

The State of the Quality Effort

In preparation for our November 2010 Quality Checkup Visit, Northern Wyoming Community College District has prepared this narrative, required to be no more than 10 pages, describing the current state of our quality program: how it is organized and what we have done over the past few years. We have updated our Systems Portfolio, processed and used the feedback from a Systems Portfolio Appraisal, launched and completed Action Projects, worked toward integrating continuous quality improvement throughout our organization.

Northern Wyoming Community College District
October 1, 2010

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Introduction

Our Senior Staff Team leads our Quality Effort and our response to the *2008 Systems Portfolio Feedback* report. Senior Staff selects institutional strategies and approves AQIP Projects and other initiatives based on identified priorities. Each member of Senior Staff provides input to the Systems Portfolio based on individual expertise and areas managed. Overall leadership is provided by the President and implementation of continuous quality in functional areas is the responsibility of the functional head. Our Trustees fully support our quality effort and are themselves working to learn about and better understand CQI.

NWCCD joined AQIP in February 2005 and began the journey to become a continuous quality improvement organization. At that time we collected standard information about students and finances and filed required reports to the State and various agencies, but information was rarely analyzed for meaning and decision-making was largely intuitive. We submitted our first Systems Portfolio in October 2007, a process that helped us better understand where we were on the journey as well as the magnitude of the culture shift necessary if we were to reach that goal.

We have accomplished significant growth over the past three years, particularly in the two areas we identified as priorities at the time of the 2008 Strategy Forum: assessment of student learning (Category One), and planning and measuring continuous improvement (Category Eight). Each is discussed in detail below.

Systems Portfolio Update 2010 incorporates substantive Results sections for every Category; our use of measures and baselines is increasing and our ability to pull meaning from data is improving. Our goal is to be an institution that focuses its energies appropriately and where every employee understands how CQI can improve his or her own work and where decisions are appropriately data-based. We are not there yet, but we are well on our way and have good forward momentum.

Category One: Helping Students Learn

We are a student-focused institution and "student success" is the heart of our Mission. Faculty commitment to that mission has never wavered, and we have a long history of good teaching by our full-time faculty and our dedicated part-time faculty. However, we have needed particular improvement in two key areas: (1) ensuring unity of effort across our two campuses; (2) documenting that students did, in fact, learn what we believed we were teaching.

In January 2005 a One-College Task Force was asked to develop recommendations to improve collegiality and consistency across academic areas; their report in January 2006 contained a number of recommendations. One of our first AQIP Projects (launched February 2006) was a review and re-design of Governance that also made evident the need to reevaluate the organization and structure of the Academic Division. Some organizational changes were made following the One-College report and the full reorganization was implemented in Fall 2009. This reorganization has improved communication and the clarity of reporting lines and will provide academic leadership support that has historically been left

up to faculty to manage on their own time and energy. In addition, it is expected that this reorganization will alter the governance structure and will guarantee representation of academic interests in institutional planning and decisions.

Spring 2006 we launched a series of very ambitious AQIP Projects, all designed to improve student success: One-Stop Services (to smooth and simplify student access to student services) and Student Success Curriculum (to assist students likely to experience academic difficulty) were launched in March 2006, followed by First-Year Experience Planning in August 2006 and First-Year Implementation in September 2007. The First-Year and Success Curriculum projects led to the development of a new Gateway Course for entering first-time students (first offered in Fall 2008), training in advising for all student advisors, development of a resource booklet for students and revision and expansion of our program to orient entering students to the institution.

By the start of Spring semester 2008 the One-Stop and Student Success projects were close to completion and in March 2008 we launched an AQIP Project to update General Education competencies. As work moved forward it became evident the existing institutional assessment model was overly complicated and did not express our true goals. Over the next two years the Assessment Committee led the entire faculty in a full re-definition of the Core Abilities we aim to see in all graduates. Fall 2010 we will launch our first effort to implement the identified measures and build a database to document outcomes.

The assessment effort included training all faculty in basic concepts of assessment and the academic deans agree there has been improvement of general faculty understanding of measurement and how it applies to the art and practice of teaching, though much is still to be done in this area.

Concurrent with, but not as part of, the Assessment Project we developed new protocols for Program Review (implemented Fall 2008) and for New Program Development (implemented Spring 2010) and also introduced the Designing and Assessing Learning (DAL) model and the Worldwide Instructional Design Systems (WIDS) software support and management tool Fall 2008.

During the 2008-2009 academic year we re-established majors within our AA and AS degrees, with the long-term goal to move forward and develop outcome measures for all programs. The Assessment Project was retired in May 2010 and replaced by a new AQIP Project to identify and update Program Outcomes.

It is worth noting that the period from Summer 2005 to the present has seen three different Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs leading our efforts to improve the ways we help students learn. We credit our faculty and the strength of institutional commitment to our core mission for much of the sustained focus and progress that was achieved.

Category One: Next Steps

Our student-oriented AQIP Projects have been extremely ambitious, and we have struggled to maintain momentum and honor timelines. We have not done well at measuring outcomes, but an important exception is the Gateway course, which has improved retention of first-time students (see Table 1R2.3 in the 2010 Portfolio Update).

We see our current Program Outcomes AQIP Project as reasonably manageable, but our longer-term goal is to develop projects that are clearly stated, have short timelines and readily measured outcomes.

We also foresee continued emphasis on Institutional Assessment, for there is little that could be more important than discerning the degree to which students have learned what we believe we have taught them.

Our effort at assessment will include documentation of a small set of the very most important and universal learning outcomes. These assessment efforts will be discernible, documentable, trackable, and meaningful to the institution and to faculty.

We believe that, given time, our faculty will increasingly engage in independent (course and program level) assessment of their own volition as a result of the question generation that emerges from effective institution-wide assessment.

We believe the most important success we can achieve in our assessment efforts is to prompt assessment activities that are meaningful to individual faculty. Meaningful and useful practices developed and owned by individual faculty can lead to assessment-evaluation-reflection-assessment-evaluation-reflection cycles that over time become as natural as traditional grade administration. Shared at intra-institutional colloquia with enlivened colleagues such continuous learning on the part of faculty will lead us to the ultimate target of assessment: to prompt reflective teaching practice based upon data. The development of institution-wide inventories of assessment is only the beginning of the process at NWCCD.

Category Eight: Planning Continuous Improvement

The *2008 Feedback Report* identified five Strategic Issues, three of which involved the identification of measures and use of results for decision-making and to ensure mission-alignment. A fourth urged better use of benchmarks and comparisons of results to similar institutions. Measurement was an Opportunity in every Category, but we chose to focus on Category Eight as the one most identified with the work of the Institutional Effectiveness (IE) team charged with leading strategic planning and the transition to continuous quality.

The last two years have seen significant progress in the identification and use of measures and comparison benchmarks, as is evident by the greatly expanded reports of Results throughout the *Systems Portfolio Update 2010*.

The Institutional Effectiveness Team has worked with individual managers to provide support where needed. At the same time, much of the energy of the IE Team has been devoted to the effort to identify clear priorities and instill commitment to regular progress along planned timelines.

Summer 2005 we held our first Strategic Planning Retreat, which launched a year-long inclusive process to define a new Vision. By January 2006 we were launching our first round of AQIP Projects but it was not until the 2006 Annual Planning Retreat that we first articulated strategies, which were then discussed with employees and Trustees before becoming final. That Retreat also launched our first effort to organize the many priorities on the table and to create a tracking mechanism; *Projects Master* was helpful, but not successful in meeting our needs.

In January 2007 the IE Team turned its energy to producing the first Systems Portfolio, with specific Categories assigned to individual members of Senior Staff. This was an essential project and a valuable source of learning; an unintended consequence was that both strategic planning and work to identify meaningful measures were drastically slowed.

However, the Summer 2008 Planning Retreat produced a revised set of Strategies and formal statements of Goals for each, which were published in a brochure at the end of Fall Semester. Preparation for, and attendance at, the October 2008 Strategy Forum also helped Senior Staff identify priority areas of effort.

As the Strategies and Goals became a more formal Plan with Objectives and Timelines, those documents gradually replaced Projects Master. In January 2009 we launched the Planning Systems Integration AQIP Project, which centered on use of a formal Planning Calendar designed to ensure regular reports to Senior Staff about progress on Strategic Initiatives and AQIP Projects. We also developed formal internal protocols for proposing and retiring AQIP Projects, designed to create a more systematic process and to ensure that such projects support our Strategic Plan.

We next began to emphasize the importance of outcome measures for each strategy and goal because it became increasingly clear that managers were not thinking about the identification and measurement of actual outcomes. Instead, there was a tendency to focus on completing a project and moving on to the next initiative.

Spring 2009 we administered an all-employee *Climate Survey* that provided valuable information about our effectiveness in terms of leading and communicating, mission clarity, and valuing people. The survey was created as a continuation of a process that included a job satisfaction survey in 2003 and the *Examiner* survey in 2005, and specific items were designed to compare with results from those instruments. Senior Staff analysis and discussion of the data led to a commitment to significantly improve communication with employees and across divisions. Results from the survey are discussed in Categories 4, 5 and 8 of the 2010 Systems Portfolio Update.

Analysis of the 2009 CCSSE report made it clear that our full-time and part-time populations are very different, and part-time students appear to be less satisfied and less engaged. In Fall 2009 the Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs, Enrollment Management, and Institutional Effectiveness began a personal effort to better understand our part-time students and their needs. This effort was slowed considerably by the presidential transition during Spring 2010, as a result of which two of the three team members assumed new roles. A student survey is planned for Fall 2010 and work is proceeding under the Vice President Academic Affairs, Dean of Enrollment Management and Dean of Students.

The Portfolio Update launched in Spring 2009 covered Categories 1, 5, 7 and 8; the 2010 Update includes a full revision of information and reorganization under the new questions.

In Fall 2009 we also began to see significant progress at identifying outcome measures for Strategies and Goals, and as of this report four of our five current strategies have outcome measures, which are incorporated in the 2010 Portfolio Update, and the fifth exists in draft form. We are close to publishing a Balanced Scorecard for the District and our new President has committed to increased sharing of measures and data with Trustees.

Category Eight: Next Steps

The 2010 Planning Retreat was led by our new President. It included a session for all managers on AQIP and CQI principles, as well as intensive working sessions with Senior Staff on strategic planning and active initiatives for the current year. The 2011 Planning Retreat will focus on a full review of Strategies and Vision aimed at producing a new five-year strategic plan.

Although we believe we are making good progress toward our goal of becoming a continuous quality culture, we know there is much to do. Senior Staff has begun to use data to support choices and decisions, but the practice is not consistent. In the long term we look to see substantive decisions and recommendations routinely informed by data. Once that fundamental culture change occurs at the level of senior management, we believe the next step is for them to help all employees understand that CQI can be a part of routine operations and that quality improvement and measurement are a way of life that will help everyone do better work. To support that growth we also will need better skills for creating, organizing, and interpreting data.

Focus is difficult to achieve in an institution where growth and change are rapid. We are in the top ten community colleges nation-wide in terms of percentage of growth, and, like nearly all public institutions, our resources have stalled along with the economy. Leadership transitions during the past year in Academics, the Presidency, Gillette College, Student Services and Enrollment Management have contributed to uncertainty. Nevertheless, we have done very well at staying committed to continuous improvement, and the fact that our leadership changes have been internal has helped us regain momentum. The full leadership team is in place for the start of Fall Semester.

Institutional Support for Continuous Quality Improvement

Climate Survey 2009 made it clear that there is very broad support for, and commitment to, NWCCD and its Mission. There is broad and genuine commitment to quality, but most employees do not yet understand how CQI can support their personal goal to do their jobs well. The relationships between continuous quality improvement, AQIP and accreditation are genuinely difficult to articulate, and we realize that we should have started out in 2005 by talking about CQI, rather than about AQIP.

We are a small state institution with enrollment growth outstripping our budget. We are not in a position to fund a full-time dedicated position to provide CQI training and support across departments. Thus a busy team of senior managers must learn themselves and then lead by example, mentoring and coaching until CQI is integrated as normal practice in all areas. We have made remarkable progress, but there is much to be done.

Lessons Learned

As a result of our efforts over the past 3 years we have learned a number of lessons:

1. We must focus our energies more narrowly, selecting a fewer areas for emphasis, and
2. Sustain our focus until the goals are accomplished, and
3. Better help employees understand how their day to day efforts to improve fit into and help integrate CQI as a part of our culture and practices.

Quality Effort Priorities for the Next Five Years

1. Provide training in the use of measures and CQI principles for all employees
2. Steadily increase the use of measures in working sessions of Senior Staff
3. Ensure that key data used in decision-making are stored in an institutional depository that is shareable and password protected, along with appropriate information about the methods used in analysis
4. Continue our emphasis on Assessment of Student Learning, particularly the implementation of our newly developed measures of Core Abilities, followed by analysis and discussion of possible improvements for the new system
5. Launch broad efforts to engage faculty in collegial discussion of the results from institutional assessment as well as their own course and program level assessments
6. Implement a new emphasis on unity of effort and assessment of results across both operational processes and services to students
7. Carry out an intensive Planning Retreat for 2011 that will include full review and revision of Strategies and Vision, followed by a process that engages all employees in the conversation
8. Increase the size of the Institutional Effectiveness team, including a full-time dedicated position for an Institutional Effectiveness Director

Selected List of Quality Effort Milestones - Fall 2008 to Present

- March 2008 received *Systems Portfolio Feedback Report*; it was reviewed by Senior Staff, distributed to Trustees, and made available to all employees on our website
- March 2008 launched AQIP Project to update General Education Competencies
- April 2008 launched AQIP Project on Employee Orientation
- August 2008 Senior Staff Strategic Planning Retreat included a detailed review of feedback and the identification of two areas of emphasis for next 3 years
- Fall 2008 implemented new Program Review process
- October 2008 a six-member team attended Strategy Forum
- October 2008 all-campus retreat included discussion of Portfolio, Feedback, and Strategy Forum
- January 2009 launched an AQIP Project related to Category 8, Planning Systems Integration
- January 2009 began project to fully update Systems Portfolio
- February 2009 conducted Climate Survey of all employees
- Spring 2009 retired AQIP Project First Year Experience Implementation
- April 2009 launched AQIP Project on Early Alert to improve Student Retention
- May 2009 completed the reestablishment of majors within the AA and AS degrees
- June 2009 retired AQIP Project on Employee Orientation
- August 2009 Senior Staff Planning Retreat included discussion of *Climate Survey* and decision on follow-up action; appointed a Climate Team of three Senior Staff members to manage follow-up
- Fall 2009 implemented the full reorganization of the Academic Division
- September 2009 formed Senior Staff team to explore implications of 2009 CCSSE Report
- Fall 2009 launched Informal Conversations by Senior Staff members in response to Climate Survey data and revised Town Hall meeting format
- January 2010 launched a detailed review by Senior Staff of Portfolio Feedback and associated changes and improvements
- Spring 2010 implemented new Program Development Process
- April 2010 launched AQIP Project on Program Outcomes
- May 2010 retired AQIP Project on General Education Competencies
- August 2010 completed full *Systems Portfolio Update* and documented changes related to Feedback

Key Documents

The following documents are posted on the Institutional Research website
<http://www.sheridan.edu/offices/ir/>

- ❖ Academic Assessment Page
- ❖ AQIP Projects – proposals, minutes, reports
- ❖ AQIP Projects – Protocol for final report
- ❖ AQIP Projects – Protocol for proposing new projects
- ❖ Planning Calendar (part of AQIP Project Planning Systems Integration)
- ❖ Systems Portfolio 2007
- ❖ Systems Portfolio Update 2010
- ❖ Program Review Model and schedule of reviews
- ❖ Strategic Planning Brochure
- ❖ Strategic Planning Model

Our *Policy Manual*, which includes the Governance System, is at
<http://www.sheridan.edu/about/internalgovernance/policy.asp>

Our *Student Handbook* is at
<http://www.sheridan.edu/offices/ir/sr-stuhand1011.pdf>

Our *College Catalog* is at
<http://catalog.sheridan.edu/>