

## Accreditation Update

During Fiscal Year 2006, the College applied successfully for admission to the Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). This new initiative replaces the traditional accreditation self-study process; it incorporates ongoing projects designed to achieve self-improvement in the College's mission-critical areas. Additionally, AQIP may help us as we strive to become a college of distinction. Institutions that have been admitted to AQIP automatically receive seven more years of accreditation.

As stated on the [www.aqip.org](http://www.aqip.org) website:

“The Systems Portfolio covers the nine AQIP Categories, describing context, processes, results, & improvement in each system, and shows evidence that the institution continues to meet the Higher Learning Commission's five Criteria for Accreditation.

Created once (gradually through the first four years of AQIP involvement), the Systems Portfolio is continually updated to reflect changes in the institution's systems and processes.

The Systems Portfolio is a valuable resource, both internally and for the institution's external audiences, including accrediting organizations, state higher education agencies, prospective employees, and other stakeholders.

In AQIP, the formal procedure culminating in Reaffirmation of Accreditation occurs every seven years. In the Reaffirmation procedure, an AQIP Review Panel on Reaffirmation reviews each institution's assembled, cumulative record of activity and judges whether it has documented that it meets the Higher Learning Commission's five Criteria for Accreditation. The Panel also recommends whether the institution should be permitted to continue participating in AQIP.

Reaffirmation in AQIP cannot be viewed as a separate, stand-alone procedure. Rather, AQIP's Reaffirmation procedure is the culmination of all of the other AQIP procedures, Strategy Forums, Action Projects, Annual Updates, Systems Appraisals, and Quality Checkup Visits.

Heartland Community College is tentatively scheduled for a Checkup Visit in FY 2011 while the Reaffirmation of Accreditation is tentatively scheduled for FY 2012.

The College submitted its first AQIP Systems Portfolio on June 1, 2009, and received its first Systems Appraisal on October 7, 2009.

“The Systems Appraisal team concluded that Heartland Community College has presented evidence that it complies with each of the five Criteria for Accreditation and each of their Core Components. Although the Systems Appraisal does not in itself constitute a review for continued accreditation, the team's conclusion upon reviewing your Portfolio against the Criteria will serve as a telling piece of evidence during the Commission's next scheduled AQIP review of your institution for Reaffirmation of Accreditation.” (page 6)

## Areas of Strength Identified

The following are a few of the highlighted strengths the appraisers noted across the nine categories.

“In its relatively short existence, HCC has demonstrated progress in making continuous improvement with regard to student learning: processes for establishing learning outcomes are in place with the Assessment Committee and the Curriculum and Academic Standards Committee, and General Education Learning Outcomes have been identified. As an open-access institution, the College is proactive in assisting underprepared, nontraditional and disabled students, with effective means for determining and communicating requirements for learning and development: placement assessment, advising, SOAR, developmental courses, clear course prerequisites, tutors, a Transitions Program and HALO. Additionally, the College has begun to put into place other processes (curriculum mapping, the Gradebook Project, the Faculty Academy, Best Practices workshops, the Cornerstone Project) that will allow it to track in meaningful ways, beyond grades, student mastery of learning” (page 1).

“HCC remains responsive to the needs of its stakeholders by seeking stakeholder input and conducting environmental scans. As a result of these methods, the College has developed several responses to the community’s needs, such as the Green Institute, the Traffic Safety School, the Challenger Learning Center, the Academic English Language Program, and the Adult Education Skills for Success class” (page 18).

“Process mapping and strategic planning are effective methods for creating a culture and infrastructure that identify processes and help institutions select specific processes to improve and to set targets for improved performance results; HCC has implemented these approaches, which could be duplicated across the institution, in several units” (page 22).

“The portfolio indicates that HCC orients employees to the mission, vision and values of the College” (page 24).

“Through an array of activities and provisions, HCC provides a platform to promote professional development amongst its staff and faculty, with monetary support, such as professional development money for full-time faculty, stipends for adjunct faculty, and financial support for support staff to attend workshops” (page 29).

“HCC has processes for identifying the service needs of students and stakeholders and may benefit from creating a cross-college analysis to further improve service to students and stakeholders” (page 31).

“HCC is implementing some effective changes with regards to the selection, management and distribution of data to support planning and improvement efforts, especially the data warehouse and IR website” (page 34).

“The five key questions provide a basis for the College’s planning model, aligning the goals and responsibilities from internal and external stakeholders” (page 37).

“HCC has formal articulation agreements with other institutions of higher learning and contacts with businesses in the communities it serves to provide transfer and placement for students” (page 40).

## Issues Affecting Future Institutional Improvement

On pages six and seven, the Systems Appraisal Team outlined “important broad challenges and opportunities” Heartland Community College faces. The following items were identified as “strategic issues” the College should address as we strive to become a college of distinction.

- “While the HCC portfolio cites isolated effective projects or mentions exemplary programs, oftentimes no indication is made of how a process has been implemented across the institution. Similarly, frequent allusions to effective ad hoc approaches are made, with no evidence provided of how intentional, ongoing, data-driven systems are being put into place.”
- “Based on the information provided in the portfolio, data collection, management and analysis appear to be ad hoc. Unit directors and other managers operate separately from each other to provide services to students and staff. The College would benefit from systemizing data collection and moving to a more regular collection and disbursement pattern and including such evidence of a systematized approach with results reported in future portfolios.”
- “As the College continues to use the Five Key Questions model to define how it measures success, one challenge will be to articulate this vision clearly to all employees. Also as the College grows, the collection of qualitative data may be more difficult and less reliable. HCC has the opportunity to mature in assessing systems by utilizing not only qualitative responses but also measurable outcomes across all units.”
- “HCC is experiencing tremendous growth on the main campus as well as satellite locations. This growth provides the College with the opportunity to create and implement improved internal communication strategies not only to inform staff about College operations, but also to communicate how the College defines and measures quality and improvement.”
- “Communication is a common theme in the portfolio. In the case of some institutional practices the communication is one-sided. The voice of the employee does not get many opportunities to be heard through anonymous employee surveys or 360-degree reviews. This feedback may benefit the College by providing opportunities for honest, constructive dialogue and data for assessing the effectiveness of processes.”

The AQIP Coordinating Committee has briefly reviewed these strategic issues and has classified them under two general concepts: governance and data-driven decision making. Related to governance the feedback report stated:

“HCC would benefit from systematically collecting data from sources such as climate or employee satisfaction surveys to analyze the organization’s governance and administrative structures to determine if they promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission” (page 5).

Table 1 below is an aggregation of ratings found in the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report. The data clearly show that Heartland has demonstrated skill in creating processes and changing with the intention of improvement. However, we are less results-driven and data-driven than we could be. Seven of the nine process ratings are above 3.0, while only five improvement and three results ratings are over 3.0.

“A central concern is that in its current state the Portfolio lacks evidence and data, crucial components in the continuous improvement cycle that allow for the vital steps of discussion and analysis to close the loop: to plan and implement actions that do, in fact, improve processes and results” (page 6).

Table 1: 2009 Systems Appraisal Feedback Report Rating Aggregates

<b>The AQIP Criteria</b> 5 = Super Strength, 1 = Outstanding Opportunity for Improvement	Heartland Community College		
	Process Questions	Results Questions	Improvement Questions
Helping Students Learn	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.0</b>
Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives	<b>2.8</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.0</b>
Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.5</b>
Valuing People	<b>3.0</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.0</b>
Leading and Communicating	<b>3.3</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>
Supporting Institutional Operations	<b>3.6</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.0</b>
Measuring Effectiveness	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.5</b>
Planning Continuous Improvement	<b>3.0</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>3.0</b>
Building Collaborative Relationships	<b>3.1</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>2.5</b>

Overall, the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report is a positive one. The goal is to help us improve as we proceed down our path of becoming a college of distinction. As stated by AQIP, the feedback is given so we may discuss the strategic issues ahead of us and then plan the improvements we feel are most warranted.

Both the Systems Portfolio and the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report are available at:

<http://www.heartland.edu/aqip/historySystemsPortfolio.jsp#SystemsAppraisal>

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(This team gathered the content that was used to draft the system portfolio document.)

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