Chapter 6

Maintaining Accredited Status through the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)
Launched in July 1999 with a generous grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) is an alternative process through which an organization can maintain its accredited status with The Higher Learning Commission. AQIP’s goal is to infuse the principles and benefits of continuous improvement into the culture of colleges and universities in order to assure and advance the quality of higher education. AQIP allows an organization to demonstrate that it meets The Higher Learning Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation and other expectations through sequences of events that align with the ongoing activities that characterize organizations striving continuously to improve their performance. By sharing both its advancement activities and the results of these actions with AQIP, an organization develops the evidence necessary to support and assist the organization in achieving the distinctive higher education mission it has set for itself and the evidence to enable the Commission to make a public quality assurance judgment.

To accomplish these goals, AQIP uses direct, cost-effective processes that it continuously improves. Full details about AQIP’s Strategy Forums, Systems Appraisals, and various other services are available on the AQIP Web site. The Web site also provides links to information about involvement, quality and systematic improvement, and other initiatives that support AQIP’s network of participants.

### Exploring AQIP and Quality Improvement

The first step for an organization interested in continuous improvement is to learn as much as possible about AQIP and other quality programs and to kick off a campus-wide discussion of how such an initiative might serve its needs and fit its culture. AQIP’s Principles of High Performance Organizations describe the characteristics participating colleges and universities strive to embed within their culture. Research and experience indicate that these principles—Focus, Involvement, Leadership, Learning, People, Collaboration, Agility, Foresight, Information, and Integrity—are characteristics of organizations that have achieved a systematic approach to continuous quality improvement. These qualities underlie all of AQIP’s criteria, activities, processes, and services, and they represent the values to which AQIP itself aspires organizationally.

An organization that currently has a flourishing quality program has finished this first step. But if words like alignment, process, silo, team, and metric are foreign to campus discourse, the organization needs to encourage conversation and learn more about quality principles before continuing. It is critical that a core of people, including senior leaders, appreciates the principles of continuous quality improvement and the level of commitment required. Leaders need to clearly understand how system-wide continuous improvement can be introduced, how improved processes can be encouraged, and how enhanced performance can affect overall organizational fitness. Although successful quality initiatives involve everyone, support from leaders is essential.

Every campus has faculty and staff members who are already familiar with quality improvement principles and tools, experts just waiting for a chance to share their enthusiasm with their colleagues. An organization that wants to talk directly with AQIP staff members or arrange an on-campus event that provides deeper understanding should consult Exploration Options on the AQIP Web site.
6.1 - An Introduction to AQIP

Chapter 6: AQIP

Two Options for AQIP Involvement

AQIP offers two different ways for organizations to become involved. One way allows institutions accredited by The Higher Learning Commission to maintain that status, formally reaffirming it periodically, while the other allows any organization to use AQIP processes to propel its continuous improvement efforts without accreditation benefits.

Continuing Improvement and Maintaining Accredited Status

When a college or university formally becomes a Participant in AQIP, the date of its next reaffirmation of accreditation is set seven years from the date of the official action admitting the organization to AQIP. Reaffirmation seven years later is based on the pattern of full participation in AQIP during that period, on evidence of progress and improvement in the organization, and on evidence that the organization continues to fulfill the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation.

An organization can elect to leave AQIP at any time to return to PEAQ, the Commission’s traditional process for maintaining accredited status. If an organization chooses to withdraw from AQIP after participating for five or fewer years, the date for the next comprehensive evaluation reverts to the date on which that review was originally scheduled, or a year later if more time is needed to prepare. If an organization withdraws after more than five years, its next traditional comprehensive evaluation is typically scheduled five years from the year it formally withdrew. Should leaving AQIP create an extended period during which no comprehensive review has occurred, the Commission may require a different schedule.

Continuing Improvement Only

An organization or a major division of a large learning organization can participate in order to use AQIP’s processes for improvement and for the opportunity to network with other organizations that are using quality principles and tools. This Associate participation is appropriate for organizations not located in the North Central Association region (and therefore not eligible for Higher Learning Commission accreditation) or for divisions (such as the School of Education, the College of Engineering, or the Student Affairs Division) of a large organization that is not yet ready or willing to base accreditation on an organization-wide quality initiative. Associate participation requires the same level of involvement as organizations using AQIP to maintain their accreditation, except that accreditation is not part of the relationship. Further details regarding the Associate relationship, as well as specific regulations regarding any published referral to this relationship, are available from the AQIP staff.

Formal Application

To join AQIP, an organization must first formally submit an application, and The Higher Learning Commission must approve it. Like all AQIP documents, the application is Web-based and is available on the AQIP Web site. The application should be submitted well before a traditional self-study would normally be initiated. The application should indicate that the organization has already completed some form of quality-based preliminary self-assessment that included an outside perspective, or that it has concrete plans to do so, with a target date for completion of the self-assessment. Facing challenges does not exclude an organization from AQIP, for systematic improvement is often the ideal strategy for solving a problem or enhancing performance.

An AQIP Review Panel of educational and quality experts evaluates the application and forwards a consensus recommendation to the Commission’s Institutional Actions Council (IAC). The executive director sends the organization a letter announcing the Commission’s action. When an organization is accepted into AQIP, the entire AQIP staff serves as its primary link with the Commission for all matters.

Organizational Self-Assessment

In applying to join AQIP, an organization must demonstrate that it has begun to think about itself in a quality framework. A preliminary self-assessment provides evidence that the organization has looked at itself as a set of systems and processes, rather than as a collection of offices, departments, and academic or administrative units.
As noted above, the self-assessment also needs to provide some outside perspective. Often the people within an organization are too close to a process to perceive the organization’s strengths and opportunities for improvement.

This preliminary self-assessment may take various forms. An organization that has completed an application to a state or national quality award program has a valuable self-assessment in the feedback report. A report that gives evidence of outside advice and guidance resulting from a quality-based self-assessment undertaken in partnership with a consultant also meets AQIP’s expectations.

AQIP itself provides two optional tools, Vital Focus and AQIP Examiner, that may help applicants meet this preliminary self-assessment requirement.

- **Vital Focus.** AQIP has developed Vital Focus, a self-assessment package, to help organizations prepare themselves for implementing quality improvement by looking at their improvement opportunities from a systems and process perspective. Vital Focus swiftly provides an organization with an index of its strengths in relationship to the AQIP Criteria and Principles of High Performance Organizations. It makes visible the gaps between current performance and where the organization could or should be. By evaluating AQIP’s fit with the organization’s strategic context, mission, goals, and priorities, Vital Focus serves as a tool for strategic planning and organizational learning.

  Vital Focus also enables the organization to tap into the diverse perspectives of staff, revealing the organization’s cultural foundation. The package involves an online survey form to be completed by all faculty and staff members, which is followed by a visit to campus by an AQIP representative to kick off a discussion series exploring the survey results. Vital Focus is a valuable tool for involving an entire campus in the discussion of continuous systematic improvement, something quality award applications often fail to do.

- **AQIP Examiner.** For organizations that have recently hosted a PEAQ comprehensive visit and wish to join AQIP, AQIP Examiner may provide a useful self-assessment instrument. AQIP Examiner is an online survey hosted at a neutral Web site to assure participants of confidentiality. It is designed to help higher education organizations gauge their progress in creating a culture of continuous process improvement, and to discover how and where they can next profitably invest their efforts.
The AQIP Criteria and the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation

6.2 - Systems Thinking in the Process-Focused Organization

AQIP is characterized by its concentration on systems and processes both as the basis for quality assurance and as leverage for institutional improvement. To ensure that its participant organizations maintain this process focus, AQIP created nine criteria that pose challenging questions about groups of related processes. Although the AQIP Criteria examine an organization from a perspective different from the lens used in the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation, they ultimately permit an institution to create a body of evidence that will allow easy proof that it fulfills the Commission’s Criteria. The figure below shows how the nine AQIP Criteria together describe the interrelationships among systems essential to any effective college or university, using quality to refer to the never-ending improvement of systems and processes in support of mission.

AQIP insists that every organization be lucid and direct about what it is trying to accomplish, and clear about identifying those for whom it is expending its energies and capital. To do this effectively, every organization needs a system that can precisely decipher the shifting needs of its target students and stakeholders. At the left of the figure, Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs examines this system, which reestablishes the basis for accountability by determining the requirements, expectations, and preferences of stakeholders. Knowing the needs it chooses to serve delineates a higher education organization’s mission and vision. In turn, this understanding drives the design and operation of the other systems and processes an organization establishes to carry out its mission.

On the figure’s right end, Helping Students Learn highlights the core processes—such as instructional design and delivery—that contribute directly to student learning, an educational organization’s primary purpose and achievement. Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives provides for diversity in the character of higher education organizations by encompassing the variety of processes that organizations administer to pursue additional critical goals, such as research, development of endowment funds, competitive athletics, and service to specific communities. Together, these two criteria examine the key processes that a college or university employs to create value directly for its students and other stakeholders. In the eyes of the people an organization serves, the processes included in these systems are the apparent reasons it exists. They are where an organization touches and affects the lives of its stakeholders.
The center of the diagram lists the AQIP Criteria that examine those key groups of internal processes that every organization uses to convert the needs of those it serves into the services it provides. Valuing People examines human resource policies and procedures, while Leading and Communicating scrutinizes the ways decisions are made and conveyed to an organization’s external and internal constituents. Supporting Institutional Operations looks at the array of support services critical to every college or university—accounting, food service, maintenance, parking, and many others. Planning Continuous Improvement examines how an organization plans, strategically and operationally. Building Collaborative Relationships reviews an organization’s ways of promoting internal cooperation across divisions and for forging collaborations with other institutions, businesses, and communities. Often these groups of crucial processes are invisible to outsiders. Helping an organization better link and align these “internal” processes allows it to better respond to those external students and stakeholders whom it exists to serve.

Underlying everything, Measuring Effectiveness sustains other systems by effectively collecting, storing, retrieving, and interpreting the information needed to improve the entire organization. While AQIP recognizes the importance of inputs and resources, this criteria stresses the necessity for an organization to accurately measure its current performance in key processes—to know whether it is delivering what students and stakeholders require and expect. By developing and using performance metrics, an organization ensures that it is using its resources effectively and demonstrating its accountability to those who fund and support it. When gaps exist between present performance and possible or desirable results, new strategies for improvement come primarily from understanding existing systems and processes and redesigning or improving them.

Together, these nine sets of questions analyze interrelationships among systems essential to all effective colleges and universities. To advance the core purpose of all higher education, the AQIP Criteria take a systemic view, defining and evaluating the key systems or processes within an organization as they relate to learning, and demanding concrete indicators that measure their effectiveness. The questions in each criterion provide a road map for examining systems by asking: Are we doing the right things to achieve our mission? Are we doing those things well? Mission-focused and holistic, the AQIP Criteria provide a framework that supports improvement within any organization whose mission targets learning.

Participation in AQIP and Meeting the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation

To maintain their accredited status, all Commission-accredited colleges and universities must meet identical requirements: file an Annual Report on Organizational Information and Operational Indicators, follow the Commission’s institutional change processes, keep current on dues, and demonstrate they meet the Criteria for Accreditation. While the processes for maintaining accredited status differ in AQIP from those used in PEAQ, the fundamental requirements remain the same.

Because each of the nine AQIP Criteria examines a category of processes vital to every college or university, the nine categories are comprehensive, covering all of the key processes and goals found in any higher education organization. The AQIP Criteria’s comprehensive nature and specific questions about processes, results, and improvement allow each organization to fully describe its activities and accomplishments while analyzing itself in a way that promotes critical and productive thinking about improvement. When an organization uses AQIP is required to provide evidence that it meets the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation, it can usually reference the same evidence it provides in answering the AQIP Criteria questions. The table on the following page illustrates the alignment between the Commission’s five Criteria for Accreditation and the AQIP Criteria.

AQIP works regularly with institutions to make sure the records they present—through their Portfolios, selection of Action Projects, and other activities—provide the Commission with the documentation needed to justify continuation of accredited status. The AQIP Criteria are reviewed annually to ensure that the questions they pose stimulate institutions to examine and address all of the areas covered in the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation. Through these activities, AQIP guarantees that its requirements remain in alignment with the Commission’s, and that participating organizations should readily be able to provide evidence that they meet the Commission’s expectations for continuation of accredited status.
### The Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation

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<tr>
<th>Criterion One: Mission and Integrity. The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future. The organization’s allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.</td>
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<td>Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching. The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.</td>
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<td>Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge. The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.</td>
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<td>Criterion Five: Engagement and Service. As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both valuable.</td>
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#### See Section 6.4 for the complete AQIP Criteria questions. Here are the groups of processes they focus on:

1. Helping Students Learn
2. Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives
3. Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs
4. Valuing People
5. Leading and Communicating
6. Supporting Institutional Operations
7. Measuring Effectiveness
8. Planning Continuous Improvement
9. Building Collaborative Relationships

See Section 6.4 for the complete AQIP Criteria questions.
Chapter 6: AQIP

6.3 - AQIP’s Core Processes

The Strategy Forum, Action Projects, Annual Updates, Systems Portfolios, and Systems Appraisal are all integral AQIP processes. So, too, is reaffirmation of accreditation, which enables a college or university participating in AQIP to demonstrate its continued fulfillment of the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation. A brief description of each follows.

**Strategy Forum**

The Strategy Forum is a supportive, facilitated peer review process to help an organization select, critically examine, and commit to a set of Action Projects that will drive quality improvement. The Strategy Forum helps the organization address the AQIP Criteria that are most vital at the time. AQIP does not expect a college or university to address everything simultaneously, but instead to concentrate its energies on three or four Action Projects that will most significantly advance its goals.

At the Strategy Forum, peers from a variety of organizations work to improve each others’ systems by probing, questioning, and testing strategies and Action Projects. This takes place in a constructive environment designed to help everyone invest improvement efforts wisely and productively. No one outside an organization, either peers or AQIP, will dictate what the organization must do to improve. That responsibility rests with the organization alone. The function of peers, AQIP facilitators, and Strategy Forum staff is to guarantee that each organization has examined important issues from all perspectives before it makes these critical decisions.

**Participants**

Each Strategy Forum is a three-day event attended by teams from up to eight institutions. The tone is serious, but casual and friendly. The Strategy Forum mixes small and large, public and private, two-year and graduate, and rural and urban institutions from different states. The diversity means that participants will be exposed to unfamiliar viewpoints and strategies and will have their assumptions challenged.

Also attending are a selected group of trained AQIP facilitators and staff members conversant with quality principles and tools. They help ensure that discussions stay on track and focus on helping each organization craft Action Projects that will advance its quality improvement agenda.

**Action Projects**

Within the larger sequence of activities and services that constitute AQIP, Action Projects strengthen an organization’s commitment to continuous improvement; educate and motivate faculty, staff, and administrators; and improve systems and processes that will lead to success in achieving organizational goals. Ambitious Action Projects create a foundation for improvement initiatives and demonstrate the vitality of the organization’s commitment to quality. Each organization shares three or four Action Projects that will swiftly and determinedly move it closer to being what it wants to be.

At least one of the Action Projects relates directly to Helping Students Learn. This project can deal with learning assessment, educational program design and delivery of instruction, evaluation, academic advising, or other academic processes that directly affect students’ learning.
In designing its Action Projects, an organization can examine new opportunities or target systems and processes that have served it poorly in the past. To prepare for the Strategy Forum’s intensive dialogue, each team needs to be confident that the Action Projects it has identified

- Make a serious and visible difference to institutional performance
- Embody challenging but attainable goals
- Stretch the organization to learn and to excel in new ways
- Focus on both efficiency and benefits to students and other stakeholders

Organizations choose their own Action Projects, for they know better than anyone else what needs to be improved to help them achieve their visions and missions. Neither AQIP nor peers formally approve Action Projects. But at the Strategy Forum, both AQIP representatives and peers from other organizations that are equally serious about quality improvement challenge and test choices, grilling participants on why they wish to select these particular projects as the most vitally important priorities for improvement. Valuable guidance for generating Action Project ideas and narrowing down a broader list of potential projects can be found on AQIP’s Web site.

**Annual Update**

Organizations participating in AQIP file Annual Updates on the progress or completion of the Action Projects that they committed to after attending the Strategy Forum. Holding organizations accountable for the projects they began, these Updates provide feedback, recognition, and assistance if needed. If a project’s sole goal was a successful outcome, organizations might be tempted to take on only easy, sure-to-succeed endeavors that would undermine their purposes. Therefore, AQIP does not directly draw conclusions from whether an Action Project succeeds or fails.

**Action Project Directory**

The Action Project Directory is a Web-based database of all current and successfully completed Action Projects undertaken by AQIP participants. It can be searched by organization, by the AQIP criteria related to a project, or by keywords, and it provides details and a contact person at the organization doing the project.

Action Projects invariably touch upon processes covered by more than one AQIP Criterion. For each project, an organization identifies the AQIP Criterion most directly related to the goal, and up to three other related criteria. For example, the goal of improving faculty ability to use technology in teaching might relate to Helping Students Learn (criterion 1), Valuing People (criterion 4), and Measuring Effectiveness (criterion 7), among others. Organizations also identify up to four Principles of High Performance Organizations that should or could be affected by the project. By searching for others’ projects using the AQIP criteria and principles, organizations can generate ideas for their own projects and can network with others doing similar projects.

Nearly all organizations allow public access to their projects in the Action Project Directory. The directory is an invaluable networking tool as well as a publicly visible testament to the creativity and self-regulatory sense of responsibility of higher education organizations.

**Systems Portfolio**

During the first three years of participating, an organization assembles a Systems Portfolio with broad faculty and staff involvement. This document is essential for the Systems Appraisal that AQIP conducts three years after the organization’s first Strategy Forum. Preparation can begin as soon as the organization is accepted to participate in AQIP. Crafting the Systems Portfolio is an opportunity to look at systems and processes in new and revealing ways.

The Systems Portfolio consists of an Organizational Overview and explicates each of the major systems employed to accomplish an organization’s mission and objectives. The organization answers specific questions for each of the nine AQIP Criteria. For each system, the questions deal with context for analysis, processes, results, and improvement. The Organizational Overview presents a capsule picture that helps readers understand the organization’s key strengths and ambitions, as well as the challenges and conflicts it faces. Information about systems, processes, and performance provides a context for appreciating the organization’s choices and decisions.
The Systems Portfolio serves as an always-up-to-date account of key systems and processes. It is a credible accountability report for all constituencies interested in organizational performance, including specialized accrediting agencies, state regulators, funding and grant agencies, voters, legislators, and various public groups.

**Contents**

In combination with other information shared with the Commission, the Systems Portfolio provides the basic information AQIP needs to review the organization and assure the public of its quality. The fact that an organization shares its Systems Portfolio with faculty, staff, administrators, and the public helps guarantee its accuracy and veracity. The process used by the Commission for reviewing the Systems Portfolio is explained below.

**Keeping the Portfolio Current**

Following the Systems Appraisal, the organization continues to update its Systems Portfolio whenever major changes occur or new performance data become available. For future Systems Appraisals, the organization does not need to create a new Systems Portfolio if it keeps the original up-to-date. Thus, if an organization mounts an Action Project that leads to a redesign of a key process, it will capture its success in the Systems Portfolio. Similarly, it will include changes in performance.

**The Systems Appraisal**

The Systems Appraisal complements the intensive work embodied in the Action Projects by asking the organization to take stock of its overall systems for maintaining quality. It is also the lead-in for the next round of Action Projects.

**The Systems Appraisal Process**

Appraisals consist of two stages, independent and consensus review. By including two distinct stages, AQIP ensures consistent Systems Appraisals, making sure judgments represent the shared consensus of all Systems Appraisers. AQIP designates a leader for each Systems Appraisal, who makes assignments based on each reviewer’s expertise.

Appraisers may look at the organization’s Web site, but organizations are not expected to prepare additional materials (e.g., appendices) beyond the Systems Portfolio. If the Appraisers have serious questions that require clarification or verification, they communicate these to the Systems Appraisal leader or to AQIP staff, who may contact the organization to obtain clarification.

**The Appraisal Feedback Report**

Following standardized evaluation procedures, the Systems Appraisal produces a consensus Appraisal Feedback Report for the institution. This report assesses the maturity of each of the nine systems to which the AQIP Criteria refer, identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement within each. Feedback reports range from thirty to forty pages: a two- or three-page introduction, two to four pages on each criterion (with twice that on Criterion One), and a four- to five-page Strategic Issues Analysis.

In addition, the Systems Appraisal provides an Appraisal Abstract that serves as an executive summary and is released publicly by The Higher Learning Commission. It serves as the Commission’s public disclosure of the organization’s progress in its quality journey.

The process concludes when AQIP sends the organization its Feedback Report. However, organizations may choose to have the Systems Appraisal leader deliver the Appraisal Feedback Report in person. AQIP believes that offering this option assists organizations that are using the process to focus attention on their quality efforts and drive higher levels of improvement.

Before the Appraisal Feedback Report is completed, a draft is provided to a fact checker identified by the organization. The fact checker, whose involvement is scheduled before the Systems Appraisal begins, certifies the accuracy of the facts included in the report.
Between the Systems Appraisal and the Next Strategy Forum

Following a Systems Appraisal, AQIP offers additional assistance to organizations that want to accelerate their improvement plans. They can choose:

- A conferral report, in which an expert in a particular area reviews plans and offers written advice
- A one-day campus visit by an AQIP Coach
- A campus visit by a team of selected consultants for one or more days

Organizations absorb the costs of these services, which AQIP arranges. In all such cases, the organization establishes the topic(s) on which it seeks assistance and the criteria for determining the value of the advice.

During the seven year period prior to an institution’s reaffirmation of accreditation, AQIP will physically visit every organization at least once. This visit can serve multiple purposes. At a minimum, it will establish that the organization complies with those USDE requirements the Commission is expected to check, as well as to confirm any expectations of the Commission’s, such as review of third party comment. The visit will also provide an opportunity for the organization’s faculty, staff, and students to share their perceptions and concerns directly with representatives of the Commission. AQIP visits may be combined with visits that result from an organizational request for consulting assistance or permission to institute a major organizational change. The scheduling, size, and agenda for an AQIP visit will be determined by the organization and AQIP in collaboration, as will the written reports and artifacts that result from such visits.

Reaffirmation of Accreditation through AQIP

Every seven years, AQIP reviews and reaffirms the accredited status of participating Commission-accredited organizations. A Commission-trained AQIP Review Panel examines each organization’s current Systems Portfolio and its last six years of Action Projects, Systems Appraisals, and other interactions with AQIP and the Commission, including reports of organizationally-requested or Commission-sponsored visits. AQIP and each organization will collaborate to ensure that both the organization and AQIP know how the evidence in the System’s Portfolio aligns with and supports the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation. The Panel documents where it finds satisfactory evidence of compliance with each of the Criteria for Accreditation. In exceptional cases in which the evidence is incomplete, the Panel seeks and obtains additional facts or verification before it makes a recommendation to the Institutional Actions Council (IAC). These steps are followed:

**Step 1.** An organization engages in all AQIP processes (Strategy Forums, Annual Updates, Systems Portfolio Appraisals, at least one visit) for a seven-year period. Throughout this period, the organization works collaboratively with AQIP to ensure that the overall body of evidence it presents demonstrates awareness of and compliance with the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation.

**Step 2.** The AQIP Review Panel examines the collective history of the organization’s interaction with AQIP and the Commission (i.e., reports of the various processes and activities, organizational indicators, current Systems Portfolio, tables prepared by the organization showing the correspondence between AQIP documents and the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation) and other materials provided by the organization to determine whether and how this evidence demonstrates fulfillment of the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components. If evidence relating to any of the Core Components is insufficient, the Panel seeks and obtains additional information from the organization before making its recommendation.

**Step 3.** The Panel forwards recommendations regarding reaffirmation of accreditation and continuing AQIP participation to the IAC for a decision and subsequent ratification by the Board of Trustees.

AQIP works to help accredited organizations proactively maintain that status. Colleges and universities are supported in using their own quality improvement initiatives to accomplish goals and reach levels of performance that meet the expectations of the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation. Should an organization begin to flounder in its ability to meet a Criterion or a Core Component, the checks and milestones built into AQIP’s processes provide the college or university with the feedback and help needed to prevent little problems from growing into big gaps or failings. By keeping reaffirmation of accreditation separate from its other processes and services, AQIP takes care to maintain the independence of judgment that public quality assurance requires while still providing accredited organizations with the nurture, support, and encouragement that enables improvement and quality performance.
6.4 - Using the AQIP Criteria

Each AQIP Criterion deals with a related group of processes and allows an organization to analyze, understand, and explore opportunities for improving these processes. Thus each asks

- How does your organization approach these processes? How do you design and stabilize key processes? What methods do you use consistently to achieve the goals you want?
- How broadly have you implemented your approach across different departments, operations, and locations?
- How do you measure your processes and evaluate your results? What trends do you perceive? How do your results compare with the results of other approaches designed to achieve similar goals?
- How do you use information about your processes' performance results to improve your own approach? How do you learn to improve continuously from your experience with these processes?
- How effectively do your processes and their results serve your students’ and other stakeholders’ needs?

The AQIP Criteria

AQIP Criterion One: Helping Students Learn

Criterion One identifies the shared purpose of all higher education organizations and is accordingly the pivot of any institutional analysis. This criterion focuses on the teaching–learning processes within a formal instructional context, yet also addresses how the entire organization contributes to student learning and overall student development. It examines 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 cocurricular support
- Student assessment
- Measures
- Analysis of results
- Improvement efforts
6.4 - Using the AQIP Criteria

Chapter 6: AQIP

Answer the following questions about Criterion One.

Context for Analysis (C)

1C1 What common student learning objectives do you hold for all students (regardless of their status or program of study), and what pattern of knowledge and skills do you expect them to possess upon completion of their general and specialized studies? As appropriate, address cocurricular objectives/goals. Criterion Six, Supporting Institutional Operations, asks how you determine, address, and improve your learning support systems to contribute to achieving student learning and development objectives.

1C2 By what means do you ensure that student learning expectations, practices, and development objectives align with your mission, vision, and philosophy?

1C3 What are your key instructional programs? What delivery methods are used within these key programs? To what degree is technology used within the formal instructional context?

1C4 What practices do you use to ensure that the design and delivery of student learning options prepare students to live in a diverse world and accommodate a variety of student learning styles?

1C5 By what means do you create and maintain a climate that celebrates intellectual freedom, inquiry, reflection, respect for intellectual property, and respect for differing and diverse opinions?

Processes (P)

1P1 How do you determine your common student learning objectives as well as specific program learning objectives? Who is involved in setting these objectives?

1P2 How do you design new programs and courses to facilitate student learning? How do you balance educational market issues with student needs in designing responsive academic programming?

1P3 How do you determine the preparation required of students for the specific curricula, programs, courses, and learning they will pursue?

1P4 How do you communicate expectations regarding student preparation and student learning objectives (for programs, courses, and the awarding of specific degrees or credentials) to prospective and current students? How do admissions, student support, and registration services aid in this process?

1P5 How do you help students select programs of study that match their needs, interests, and abilities? In providing this help, how are discrepancies between the necessary and actual preparation of students and their learning styles detected and addressed?

1P6 How do you determine and document effective teaching and learning? How are these expectations communicated across the institution?

Criterion Four, Valuing People, examines how you ensure that hiring practices take into account the needs for appropriate faculty talents and credentials and how you ensure that reward and recognition systems are aligned with teaching and learning objectives.

1P7 How do you build an effective and efficient course delivery system? How do delivery decisions balance student and institutional needs?

1P8 How do you monitor the currency and effectiveness of your curriculum? What process is in place for changing or discontinuing programs and courses?

1P9 How do you determine student and faculty needs relative to learning support? How are learning support areas involved in the student learning and development process? Learning support areas may include library, advising, and tutoring, as appropriate.

1P10 How are cocurricular development goals aligned with curricular learning objectives?

From the point of view of the formal instructional process, Criterion Six, Supporting Institutional Operations, asks how support areas such as residence life, student activities, advising, and counseling address student development performance (learning, behaviors, values, activities, etc.) and determine processes and goals to aid in student development.

1P11 How do you determine the processes for student assessment?

1P12 How do you discover how well prepared the students who are completing programs, degrees, and certificates are for further education or employment?

1P13 What measures of student performance do you collect and analyze regularly?
Chapter 6: AQIP

6.4 - Using the AQIP Criteria

Results (R)

1R1 What are your results for common student learning objectives as well as specific program learning objectives?
1R2 What is your evidence that students have acquired the knowledge and skills base required by the institution and its stakeholders (that is, other educational institutions and employers) for the awarding of specific degrees or credentials?
   Results might address perspectives of other higher education institutions, employers, and so on.
1R3 What are your results for processes associated with helping students learn?
   Results might include processes in designing and introducing new courses and programs, using technology and its impact, evidence of effective teaching, processes associated with scheduling, and so on.
1R4 Regarding 1R1 through 1R3, how do your results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside the education community?
   For 1R1 through 1R4, address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate.

Improvement (I)

1I1 How do you improve your current processes and systems for helping students learn and develop?
1I2 With regard to your current results for student learning and development, how do you set targets for improvement? What specific improvement priorities are you targeting, and how will they be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders?

AQIP Criterion Two: Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives

Criterion Two addresses the processes that contribute to the achievement of the major objectives that complement student learning and fulfill other portions of the mission. Depending on the organization’s character, the Criterion examines processes and systems related to

- Identification of other distinctive objectives
- Alignment of other distinctive objectives
- Faculty and staff roles
- Assessment and review of objectives
- Measures
- Analysis of results
- Improvement efforts

Answer the following questions about Criterion Two.

Context for Analysis (C)

2C1 What are your explicit institutional objectives in addition to helping students learn (Criterion One)?
   Other distinctive objectives may include pure and applied research and scholarship, professional and public service, institutional citizenship, service learning, service to a religious order or philosophy, economic stimulation and development of the community, growth in organizational capital, participation in college athletics and other auxiliary or secondary activities, or any other major activities to which the institution commits substantial resources, energy, and attention. These objectives are distinctive because they distinguish the institution’s unique identity, while all higher education organizations share the objective of helping students learn.

2C2 By what means do you ensure that your other distinctive objectives align with your mission, vision, and philosophy?

2C3 How do your other distinctive objectives support or complement your processes and systems for helping students learn?

Processes (P)

2P1 How do you determine your other distinctive objectives? Who is involved in setting these objectives?

2P2 How do you communicate your expectations regarding these objectives?
   Criterion Four, Valuing People, examines the ways you make certain that your reward and recognition systems are aligned with your other distinctive objectives.

2P3 How do you determine faculty and staff needs relative to these objectives?

2P4 How are these objectives assessed and reviewed? Who is involved, and how is their feedback incorporated in readjusting the objectives or the processes that support them?

2P5 What measures of accomplishing your other distinctive objectives do you collect and analyze regularly?
Results (R)

2R1 What are your results in accomplishing your other distinctive objectives?

2R2 How do the results in 2R1 compare with the results of peer institutions? How do they compare, if appropriate, with the results of other higher education institutions and of organizations outside the education community?
   For 2R1 and 2R2, address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate.

2R3 How do your results in accomplishing other distinctive objectives strengthen your overall institution? How do they enhance your relationship with the community and region you serve?

Improvement (I)

2I1 How do you improve your systems and processes for accomplishing your other distinctive objectives?

2I2 With regard to your current results for accomplishing your other distinctive objectives, how do you set targets for improvement? What specific improvement priorities are you targeting, and how will they be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders?

AQIP Criterion Three: Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs

Criterion Three examines how the organization works actively to understand student and other stakeholder needs. It examines 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
- Improvement efforts

Answer the following questions about Criterion Three.

Context for Analysis (C)

3C1 Into what key groups do you subcategorize your students and other stakeholders? How do you define and differentiate these student and other stakeholder groups?
   Students are any educational organization’s primary stakeholders, but your organization may see its mission as serving other groups as well. For purposes of Criterion Three, other stakeholders refers to groups that have a major stake in the organization’s success, such as, for example, parents, alumni, board members, local and regional communities, employers, and legislators. Internal groups (faculty and staff) are addressed in Criterion Four, Valuing People.

3C2 What are the short-term and long-term requirements and expectations of your student and other stakeholder groups?

Processes (P)

3P1 How do you identify the changing needs of your student groups? How do you analyze and select a course of action regarding these needs?
   Changing needs might address, for example, needs that will impact enrollment in programs and courses, services provided, and facilities required, as appropriate.

3P2 How do you build and maintain a relationship with your students?
   Address current and prospective students, as appropriate.

3P3 How do you identify the changing needs of your key stakeholder groups? How do you analyze and select a course of action regarding these needs?
   Changing needs might address, for example, needs of the communities and region that you serve and needs that will impact students upon entry into internship and service opportunities, the job market, and further educational opportunities, as appropriate.

3P4 How do you build and maintain a relationship with your key stakeholders?
   Address both current and prospective stakeholders, as appropriate.
3P5 How do you determine whether new student and stakeholder groups should be addressed within your educational offerings and services?
How you anticipate the future needs of your student and other stakeholder groups and include them in your planning process should be addressed in Criterion Eight, Planning Continuous Improvement.

3P6 How do you collect complaint information from students and other stakeholders? How do you analyze this feedback both in a formative and summative manner and select a course of action? How do you communicate your actions to students and stakeholders?

3P7 How do you determine student and other stakeholder satisfaction? What measures of student and other stakeholder satisfaction do you collect and analyze regularly?

Results (R)

3R1 What are your results for student satisfaction with your performance?
Results might include satisfaction with instructional and supporting institutional operations, as driven by the requirements identified in 3C2. Results might include complaint information as well.

3R2 What are your results for the building of relationships with your students?
Results might address, for example, attrition and retention, transfer, loyalty, and overall value ratings.

3R3 What are your results for stakeholder satisfaction with your performance?
Results regarding serving the communities and region that you serve should be addressed in Criterion Two, Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives.

3R4 What are your results for the building of relationships with your key stakeholders?
Results might address, for example, retention, loyalty, and overall value ratings.

3R5 Regarding 3R1 through 3R4, how do your results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside the education community?
For 3R1 through 3R5, address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate.

Improvement (I)

3I1 How do you improve your current processes and systems for understanding the needs of your key student and other stakeholder groups?

3I2 With regard to your current results for understanding the needs of your key student and other stakeholder groups, how do you set targets for improvement? What specific improvement priorities are you targeting, and how will they be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders?

AQIP Criterion Four: Valuing People

Criterion Four explores commitment to the development of faculty, staff, and administrators, since the efforts of all are required for success. It examines 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
- Improvement efforts
Answer the following questions about Criterion Four.

**Context for Analysis (C)**

4C1 In what distinctive ways do you organize your work environment, work activities, and job classifications to strengthen your focus on student learning and development?

Criterion Four addresses your workforce, including faculty, staff, and administrators. As appropriate, address your student workforce throughout Criterion Four as well.

4C2 What key institutional and geographic factors determine how you address your work environment and job classification? In what ways do you use part-time employees?

4C3 What demographic trends do you analyze as you look at your workforce needs over the next decade? Also discuss how the plans addressed in Criterion Eight, Planning Continuous Improvement, include these trends and needs.

4C4 What key faculty, staff, and administrative training initiatives are you currently undertaking or planning to implement in the near future?

**Processes (P)**

4P1 How do you identify the specific credentials, skills, and values required for faculty, staff, and administrators? How do your hiring processes make certain that you employ people who possess these characteristics?

4P2 How do you recruit, hire, and retain employees? How do you orient all employees to your organization? How do you plan for changes in personnel?

4P3 How do your work processes and activities contribute to communications, cooperation, high performance, innovation, empowerment, organizational learning, and skill sharing? How do you ensure the ethical practices of all employees?

4P4 How do you train and develop all faculty, staff, and administrators to contribute fully and effectively throughout their careers with your institution? How do you reinforce this training? Training and development might include, for example, leadership training at all organizational levels, the use of technology, safety issues, the collection and use of tools associated with measuring effectiveness, and the key issues associated with educational changes.

4P5 How do you determine training needs? How is your training aligned with the plans addressed in Criterion Eight, Planning Continuous Improvement, and how does it augment your focus on helping students learn and accomplishing other distinctive objectives? Include how you prepare all personnel to contribute to a culture of continuous improvement and an understanding of how their roles and responsibilities contribute to the success of your organization.

4P6 How do you design and use your personnel evaluation system? How does this system align with your objectives in Criterion One, Helping Students Learn, and in Criterion Two, Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives? Include how you provide feedback to employees.

4P7 How do you design your recognition, reward, and compensation systems to align with your objectives in Criterion One, Helping Students Learn, and in Criterion Two, Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives? How do you support employees through benefits and services?

4P8 How do you determine key issues related to the motivation of faculty, staff, and administrators? How are these issues analyzed, and how is a course of action selected?

4P9 How do you provide for and evaluate employee satisfaction, health and safety, and well-being? Specify varying methods, if appropriate, for faculty, staff, and administrators.

4P10 What measures of valuing people do you collect and analyze regularly?

**Results (R)**

4R1 What are your results in valuing people?

Include faculty, staff, and administrator satisfaction, health and safety, well-being, and your employees’ impact on institutional development.

4R2 What are your results in processes associated with valuing people?

Results might include, for example, processes in designing, modifying, and delivering new recruitment and selection procedures, orientation and/or training sessions, retention of employees, and employee evaluation systems.

4R3 What evidence indicates the productivity and effectiveness of your faculty, staff, and administrators in helping you achieve your goals?
AQIP Criterion Five: Leading and Communicating

Criterion Five addresses how the leadership and communication structures, networks, and processes guide the organization in setting directions, making decisions, seeking future opportunities, and building and sustaining a learning environment. It examines 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
- Improvement efforts

**Answer the following questions about Criterion Five.**

**Context for Analysis (C)**

- **5C1** Describe your leadership and communication systems. (A brief chart or summary of groups, committees, or teams and their functions may be useful.)
  - Your leadership system includes not only individuals who have day-to-day supervisory or decision-making responsibility, but also leadership groups within the organization and oversight entities such as institutional or state boards or trustees.

- **5C2** In what ways do you ensure that the practices of your leadership system—at all institutional levels—align with the practices and views of your board, senior leaders, and (if applicable) oversight entities?

- **5C3** What are your institutional values and expectations regarding ethics and equity, social responsibilities, and community service and involvement?
  - Specific community service and involvement activities may be addressed in Criterion Two, Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives. For purposes of Criterion Five, address the overall values and expectations set forth by leaders.

**Processes (P)**

- **5P1** How do your leaders set directions in alignment with your mission, vision, and values that are conducive to high performance, individual development and initiative, organizational learning, and innovation? How do these directions take into account the needs and expectations of students and key stakeholder groups and create a strong focus on students and learning?

- **5P2** How do your leaders guide your institution in seeking future opportunities and building and sustaining a learning environment?

- **5P3** How are decisions made in your institution? How do you use teams, task forces, groups, or committees to recommend or make decisions and to carry them out?
  - Describe how decisions are actually made and implemented, even if this differs from your theoretical or procedural governance guidelines.
| **5P4** | How do your leaders use information and results in their decision-making process?  
*By specific group, describe the key results reviewed and indicate the frequency. Key results are those results, from all organizational areas, that are critical to understanding whether the organization is succeeding—the kind of results described in the nine AQIP Criteria.* |
| **5P5** | How does communication occur between and among institutional levels?  
*Address downward, upward, and two-way communication, as well as how leaders and leadership groups communicate with one another.* |
| **5P6** | How do your leaders communicate a shared mission, vision, values, and high performance expectations regarding institutional directions and opportunities, learning, continuous improvement, ethics and equity, social responsibilities, and community service and involvement? |
| **5P7** | How are leadership abilities encouraged, developed, and strengthened among faculty, staff, and administrators? How are leadership best practices, knowledge, and skills communicated and shared throughout your institution? |
| **5P8** | How do your leaders and board members ensure that your mission, vision, and values are passed on during leadership succession? How is your leadership succession plan developed?  
*Describe your leadership succession plan.* |
| **5P9** | What measures of leading and communicating do you collect and analyze regularly? |

### Results (R)

| **5R1** | What are your results for leading and communicating processes and systems?  
*Results might include, for example, leadership effectiveness, satisfaction with leadership, leadership communication effectiveness, and value of decisions made.* |
| **5R2** | Regarding **5R1**, how do your results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside the education community?  
*For **5R1** and **5R2**, address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate.* |

### Improvement (I)

| **5I1** | How do you improve your current processes and systems for leading and communicating?  
*Address how you use student, faculty, staff, administrator, and key stakeholder feedback, as appropriate.* |
| **5I2** | With regard to your current results for leading and communicating, how do you set targets for improvement? What specific improvement priorities are you targeting, and how will these be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders? |

### AQIP Criterion Six: Supporting Institutional Operations

Criterion Six addresses the support processes that help provide an environment in which learning can thrive. It examines 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
- Improvement efforts

### Answer the following questions about Criterion Six.

| **6C1** | What are your key student and administrative support service processes? What are the support service process needs of students and other stakeholder groups?  
*Student support services could include, for example, admissions, advising, athletics, bookstore, campus activities, campus safety, career services, computing, disability services, financial aid, food services, health, library, registration, residential life, and tutoring. Administrative support services could include, for example, accounting, business office, cashiering, custodial services, facilities planning and management, financing, maintenance, purchasing, and risk management. Address which services, if any, are outsourced.* |
6.4 - Using the AQIP Criteria

Chapter 6: AQIP

AQIP Criterion Seven: **Measuring Effectiveness**

Criterion Seven examines how the organization collects, analyzes, and uses information to manage itself and to drive performance improvement. It examines 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 system and processes
- Measures
- Analysis of results
- Improvement efforts

**Answer the following questions about Criterion Seven.**

7C1 In what ways do you collect and store information and data, both in centralized and decentralized circumstances? In what ways is this information made accessible to those who need it? Address your primary data collection mechanisms, as appropriate, your information system(s)—not only your central information system, but also those used at varying levels—and your accessibility options (what is available and to whom).
6.4 - Using the AQIP Criteria

Chapter 6: AQIP

AQIP Criterion Eight: Planning Continuous Improvement

Criterion Eight examines the planning processes and how strategies and action plans are helping achieve the mission and vision. It examines 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
- Improvement efforts

| Processes (P) | 7C2 | What are your key institutional measures for tracking effectiveness? These measures might include data on students; accomplishing other distinctive objectives; faculty, staff, and administrators; other key stakeholder groups; academic and other programs; and the performance of institutional operations and processes; and comparative information concerning students, stakeholder groups, programs, and performance in other organizations. |
| Processes (P) | 7P1 | How do you select, manage, and use information and data (including current performance information) to support student learning (Criterion One), overall institutional objectives (Criterion Two), strategies (Criterion Eight), and improvement efforts (all Criteria)? |
| Processes (P) | 7P2 | How do you determine the needs of your departments and units related to information and data collection, storage, and accessibility? How are these needs met? |
| Processes (P) | 7P3 | How do you determine the needs and priorities for comparative information and data? What are your criteria and methods for selecting sources of comparative information and data within and outside the education community? Address determination of needs at both the institutional and department or unit levels. |
| Processes (P) | 7P4 | How, at the institutional level, do you analyze information and data regarding overall performance? How is this analysis shared throughout the organization? Analysis of performance information should span measures you determine to be key from across the nine AQIP Criteria. |
| Processes (P) | 7P5 | How do you ensure that department and unit analysis of information and data aligns with your institutional goals regarding student learning (Criterion One) and overall institutional objectives? How is this analysis shared? |
| Processes (P) | 7P6 | How do you ensure the effectiveness of your information system(s) and related processes? Address, for example, your hardware and software system upgrades, integrity and reliability of information and data, and confidentiality and security of information and data. |
| Processes (P) | 7P7 | What measures of the effectiveness of your system for measuring effectiveness do you collect and analyze regularly? |
| Results (R) | 7R1 | What is the evidence that your system for measuring effectiveness meets your institution’s needs in accomplishing its mission and goals? Results should address processes associated with information and data collection, analysis, and use. These might include, for example, system accessibility; reliability and confidentiality of information and data; and internal satisfaction ratings of the timeliness, accessibility, and user-friendliness of information and data. |
| Results (R) | 7R2 | Regarding 7R1, how do your results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside the education community? For 7R1 and 7R2, address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate. |
| Improvement (I) | 7I1 | How do you improve your current processes and systems for measuring effectiveness? |
| Improvement (I) | 7I2 | With regard to your current results for measuring effectiveness, how do you set targets for improvement? What specific improvement priorities are you targeting, and how will these be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders? |
### Answer the following questions about Criterion Eight.

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| 8C2 | What are your institution’s short-term and long-term strategies? How are these strategies aligned with your mission and vision?  
> Strategies should be interpreted broadly to reflect institutional nuances in language. Thus, strategies might refer to initiatives, directions, objectives, and the like. |

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<th>Processes (P)</th>
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| 8P1 | What is your planning process?  
> Describe, as appropriate, planning steps, who is involved, timelines, factors that are addressed, and methods for addressing the future. Also address how modifications to the mission and vision are addressed. |
| 8P2 | How do you select short-term and long-term strategies?  
> Address, as appropriate, the key influences, challenges, and requirements that most affect your strategy selection and how you address conflicting expectations of key stakeholder groups. |
| 8P3 | How do you develop key action plans to support your institutional strategies?  
> Address the plans you regularly produce, implement, and revise. Also address how progress reports are regularly tracked as well as communicated to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and key stakeholder groups. |
| 8P4 | How do you coordinate and align your planning processes and overall institutional strategies and action plans with your varying institutional levels?  
> Levels might include, for example, colleges, departments, units, and satellite campuses. |
| 8P5 | How do you select measures and set performance projections for your institutional strategies and action plans? |
| 8P6 | How do you account for appropriate resource needs within your strategy selection and action plan implementation processes?  
> Resource needs might include staff, financial, space, and equipment. |
| 8P7 | How do you ensure that faculty, staff, and administrator capabilities will be developed and nurtured to address requirements regarding changing institutional strategies and action plans? |
| 8P8 | What measures of the effectiveness of your system for planning continuous improvement do you collect and analyze regularly? |

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| 8R4 | What is the evidence that your system for planning continuous improvement is effective?  
> Results might include, for example, number of participants involved in the planning process and employee and stakeholder satisfaction with the planning process. Address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate. |

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| 8I2 | With regard to your current results for planning continuous improvement, how do you set targets for improvement? What specific improvement priorities are you targeting, and how will these be addressed?  
> How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities as well as performance projections to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders? |

### AQIP Criterion Nine: Building Collaborative Relationships

Criterion Nine examines the organization’s relationships—current and potential—to analyze how they contribute to accomplishing the mission. It examines processes and systems related to:

- Identification of key internal and external collaborative relationships
- Alignment of key collaborative relationships
- Relationship creation, prioritization, and building
- Needs identification
- Internal relationships
Answer the following questions about Criterion Nine.

**Context for Analysis (C)**

9C1 What are your institution’s key collaborative relationships?
Address specific relationships with educational organizations, businesses, and other organizations. Also address the nature of the relationship (existing or emerging, feeder or receiver, community support, outsource, etc.). Activity that promotes internal collaboration among employees is best addressed in Criterion Four, Valuing People.

External collaborative partners might include organizations that are the sources of entering students (high schools, community colleges, places of work); organizations that are the destination of exiting students (four-year institutions, graduate schools, places of work); suppliers such as food services, book suppliers, and student recruiting services; external agencies such as state coordinating boards or state, local, or national governments; religious organizations; and other institutions or consortia of institutions.

9C2 In what ways do these collaborative relationships reinforce your institutional mission? If applicable, how do the relationships support changes in your institutional directions as addressed in Criterion Eight, Planning Continuous Improvement?

Involvement of external collaborative partners in planning processes may also be addressed in Criterion Eight, Planning Continuous Improvement.

**Processes (P)**

9P1 How do you create, prioritize, and build relationships with the following?

- Educational institutions and other organizations from which you receive your students
- Educational institutions and employers that depend on a supply of your students and graduates who meet their requirements
- Organizations that provide services to your students
- Education associations, external agencies, consortia partners, and the general community with which you interact

9P2 How do you ensure that the varying needs of those involved in these relationships are being met?

9P3 How do you create and build relationships within your institution? How do you assure integration and communication across these relationships?

9P4 What measures of building collaborative relationships do you collect and analyze regularly?

**Results (R)**

9R1 What are your results in building your key collaborative relationships?

9R2 Regarding 9R1, how do your results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside the education community?

For 9R1 and 9R2, address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate.

**Improvement (I)**

9I1 How do you improve your current processes and systems for building collaborative relationships?

9I2 With regard to your current results for student learning and development, how do you set targets for improvement? What specific improvement priorities are you targeting, and how will these be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to relationship partners, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate students and stakeholders?
From The Higher Learning Commission’s 2003 *Handbook of Accreditation*, this is Chapter Six, which describes the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). Additional information about AQIP can be found:

- By looking on AQIP’s website, [http://www.AQIP.org](http://www.AQIP.org)

- By telephoning any of the AQIP staff at 800-621-7440 or emailing them directly:
  - Stephen D. Spangehl, AQIP Director, [ssspangehl@hlcommission.org](mailto:ssspangehl@hlcommission.org) or extension 106
  - Anita Daniel, AQIP Facilitator, [adaniel@hlcommission.org](mailto:adaniel@hlcommission.org) or extension 109
  - Mary Fleming, AQIP Information Specialist, [mfleming@hlcommission.org](mailto:mfleming@hlcommission.org) or extension 130

- By emailing AQIP at [AQIP@hlcommission.org](mailto:AQIP@hlcommission.org)

- By visiting AQIP at the Commission offices at 30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400. Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504