



The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools

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30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400 | Chicago, IL 60602 | 312-263-0456
800-621-7440 | Fax: 312-263-7462 | www.ncahlc.org

Serving the common good by assuring and advancing the quality of higher learning

April 29, 2009

David Reist
President
Highland Community College
606 West Main Street
Highland, KS 66035-4165

Dear President Reist:

Enclosed is the report of the team that conducted the Highland Community College Quality Checkup site visit. In addition to communicating the team's evaluation of your compliance with the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation and with the Commission's Federal Compliance Program, the report captures the team's assessment of your use of the feedback from your last Systems Appraisal and your overall commitment to continuous improvement.

I hope you will read and study the report carefully, because the team invested heavily in preparing for and conducting this visit, and its perceptions and advice are valuable to your institution. Please consider distributing it widely throughout your institution, since its positive feedback can be helpful in strengthening and broadening involvement in your quality improvement efforts.

A copy of the report will be read and analyzed by the AQIP Panel that reviews institutions for Reaffirmation of Accreditation at the time your review is scheduled. Prior to that review, we will send you a listing of the materials the Panel will consider, and give you an opportunity to update or supplement them if you so desire.

Since we are still working to develop a permanent Quality Checkup process that delivers real value to the institutions participating in AQIP, we would welcome any comments, cautions, or advice you wish to share with us, either about the visit itself, the report, or any related topic.

Sincerely,

Stephen D. Spangehl
Vice President

QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

Highland Community College

Highland, Kansas
March 25-27, 2009

Quality Checkup team members:

Dr. Sharon Katterman
Director, Resource Development &
Institutional Effectiveness
Moraine Valley Community College

Mr. Albert Reed
Dean of Business & Technologies
Santa Fe Community College

Academic  Quality Improvement Program

The Higher Learning Commission
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504
800-621-7440 • www.ncahlc.org

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

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.

Based on portfolio feedback, Highland has developed a strategic plan and a Strategic Planning Council to oversee planning. The strategic plan includes a crosswalk indicating how each opportunity and outstanding opportunity statement from the appraisal report fits into the strategic plan's goals and objectives. During the course of the visit, the Quality Checkup visitors assisted Highland administrators with methods for conducting annual planning that is connected with their new strategic plan.

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

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.

No accreditation issues were identified in Highland's last Systems Appraisal report.

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

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.

In order to fully comply with AQIP's expectations, Highland must implement their strategic and annual planning processes within the next year. These processes should include all components of the Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle referenced in Highland's portfolio. In addition, the institution needs to clearly communicate their strategic and annual plan initiatives to all internal and external stakeholders. Roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders should also be identified and conveyed.

The reviewers note that while the development of the strategic plan is a significant step forward, more attention is needed to better integrate AQIP principles throughout the institution to address appraisal opportunities. Highland's reliance on the strategic plan as the major focus of its AQIP

initiative has, perhaps, limited actionable quality progress across the broader institution. Some employees expressed a sense of burden at the task of addressing the opportunities that were identified in the appraisal. The reviewers encouraged faculty and staff to look at areas within their own sphere of influence, as well as the broader Action Projects and strategic plan, where they can make 'bottom-up' improvements to address identified opportunities. As noted in the next section, participants in the discussions did, in fact, present example of quality initiatives taking place on the campus that had only been addressed in the portfolio within Context, rather than in the Process, Results and Improvement sections.

Review of organizational commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement

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.

Since the Systems Appraisal was completed in February 2008, this institution hired an outside consultant to help design a Strategic Plan. The institution now needs to implement this plan in order to fully comply with AQIP expectations. It is important for Highland's quality improvement processes to include data collection, analysis and use of results for continuous improvement. The Quality Checkup visitors observed a number of aspects within Highland's current culture that positions the institution to advance the college's continuous improvement initiatives. These include, but are not limited to:

- Initiatives exist, as demonstrated in reports from the Assessment Team and the student leaders' Creating an Invitational Campus Culture that can serve as examples of continuous improvement for other departments on campus
- Program development and improvement is underway at the regional sites that demonstrate that the institution is addressing current and future student and stakeholder needs
- An Office of Institutional Research has been established to support continuous improvement
- Faculty and staff understand and appreciate that being an AQIP institution means that the college establishes and owns its improvement priorities
- Highland has completed two AQIP Action Projects and currently has three Action Projects in place: Distance Learning, Athletics, and Retention

- Involvement of regional site coordinators and staff on the assessment and Action Project teams

The reviewers identified examples of processes and quality 'pockets' across the institution where measurement and use of results for continuous improvement is occurring. These efforts can be brought to light by connecting them with the strategic plan and AQIP initiatives. There was a perception on the part of some faculty and staff that the process/results/improvement cycle was limited to Action Projects or specific goals in the strategic plan, rather than embracing a data-informed culture within every level of the organization. As a result, the commitment of Highland employees to AQIP has not been fully realized or documented.

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

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.

Highland's loan default has increased from 3.2 in 2005 to 8.7 in 2006 due to federal loan policy changes that make loans available to everyone. The College works with an outside collection agency to educate borrowers about loan rights and responsibilities and to explore additional steps it might take to reduce its loan default rate.

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

The team is unclear whether the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup.

Highland reported that in December it had developed the notice for newspaper publication and planned to publish it after the first of the year. The institution was uncertain whether or not it was published and provided no documentation that it had been. Therefore, the institution published it again during the 10 days prior to the visit. Since it was published so close to the visit, it was not surprising that no third party comments were received.

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

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.

No issues or findings were identified.

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

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.

No issues or findings were identified.

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

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.

No issues or findings were identified.

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

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.

Highland provided documentation indicating that four students have filed sexual harassment grievances during the past two years. Three of the four were investigated and concluded by Human Resources in a timely manner. One of the grievances moved beyond HR to a Grievance Committee which resolved the issue in a timely manner.

Other USDE compliance-related issues

None noted.

Other AQIP issues

The Quality Checkup Team reminded the institution's responsible parties of the AQIP requirement that Highland have three active Action Projects at all times. As a result of the visit, it was determined that Highland does have three active Action Projects. However, these projects could not be accessed on the AQIP Action Project Directory or on the institution's AQIP web site. The team recommends that Highland update the AQIP Action Project Directory and their own AQIP web site regularly to include AQIP Action projects, the most current Systems Portfolio and Systems Appraisal Report, and other AQIP activities and outcomes.