Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)
Systems Appraisal Feedback

A summary of the feedback to WCTC’s Systems Portfolio

Background
Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) completed its Systems Portfolio in October 2007, and submitted it for review to AQIP in November 2007. The Systems Portfolio is a diagnostic snapshot of the college’s continuous improvement processes. The portfolio is reviewed by a group of external Higher Learning Commission peer reviewers (called systems appraisers) who read the document, evaluate the contents, and reach consensus on the current state of continuous improvement at the college. The anonymous systems appraisers prepare a report called a systems appraisal that summarizes the group’s findings. The systems appraisal is one component (others include the Conversation Day, Action Project teamwork, check-up visit, etc.) reviewed by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC – the regional accrediting body that accredits WCTC) in determining whether to renew the college’s accreditation, which is up for renewal in 2010.

The systems appraisal provides feedback for each of the nine categories (Helping Students Learn; Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives; Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs; Valuing People; Leading and Communicating; Supporting Institutional Operations; Measuring Effectiveness; Planning for Continuous Improvement; and Building Collaborative Relationships) in the systems portfolio. The categories are evaluated in the context of the college’s critical characteristics, which the systems appraisers identify from the first section of the systems portfolio, called the organizational overview. The critical characteristics are identified by the systems appraisers based on a reading of the portfolio; for example, one critical characteristic that the appraisers identified is that:

More than 98% of WCTC graduates stay and work in Wisconsin, directly contributing to the state’s economy. Over the past 5 years, 95% of the graduates indicate that they are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their education at WCTC.

In addition to feedback on each category, the systems appraisers specifically identify accreditation and strategic issues. Accreditation issues are those that, if left uncorrected, would put the college’s HLC accreditation at risk. Strategic issues are broad challenges and opportunities that may have a significant impact on the college and its operation, in the opinion of the systems appraisers.

Accreditation Issues
The systems appraiser found no accreditation issues for WCTC. In the systems appraisal, the reviewers wrote:

The Systems Appraisal team concluded that Waukesha County Technical College has presented evidence that it complies with each of the Five Criteria for Accreditation and each of their Core Components. Although the Systems Appraisal does not in itself constitute a review for continued accreditation, the team’s conclusion upon reviewing your Portfolio against the Criteria will serve as a telling piece of evidence during the Commission’s next scheduled AQIP review of your institute for Reaffirmation of Accreditation.
Strategic Issues

- WCTC would benefit from better defining their processes, developing systemic strategies of applying a consistent process for measuring the effectiveness of programs and courses. The College recognizes that it would also benefit from establishing benchmarks based upon historical data and comparative data from other institutions. It is suggested that WCTC looks beyond number of students served for a measure of effectiveness to fully determine student satisfaction.
- Data gathering processes and information based upon student input seems limited or older than three to five years. As WCTC develops and improves their assessment and data gather process it is critical that they deliberately identify strategies to gather student input and feedback. It is also suggested that WCTC does not rely solely upon “one size fits all” surveys such as Noel Levitz but ensures some customization based upon their students, institution, and programs.
- Prospective and current students of WCTC would benefit from an educational planning process that links career interests with programs as well as determining the level of student preparedness for career programs. Implementing mandatory placement assessments for all students and gathering that data for analysis will also benefit the institution in determining student needs in academic support areas.
- WCTC does not appear to have completely embraced a systems view of its institution in its culture. Having a systems view will allow for better collaboration between academic departments, student services and other non-academic departments. The systems view will also provide for a more efficient coordination of services and resources and improved collaboration.
- The College would benefit by holding consistent “all college” meetings to discuss progress in their continuous quality improvement initiatives, information from data gathered, and planning for future action projects. The results from Conversation Day suggest a positive model for further meetings.
- It is noted that WCTC has implemented a student complaint procedure. How formal this procedure is and how well documented the actions taken on the complaints is not noted. As this is a Federal Compliance requirement, it is critical that WCTC can produce documentation at the time of their Checkup Visit of the adequacy of the process of their place.
- The team has consistently noted that the results presented do not match the data expected based upon the prescribed processes for that category, and that the connection between these results and measures of effectiveness are not readily apparent. It is strongly suggested that WCTC ensure that evidence for all areas required for accreditation is in place for the check-up review Checkup Visit team.

As WCTC reviews the Strategic Issues identified by the appraisal team, we must remember that the team is reacting solely on the summaries the college presented. We know that some of the issues outlined above are apparent and need improvement. We also know that some are not problem areas and this will be made clear during the re-accreditation Checkup Visit in 2009.

Within the next several pages are examples of strengths and opportunities provided by the reviewers relative to each of the nine AQIP Categories.

Category 1: Helping Students Learn. This category is the largest in the systems portfolio, because student learning is central to the mission of a higher learning organization. According to the HLC, the category “focuses on the teaching-learning process within a formal instructional context, yet also
addresses how your entire institution contributes to helping students learn and overall student development. It examines your institution’s processes and systems related to learning objectives, mission-driven student learning and development, intellectual climate, academic programs and courses, student preparation, key issues such as technology and diversity, program and course delivery, faculty and staff roles, teaching and learning effectiveness, course sequencing and scheduling, learning and co-curricular support, student assessment, measures, analysis of results, and efforts to continuously improve these areas.”

Strengths:

- WCTC’s long term commitment to Critical Life Skills is evidenced by the CLS being embedded throughout program curricula. A formal Student Outcomes Assessment process for pre-, during- and post-enrollment assessment factors is in place. Consistent use of Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle in relation to student learning; use of WIDS model for curriculum design, delivery and assessment.
- The DACUM occupational analysis is inclusive, well-aligned, and robust. There is a comprehensive and systematic program development process.
- Students are well-informed about educational opportunities and services through traditional communication channels, including electronic, print, group presentations and personal contacts.
- WCTC has strong relationships with high schools; students are supported in their self-determination of program choice through special events, career counseling and Career Center.
- The Teacher Improvement System (TIS) supports teachers in assessing and improving.
- The four-step Quality Review Process (QRP) monitors curriculum currency and program effectiveness. WCTC compares itself to other WTCS institutional performance indicators.
- Feedback is collected from current students (through the Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory), from employers, and from graduates at scheduled intervals. Graduate satisfaction rates are consistently high and placement rates indicate that most graduates have jobs related to their programs of study.

Opportunities:

- The college is encouraged to improve data gathering and measuring of their results to improve various processes and systems including, for example, the analysis of measures of student learning, the connection between student preparedness and program selection, the assurance of the most efficient and effective program and course delivery, the determination of student support needs, and the evaluation of preparedness and success of transfer students.
- WCTC should expand its course-based assessment process beyond Written Communication to include levels of Reading, Math, and Science. It is suggested that a process be developed to determine who is exempted from the COMPASS and a process be used to assess those who are exempted.
- While WIDS and TIS are described, a comprehensive closed-loop process which includes data gathered through documenting teaching and learning results is not addressed. A systematic process for measuring the effectiveness of teaching and learning could allow longitudinal trends to be observed and the effects of new techniques to be assessed.
- WCTC does not describe the process for program discontinuation. There is also need to enhance and facilitate the understanding and implementation of the processes for new program, advanced technical certificate and technical certificate development. In addition, a process for regularly identifying potential new programs needs to be clarified.
- Process details of the Student Learning Outcome plan are not clear. While WCTC mentions the development and regular review of common learning objectives, a well-defined process with
timelines and a description of how the process is used to systematically review and document competencies and assessment practices would provide further explanation and improvement.

- The results of CLS exit outcomes should be analyzed to ensure that general student learning outcomes are achieved. WCTC would also benefit from analyzing the results from portfolio and capstone projects and demonstrating how these measure students’ learning.

**Category 2: Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives.** This category is a catch-all, designed to allow organizations to highlight unique objectives other than students learning. According to the HLC, this category “…addresses the processes that contribute to the achievement of WCTC’s major objectives that complement student learning and fulfill other portions of our mission. Depending on an institution’s character, it examines processes and systems related to other distinctive objectives, alignment of other distinctive objectives, faculty and staff roles, assessment and review of objectives, measures, analysis of results, and efforts to continuously improve these areas.”

**Strengths:**

- The reviewers consider WCTC’s strategic planning process a strength, especially because it is collaborative and incorporates input from a wide range of stakeholders, both within and outside of the college. Assessing progress at mid- and year-end supports a culture of continuous improvement. Use of the PDSA cycle for implementation plans of action is noted.
- Customer-driven education services provided through the Global Business Center, the Center for Quality and Innovation and the RTA Education Center is positive and well-documented.
- WCTC collects and analyzes data to monitor its performance in serving under-prepared learners; Goals for serving under-prepared learners through basic skills, ABE, ELL, and developmental and remedial classes have been met. Efforts to foster success in these students as well as other career and technical and college transfer students have benefited the lifelong learning needs as well as work-skill needs of the district. WCTC offers four pathways for students to complete a high school education including Adult High School, GED, High School Equivalency Diploma, and External High School Diploma.
- Articulations agreements with high schools and 4-year institutions is a first rate example of strengthening the entire institution.
- An aggressive grants program has enable the college to meet some of its distinctive objectives.

**Opportunities:**

- WCTC has the opportunity to analyze its effectiveness by determining measures in terms of expected outcomes and results in its other distinctive objectives.
- Colleges within the WTCS could benchmark with one another on objectives in addition to the QRP indicators thereby providing comparisons of other common objectives. When WCTC experiences a gap between its performance and the targets set by the WTCS scorecard, it may want to consider these targets as long-term goals and set more achievable short-term targets.
- WCTC may find it helpful to measure the effectiveness of partnerships involving distinctive objectives as well as the satisfaction of the partners and related stakeholders.

**Category 3: Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs.** This category examines how WCTC works actively to understand student and other stakeholder needs. According to the HLC category “…examines WCTC’s processes and systems related to: student and stakeholder identification, student and stakeholder requirements, analysis of student and stakeholder needs, relationship building
with students and stakeholders, complaint collection, analysis, and resolution, determining satisfaction of students and stakeholders, measures, analysis of results, and improvement efforts.”

Strengths:

- The systems appraisers noted that the college has regular methods of collecting information about student satisfaction, course feedback, and business and industry perceptions. The reviewers mentioned that input from industry advisory committees is well utilized.
- Multiple processes including the QRP, TIS, etc. help the college ensure that changing student needs are identified. WCTC realizes the need to connect with its students and uses a range of direct/indirect activities and communications, events and technology to establish relationships with potential and current students. WCTC shows commitment to this relationship-building.
- Data and feedback from key student and other stakeholder groups are integrated with strategic planning in regard to changing needs for job skills, technology, and related issues.
- An employer survey tracks stakeholder satisfaction. In addition, the Foundation and scholarship support, number of training contracts, and participation of community members on advisory committees, board of trustees, and as guest speakers demonstrate WCTC’s positive results in building stakeholder satisfaction.

Opportunities:

- The reviewers noted that it is unclear whether the college tabulates the summative results of End-of-course feedback forms. They suggest this data could be used in conjunction with existing date from student surveys to provide a clearer picture of student satisfaction.
- Providing results for transfer rates to and from the college could provide an important measure of the college’s ability to meet the needs of this subgroup of students and provide insight to improve their transfer and success rate.
- WCTC evaluates results for student satisfaction with several “number” measures: number of admissions; course and program enrollments; retention rates; transfer rates, etc. The college may with to reconsider whether some of these measures truly are satisfaction measures.

Category 4: Valuing People. This category examines how WCTC views its human resources, since people are central to the success of any organization. The HLC says the category “…examines your institution’s processes and systems related to “Work and job environment; workforce needs, training initiatives, job competencies and characteristics, recruitment, hiring, and retention practices, work processes and activities, training and development, personnel evaluation, recognition, reward, compensation, and benefits, motivation factors, satisfaction, health and safety, and well-being, measures, analysis of results, and improvement efforts.”

Strengths:

- WCTC’s hiring processes are tied to planning operations and are in compliance with certification requirements. The college identified ideal characteristics for all/new employees. Recruitment for openings is done both internally and externally according to union contracts. Cross-functional interview teams are utilized. A testing process is used for support staff positions and a teaching demonstration is used for potential faculty. New employees go through an orientation and probationary employment period.
- Reviewers noted that WCTC uses its continuous improvement processes to provide mechanisms for promoting high performance, communication, and organizational learning. Quality training,
the use of cross-functional teams, and teams for the Systems Portfolio supports this focus. In
addition, WCTC utilizes Joint Issues Teams to begin addressing union-related issues.

- Annual performance improvement systems for all categories of employees make use of feedback
  obtained to plan and implement improvements. These systems were developed by cross-
  functional quality improvement teams and empower staff to take a self-directed approach to their
  own development and improvement.
- Examples of positive results in this category include: low employee turnover rates; high average
  years of employment (indicators of retention); low Workers Compensation modification rates;
  high participation in employee performance improvement systems; formation of Joint Issues
  teams demonstrating collaboration among different departments/stakeholders.

**Opportunities:**

- The Workforce/Succession Planning process is just beginning and does not address determining
  who needs what types of training. There appears to be no indication of a succession plan in place
  for key leadership roles for the college.
- Comparative results from employee surveys in ’96, ’99, and 04 reflect that employees have
  concerns re: decision making, internal cooperation and communication. Development of AQIP
  Action Project teams is a first step in addressing these concerns. WCTC should continue this
  improvement cycle (PDSA) with future implementation, analysis, and closing the feedback loop.
- While PACE results from 1999 document WCTC’s student learning centered focus in relation to
  its peers, a more systematic assessment could assist the college in identifying contemporary
  issues. Continued participation in the national benchmarking project should provide additional
  comparisons.

**Category 5: Leading and Communicating.** According to the HLC, this category “…addresses how
WCTC’s leadership and communication structures, networks, and processes guide your institution in
setting directions, making decisions, seeking future opportunities, and building and sustaining a
learning environment. It examines your institution’s processes and systems related to: Leading
activities, communicating activities, alignment of leadership system practices, institutional values and
expectations, direction setting, future opportunity seeking, decision making, use of data, leadership
development and sharing, succession planning, measures analysis of results, and improvement efforts.”

**Strengths:**

- Environmental scanning and professional development programs are used to identify new
  opportunities. WCTC works through external partnerships with business, industry, government,
  and community-based organizations to seek input regarding new initiatives and future needs.
- WCTC recognized that the decision making process of the college needed improvement and
  therefore has implemented an action project to address this concern. Training modules are in
  place for all staff.
- WCTC promotes leadership development for all staff through a variety of internal and external
  programs and opportunities.
- WCTC has a comprehensive and clear process which includes expectations for potential
  employees. A team-developed document, “Characteristics of a WCTC Employee,” frames
  expectations of new hires regarding mission, vision, and values. Electronic and other documents
  reinforce this message for current employees.
Opportunities

- Results from AQIP’s Conversation Day and Constellation Survey indicate that WTC has opportunities to improve leadership and internal communication. (WCTC’s current administration was not here at that time.) In response, WCTC has formed two action project teams to address Participative Data-Driven Decision Making and Improving Internal Communications. Subsequent results will indicate the success or failures of these approaches.
- WCTC collects a variety of information related to leading and communication (participation data, interviews, surveys, PACE and Constellation, etc.). Implementing a process which would analyze this data would assist the college.
- It is suggested by the reviewers that WCTC hold more campus-wide gatherings to keep lines of communication open, celebrate successes, acknowledge achievement of goals, and identify future challenges facing the institution. WCTC is working towards improvement in this area.

Category 6: Supporting Institutional Operations. The HLC says this category evaluates “…institutional support processes that help to provide an environment in which learning can thrive. It examines your institution’s processes and systems related to: Student support, administrative support, identification of needs, contribution to student learning and accomplishing other distinctive objectives, day-to-day operations, use of data, measures, analysis of results, and improvement efforts.”

Strengths:

- The college has created a number of cross-functional committees and work teams to work on specific needs, issues, and process improvements including Quality teams, Joint Issues Teams, AQIP Action Project teams. WCTC has embrace quality and appreciative inquiry methods to make improvements. Faculty and other staff use the Teaching Innovation Center to learn and try out new tools as well as to seek assistance.
- The college has processes in place that result in a financially solid and viable educational institution through gathering results pertinent to departments. Results indicate effective support for the administration of the college.
- WCTC has realigned its budget allocation process by putting planning first.
- WCTC utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data aligned with key student support and administrative services. Data is also relevant to Helping Students Learn and Valuing People.

Opportunities:

- Direct feedback from students and stakeholders might assist and enrich the meetings that manager and supervisors hold regularly with faculty and staff to analyze how specific areas and processes meet student daily needs.
- The college employs a number of useful measures for a variety of processes but there needs to be a way to “close the loop.” For example, counting the number of help desk calls received does not indicate if the responses were effective or if the callers were satisfied.
- WCTC’s development of a dashboard/scorecard and related measures and targets could improve understanding of how well the college (and support services) are functioning.

Category 7: Measuring Effectiveness. According to the HLC, this category “…examines how WCTC collects, analyzes, and uses information to manage itself and to drive performance improvement. It examines the college’s processes and systems related to: collection, storage, management, and use of information and data – at the institutional and departmental/unit levels; institutional measures of effectiveness; information and data alignment with institutional needs and directions; comparative
information and data; analysis of information and data; effectiveness of information systems and processes; measures; analysis of results; and improvement efforts.

Strengths:

- WCTC has identified institutional criteria that frame the selection, management, and use of data. Data is managed across the college system at the department, division, committee/team, and organizational levels through its Banner Information System. This decentralized approach to data management allows for decision making at the lowest levels.
- Based on its commitment to data-driven decision making for quality improvement, WCTC has established criteria used to select data for internal as well as comparative peer assessments. The criteria are based upon what the WTCS and the National Community College Benchmarking Project (NCCBP) require and are used to benchmark with other high performing institutions.
- WCTC conducts trend and statistical analyses to assess performance. Units and departments use retention data, job placement, graduate satisfaction, etc. to measure the success of institutional objectives. The strategic planning and semi-annual progress reporting processes are used to ensure that analyses of information and data align with institutional goals.
- WCTC’s current college administration supports continuous quality improvement, promotes sharing with other Wisconsin technical colleges, and has started several initiatives to improve the collection and analysis of data.

Opportunities:

- The college recognizes the need to identify measures for evaluating effectiveness and is evaluating current measures as well as developing dashboard measures and targets. Finding summative and formative measures that directly document student learning will alert WCTC to needed improvements. Additionally, identifying other direct measures of institutional effectiveness should assist the college in its quest for excellence.
- Program level indicators of student learning are limited. Using direct measure of student achievement of learning would enable WCTC to align analysis and data with institutional goals regarding student learning.
- WCTC recognizes the needs to obtain more comparative data framed by its mission. Using data from the NCCBP should enable the college to gain a better understanding of its progress and opportunities in Measuring Effectiveness.

Category 8: Planning for Continuous Improvement. According to the HLC, this category “...examines your institution’s planning processes and how your strategies and action plans are helping you achieve your mission and vision. It examines your institution’s processes and systems related to: institutional vision; planning; strategies and action plans; coordination and alignment of strategies and action plans; measures and performance projections; resource needs; faculty, staff, and administrator capabilities; measures; analysis of performance projections and results; and improvement efforts.”

Strengths:

- WCTC’s strategic planning process includes the regular review of mission, vision, values, and goals by engaging multiple stakeholders. Cross-functional teams for various parts of the process further develop plans for achieving goals.
- WCTC has a comprehensive list of action plans and outcomes in its strategic plan and it monitors results both at the mid-point and end of each year.
WCTC has a comprehensive system to develop and nurture employees to keep abreast of institutional demands. It provides professional development opportunities for staff through informational session, one-on-one meetings, as well as state and national conference attendance.

**Opportunities:**
- The process for setting effectiveness measures for planning is not clear and the college would benefit from improving its communication of its related results. Having now employed a vice-president for strategic effectiveness should improve this process.
- WCTC would benefit from collecting more feedback from organizational meetings, integration of information from conferences, and use of other strategies to provide other measures of effectiveness of planning systems.

**Category 9: Building Collaborative Relationships**
According to the HLC, this category “…examines WCTC’s relationship – current and potential – to analyze how they contribute to the institution’s accomplishing its mission. It examines your institution’s processes and systems related to: identification of key internal and external collaborative relationships, alignment of key collaborative relationships, relationship creation, prioritization, building; needs identification; internal relationships; measures; analysis of results; and improvement efforts.”

**Strengths:**
- WCTC’s use of cross-functional teams and other cross-functional work groups is a positive toward ensuring integration and communication throughout the college.
- WCTC has a number of strong collaborative community relationships.
- A School-to-Work committee, which is co-chaired by an area school district superintendent and the WCTC VP of Learning and Student Services develops plans, shared professional development activities and articulation agreements.

**Opportunities:**
- Given WCTC’s goal to “Maximize and expand external partnerships and external collaboration,” it may be helpful to create a process for identifying opportunities for creating new relationships.
- WCTC does not appear to have a process to ensure that the needs of those involved in partnerships are being met. The college could probe the success or failure of relationships utilizing direct measures that can be transferable to actionable data.