

AQIP Action Project Registration

Title: FYE Reimagined

Version: 2

Institution: South Central College

Status: Active

Submitted:

Category: 1-6 – Category 2 Focus –
Meeting Student and Other Key
Stakeholder Needs

Timeline

Planned project kickoff date: 03-22-2017

Target completion date: 12-31-2018

Actual completion date:

Project Detail

1. Project Description

Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or less. Be sure to identify the key organizational areas (departments, programs, divisions, etc) and key organizational processes that this action project will affect, change and/or improve.

The FYE Reimagined Action Project's primary goal is to plan and implement a robust FYE course for students at SCC during their first semester. Organizational areas affected include Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS), Student Affairs, both SCC Foundations, and potentially technical programs. Changes to the advising and registration process may occur in order to increase the likelihood of students electing to take FYE during their first semester. Potential credit changes would impact technical programs requiring FYE. This project will also support SCC's commitment to Achieving the Dream by pre-emptively addressing an area of need identified using SCC data.

2. Reasons For Project

2a. Describe briefly your institution's reasons for taking on this Action Project now -- why the project and its goals are high among your current priorities.

Decades of research and initiatives at community colleges and universities across the nation have shown that providing incoming college students with peer and faculty engagement, campus-specific information, study strategies, and academic resources will increase the likelihood of those students being retained and persisting through to completion. As SCC seeks to increase student success rates, examining how the campus can improve the students' experience and provide timely information to new students is an important step. Data from the college's Office of Research and Institutional Effectiveness shows that students who took FYE had consistently higher retention and persistence rates than students who did not take the course. The "Second Fall Success" rates were as much as 18.3% higher. When many SCC students choose not to take the course or to take the course later in their academic careers, the intended benefits of the course are not realized.

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The Key Findings of the 2015 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) reveal students' lack of engagement in first-semester, community-focused experiences of any sort. Ensuring greater consistency in the FYE course delivery and promoting its benefits to incoming students are key steps SCC can take to increase the number of students taking the course during their first semester so they can utilize the knowledge they gain to improve their chances of success. The CCSSE shows that only 6.8% of SCC students were enrolled in a student success course (of any type) during their first semester. Similarly, 84.2% of survey takers indicated never enrolling in a "learning community" of any sort. More than half of students completing the survey (54.3%) never participated in a structured experience for new students, and only 33.2% of students reported engaging in any experience for new students in the first semester of college.

The same report shows that the Aspects of Lowest Student Engagement at SCC include low ratings in "working with classmates outside of class;" "analyzing basic elements of an idea experience, or theory;" "making judgements about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods;" being encouraged to "spend significant amounts of time studying;" and engaging in frequent "academic advising/planning." Even the Aspects of Highest Student Engagement within the report indicate areas for improvement. SCC also scored below the 2015 CCSSE Cohort in the following categories: Active and Collaborative Learning, Student Effort, Academic Challenge, and Support for Learners.

By re-examining the course expectations, many of these issues could be addressed with careful and precise delivery of the curriculum; others could be addressed through curriculum additions or revisions. Ensuring all FYE instructors have a consistent understanding of expectations, the training necessary to address the content successfully, and resources to assist in the delivery of course content will ensure a more consistent and dynamic experience for students taking the course. One key resource would be an established network of instructor and staff connections, so experts could deliver necessary information in a timely fashion (e.g., advisors hosting an information and registration session during class around week 9).

These issues could be addressed by increasing student preparedness—especially related to goal setting, time management, study skills and academic planning—by implementing a more robust FYE course for students at SCC during the first semester of enrollment.

2b. Explain how this project relates to any strategic initiatives or challenges described in the institution's systems portfolio.

This project directly addresses at least one subcategory of categories 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Systems Portfolio. Students will increase their knowledge of resources, use those tools to improve their learning experiences, and persist in their educational efforts to a greater degree. Specifically, the committee guiding this project can help SCC address multiple subcategories, some outside the aforementioned categories, by doing the following:

1P1: establishing a foundation of communication expectations for incoming students within the academic setting (e.g., interacting with peers, staff, and faculty in varied methods) and promoting

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critical thinking in the Common Course Outline, notably when students create learner and career success plans.

1P3: focusing on students' best interests—the AA degree requires students to complete the FYE course because it helps meet students' needs. The committee will work to increase earlier course enrollment because of the data indicating improved success rates for students taking FYE in their first semesters.

1P5: introducing students to the research process and scholarly practice; by faculty using research and personal experience to ensure best practices and content are delivered in the course in an ethical fashion (i.e., determining if the Common Course Outline can be addressed thoroughly with the current credit load).

2P1: presenting an array of resources and strategies to help students, especially at-risk students, address current and future needs (e.g., establishing a clear set of expectations related to academic rigor, personal grit, growth mindsets, and self-regulated learning) with the intent of preventing student needs from becoming barriers.

2P2: delivering must-know information to incoming students to help them overcome challenges that could halt their academic progress; reviewing data to determine the impact (compared to prior student success rates of incoming AA students at SCC); and identifying areas for improvement.

3P1: serving as consultants to the Dean of LAS to help generate methods for identifying the best possible instructors to teach this course, whether those individuals be current volunteer faculty, newly-hired and designated FYE faculty, or SCC staff.

3P2: encouraging the designation of a process owner for FYE; part of process ownership would ideally be to contribute to the instructor evaluation system for those teaching FYE.

3P3: suggesting methods and preparing materials for training FYE instructors in best practices and orienting them to the available resources; encouraging regular professional development related to teaching first-year and at-risk students.

4P1: supporting the college's goals to focus on student success and sustainability—increased student success results in retention and persistence that help stabilize, and potentially raise, enrollment.

4P2: advocating for a college-wide focus on ensuring the thoughtful integration of FYE in the college's plans in order to improve SCC's efforts to realize its mission of "promot[ing] student growth."

4P4: examining the course curriculum and determining an appropriate credit load that is ethical for both students and faculty, and ensuring all FYE instructors have sufficient preparation.

5P1: using SCC's past success rates for students taking FYE during the first semester to advocate for more institutional support of FYE (e.g., investing in dedicated and prepared faculty who can best reach the students in order to increase their success chances, which would likely provide greater returns through future tuition).

6P1: using an Action Project to meet multiple sub-categories in the Systems Portfolio and pre-emptively addressing an often targeted intervention area for Achieving the Dream colleges.

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6P2: working toward established process ownership of the overall first-year experience at SCC will allow the owner(s) to seek continuous improvement and create a culture of quality.

3. Project goals, milestones and deliverables

List the project goals, milestones and deliverables along with corresponding metrics, due dates and other measures for assessing the progress to each goal. Be sure to include formal evaluations when the project progress will be reviewed.

Goal 1: Review and document best practices of similar courses at other institutions; collect and review the history of the FYE course at SCC.

Milestone(s) for this Goal with due date(s): Data acquired and history documented 05/8/2017. Best practices collected and discussed during 01/2018.

Deliverable(s) for this goal with due date(s): Best practices gathered from peer-reviewed articles, reputable agencies, and Achieving the Dream resources; data collected from SCC's Office of Research & Institutional Effectiveness and CCSSE survey; reviewed history and resources from the former FYE Committee. Materials documented for review on 05/08/2017. Additional analysis may be completed and reviewed during 01/2018.

Evaluation/Assessment of this goal: Best Practices and FYE History document created and reviewed.

Goal 2: Develop a plan to implement a more focused FYE course for instructors at SCC. Compare the content of first-year student objectives (defined and organized by the committee on 10/25/17) with the current Common Course Outline. Outline course topics and identify the potential necessity of additional materials for instructors to use or adapt when teaching.

Milestone(s) for this Goal with due date(s): Identified ideal course content on 09/11/2017, organized content in 16-week outline on 10/25/2017 and identify needed materials by 01/31/2018.

Deliverable(s) for this goal with due date(s): Implementation plan for revised FYE course with a 16-week outline of course topics. Draft plan completed on 01/31/2018 and reviewed by 04/2018.

Evaluation/Assessment of this goal: Student, faculty, and staff feedback on past/current lesson content in addition to a review of possible revisions and additions.

Goal 3: Collect, adopt, revise, and create Open Educational Resource materials (including class readings) and/or lesson plans to enhance the consistency of quality learning experiences. Prepare new FYE course content and lessons in accordance with the content outline presented by the committee; make materials accessible within D2L to all SCC instructors, not only those teaching FYE.

Milestone(s) for this Goal with due date(s): Have course materials prepared and organized before 7/1/2018. Ensure all instructors have access to materials before 08/2018. Complete course evaluations during 12/2018.

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Deliverable(s) for this goal with due date(s): A reorganized outline of course topics and an openly accessible collection of OER activities, lesson plans, and reading materials (including open textbook sections) for each course topic.

Evaluation/Assessment of this goal: Compare findings from student surveys and focus groups focused on FYE sections in Fall 2017 and then on (new) FYE sections in Fall 2018.

Goal 4: Define functional and sustainable process ownership for the FYE course within the scope of students' overall first-year experience at SCC. Establish a mission statement to help guide FYE instruction, organization, training, and non-curricular activities within the SCC community.

Milestone(s) for this Goal with due date(s): Create a list of personnel responsibilities that could improve the quality and stability of students' first-year experience at SCC (05/11/2018).

Deliverable(s) for this goal with due date(s): The list of responsibilities will be generated (10/2018) and used to make recommendations of potential steps to address the list (12/2018).

Evaluation/Assessment of this goal: Have the responsibilities list and the recommendations been presented to and reviewed by administration? Was process ownership assigned?

Goal 5: Establish a process for early identification and preparation of FYE instructors.

Milestone(s) for this Goal with due date(s): Consult the Dean of LAS and support the choice to assign Spring 2018 sections of FYE to faculty who volunteered to teach the course. By 3/16/2018, develop and distribute a clear process to identify FYE instructors prior to their attendance at an orientation or training session focused on teaching the course. Ensure the process involves letting the Dean of LAS know which instructors want to teach the course. Based on increased enrollment numbers, revisit the new course assignment process to ensure sustainability before 08/2018. To prepare for the future, ensure volunteer instructors can complete initial and ongoing training with other FYE instructors and the process owner.

Deliverable(s) for this goal with due date(s): Before Fall 2018 registration, produce a formal, sustainable plan for identifying and assigning instructors to teach FYE in upcoming semesters.

Evaluation/Assessment of this goal: Verification that the plan can provide sufficient instructors to fill all sections of FYE.

Goal 6: Increase enrollment of all first-semester AA students with fewer than 15 transfer credits in FYE from 22% to >75%.

Milestone(s) for this Goal with due date(s): Before the first A&R sessions in Spring 2018, prepare presentation materials highlighting the benefits of taking FYE in the first semester. In registration labs, reinforce the presentation information by integrating some of the following tactics: (1) adding FYE to the required course stickers attached to student folders, (2) presenting mock schedules that all include FYE in the first semester, (3) showing/stating reminders, and/or (4) including FYE on students' checklist.

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Deliverable(s) for this goal with due date(s): Registration presentation content, updated stickers for student folders, mock schedules, revised checklists—all of these must be done before the first Spring 2018 A&R session.

Evaluation/Assessment of this goal: Were the strategies put into place? Did FYE enrollment increase for first-semester AA students?

4. Organizational Areas Affected/Members involved

4a. List the organizational areas -- institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units -- most affected by or involved in this Action Project.

AA students, college readiness students, LAS, any technical programs requiring FYE, advisors, and (possibly) administrator support to determine process ownership.

4b. Describe how various members of the learning community will participate in this action project.

Feedback will be sought via email; focus groups and surveys for current and future students; focus groups and surveys for current, past, and future faculty; and course evaluations from the Office of Research & Institutional Effectiveness.

4c. Show the breadth of involvement by individuals and groups over the project's duration.

Committee members will contribute to varying degrees during group-wide meetings throughout the duration of the project. Six workgroups, formed in November of 2017, will focus on completing each of the revised goals. Most, but not all, of the committee members have committed to participating in one or more of the workgroups; responsibilities will be assigned as the need arises. The Project Team Leader will ensure completion of the project registration and any other necessary documentation with input from the team.

5. Project Outcome Measures

Describe the overall "outcome" measures or indicators that will tell you whether this Action Project has been a success or failure in achieving its goals. Describe how the institution will monitor project progress/success during, and at the completion of the project. Be sure to specifically state the measures that will be evaluated and when.

Objective 1: Best Practices & History

Objective: Create documents that identify research-based, FYE-related best practices at community colleges and share the history of FYE at SCC.

Measure: Were the documents completed and utilized during the Action Project?

Criteria for Success: Committee members must refer to the documents to inform decisions.

Timing of evaluation: End of Spring 2018 semester and of the pilot run.

Objective 2: Outline of FYE Course Topics

Objective: Identify ideal course topics and outline an optimal sequence of delivery throughout a 16-week course for first-semester students.

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Measure: Was the outline created? Did the committee members utilize and revise the outline during course activity and lesson creation?

Criteria for Success: Committee members ensure class materials address each topic.

Timing of evaluation: Prior to 08/2018 when materials are finalized and delivered to instructors.

Objective 3: Class Resources & Lessons

Objective: Gather activities, reading materials, and lesson plans in a shared space for all faculty to access and utilize in their courses.

Measure: Was the collection of learning materials gathered and organized? Were faculty made aware of these materials? Is material quality reviewed by considering anecdotal observations, student surveys, and focus groups? Are new materials identified to improve quality continuously?

Criteria for Success: Faculty committee members verify that materials offer variety and engaging content. Organize the content in a user-friendly fashion for instructors. The FYE process owner (or the Dean of LAS) ensures all new FYE instructors are aware of these resources. FYE instructors share and discuss the use of both existing and new learning materials each semester.

Timing of evaluation: Throughout Fall 2018 when instructors are using learning materials.

Objective 4: Sustainable Process Ownership

Objective: Determine permanent process ownership to ensure the stability of the FYE course, to verify the course helps meet SCC's goals for students' first year experiences, to recruit and train instructors, and to help instructors align class activities with campus-wide events.

Measure: Were all essential duties of a process owner identified? Has process ownership been assigned with all essential duties in the description of responsibilities?

Criteria for Success: A permanent process owner role overseeing FYE has been defined and filled at SCC.

Timing of evaluation: List of duties generated and revised by 10/2018; a recommendation made to administration by 12/2018.

Objective 5: FYE Instructor Identification & Preparation

Objective: Establish a sustainable process to identify sufficient instructors who want to teach FYE, are willing to complete initial training (or previously completed it), and can participate in ongoing (a)synchronous discussions with other faculty and the FYE process owner.

Measure: Do all assigned FYE instructors meet the aforementioned objectives?

Criteria for Success: A permanent process is in place for the process owner of FYE to identify, train, and assess the training of FYE instructors; methods of ongoing, semester-long communication with FYE instructors are established with plans for reviewing the effectiveness.

Timing of evaluation: End of A & R sessions for Fall 2018 and end of the pilot run.

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Objective 6: First-semester FYE Enrollment Increase

Objective: Increase enrollment in FYE from 22% to >75% for first-semester AA students with fewer than 15 transfer credits.

Measure: What percentage of first-semester AA students in the target group enrolled in FYE?

Criteria for Success: One or more of the multiple, experimental strategies for increasing FYE enrollment are put into place with plans for future use. The initial effort to enroll first-semester students from the target group in FYE resulted in >75% student enrollment.

Timing of evaluation: Week 2 of Fall 2018 semester.

6. Project Challenges

Describe the challenges that may be encountered in successfully completing the project or for institutionalizing the learning from the project's goals.

Challenges include buy-in from all campus stakeholders, time constraints, sustainability of processes beyond the project end date, sufficient volunteer instructors to fill all sections, and training for instructors.

7. Additional information

Provide any additional information that the institution wishes for reviewers to understand regarding this action project.