



HEARTLAND

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Quality Program Summary

November, 2011



**Academic
Quality Improvement
Program**

The Higher Learning Commission **NCA**

Heartland Community College was founded in 1990 and began offering classes in the fall of 1991. Heartland serves a geographic corridor that includes parts of De Witt, Ford, Livingston, Logan, McLean, and Tazewell Counties in which the twin cities of Bloomington-Normal serve as its hub and population center. This area, known as Illinois Community College District 540, encompasses some 1,863 square miles and serves a population of more than 208,000 residents.

The College was granted acceptance to the Academic Quality Improvement Program by the Higher Learning Commission in 2005, and submitted its first Systems Portfolio in June, 2009. Systems Appraisal Feedback was provided to the institution in October, 2009.

The State of the Quality Improvement Culture at Heartland Community College

Heartland's approach to implementing AQIP focused initially on chartering successful and impactful Action Projects within a coordinating structure that invited openness of ideas and fostered a sense of ownership among Heartland employees, particularly faculty members. That structure was, and is, primarily supported by an 18-member Coordinating Committee, a smaller sub-group called the New Action Projects Team, and the College's senior leadership. Action Projects throughout Heartland's AQIP tenure have emphasized the use of voicing data from both internal and external stakeholders – including, in many cases, students – to help define project opportunities and refine the scope and goals of those projects. Consequently, while Heartland's Action Projects have been ambitious, most have been tempered by realistic expectations about implementation requirements and timelines. Finally, Action Projects have demonstrated faithful alignment with the nine AQIP Categories as well as with the Higher Learning Commission's Criteria for Accreditation. Past Action Projects have included the following:

- *Tracking Developmental Students Success*: a feasibility study for implementing the “stars” software program, which graphically depicts persistence- and retention-related data at the student unit level or in aggregate.
- *Fostering Community through Enhanced Campus Communication*: a project that resulted in common hours on Friday afternoons dedicated for campus committee, team, department, or unit meetings; 360-degree evaluations of academic supervisors and administrators; the creation of a Faculty Senate; and the regular practice of hosting Campus Conversation, meetings convened among all Heartland employees, typically at the beginning of each new semester.
- *Faculty Academy*: an ongoing component of faculty professional development since its creation as an AQIP Action Project in 2006, the Faculty Academy has cycled through several iterations, each new session building on the successes and challenges experienced in the last. New and returning faculty members have the opportunity to participate in discussion and training focused on a wide array of pertinent or emerging issues in teaching and learning. Furthermore, Academy activities themselves employ a breadth of delivery modes both for convenience and learning.
- *Defining, Describing, Measuring, and Tracking Student Success*: focused discussions across the institution intended to promote more in-depth understanding of the College's measures of effectiveness for student success.
- *Campus Recycling Review and Recommendations*: as a major piece of the College's Climate Action Plan, this project resulted in the mapping and evaluation of the campus recycling process, physical mapping of the locations of recycling units throughout the campus,

administration of campuswide recycling awareness survey, and the implementation of battery recycling.

- *National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) Certification*: a project to complete the NADE certification processes for the College's Developmental Reading, Writing, and Math programs, including self-study and data analysis components.
- *Defining a Comprehensive Career Services/Placement Process*: a particular topic of interest which resulted from the College's first Campus Conversation Day in 2006, this project team studied the capacity and capabilities of the College's current Career/Placement center and identified the requirements for expanding those services in a more comprehensive model. The action project team addressed its work by forming subcommittees to address the development and implementation of a student survey, to research best practices and statutory compliance issues, and to document successes in a centralized portfolio. A final report, which will take into account recent changes in HCC's Enrollment Services and Student Success departments, is due to the College's Cabinet in early 2012.

Current Action Projects are focusing on defining the College's practices in fostering a climate more attentive to issues of academic integrity, exploring the College's current and required capacity for improved counseling services for students, and on implementing Guided Path to Success, or GPS – an outreach model for strengthening HCC's relationships with students, teachers, and administrators within the College's K-12 systems.

Heartland's AQIP efforts have achieved and sustained a number of notable accomplishments over the last six years, including the production of its first Systems Portfolio, the institution of the regularly held Campus Conversations, and the successful completion and implementation of its Faculty Academy Action Project. This latter accomplishment also served as a "bridge" project to Heartland's participation in the HLC's Assessment Academy and the creation of its Cornerstone project, a general education assessment model.

However, as the College prepares to enter its seventh year of AQIP participation and to prepare for its Quality Check-up Visit by the Higher Learning Commission, sustaining the momentum and enthusiasm with which the quality improvement initiative was established, is faced with some challenges.

These challenges are manifested in a few distinct ways. First, Heartland employees throughout the organization – and particularly those from operational (non-instructional) areas – hold a somewhat limited understanding of AQIP and what it means for the organization to be an AQIP institution. Although cross representation was initially sought on the College's AQIP Coordinating Committee, New Action Projects Team, and individual Action Project teams, the maintenance of the College's AQIP efforts has been spearheaded in large part by faculty members. While this has been highly beneficial for the advancement of Action Projects and improvements to Heartland's approaches to promoting student learning and success, and has created a strong sense of ownership within the College's academic ranks, the organizational learning potential within other operational centers of the College has not been fully realized, nor pursued with a high degree of intentionality.

Second, AQIP Coordinating Committee members, new and veteran alike, recognize that there is a certain disconnection between what the Coordinating Committee is charged to do under its existing structure and bylaws, and what an AQIP institution's commitment to quality improvement *requires* of its workforce and its organizational structures. Prior to the 2011-12 academic year, the Coordinating Committee's role was largely one of shepherding Action Project charters from inception to Cabinet

approval to completion, with too little attention given to the critical activity of maintaining the College's Systems Portfolio. In 2009, the College had conceived and convened the Institutional Effectiveness Council – a committee charged with establishing a better accounting of the College's sources for performance measurement data and the application of those data to relevant key work processes. However, the activity was suspended in early 2010 and not continued after the retirement of the College's Director of Institutional Research later that year. Furthermore, as already noted, an Action Project went forward in 2006 to promote wider understanding and use of performance data, particularly those reflective of student learning and success. The Coordinating Committee now realizes that the work of documenting, deploying, and developing the learning and evaluation mechanisms for the approaches outlined in Heartland's first Systems Portfolio has been left undone and must be a central purpose for the Coordinating Committee moving forward.

Finally, whether due to the impending "roll off" of Coordinating Committee members or other reasons, and in spite of strong leadership and a highly "dedicated few," relatively low turnout at the Committee's regular monthly meetings during the 2010-11 academic year was noticeable. This further prompted discussions as to the need for re-purposing the Coordinating Committee and its New Action Projects Team.

The rapid growth of Heartland Community College over the past twenty years necessarily fed the need to often act in non-integrated ways in order to find effective solutions to meet student and stakeholder needs. "Go-and-do" was, and to some extent remains, the operational mantra and – in what employees would call typical Heartland fashion – it has been done well. Breakthrough innovation is the end goal of any organization's quality improvement efforts – a notion that fits very nicely with Heartland's overall organizational culture and desire to be an institution of distinction. Getting there, however, requires no small measure of discipline. The College is aware that its approaches to fostering an environment in which organizational challenges can be creatively and collaboratively solved must be rooted in the development and safeguarding of that discipline. Heartland's focus has therefore turned to cultivating a greater degree of understanding of and expertise in the *craft* of quality and process improvement – "sharpening the sword," so to speak.

The Systems Appraisal feedback Heartland received in 2009 provided valuable observations about its earliest efforts toward AQIP implementation. The College has since embarked on several initiatives – notwithstanding the continuation and launch of ambitious Action Projects – that are intended to address those identified opportunities in an aligned and integrated fashion. What follows are brief descriptions of those efforts – current and proposed – to revitalizing and redirecting the College's quality improvement program.

Repurposing and Reconstituting the AQIP Coordinating Committee

At the close of the 2010-2011 academic year, the recently hired Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness was asked by the College's new President and the Cabinet to prepare a list of recommendations for how to better leverage the work of the AQIP Coordinating Committee to more effectively accomplish Heartland's strategic and operational goals. After some discussion with the current AQIP Coordinating Committee Chair and with the Committee's remaining and outgoing membership, those recommendations were presented to the President and Cabinet.

First among these was a recommendation for redefining the purpose and scope of the College's AQIP Coordinating Committee, and doing so in two distinct ways. First, ongoing maintenance of Heartland's Systems Portfolio should rest with the Coordinating Committee and become a primary deliverable of the

Committee to the Cabinet on a defined, routine schedule of two to three years. Second, membership on the AQIP Coordinating Committee should be restructured and active recruitment efforts enacted to elicit a broader scope of participation from people throughout the organization.

Membership efforts, to date, have yielded new Coordinating Committee members from operational areas previously not represented and active recruitment efforts continue, particularly within crucial student support areas including Financial Aid, Student Success, and Student Athletics. The proposed changes to the Committee's Goal Statements have progressed through a drafting phase which began at the opening of the Fall, 2011 semester, and adoption by the new AQIP Coordinating Committee membership will occur at its November, 2011 meeting. Currently seated New Action Project Team members as well as those whose terms had recently expired have been invited to join the general Coordinating Committee membership to ensure a better degree of continuity as the Committee reviews and revises its scope of responsibilities.

The Coordinating Committee's recommendations further emphasized a real need for these two bodies – the Coordinating Committee and New Action Projects Team – to have a firm grasp of their roles and responsibilities in spearheading Heartland's quality improvement efforts in alignment with the AQIP criteria. This points to an institutional acknowledgement that there exists a degree of expertise that's currently lacking in the management of quality improvement projects, whether they go forward as AQIP Action Projects or not.

To the first point, in-house training opportunities are currently being sought from the Higher Learning Commission (and potentially from the Lincoln Foundation for Performance Excellence) to lead the AQIP Coordinating Committee and New Action Projects Team through a self-assessment of the processes or approaches that must be deployed to fulfill their specific, "repurposed" charges.

Regarding the management of Action Projects (or any process improvement effort, for that matter), the Coordinating Committee's recommendations emphasized the need for there to be greater consistency – across efforts – in methodology by providing an orientation to essential project management principles. Even basic-level exposure to concepts inherent to Plan-Do-Check-Act, Six Sigma, or some other formal structure could greatly help those leading and serving on cross-functional teams, as well as in recognizing improvement opportunities in the future. The Coordinating Committee will continue its exploration of those opportunities, with the intent of presenting formal recommendations for professional development in early 2012.

Finally, the Higher Learning Commission has recently published updated information this fall on additional training opportunities through the AQIP Peer Review Corps. The Coordinating Committee has strongly recommended that three to five members of the AQIP Coordinating Committee commit to the training to become peer reviewers this year. The Committee recognizes that it's a lot of work, but the experience of learning how to apply AQIP's rigorous, Baldrige-based criteria to evaluate the processes and systems in place at other institutions could reap valuable rewards for the College's own quality improvement efforts.

Systems & Process Mapping

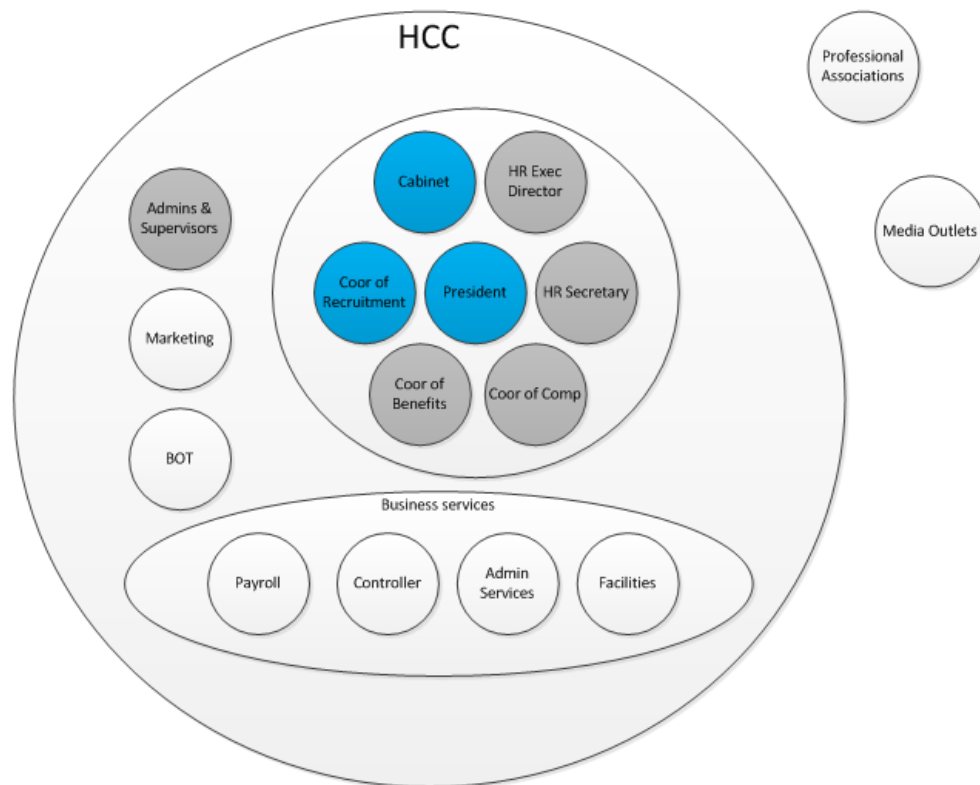
Among many opportunities identified in the Systems Appraisal Feedback received in 2009 were those which pointed to a lack of evidence throughout the portfolio to illustrate the necessary learning and evaluation components embedded in the College's processes. The Appraisal Feedback also highlighted need for the College to exercise greater effort toward understanding and implementing, "intentional,

ongoing, data-driven” systems through which it performed its work. Furthermore, the College’s peer reviewers pointed out the risk faced by the College with respect to maintaining strong internal communication processes in the face of exploding enrollment and campus expansion.

One of many responses to these three key findings has been the formation of the initiative known as Systems Mapping, which is being carried out by the President’s Council Task Team. Borrowing from a concept begun at Hazard County Technical College (the former institution from which Heartland’s current President arrived) and led by the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness and the Director of Development, the Systems Mapping initiative has resulted in more than 20 organizational “maps” depicting the relationships that specific Heartland entities, units, departments, or divisions have to various key work systems. The key work systems were identified and selected for mapping based on the AQIP criteria. Furthermore, the President’s Council Task Team members identified the centrality of the entity relationships on each map based on the processes or tasks with which they’re involved.

For example, in the systems map depicted below for Recruiting and Hiring Regular Employees (non-student employees), the shading and patterning of the entity “bubbles” represents the degree of centrality that entity has to the overall system (blue for primary, shaded grey for substantial, and clear for supportive). However, for those “primary” relationships, the color/shading scheme further indicates that the organizational entity is *doing* something – a process or task – that is embedded in that relationship.

Recruiting and Hiring Regular Employees



The work of the Task Team included cataloging those processes and will point the institution in the direction of where more detailed process mapping should occur in the coming year.

Heartland believes this approach also serves as a valuable communication tool for the institution. As it continues to grow and evolve, Heartland's employees will maintain a sense for process ownership and integration. It should also be noted – in mentioning evolution – this initiative began in March of 2011 and is moving through a third revision.

Strategic and Program Planning

Returning to the Systems Appraisal feedback which highlighted the opportunity for “intentional, ongoing, data-driven systems,” it should be noted that Heartland's Strategic and Program Planning processes are undergoing significant process changes. With the hiring of the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness in July, 2010, the College emphasized the need to centralize the College's efforts to align its numerous program-level goals and resource needs with strategic, institution-level priorities. The annual planning process, as designed, now includes:

- A reaffirmation of the College's Mission, Vision, and Values statements
- A situational analysis based on a scan of the College's external and internal environments to uncover strategic advantages and challenges
- The assessment of progress toward the College's enduring strategic goals, based on a slate of measures of institutional effectiveness
- The establishment of institution-level Priority Initiatives (in some cases, AQIP Action Projects)
- Campuswide roll-out of strategic level finding and priorities
- Director-level accountability for aligning department and unit goals, as well as resource requests, with strategic goals and Priority Initiatives and informed largely by annual program reviews that leverage the College's existing “Five Key Questions” model

Data, Information and Decision Support

A recurring theme throughout the Systems Appraisal Feedback was the need for systematic data collection, management, and analysis practices – for both qualitative and quantitative data – and to provide the results of these efforts in future portfolios. The Systems Mapping initiative explained above forms an important piece to addressing this opportunity insofar as the institution really must be able to attain a solid understanding of its key work systems and processes to know how to deem them effective or not.

However, the College also has recognized that even if there did exist an incrementally greater degree of systems thinking embedded in the Heartland culture, it would be to little avail: the current capacity of the institution to address the many routine and ad hoc inquiries into its effectiveness simply does not exist. The barriers to reliably accessing performance-related data are three-fold: first, there are – at present – too few practiced hands dedicated to data management for analysis purposes; second, the data management systems – beyond the transactional – are not centralized and are, furthermore, very difficult and time-consuming to maintain; and third, some (but certainly not all) of Heartland's business processes – where transactional data are captured – suffer from degrees of variation which, in the end, leads to serious data integrity issues.

Heartland is addressing each of these areas via the aforementioned systems and process mapping initiatives, but also through the hiring of additional Institutional Effectiveness staff, which will expand the office from a single member to three in the coming one to two months. From a more stable

foundation of data management capability, the IE Office can then focus on the critical processes that are depicted Category 7 and which support processes throughout the other eight AQIP categories.

Heartland is also in the exploratory stages for the adoption of a formal decision-support system consisting of, among other things, a data warehouse solution and business intelligence platform. This is a key element of the recently adopted Technology Strategic Plan. It should be noted, though, that the College is keenly aware that prior to formal adoption, data integrity issues – those which rest on the standardization of transactional process – will not be magically resolved. The systems and process mapping initiatives – those which will allow the College to better recognize where variation exists in our many business processes – are truly integrated efforts.

Some Final Thoughts

Heartland Community College recognizes the tremendously beneficial opportunity it has to welcome its AQIP peer reviewers for open and constructive discussion of its quality journey to date and, in particular, guidance on its current trajectory. Heartland sees itself poised to be a college of distinction, and is prepared to embark on the work needed to pair its spirit of innovation with the rigor of quality improvement discipline to accomplish that.