**Outcomes Assessment Action Project Update – September 2009**

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

Outcomes assessment (OA) at NMU applies to both academic and service units. For academic units, the assessment emphasis is to “ensure student learning”, while for service units, it evaluates “efficiency and effectiveness” in supporting and facilitating student learning. As noted when this Action Project was submitted, one goal of the project was to review and revise the means by which departments use the data they collect in OA reports. A second goal was to evaluate and refine a scoring rubric used to evaluate reports. A third goal was to establish a consistent review process for service department reports and plans, and for academic department reports. An overall goal was to attend particularly to OA reports submitted by academic departments; to that end, we arranged for a student learning OA expert to visit our campus to help design effective and measurable OA goals and objectives that reflected the individual needs of each academic department.

The accomplishments of this project are reported in its Final Report (see: <http://webb.nmu.edu/aqip/SiteSections/ActionProjects/Assessment/AssessmentIntro.shtml>). This report describes the work completed with respect to both service department OA (reports and plans) and academic department OA (reports only). It was noted at the onset of this project that the OA process of service departments was more finely developed than that of academic departments, and hence most energy of the Action Project Committee focused on improving the process in academic departments.

**Service Department Progress**. In January of 2009, a seven-person service department OA committee met to review the reports and plans that had been submitted from service departments. This committee, which was newly constituted after a one-year trial period in which the reviews were completed by a single person, revised a rubric to evaluate the reports and plans (see: <http://webb.nmu.edu/aqip/SiteSections/AboutAQIP/AQIP_PlansReports.shtml>). Using this rubric, all reports and plans were evaluated and discussed in weekly meetings by all members of the committee. Following these discussions, written feedback was provided to most service departments that had submitted reports and plans. For the remaining departments whose documents were less well prepared, a two person team from the committee visited with the department to discuss ways in which they could improve their OA process. In May of 2009, the service department committee conducted an in-service training on the outcomes assessment process. All information that was discussed during the in-service was also placed on the AQIP website. The 2008-09 OA Reports and 2009-10 Plans were submitted by service departments in July of 2009; the service department OA committee, all of whose original members volunteered to serve on this committee for a second year, is currently reviewing the new reports and plans.

The service department OA committee submitted a Progress Report (included as a part of this Action Project Final Report), in which they evaluated the status of OA in service departments. Comparing 2006-07 and 2007-08 reports submitted from all service departments revealed substantial improvement in four of the five report item categories. In sum, comparing (respectively) 2006-07 reports with 2007-08 reports, 100% and 88% of reports showed good congruence between the university and the unit mission statements; 36% and 90% reported clearly identified objectives; 26% and 61% demonstrated good means of assessing the stated objectives; 39% and 62% included data; and 23% and 50% used their data to drive quality improvements in their units. With respect to mission statement congruence, the only area that did not show an improvement within this time frame, we note that the revised university mission was adopted in the 2008-09 academic year; hence plans had been submitted prior to the adoption of the new mission statement, and congruence therefore suffered during this transition period. We anticipate exceptional congruence in the reports and plans currently under review, in large part because of our 2008-09 AQIP Action Project entitled “Aligning unit mission statements with a revised university mission statement”.

**Academic Department Progress**. In December of 2008, a six-person academic department OA committee met and reviewed all 2007-08 academic department OA reports. This committee was newly constituted, in a fashion similar to that of the service department committee. After the reports were evaluated, written feedback was provided to all academic departments. In lieu of meeting individually with departments whose documentation suggested that the departmental OA process was not optimal, Dr. Susan Hatfield, a nationally-known student learning OA expert, was invited to NMU in January of 2009; the two forums that Dr. Hatfield conducted were well-attended, as noted below.

With respect to *Process Measures* that were developed to evaluate whether this Action Project succeeded in achieving its goals, the Action Project Committee used the scoring rubric developed by the service department OA committee to review the 2007-08 academic reports. Use of this rubric permitted a fair and objective evaluation of reports and plans.

In the summer of 2009, the Action Project Committee surveyed all Academic Department Heads to evaluate their understanding of the student learning OA process. The survey consisted of 11 Likert-scale items rated on a five-point “Definitely-Yes to Definitely-No” scale; it also included three open-ended questions. The survey was sent electronically to the NMU Department Head list-serve; 22 of the 26 Heads responded, an 85% response rate. Survey results revealed that a majority of the academic departments were comfortable with the academic OA process. Those departments that reported difficulties were interested in having a consistent form, a clear timeline, and someone with whom they could discuss the plans or measures adopted by their departments. Most departments reported that they understood their data and did not want help with data analysis. While all departments noted that aligning their unit mission statement with that of the university was easily accomplished, some departments said that faculty buy-in of the OA process was problematic.

Another accomplishment of the Action Project Committee was to launch an OA website (see: <http://webb.nmu.edu/aqip/SiteSections/AboutAQIP/AQIP_PlansReports.shtml>) so that departments could download the common format to be used for report and plan completion, and view the scoring rubric. One *Process Measure* that was not completed was the development of a web-based in-house best practice resource for consultative purposes of academic departments.

With respect to *Outcomes Measures* for this Action Project, in January of 2009, Dr. Susan Hatfield, the Coordinator of Assessment at Winona State University, visited our campus for 2 days, and gave two half-day seminars in which she discussed best practice in the assessment of student learning. Approximately 40 people attended each session; attendees included department heads and faculty members representing all academic departments. A second *Outcome Measure* that the project completed was a comparison of 2006-07 and 2007-08 Outcomes Assessment Report feedback scores (note that these comparative data are a portion of the Action Project Final Report). The comparison documented improvement in the use of assessment plans and programs across academic units. For example, while 72% of academic departments submitted an OA report in 2006-07, 100% did so in 2007-08. In 2006-07, 27% of departments demonstrated acceptable levels of congruence between the departmental and the university mission statements; by 2007-08, acceptable levels of congruence had increased to 59% across departments. With respect to outcomes, 69% and 85% of departments reported clearly identified outcome measures in 06-07 and 07-08, respectively. Similarly 54% and 62% reported acceptable criteria for measuring outcomes in 06-07 and 07-08, respectively. Regarding data, 50% and 59% reported data in 06-07 and 07-08, respectively; similarly, 38% and 47% of academic departments reported using data in those years of analysis. Further corroboration of improvement in academic OA reports was provided by an in-house analysis of how data were used to drive curricular changes in the College of Arts and Sciences (see: <http://webb.nmu.edu/aqip/SiteSections/ActionProjects/Assessment/AssessmentIntro.shtml>). While we recognize that our current OA process in academic units is not perfect, we are encouraged that those units have shown a pattern of continuing improvement over time.

**Action Project Committee Recommendations.** Following their work, the Action Project Committee made five recommendations to be implemented as standard practice for academic OA reports.

1. Two levels of review should be implemented for OA reports. The first level would commence as the plans are set up, while the second would begin after report submission. Both reviews should be completed by a committee with a clearly named chairperson, a faculty representative from each college, and a department head from each college. The term for serving on this committee should be 2-3 years, with staggered terms to ensure continuity in the process.

2. NMU should develop a website displaying exemplary OA academic reports and listing resources to assist in OA planning.

3. A standardized, web-based reporting protocol, modeled after that currently used by service-units, should be adopted to facilitate annual reporting and archiving of assessment data.

4. Time lines and flow charts of functional OA procedures should be made available to all departments.

5. A four-point scoring rubric based on satisfactory reports and opportunities (SS/S/O/OO) on five categories per report should be used to evaluate reports. The five categories would include university/departmental mission statement congruence, outcomes to be evaluated, assessment measures, data, and the use of data.

The Final Report of the Action Project Committee noted that these recommendations are based on successful practices currently employed in the services departments. The academic departments have improved in terms of reporting compliance, but they have selective needs when evaluating the adequacy of their reports. Those departments that are subject to external accreditation standards submitted reports of excellent quality, while those that were not had less completely developed reports. The committee concluded that these recommendations would improve the academic department reports, and when accompanied by a processing flowchart, timeline and reminders, the procedure will become a standard part of the NMU culture of assessment.

***AQIP Review*** *(09-20-09):*

Outcomes assessment at Northern Michigan University focused on both academic and service units with the emphasis being “ensure student learning” (academic departments) and “efficiency and effectiveness” in supporting and facilitating student learning (service departments). With this action project, Northern Michigan University set out to: • review and revise the means by which departments use the data they collect in outcomes assessment reports. • evaluate and refine a scoring rubric used to evaluate reports. • establish a consistent review process for service department reports and plans, and for academic department reports. The project has employed several of AQIP’s Principles of High Performance Organizations including Focus (by carefully outlining the goals for the project), People (through the involvement of multiple people from across the organization), Continuous Improvement (through the collection of data and feedback), and Helping Students Learn (focusing on facilitating student learning). NMU created an open environment for the campus community and external constituents through the distribution of information on the website. The accomplishments of this project are reported in its Final Report (see: http://webb.nmu.edu/aqip/SiteSections/ActionProjects/Assessment/AssessmentIntro.shtml). The report describes the work completed with respect to both service department outcomes assessment (reports and plans) and academic department outcomes assessment (reports only). The project is nearing completion, and in the effort of continuous improvement, the Action Project Committee made the following recommendations: 1. Providing two levels of review with a rotating committee 2. Continuing to build on the success of the current website by displaying exemplary outcomes assessment academic reports. In addition the website would include resources focused on outcomes assessment planning. 3. Standardizing the reporting protocol model 4. Disseminating time lines and flow charts of functional outcomes assessment procedures 5. Creating a four-point scoring rubric based on satisfactory reports and opportunities

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

The committee that directed this project consisted of the Psychology Department Head and the Communication and Performance Studies Department Head (both of whom had prior experience in OA), a Faculty Member from the College of Business, and three members of our already-established service department OA committee.

Two separate OA committees were formed, one to review service department OA reports and plans, and the other to review academic department OA reports. Members of the service department committee were appointed by the President of NMU, the Vice President for Finance and Administration, and the Associate Provost for Student Affairs and Enrollment, each of whom appointed two people from their divisions. Members of the academic department committee were appointed by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, and included the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, the Dean of the College of Professional Studies, the Dean of the College of Business, the Dean of Academic Information Systems, and the Vice President for Institutional Research. The AQIP Liaison was a member of both the service and the academic committees.

Additional people who were involved in this Action Project included approximately 80 faculty members and department heads from academic departments who attended the two presentations by Dr. Susan Hatfield, and all departmental members (service and academic) who participating in collecting and analyzing data, and submitting the 2008 annual OA reports from their respective units.

***AQIP Review*** *(09-20-09):*

Northern Michigan University demonstrated AQIP’s value people (Category 5) by developing a process which included a large number of people. More than 80 faculty members were involved in the outcomes assessment presentation by Dr. Susan Hatfield. In addition two outcomes assessment committees were formed with representatives across campus – one committee reviewed academic department’s outcomes assessment reports while the other reviewed reports from service units. Recommendations by the action project committee will establish a process from which team members will be rotated as well as disseminating committee information to the larger campus community. Student and alumni involvement was not clearly indicated within the report. Has the project team included soliciting input from students and/or alumni? How will outside constituencies be informed of the outcomes determined by the academic and service units? How will feedback received from these groups be utilized to improve the overall process?

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

During the next year, we expect to use the forms that were developed by the Action Project Committee, including the scoring rubric, on all departmental OA reports. We will form an academic OA standing review committee, constituted according to the recommendation of the Action Project Committee. The OA website will complete the development that was begun by the Action Project Committee. NMU is a “laptop” university, which facilitates transmission of information electronically; placing reports available for review, and listing resources to assist in planning on this website will facilitate the work of both academic departments when they prepare reports, and the academic OA review committee when they review reports.

***AQIP Review*** *(09-20-09):*

According to the report, this action project is targeted to be completed on October 14, 2009. Although the project is scheduled to be completed, the institution has indicated plans for the upcoming year which will implement the scoring rubric developed by the action project committee across all outcomes assessment reports. In addition, an outcomes assessment review committee will be established to guide the process over the longer term at Northern Michigan University. NMU has demonstrated a focus on the AQIP principle of Continuous Improvement by establishing a mechanism that will allow for this outcomes assessment project to continue to “live” beyond the project period.

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

The most effective practice that developed from this project was the standardization of the OA process at NMU. A criticism of our approach in the past has been that the required format and review committees changed frequently, resulting in confusion and a lack of faculty and staff commitment to the process. Both service and academic departments will use the same form when submitting reports, with a modification made for the outcome emphasis (support for student learning, or student learning, respectively). Consistent review committee membership and process will also be useful in creating a system of OA with increased faculty buy-in.

***AQIP Review*** *(09-20-09):*

The institution is to be commended for establishing a consistent process and format for submitting outcomes assessment for both the academic (faculty) and service (staff) components. The development of a consistent process and review committee will provide a foundation for the institution to continue progress on the outcomes project beyond the AQIP project timeline.

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

The major challenges remaining were revealed in the Academic Departmental Survey, which indicated that those departments that are still experiencing difficulties would like a consistent form, clear timelines, and someone with whom they can discuss the plans or measures adopted by their departments. While a consistent form has been adopted, and timelines have been clarified, creation of an NMU Office of Outcomes Assessment would be ideal. While our current budgetary situation does not suggest that this office will be created in the upcoming year, we are exploring ways of providing current faculty expertise that we frequently find in programs that are externally accredited to assist those departments that are not, and therefore have less facility with the assessment process. The other major challenge we face is the lack of faculty buy-in in some academic departments. However, we are hopeful that our recent university-wide concerted emphasis on the importance of Outcomes Assessment, and in particular on the assessment of *student learning,* should mitigate that concern.

***AQIP Review*** *(09-20-09):*

Through the academic departmental survey, Northern Michigan University has identified some challenges related to the outcomes assessment project – namely need for additional guidance from a resource on campus and understanding of the form and timeline for outcome reporting. While the budget does not currently allow for the creation of an NMU Office of Outcomes Assessment, you might want to consider methods in which departments can share their progress with other departments. By providing a framework for sharing and discussing outcomes, the institution might leverage expertise from within the college.

F. If you would like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help to stimulate progress on this Action Project, explain your need(s) here and tell us who to contact and when.

While we will “retire” this Action Project, clearly the work that it has stimulated will continue. The recommendations from the committee will be implemented prior to the review of the Outcomes Assessment Reports from academic departments that will be submitted on October 15th. We feel that this Action Project has made significant recommendations in the processes by which NMU assesses student learning, and therefore we do not ask for help from AQIP as we continue to improve those processes.

***AQIP Review*** *(09-20-09):*

Since this project is nearly complete, the institution did not request of AQIP assistance. Should the institution find the need for additional assistance; they are encouraged to contact AQIP. 9777