

AQIP Adult Learner Retention and Success Project Update

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

The AQIP Adult Learner Retention and Success action project team achieved several significant goals this year:

1) **DEFINITIVE ADULT LEARNER PRESENCE ON THE IHCC WEB SITE.** The team members met every three weeks from February to May to discuss the overall vision and included viewing many college websites to understand what marketing strategies and information directed at adults are used. The use of social networking sites for students and professionals such as Facebook and MySpace were explored. A decision was made to develop an Adult Learner “landing” page that would contain resources and services for adult students on the IHCC campus. Staff from Enrollment Services, Marketing, and IT were invited to give input on the design and content of the site. This initiative helped guide decisions about a presence for adult students overall on the IHCC website which resulted in two new additions: an “adult students” link, a more visible direct link to the ASAP program website, and a student blog feature which includes two adult student participants.

2) **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Speaker and author Raymond Wlodkowski, an expert on adult learning and motivation, returned to IHCC on October 12, 2007 for a follow-up presentation and meetings with faculty and staff. Dr. Wlodkowski presented in May 2007 and was so well received, another session was requested. He led an interactive workshop for faculty teaching accelerated courses. 28 faculty and staff attended with a 98% satisfaction rate. The AQIP team planned this session. Dr. Wlodkowski returned to be the keynote speaker on the last professional development day of the year, May 15. The continuity of the same speaker/facilitator continues to keep the focus of the adult learner in the forefront. It is also a benefit as Dr. Wlodkowski is beginning to know and understand the culture of IHCC. Dr. Wlodkowski’s topic was on personal motivation. Approximately 140 employees attended.

3) **DELIBERATE INVOLVEMENT OF SUPPORT STAFF IN COLLEGE-WIDE STAFF DEVELOPMENT.** This was first introduced at the May 2007 professional day with Dr. Wlodkowski. Staff were encouraged to attend Dr. Wlodkowski’s presentations as his topics are vital for understanding all students needs. Managers were encouraged to invite key front line staff. Including support staff was a first in many years at IHCC. Several attended and this has been a pattern ever since.

4) **NEW ADULT LEARNER ORIENTATION SESSIONS WERE HELD SUMMER-FALL 2008.** The Counseling department and the ASAP department collaborated over spring and summer to plan and implement adult-learner-focused orientation with sessions relevant to adult students’ needs. The sessions included discussions about adult learner needs inside and outside the classroom, course options geared to the busy adult student, campus and remote services, alternative credit options, and tips from other adult students. The following criteria were used to help students self-select into these orientations: a.) out of high school for 5+

years, b.) military experience, c.) work full time, d.) multiple responsibilities at home (including the care of others), 5.) attend part time and need flexible options. Adult learners who self-selected to attend this session were separated from the large group after the beginning introductions and a counselor and ASAP staff jointly facilitated this portion of the orientation. The adult student orientation is currently being reviewed after conducting five sessions, and the collaboration process will continue to be evaluated this Fall.

Review: This is an important and well-designed Action Project, focusing both on very specific steps to assist adult learners as well as a larger culture change at the institution. The activities and accomplishments of the last year are varied and significant. The focus on the web site, the involvement of support staff, the adult learner orientation sessions, and the continuing commitment to professional development will contribute to the culture change and to the improvement of services for adult students. It is hoped that adult students themselves were asked or will be asked about their new orientation experiences. All of these activities are targeted toward increasing the success of adult learners, so it will be of continuing importance to collect and analyze data about the learning, persistence, and graduation rate of adult learners. There is not much evidence in this annual report about changes or improvements in adult learner success, which was intended to be the key outcome of this Action Project.

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

1) The AQIP Adult Learner Retention and Success team provided an update at the fall 2007 opening day. Over 200 IHCC employees were present. The small groups initiated at the May 2007 workshop were reminded of their group and individual action plans and reports were gathered of all groups in December 2007. Over 80% of the individual action plans were completed fall semester 2007 and approximately 70% of group plans were completed.

2) The Executive and Management team, along with the Professional Development team, were involved with the planning of the May 15 day in which Dr. Wlodkowski was the keynote speaker. The IHCC President introduced him again. This was strategically planned as a way to display AQIP Adult Learner commitment to the IHCC community

3) A summary of the beginning of the Adult Learner Landing Page was given at an Institutional Effectiveness Council meeting in May. Feedback was collected by the council and will be discussed at the first AQIP meeting this October.

4) Marketing, Admissions, Enrollment Services, Counseling, and ASAP were integral in developing the new adult learner orientation. Working collaboratively will continue with the evaluation process and future endeavors.

5) The data manager continues to provide, on a yearly basis, information concerning the adult learner. This has helped with getting correct and detailed information regarding student age. The number of unknown ages has been reduced from 14% academic year 2006-07 to approximately 6% this fall 2008.

6) Continue to involve the Academic VP, the interim Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, and invite the Enrollment Services VP to attend some of the data analysis meetings.

Review: The institution has done a good job in getting an increasing number of people involved in this project and in sharing results with the campus community. These are essential steps in changing campus culture. It is gratifying to see the positive report of the small groups and their plans. The involvement of top-level management is an important symbol to the campus about the significance of this project. It is not clear how the voices of adult students themselves were part of the activities of this past year.

3) Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

This coming academic year, the AQIP team has significant projects planned:

- 1) Gathering data of adult learners 2007-08 and comparison of 2006-07 data. Findings and comparisons to be presented to Management and Executive team.
- 2) Have campus "opinion makers" review and evaluate this initiative. Individual team members will work to get them interested in this project.
- 3) Students focus groups will be invited to evaluate the web site. The focus groups will be held in the Fall of 2008 and include new and current students. Then we will finalize and launch the adult learner landing page.
- 4) The CAEL/Noel-Levitz ALI (Adult Learner Inventory) to be administered mid-November with differentiation of general adult learners and ASAP students.
- 5) Results of the ALI with internal and national comparisons to be reviewed and distributed to all through CAEL/Noel-Levitz led workshop.
- 6) Evaluation of the Adult Learner Orientation to include Enrollment Services, Counseling, ASAP, and adult students. Determination of future endeavors.

Review: The next few months will be an important time for this project, as the focus returns to the evidence of adult learner success. It is not clear, but assumed, that the 2007-08 data on adult learners includes persistence, retention, and graduation rates, in addition to the administration of the ALI. Focusing on campus "opinion makers" is a good response to a suggestion by a previous reviewer. These next steps suggest again that the institution has a good handle on the issue and the challenge of increasing adult student success.

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

1) The increased presence of LINKS FOR ADULT STUDENTS ON THE IHCC WEBSITE has garnered more attention from prospective students. Although there is no proven correlation, the adult student enrollment has consistently risen since the beginning of this AQIP project.

2) The NEW ADULT STUDENT ORIENTATION sessions are a worthy initiative to continue to strive to meet the needs of our adult learners on campus. Acknowledging the unique needs in a traditional college setting is a big step. Small shifts are happening in the campus culture involving these learner needs, and keeping the topic of adult students in the forefront has helped this shift.

3) Although college hours of operation remain the same, ONLINE SERVICES FOR STUDENTS have improved. Conversations were held at the May Professional Development Day that concluded more services should be available to adult learners in terms of hours of operation for night and weekend learners. These suggestions are part of a broader search for new initiatives in the coming years. The Institutional Effectiveness Council will be reviewing all the suggestions and determinations will be made this year. It will be interesting and encouraging if one or more of the adult learner suggestions will be part of future projects.

Review: These are commendable features of this Action Project, worthy of being shared with other institutions who are also working to enhance adult student success. The changes to the web site, the new orientation sessions, and the continuing development of online services are accomplishments to be celebrated internally and shared widely. What would be particularly gratifying and praise-worthy would be evidence that these changes in processes are positively received by adult students and evidence that these changes are contributing to adult learner success.

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

1) Since this AQIP project is broader and the initiative includes culture change, it is important for the AQIP group not to get discouraged. The team meetings might involve some social time off campus to keep the group cohesive; to build upon the energy. Also, praise for small steps is crucial for individuals in the group. Adding new members this year may also help motivate the group and reduce some stress and work from existing members.

2) Data show this Fall 2008, approximately 46% of IHCC students who report their age are 24 and over. This is a 4% increase compared to Fall 2007 and a 6% increase to Fall 2006. Also, Fall 2007 data show only 1655 out of 5707 credit students took only day classes. The number of day-only students declined from 2006-07 in comparison to the total number of students enrolled. Other data show in 2007-08, approximately 3500 students took day and other (evening, online, off campus, Saturday) classes while approximately 2000 students took no day and only other type courses. This trend has continued to rise over the past three years,

yet services and other amenities for students remain mainly in the daytime. The AQIP team is going to request an invite to the senior management and management team meetings this Fall to share the data.

3) Another challenge is a change in leadership. A dean left and there are three interim deans filling positions. The college President is retiring at the end of this year as well. Several senior management positions will need to be filled this coming year, and with these changes, there may be new initiatives and new challenges.

Review: The increasing number of adult students at this institution points to the importance of this Action Project, and the institution has much to celebrate. Although leadership changes will have an impact on campus culture and priorities, it appears that the focus on and commitment to adult learners is becoming ingrained in campus culture. As the institution continues to add new staff and faculty to this project, the AQIP team is encouraged to develop a strategy for bringing the new senior managers on board. In this regard, the data that will be gathered this year on adult learner success will be a key factor in demonstrating the significance of this Action Project for institutional well-being.

6) *The optional question:*

It would be helpful to get an outside perspective from individuals who have been part of a culture change as well as experience in working with adult learner programs. Learning of other accomplishments and ways of achieving change in a similar college setting would be advantageous to the AQIP group. It may foster and maintain energy and enthusiasm for such a daunting endeavor. The contact for this project is Martha Kudak, 651-450-8527, mkudak@inverhills.edu

Review: The institution has already worked hard to gain outside perspectives with the repeat visits of Dr. Wlodkowski. There is a growing body of research literature on cultural and institutional change in higher education that members of the AQIP Team can access and share. In addition, there are likely to be opportunities for IHCC representatives to be part of a panel presentation at an HLC or CAEL conference on adult learning success.