Soft Skills Across the Curriculum

Q1. Briefly describe the project in less than 100 words. Be sure to identify the key organizational areas (departments, programs, divisions, units, etc.) and key organizational processes that this action project will affect, change, and/or improve.

A. The goal of the Soft Skills across the Curriculum project is for WSCC students to graduate with both the technical skills and the employer-expected soft skills required to be successful in their careers. Faculty and staff will work to identify the soft skills that we want to encourage in all students. Faculty will develop and use a soft skills rubric across the curriculum to emphasize the need for strong communication skills, professionalism, problem solving, and teamwork. A second aspect of the project will create a consistent way of assessing students' abilities and interests to point them to a best fit career path.

Q2. Describe your institution's reasons for initiating this action project now and how long it should take to complete it. Why are this project and its goals high among your institution's current priorities? Also, explain how this project relates to any strategic initiatives or challenges described in the institutions recent or soon-to-be submitted Systems Portfolio.

A. Soft skills are the personal attributes that help employees interact effectively and harmoniously with others as they perform the technical aspects of their jobs. Communication, professionalism, problem solving, and teamwork are key soft skills.

Employers consistently state through advisory committee input and other interactions that new employees often lack the soft skills needed to function effectively in the work environment. Adequate soft skills help employees communicate well, work effectively in teams, and solve problems. Ineffective soft skills result in lack of professionalism and lead to failure to thrive within the work environment. The soft skills deficit seems to be a systemic problem requiring an organized response that will impact all students across the curriculum. Additionally, we find that students often select a career based on the necessity to declare a major in order to be eligible for financial aid rather than their actual interests and abilities. This disconnect also impacts the soft skills challenge by placing students in majors that are not a best fit with their technical skills or aptitudes. We recognized that the college can further improve students' outcomes both in technical skills and soft skills by consistently helping to match them with a career that is a good fit for them.

Training on soft skills is a part of the WSCC Strategic Vision and appears specifically under Strategic Priority 2 - Student Success, and Strategic Priority 5 - Community and Economic Development. In turn, the priorities are integrated with the college's AQIP initiative in the area of Helping Students Learn and Meeting Students and Other Stakeholders Needs.

The college faculty and staff have the opportunity to significantly improve students' career outcomes by emphasizing the development of soft skills across all levels of the college curriculum.

We realize that this is a long-term project that will significantly impact the instructional strategies used across the college. Our plan is to phase in the project over time, and this action project may be the first of several that will lead toward our ultimate goal. This project will encompass one year of work and will position the college to go into full implementation mode with both the soft skills rubric and with the career assessment process that we will pilot during the project period.

Q3. List the project goals, milestones, and deliverables along with corresponding metrics, due dates, and other measures for assessing the progress toward each goal. Be sure to include when you anticipate submitting the project for formal reviews.

A. *Project Goals*

1. The AQIP Soft Skills Project Team will create a soft skills standards rubric for various types of communication including emails, texts, formal papers, and phone etiquette. The rubric will also include expectations for aspects of professionalism, teamwork, and problem solving. *Deliverable: Soft Skills Standards Rubric created, vetted, and distributed to faculty by the end of spring semester 2016.*

2. Students will apply the soft skills rubric to their class assignments and interactions with faculty and other students. *Deliverable: Students will receive the Soft Skills Standards Rubric from faculty during fall semester 2016 and work toward demonstrating the required skills throughout their program of study.*

3. Faculty and staff of WSCC will exhibit professional behaviors to model soft skills, including but not limited to communication, punctuality, attendance, appearance, work ethic/integrity, organization, and time management. *Deliverable: Faculty and staff will consistently model effective soft skills for students.*

4. The project management team will identify and implement professional development opportunities to incorporate soft skills into curricula. *Deliverable: One or more professional development sessions related to the Communication Standards Rubric will be created and presented prior to the end of spring semester 2016 and again during the fall 2016 in-service.*

5. The Division of Student Services will identify and begin to implement a consistent career assessment tool as a mandatory requirement for admission. *Deliverable: Career assessment tool identified and piloted by December 2016.*

Project Schedule

- December 2015 - January 2016: Initial planning, team formation, review of data received from advisory committees and other sources, communication about soft skills concepts and need for the project. (Communication through presentation at faculty/staff meeting, Collage (weekly printed newsletter), email, advisory committees, handouts/flyers.)

- February - March 2016: Survey faculty and staff to gather additional information about key soft skills. Use of both an electronic survey and faculty/staff focus groups.

- March - April 2016: Creation of Communication Standards Rubric - Rubric is drafted, shared for comment, revised, and published.

- April - May 2016: Professional Development Session on Soft Skills Rubric created.

- May 2016 (End-of-Year In-Service): Professional Development Sessions on Communication Standards Rubric Offered.

- August 2016: Project Team meets to conduct formative assessment of project outcomes and to adjust approach and activities as needed.

- Summer 2016: Career assessment tools reviewed and one is selected. Plan created for including the selected tool in all pre-admission advising.

- August 2016 (Fall In-service): Project update. Additional Professional Development.

- Fall Semester 2016: Use of Communication Standards Rubric implemented across the curriculum.

- Fall Semester 2016: Career Assessment tools piloted.

- December 2016: Project Team meets to conduct final project evaluation and to plan for next steps in project implementation.

Q4. Describe how various members of the learning community will participate in this action project. Show the breadth of involvement by individuals and groups over the project's duration.

A. Washington State has assembled a group of full-time and part-time faculty, staff, and administrators to oversee the project. It is chaired by two faculty members, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs serves on the team as the administrative project sponsor. The project began as a result of input from advisory committees and employers. Throughout the project, the team will reach out to faculty and staff through surveys, focus groups, professional development sessions, and through progress updates to such groups as the Business Action Team, the President's Cabinet, and the Executive Cabinet. Eventually, all faculty will be asked to use the soft skills rubric as part of their instructional process. At the end, the team will close the loop by reporting back to the advisory committees regarding the project and its outcomes.

Q5. Describe how the institution will monitor project progress/success during, and at the completion of this project. Be sure to specifically state the measures that will be evaluated and when.

The project team will use the following measures and desired outcomes to assess the project outcomes. The team will conduct a mid-project assessment in August 2016 and an end of project assessment in December 2016. Each of these assessments will result in a report to the College's President's Cabinet, a group of middle and senior managers for both staff and faculty.

Measures and Desired Outcomes

1. Pre-Post Faculty Survey regarding soft skills focus in the classroom. - Desired Outcome: a 10-20% increase in the number of faculty reporting that they are (1) consistently addressing soft skills in the classroom, and (2) addressing soft skills beyond basic communication skills in the classroom.

2. Creation and implementation of a college-wide rubric for soft skills expectations. - Desired Outcome: Rubric created and shared with students in 80% of class sections by December 2016.

3. Professional Development on Soft Skills and Soft Skills Rubric created and delivered. - Desired Outcome: 90% of full-time faculty and 50% of part-time faculty participate in one or more professional development sessions on these topics by December 2016.

4. Career Assessment Tool identified and piloted. - A new career assessment tool identified and piloted for 80% or more of new incoming students beginning in August 2016.

Q6. Describe the challenges that may be encountered in successfully completing the project or for institutionalizing the learning from the project's goals.

A. ***Assumptions and Constraints***

The project assumes faculty/staff support for the concept, sufficient budget to implement, and sufficient time to implement the various steps envisioned.

The project will be constrained by the strength of faculty/staff support, the funding that is available, and the amount of time that faculty and staff can dedicate to this endeavor despite their very busy lives and schedules.

Threats to Success and Counter Measures

Threats	Counter Measures
Lack of faculty/staff buy-in	Communication, training, explain the "why" and the "what's in it for me"
Lack of money for training and adjunct meetings	Work with administrative leadership to create a project budget of at least $5,000
Lack of accountability for implementation of the soft skills rubric	Work with administrative leadership and project leadership

Q7. Provide any additional information that the institution wishes reviewers to understand regarding this Action Project.

A. We have been greatly encouraged by faculty and staff interest in the project and their dedication of time and effort toward making it happen. In particular, we are very pleased that several of our part-time faculty members volunteered to serve on the project team and are interested in helping to engage other part-time faculty in the efforts to improve students soft skills.