Lake Superior COLLEGE

Quality Program Summary 2014

QUALITY PROGRAM SUMMARY

February 26, 2014

HISTORY (2001-2010)

Lake Superior College was created in 1995, granted initial accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission in 1998, and accepted into AQIP in 2001. Thus, LSC's membership in AQIP spans 13 years, representing two thirds of its history.

For the first 10 years of LSC's AQIP participation, planning and oversight was provided by a 40-50 member Institutional Effectiveness (I.E.) Committee. All administrators were members, and the large size enabled the inclusion of multiple representatives from all units across the institution, as well as students and the community.

The I.E. Committee was productive. Continuous quality improvement concepts became part of the College's vernacular. Many employees, particularly those in supervisory positions, felt empowered to look for and suggest opportunities for improvement. Initiatives from units across the College were supported by competitively awarded quality improvement grants. Funding for the I.E. Committee's quality improvement grants varied from year to year, but for several years exceeded two hundred thousand dollars. Eventually, budget pressures reduced the amounts available and finally eliminated the grants altogether.

Action Projects selected by the IE Committee and carried out by teams drawn from the IE Committee's membership led to both large and small improvements in the College's operations. Notable successes included Action Projects that planned and implemented a First Year Experience course (now called the Student Success Seminar) and a biannual Student Engagement Day (now called Student Success Day). Notable failures included Action Projects that developed a Process Improvement Manual and a Computer Literacy Assessment, neither of which were successfully institutionalized.

The I.E. Committee also participated, to some extent, in long term institutional planning. For instance, over the years several IE Committee retreats were held for the purpose of conducting and reviewing environmental scans, developing strategic priorities, and identifying new initiatives. Those efforts were, at least generally, aligned with the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) System's strategic directions and other planning processes. However, the College's annual work plan development process took place outside of the I.E. Committee structure.

REORGANIZATION (2010-2011)

For many years, the last item on most agendas for IE Committee meetings was a Plus/Delta process improvement session to discuss what "worked" and "didn't work" during that meeting. Longer and more general Plus/Delta sessions were undertaken at the end of each academic year.

Over time, it became increasingly evident that the I.E. Committee structure was no longer working well. The Plus/Delta session at the end of the 2009-10 academic year led to plans to re-evaluate the IE Committee's structure and function. The result was suspension of the I.E. Committee in the fall of 2010, and several open forum type listening sessions for all employees to discuss ideas for change. Those sessions led the College's then Vice President for Institutional Advancement to develop a proposal to replace the IE Committee with a smaller AQIP Steering Committee.

At about the same, during the summer of 2010, the College's long-time President, Dr. Kathleen Nelson, retired and was replaced by Dr. Patrick Johns. Dr. Johns undertook a complete review of the College's administrative structure and in late 2010 eliminated four Vice Presidential positions and laid off the persons in those positions, including the Vice President for Institutional Advancement.

In March, 2011, institutional responsibility for AQIP was delegated to a new position, the Director of Accreditation, Research, and Assessment. The Director reports to the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, who was designated the Accreditation Liaison Officer to the Higher Learning Commission. A new, ten member AQIP Steering Committee to oversee LSC's accreditation work was formed. The intent was for the AQIP Steering Committee to be an advocate for and oversee continuous improvement on campus.

Subsequently, in preparation for LSC's 2012 AQIP Strategy Forum, the AQIP Steering Committee reviewed the history and operation of the I.E. Committee. Former members of the I.E. Committee, including the College's former President, were consulted.

The review concluded that the effectiveness of the I.E. Committee had declined over time for a number of reasons. Over the long term, administrators and employees alike were unable to maintain the high level of energy and commitment that AQIP requires. I.E. Committee members were not regularly rotated off and replaced; many felt "trapped" on the Committee or grew tired of the work. Members were assigned constituencies, but in practice there was little reporting to and consulting of those constituencies. As a result, despite its broad representation, the I.E. Committee became isolated from the College as a whole.

Moreover, with 40-50 members, it proved difficult to achieve consensus, so various types of voting processes were often used to make decisions. That proved problematic because members of some units, such as Information Technology and Academics Affairs, felt they were under-represented and could not effectively compete for projects and funding. For many, this compromised the legitimacy of the Committee.

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

The AQIP Steering Committee meets as needed, generally two to three times a semester. Meetings are generally two hours in length. Currently, the Committee is comprised of:

- The Vice President of Academic and Student Services
- The Director of Accreditation, Research, and Assessment (Chair)
- Three Faculty Members (one representing each Academic Division)
- The Director of Advising
- The Director of the Multi-cultural Center
- The Director of Web Services
- A Community Member
- A Student designated by the Student Senate (currently vacant)

The Steering Committee was actively involved in the writing of LSC's 2013 Systems Portfolio and is involved in preparations for the College's Quality Checkup Visit. The Steering Committee also solicits ideas for new Action Projects as needed, charters new projects, and monitors their progress. Generally, there is now very little cross-membership between the Action Project teams and the Steering Committee.

Because it is a relatively recent replacement for the long-time I.E. Committee, the AQIP Steering Committee has recently undertaken a review of its role and effectiveness. That review, coupled with insights gained from preparation of the new Systems Portfolio, has made clear that the Steering Committee needs to be integrated into the College's overall planning processes. Those processes are themselves undergoing a comprehensive review.

RECENT ACTIVITY

SYSTEMS PORTFOLIO:

The four years since submission of the College's 2010 Systems Portfolio have been characterized by adjustment to substantial changes. As a result, LSC's 2013 Systems Portfolio was entirely rewritten from the one submitted in 2010.

A web-based copy of the College's Systems Portfolio is posted here: http://www.lsc.edu/About-LSC/Accreditation/

SYSTEMS APPRAISAL FEEDBACK REPORT:

The Systems Appraisal Feedback Report dated February 6, 2014, was received by LSC on February 21st, after this Quality Program Summary was substantially complete. This new report will be reviewed prior to the Quality Checkup visit, but the College is not in a position to respond to it here.

LSC's Systems Appraisal Feedback Report dated September 27, 2010, pointed out important opportunities for improvement that LSC categorized under three overarching themes: processes, benchmarking, and data integrity. In response, the College has made concerted efforts to make improvements falling within these themes.

Processes:

The College's Strategic Plan contains a goal to "Identify and Streamline a minimum of three processes per year and track savings, efficiencies, and quality." An action project was chartered to focus on developing a process to make process improvements. Though that project has struggled, in the past two years the College has made deliberate and concerted efforts to improve multiple institutional processes, including those for its College in the Schools (concurrent enrollment) program, website management, program reviews, student complaints, course schedule development, and IT support.

Benchmarking:

The College has identified peer institutions both within MnSCU and out-of-state for purposes of benchmarking and comparisons. Administration of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement every other year and annual administration of the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory provide benchmarking data on student engagement and satisfaction. LSC has also joined with approximately 15 other AQIP institutions to develop and administer an annual Partnership Survey, which provides benchmarking data on the College's important partnerships.

Data Integrity:

The College's Strategic Plan contains a goal to "Improve Data Integrity and Data Based Decision-Making." An action project was chartered to focus on improving data integrity. That project has proven to be productive and will likely be transformed into a standing committee. In addition, to ensure consistency, the Institutional Research office has been designated as the official source of all college data.

ACTION PROJECTS:

The College currently has four active action projects:

1. Comprehensive Online Teacher Training

    A new training program for faculty focused on technology and the pedagogy of online teaching was piloted in the summer of 2012 and expanded in 2013. An AQIP Action Project is expanding and institutionalizing the training, which offers a free workshop for up to twenty instructors new to online teaching or with fewer than two years of online teaching experience. Total instructional time is 24 hours with an ongoing mentoring component thereafter. The program will be further expanded in the near future to include additional training for more experienced online instructors.

2. Sustainable Twin Ports - Early Adopter Project

    In early 2013 LSC chartered an AQIP Action Project under which the College is participating in the Sustainable Twin Ports Early Adopter Project. The 2013 Early Adopter Cohort, consisting of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Canal Park Brewing Company, the University of Wisconsin-Superior, and LSC, committed to a process of comprehensive and strategic training in sustainability.

    This project will be closed out in the near future. It has been successful because it built on previous work, including a prior action project.

3. Data Integrity

    This Action Project has focused its attention on the College's data entry processes and developing a better understanding of the limitations of the College's data. An important unintended consequence of the project is that it has brought together persons who share an interest in data integrity but who because of institutional boundaries never would have compared notes but for the project.

    The Data Integrity Action Project has provided a venue for selecting data related processes that are important opportunities for improvement and setting targets for improvements. In addition to the work it has already done, the Project is developing a glossary of data-related terms to help data users better understand and interpret the College's data. Work has also started on developing a set of data integrity queries that will be run on a regular schedule to identify and clean-up "dirty" data.

    To institutionalize the work it has started, the Action Project team likely will recommend creation of a standing Data Integrity committee after completion of its current initiatives.

4. Process Improvement

    Many LSC processes remain undocumented, at least formally. A Process Review Manual was developed in 2005 as part of an AQIP Action Project; however, its use was never institutionalized and its champions have left or retired. A current "Process Improvement" Action Project is again tackling the challenge of documenting and improving processes. One hoped for outcome of that project will be a formal method for choosing and conducting process improvement reviews. In the meantime, the College has been reviewing and mapping support processes in a reactive manner as problems arise.

CHALLENGES

An ongoing challenge for LSC's quality improvement program has been that the College's planning processes have never been fully integrated with AQIP. Achieving alignment has always been inherently difficult because LSC must be responsive to the MnSCU System's planning processes. Recently those processes have proceeded without regard to the content and timing of LSC's own processes.

In the two years since the adoption of LSC's current Strategic Plan, MnSCU has adopted a new Strategic Framework, developed a new comprehensive list of Performance Metrics with associated institutional goals, and created a new comprehensive plan called "Charting the Future" that will be implemented over the next year. These developments will increasingly challenge LSC to maintain its own quality improvement initiatives while responding to additional expectations, constraints, and mandates that are largely outside its control.

To address this challenge, the College's President recently tasked the College's Vice President of Academics and Student Services with developing a plan to integrate all of LSC's goals, strategies, ongoing initiatives, and special projects with those of MnSCU, while at the same time giving due consideration to HLC's accreditation related requirements and compliance with U.S. Department of Education requirements. The objective is to create a continuous planning process and structure to institutionalize such planning and integration in the future.

Another challenge going forward is that the original AQIP champions at LSC have all left the institution and there has been significant staff turnover. The College's current leaders and many of its employees have relatively little experience with AQIP. Thus, despite LSC's long history as an AQIP institution, AQIP terminology and processes are no longer embedded in the culture to the extent they once were.

CONCLUSION

The notion of continuous quality improvement fits comfortably with the institution's culture and the disposition of its current leaders. However, in the thirteen years that LSC has been part of AQIP, the College has never made an intentional and comprehensive review of its Quality Program or evaluated the results of its participation in AQIP. As the College's current accreditation cycle comes to an end, now is a propitious time ask whether AQIP continues to serve the institution well.

Over the past two years, the College has found that its major opportunities and challenges have, for the most part, called for responses that do not fit particularly well within the AQIP paradigm. Recent improvement initiatives, such as the re-design of the College in the Schools program and the relocation of a number of industrial programs to a new downtown site, have aligned well with the College's Strategic Plan and Master Academic Plan but not with its AQIP processes.

Moreover, AQIP participation is increasingly viewed by many at LSC as a matter of compliance rather than improvement. In particular, it is unclear whether the more prescriptive requirements of AQIP (e.g. three action projects at all times, and strategy forums at prescribed times) are currently producing benefits for the College sufficient to justify the resources that must be devoted to making a good faith effort to satisfy them.

Thus, LSC's Quality Program is approaching a crossroads. With the upcoming completion of its current AQIP cycle, the institution's administration will need to decide whether to affirm the commitment of its predecessor administration to quality improvement through the AQIP process. To make that decision will require both a thorough review of HLC's recent revisions to AQIP and a careful review of the requirements and potential benefits of a possible transition to the Open Pathway.