their professional advisor spent sufficient; (31% reported that the advisors did not. Faculty and staff were more likely to believe that advisors enable students to reach their goals (58% versus 18%), but less likely to think that students can easily schedule a time to see them (47% vs. 38% agreed). Students' comments



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called for more and better qualified advisors who provide more flexible meeting times. Some stated that they did not know who their advisor was. Faculty/staff were overwhelmingly in favor of hiring more advisors to provide individual attention to students and increase retention. Sixty percent of LAS faculty expressed interest in a student coaching program to supplement advising; 13% were not interested. A majority of students reported receiving information on the FAFSA (89%), scholarships (76%), grants (81%), work study (71%) and loans (78%). Students expressed high levels of satisfaction with a wide variety of student services. Faculty/staff estimates of student satisfaction were mostly lower than students actually reported. Examples include: financial aid (90% vs. 79%), admissions (96% vs. 85%), career counseling (83% vs. 85%), personal counseling (84% vs. 56%), Academic Support Cents (ASC)/tutoring (95% vs. 76%), disability services (85% vs. 56%), IT help desk (97% vs. 73%), faculty availability outside of the classroom, (95% vs. 77%). A majority (98%) of students and faculty agreed that classrooms at SCC have a welcoming atmosphere. Opinions differed, however, regarding the level of satisfaction with college facilities. Ninety percent of students were somewhat or very satisfied with the ease of finding rooms; faculty/staff estimated that only 47% would be. Similar disparities occurred regarding the noise level in classrooms (93% of students were satisfied vs. a faculty/staff estimate of satisfaction of 58%) and as the availability of social spaces (89% vs. 58%). Students and faculty/staff were in closer agreement about the availability of study spaces (88% vs. 77%), the quality of the cafeteria (88% vs. 82%), and the provision of Wi-Fi (69% vs. 66%). Students complained, however, about the weakness of Wi-Fi signals and suggested that the cafeteria should provide a wider range of food options. Both students and faculty/staff commented on the absence of power outlets near the tables and chairs in the hallways. Both students and faculty/staff expressed satisfaction with the variety of student organizations on campus, although only 25% of students indicated that they're involved with a student group. Twenty-eight percent of student expressed interest in community service. Fifty percent of students feel adequately informed about events on campus; 18% did not. Faculty/staff estimated that only 32% would report feeling informed. Even greater disparities between students and the faculty/staff emerged regarding whether students feel welcomed at SCC. Seventy-eight percent of student reported feeling welcome and 2% did not; faculty/staff estimated 24% vs. 26%. A large majority of students reported that they felt that SCC employees were helpful and caring (81% vs. 3%) while the faculty/staff estimate was much lower (38% vs. 25%). Seventy-three percent of students indicated that they were able to register for desired classes; faculty/staff estimated that only 22% would be satisfied. Faculty/staff were uniform in their praise for the Director of Student Life, recognizing how difficult it can be to get students involved in extra-curricular activities. Faculty/staff reported that they've successfully engaged students by being friendly, courteous, open, available and inclusive, providing individual advising and encouraging students to become involved in student organizations. If additional



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resources were made available, faculty/staff recommend: hire additional advisors, engage in more “intrusive” advising, plan family events, provide day care for students with children, expand the counseling services which SCC provides, reestablish the multicultural center, increase marketing, and offer free food for students at events.

The Action Project Team refrained from making recommendations regarding phase two of the project. Instead, the data will speak for itself and allow the new team to establish priorities and propose specific changes.

(Please see attached documents for graphs summarizing the survey data.)

3. Describe how members of the SCC community participated in this project.
Three hundred twenty three students and seventy-six faculty and staff participated in the surveys the group administered.
4. Describe the effect this project has/will have on the institution, students and/or others. What can be identified as good practice from which other institutions may benefit?
This project will provide a foundation for continued discussion in Phase II of the project. The Action Project Team felt it was important to have accurate information about what the college is doing well and areas in which we can improve before attempting to prioritize and implement improvements.
5. Describe the challenges the college might encounter when successfully completing and institutionalizing the project’s goals.
During the timeframe of this Action Project, the team developed and implemented a survey to investigate perceptions of the SCC Welcoming environment. The Team did not meet its Criteria for Success because neither a crosswalk with other measurement tools nor recommendation for Phase II was completed. However, the latter will serve as starting points for the Phase II Action Project.
6. In light of the project goals, current circumstances, institutional learning from the project, and anticipated challenges, what are the next steps that must be taken to complete or institutionalize the results of this action project? Can you provide a recommended timeline?
The SCC First-Year Student Initiative Phase II Action Project Team will be responsible for proposing and implementing changes the Phase I survey data; they will determine appropriate priorities timeline for their project



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7. Provide any additional information or concerns that reviewers and others should understand about this project.

The goal of this Action Project was to ensure that the college had an understanding of the perceptions of student and of faculty/staff before developing or implementing changes. Phase II will begin at the conclusion of this project.



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