Action Project

Title: Graduate Capstone Project

Version: 1

Institution: Lewis University

Submitted: 2012-05-02

Status: Completed

Category: 1-Helping Students Learn

Timeline

Planned project kickoff date: 2012-05-02
Target completion date: 2012-10-31
Actual completion date: 2012-11-29

Project Detail

Project Goal

To determine which graduate programs have capstone experiences and the nature of the capstone experiences.

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

Many in higher education, the Lumina Foundation, for example, believe that an integrative, culminating experience is an essential part of a graduate student's program. Such experiences may be referred to as a capstone, a project, a thesis, a performance, a dissertation, or by some other name. We will refer to these experiences as "capstones." We do not know which graduate programs contain such experiences or what they are. Because we have not articulated standards for capstone experiences, we cannot effectively assure quality.

The Graduate Capstones Project should give us the opportunity to secure this information so that we may begin to articulate University-wide graduate standards for capstone experiences.

Organizational Areas Affected

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

Colleges and all graduate academic programs, Registrar, Admissions, Marketing and Communication.

Key Organizational Process(es)

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

Graduate Curriculum Development-Identification of articulated standards will provide programs an internal benchmark to use for quality improvement.

Academic Support- identification of articulated standards will allow for more accurate determination of support needs from the library, the writing center, and other non-college units that aid students with their academic work.

Admissions / Registrar- identification of articulated standards will allow for more accurate evaluation of student preparation for admission and more accurate auditing of completed student work toward degree completion.

Marketing / Communication- identification of articulated standards will allow for development of more effective advertising and informational materials.

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

Timeframe was set with an eye to moving the project along quickly, while still allowing adequate time to accomplish the tasks involved. The milestone dates are synchronized to meeting dates of key committees and groups involved.

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

Project co-chairs will discuss progress bi-weekly and take corrective action as needed.

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

If the project is successful, we should be able to identify key information, such as :

1) % of programs with capstone

2)% of programs with a research methods prerequisite

3)% of programs with a quantitative methods prerequisite

4)% of programs with an accreditor-requirement for capstone

From these and other measures, we hope to decide if we need University-wide standards for our capstones. If such a need exists, the information secured should allow us to generate a new project to help the community develop standards tha

Annual Update

Project Accomplishments and Status
Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project

The committee was formed in Winter 2012. Co-chairs and an AQIP liaison were identified. A charter was written and approved in April 2012 for immediate project commencement. The project is moving along very rapidly. All necessary communications (see #2, below) were accomplished. All milestones due to date were met. We needed to learn about the number programs that had a "capstone" experience and about the diversity of activities that made up capstone experiences. The survey instrument to acquire information involving 15 elements of capstone experiences was developed and tested. The survey was issued. The results were secured. The results were descriptively analyzed.

We note that survey response rate was high, but not universal. The responses were also richer in narrative content than expected.

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

The project communicated with key stakeholders heavily since inception. Project members have met with and continue to communicate with: the Provost, College Deans, Graduate Program Directors, the AQIP Coordinating Team, the University Graduate Affairs Committee, and the Lewis University Assessment Committee. The co-chairs attended AQIP project manager training in August.

A Blackboard venue has been established for the project's use in communications.

The project was designed to run its course quickly (in a little over six months)and generate a follow-up project. The short time frame has necessitated a high level of motivation to stay on schedule.

The next pre-planned steps include:

-Share the results with affected stakeholders (September 2012) and

-Write final report / generate new project charter, if appropriate (October 2012)

The project proposes to alter the pre-planned steps as follows:

-Follow-up with programs that did not respond to the survey, incorporating their information and conducting additional analysis (September 2012)

-Share the results with affected stakeholders (October 2012)

-Write report / generate new project charter, if appropriate (October 2012)

-If any additional opportunities shortcomings are identified, extend the life of the project by a month to deal with them.

The project has not yet identified any report-worthy practices. Such practices may be identified in the additional analysis that is about to occur.

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. If you would like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help beyond the review process, explain your need(s) and tell us whom to contact and when.

This project is largely about gathering and analyzing information. Timely responsiveness to the survey was the likely challenge. As we intentionally made all of our deadlines short ones, even if we add an additional month should not cause us any operational harm. The high initial response rate has obviated most concerns we may have had. We expect to overcome this challenge or concern.

Annual Update

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

All desired activities have been completed.

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

1. The team developed and maintained a high degree of motivation. This drove the project through to a successful and fast completion.

2. We now have sufficient data about our existing graduate capstones to proceed with a proposal for a requirement for capstones in all graduate programs, and we have some benchmarking data on peer and aspirant institutions.

3. We now have sufficient data about our existing graduate capstones to proceed with the development of standards for capstone courses.

4. We have a successful questionnaire that could be used for undergraduate data gathering.

5. Initiated a conversation about the current University definition of a capstone. The definition requires "research," and some programs are adamant about retaining that word and requirement in the definition. The proposed new definition is more flexible, allowing for the use of a performance or of a comprehensive, standardized test, or other activity appropriate to the discipline.

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

Initial response rate was not universal and we had to follow-up to secure some data.