

(Each response must be stated in 200 words or fewer.)

1. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project. (Describe concrete achievements: meetings, data gathered and analyzed, plans made or implemented, changes in processes, and measured results. If you haven't made much progress, explain why you think things are moving slower than planned.)

The Graduation Action Project committee completed its mission in Fall 2006; the members recommended that three aspects of the project continue: the graduation alert letter, for which the vice president of Instruction would be responsible; the degree audit requests, which would remain the provenance of Advising; and the continued marketing to students and RRCC staff of the importance of graduating with a two-degree from Red Rocks (responsibility has yet to be decided.)

In Fall 2005, committee members drafted a letter, which was signed by the college president and then mailed to all students who had (1) completed at least 45 credit hours with a GPA of 2.0 or above. On Dec. 4, 2005, 1,184 letters were mailed; on April 17, 2006, 1,360. The letter strongly encouraged students to initiate degree audits. Twenty-four percent of students who received the first letter and requested a degree audit graduated; that percentage dropped to 12.5 with the second letter. No letters were mailed in Spring 2007. The VPI is currently considering whether to repeat the mailings in Fall 2007 as she examines the data.

Degree audits have continued, and students with 45 or more credits are encouraged by faculty and staff to request audits. The degree audit form is available in Advising as well as online, as is the graduation application. The promotion of graduating continues through posters, word-of-mouth, and the college Web site.

2. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this action project.
(AQIP wants information about motivation and communication: how you kept this project on the institution's priority list, how you maintained general awareness of the importance and progress of the project, and how you kept those working on it directly active and motivated.)

During Fall 2006, Graduation Committee chair Nancy Carlson and the committee members worked closely with administrators and employees in Student Services, Advising, the Learning and Resource Center, Institutional Research, Marketing, and Instructional Services to raise student, faculty, and employee awareness of the opportunity for students to graduate from RRCC with two-year degrees. Creating and sending the graduation alert letter to students who had earned approximately 45 credits, creating and promoting the degree audit form, conducting degree audits, and raising the awareness of faculty and staff who have direct contact with students to encourage graduation helped to begin creating a culture of graduation at the college.

3. Describe your planned next steps for this action project.
(Be specific about the next critical steps you are planning to move the action project ahead. If your planning is vague or there is no planning at this point, explain why.)

VPI Colleen Jorgensen has designated the academic year of 2007-2008 as the period of action project evaluation. She has asked that those involved in and affected by the projects take time to reflect on each project's goals, effectiveness, accomplishments, and importance to the college and the students. The next critical step for the Graduation Action Project is examination by college leaders of its components (such as the graduation letter) and their effectiveness.

The degree audit form and its use have come closest to becoming SOP. The next step is for Advising staff and the vice presidents of Instruction and Student Services to determine how to track effectively the number of requests for degree audits and the number of audits completed. They also will consider how to better involve faculty who conduct degree audits for students in their programs.

4. Describe any effective practices that resulted from your work on this action project.

(Share practices—or processes, policies, procedures, or initiatives—that could be adopted or adapted to other institutions. AQIP is most interested in practices that would give value—better educational services, cost-savings, improved morale, more satisfied stakeholders, etc.—to another institution if it copied your innovation. If you believe that your work on this project has little or no value for other institutions, explain why.)

Making the degree audit form available on campus in the Advising Office and online has been valuable to students. Many do not realize that they need only 60 credits (in most cases) to earn an associate's degree, and they are often unaware of the degree's value, particularly students who are planning to transfer to four-year institutions. Completing degree audits provides an opportunity for students to meet with advisers—perhaps for the first time—and evaluate what they already have accomplished and what they want to accomplish in the near future. Connecting with advisers allows students to assess themselves, their accomplishments, and their goals. With RRCC advisers' assistance, students can make definitive plans to take the right classes that will lead them to graduation and, if they desire, to transfer their RRCC classes to four-year institutions.

Raising student and employee awareness of graduation as an attainable goal for community college students can be accomplished without spending a great deal of money: strategically placed posters; timely use of information tables staffed by friendly and knowledgeable advisers, faculty, and staff; easily accessible degree audit forms; and the availability of well informed, encouraging academic and faculty advisers helps students succeed.

5. What challenges, if any, are you still facing with regard to this action project?
(This is an opportunity to obtain constructive, actionable feedback and advice from AQIP's review process. Use this question to specify where your blocks, gaps, sticking points, or problems are. If you already have fashioned strategies to deal with any challenge you face, share both the challenge and your strategy for meeting it.)

- **Communication across all levels at the college has been an obstacle.**
- **The college does not have staff members dedicated to continuing the work begun by this action project's chair and committee members who can keep the momentum going.**
- **College leaders have yet to determine the priority of keeping students informed regarding their need to plan for graduating from RRCC.**
- **The timing of informing and encouraging students to request degree audits coincides with the college's busiest times (at the beginning and end of semesters) when employees are already pushed to the limit. The efforts of the Faculty Advising Action Project have helped to relieve some of that burden.**
- **The Colorado community college system's shift from SIS to Banner, though a positive move, has not progressed as seamlessly as anticipated. The shift has affected the consistent availability of student records and other data. The problems associated with the shift have been recognized, and staff members across the college have been examining and clarifying their roles and responsibilities to best address the challenges and changes.**
- **Additional strategies for addressing the challenges listed will take place under the guidance of the VPI during the 2007-2008 academic year.**