1: Project Goal

A: Our goal is to create and implement a complete, systematic process to assess student learning at the institutional level. We will also gain an understanding of how institutional level assessment connects with our existing program review process and ongoing course level assessment.

2: Reasons For Project

A: In June, 2009, SCC submitted its first Systems Portfolio to the HLC. The feedback clearly substantiated our need for a systematic process to assess student learning. Reviewers noted our lack of such a process in 1P1, 1P2, 1P17, and 1P18. In October, 2009, all employees reviewed our O and OO ratings and overwhelmingly selected SCC's lack of an assessment process as our greatest challenge. Assessment of student learning became the focus of our participation in the November Strategy Forum. After participating in the Strategy Forum, SCC created an Institutional Assessment Committee comprised of the President, CAO, Dean of Humanities, Director of Institutional Research, Director of Grants & Accreditation, and six faculty members from various programs. In September, 2011, the Committee created bylaws which implemented term limits for faculty members and the academic dean so that more would have a chance to participate. Southeastern wrote a new Strategic Plan in 2011, and "Systematically assess student learning college-wide" is included as a strategy. The President also included specific assessment-related activities in her 2012 Goals.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: The Teaching & Learning Division will be most affected by this Action Project.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Classroom instruction and faculty professional development.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: The length of time is determined by SCC's participation in the HLC Assessment Academy, which is a four-year commitment.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Since the 2009 Strategy Forum, SCC's Assessment Committee has worked with all faculty to create five new core competencies. Having learned from past unsuccessful attempts to implement assessment, the Committee decided to start slow and chose to pilot just one of the new competencies: Communication. The Committee created indicators for this competency, using input from all faculty and staff gathered at an in-service.

The President included the following in her goals for 2012: "Work with faculty to identify and/or create appropriate assessments for the Communications Core Competency in all key courses by May 11, 2012." She provides semi-annual updates to the Board of Trustees on her progress toward the goals. SCC's 2011 5-year Strategic Plan includes the following initiatives:
- Develop Competencies for each of the five core competencies.
- Implement and administer an assessment of student learning based on our Core Competencies utilizing our competency indicators. Progress toward all initiatives is monitored by the President’s Executive Cabinet and the Board of Trustees.

SCC will also establish a timeline and milestones through its participation in the Academy and will provide updates / reports as required.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: As well as the outcomes listed in question 6 above, SCC’s participation in the Academy will provide us with feedback regarding our successful implementation of an assessment plan. Similarly, we will detail our efforts in our next Systems Portfolio, due in June, 2013. The feedback report will be closely reviewed by the assessment committee.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Southeastern Community College’s 2009 Systems Portfolio had several Opportunities for Improvement related to its need for a comprehensive process to assess student learning. After receiving the Feedback Report, all employees reviewed the O and OO ratings and overwhelmingly selected SCC’s need for a comprehensive, systematic academic assessment process as the greatest challenge. A team of faculty, administrators and professional staff attended the HLC Strategy Forum in November, 2009 and worked together to address this challenge. After the Forum, the team became the Academic Assessment Committee and was expanded to include several more faculty members and the Vice President of Teaching & Learning. Until recently, the president served as the chair of this Committee; now a faculty member will serve in that capacity. Starting in the fall 2012, Cathy Ziglar, biology faculty, assumed coordination of the Assessment Committee with support from the AQIP liaison. Cathy has release time from one course to provide time for these duties.

The Committee has made significant progress since the Strategy Forum. SCC’s career and technical programs already had a strong program review process in place, so the Committee decided to start with review / revision of SCC’s Core Competencies, which were developed with faculty involvement but never put into practice. At the January and April 2010 in-service meetings, employees reviewed the original competencies and gave input regarding their appropriateness. The Committee reviewed all suggestions and developed five new Core Competencies. The Committee brought in a guest speaker recommended by the HLC, attended conferences, and networked with peers to gain additional information about assessment process. To ensure that the project remained on track, SCC joined the HLC Assessment Academy in 2011.

The Committee fleshed out the definitions for the competencies, using input from all faculty and staff gathered at in-services. Guided by input from the HLC and having learned from past unsuccessful attempts to implement an entire plan at one time, the Committee decided to start slow and chose to pilot just one of the five competencies: Communication. The Committee refined the definitions for the Communications Competency into ten indicators that would measure students’ attainment of the Competency. The Committee created a rubric that faculty could use when assessing students. The Committee also created a new plan of the entire assessment implementation process to provide a solid framework for next steps.

The faculty members on the Assessment Committee piloted the Communications Core Competency in the spring 2012 semester. Faculty either created new assignments to use in the pilot or used existing assignments. The Committee reviewed all assignments from the faculty participating in the pilot for relevance to the competency. Faculty members entered data on a rubric worksheet, and Institutional Research staff analyzed the data from the pilot assessments. The IR director completed a comprehensive report with the findings, and the Committee will discuss the pilot results at its next meeting.

SCC had its AQIP Quality Checkup Visit on August 13-14, 2012. The visit report complimented SCC on providing a faculty member with the opportunity to lead the assessment initiative. The team also urged the Assessment Committee to “pick up some momentum” to help create a culture of assessment. As a result, the team is moving more quickly starting this fall.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The Academic Assessment Committee currently has fifteen members:
- Vice President of Teaching & Learning
- Director of Institutional Grants & Accreditation
- Director of Institutional Research
- Division Chairs (CTE and Arts & Sciences)
- Dean of Arts and Sciences
- Dean of Career and Technical Education
- Dean of Transitional Education and the Keokuk Campus
- Library Liaison
- Six faculty members - Limited term members shall serve three year terms.
  - Each year two faculty members shall be appointed to fill positions as the two senior faculty members vacate.
  - Faculty from both West Burlington and Keokuk campuses will be included.
  - To the extent possible, limited term members shall represent the academic disciplines in both institutional divisions, Arts & Sciences and Career & Technical (including health):
    - Science
    - Social Science
    - Fine Arts or Communication
    - Health
    - Business
    - Industrial or Agricultural

The faculty members have three-year staggered terms. The Committee will contact faculty members regarding replacements as needed.

As noted above, all faculty have been involved with the College’s academic assessment process from the beginning. The Committee will continue to get input from all faculty as the remaining competencies are finalized and piloted.

Communication was one of the initiatives that resulted from SCC’s participation in the Assessment Academy Roundtable. The team has published multiple articles in the College’s internal newsletter, The FrontPage, and members have given presentations at all-staff professional development days. The Committee is planning an “Assessment Day” which will take place next spring.

### 3: Next Steps

**A:** After reviewing the IR report from the first pilot and making changes to the process as needed, the Committee will identify the next group of faculty that will assess the Communication Core Competency. This group will be larger than the first pilot group and will represent a cross-section of programs. The Committee will provide these faculty members with training on the rubric and the entire assessment process.

At its last meeting, the Committee determined that it will next pilot the Critical Thinking Competency. Members will create a rubric and will distribute it to all faculty for their input by the end of the fall 2013 semester. This competency will then be piloted, and the pilot should be complete by April, 2013. Institutional Research will analyze these results and will provide a report. The Committee chair is finalizing a revised, more aggressive timeline for activities, including regularly scheduled Committee meetings.

### 4: Resulting Effective Practices

**A:** SCC’s Assessment Committee has not yet discovered any practices that would benefit other institutions; we are too early in our process. However, we do have a lesson learned that occurred as a result of our AQIP Quality Checkup Visit and the timely arrival of a new interim Vice President. Our Assessment Committee members heard at many presentations and webinars advising institutions to “start slow” when developing and implementing an academic assessment plan. We heeded this advice to a greater degree than we should have, and our project was in danger of losing all forward momentum. Fortunately, we received input telling us to pick up the pace. Our AQIP peer reviewers told us that we needed to “move quickly beyond piloting a single Core Competency” so that we could begin to build a culture of assessment. The College’s interim Vice President of Teaching & Learning is helping the Committee craft a more aggressive timeline.

### 5: Project Challenges
As we broaden our assessment activities to include more faculty members, we could potentially face resistance from some. It will be important that the Committee members have a good understanding of the plan and can give a quick “elevator speech” to explain why assessment is crucial for the students and for our institution.

It has been difficult to gain an understanding of how to approach implementing assessment at the College. Because there is no one-size-fits-all plan, we have had to work through many models to figure out what would work best for our college with our culture. This uncertainty has left many Committee members frustrated. The problem was compounded because we had no one on staff who had extensive first-hand experience with implementation of an assessment process. This situation is improving with the addition of seasoned administrators who can better guide the process. Currently SCC is discussing the hiring of an academic assessment officer to further help us integrate assessment into the culture of the college.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

Southeastern Community College's Action Project pertaining to assessment of student learning has benefitted with feedback from a previous Systems Portfolio, at an AQIP Strategy Forum to create this project, and the very recent Quality Check-Up. The college notes one aspect of feedback indicating that the pace should be accelerated. The college noted this feedback and is planning to increase the pace. The project is reported to be over four years. Modification of this timeline to not exceed three years will accelerate activities to a reasonable pace.

The project as posted focuses on connecting existing program review to institutional assessment as one of its main goals. The Academic Assessment Committee may want to delay this goal to a separate short-term action project to follow retirement of the currently focused project. The goal of refining definitions, determining measures, and instituting assessment of all five Core Competencies campus-wide will likely take the next two years. Greater momentum can be gained when a project is well focused. Secondly, new stakeholders may be needed to tie program review to Core Competency assessment.

The past year’s accomplishments included formation of an Academic Assessment Committee that includes campus-wide faculty representation and the Vice-President of Teaching & Learning. Core competencies were reviewed for current relevancy that emerged as five Core Competencies. One Core Competency was identified to be piloted for assessment after its definition was refined and rubrics were created. Data was collected, analyzed and reported. The college supported a campus guest speaker, attendance at conferences and most importantly became a member of the Higher Learning Commission’s Assessment Academy. Work on this project is directed at Category 1 Helping Student Learn and Category 7 Measuring Effectiveness. In addition, the commitment to assessment with Integrity in Words and Deeds and movement toward a Learning-Oriented culture reflect Principles of High Performing Organizations.

2: Institution Involvement

Administrators and faculty represent campus-wide membership on the Academic Assessment Committee including a faculty member who is chairing the committee. The committee has communicated with the campus community in a variety of modes and solicited campus feedback. Designating an “Assessment Day” annually while the project is occurring can be an opportunity to show case campus best practices and provide recognition for assessment work.

3: Next Steps

Southeastern Community College has the opportunity to lay out next steps in more specific detail. Creating specific objectives to be accomplished allows for results to be measured. Given the size of the committee membership, perhaps sub-committees could be formed that could simultaneously work on the remaining Core Competencies. Regular updates by the sub-committees to the Assessment Committee would provide accountability and communication. Likewise it may be beneficial to pilot each of the remaining Core Competencies, once fully developed with rubrics, to different academic units so that the campus is more widely engaged in the pilot.

Core Competencies that are successfully piloted and accepted, can be mapped back for alignment to program and course objectives. This may be an idea for a future short-term action project. Another possibility for an action project could be to broaden out the five
Core Competencies to support services as well as the academic areas. Communication as one of the Core Competencies could resonate well with student services for example. Continuity of message from both academic and non-academic departments will highlight the importance of these five Core Competencies to students and reinforce that the entire campus is involved in helping students learn.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Creating rubrics to measure the well-defined Core Competencies is a best practice. Sharing the development of the Core Competencies and rubrics at the AQIP Colloquium at the Higher Learning Commission’s Annual Meeting could be helpful to other colleges as the project nears completion.

5: Project Challenges

A: Resistance is to be expected for any significant change. The College has a plan to meet the resistance with information. Southeastern Community College is making reasonable progress toward completion of the project and development of an institution-wide continuous quality improvement culture.