

AQIP ACTION PROJECT TEAM ANNUAL REPORT
September 2009

First Year Experience Team

A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

The First Year Experience Team addressed a number of short- and long-term goals that were identified by the Foundations of Excellence® steering committee in 2008. These included:

1. Screening of over 75 applicants for the Director of the First Year Experience position. In spite of statewide, drastic budget cuts this year and projected for 2010, this position was advertised and a candidate was brought to campus to interview. The Screening Committee hopes to have the position filled by the end of this calendar year.
2. Launch of the Math and Writing Coordinator services. With the appointment of the Math and Writing Coordinators (both from our faculty), WNMU was able to pilot new supplemental instructional approaches (including teaching methods and software) for use by students who tested into developmental courses. COMPASS math scores for participating students increased 4% in the first academic year. Pre- and post-writing diagnostic tests were developed by the Writing Coordinator and her colleagues in the Humanities Department and are being implemented this semester. Both Coordinators are assisting with hiring and orientation of adjunct instructors to ensure consistency of instruction, and, as needed, the coordinators travel to our regional learning centers to support off-campus learners and teachers.
3. Creation of the Jump Start Program. One of the most urgent issues facing our freshman students is lack of preparation for college. Jump Start is a two-week, intensive bridge program that gives students the opportunity to earn up to six credits by taking the Student Success Seminar and Developmental Algebra. Nineteen students participated during the program's pilot in August, 2009. A graduation ceremony that included speeches and PowerPoint presentations by the students was held, with WNMU faculty, staff, and administration in attendance. Two students who met in the Jump Start program are now residence hall roommates.

B. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

Because students are the number one priority at WNMU, The First Year Experience Team membership and initiatives represent all divisions and functions within the institution, from Admissions to Alumni Affairs. Guests are routinely invited to meetings to impart information and/or to fulfill requests. For example, the Marketing/Public Relations staff attended a Team meeting to participate in a discussion about enhancing the new student orientation process for family members.

C. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

The highest priority of the Team is to orient the Director of the First Year Experience, once that position is filled, as Chair of this Action Project. Other next steps include: Re-vamping of the Early Alert System; expanding service learning initiatives; and emphasizing importance of attention to the first year through MBOs and promotion/tenure review. All of these were identified in the FoE Final Report as critical to improving the college experience for our freshmen.

D. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.

The Math Coordinator successfully piloted ALEKS, an online developmental course package, combined with targeted, one-on-one instruction. This practice increased mathematics placement testing scores and allowed faculty to raise content expectations for developmental math students to reach an A grade. Also, the Jump Start Program received very positive reviews from the student participants, and resulted in improved COMPASS test scores for these individuals.

E. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?

The lack of a Director of the First Year Experience. A highly qualified candidate was offered the position and declined after protracted negotiations. The search committee has reconvened to continue screening applicants from this large pool.

Customer Services Improvement Team

A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

The Customer Services Improvement (CSI) Team performed a cost study, based on human resource and supplies estimates, for conversion to fully online Business Office, Financial Aid, and Admissions services. Savings estimates exceeded \$100,000 per year, and were forwarded to the Vice Presidents, along with recommendations for supporting these efforts. From this list, the highest priority put forward was to purchase TouchNet, an online payment and financial aid award disbursement system that interfaces with SCT Banner and is used by all but two higher education institutions in the state. In spite of the current and projected economic situation, and because of it, the TouchNet purchase was approved during spring, 2009 budget negotiations. The installation plan is currently underway and will include a number of training components for employees and students. This accomplishment was made possible by last year's efforts by Team members and others to map processes in both the Student Affairs and Business Affairs divisions.

In another effort to streamline and automate student services, the Director of Admissions converted 31 form letters, used to communicate with students and prospective students, from paper to electronic format. This accomplishment is supporting WNMU's rapidly growing Virtual Campus and facilitating the registration process for all students and for the Admissions staff, as well.

This Team is currently active, and a faculty co-chair, Dr. Barbara Peppey, is serving on CSI.

B. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

Efforts to map processes and to conduct cost analyses for labor and supplies involved entire divisions, namely Student Affairs and Business Affairs. Information Technology staff, under the University's Academic Affairs division, assisted in designing Banner interfaces and other web-based functions, as needed. Editorial assistance in the Admissions correspondence revision process was provided by staff in the Academic Affairs and Institutional Advancement divisions, by employees who do not serve on the Team.

C. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

The CSI Team's focus for this academic year is to:

1. Launch TouchNet and provide employee and student training (the latter will be done through the Student Success Seminar required course). These efforts will be led by the Team Staff Co-Chair.
2. Design and implement electronic finalization (to address the problem of student disenrollment due to lack of payment), which will include drafting a Statement of Financial Responsibility policy.

D. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.

Over the past academic year, Business Affairs staff have worked closely with, trained, and designed improved processes for the Financial Aid Office. For example, CSI Team members arranged training on Banner Crystal reports for Business Office, Admissions and Financial Aid staff. They also assisted the Financial Aid Office in implementing the Banner web-based Communication Plan to facilitate current and accurate correspondence with students. The CSI Team has created a bridge between offices that, historically, have worked independently of each other, often at the expense of our students. The Business and Financial Aid offices saw significantly smaller lines and received very few complaints during registration and the first few weeks of the semester, "crunch time" for both service areas.

E. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?

Funding.

People First Team

A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

Within the past year, People First accomplished the following:

1. Review of hiring procedures for faculty, exempt staff, and non-exempt staff. The goal was to make these processes more efficient in terms of time and cost. Meeting frequency was changed from twice a month to once a week to accommodate the rigorous process of revising procedures and corresponding policies. The faculty and staff hiring processes were piloted during the spring and summer of 2009; feedback was gathered from all employees at the University's annual Assessment Convocation, as well as from new hires at both faculty and staff orientations in the fall of 2009, and from employees who served on the pilot screening committees. The Team is in the process of reviewing and incorporating this feedback, and will continue to meet weekly until all processes and policies are revised.

2. A New Staff Mentor Program was developed and implemented in conjunction with the WNMU Staff Senate. This program partners a "seasoned" staff employee with demonstrated leadership qualities and a positive attitude with a new hire for a period of one year. Mentors are trained and are expected to check in with new staff at least once a week, and to answer promptly all email and telephone questions posed by the new employees.

The status of the People First Team is active.

B. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

Team members are from all campus divisions – Academic, Business, and Student Affairs, as well as Institutional Advancement. Guests are routinely invited to participate in meetings, either in person or via telephone (in the case of our regional learning center employees). As described in A. above, the revised screening committee processes were vetted campus-wide in the annual Assessment Convocation. New employees assisted the Team by providing feedback on their recent experience with the hiring process, and with the New Staff Orientation program. Institution-wide interest in and involvement with the People First Team will continue as this Action Project's work affects all employees.

C. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

Upon finalization of changes in the hiring processes, the People First Team will begin to review and revise the employee performance evaluation process for staff. A process exists; however, it is not consistently used across campus and learning centers. Also, a professional development program is currently being put together, the content of which is based on feedback from WNMU employees. For example, employee training for the new screening committee processes will be launched with the finalization of the revised staff and faculty hiring processes. Other regularly-scheduled professional development programs will cover AA/EEO issues (such as sexual harassment) and safety, to name a few.

D. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.

Significant improvements in the hiring practices for exempt staff, non-exempt staff, and faculty include: a streamlined process with enforced deadlines that saved, in the pilot committees, several weeks' worth of time; more use of email for conducting reference

checks (this was traditionally conducted by telephone only, and delays in call-backs were prohibitive in terms of time); and instituting a “one candidate at a time” on-site interview practice (bringing out-of-state candidates to our remote location is expensive). Another effective practice that came out of the hiring process changes implemented by the People First Team is that of making the hiring supervisor responsible for scheduling and conducting all telephone and on-site interviews. In the past, these final steps were conducted by the screening committee, and often languished as committee members (who were not all from the department or office doing the hiring) juggled other responsibilities. Putting the responsibility for these final and critical steps on the hiring supervisor leverages ownership to the advantage of the candidate (by supporting a more efficient process) and the organization.

E. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?

Faculty approval of the revised hiring process. The Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs is working with the faculty to address concerns, particularly with the “one candidate at a time” practice. This dialogue will provide the People First Team with a framework for making final revisions to the faculty hiring procedure and policy.