Higher Learning Commission
A commission of the North Central Association

230 South LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500 | Chicago, IL 60604-1411
312-263-0456 | 800-621-7440 | Fax: 312-263-7462 | ncahlc.org

November 8, 2013

Dr. David Buettner
Interim President
North Iowa Area Community College
500 College Dr.
Mason City, IA 50401-7299

Dear President Buettner:

Attached is the report of the team that conducted North Iowa Area Community College's Quality Checkup site visit. In addition to communicating the team's evaluation of your compliance with the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation and 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.

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.

Please acknowledge receipt of this report within the next two weeks, and provide us with any comments you wish to make about it. Your response will become a part of the institution's permanent record.

Sincerely,

Mary L. Green
Process Administrator, AQIP Accreditation Services

QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC)

Mason, City, IA
September 18-19, 2013

The Higher Learning Commission
A commission of the North Central Association

QUALITY CHECKUP TEAM MEMBERS:

Kenneth Urban
Vice President of Teaching, Learning, and Student Success
Nicolet College

Diane Douglas
Registrar
University of Wisconsin-Superior

Dwight Smith
Vice President of Academic Affairs
County College of Morris

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 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 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), including review of distance delivery and distributed education if the institution is so engaged.

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 reviewers 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 Quality Summary Report provided to AQIP by the institution is also shared with the evaluators. Copies of the Quality Checkup Report are provided to the institution's CEO and AQIP liaison. The Commission retains a copy in 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 issues, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with the Commission's standards and AQIP's expectations.

The team was provided with a wide range of documents that substantiated the institution's continuous quality improvement process, including its process for evaluating and improving programs. The team had the opportunity to meet with students, faculty, staff, board members, and community members.

In the systems portfolio, the team was unable to identify many processes or results; the lack of clarity in the portfolio led the team to identify six strategic issues. Once on site, however, it became clear to the team that NIACC was an institution truly committed to continuous improvement. This commitment was communicated by internal and external stakeholders at all levels, and the data that were presented during the visit clarified the issues that were obscured by lack of clarity in the portfolio itself.

Review of the organization's quality assurance oversight of its distance education activities.

In the team's judgment, the institution has presented satisfactory evidence that its distance education activities are acceptable and do comply with the Commission's standards and expectations. In a meeting with the staff from the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), the team found that NIACC had strong support for educational technology, professional development, and instructional quality. CETL offers a variety of professional development opportunities to ensure faculty members are well-prepared to deliver high-quality instruction.

The institution is approved by the Commission to offer up to 20% of its degree programs through distance delivery. To that end, NIACC offers dozens of its credit and non-credit courses online, with the potential to earn an AA or ASB degree. NIACC also offers courses through Iowa's fiber-optic interactive television network. The institution provides training for faculty members for distance delivery.

Review of the organization's quality assurance and oversight of distributed education (multiple campuses)

The team confirmed that the institution does not offer credit-bearing courses or programs at additional campuses at this time, and that the institution understands it must seek HLC approval before it offers 50% or more of any program at an additional location.

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.

Screening of Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components

The following section identifies any areas in the judgment of the Quality Checkup Team where the institution either has not provided sufficient evidence that it currently meets the Commission's *Criteria for Accreditation* (and the core components therein) or that it may face difficulty in meeting the *Criteria* and core components in the future. Identification of any such deficiencies as part of the Quality Checkup affords the institution the opportunity to remedy the problem prior to Reaffirmation of Accreditation. Items judged to be "Adequate but could be improved" or "Unclear or incomplete" during the Checkup Visit screening will not require Commission follow-up in the form of written reports or focused visits. However, Commission follow-up will occur if the issues remain apparent at the point of reaffirmation of accreditation.

Criterion 1: Evidence found in the Systems Portfolio	Core Component				
	1A	1B	1C	1D	
Strong, clear, and well-presented.		X		X	
Adequate but could be improved.	X		X		
Unclear or incomplete.					

Criterion 2: Evidence found in the Systems Portfolio	Core Component				
	2A	2B	2C	2D	2E
Strong, clear, and well-presented.	X	X		X	
Adequate but could be improved.			X		X
Unclear or incomplete.					

Criterion 3: Evidence found in the Systems Portfolio	Core Component				
	3A	3B	3C	3D	3E
Strong, clear, and well-presented.				X	
Adequate but could be improved.	X	X	X		X
Unclear or incomplete.					

Criterion 4: Evidence found in the Systems Portfolio	Core Component				
	4A	4B	4C		
Strong, clear, and well-presented.					
Adequate but could be improved.	X	X	X		
Unclear or incomplete.					

Criterion 5: Evidence found in the Systems Portfolio	Core Component				
	5A	5B	5C	5D	
Strong, clear, and well-presented.			X		
Adequate but could be improved.	X	X		X	
Unclear or incomplete.					

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.

The Systems Appraisal Report stated that evidence for Core Component 4.C. was unclear and incomplete.

- Core Component 4.C. says, "The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs."
- After our on-site review, it is clear that NIACC has these data, and has room for growth in this area. The team recommends that the assessment of this component be changed to "Adequate but needs improvement."

The Systems Appraisal Report stated that evidence was unclear or incomplete for Core Component 3.A.

- Core component 3.A. says, "The institution's degree programs are appropriate to higher education."
- The assessment in the Systems Appraisal Report was based on a lack of data related to evidence supporting learning goals for non-CTE programs.
- After our on-site review, it is clear that NIACC has these data, and has room for growth in this area. The team recommends that the assessment of this component be changed to "Adequate but needs improvement."

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.

The team identified six strategic issues in the Systems Appraisal Report. The issues and the team's findings related to them are:

1. As NIACC searches for a new president the College will need to reaffirm its commitment to AQIP.

   a. Finding: In discussion with the Board chair and members, they affirmed that of the 20 questions being asked of each candidate for the presidency, commitment to AQIP and CQI is one of those questions. The team believes that this strategic issue has been adequately addressed.

2. Evidence concerning success of transfer students is lacking. The articulation agreements mentioned in the Systems Portfolio provide NIACC an opportunity for collecting data on the success of its graduates.

   a. Finding: The president explained that NIACC has been presented with data from Northern Iowa University demonstrating that NIACC is their leading feeder school, and that NIACC students attain higher academic standing at NIU compared to transfer students from other Iowa Community Colleges. Additionally, the supplemental resource materials included a document showing specific success, transfer, and graduation rates of NIAAC transfer students in comparison to the other 15 Iowa Community Colleges. NIACC ranked fourth. The team believes that this strategic issue has been adequately addressed.

3. Enrollment goals are not clear at the institution and program level. Targets for retention and completion are not evident, even though there was an Action Plan to identify them. The College's program review process also provides an opportunity for reporting of enrollment and retention results.

   a. Finding: Provided in the supplemental resource materials was a document that compared NIACC's retention percentage for first-time students to the other 15 Iowa Community Colleges. This same document also compared NIACC's retention percentage to that of 19 other community and technical colleges with enrollments between 2,000 and 5,000. NIACC ranked ninth on this list. Lastly, this same document provided graduation/transfer-out percentages comparing NIACC to the same group of community and technical colleges, and showed that NIACC ranked number two among the 16 Iowa Community Colleges and number three among the 19 other community colleges. The team believes that this strategic issue has been adequately addressed.

4. Commitment to a multi-cultural perspective is not clear in the curriculum or strategic plan. There is no mention of the work of the Diversity and the Global Diversity Committees even though they are mentioned in Category 8.

   a. Finding: In discussion with various groups, several faculty commented on how they incorporate teaching diversity and the importance of understanding a global society in their classes; this included faculty who teach CTE, as well as Arts and Sciences curriculum. The discussions also revealed a large group of international students, a number of student clubs related to diversity, and inclusion of the topic in specific courses. The team believes that this strategic issue has been adequately addressed.

5. Assessment results for general education are not provided for each of the general education outcomes. The portfolio mentions a general education outcomes assessment process, but no results were provided.

    a.   Finding: The Federal Compliance document demonstrated how General Education has been assessed for two of the eight general education outcomes thus far and their plans to complete two per additional outcomes per year until all eight have been completed. Further discussion clarified the general education assessment process itself. The team believes that this strategic issue has been adequately addressed.

6.   Results for each category are lacking. Data are collected, but not presented. Disaggregated data for student and external stakeholder groups are also not provided. The institution needs to show ongoing commitment for providing results and analysis of comparisons and trends. The addition of an institutional researcher mentioned throughout the portfolio may help with this commitment. The portfolio suggests that the College is data rich and information poor.

    a.   Finding: It became clear during the checkup visit that there is a strong commitment to data collection. What appears to be lacking is a centralized place to aggregate these data in a way that would permit NIACC to make meaningful institutional comparisons and decisions. The institution might benefit from finding ways to roll these data into a single repository to provide the ability to evaluate institutional performance. The team believes that this remains a strategic issue for NIACC.

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.

NIACC showed a strong commitment to continuous quality improvement (CQI) throughout the organization, from Board members who made CQI a key question for candidates for the institution's next president to students who reported responsiveness to suggestions for improvement to faculty and staff who showed familiarity with CQI terminology and processes.

Perhaps most striking was the contrast between what the institution communicated in the systems portfolio and what the team found on-site. It was clear to the team that NIACC highlighted CQI through training, frequent discussion, and strong communication. The AQIP categories are integrated into the strategic planning process, and the AQIP Quality Council, with whom the team met, provides strong CQI leadership. The institution actively participates in statewide CQI organizations, benchmarking NIACC's performance against other Iowa institutions, and exchanges information with other AQIP institutions in the state.

Other AQIP Considerations or Concerns

- The team identified that NIACC does not require students to change their default password after the first login. NIACC may want to consider requiring every portal user to create a new password the first time s/he logs into the portal to increase security. This is especially important once NIACC begins to use a single sign-on system.

- NIACC may want to automate the student complaint process to make it more student friendly. Students may feel uncomfortable voicing a complaint in person (and therefore not do so). NIACC should state what it has learned from student complaints and that it has integrated any relevant findings into a review and planning process.

- NIACC may want to consider decreasing the amount of time (currently described as more than a semester and up to a year) to evaluate transcripts from institutions not accredited by a regional accrediting body. The lengthy processing time could result in students enrolling in a course at NIAAC that may have already been completed at a transfer institution.

- The team noted that there is significant variability between syllabi from different courses, and students found this confusing. Students may benefit from a standardized syllabus format and template, or a content checklist.

- The team noted that data miners at NIACC worked at the departmental rather than institutional level. The institution might benefit from finding ways to roll these data into a single repository to provide the ability to evaluate institutional performance.

- Discussions with NIACC staff members highlighted that many processes are ad hoc. The team suggests that NIACC may benefit from an effort to formalize processes and systems in a way that might provide ways to evaluate performance at all levels of the institution.

Federal Compliance Worksheet for Evaluation Teams

Effective September 1, 2013 – August 31, 2014

Evaluation of Federal Compliance Components

The team reviews each item identified in the Federal Compliance Guide and documents its findings in the appropriate spaces below. Teams should expect institutions to address these requirements with brief narrative responses and provide supporting documentation, where necessary. Generally, if the team finds in the course of this review that there are substantive issues related to the institution's ability to fulfill the Criteria for Accreditation, such issues should be raised in appropriate sections of the Assurance Section of the Team Report or highlighted as such in the appropriate AQIP Quality Checkup Report.

This worksheet outlines the information the team should review in relation to the federal requirements and provides spaces for the team's conclusions in relation to each requirement. The team should refer to the Federal Compliance Guide for Institutions and Evaluation Teams in completing this worksheet. The Guide identifies applicable Commission policies and an explanation of each requirement. **The worksheet becomes an appendix to the team's report. If the team recommends monitoring on a Federal Compliance requirement in the form of a report or focused visit, it should be included in the Federal Compliance monitoring sections below and added to the appropriate section in the team report template.**

Institution under review: North Iowa Area Community College

Assignment of Credits, Program Length, and Tuition

Address this requirement by completing the "Team Worksheet for Evaluating an Institution's Assignment of Credit Hours and on Clock Hours" in the Appendix at the end of this document.

Institutional Records of Student Complaints

The institution has documented a process in place for addressing student complaints and appears to be systematically processing such complaints as evidenced by the data on student complaints since the last comprehensive evaluation.

1. Review the process that the institution uses to manage complaints as well as the history of complaints received and processed with a particular focus in that history on the past three or four years.

2. Determine whether the institution has a process to review and resolve complaints in a timely manner.

3. Verify that the evidence shows that the institution can, and does, follow this process and that it is able to integrate any relevant findings from this process into its review and planning processes.

4. Advise the institution of any improvements that might be appropriate.

5. Consider whether the record of student complaints indicates any pattern of complaints or otherwise raises concerns about the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation or Assumed Practices.

6. Check the appropriate response that reflects the team's conclusions:

__X_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends Commission follow-up.

___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends Commission follow-up.

___ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments: NIACC Complaint Log was provided with no discernible pattern of complaints. *Student Handbook* contains complaint procedure.

Additional monitoring, if any: None.

Publication of Transfer Policies

The institution has demonstrated it is appropriately disclosing its transfer policies to students and to the public. Policies contain information about the criteria the institution uses to make transfer decisions.

1. Review the institution's transfer policies.

2. Review any articulation agreements the institution has in place, including articulation agreements at the institution level and program-specific articulation agreements.

3. Consider where the institution discloses these policies (e.g., in its catalog, on its web site) and how easily current and prospective students can access that information.

Determine whether the disclosed information clearly explains the criteria the institution uses to make transfer decisions and any articulation arrangements the institution has with other institutions. Note whether the institution appropriately lists its articulation agreements with other institutions on its website or elsewhere. The information the institution provides should include any program-specific articulation agreements in place and should clearly identify program-specific articulation agreements as such. Also, the information the institution provides should include whether the articulation agreement anticipates that the institution under Commission review: 1) accepts credit from the other institution(s) in the articulation agreement; 2) sends credits to the other institution(s) in the articulation agreements that it accepts; or 3) both offers and accepts credits with the other institution(s).

4. Check the appropriate response that reflects the team's conclusions:

_X__ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends Commission follow-up.

___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends Commission follow-up.

___ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments: NIACC includes transfer process and policy in the *Student Handbook* and *Catalog*. Articulation agreements are accessible via www.niacc.edu.

Additional monitoring, if any: None.

Practices for Verification of Student Identity

The institution has demonstrated that it verifies the identity of students who participate in courses or programs provided to the student through distance or correspondence education and appropriately discloses additional fees related to verification to students and to protect their privacy.

1. Determine how the institution verifies that the student who enrolls in a course is the same student who submits assignments, takes exams, and earns a final grade. The team should ensure that the institution's approach respects student privacy.

2. Check that any fees related to verification and not included in tuition are explained to the students prior to enrollment in distance courses (e.g., a proctoring fee paid by students on the day of the proctored exam).

3. Check the appropriate response that reflects the team's conclusions:

_X__ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends Commission follow-up.

___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends Commission follow-up.

___ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments: NIACC provides to students enrolled in online courses a unique username and password. Students enrolled in online courses must take tests at the NIACC Testing Center or a proctored testing location and must provide a photo ID before taking a test.

Additional monitoring, if any: None.

Title IV Program Responsibilities

The institution has presented evidence on the required components of the Title IV Program.

This requirement has several components the institution and team must address:

- ***General Program Requirements.*** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about the fulfillment of its Title IV program responsibilities, particularly findings from any review activities by the Department of Education. It has, as necessary, addressed any issues the Department raised regarding the institution's fulfillment of its responsibilities in this area.*

- ***Financial Responsibility Requirements.*** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about the Department's review of composite ratios and financial audits. It has, as necessary, addressed any issues the Department raised regarding the institution's fulfillment of its responsibilities in this area. (Note that the team should also be commenting under Criterion Five if an institution has significant issues with financial responsibility as demonstrated through ratios that are below acceptable levels or other financial responsibility findings by its auditor.)*

- **Default Rates.** The institution has provided the Commission with information about its three year default rate. It has a responsible program to work with students to minimize default rates. It has, as necessary, addressed any issues the Department raised regarding the institution's fulfillment of its responsibilities in this area. Note for 2012 and thereafter institutions and teams should be using the three-year default rate based on revised default rate data published by the Department in September 2012; if the institution does not provide the default rate for three years leading up to the comprehensive evaluation visit, the team should contact Commission staff.

- ***Campus Crime Information, Athletic Participation and Financial Aid, and Related Disclosures.*** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about its disclosures. It has demonstrated, and the team has reviewed, the institution's policies and practices for ensuring compliance with these regulations.*

- ***Student Right to Know.*** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about its disclosures. It has demonstrated, and the team has reviewed, the institution's policies and practices for ensuring compliance with these regulations. The disclosures are accurate and provide appropriate information to students. (Note that the team should also be commenting under Criterion One if the team determines that disclosures are not accurate or appropriate.)*

- ***Satisfactory Academic Progress and Attendance.*** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about policies and practices for ensuring compliance with these regulations. The institution has demonstrated that the policies and practices meet state or federal requirements and that the institution is appropriately applying these policies and practices to students. In most cases, teams should verify that these policies exist and are available to students, typically in the course catalog or student handbook. Note that the Commission does not necessarily require that the institution take attendance but does anticipate that institutional attendance policies will provide information to students about attendance at the institution.*

- ***Contractual Relationships.*** *The institution has presented a list of its contractual relationships related to its academic program and evidence of its compliance with Commission policies requiring notification or approval for contractual relationships (If the team learns that the institution has a contractual relationship that may require Commission approval and has not received Commission approval the team must require that the institution complete and file the change request form as soon as possible. The team should direct the institution to review the Contractual Change Application on the Commission's web site for more information.)*

- ***Consortial Relationships.*** *The institution has presented a list of its consortial relationships related to its academic program and evidence of its compliance with Commission policies requiring notification*

or approval for consortial relationships. (If the team learns that the institution has a consortial relationship that may require Commission approval and has not received Commission approval the team must require that the institution complete and file the form as soon as possible. The team should direct the institution to review the Consortial Change Application on the Commission's web site for more information.)

1. Review all of the information that the institution discloses having to do with its Title IV program responsibilities.

2. Determine whether the Department has raised any issues related to the institution's compliance or whether the institution's auditor in the A-133 has raised any issues about the institution's compliance as well as look to see how carefully and effectively the institution handles its Title IV responsibilities.

3. If an institution has been cited or is not handling these responsibilities effectively, indicate that finding within the federal compliance portion of the team report and whether the institution appears to be moving forward with corrective action that the Department has determined to be appropriate.

4. If issues have been raised with the institution's compliance, decide whether these issues relate to the institution's ability to satisfy the Criteria for Accreditation, particularly with regard to whether its disclosures to students are candid and complete and demonstrate appropriate integrity (*Core Component 2.A and 2.B*).

5. Check the appropriate response that reflects the team's conclusions:

   _X__ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

   ___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends Commission follow-up.

   ___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends Commission follow-up.

   ___ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

   Comments: NIACC provided data for crime for the three most recent years and students' graduation and transfer rates disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender. Required policies and data are published in the *Student Handbook* and available at www.niacc.edu.

   Additional monitoring, if any: None.

Required Information for Students and the Public

1. Verify that the institution publishes fair, accurate, and complete information on the following topics: the calendar, grading, admissions, academic program requirements, tuition and fees, and refund policies.

2. Check the appropriate response that reflects the team's conclusions:

_X__   The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

___   The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends Commission follow-up.

___   The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends Commission follow-up.

___   The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments: Information is published in the *Student Handbook* and *Catalog* and available at www.niacc.edu.

Additional monitoring, if any: None.

Advertising and Recruitment Materials and Other Public Information

The institution has documented that it provides accurate, timely and appropriately detailed information to current and prospective students and the public about its accreditation status with the Commission and other agencies as well as about its programs, locations and policies.

1.   Review the institution's disclosure about its accreditation status with the Commission to determine whether the information it provides is accurate and complete, appropriately formatted and contains the Commission's web address.

2.   Review institutional disclosures about its relationship with other accrediting agencies for accuracy and for appropriate consumer information, particularly regarding the link between specialized/professional accreditation and the licensure necessary for employment in many professional or specialized areas.

3.   Review the institution's catalog, brochures, recruiting materials, and information provided by the institution's advisors or counselors to determine whether the institution provides accurate information to current and prospective students about its accreditation, placement or licensure, program requirements, etc.

4.   Check the appropriate response that reflects the team's conclusions:

   _X_   The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

   ___   The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends Commission follow-up.

   ___   The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends Commission follow-up.

   ___   The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments: Statements on accreditation and consumer information are available at www.niacc.edu.

Additional monitoring, if any:

Review of Student Outcome Data

1. Review the student outcome data the institution collects to determine whether it is appropriate and sufficient based on the kinds of academic programs it offers and the students it serves.

2. Determine whether the institution uses this information effectively to make decisions about academic programs and requirements and to determine its effectiveness in achieving its educational objectives.

3. Check the appropriate response that reflects the team's conclusions:

   _X_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

   ___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends Commission follow-up.

   ___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends Commission follow-up.

   ___ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

   Comments: Outcomes assessment data are provided. These data should be included in future Systems Portfolios. The use of assessment data to improve student learning should be included in the Systems Portfolio, particularly for Category 1.

   Additional monitoring, if any:

Standing with State and Other Accrediting Agencies

The institution has documented that it discloses accurately to the public and the Commission its relationship with any other specialized, professional or institutional accreditor and with all governing or coordinating bodies in states in which the institution may have a presence.

The team has considered any potential implications for accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of sanction or loss of status by the institution with any other accrediting agency or loss of authorization in any state.

Important note: If the team is recommending initial or continued status, and the institution is now or has been in the past five years under sanction or show-cause with, or has received an adverse action (i.e., withdrawal, suspension, denial, or termination) from, any other federally recognized specialized or institutional accreditor or a state entity, then the team must explain the sanction or adverse action of the other agency in the body of the Assurance Section of the Team Report and provide its rationale for recommending Commission status in light of this action. In addition, the team must contact the staff liaison immediately if it learns that the institution is at risk of losing its degree authorization or lacks such authorization in any state in which the institution meets state presence requirements.

1. Review the information, particularly any information that indicates the institution is under sanction or show-cause or has had its status with any agency suspended, revoked, or terminated, as well as the reasons for such actions.

2. Determine whether this information provides any indication about the institution's capacity to meet the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation. Should the team learn that the institution is at risk of losing, or has lost, its degree or program authorization in any state in which it meets state presence requirements, it should contact the Commission staff liaison immediately.

3. Check the appropriate response that reflects the team's conclusions:

   _X_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

   _ __ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends Commission follow-up.

   ___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends Commission follow-up.

   ___ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

   Comments: NIACC's accreditation status is included in the *Catalog* and at www.niacc.edu, including specialized accreditations.

   Additional monitoring, if any:

Public Notification of Opportunity to Comment

The institution has made an appropriate and timely effort to solicit third party comments. The team has evaluated any comments received and completed any necessary follow-up on issues raised in these comments. **Note that if the team has determined that any issues raised by third-party comment relate to the team's review of the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, it must discuss this information and its analysis in the body of the Assurance Section of the Team Report.**

1. Review information about the public disclosure of the upcoming visit, including sample announcements, to determine whether the institution made an appropriate and timely effort to notify the public and seek comments.

2. Evaluate the comments to determine whether the team needs to follow-up on any issues through its interviews and review of documentation during the visit process.

3. Check the appropriate response that reflects the team's conclusions:

   _X_ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements.

   ___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution to meet the Commission's requirements but recommends Commission follow-up.

   ___ The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and has found the institution not to meet the Commission's requirements and recommends Commission follow-up.

___ The team also has comments that relate to the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. See Criterion (insert appropriate reference).

Comments:

Additional monitoring, if any: None.

Institutional Materials Related to Federal Compliance Reviewed by the Team

Provide a list materials reviewed here:

NIACC Federal Compliance report to the Higher Learning Commission
  NIACC *Course Catalog*
  NIACC *Student Handbook*
  www.niacc.edu

  Syllabi for the following courses: AGA 154, AGS 109, CON 121, ENGL 102, ENGL 103, ENGL 105, EDU 235, HCR 115, HCR 155, HIS 151, MFG 245, POL 111, MUS 100, PSY 111, PSY 121, PSY 211, PSY 223, SOC 110, WEL 222

Appendix

Team Worksheet for Evaluating an Institution's Program Length and Tuition, Assignment of Credit Hours and on Clock Hours

Institution under review: ___North Iowa Area Community College_____

Part 1: Program Length and Tuition

Instructions

The institution has documented that it has credit hour assignments and degree program lengths within the range of good practice in higher education and that tuition is consistent across degree programs (or that there is a rational basis for any program-specific tuition).

Review the *"Worksheet for Use by Institutions on the Assignment of Credit Hours and on Clock Hours"* as well as the course catalog and other attachments required for the institutional worksheet.

Worksheet on Program Length and Tuition

A. Answer the Following Questions

Are the institution's degree program requirements within the range of good practice in higher education and contribute to an academic environment in which students receive a rigorous and thorough education?

   _X__ Yes   ____ No

     Comments: Sixty credits are required for the associate's degree.

Are the institution's tuition costs across programs within the range of good practice in higher education and contribute to an academic environment in which students receive a rigorous and thorough education?

   __X__ Yes   ____ No

     Comments: Tuition costs are listed in the *Student Handbook* and www.niacc.edu and are in the range of good practice for community colleges.

B. Recommend Commission Follow-up, If Appropriate

Is any Commission follow-up required related to the institution's program length and tuition practices?

_____ Yes   ___X_ No

Rationale:

Identify the type of Commission monitoring required and the due date: NA

Part 2: Assignment of Credit Hours

Instructions

In assessing the appropriateness of the credit allocations provided by the institution the team should complete the following steps:

1. Review the Worksheet completed by the institution, which provides information about an institution's academic calendar and an overview of credit hour assignments across institutional offerings and delivery formats, and the institution's policy and procedures for awarding credit hours. Note that such policies may be at the institution or department level and may be differentiated by such distinctions as undergraduate or graduate, by delivery format, etc.

2. Identify the institution's principal degree levels and the number of credit hours for degrees at each level. The following minimum number of credit hours should apply at a semester institution:

    *   Associate's degrees = 60 hours

    *   Bachelor's degrees = 120 hours

    *   Master's or other degrees beyond the Bachelor's = at least 30 hours beyond the Bachelor's degree

    *   Note that one quarter hour = .67 semester hour

    *   Any exceptions to this requirement must be explained and justified.

3. Scan the course descriptions in the catalog and the number of credit hours assigned for courses in different departments at the institution.

    *   At semester-based institutions courses will be typically be from two to four credit hours (or approximately five quarter hours) and extend approximately 14-16 weeks (or approximately 10 weeks for a quarter). The description in the catalog should indicate a course that is appropriately rigorous and has collegiate expectations for objectives and workload. Identify courses/disciplines that seem to depart markedly from these expectations.

    *   Institutions may have courses that are in compressed format, self-paced, or otherwise alternatively structured. Credit assignments should be reasonable. (For example, as a full-time load for a traditional semester is typically 15 credits, it might be expected that the norm for a full-time load in a five-week term is 5 credits; therefore, a single five-week course awarding 10 credits would be subject to inquiry and justification.)

    *   Teams should be sure to scan across disciplines, delivery mode, and types of academic activities.

    *   Federal regulations allow for an institution to have two credit-hour awards: one award for Title IV purposes and following the above federal definition and one for the purpose of defining progression in and completion of an academic program at that institution.

Commission procedure also permits this approach.

4. Scan course schedules to determine how frequently courses meet each week and what other scheduled activities are required for each course. Pay particular attention to alternatively-structured or other courses with particularly high credit hours for a course completed in a short period of time or with less frequently scheduled interaction between student and instructor.

5. **Sampling.** Teams will need to sample some number of degree programs based on the headcount at the institution and the range of programs it offers.

   - At a minimum, teams should anticipate sampling at least a few programs at each degree level.

   - For institutions with several different academic calendars or terms or with a wide range of academic programs, the team should expand the sample size appropriately to ensure that it is paying careful attention to alternative format and compressed and accelerated courses.

   - Where the institution offers the same course in more than one format, the team is advised to sample across the various formats to test for consistency.

   - For the programs the team sampled, the team should review syllabi and intended learning outcomes for several of the courses in the program, identify the contact hours for each course, and expectations for homework or work outside of instructional time.

   - The team should pay particular attention to alternatively-structured and other courses that have high credit hours and less frequently scheduled interaction between the students and the instructor.

   - Provide information on the samples in the appropriate space on the worksheet.

6. Consider the following questions:

   - Does the institution's policy for awarding credit address all the delivery formats employed by the institution?

   - Does that policy address the amount of instructional or contact time assigned and homework typically expected of a student with regard to credit hours earned?

   - For institutions with courses in alternative formats or with less instructional and homework time than would be typically expected, does that policy also equate credit hours with intended learning outcomes and student achievement that could be reasonably achieved by a student in the timeframe allotted for the course?

   - Is the policy reasonable within the federal definition as well as within the range of good practice in higher education? (Note that the Commission will expect that credit hour policies at public institutions that meet state regulatory requirements or are dictated by the state will likely meet federal definitions as well.)

   - If so, is the institution's assignment of credit to courses reflective of its policy on the award of credit?

7. If the answers to the above questions lead the team to conclude that there may be a problem with the credit hours awarded the team should recommend the following:

- If the problem involves a poor or insufficiently-detailed institutional policy, the team should call for a revised policy as soon as possible by requiring a monitoring report within no more than one year that demonstrates the institution has a revised policy and evidence of implementation.

- If the team identifies an application problem and that problem is isolated to a few courses or single department or division or learning format, the team should call for follow-up activities (monitoring report or focused evaluation) to ensure that the problems are corrected within no more than one year.

- If the team identifies systematic non-compliance across the institution with regard to the award of credit, the team should notify Commission staff immediately and work with staff to design appropriate follow-up activities. The Commission shall understand systematic noncompliance to mean that the institution lacks any policies to determine the award of academic credit or that there is an inappropriate award of institutional credit not in conformity with the policies established by the institution or with commonly accepted practices in higher education across multiple programs or divisions or affecting significant numbers of students.

Worksheet on Assignment of Credit Hours

A. Identify the Sample Courses and Programs Reviewed by the Team (see #5 of instructions in completing this section)

B. Answer the Following Questions

    1) Institutional Policies on Credit Hours

    Does the institution's policy for awarding credit address all the delivery formats employed by the institution? (Note that for this question and the questions that follow an institution may have a single comprehensive policy or multiple policies.)

    __X__ Yes   ____ No

        Comments: Policy defines number of hours and minutes in a semester required for a credit hour.

    Does that policy relate the amount of instructional or contact time provided and homework typically expected of a student to the credit hours awarded for the classes offered in the delivery formats offered by the institution? (Note that an institution's policy must go beyond simply stating that it awards credit solely based on assessment of student learning and should also reference instructional time.)

    __X__ Yes   ____ No

        Comments: Policy stipulates number of hours and minutes of instructional time required. Policy does not mention homework requirements.

For institutions with non-traditional courses in alternative formats or with less instructional and homework time than would be typically expected, does that policy equate credit hours with intended learning outcomes and student achievement that could be reasonably achieved by a student in the timeframe and utilizing the activities allotted for the course?

_____ Yes   _____ No

   Comments: Not applicable.

Is the policy reasonable within the federal definition as well as within the range of good practice in higher education? (Note that the Commission will expect that credit hour policies at public institutions that meet state regulatory requirements or are dictated by the state will likely meet federal definitions as well.)

_____ Yes   _____ No

   Comments: Not applicable.

2) **Application of Policies**

Are the course descriptions and syllabi in the sample academic programs reviewed by the team appropriate and reflective of the institution's policy on the award of credit? (Note that the Commission will expect that credit hour policies at public institutions that meet state regulatory requirements or are dictated by the state will likely meet federal definitions as well.)

__X__ Yes   _____ No

   Comments: Course descriptions include total number of lecture, lab, clinical, or work
   experience hours required for the course. Syllabi reflect required instructional time.

Are the learning outcomes in the sample reviewed by the team appropriate to the courses and programs reviewed and in keeping with the institution's policy on the award of credit?

__X__ Yes   _____ No

   Comments:

If the institution offers any alternative delivery or compressed format courses or programs, were the course descriptions and syllabi for those courses appropriate and reflective of the institution's policy on the award of academic credit?

_X___ Yes   _____ No

   Comments: Course schedule and syllabi adhere to NIACC's policy on credit hour.

If the institution offers alternative delivery or compressed format courses or programs, are the learning outcomes reviewed by the team appropriate to the courses and programs reviewed and in keeping with the institution's policy on the award of credit? Are the learning outcomes reasonably capable of being fulfilled by students in the time allocated to justify the allocation of credit?

__X__ Yes   ____ No

        Comments: Learning outcomes are the same as courses in non-compressed format.

Is the institution's actual assignment of credit to courses and programs across the institution reflective of its policy on the award of credit and reasonable and appropriate within commonly accepted practice in higher education?

__X__ Yes   ____ No

        Comments: Assignment of credit adheres to NIACC's credit hour policy which is aligned to the Carnegie unit.

C. Recommend Commission Follow-up, If Appropriate

Review the responses provided in this section. If the team has responded "no" to any of the questions above, the team will need to assign Commission follow-up to assure that the institution comes into compliance with expectations regarding the assignment of credit hours.

Is any Commission follow-up required related to the institution's credit hour policies and practices?

____ Yes   __X_ No

Rationale:

Identify the type of Commission monitoring required and the due date:

D. Identify and Explain Any Findings of Systematic Non-Compliance in One or More Educational Programs with Commission Policies Regarding the Credit Hour

Part 3: Clock Hours

Does the institution offer any degree or certificate programs in clock hours?

____ Yes   __X__ No

Does the institution offer any degree or certificate programs that must be reported to the Department of Education in clock hours for Title IV purposes even though students may earn credit hours for graduation from these programs?

____ Yes   __X__ No

If the answer to either question is "Yes," complete this part of the form.