



## AQIP Action Project Report

An AQIP Action Project Report should be submitted at the completion of an action project, and annually for projects that are not completed in one year. AQIP Action Project Team responses keep the Steering Committee up to date with the project's progress and provide the information needed to complete the required HLC/AQIP documentation for action projects.

Reports should be completed and submitted to the AQIP Steering Committee by email ([aqip@southcentral.edu](mailto:aqip@southcentral.edu)) at the conclusion of a project and, when appropriate, annually from the project's start date.

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

Action Project Name: First Year Student Initiative Phase 2

Action Project Purpose – Please give a brief summary of the project purpose.

The goal of this project is to develop a student ambassador program to assist with creating a welcoming and informed environment. Student Ambassadors will support the mission and vision of South Central College by welcoming and serving students through participating in a variety of student events. This creates an opportunity for students who are committed to SCC to engage and connect with new students on campus. The results from the survey administered in FYI Phase 1 indicated that new students were looking for additional interactions and connections with current students during STAR sessions, campus visits, and during the first weeks of classes. This project supports SCC's Purpose Statements of "Foster a welcoming environment that cultivates a sense of respect and appreciation for differences" and "Offer student services and enrichment experiences that support academic success".

Action Project Membership – Please list the names of the project team members and their role at the college.

Amber Ness, Academic Advisor; Anthony Riesberg, Director of Admissions and Advising; Candy Laven, Coordinator of Placement/Graduation/Work Study; Lisa Kinowski, Marketing Coordinator; Susan Mucha, Learning Specialist – Academic Support Center. Karen Snay, Faculty, served on the committee during fall semester.



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Action Project Start Date: 09/01/2015

Action Project End Date: 05/31/2016

Please address the following questions regarding your project.

1. List the project goals along with the metrics/measures you used for assessing the goals. Develop and implement a student ambassador program to assist with creating a welcoming and informed environment. Objective 1/Measure – Improve the perceptions of new students and staff that the South Central College community has a welcoming environment. Improved ratings offered in qualitative surveys conducted with 1st year students and employees of South Central College. Objective 2/Measure - Increase satisfaction of students regarding the ability to get their unique questions answered. Improved ratings offered in qualitative surveys conducted after STAR sessions. Objective 3 /Measure - Increase satisfaction of students regarding getting questions answered in a timely manner. Improved ratings offered in qualitative questionnaires submitted either online or in person by people that visit the Student Affairs Centers. Objective 4 /Measure - Achieve a 95% satisfaction rate of staff that were previously impacted by the activities being conducted by the student ambassadors via a new survey. Qualitative ratings that show 95% satisfaction of SCC employees indicating that student ambassadors have a positive impact on the college community/image.
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.)

Accomplishments of this Action Project include the development, implementation and subsequent assessment of a Student Ambassador Program. The Student Ambassador Program utilizes students to represent the college at various events when we want to engage the public in getting to know what great students we have. The goal of having the student ambassadors available was to help create a warm and welcoming environment at South Central College. The Student Ambassadors were provided training in providing tours, in general processes associated with student support, and in the history of South Central College as well as the campus that they may be supporting.



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Student Ambassadors received a South Central College polo shirt similar to those worn by staff and they have name tags identifying them as Student Ambassadors. Typical events include giving tours, helping at STAR (Registration) sessions, attending an on-campus rotary meeting, and attending a public on-campus event. Student Ambassadors availability to attend events was based on their class schedules and other commitments like studying, work, and family.

The Student Ambassadors description is as follows: Student Ambassadors will advance the mission and vision of South Central College (SCC) by welcoming and serving students through a variety of events and means. Student Ambassadors reported to the Director of Admissions and Advising. Responsibilities included assisting with various aspects of registration sessions, tours and other initiatives to promote SCC as a friendly and welcoming environment. At registration sessions they helped to gather and distribute materials as well as helped new students through the registration process and with navigation of E-services, E-mail, and other resources.

Minimum qualifications included that the student be a currently enrolled student in good academic standing who has completed at least 1 semester at SCC with a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher. Ambassadors were also expected to attend mandatory training as well as have the ability to communicate effectively and maintain professional appearance and behavior.

Preferred qualifications included knowledge of SCC procedures and processes as well as experience with or knowledge of SCC resources including Admissions, Academic Advising, Academic Support Center, TRiO, Disability Services, Career Services and Counseling, Faculty, etc. Students were asked to be positive, friendly, and familiar working with diverse groups of people as well as have advanced skills in the registration process as well as navigating E-services, E-mail, and other resources. Preferred was also the ability to work collaboratively with faculty, staff, students, and community members.

Learning Outcomes of the Student ambassador program included that students would improve knowledge of SCC resources and policies as well as facilitate relationships within and outside of the institution. Students would also professionally interact and effectively communicate with SCC faculty, staff, students, and the public and engage in opportunities to develop strong leadership skills. Another learning outcome is that students would cultivate communication and other skills necessary for professional



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growth.

Objective 1/Measure – The first objective was to improve the perceptions of new students and staff that the South Central College community has a welcoming environment. The original measure of this outcome was improved ratings offered in qualitative surveys conducted with 1st year students and employees of South Central College. At the conclusion of the project, the team did not feel that the Welcoming Culture Survey would be a valid assessment as had originally been anticipated. The team will recommend that the program manager revamp the assessment to be used in the future to evaluate the program. Objective 2/Measure – The second project objective was to increase satisfaction of students regarding the ability to get their unique questions answered. The measurement was to be improved ratings offered in qualitative surveys conducted after STAR sessions. According to survey results given at the April STAR session when the Student Ambassadors were implemented, 97% of students agreed that they felt welcomed to the South Central College community and 3% were neutral. Students indicated their satisfaction with the Student Ambassadors making them feel welcomed as follows: 87% satisfied, 12% neutral, 1% not satisfied. Objective 3 /Measure – The third objective of increase satisfaction of students regarding getting questions answered in a timely manner was measured via improved ratings offered in qualitative questionnaires submitted either online or in person by people that visit the Student Affairs Centers. Only 8 surveys were received, so the data should be interpreted with caution, however, according to surveys given to students that have visited the Student Affairs Center since implementation of the Student Ambassador Program, 100% (75% strongly agree, 25% agree) of students indicated that they received help in a timely manner. Objective 4 /Measure – The final objective was to achieve a 95% satisfaction rate of staff that were previously impacted by the activities being conducted by the student ambassadors via a new survey. Qualitative ratings that show 95% satisfaction of SCC employees indicating that student ambassadors have a positive impact on the college community/image. May 2016 survey results show that 75% (31% strongly agree, 44% somewhat agree) agree that student ambassadors have a positive impact on the SCC college community image.

3. Describe how members of the SCC community participated in this project. (Show the breadth of involvement over the project's duration.)



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There have been numerous SCC community members who have participated in this project along the way. The team reviewed the data and recommendations from the previous AQIP Action Project to determine possible options to investigate. The initial direction of this project was to focus on creating an intrusive coaching program specifically focusing on LAS faculty. The VP of Student and Academic Affairs advised us against pursuing such a program due to the contractual issues which would arise. The team then further discussed what other potential actions could lead to creating a welcoming and informed environment. Upon reviewing the data, a common theme that emerged was students looking for more interaction and connections with other students. One way to meet this need was to create a Student Ambassador Program to give new students a chance to connect with experienced students. Research was completed to determine best practices in similar programs offered throughout the MnSCU system and an estimated budget was determined. The team reached out to the VP of Student and Academic Affairs and the Associate Vice President of Research & Institutional Effectiveness requesting funding to implement a pilot and were told that there was not funding available for the project. The team then decided to see if a volunteer program would be viable and it was determined that it would not. The team met with the Foundation Director to see if there were any options of utilizing scholarships or scholarship recipients for the program, but it was determined that it would not. The team reached out to the Director of Student Life and the Student Senate to explore the option of the program being a student club. A faculty member was interested in being the advisor for the potential club. The Student Senate felt that the program was good, but did not feel that it should be placed as a student club. Finally, the team connected with the Financial Aid Director who assisted with work study funding for the program.

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? The Student Ambassador Program has the potential to create a welcoming environment for students by connecting new students with current successful students. The program has the potential to create a positive image of SCC to community members, employees, and students. The program offers students an opportunity to gain professional skills and develop working relationships with students and SCC employees. The Student



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Ambassador Programs also creates opportunities for students to assist SCC employees with duties which could potentially ease the workload of the employee. One of the team's focuses was to try to create an environment that inspired students to have pride in their choice of schools. The importance of critical thinking and not giving up were at the core of this team's philosophy.

5. Describe the challenges the college might encounter when successfully completed for institutionalizing the project's goals.

One of the biggest challenges will be funding the program. The pilot program was funded using work study dollars; however, there is not a guarantee that this will be sufficient to continue or expand the program. If the program is going to continue or expand, institutional dollars would need to be dedicated to the program. Funding will also contribute to the scalability of the program. For example, the number of students that the program will be able to hire will impact the number of students that would be available to help with requested activities. Supervisory workload is another challenge that the college might encounter. Other potential challenges include student availability to participate in the program due to class schedules and other time commitments and concerns with communication among faculty and staff.

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 program has transitioned to the Director of Admissions and Advising and steps are being put in to place to implement it within the Student Affairs Center. The program will be embedded into the Student Affairs Center for summer session and will be guided and directed by the Director of Admissions and Advising. Initial organizational structures and procedures were created. These will be reviewed for functionality and sustainability and enhancements will be made as needed.



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

The team has encountered many challenges throughout this project. The team lost members at the start of the project due to various reasons (new position at a different college, faculty layoff, and concerns with the process). One of the members that left was one of the co-leads for the project, which left the responsibility to the other team lead. The process for finding funding proved to be a huge challenge for this team. The team's understanding at the beginning of the project was that there were AQIP dollars that could be used for AQIP projects, but later found that this was not the case. Funds were for supplies alone and could not be used for personnel. It was important to the team to find a sustainable funding source for the program, which we could not. The team did not have participation from the Faribault campus. There were constant delays in moving the project forward due to waiting for approval or information from administration on various issues. The team also struggled with finding time in everyone's schedules to consistently meet. In the future, the team would recommend that funding options/use of AQIP funding be clearly explained prior to starting or approving the project, there should be two project team leads, and the team leads should have some type of training regarding the process.



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