

Driving Action Through Analytics (DATA) Action Project Update Review

VERSIONS

REVIEWED VERSION 1.0 

Project Details

Title	Driving Action Through Analytics (DATA)	Status	REVIEWED
Category	7-Measuring Effectiveness	Updated	01-27-2015
Timeline		Reviewed	04-06-2015
Planned Project Kickoff	09-15-2013	Created	11-08-2013
Target Completion	05-15-2016	Last Modified	04-06-2015

1: CURRENT PROJECT STATUS SUMMARY

- **VU's Answer:**
 1. **General project status:** Completed; In Progress; Suspended; Reopened

Original Start Date: November 2013

Original Projected End Date: December 2015

Anticipated Completion Date if Not Completed: Assuming same effort, December 2016.

Briefly explain the current status of the project: The project is progressing, just not at the speed required to meet the current project schedule (which is included in the original proposal). Therefore, we need to either make adjustments to the schedule or re-prioritize this project. VU is learning that some technology enhancements, which have been on-going, were needed to make progress on the project, and VU has discovered that it can be difficult for IT staff to allocate time to the project when other priorities arise. Furthermore, parts of the project require an additional focused effort, including the need to achieve institutional agreement on the types of data essential to understanding current retention levels and issues, the need to identify key student risk indicators, and the need to determine the best ways to present key data so it is useful for the appropriate audience.

Explain how this project relates to any strategic initiatives or challenges described in the institution's most recent or soon-to-be submitted systems portfolio, if applicable. This project will promote communication and collaboration within the institution by helping VU make the most efficient use of data in our processes, and it will help transform VU into a more data-driven institution. More specifically, this project

addresses VU's retention strategic plan goal. As the Data Warehouse Committee studied data warehouse development, it recognized in the literature a recommendation that the institution begin building a warehouse by starting with a specific project for which data was needed, a project of special importance to the institution, in order to make the abstractions of a data warehouse and analytics more concrete. VU has in the current strategic plan (and it is assumed in the next strategic plan) a student retention goal. The project is going to help bring retention goals and data into greater focus as VU develops student retention dashboards, student risk profiles, and other predictive data.

- **HLC Reviewer Response:**

As noted in the AQIP Action Project Guide, "*an Action Project should last as long as it takes — six weeks, three months, one year — to achieve its goals, and no longer*"; but not three years. Much of the value derived from an Action Project is learning how to identify and solve a problem quickly. The school notes that the Project is progressing but offers no update of the tables provided in the original Project proposal or indication of where the school is at in the three phases described.

What the school is experiencing may be scope creep; which is not unusual in a Project of this magnitude. In hind sight, it might have been better to have chunked the Project into thirds; each phase becoming a Project. Based on the given responses, the school may consider suspending the current Project and reopening it at a later time with scalable outcomes and measures.

The Project has clear relationships to VU's strategic initiatives and the final product(s) and process(s) will undoubtedly result in "*growing a culture of consistent and coordinated data via the development of a greater number of users and greater access to data tools.*"

2. ORIGINAL PROJECT GOALS AND DELIVERABLES: List the project goals as stated in the original project declaration along with the metrics/measures for assessing the progress for each goal:

- **VU's Answer:**

Phase I - Introduce a culture within the institution that will enable us to use data more efficiently and effectively, focusing on retention data; Phase II - Establish electronic monitors to support the measurement of key institutional performance indicators, again, with a focus on retention; and Phase III - Implementation of enhanced data transformation and predictive analysis systems. In terms of measuring progress, the most tangible measurement will be to review the detailed implementation plan for the project; the implementation plan (which is in the original project description) includes numerous specific steps, many of which are in process.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response:**

Based on the responses and lack of tangible evidence of substantive progress, the recommendation to suspend the current Project is repeated. Embedded within the proposal and phases are a number of potential Projects, e.g. *Creating a Data-Driven*

Culture, Bringing Retention Goals and Data into Focus, etc. Projects of shorter duration are more likely to result in success on which the school can build future Projects.

3. ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR: Describe what has been accomplished with this project over the past year, specifically referring to the quantifiable results that show progress. You may need to include a discussion clarifying how the original goals and anticipated outcomes may have shifted during the year.

- **VU's Answer:**

Accomplishments to date include the formation of our Data Committee, whose mission is twofold: 1) facilitate this DATA (Driving Action Thru Analytics) AQIP action project and 2) serve as continual data governance for the university. Additionally, retention data dashboards are in development, and some preliminary student profile dashboards have been developed and are soon to be introduced to the staff of VU's new Success Center. Also, a set of fifteen student risk indicators has been identified, along with a correlate set of questions that will be placed in the Admissions and Start VU surveys. VU is working to link the survey results to VU's SIS, Banner, in order create a risk profile for each individual student (the creation of the profile being one of the tasks for this year). This information will be combined with data from VU's early warning system and a proposed midterm engagement survey.

It is important to understand, there are other internal MIC projects underway that are necessary and will help support the framework of this project, even though these needs were not anticipated as the project was being developed. They include: 1) mobile application; 2) enterprise authentication; 3) single sign on; 4) electronic help desk and 5) new web portal migration.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response:**

The school's accomplishments to date are more significant than they appear because the original proposal was too ambitious and too large for a single Action Project. Establishing governance and sustainable processes to manage data was essential to ensure the continued success of the initiative. Data-enriched thinking nurtures evaluation and a results-orientation concentrated on increasing the benefits and value produced for students and other stakeholders. High performance institutions develop and refine systems for gathering and assessing valuable feedback and data, and continually seek better methods for obtaining the most useful information on which to base decisions and improvements.

The development of indicators and questions to help identify students at risk is another example of an unintended outcome of the Project and would have been, in itself, a good Action Project (Category 1).

4. INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT: Describe how various members of the learning community have participated in this action project. Show the breadth of involvement by individuals and groups over the projects duration, particularly during the past year.

- **VU's Answer:**

To date, instructional areas have had little opportunity to contribute, as we have not engaged their participation yet; however, a wide range of people from different areas are participating in the project. Staff from IR, IT, Admissions, the Dean of Students Office, the Student Success Center, the Registrar, Institutional Effectiveness, as well as the President and Provost, have all participated in the project in some way.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response:**

The school may consider completing a time-on-task analysis from attendance and meeting notes. This may show an allocation of personnel and other resources that may be significant. In future Project reporting, the school may consider clearly identifying who contributes what and to what degree. Note what teams are created and how frequently they meet.

5. EFFECTIVE PRACTICES: Describe the effect that this project has had on the institution, students, and others in the learning community. What has the institution learned that can be identified as a good practice to use in other aspects of its quality work or from which other institutions might benefit.

- **VU's Answer:**

For the most part, the impact has been limited, as VU has yet to make significant changes in business processes that will involve large number of staff and faculty. However, the work so far has led to recognition of unanticipated needs in order to complete the project and helped to clarify elements of a retention strategic plan that is being developed, helped VU to recognize certain research is needed for success, and helped with the development of a set of at-risk indicators. One lesson learned is the difficulty of anticipating all the needs for a project such as this—the “data warehouse” and “analytics” concepts are abstract, and it has proven difficult to anticipate all the resources, tools, and time needed to put predictive data in people's hands.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response:**

The school may have had greater success than originally thought. It may be difficult to measure the impact the dashboards have had in their ideation and development. Creating awareness to the need for consistent and actionable data and responding with the development of preliminary student profile dashboards creates momentum. “Growing a culture “is a long-term commitment. The school is on the right track and its recognition of scope creep will help scale back future initiatives into manageable components and realistic timeframes.

6. ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES TO PROJECT SUCCESS: Describe the anticipated challenges that may be encountered in successfully completing the project or for institutionalizing the learning from the project's goals.

- **VU's Answer:**

The major challenge is the development of definitive project schedules with owners and dates. The project needs regular administrative status updates to keep it on track.

Eventually, it will require the commitment of all employees to embed data into their monitoring and decision-making processes. For instance, VU needs to develop in faculty and staff an understanding of the role of KPI's in VU's retention plan and the importance of ownership of those results. VU is going to have to change documents, such as its admissions application, and some processes, such as Start VU, to ensure all students complete the survey questions that will provide data for the risk profiles. Even though the DATA project has the narrowed focus of student retention, there are many moving parts that have to be aligned.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response:**

The school clearly understands some of the challenges to the effective governance of any system; ownership and accountability. An institution thrives when its leadership actively creates and supports a quality-driven culture, modeling values and behaviors that communicate a comprehensive and focused vision to all constituents. Leaders have a responsibility to make sure that everyone understands and values the institution's mission, goals, and directions— and uses this understanding to inform their individual work goals and decision-making strategies. Everyone needs to understand the importance of key performance indicators. A culture of involvement requires ongoing development of people's skills in making fact-based decisions, working with diverse groups, resolving conflicts, and using quality based tools to build consensus.

7. PLANNED NEXT STEPS AND TIME LINE: In light of the project goals, current circumstances, institutional learning from this project, and anticipated barriers to success, list the next steps to be taken over the course of the next 12-24 months in order to complete or institutionalize the results of this action project. Provide a timeline for completing each next step.

- **VU's Answer:**

In the broadest terms, VU must revise its timeline for completing next steps, and there needs to be a recommitment of leadership within the DATA committee to make all phases of this project a priority. More concretely, key reports need to be developed so VU personnel regularly receive student risk and retention data. From the IT side, more data tools need to be developed and made accessible, and training will have to occur so staff and faculty know how to access the data.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response:**

In the simplest of terms, the school will be better served by revising the Project timeline or breaking it into smaller more manageable initiatives. With effective communication, multiple inter-related Projects can be coordinated. A master project plan may assist in cascading the message and presenting a comprehensive picture of the desired future state.

1. 8. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS: Provide any additional information, inquiries, or concerns that the institution wishes for reviewers to understand regarding this action project.

- **VU's Answer:**

It is always going to be difficult to measure progress for this project on a consistent basis. For instance, sometimes significant progress is made and other times little to none, due to staff responsibilities for other projects; many of these unanticipated projects become priorities that require immediate attention. Lastly, as with any university-wide project, there will be unexpected challenges that could impact both the end result and timing of the project.

- **HLC Reviewer's Response:**

While there are usually unexpected challenges inherent in any initiative, effective project management allows the school to identify, evaluate, and mitigate risks early and anticipate and accommodate changes. KPIs (Key Performance Indicator) “...*and the ownership of those results*” are also a factor in project development, management, and reporting.

If the school steps back and looks objectively at what it has been able to accomplish since the initial launch of the Project, the school will see there have been some significant accomplishments and opportunities identified for additional improvements.