

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION/MANDATORY PLACEMENT PROJECT CHARTER [EC SUBMISSION DRAFT 10-1-2010]

100-word project description from the AQIP Action Project Directory:

The goal of this project is to recommend policies and processes that address the academic needs of under-prepared students and increase success, retention and graduation/completion rates. This team will make specific recommendations on two aspects of developmental education at MCC: (1) the potential for the creation of a comprehensive, coordinated, and cross-disciplinary developmental education program, and (2) the potential for mandatory placement into developmental courses based upon the academic preparedness of incoming students.

I. Business Case

Rationale: This Action Project is needed at MCC because of the increasing number of students who are academically under-prepared and the challenges this places on our current developmental education programs and placement processes. This effort will attempt to resolve the issues by studying the current state of developmental education and placement at MCC, examining best practices and current scholarship, and recommending strategies for improvement.

Do-Nothing Scenario: If this Action Project is not undertaken, MCC will continue to experience increased difficulty in helping under-prepared students learn; this will likely be apparent in declining graduation and persistence rates, declining success rates in developmental courses, and increasing frustration on the part of faculty and students. In addition, MCC risks undermining its positive reputation by not fulfilling its mission of commitment to the success of all students.

Timing/Resources: We estimate that recommendations from this group will be made by April 2011. In our estimation, the resources dedicated to this Action Project are adequate to result in the successful completion of this goal.

II. Problem/Opportunity/Goal Statements

- a. **Problem Statement:** Despite their expectations of success, many incoming MCC students have not yet developed the academic skills needed to perform college-level work. Economic and social changes in the external environment are reflected in increased numbers of students who arrive under-prepared. Increasingly, external agencies expect MCC to serve these under-prepared students in limited time frames. In addition, the degree or severity of under-preparedness has resulted in more students who are not ready for developmental coursework.

- b. **Opportunity Statement:** This project presents the opportunity for MCC to collectively explore recent developments in learning theory and move forward institutionally. There exists an opportunity to better assess the reading, writing, mathematics, and other skills of newly-enrolled students and track their progress over time. With better assessments, we will enhance our ability to inform students of and facilitate their access to needed services on campus. Finally, we have an opportunity to explain to all stakeholders what “open admissions” and “ability to benefit” really mean.
- c. **Goal Statements:** The initial description of this project was to make recommendations considering two specific areas: (1) the potential for the creation of a comprehensive, coordinated, and cross-disciplinary developmental education program, and (2) the potential for mandatory placement into developmental courses based upon the academic preparedness of incoming students. In addition, the team has identified the following goals:
 - Study and then improve the assessment process
 - Study and then improve the placement process
 - Build connections and provide opportunities for coordination among the developmental subject areas, including writing, reading, and math
 - Explore the possibility of adding other developmental subjects
 - Improve the ability of reading/writing teachers and advisors to access data about students; e.g. when an English teacher or advisor looks up the placement information for a student, that student record does not reflect “updated” or “current” placement
 - Build awareness/share the information that we do have about more current assessment information

III. Scope/Constraints/Assumptions

- a. **Scope:** This project is limited in scope in that it is only charged to recommend improvement strategies; any proposed changes must go through established academic governance channels and/or departmental/organizational units. In addition, the team identified the following limitations on project scope:
 - A focus on academic as opposed to behavioral factors (e.g. in contrast to the work of the other Action Project team dealing with student readiness)
 - Examination of MCC’s existing tools for assessment and how they are used, including analysis of what cut scores mean and who has access to those scores
 - Our study is limited to MCC and its current student population
 - Certain aspects of MCC’s organizational mission and culture, such as open admissions, may need to be redefined
 - If we are going to examine/consider mandatory placement, we need to explore “failsafe” or “backup” processes to accommodate exceptions, special cases, etc.
 - Physical/financial resource limits

- b. Constraints: A primary constraint for this project is the fact that it can only make recommendations to the President and Executive Cabinet and/or CPSC and/or existing department/organizational units. Further constraints include limitations on our ability to assess the skills of incoming students and the nature of our programs to serve students who need accommodation for disabilities. In addition, this Action Project team will not be designing particular courses. Finally, larger external constraints such as FERPA and financial aid as an incentive for under-prepared students to enroll place defined limits on the scope of the project.

- c. Assumptions: Our team makes the following assumptions about developmental education and placement:
 - Developmental education means instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics. We are open to other future definitions
 - Some current MCC students are not ready and/or capable of succeeding in courses in which they are enrolled
 - MCC may not be able to help every student realize his or her personal academic goals
 - Moving to mandatory placement may require more sections of developmental reading, writing, and mathematics, including the necessary additional instructional resources and support
 - Developmental courses should be taught by competent, qualified, and appropriately-prepared teachers
 - Our recommendations will be driven by analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data

IV. Team Guidelines

The team has determined the following operational guidelines for its regular meetings:

- Reaching consensus / decision making
- Agenda for each meeting
- Okay to end early; be mindful of time limits
- Set next meeting date/time before the meeting ends
- Okay/permission to explore sensitive topics; openness/critique of group process
- Willing to consult stakeholders formally/informally
- Commitment to use the quality tools and processes
- Every person's perspective is valuable; speak frankly without casting blame
- Be cautious not to get bogged down in one of the 7 steps
- Agree to update or update guidelines as needed
- Check on the muddiest point—sometimes we move too fast and we may not be clear on something

V. Team Membership

Membership on AQIP Action Project teams is set by the President and Executive Cabinet who strive to invite a diverse and cross-functional group of employees to serve. This team includes the following MCC employees:

- Gail Knapp, Co-Chair
- Julie Steffey, Co-Chair
- Paula Weston
- Parmis Johnson
- Bernard Cunningham
- Patricia Bergh
- Rose Beane
- Janet Westhoff
- Robert Dudock
- Lisa Banks
- Virginia Rucks

VI. Preliminary Project Plan

This project will follow the 7-Step Plan/Do/Check/Act (PDCA) Cycle:

Step 1: Identify Area for Improvement

Step 2: Define Current Situation

Step 3: Analyze Current Situation

Step 4: Develop an Improvement Theory

Step 5: Implement Best Strategies

Step 6: Monitor Results

Step 7: Adjust, Standardize, or Plan Further

Due to the fact that the group will be making recommendations, a formal presentation of the team's proposed solution(s) will be the culmination of Step 4. In preparation for its work, the team has determined the following present and future steps:

- Completion of this charter document
- Exploration of the current state of developmental education at MCC
- Review of existing literature and best practices in developmental education and student placement

VII. Identification of Important Stakeholders

A number of programs, departments and divisions will be involved and impacted by the activities of this team, among them:

- Developmental Writing and Developmental Reading areas (disciplines within the Humanities Division)
- Developmental Math (a discipline within the Science & Math Division)
- Advising

- Counseling & Student Development
- MCC's academic governance body, the College Professional Study Committee (CPSC)
- Office of the Registrar

Care has been taken to select team members from areas of the college that are representative of the perspectives and interests of these areas.