

QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

Wayne State College

Wayne, NE
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Quality Checkup team members:

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Background on Quality Checkups conducted by the Academic Quality Improvement Program

The Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) conducts Quality Checkup site visits to each institution during the fifth or sixth year in every seven-year cycle of AQIP participation. These visits are conducted by trained, experienced AQIP Reviewers to determine whether the institution continues to meet The Higher Learning Commission's *Criteria for Accreditation*, and whether it is using quality management principles and building a culture of continuous improvement as participation in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) requires. The goals of an AQIP Quality Checkup are to:

1. Affirm the accuracy of the organization's online Systems Portfolio and verify information included in the portfolio that the last Systems Appraisal has identified as needing clarification or verification (System Portfolio Clarification and Verification);
2. Review with organizational leaders actions taken to capitalize on the strategic issues and opportunities for improvement identified by the last Systems Appraisal (Systems Appraisal Follow Up);
3. Alert the organization to areas that need its attention prior to Reaffirmation of Accreditation, and reassure it concerning areas that have been covered adequately (Accreditation Issues Follow Up);
4. Verify federal compliance issues such as default rates, complaints, USDE interactions and program reviews, etc. (Federal Compliance Review); and
5. Assure continuing organizational quality improvement commitment through presentations, meetings, or sessions that clarify AQIP and Commission accreditation work (Organizational Quality Commitment).

The AQIP peer reviewer(s) trained for this role prepare for the visit by reviewing relevant organizational and AQIP file materials, particularly the organization's last *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report* and the Commission's internal *Organizational Profile*, which summarizes information reported by the institution in its *Annual Institutional Data Update*. The report provided to AQIP by the institution is also shared with the evaluator(s). Copies of the Quality Checkup report are provided to the institution's CEO and AQIP liaison. A copy is retained by the Commission for the institution's permanent file, and will be part of the materials reviewed by the AQIP Review Panel during Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

Clarification and verification of contents of the institution's Systems Portfolio

Wayne State College (WSC) submitted a substantially updated Systems Portfolio in preparation for their Quality Checkup Visit (QCV). The QC Team reviewed the first Systems Portfolio and update, as well as the institutional response to the Systems Portfolio Feedback Report prior to the visit. They also reviewed a selection of other publications and internal documents and discussed sections of the Systems Portfolio with AQIP category committee representatives. The QCV team did not find discrepancy between the portfolio updates and the campus environment. Comments from faculty and staff indicated that the Systems Portfolio can provide a history for the institutional record and will function as a dynamic document. This attitude reflects a continuous quality approach.

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

Review of specific accreditation issues identified by the institution's last Systems

Appraisal

The Systems Appraisal review team identified one accreditation issue, related to Core accreditation component 2c: "The organization's on-going assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement." The Feedback Report stated, "WSC is just beginning its program for assessment of student learning. WSC indicates that its current assessment is not now tied to specific learning objectives and it is not apparent that there is a process to objectively determine the success of its General Education program."

During the Quality Checkup Visit, the CQ Team concluded that WSC is moving toward compliance in this area. Many departments have clear statements of student learning outcomes; however, some have not yet articulated specific student learning outcomes. Data collected in these programs appears to be tied to general characteristics rather than tightly defined student learning outcomes (notable exceptions are programs required to articulate such by specialized accreditors). Additionally, data is organized only by department, and there is no institutional standardization for reporting assessment findings.

So, the accreditation issue of *systematizing* assessment has not been completely addressed. The departments which have an external impetus for conducting assessment have

very comprehensive measures in place for assessment. For example, the Education department uses NCATE and Business and Technology uses a discipline-specific test. Other departments have developed a number of appropriate direct measures to check student learning at the program level. Assessment plans and reports showed that faculty have thought about ways to measure student learning, have tracked some data and had discussions about the implications. Several of the reports exemplify good practice in assessment. For example The Counseling and Special Education Department Assessment Report shows clear student learning objectives, measures, activities, analysis of results, and discussion of implications. The addition (or publication) of charts for the data would complete the report. Models such as this can share best practice with other departments which need to move forward in assessment progress.

A standardized reporting form is not used throughout the campus. Additionally, the reports currently reside in the various departments. In order to provide a clearer institutional record, which can be referenced and potentially shared with other stakeholders such as the business community and students, the College needs to create a database or central repository to streamline the process. Senior Administrators and deans understand this and expressed the need for assistance with this task.

Several people also explained that the addition of an assessment director (who was hired while the Team conducted the Checkup Visit) is expected to solve some of the challenges of systematizing and standardizing the data collection and reporting. The institution is excited about this addition, but this team cautions WSC that a new person alone cannot “fix” assessment for everyone or institutionalize it in the timeframe necessary. It is apparent that WSC leadership supports assessment, but two years have passed without visible evidence of significant improvement regarding the HLC assessment mandate. Consideration of how and what to report to the public/external stakeholders would be the next step.

WSC has been involved in reforming its general education program for three years and is making progress in assessing it, but they have not yet completed the assessment of this program at this date for a scheduled implementation of fall 2008. Clear learning outcomes have been identified and a robust description of courses and alignment with the outcomes has occurred. The capstone experience course has the potential to produce an assessment tool which can be used to measure these outcomes. Further, the General Education Committee seems to understand the importance of soliciting input from faculty who will deliver the courses. The Committee will monitor the courses and coordinate the assessment.

Opportunities to share information can be increased. Several faculty talked about the benefit of their department retreats for analyzing assessment results and completing assessment work. Since institution-wide faculty meetings occur only three times a year, there isn't a forum for sharing across the entire institution. Creating opportunities to share best practice could enhance the ability to improve practice for everyone. WSC can also elevate their assessment activities by soliciting faculty and administrative staff to attend the HLC Assessment Academy or similar professional development experiences.

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations

Review of the institution's approach to capitalizing on recommendations identified by its last Systems Appraisal in the *Strategic Issues Analysis*.

The following section discusses strategic issues identified in the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report.

1. The Systems Portfolio Feedback report stated that "WSC does not systematically report on its supportive campus environment criterion."

In this area, WSC did not provide a substantive update to this criterion to the QCV team. No additional processes are explained, no additional data is reported. This strategic issue continues while WSC is revising that category. Leadership acknowledged that not all AQIP committees had completed their work and this issue will be addressed.

2. The Systems Portfolio Feedback Report stated that "Key collaborative partnerships are not well documented. Additional opportunity might easily result if identified processes were utilized to assess collaborative relationships and stakeholder needs. Systemic analysis of stakeholders might also reveal unmet needs or opportunities."

WSC has taken a few steps to improve their processes related to collaborative relationships. It was apparent during the QCV that the collaborative relationships are critical to the mission and long-term success of WSC. Creating a central point of administration with distributed management hold promise as a means of improving WSC's current system without adding unnecessary expense.

3. The Systems Portfolio Review Team stated that "WSC's communication structures are reported to be top down with dissatisfaction regarding the quality of communication at lower

levels. High performing institutions develop ways to increase the flow of communication in all directions, share ideas and skills within the organization, and tap into knowledge and skills of other stakeholder groups.”

WSC can still benefit from invigorating its internal communication processes so that AQIP activity is “on the radar” for the entire faculty and staff culture. Faculty and administration generated ideas about how the information flow can be enhanced. WSC appeared to have some “pushback” regarding how AQIP was first applied to campus. WSC administration responded with a revised strategy, improved communication processes, and stakeholder involvement. The result, at least anecdotally, is an improved receptiveness to quality improvement.

4. The Systems Portfolio Feedback Report stated that “WSC cites the 11% drop in enrollment as a significant concern, but no systems are apparent to address this issue in a systematic fashion. Without a system of processes to guide and integrate improvement with recruiting, retention, program development, marketing and scholarship/financial assistance to maintain/increase enrollment, WSC may limit its ability to compete and ultimately impact its ability to sustain its mission.”

WSC correctly identified the enrollment challenge as a primary motivator and has spent significant effort to maintain a healthy recruiting strategy. Their aggressive campaign to address declining enrollment has reversed the trend. Administration reported an increase in enrollment since the Systems Portfolio review. Learning communities, additional recruiters, and a marketing study and campaign have contributed to this improvement. WSC appears to have met this strategic concern through adapting innovative ideas.

It remains unclear, however, the extent to which traditional recruitment efforts still dominate their processes, or the extent to which process improvement occurred in these areas.

5. The Systems Portfolio Review Team reported that “WSC is transitioning to a process of systematic review and continuous improvement. WSC has just started creating baseline data, and this lack of data is evident throughout the Systems Portfolio. There is concern that WSC is still transitioning after three years. While the organization identifies various improvements that have been made and/or improvements to be made, there does not appear to be a systematic improvement process to evaluate progress, to target priorities to make improvements, and to communicate improvements to enhance learning throughout the organization as they relate to the criteria. One example of commitment to quality can be shown

by developing an accountability and recognition system which celebrates individuals and teams who achieve success through an attention to quality.”

Continuous improvement is not yet systematic or systemic but seems to be practiced in “pockets” across campus. WSC’s action projects have been successful and there is less stakeholder resistance to quality improvement. An earlier attempt at merging quality improvement into the WSC culture was met with some concern. Even now, the focused approach performed by AQIP council and internal teams has not been distributed systematically throughout the WSC culture. The role of data in decision-making is not well articulated, and improvement seems to be a natural byproduct of discussion rather than process consideration. Strategic communication can dramatically improve the way AQIP is perceived and applied at WSC. Creating opportunities such as the college-wide and department retreats and workshop opportunities can enhance the ability to share and apply AQIP principles to stakeholders. WSC stakeholders should consider showcasing their “best practices” that have produced process improvements and results. The previous practice of publishing an AQIP actions report (if modified and centrally focused) is an excellent idea, which several leaders mentioned re-establishing.

In the team’s judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Review of organizational commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement

The deep culture of continuous quality improvement as an organizing principle for the institution is not apparent. While campus leaders can relate *ad hoc* instances of success associated with AQIP, the team was unable to determine whether a majority of faculty, staff, and students embrace and practice continuous quality. There was some sense from conversations that the campus community may be aware that AQIP exists; however the understanding of how quality can pervade the culture seems absent. Communication strategies and professional development regarding continuous quality, process improvement, results management, and systems thinking training will likely invigorate their culture.

The College also needs a greater sense of urgency to create a pervasive culture of continuous improvement. For example, WSC reports not taking full advantage of system appraisal comments in a timely manner, apparently due to stakeholder resistance. Aligning

process improvement to a 3-year action project timeline misses opportunities. Smaller projects completed in much shorter timelines may provide organizational learning opportunities that can be taken back and applied at the department level and generalized across the campus. The key is to more aggressively respond to issues by applying quality improvement techniques and sharing results. Even a simple “in service” on PDSA (Plan – Do – Study – Act) methodology may spur learning that can be quickly applied in any unit. Resources such as those on the AQIP website as well as consulting books by experts such as Peter Senge (*The Dance of Change*, 1999) and John P. Kotter (*Leading Change*, 1996) may provide some more direction about systems change and creating a sense of urgency.

In the team’s judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

USDE issues related to default rate (renewal of eligibility, program audits, or other USDE actions)

The QCV team reviewed material related to USDE eligibility and found no compliance issues at WSC at this time. The average default rate is at 4.3%, well below the national average.

In the team’s judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Compliance with Commission Policy IV.A.8, Public Notification of Comprehensive Evaluation Visit

The QCV team reviewed material related to this item; no third party comments were filed. Therefore, the Team found no compliance issues at WSC at this time.

In the team’s judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations

Compliance with Commission policy 1.C.7, Credits, Program Length, and Tuition

The QCV team reviewed material related to this item and found no compliance issues at WSC

at this time. All programs, distribution of credits, and tuition are standardized for four-year colleges throughout the state and are consistent with higher education practice.

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations

Compliance with Commission policy IV.B.2, Advertising and Recruitment Materials

The QCV team reviewed several advertising brochures, the College website, catalog, and internal documents and found no compliance issues at WSC at this time.

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

Compliance with Commission policy III.A.1, Professional Accreditation, and III.A.3, Requirements of Organizations Holding Dual Institutional Accreditation

The QCV team reviewed material related to this item and found no compliance issues at WSC at this time. Wayne State has only one institution-wide accreditation relationship, with the Higher Learning Commission. Specialized program accreditations include The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (all graduate and undergraduate education programs) and the International Assembly of Collegiate Business Education for Business Administration programs.

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations

Compliance with Commission policy IV.B.4, Organizational Records of Student Complaints

The QCV team reviewed material related to this item and discussed the complaint process and reports with appropriate personnel. There are very few formal student complaints. The Team found no compliance issues at WSC at this time.

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the

Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

Other USDE compliance-related issues (specify)

The QCV team found no other USDE compliance issues at WSC at this time.

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

Other AQIP issues

1. A tone of collegiality, friendliness, and a frank and open approach to the Quality Checkup speak to the willingness of the college community to engage in continuous quality processes. Senior administration, deans and faculty leaders are invested in making the AQIP work and moving the college forward. What appears to be needed to push to the next level is the knowledge of how to infuse a sense of urgency and systems thinking throughout the entire college community. The College needs to make the transition from an emphasis on the hierarchical structure and separate departments and divisions to a more interactive and collaborative vision of the entire institution. Leadership expressed an awareness and understanding of this need.

2. Attention to high standards of practice in programs is very apparent. Faculty related several examples of students who had gone on to excel at other higher education or business endeavors, in particular through the Rural Health Opportunities Program (collaboration with the University of Nebraska Medical Center) and Mid-America Rural Health Opportunities (with Creighton University). Continuing to support these as well as share the Wayne State "story" with a broader public may help the College position itself for competition and changes in higher education.

3. A number of effective projects have been developed, some as a result of the focus on AQIP action projects. Service learning and learning communities, for example, are stellar best practice. The development of learning communities as part of the College culture has become

well-established. Reports from education faculty indicated that these work extremely well; students who have participated often recruit fellow students to participate. Service learning has also progressed as a result of the focus on learning communities. Interviews with faculty and deans included several reports of excellent projects and service to community agencies, the school district, and businesses. The commitment to community service, in particular, the relationship with the school district, continues to be a strength of the College and part of a strong partnership with the community. Conversations with the district superintendent and faculty who lead the process revealed a long history of collaboration. In addition, faculty reported on the positive results from the Study Abroad Program through the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

4. For the programs which have developed strong assessment processes, the heart of effective assessment--conversations and deliberation about the meaning of the results appears to produce effective practice and continual reflection on the curriculum. Many department assessment reports contained substantive discussion and reference to changes in curriculum and programs. Departments which have developed effective reporting systems might share their process to help move other departments forward.

5. Several people noted that Wayne State is a "best kept secret" in terms of the quality, personal attention, and the positive residential experience afforded students. As the College addresses ways to weather the changes in higher education, the College personnel have several ideas for enhancing marketing and recruitment.

6. Discussions with Administration and faculty noted the important and positive impact of the Wayne State Foundation on growth and development of the College. Leadership for the foundation and the support of many donors are exemplary.

7. The campus is an attractive, welcoming setting where students can experience learning in a residential environment. A major construction project currently in process will further enhance the campus appearance.

Activity	Purpose	Participants (total participants)
May 23		
Welcome	Introductions, Review AQIP issues for visit, Agenda, Q & A	President's Staff (10)
Compliance Review	Check On Student Financial Aid, Title IV Compliance, Marketing, Admissions, and Complaint Processes	Financial Aid Director, Marketing, Admissions Director, Vice President for Student Services (VPSS), Vice President for Administration and Finance (VPAF) (10)
Systems Portfolio Review	Clarification and Verification	Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA), Criterion group members, AQIP Council (25)
Extended Campus	Review Extended Campus Operations	Continuing Education Director and VPAA (15)
Institutional Profile	Review the Institutional Profile data	VPAA (15)
May 24		
Action Projects	Review of Recently Retired Projects and New Initiatives	Faculty and Staff Involved with the Projects, VPAA, AQIP Council (20)
Strategic Planning	Discuss Strategic Planning Processes and Issues.	President's Staff (10)
System Appraisal Review	Discuss Reviewers' Comments and Responses	AQIP Council, Deans, VPAA (15)
General Education	Discuss General Education, Review Process and Plans for General Education Assessment	General Education Committee, VPAA (25)
Open Session	General Discussion	Faculty, Staff (30)
Assessment	Discussion of Assessment in Academic Programs	Deans, VPAA (15)

May 25		
Organizational Quality Commitment	Discuss Past & Current Initiatives and Future Plans	President's Staff, Deans, Directors (20)
Closing Dialog	Discussion of the Quality Check-up Visit	President's Staff (20)