

North Iowa Area Community College
500 College Drive
Mason City, IA 50401

AQIP Quality Highlights Report

Prepared for the
Reaffirmation Review Panel,
as part of the Accreditation Reaffirmation Process



Major Changes and Improvements

North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) submitted its first Systems Portfolio as an AQIP institution in July 2013 with receipt of the Systems Appraisal Report that following August. Due to the timing of NIACC's entry into AQIP, moving from a ten year accreditation cycle to a seven year cycle and to remain compliant with the Commission policy of comprehensive appraisal of at least every ten years of reaffirmation, the College held the Quality Checkup Visit September 18-19, 2013. The College was in receipt of the Quality Checkup Report in November 2013. Although this condensed AQIP cycle provided little time for NIACC to make use of all feedback, striking improvements have occurred along with developed plans for continued improvement.

The primary focus of our improvement efforts have been to the one remaining strategic issue identified by the Quality Checkup Visit Peer Review Team along with the six other AQIP considerations or concerns.

The remaining strategic issue of the Quality Checkup Visit Peer Review Team as stated in the Quality Checkup Report:

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 comparison and decision. 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.

Actions: NIACC has made a significant investment to improvement in this area which has resulted noteworthy progress to this strategic issue. As noted, the College has made a long-standing commitment to data collection and reporting. Since the Quality Checkup Visit, a series of dashboards have been created to capture point in time reports on: enrollment by credits and headcount, student enrollment status and classification, online credits and headcount, minority and international student headcount, fall to fall and fall to spring retention. This information is readily available to all faculty, staff and the NIACC Board of Directors on a newly created Research Data tab on the NIACC portal.

This new Research Data tab has been developed to reflect Institutional, Academic, and Student performance data and reports. The Institutional page includes information on AQIP, strategic planning, and benchmarking reports produced or developed with data supplied by the National Community College Benchmark Project, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, and the Iowa Department of Education. The Academic tab continues to be in development, but progressing at an ambitious pace to include classroom and program assessment. In the testing

phase to launch on the Academic tab are program and course enrollment, retention and completion data. It is expected to have the program and course enrollment with student success data available October 2014. The Student research tab includes the student profile report including historic enrollment reports by program, delivery type, and student classification as well as financial and admissions reports.

The development of the portal and this single data repository have permitted faculty, staff and NIACC Board of Director members to navigate seamlessly between reports and increase access to meaningful data.

NIACC has also been attentive to the six identified “other AQIP considerations or concerns.” Those considerations as listed in the Quality Checkup Report and subsequent actions are identified below:

1. *Consideration: 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.*

Action: This concern has been remedied. With the start of the 2014-15 academic year all students will be required to change their default password after initial login and anytime thereafter.

2. *Consideration: 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.*

Action: The project to develop an automated complaint process is testing this week and expected to be initiated next week August 25, 2014 (first week of classes). A new web component will be developed and housed on the Student Constituency page allowing for student concerns and observations to be submitted electronically to the Vice President of Student Services.

3. *Consideration: 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 NIACC that may have already been completed at a transfer institution.*

Action: Since the Quality Checkup Visit Peer Review Team visit this concern has also been remedied. The majority of the time delays occurred with international transcript review. NIACC has now entered into an agreement with Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc. (<https://www.ece.org/>) to evaluate international transcripts. The processing time has been reduced to 1-12 business days.

4. *Consideration: 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.*

Action: This item of consideration became an Action Project for the College in December 2013. During spring 2014 Academic Affairs leaders and the faculty leaders of NIACC's Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning identified common syllabi elements, created a checklist and developed a common syllabi template. All faculty members were provided an opportunity to participate in the process. Mandatory training on the new syllabi elements and template occurred in August 2014 just prior to the beginning of the Fall 2014 semester. Beginning Fall 2014 all full time faculty must, at minimum, ensure the required elements are included on their syllabi. All adjunct and qualified instructors who deliver concurrent enrollment classes in the high school setting will be expected to use the common syllabi template beginning spring 2015. Every faculty member is expected to submit their syllabi to their respective Division Chair at the beginning of each semester.

5. *Consideration: 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.*

Action: As noted above, a single data repository has been developed and housed on the NIACC portal allowing for all faculty, staff, and NIACC Board of Directors to access performance and achievement data.

6. *Consideration: 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.*

Action: Over the nine-month period since the receipt of the Quality Checkup Report a number of processes and systems have met with improvement. Worthy of mention is the Action Project devoted to measuring institutional performance. The goal of this Action Project is to formalize a process and system to aid the evaluation of institutional performance. Each

administrative unit of the College will prepare and present to the Board of Directors a comprehensive overview of its primary activities, key challenges and opportunities, and results including key performance metrics according to the schedule presented. Following each report, the Board will assess its satisfaction with the featured essential function by completing an evaluation form which produces an aggregate rating and constructive feedback. Through continuous improvement strategies, College leadership strives to earn improved and generally high ratings over time. One full year will be required for the administrative units to report. This will give the Board an opportunity to go through one full year of reports and then to evaluate the process during their Board Retreat in November 2014.

Current Commitment to Continuous Improvement

NIACC participated in the Strategy Forum May 14-16, 2014. The focus of our time at the Forum was to create plans of implementation for Quality Matters (QM) and to advance our continuous quality improvement (CQI) efforts. Both projects have since been launched as Action Projects.

To meet student demands and hold a competitive market edge NIACC desires to expand its online offerings and in doing so set standards for quality measures. To accomplish this NIACC has chosen to embrace the standards of Quality Matters (<https://www.qualitymatters.org/>). The primary purpose of this project is to provide a consistent student experience, to set quality standards and to develop a process for onboarding new online courses. Mandatory in-service training on QM standards occurred in August 2014 with faculty being provided the tools and metrics for course self-evaluation. Faculty members are encouraged to begin course self-evaluation as they are able. A QM training plan and timeline has been developed for the 2014-15 academic year. This plan includes training peer reviewers on how to apply courses according to QM general standards. Peer reviewer training will be completed by January 2015. In February 2015 peer evaluators will have complete the assessment of the practice courses and begin to evaluate NIACC online courses. The selection of courses to be evaluated is based on two factors, the courses with the highest enrollment for Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters and sample course from across the academic divisions. To compliment advancing the learning experience for students, a template for online courses has been developed in our learning management system. This template will assist faculty in organizing their course content and provide consistent operational structure to our online courses. We believe this will improve the learning experience for students as they navigate between online courses. An added feature to the template is a hidden folder for instructor use which houses QM resources. NIACC has long provided a voluntary student self-readiness survey prior to enrollment in online courses. During this review of successful online course strategies NIACC has changed its processes to include the self-readiness survey as part of the registration process. Aggregate survey results

are now available and areas of deficiencies will be used to drive supplemental instruction curriculum.

The purpose of the second Strategy Forum project is to advance the College's current CQI efforts via an immersion strategy which includes widespread use of common tools and CQI training. Rather than widespread blanket training for all staff, this approach will focus on real application of the tools a few vital projects at a time. The intention is to continue to build a culture of quality by bringing people together for a common focus with attention to students, process/systems, and data using tools, communication, and consensus building using CQI tools. A specific training plan has been developed with implementation in process. The plan calls for members of the President's Council, AQIP Quality Council and selected CQI Facilitators to be trained on the CQI agenda format, flowcharting, and problem solving strategies. After implementation all committees and meetings will be required to use the CQI agenda and minute format providing consistency and efficiency in meeting times. Members of the President's Council have started the training plan by completing the CQI agenda and flowcharting. The next phase of training includes a four-part series focusing on problem solving tools. A team of trained CQI facilitators will then be assigned to work with Action Project and other ad hoc teams. The expected result is use of CQI tools in process improvement action teams with the exposure to the learning tools being carried on by team members. The facilitators and Action Project team champion will provide monthly updates to the AQIP Quality Council.

NIACC is currently a member participant in the Assessment Academy. During the past two years of our involvement in the Academy, efforts have focused on assessing general education across all curriculums.

The College currently has seven active Action Projects:

1. Development of Rubrics for Four General Education Outcomes.
2. Assessment of Communication and Aesthetics General Education Outcomes.
3. NIACC Syllabi Policy.
4. Improving the Collection of Past Due Student Accounts.
5. Monitoring Institutional Performance.
6. Implementation of Quality Matters.
7. Advancing CQI.

NIACC will be participating in the American Association of Community Colleges Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA). The VFA measures provides for benchmarking student progress and outcomes, including developmental education and adult basic education, academic progress, completion and transfer measures, and workforce outcomes for career and

technical education. Initial data submissions are due to the Iowa Department of Education which is assisting with the data submission efforts October 15, 2014. NIACC will continue to participate in the National Community College Benchmark Data Project until a full assessment of the VFA outcomes reporting can be evaluated.

This fall, NIACC will be again participating in a voluntary national survey research project, the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE). Administered during the fourth and fifth class weeks of the fall academic term, this survey focuses on institutional practices and student behaviors in the earliest weeks of college. Survey data will be collected, analyzed, and reported back to the College, further supporting our institutional efforts to understand the critical early student experience, and to improve practices in ways that will increase student success in the first college year. The project is part of the Center for Community College Student Engagement and the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin.

When financial constraints are in place, creative and innovative ideas may be stifled. To combat this NIACC created a Strategic Investment Initiative. The President's Council solicits nominations of noteworthy innovations and provides financial support via NIACC Board of Director approval. This initiative assures financial investment in improvement strategies during financially challenging times.

The first Strategic Investment Initiative approved in April 2014 seeks to expand campus internationalization and foster a globally aware student population through increasing the number of international students within the next three years. The goal is to expand by 65 percent (100) the number of F1 international students we serve. This investment supports the hire of a part-time international student advisor and an ESL part-time position in the Student Learning Center. It is expected by the end of the second year of the three-year investment; the project would not only be fully funding itself but would be providing additional revenues to the College.

Other Factors to Consider

North Iowa Area Community College was deemed to have met the five criteria for accreditation by the Quality Checkup Peer Review Team members per the Quality Checkup Report received by the College on November 8, 2013. NIACC has been attentive to the issues and concerns raised in the Systems Appraisal, Quality Checkup Report and counsel provided by the Peer Review Team.

NIACC has demonstrated repeatedly its long-term commitment to continuous quality improvement and made it a priority address any major issues and other considerations identified in the Quality Checkup Report. The improvements noted in this report have occurred

over a relatively short period of time. It is our culture of operation at NIACC to continually evaluate and improve our process and functions to assure an optimal experience and success of our students. The College has done so without faltering on the level of commitment to CQI as noted by the Peer Review Team, “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 student who reported responsiveness to suggestions for improvement to faculty and staff who showed familiarity with CQI terminology and process.”