Action Project

Title: Collection and Analysis of Student Retention Data
Version: 1

Institution: Illinois Central College
Submitted: 2012-05-15

Status: Completed
Category: 7-Measuring Effectiveness

Timeline

Planned project kickoff date: 2012-01-19
Target completion date: 2012-06-01
Actual completion date: 2012-08-01

Project Detail

Project Goal
Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer

Currently, ICC collects and reports fall-to-spring retention rates and fall-to-fall retention rates; however, no further systematic analysis of these data is completed. More complete analyses of retention data may reveal important insights regarding which students are retained and which are not. This project's goal is to collect and analyze retention data at Illinois Central College, identifying appropriate measures which can be used to drive future improvements related to engaging and retaining students. This project will help the college develop its ability to measure effectiveness. Additionally, the data collected and analyzed during this project will inform future AQIP action projects.

Reasons For Project
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

This project is necessary for a number of reasons:

1. The ability to retain students is an essential factor in responding to President Obama's 2025 College Completion Goal. As ICC works toward this national goal, it will need to fully understand the challenges of student retention as they apply to degree and certificate completion.

2. Understanding student retention will enable ICC to create course offerings, programs, and support services which enable student success and engagement.

3. Understanding student retention will enable ICC to ensure that access to educational services is equitable and fair.
4. Methods for measuring and analyzing student retention data will enable ICC to seek opportunities to improve the systems and processes which support student success.

Organizational Areas Affected
List the organizational areas -- institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units -- most affected by or involved in this Action Project

This project and future improvements stemming form the work of this project will affect all academic departments, faculty, students, advisement, support services, student services, and other areas of the college. Institutional Research will be responsible for capturing data and presenting the data to stakeholders for analysis.

Key Organizational Process(es)
Name and describe briefly the key organizational process(es) that you expect this Action Project to change or improve

This project may change or improve the following organizational processes: advisement and support services, curriculum design, scheduling, and instruction.

Project Time Frame Rationale
Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion)

The aim of this project is to define "student retention" before collecting and analyzing student retention data. It will provide vital first steps in making the necessary improvements which will help ICC students achieve higher rates of certificate and degree completion. Completing this project in June will make it possible to launch improvement projects in the next academic year.

Project Success Monitoring
Describe how you plan to monitor how successfully your efforts on this Action Project are progressing

The DMAIC process will provide a framework for monitoring success. At each stage of DMAIC, the team will report to the AQIP steering committee, seeking input, feedback, and assessment of progress.

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

One deliverable from this project will be an institutional definition for "student retention." This definition will lead to a second deliverable, raw data and data-driven analysis of meaningful factors which affect retention. These data will drive future improvements designed to help students learn, remain engaged in their learning, and complete college certificates and degrees. Positive trends in future retention data will indicate that this project is successful.

Annual Update

Project Accomplishments and Status
Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project
The project titled “Collection and Analysis of Student Retention Data” began on September 21st of 2011 and was completed on June 1st of 2012. During the project periods, participants and team members met regularly to discuss current research related to student retention and ideas for improving processes at Illinois Central College. Recommendations made by the team included:

- collection of “intent” data from students at regular intervals during their academic progress.
- continued collection of retention and persistence metrics.
- beginning the progression metrics by using the concept of “momentum points” to assess student progress toward degree and certificate completion.

As these recommendations were made to the AQIP steering committee who then passed them along to other teams and stakeholders at the college.

Using these recommendations, the Student Services division has introduced a program call CougarLEAP which was introduced to students on the first day of classes for Fall 2012. CougarLEAP asks students to complete a “Passport to Success,” a series of activities and experiences which is hoped to lead to student engagement and success. These activities represent some of the “momentum points” outlined in the AQIP Retention Team’s report; for example, students are required to visit an academic support center, meet with an academic advisor, meet with an instructor during office hours, complete a career assessment, and other behaviors which predict successful progress toward degree and certificate completion.

Institution Involvement
Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project

The AQIP Steering committee assembled a cross-functional team to complete this project. The team included the Associate Dean of English and Language Studies, The Director of Advising and Counseling, the Coordinator of College Transitions, the Coordinator of Diversity Retention, and a Research Assistant from the college Institutional Research department. These team members communicated with colleagues in their respective divisions and sought input from various stakeholders throughout the duration of the project. Upon completion, the team disseminated the recommendations throughout the college; specifically, the recommendations were posted online and a copy was delivered to a Title III grant writing team who used the research to draft the first iteration of the CougarLEAP program.

Next Steps
Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project

Future steps emerging from this work include:

- monitoring impact of the CougarLEAP first year experience and improving its approach to student success and progress toward completion.
- offering a mandatory orientation for all full-time, degree or certificate seeking students.
investigating early warning and retention predictor models.

Many of these developments are currently in progress; for example, Institutional Research is currently working on a model for predictive analytics.

Resulting Effective Practices
Describe any “effective practice(s)” that resulted from your work on this Action Project

Student engagement leads to student retention and success. As a result of this action project, Illinois Central College has reinvigorated its approach to student success and progress toward degree completion. This is most evident in CougarLEAP’s Passport to Success. Using some of the recommendations from this action project, the CougarLEAP team has used a proactive approach to encouraging student engagement. As a part of the Passport program, students must visit at least two academic support centers during the first week of class; this activity will ensure that they are aware of support services available to them on campus. Visiting academic support labs represents a “momentum point” on a students’ path to success and will result in increased engagement and better retention. Additionally, the Passport program requires students to meet with one of their course instructors during office hours. This behavior will result in greater engagement which leads to success and retention.

In terms of assessment and using data to guide improvements, this action project has also resulted in effective practices related to data used at the college. ICC will continue capturing success and retention data; additionally, Institutional Research will begin working on capturing data related to student progress toward degree and certificate completion as well as implementing predictive models to identify at-risk students before their academic success is impeded by poor performance.

Project Challenges
What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project? This is an opportunity to get constructive, actionable feedback and advice from our review process. Use this question to specify where your blocks, gaps, sticking points, or problems are. If you have already fashioned strategies to deal with any challenge you face, share both the challenge and your strategy for meeting it.

At this point, no challenges have been identified. Recommendations from this team are being implemented in work practice of ICC’s Institutional Research department as well as the CougarLEAP program introduced in the Fall of 2012.

Annual Update

Reason for completion
What is the primary reason for closing this project?

The goals and improvements identified in the project have been satisfactorily met.

Success Factors
What aspects of this project would you categorize as successful?

Among the most successful aspects of this project is the manner in which the outcomes have
guided college wide success strategies. For example, many of the recommendations from this project are incorporated into the college's new success and retention program titled CougarLEAP which measures milestones/momentum points leading to student success and retention. Other aspects of the project have led to continued work on using predictive analytics to proactively identify appropriate interventions for students at risk. ICC’s Institutional Research department has created a pilot version of a predictive model and is ready to scale up for more robust utilization at the College.

Unsuccessful Factors

What aspects of this project would you categorize as less than successful?

All aspects of the project were successful because the project has initiated awareness and change at the College. Because the project operated within a realistic scope, each of the initial goals were realized and led to improvements.