

Academy Application

DUE DATE: JULY 15, 2007

Name of Institution: **Wayne State College** City, State: **Wayne, Nebraska** Application Date: **7/30/07**

Preferred Point of Entry to the Academy:

- October 2007
 February 2008
 June 2008

Note: HLC will determine Academy entry point based on the Admissions Panel's recommendations and the process of constructing cohorts based on needs, goals, institutional types, mission, size, ...etc.

Application Questions:

Recent Efforts

1. *What is your "assessment story"? Evaluate your past and present efforts (include here things such as your accomplishments, issues, barriers, results, strategies).*

Accomplishments

Wayne State College (WSC) is a regional public, open-admission college geographically positioned to serve rural Nebraska. The College, a member of the Nebraska State College System, was founded in 1910 as a State Teacher's College. During the 1950s and 1960s liberal arts degrees and a Master's degree in Education were added. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, enrollment increased and the college developed academic programs in business and the arts and sciences. During the 1990s the college evolved into a comprehensive institution with equal emphasis on the arts and sciences, business, and teacher education. During the decades of enrollment growth and transition to a comprehensive college, new curricula were created and an academic structure developed to support this growth. The resulting fragmented curriculum and decentralized academic structure became resistant to change. Recognizing the limitations of the existing academic structure, the institution underwent an extensive review and implemented a more centralized academic structure on July 1, 2001. The reorganized structure includes four schools, each directed by a dean. The College's new academic structure has enhanced its ability to: provide greater opportunities for cross-disciplinary initiatives focused on improved student learning; allow for more flexible approaches to meet regional service needs resulting in improved recruitment of students and faculty; and improve the College's ability to adapt to and position itself within the changing environment of higher education.

In 2001 a strategic planning task force was selected representing students, faculty, professional staff, and staff to review, revise and adopt the mission, vision, and philosophy of Wayne State College. The following statements were proposed to guide our efforts in providing quality educational services.

Mission: Wayne State College is a comprehensive institution of higher education dedicated to freedom of inquiry, excellence in teaching and learning, and regional service and development. Offering affordable undergraduate and graduate programs, the College prepares students for careers, advanced study, and civic engagement. The College is committed to faculty-staff-student interaction, public service, and diversity within a friendly and collegial campus community.

Vision: To make a notable difference to rural and community life through learning excellence, student success, and regional service; a regional college of national distinction.

The philosophy of the College can be derived by means of a strict interpretation of the mission and vision:

Philosophy: The highest form of service (corresponding to its rank order in the Mission and Vision Statements) is to the disciplined pursuit of knowledge. All other forms of service (to students, to stakeholders, to the region, etc.) are subordinate to this form of service.

Student-learning expectations, practices, and developmental objectives are aligned with the mission, vision, and philosophy by means of assessment. Each department sets goals that in some way affirm the mission, vision, and philosophy of the College. These goals all have one thing in common: students are expected to attain a predetermined level of proficiency within their fields of study. To determine whether or not students are learning in a satisfactory manner, department members responsible for implementing specific programs within departments devise and implement assessment plans. The goals for specific programs are determined by faculty members responsible for implementing the program, and (or) by other faculty that have an interest in the program. Based on the results of assessment, each program modifies its practices when necessary in order to fulfill learning expectations and development objectives.

The College has also initiated an effective planning process with a renewed emphasis on assessment and quality improvement. The mission of the College guides the strategic planning process that is used to assess institutional effectiveness. In 1999, the president initiated a campus-wide process that revised the College's mission statement and developed institutional goals. In March 2002, a College strategic planning retreat involving representatives from all College constituencies was conducted to update the current strategic plan. The College employed techniques from the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) to facilitate campus-wide collaboration and assessment.

The General Education Committee was established in 2003 to review the courses that are required for all students. The General Education Committee completed the curriculum design process last year. This year the committee will establish assessment procedures to monitor the effectiveness of General Education courses and the goals established earlier.

The processes for student assessment have been re-organized over the past two years. The institution has established a new management scheme in the hopes of providing an efficient and manageable procedure for documenting continual assessment of student learning. With administration support, a new assessment organizational structure has been established with program assessment centered in the academic departments and general education assessment supervised by the General Education Committee and the Assessment Director.

General Education goals have been established in the past and are outlined in the current college catalog. The General Education Committee has revised these goals as a part of their review process. The new program will be phased in next fall (08). This committee is also in the process of developing a standardized assessment protocol for General Education courses. The current plan calls for assessment of General Education courses on a five-year rotation. Once each course is assessed, recommendations will be sent to the department. Changes are to be recommended based on compliance with current general education goals. Corrections to teaching methods, curriculum development, and course delivery are the responsibility of the department personnel.

Major assessment is the responsibility of the delivering department. Each department is responsible for developing course goals and objectives and determining the methods required to measure these objectives. Several departments are in the process of developing an online electronic portfolio application to provide continual interaction with the students as they progress through their program. Other methods of assessment might be standardized examinations, performance demonstrations, and experiential education.

To oversee the entire student assessment process on campus, the Assessment Oversight Committee has been assembled. This committee is responsible for monitoring assessment of General Education as well as assessment of the majors. With its guidance, student assessment will become standardized across campus and more visible to students and staff.

This process will assist students with their learning goals and assure that they are prepared to leave college and enter the working or academic world of their choice. It will benefit the faculty by developing a standardized process for course improvement.

Each school is responsible for establishing its student assessment goals and objectives at the school level. Departments accumulate their material and deliver it to the Dean of their school for further recommendations. Major assessment also involves the use of grades and course completion percentages.

Issues of Assessment

Wayne State College submitted a substantially updated Systems Portfolio in preparation for their AQIP Quality Checkup Visit (QCV) in May 2007. 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 complied with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

However, 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.

Therefore, the QC Team reported that 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 had thought about ways to measure student learning, had 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.

Barriers

Members of the campus community have not systematically assessed and reviewed at an institutional level the other distinctive objectives presented in this report. Currently, the college is transitioning to the (AQIP) process of systematic assessment review and continuous improvement.

The QC Team report indicated that a standardized reporting form was 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.

Results

During the QCV several people 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 cautioned 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 Higher

Learning Commission (HLC) assessment mandate. Consideration of how and what to report to the public/external stakeholders would be the next step.

The QC Team indicated that 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.

Strategies

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 during the QC Team visit. Since institution-wide faculty meetings occur only three times a year, there isn't a timely 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.

Needs and Benefits

2. *What are your most pressing needs that you expect to be addressed via your participation?*

Wayne State College is affiliated with AQIP accreditation and during a May 2007, Quality Checkup Team visitation, it was reported that the accreditation issue of systematizing assessment has not been completely addressed. Assessment exists on the campus, but in certain departments and schools there has never been a total systematic process put into action. Now, due to the AQIP evaluation, it is very important to do something and do it rather quickly. There is concern that WSC is still transitioning after several years of work. WSC needs a plan for instituting an institution-wide systematic improvement process to evaluate progress, to target priorities to make improvements, and to communicate improvements needed to enhance learning throughout the organization. Following the annual review of the WSC Strategic Plan from the Fall of 2006, the number one priority item selected and recommended for an AQIP Action Plan was to strengthen existing curriculum. This priority is under Section I, Teaching and Learning: Continuously improve academic quality and learning, subsection A, Strengthening Existing Curriculum, with subset indicators under General Education of systematically review and assess progress and revise curriculum based on committee findings.

3. *Why is the Academy key to your success now?*

Wayne State College will use the Academy of Assessment participation to serve as an AQIP action project. The mandate to comply to the AQIP recommendation to more fully address the issue of systematizing assessment is the driving force that has WSC committed to support efforts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the College assessment plan to enhance and improve the quality of student learning. The Academy can provide the necessary mentoring that WSC needs to accelerate and advance efforts to assess student learning and build an institution-wide commitment to assessment of student learning for a systematic plan for continuous quality improvement. It will also serve as a critical resource as we implement the new General Education program next year.

4. *What are your goals for the Academy? What do you think will be your focus during the Academy (e.g., projects, initiatives, activities, work)?*

A comprehensive, systematic assessment plan for the College and strategies for engagement by the entire institution would be developed as a strategy for understanding, confirming, and improving student learning. The focus would be specifically directed to the systematic review and assessment progress of the general education program. This plan would include: (1) guidelines for a well-planned, systematic, and ongoing process of program and course assessment, (2) collaboration techniques to

enhance the process for association between the school's and department's mission, goals, and objectives, (3) descriptions of multiple measures of assessment, (4) methods of engaging faculty, staff, students and administration in the assessment process, (5) measures to improve the teaching and learning process, (6) procedures for the planning, budgeting and allocating of resources, and (7) reporting methods to provide evidence in support of changes and improvements.

Commitment and Focus

5. *What evidence demonstrates your commitment to and capacity for assessment of student learning (include things such as evidence of presidential and academic commitment to full participation, plans for involving the people and groups to accomplish your goals, financial and other resource support, inclusion of the broader institutional community)?*

In July 2007, the College added the professional staff position of assessment director to coordinate and support assessment and the evaluation activities across the campus. The assessment director will:

- Work with academic school deans, department chairs and faculty in developing, maintaining, and conducting effective assessment activities.
- Provide assistance to academic and administrative departments in conducting assessment activities.
- Design and develop an assessment handbook for annual assessment plans and reports.
- Review and gives feedback, as appropriate, on assessment plans and annual assessment program reports.
- Serve as chair of the Assessment Oversight Committee.
- Plan and conduct workshops and other faculty development programs to assist faculty in conducting effective and meaningful assessment activities.
- Assist in AQIP evaluation process.

The Senior Administrators and deans understand the accreditation need to focus the institution on a systematic method of assessment and are encouraging and supporting the attendance of an assessment team at the Academy for Assessment. The make-up of this core team of five members would be the assessment director and four members of the General Education Committee to provide representation from the four schools, targeting members who serve dual roles as department chairs and faculty members. A substantial budget has been appropriated for the assessment office to assist in assessment projects and initiatives. In addition, each school is working with their School Assessment Committee to improve assessment in their departments. WSC uses a variety of means to gather information about ways to improve its processes and systems: forums using the National Issues Forum format; focus groups; general meetings of faculty and staff; surveys; and planning retreats. In-service time is being provided for retreats by the support of the Senior Administrators and deans to cancel classes to provide time for faculty to work on assessment evaluation and planning. Both AQIP and the strategic planning process provide opportunities to review current practice and identify strengths and weaknesses.

Potential Impact

6. *What results do you want to achieve by the end of four years in the Academy? What is the potential for impact on the institution? On learning and teaching? On the culture?*

By the end of four years in the Academy, WSC would like to be able to demonstrate a sustained effort to implement assessment processes that are workable, reasonable, meaningful, and useful in confirming and improving student learning and in assuring and advancing broader educational and organizational quality. Decisions for improving student learning would be based on reported data from the assessment process.

The implementation of a systematic assessment plan for the institution would be enhanced through active engagement of the principles and procedures developed and exchanged through the

Academy experience. The assessment data could be utilized to satisfy external mandated accountability requirements. Student learning would be improved through the integration of the institution's processes for program review, along with departmental and organizational planning. A review to ensure how each department or unit analysis of information and data aligns with the student learning goals of the organization would be part of the assessment report to be prepared and submitted by each department or unit. The assessment report would be reviewed by the supervisors above the submitting department or unit. Results of the analysis would be incorporated into the institution's assessment report. The department or unit analysis of information would be documented in a format that ties it to the overall institutional objective or objectives that it supported. Department or unit goals would be submitted in a format that links them to the institutional goals and objectives. Department or unit annual reports and special reports would be collected in the assessment office to convey their information in a format and manner that ties department or unit goals to their respective institutional goals and objectives for improvement of student learning.

Steps would be taken to insure the appropriate involvement of students, staff, administrators, and stakeholders in the development and review of the assessment process. The Assessment Academy team would be able to assist in the engagement of faculty campus-wide in the deployment of the systematic assessment plan. A desired outcome would be more focus on improving teaching rather than simply delivering courses. When assessment is embedded effectively within the institutional system, it will help focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of education at WSC.

7. How will your work in the Academy contribute to student learning? How will it be significant to student learning?

Work in the Academy will establish an ongoing, systematic mechanism for assessing, reviewing, and improving programs at WSC with emphasis on general education. This program assessment plan will include measurable outcomes and assessment that can be analyzed and results implemented for student learning improvement. The connections among classroom, course, program and institutional assessment will become more evident and interdependent. The common element of all levels of effective assessment at the College will be internally motivated by faculty. These continuous assessments efforts will lead to the goal of providing students with opportunities for optimal learning. Excellence in education occurs as the result of integrating the results of assessment to enhance student learning with institutional planning and budgeting.

With a systematic, ongoing process of assessment in place, student learning will become the center of all institutional endeavors. The institution will assess student learning to provide students with the skills and knowledge necessary to attain personal success and fulfill their public responsibilities in a global and diverse society.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Application Due Date: July 15, 2007

Before you email your *Academy Application* to academy@hlcommission.org, make certain it has been reviewed and approved by your institution's CEO.

APPLICATION AFFIRMATION

I affirm that the application emailed to academy@hlcommission.org presents our institution accurately, and that we agree, if admitted, to commit to meaningful and productive participation in the four-year Academy for Assessment of Student Learning.

(Copy with signed signature will be faxed) 7/31/2007
Signature of Organizational CEO **Date**

Dr. Richard Collings, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

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Include the affirmation in the electronic delivery of the application or fax to the Commission, attention to Jonathan Keiser: (312) 263-7462.