1: Project Goal

A: Our goal is to determine optimum enrollment for Southeastern Community College (SCC), taking into account our mission and strategic plan, desired student demographics, program demand and capacity, facilities, and other variables. This initiative is a part of the college’s Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) plan.

2: Reasons For Project

A: Based on input from the Systems Appraisal, Strategic Planning, the College’s Key Performance Indicators and other data sources, SCC’s President announced in 2011 that SCC would focus on three major initiatives: Assessment of Student Learning, First Year Experience, and Strategic Enrollment Management.

In the fall of 2011, a team of six SCC employees attended the Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) Strategic Enrollment Management Conference. Team members represented a cross section of the college:

- President
- Dean of Transitional Studies and the Keokuk campus
- Psychology faculty member
- Agriculture faculty member
- Enrollment Services Coordinator
- Vice President of Student Services

With knowledge gained from the conference, the team worked for several months to create a plan. They conducted an intensive review of SCC’s mission, goals, and strategic plan and an audit of existing practices, institutional data, and informal survey results from students and employees. The resulting plan addresses four overarching focus areas: (1) Connection, (2) Entry, (3) Progress, and (4) Completion. However, the members recognized that they had not yet addressed a crucial core concept of strategic enrollment management: determining the institution’s optimum enrollment. To successfully implement the SEM plan, this information must be obtained.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: The Teaching & Learning Division will be most affected by this Action Project since the faculty will need to provide much of the information regarding course capacity and other variables. Other organizational areas such as enrollment services, institutional research, and administrative services (facilities) will also be involved with providing information to help determine SCC’s optimum enrollment.

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: This project will provide crucial information needed to finalize and implement all aspects of the Strategic Enrollment Management plan. SCC’s SEM plan will affect student enrollment, retention, and completion through multiple initiatives.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

[Table listing Project Details such as Title, Category, Timeline, etc.]

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory
Southeastern Community College
The SEM committee is committed to completing this project in six months or less so that the members can incorporate the information gained into the SEM plan.

6: Project Success Monitoring

The committee plans to have the project completed by the end of May, 2013. The AQIP Liaison will work with the committee members to ensure that the project is progressing.

7: Project Outcome Measures

The outcome of this project will be determining the optimum enrollment number for Southeastern Community College. If that number is determined, the project will be a success. As the needs of the college evolve over time, our optimum enrollment will also be reevaluated and updated as needed.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

Optimum Enrollment is a complex concept which includes many different facets, including:

- Program, course, and section capacity (includes facility capacity, instructional effectiveness)
- Diversity
- Credit / non credit
- Program demand
- In-program placement (particularly clinicals)
- Regional employment opportunities

Initially, Southeastern Community College intended to identify its optimum enrollment number within six months of declaring the Action Project. This did not occur for a variety of reasons:

When initially declaring the project, we understood that optimum enrollment included many variables. However, we did not realize that we had issues to address before we could move forward with this project, specifically in the area of program, course, and section capacity. These “caps” must be factored into optimum enrollment. However, while having discussions with career, technical and health faculty during program review in the spring of 2013, SCC administrators recognized that there is no consistency in how faculty members determine their caps. Faculty cited several factors as the basis for their numbers:

- Physical limitations; i.e. shop/lab space too small to accommodate larger numbers and/or inadequate shop/lab equipment.
- Instructional effectiveness could potentially be compromised with too many students in certain courses; i.e. speech and composition as well as certain shop/lab courses.
- Many course and program caps have not been reviewed or revised for a significant period of time.
- Limited number of students who were likely to find jobs locally in a given year, especially in Career, Technical and Health-related programs.

During the program review process, we determined that the criteria for program caps needed to be more clearly defined, and thereafter, the capacity numbers revised. We also learned there is little consistency between program faculty in how they determine their caps. Consequently, this process issue must be addressed before we can move forward with determining the more global optimum enrollment number.

We have since worked with our Director of Institutional Research, who provided us with a listing of all course sections, including the fall 10-day count, section capacity, and room capacity. Using this data, Academic Affairs administrators and department chairs will work with faculty to determine a process by which program, course, and section capacities can be reliably and consistently determined.

The optimum enrollment project also experienced difficulty in moving forward this past year due to several administrative and faculty
vacancies. At the current time, SCC has openings in several administrative positions due to retirements and resignations. Two out of three Vice Presidents are interim, and we currently have only one out of three academic deans. Additionally, the one VP who is not interim and who is in charge of the optimum enrollment project was out for two months on emergency medical leave. All of these factors combined have made it difficult to move forward with this project as quickly as we had initially planned. However, we now have plans in place, and these are detailed under question #3.

Institution Involvement

Initially this project was to involve a relatively small group of employees that comprised the strategic enrollment management (SEM) team. However, as described in question #1, we discovered that we had institutional issues that must be addressed before we could determine our optimum enrollment. Determining program, course and section capacities will involve all faculty. Additionally, as described in question #3, the SEM team and the completions team will soon be merged, which will result in a larger team comprised of several faculty as well as support staff, and administration.

Next Steps

In May 2013, Academic Affairs moved to a departmental structure to help improve both communications and decision making. This new structure incorporated “department chairs” in addition to divisional deans. As described in question #1, Academic Affairs administrators and department chairs will work with faculty in the upcoming months to determine program, course, and section caps across all programs as well as design a process by which these numbers are determined in a consistent and reliable manner.

During the past year, SCC worked with an enrollment management consulting group to better define an efficient course scheduling process, and we have implemented many improvements to our schedule based upon their recommendations. Once we progress through the second semester of assessing their recommendations, we anticipate entering phase two of the project with them. This phase will specifically relate to issues related to optimum enrollment practices.

The community colleges of Iowa are working together to collect data and determine courses of action that will positively affect each college’s completion rate. The most recent meeting of the community colleges took place on September 25, 2013. Four SCC employees attended. After this meeting, the Vice President of Student Services decided to merge the strategic enrollment management team into the newly-formed completions team for the following reasons:

- The teams have similar goals and use the same data as a basis for decision making.
- Many of the same individuals serve on both teams.
- Given SCC’s current situation with unfilled vacancies – both administrative and faculty – streamlining efforts to increase efficiency is critical to ensure progress of initiatives such as completions, strategic enrollment management, and also optimum enrollment.

Resulting Effective Practices

There are no effective practices to report at this time.

Project Challenges

Challenges have been significant and are detailed under question #1. SCC still is lacking permanent administrators in key positions. However, the College is committed to moving forward with this project as a part of its completions agenda.

Update Review

Project Accomplishments and Status

The goal of this action project is to determine optimum college enrollment. This initiative is a component of the strategic enrollment management (SEM) plan, and one of three campus-wide initiatives identified on the basis of systems appraisal feedback, strategic
planning and identification of the College’s key performance indicators (AQIP Categories 5 – Leading and Communicating and 6 – Supporting Organizational Operations). The SEM plan addresses four elements of the enrollment process: 1) connection, 2) entry, 3) progress and 4) completion. Before full deployment of the SEM plan, the institution realized that to successfully finalize and implement the institution’s SEM plan, the institution must first determine its optimum enrollment (AQIP Category 2- Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives).

The project did not meet its target completion date of May 2013 because during program review in Spring 2013, the institution identified a critical piece of information, namely program, course and section capacity that, while collected, was not defined and collected in a consistent manner by all faculty. The institution chose to focus on developing clear and consistent definitions for capacity with subsequent overall revision of capacity numbers for programs, courses and sections (AQIP Categories 7 – Measuring Effectiveness and 8 – Planning Continuous Improvement).

Administrative and faculty vacancies have also contributed to the delay in completing this action project. There has been significant turnover at the level of both Vice President and Academic Dean. There has also been hierarchical reorganization in Academic Affairs, with the incorporation of department chairs, to improvement communication and decision-making (AQIP Categories 5 – Leading and Communicating and 6- Supporting Organizational Operations).

Institution Involvement

The SEM plan task force initially consisted of six members, but as work progressed it was determined that this team was insufficient to adequately manage the project. The necessity of addressing broader institutional issues required significant expansion of team; determination of program, course and section capacity will involve all faculty (AQIP Category 4 – Valuing People).

Next Steps

SCC has identified their next step as the integration of the SEM and completion teams (AQIP Category 7 – Measuring Effectiveness). Team membership and charge were similar; integration of the teams, especially in the face of administrative and faculty vacancies, simplifies the process and the ‘service burden’ for each team member (AQIP Category 4 – Valuing People). It is not clear if student representatives will be included on the new team.

Resulting Effective Practices

While the institution does not report any best practices at this time, it should be noted that this action project initiative was formulated based on systems appraisal feedback, strategic planning and identification of the College’s key performance indicators as is thus reflective of AQIP Category 3 – Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs.

SCC has also worked with an enrollment management consulting group to improve course scheduling (Phase 1) and subsequently optimum enrollment practices (Phase 2) (AQIP Categories 7 – Measuring Effectiveness and 8 – Planning Continuous Improvement).

Project Challenges

The project did not meet its target completion date, but the institution is still lacking administrators in key positions. The institution show a commitment to completing not only this action project but also their overall SEM plan. As such they are working with an enrollment management consulting group. In addition, they are participating with other Iowa community colleges to collect and analyze data to determine processes to improve individual college’s completion rates (AQIP Category 2 – Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives).