

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Des Moines Area Community College

Project Details			
Title	ENG 104 Factors Surrounding Utilization	Status	REVIEWED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated	09-22-2011
Timeline		Reviewed	10-20-2011
	Planned Project Kickoff 01-11-2010	Created	03-05-2010
	Target Completion 06-30-2011	Version	2

1: Project Goal

- A:** This action project is focused on analyzing the factors surrounding the utilization of the recently developed ENG 104 as well as the efficacy of the course.
- ENG 104 was developed under a previous action project in order to create a comprehensive writing program at DMACC that would support students at multiple levels of competencies, improve appropriate course level instruction, and improve student retention.

2: Reasons For Project

- A:** DMACC has made strides in initiating a resolution to the issue of improving student success in core English work. The initial Action Project resulted in the creation and pilot of ENG 104. A transferable credit course, ENG 104 provides an alternative way for students to learn effective college level writing. This Action Project is the logical "next step". By identifying and analyzing the factors surrounding the utilization of the ENG 104 course, DMACC looks to validate the original initiative and continue to improve student learning opportunities at the college.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

- A:** The Office of Institutional Effectiveness, English Department, Assessment, Advising/Counseling, and Scheduling.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

- A:** The findings of the study will provide insight for DMACC into enhancement of student assessment, advising, and placement. In addition, scheduling of courses across the district will be impacted.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

- A:** The first course sections were offered in spring 2009. DMACC wants to look at a minimum of two full calendar cycles in order to study the environment in regards to term-term persistence, course retention, student progression, student success, as well as student and faculty satisfaction.

6: Project Success Monitoring

- A:** A workgroup of faculty, advisors and administration will be established. Goals and timelines will be established for each of the individual components of the project to ensure that the project continues to progress. Data will be collected and analyzed over the timeline to develop the picture.

7: Project Outcome Measures

- A:** Multiple data in regards to satisfactory completion (C or better), course retention, progression and persistence will be captured for students participating in the ENG 104 pilot relative to current institutional data. The data will be integral components in measuring and studying the outcomes and provide the basis for recommendations from the workgroup.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: ENG104 was created to fill the gap and support students who may need additional time in college level writing in order to be successful in the college composition 1 course. To that end data were collected on course offerings by term, enrollments, course retention, grades and transition to ENG105. This year the ENG104 course was allowed to function without additional intervention in order to monitor the factors surrounding utilization. The first course offerings were in spring 2009. Since that time a total of 19 sections were offered across 6 campuses. There were 191 students enrolled. Of the 191 students, 44.5% either withdrew or failed ENG104 compared to 50.6% of students enrolled in ENG060 and 48.3% of students enrolled in ENG061; both developmental writing courses. Thirty-seven percent of the ENG104 students transitioned into Comp1 courses and the GPA achieved was 2.02. Only 20.2% of the ENG060 students transitioned into Comp 1 with a 1.85 GPA. Success in ENG104 was somewhat more comparable with the ENG061 course offering in that the GPA of students who took ENG061 and transitioned to Comp 1 achieved a 2.06 average. However, only 31.2% of the ENG061 students transitioned to Comp1. Data indicate that while ENG061 students appear to fare as well in GPA, a higher percentage of students in ENG104 are retained and transition to the Comp1 courses.

2: Institution Involvement

A: This phase of the ENG 104 initiative has focused on 'letting the class work'. By identifying and analyzing the factors surrounding the utilization of the ENG 104 course, the campuses, faculty and student advisors used their discretion in implementing the course on a semester basis. Students were allowed to self place in the course selecting it from the catalog and schedule. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness monitored the data.

3: Next Steps

A: DMACC is committed to supporting and retaining students in the gateway courses. As the ENG 104 course is only available to the liberal arts students for elective credit the campus offerings of the course appear to be declining. The data provided is the platform for which discipline and administrative discussions will direct the future of the course. While English has been the first foray into a concentrated initiative for improving student learning, course retention and success in the gateway courses, the lessons learned from the writing pilot are providing a springboard from which to create new approaches towards supporting students. While this project is being retired, the Math Department at DMACC will use the findings to move forward and try a new initiative focused on the gateway Math courses.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: DMACC has learned much from this project. English composition and college level math courses experience the highest enrollment of any courses at DMACC. With this project the college has 'put its money where its mouth is' and demonstrated to faculty that it will provide consistent administrative support in the areas of organization, collaboration, resources and data analysis. This has been key to engaging faculty in studying and exploring new options for improving student learning in the gateway courses. There was commitment to this project over the past 4 years. It was patiently supported through every step and as a result is a springboard for new initiatives.

5: Project Challenges

A: DMACC is facing no challenges in this Action Project. This project is being retired.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Any attempt to provide instruction for underprepared students contributes to their overall student development. The project focused

on a formal instructional context- ENG 104-to better prepare students for success in ENG 105. In addition, a higher percentage of students completing ENG 104 was retained and progressed into English Composition 1 courses. Student success in gateway courses is critical to retention and persistence toward a degree or certificate. The concept was positive, but problems seemed to develop in the implementation.

The implementation seemed to lack focus. The first step should be to identify the key concepts to be taught and evaluated for competency based on outcomes of placement testing. No indication is given in this report as to a choice of required competencies to be measured upon completion. For comparable data to be used in decision-making, all sections must cover the same content in the same format. Without that consistency in implementation, course outcomes could not realistically be evaluated. To develop an effective outcome assessment, all key stakeholders need to show a serious commitment to implementation--and that is not evident in this report.

Next, a key concern would be to specifically define who is to be tested. This action project limits the project to liberal arts students and allows faculty and staff to have too much discretion in what was covered and which students were targeted for the course. It seems that if a student could choose not to take the course, then, many who need assistance might not enroll. Most students do not want to take any coursework that does not count toward a degree. The course, if implemented in a structured manner, would provide consistency in the curricula and can provide a means by which retention, persistence, and performance improvement could be measured.

The action project, as implemented, was a fair approach to a difficult problem in community colleges. If the course were improved and reimplemented, it could contribute to overall students' development (AQIP Category 1), help address the needs of the individuals and groups it serves (AQIP Category 3), measure effectiveness of instruction and help drive improvement (AQIP Category 7), and support the work of the students it serves (AQIP Category 6).

2: Institution Involvement

A: A course designed to help the underprepared probably should have a very structured format. So, "letting the class work" may not be the appropriate pedagogy for this student. Since the goal of the project is to decrease inappropriate placement and decrease the high failure rate in English Composition 1, the key faculty must determine the placement strategy and implement it for all new students. In this project, English faculty and students are key stakeholders. It is not apparent in this discussion whether English Composition 1 faculty provided the competencies needed to be successful in their course. These outcome competencies should be the basis upon which English 104 is taught, if the purpose is to improve student performance in ENG 105. Another element essential to implementation is administrative support for the initiative. Cooperation among faculty is less likely without an administrative champion helping to overcome obstacles. High Performing Organizations utilize a Broad-based Involvement and Leadership Support. If there appears to be resistance in requiring an additional writing requirement and the stakeholders are committed to this project, then the support of upper-levels of leadership is essential to affirm the college's commitment to the project.

Is the Office of Institutional Research the appropriate place to monitor the data? The office can compile results but the English faculty can best determine the specific areas for improvement that is needed to refine course content. The data generated is most meaningful when discussion follows the class as to what changes should be made to improve how students learn.

3: Next Steps

A: It is difficult to determine if collaboration can be expanded to a similar pilot in the Math Department at DMACC. What experiences will participants in the ENG 104 pilot be able to share with the Math Department? Since the results of the ENG 104 pilot have not been detailed in this report, it is impossible to evaluate if the Math Department is the next logical step or is a refinement of the ENG 104 pedagogy a better alternative for the next step.

It appears the next logical step may be to reformulate the ENG 104 into a more structured, comprehensive, and competency-oriented course. It is not obvious that anything learned from this project could be used by Math placement courses. So, before the campus tries another attempt in a different content area, it might be more beneficial to work on ENG 104 until it provides the answer to your problems of high failure rates in ENG 105. If this attempt can become a model for future gateway efforts, then, DMACC may find a solution to a problem that plagues almost all community colleges.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: English and Math courses create one of the greatest challenges for the community college. A higher percentage of students with deficiencies start at the community college. The basic premise of ENG 104 is laudable and could be used as a springboard for developing a process that other community colleges could use as their model to improve retention, persistence, and completion rates while placing students in courses for which they are appropriately prepared.

5: Project Challenges

A: The real challenge to DMAACC would be to develop a more effective, structured, and consistent solution to the problems of high failure rates in ENG 105. High Performing Organizations (HPOs) develop the Broad-based Involvement necessary for this project to be a success for students and faculty. The willingness to reformulate and make another attempt at a solution indicates an institution's Agility and Responsiveness (Principle of HPOs) as seen in organizations committed to continuous improvement.