



# Principles and Categories for Improving Academic Quality

## Contents

Origins and Purposes of AQIP.....	2
Principles of High Performance Organizations.....	2
Systems Thinking in the Process-Focused Organization.....	3
Using the Categories .....	5
Helping Students Learn (Category 1).....	5
Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives (Category 2).....	6
Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs (Category 3).....	7
Valuing People (Category 4).....	8
Leading and Communicating (Category 5).....	9
Supporting Institutional Operations (Category 6).....	10
Measuring Effectiveness (Category 7).....	11
Planning Continuous Improvement (Category 8).....	12
Building Collaborative Relationships (Category 9).....	13
AQIP's Expectations on Assessing Student Learning .....	13
Glossary.....	14

**Academic Quality Improvement Program  
The Higher Learning Commission**

## Origins and Purposes of the Academic Quality Improvement Program

Launched in July 1999 with a generous grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Academic Quality Improvement Program attempts to infuse the principles and benefits of continuous improvement into the culture of colleges and universities by providing an alternative process through which an already-accredited institution can maintain its accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. With AQIP, an institution has the opportunity to demonstrate it meets the Higher Learning Commission's accreditation standards and expectations through sequences of events that naturally align with those ongoing activities that characterize organizations striving to improve their performance. By sharing both its advancement activities and the results of these actions with AQIP, an institution provides the Higher Learning Commission with the evidence it needs *both* to make a public quality assurance judgment *and* to support and to assist the institution in its efforts to excel at achieving the distinctive higher education mission it has set for itself.

To achieve these goals, AQIP uses direct, cost-effective, processes that themselves are continuously improved. Full details about AQIP's Strategy Forums, Systems Appraisals, and various other services are available from the AQIP website ([www.AQIP.org](http://www.AQIP.org)). The website also provides links that individuals and institutions can use to learn more about involvement, about quality and systematic improvement, or about the other initiatives that AQIP is undertaking to support its network of participants.

## Principles of High Performance Organizations

Research and experience indicate that common principles – *Focus, Involvement, Leadership, Learning, People, Collaboration, Agility, Foresight, Information, and Integrity* – permeate colleges and universities that have achieved a systematic approach to continuous quality improvement. These qualities underlie all of the Academic Quality Improvement Program's Categories, activities, processes, and services, and they represent the values to which AQIP itself aspires organizationally.

**Focus.** A mission and vision that focus on students' and other stakeholders' needs provide quality-driven higher education organizations with the foundation they need to shape communication systems, organizational and decision-making structures, and planning and improvement processes. An institution earns the trust, confidence, and loyalty of its current and potential students and its other stakeholders – both external and internal, including faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees – by actively developing and regularly employing listening tools essential for gathering and understanding their diverse and distinctive perspectives. The institution interprets and weighs these expressed needs, preferences, hopes, and requirements to frame ongoing communication, discussion, and refinement of a common mission and vision. Faculty, staff, and administrators integrate this shared focus into their individual work goals and decision-making strategies.

**Involvement.** Broad-based faculty, staff, and administrative involvement encourages better decisions and strengthens individual and group ownership of systems, activities, and initiatives. Individuals understand how what they do affects others within and outside the organization, and appreciate how their work helps further the institution's mission. A culture of involvement draws on the expertise and practical experience of those people closest to a situation and helps leaders

across the organization anticipate the complex implications of decisions. Such involvement often helps initiate and implement improvements that better meet student's and other stakeholders' needs. A culture of involvement requires ongoing development of people's skills in making fact-based decisions, working with diverse groups, resolving conflicts, and using quality-based tools to build consensus.

**Leadership.** Leaders and leadership systems that support a quality culture consistently model those values and behaviors that communicate to all constituents a clear and compelling vision of the future. Leaders have a responsibility to make sure that everyone understands and values the institution's mission, goals, and directions – and uses this understanding to inform individual work goals and decision-making strategies. Leadership must work to help students and other stakeholders share this understanding as well. Further, leadership must ensure that an institution's systems and processes align with its mission and vision, making certain that the necessary resources – people, policies, funds, facilities, equipment, supplies, time, energy, and other assets – are allocated and used to support the overall mission and vision.

**Learning.** A learning-centered environment allows an institution dedicated to quality to develop everyone's potential talents by centering attention on learning – for students, for faculty and staff, and for the institution itself. By always seeking more effective ways to enhance student achievement through careful design and evaluation of programs, courses, and learning environments, both the

institution and its employees demonstrate an enthusiastic commitment to organizational and personal learning as the route to continuous improvement. Seeing itself as a set of systems that can always improve through measurement, assessment of results, and feedback, the institution designs practical means for gauging its students' and its own progress toward clearly identified objectives. Conscious of costs and waste – whether human or fiscal – leadership champions careful design and rigorous evaluation to prevent problems before they occur, and enables the institution to continuously strengthen its programs, pedagogy, personnel, and processes.

**People.** Respect for people and the willingness to invest in them leads the quality-driven institution to prize and support the systematic development of its individual faculty, staff, and administrators. Recognizing that fully developing and using its people's abilities strengthens its most valuable resource, it consciously invests in all its people as leaders and learners through ongoing education, training, and opportunities for continuing development. Leadership encourages individuals to take responsibility in crafting and following through on professional and personal growth plans aimed at acquiring, practicing, and using new skills and knowledge to better serve students and other stakeholders. It nourishes a sense of responsibility and ownership in which all individuals understand how their role contributes to the measurable success of the institution and how they can become engaged as full participants in its improvement processes.

**Collaboration.** Collaboration and a shared institutional focus promote support for a common mission. A quality-driven institutions encourages active collaboration among and within different internal departments and operational areas, and, externally, between the institution and other institutions or organizations. It removes internal barriers to collaboration, such as the constraints individuals often experience within a hierarchical chain of command or when they find themselves working for a sub-unit rather than the larger organization. The institution provides its faculty, staff, and administrators with the training and resources successful collaboration demands, rewarding effective cooperation and celebrating model collaborative efforts with internal or external partners.

**Agility.** Agility, flexibility, and responsiveness to changing needs and conditions allow high performance institutions to transform themselves.

Traditionally colleges and universities have enjoyed more reflective and deliberative cultures than organizations, but the rapid development of new knowledge and technologies and the rising expectations of external stakeholders are altering these environments. As the pace of change quickens and competition becomes commonplace in higher education, the quality-driven institution develops the flexibility to respond quickly to opportunities, threats, and shifting needs and practices. It redirects its attention and resources in response to new requirements, and accurately monitors its performance in responding to such demands.

**Foresight.** Planning for innovation and improvement allows quality-driven institutions to think into the future, tracking trends in order to better predict how conditions will change, and anticipating how those changes may affect students and other stakeholders, operations, and performance. In dynamic or trying situations, the institution with foresight can innovate proactively, making meaningful changes to improve its services and processes in ways that create new or additional value for its students and other stakeholders. Open to new approaches and techniques, the institution designs, tests, and improves its planning structures and processes through practical use and experience.

**Information.** Fact-based information gathering and thinking to support analysis and decision-making give the quality-driven institution and its personnel the ability to assess current capacities and measure performance realistically. Faculty, staff, and administrators track progress concretely and consistently, and use performance results to set ambitious but attainable targets that increase and improve the institution's capability to meet its students' and other stakeholders' needs and expectations. Data-enriched thinking nurtures evaluation and a results-orientation that maximizes the benefits and value produced for students and other stakeholders. The institution develops and refines systems for gathering and assessing valuable feedback and data, and continually seeks better methods for obtaining the most useful information on which to base decisions and improvements.

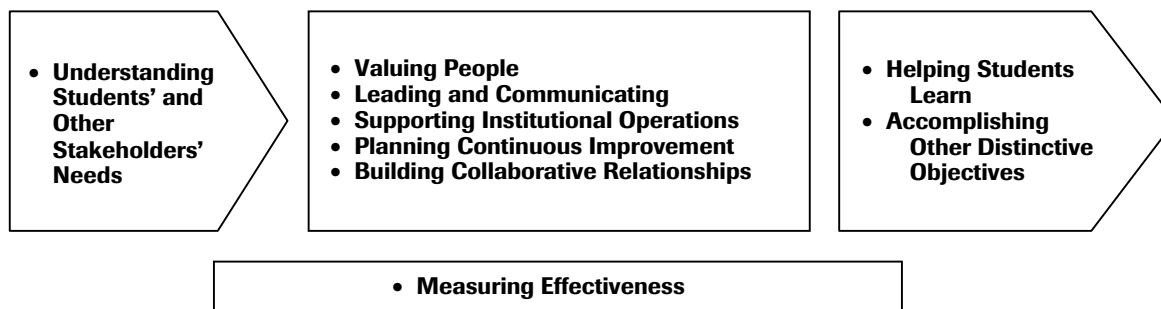
**Integrity.** Integrity and responsible institutional citizenship allow quality-driven institutions to model their values in both words and deeds. In recognizing and fulfilling its public responsibility, the institution treats people and organizations with equity, dignity, and respect. Demonstrating responsible citizenship, it anticipates and takes into account the consequences of its actions upon the various larger communities to which it belongs, and upon the higher education system, regionally, nationally, and globally. Mindful that education serves society, the institution continuously examines its practices to make certain its effects and results actively contribute to the common good.

### Systems Thinking in the Process-Focused Organization

What most distinguishes AQIP from traditional reaccreditation is its concentration on *systems and processes* both as

the basis for quality assurance and as the lever enabling institutional improvement. The figure below shows how the nine AQIP Categories 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.

### The Academic Quality Improvement Program Categories



AQIP insists that every institution be lucid and direct about what it is trying to accomplish, and clear about identifying those for whom it is doing the things on which it expends its energies and capital. To do this effectively, every institution needs a system that can decipher precisely the shifting needs of its particular 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 an institution's stakeholders. Knowing the needs it chooses to serve delineates a higher education institution's mission and vision. In turn, this understanding drives everything else – the design and operation of the other systems and processes an institution 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 institution's primary purpose and achievement. ***Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives*** provides for diversity in the character of higher education institutions by encompassing the variety of processes that institutions administer to pursue additional critical goals, such as research, development of endowment funds, competitive athletics, or service to specific communities. Together, these two Categories examine the key processes that an institution employs to create value directly for its students and its other stakeholders. In the eyes of those an institution serves, the processes included in these systems are the apparent reasons it exists. They are where an institution touches and affects the lives of its stakeholders.

The center of the diagram exemplifies the array of internal systems and processes that every institution must design and operate in order to enable and support those processes that directly impact the people it serves. ***Valuing People, Leading and Communicating, Supporting Institutional Operations, Planning Continuous Improvement, and Building Collaborative Relationships*** designate the major systems and activities through which an institution achieves the mission that its students and other stakeholders require. However these systems are enablers, making the delivery of educational and other services possible, and are often themselves invisible to students and stakeholders. The AQIP Categories require searching examination of these internally hidden support systems and processes. These five Categories do not merely review independently operating departments, offices, and divisions, but seek to understand a set of critical systems that must be linked and aligned in ways that allow an institution to maximize its ability to give its students and stakeholders the services they need.

Underlying everything, ***Measuring Effectiveness*** sustains other institutional systems by effectively collecting, storing, retrieving, and interpreting the information needed to improve the entire institution. While AQIP recognizes the importance of inputs and resources, this Category stresses the necessity for an organization to measure accurately 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 institution ensures that it is using its resources effectively, 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 through understanding those existing systems and processes that produced the current results.

Together, the nine AQIP Categories analyze interrelationships among systems essential to all effective colleges and universities. To advance the core purpose of all higher education, the Categories take a systemic view, defining and evaluating all of the key systems or processes within an institution as they relate to learning, and demanding concrete indicators that measure the effectiveness of those systems and processes. The questions in each Category provide every institution a roadmap for the examination of its systems by posing two questions repeatedly: *Are we doing the right things to achieve our mission?* and *Are we doing those things well?* Mission-focused and holistic, the Categories provide a framework that supports improvement within any organization whose mission targets learning.

## Using the Categories

Each of the Categories deals with a related group of processes, and allows an institution to analyze, understand, and explore opportunities for improving these processes. Thus each Category asks:

- How does your institution approach these processes? How do you design and stabilize key processes? Have you evolved methods 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 others' approaches designed to achieve similar goals?
- How do you use information about your processes' performance results to improve your own approach? How does your institution 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?

### AQIP Category One HELPING STUDENTS LEARN

*Helping Students Learn* identifies the shared purpose of all higher education organizations, and is accordingly the pivot of any institutional analysis. This Category focuses on the teaching-learning process within a formal instructional context, yet also addresses how your entire institution contributes to helping students learn and overall student development. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to:

- Learning objectives
- Mission-driven student learning and development
- Intellectual climate
- Academic programs and courses
- Student preparation
- Key issues such as technology and diversity
- Program and course delivery
- Faculty and staff roles
- Teaching and learning effectiveness
- Course sequencing and scheduling
- Learning and co-curricular support
- Student assessment
- Measures
- Analysis of results
- Improvement efforts

*Answer these questions about  
Helping Students Learn*

#### Context for Analysis (C)

**1C1** What are the common student learning objectives you hold for all of your students (regardless of their status or particular program of study) and the pattern of knowledge and skills you expect your students to possess upon completion of their general and specialized studies?

*Note 1: As appropriate, address co-curricular objectives/goals. Category 6, **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 your 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 your design and delivery of student learning options are preparing students to live in a diverse world and that the options 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?

*Note 2: Category 4, **Valuing People**, examines how you ensure your hiring practices take into account the needs for appropriate faculty talents and credentials and how you ensure your reward and recognition systems are aligned with your 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?

*Note 3: Learning support areas to address may include library, advising, and tutoring, as appropriate.*

**1P10** How are co-curricular development goals aligned with curricular learning objectives?

*Note 4: From the point of view of the formal instructional process, Category 6, **Supporting Institutional Operations**, asks how support areas such as residence life, student activities, advising, counseling, etc. 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 students completing programs, degrees, and certificates are for further education or employment?

**1P13** What measures of student performance do you collect and analyze regularly?

## 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 (i.e., other educational institutions and employers) for the awarding of specific degrees or credentials?

*Note 5: Results might address perspectives of other higher education institutions, employers, etc.*

**1R3** What are your results for processes associated with Helping Students Learn?

*Note 6: 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, etc.*

**1R4** Regarding 1R1 through 1R3, how do your results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside of the education community?

*Note 7: 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 these be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders?

## AQIP Category Two ACCOMPLISHING OTHER DISTINCTIVE OBJECTIVES

*Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives* addresses the processes that contribute to the achievement of your institution's major objectives that complement student learning and fulfill other portions of your mission. Depending on your institution's character, it examines your institution's 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 these questions about  
Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives*

## Context for Analysis (C)

**2C1** What are your explicit institutional objectives in addition to *Helping Students Learn* (Category 1)?

*Note 1: **Accomplishing 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 your institution's unique identity, while **Helping Students Learn** is an objective you share with all other higher education institutions.*

**2C2** By what means do you ensure 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?

*Note 2: Category 4, **Valuing People**, examines the ways you make certain 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** Regarding 2R1, how do your results compare with the results of peer institutions? How do they compare, if appropriate, with other higher education institutions and organizations outside of the education community?

*Note 3: 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(s) and region(s) 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 these be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders?

## AQIP Category Three UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS' NEEDS

*Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs* examines how your institution works actively to understand student and other stakeholder needs. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to:

- Student and stakeholder identification
- Student and stakeholder requirements
- Analysis of student and stakeholder needs
- Relationship building with students and stakeholders
- Complaint collection, analysis, and resolution
- Determining satisfaction of students and stakeholders

- Measures
- Analysis of results
- Improvement efforts

### Answer these questions about **Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs**

#### 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?

*Note 1: Students are any educational institution's primary stakeholders, but your institution may see its mission as serving other groups as well. For purposes of Category 3, **other stakeholders** refers to those groups that have a major stake in your institution's success, such as, for example, parents, alumni, board members, local and regional communities, employers, and legislators. Internal groups (e.g., faculty and staff) are addressed in Category 4, **Valuing People**.*

**3C2** What are the short- 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?

*Note 2: 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?

*Note 3: 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?

*Note 4: 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?

*Note 5: Address both current and prospective stakeholders, as appropriate.*

**3P5** How do you determine if new student and stakeholder groups should be addressed within your educational offerings and services?

*Note 6: How you anticipate the future needs of your student and other stakeholder groups and include them in your planning process should be addressed in Category 8, **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?

*Note 7: 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?

*Note 8: 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?

*Note 9: Results regarding serving the communities and region that you serve should be addressed in Category 2, **Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives**.*

**3R4** What are your results for the building of relationships with your key stakeholders?

*Note 10: 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 of the education community?

*Note 11: 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 these be addressed? How do you communicate your current results and improvement priorities to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and appropriate stakeholders?

## AQIP Category Four VALUING PEOPLE

*Valuing People* explores your institution's commitment to the development of your faculty, staff, and administrators since the efforts of all are required for institutional success. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to:

- Work and job environment
- Workforce needs
- Training initiatives
- Job competencies and characteristics
- Recruitment, hiring, and retention practices
- Work processes and activities
- Training and development

- Personnel evaluation
- Recognition, reward, compensation, and benefits
- Motivation factors
- Satisfaction, health and safety, and well-being
- Measures
- Analysis of results
- Improvement efforts

*Answer these questions about  
**Valuing People***

### 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?

*Note 1: **Valuing People** addresses your workforce, including faculty, staff, and administrators. As appropriate, address your student work force throughout Category 4 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?

*Note 2: Also discuss how your plans addressed in Category 8, **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 people you employ possess these requisite 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?

*Note 3: 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 your plans addressed in Category 8, Planning Continuous Improvement, and how does it augment your focus on helping students learn and



accomplishing other distinctive objectives?

*Note 4: 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 institution.*

**4P6** How do you design and use your personnel evaluation system? How does this system align with your objectives in Category 1, Helping Students Learn, and in Category 2, Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives?

*Note 5: Include how you provide feedback to employees.*

**4P7** How do you design your recognition, reward, and compensation systems to align with your objectives in Category 1, Helping Students Learn, and in Category 2, 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?

*Note 6: 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?

*Note 7: 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?

*Note 8: 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?

**4R4** Regarding 4R1 and 4R3, how do your results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside of the education community?

*Note 9: For 4R1 through 4R4, address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate.*

### Improvement (I)

**4I1** How do you improve your current processes and systems for valuing people?

**4I2** With regard to your current results for valuing people, 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 Category Five LEADING AND COMMUNICATING

*Leading and Communicating* addresses how your institution's leadership and communication structures, networks, and processes guide your institution in setting directions, making decisions, seeking future opportunities, and building and sustaining a learning environment. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to:

- Leading activities
- Communicating activities
- Alignment of leadership system practices
- Institutional values and expectations
- Direction setting
- Future opportunity seeking
- Decision making
- Use of data
- Leadership development and sharing
- Succession planning
- Measures
- Analysis of results
- Improvement efforts

*Answer these questions about  
Leading and Communicating*

### 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 in describing these systems.)

*Note 1: Your leadership system includes not only individuals who have day-to-day supervisory or decision-making responsibility to manage the institution, but also leadership groups within your institution and the 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?

*Note 2: Specific community service and involvement activities may be addressed in Category 2, **Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives**. For purposes of Category 5, 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 and 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?

*Note 3: 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?

*Note 4: By specific group and with what frequency, describe the key results reviewed. **Key results** refer to those results, from all organizational areas, that are critical to your understanding whether your institution is succeeding – the kind of results described in the nine AQIP Categories.*

**5P5** How does communication occur between and among institutional levels?

*Note 5: Address downward, upward, and 2-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?

*Note 6: 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?

*Note 7: Results might include, for example, leadership effectiveness, satisfaction with leadership, leadership communication effectiveness, value of decisions made, etc.*

**5R2** Regarding 5R1, how do your results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside of the education community?

*Note 8: 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?

*Note 9: 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 Category Six SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONAL OPERATIONS

*Supporting Institutional Operations* addresses the variety of your institutional support processes that help to provide an environment in which learning can thrive. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to:

- Student support
- Administrative support
- Identification of needs
- Contribution to student learning and accomplishing other distinctive objectives
- Day-to-day operations
- Use of data
- Measures
- Analysis of results
- Improvement efforts

*Answer these questions about  
**Supporting Institutional Operations***

## Context for Analysis (C)

**6C1** What are your key student and administrative support service processes? What are the support service process needs of students and other stakeholder groups?

*Note 1: 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.*

**6C2** How do your key student and administrative support services reinforce processes and systems described in Category 1, Helping Students Learn, and Category 2, Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives?

## Processes (P)

**6P1** How do you identify the support service needs of your students?

**6P2** How do you identify the administrative support service needs of your faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as other key stakeholder groups (e.g., oversight board, alumni, etc.)?

**6P3** How are your key student and administrative support service processes managed on a day-to-day basis to ensure that they are meeting the needs of students and key stakeholder groups? How do you document your processes

and encourage knowledge sharing, innovation and empowerment?

*Note 2: Address how feedback from students and key stakeholder groups (including faculty and staff) is used to change processes.*

**6P4** How do your key student and administrative support areas use information and results to improve their services?

*Note 3: Address how information and results are used on a day-to-day and summative basis.*

**6P5** What measures of student and administrative support service processes do you collect and analyze regularly?

### Results (R)

**6R1** What are your results for student support service processes?

**6R2** What are your results for administrative support service processes?

*Note 4: Address patterns of financial capacity as well as other indicators of institutional health and viability.*

**6R3** Regarding 6R1 and 6R2, how do your results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside of the education community?

*Note 5: For 6R1 through 6R3, address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate.*

### Improvement (I)

**6I1** How do you improve your current processes and systems for supporting institutional operations?

**6I2** With regard to your current results for student and administrative support processes, 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 Category Seven MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

*Measuring Effectiveness* examines how your institution collects, analyzes, and uses information to manage itself and to drive performance improvement. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to:

- Collection, storage, management, and use of information and data – at the institutional and departmental/unit levels
- Institutional measures of effectiveness
- Information and data alignment with institutional needs and directions
- Comparative information and data
- Analysis of information and data
- Effectiveness of information system and processes

- Measures
- Analysis of results
- Improvement efforts

*Answer these questions about  
Measuring Effectiveness*

### Context for Analysis (C)

**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 that need it?

*Note 1: Address your primary data collection mechanisms, as appropriate, your information system(s) – not just your central information system, but those used at varying levels – and your accessibility options (i.e., what is available, and to whom).*

**7C2** What are your key institutional measures for tracking effectiveness?

*Note 2: These measures might include data on: students; accomplishing other distinctive objectives; faculty, staff, and administrators; other key stakeholder groups; academic and other programs; the performance of institutional operations and processes; and comparative information concerning students, stakeholder groups, programs, and performance in other institutions.*

### Processes (P)

**7P1** How do you select, manage, and use information and data (including current performance information) to support student learning (Category 1), overall institutional objectives (Category 2), strategies (Category 8), and improvement (all Categories) efforts?

**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?

**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?

*Note 3: Address determination of needs at both the institutional and department or unit levels.*

**7P4** How, at the institutional level, do you analyze information and data regarding overall performance? How is this analysis shared throughout the organization?

*Note 4: Analysis of performance information should span measures you determine to be key from across the nine AQIP Categories.*

**7P5** How do you ensure department and unit analysis of information and data aligns with your institutional goals regarding student learning (Category 1) and overall institutional objectives? How is this analysis shared?

**7P6** How do you ensure the effectiveness of your information system(s) and related processes?

*Note 5: Address, for example, your hardware and software system upgrades, integrity and reliability of information and data, and confidentiality and security of information and data.*

**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?

*Note 6: 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.*

**7R2** Regarding 7R1, how do your results compare with the results of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside of the education community?

*Note 7: For 7R1 through 7R2, address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate.*

### Improvement (I)

**7I1** How do you improve your current processes and systems for measuring effectiveness?

**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?

## AQIP Category Eight PLANNING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

*Planning Continuous Improvement* examines your institution's planning processes and how your strategies and action plans are helping you achieve your mission and vision. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to:

- Institutional vision
- Planning
- Strategies and action plans
- Coordination and alignment of strategies and action plans
- Measures and performance projections
- Resource needs
- Faculty, staff, and administrator capabilities
- Measures
- Analysis of performance projections and results
- Improvement efforts

*Answer these questions about  
Planning Continuous Improvement*

### Context for Analysis (C)

**8C1** What is your institution's vision of what your institution will be like in the next 5-10 years?

**8C2** What are your institution's short- and long-term strategies? How are these strategies aligned with

your mission and vision?

*Note 1: Strategies should be interpreted broadly to reflect institutional nuances in language. Thus, strategies might refer to initiatives, directions, objectives, etc.*

### Processes (P)

**8P1** What is your planning process?

*Note 2: Describe, as appropriate, planning steps, who is involved, timelines, factors that are addressed, and methods for addressing the future. Also, address, how modifications to your mission and vision are addressed.*

**8P2** How do you select short- and long-term strategies?

*Note 3: Address, as appropriate, the key influences, challenges, and requirements that impact 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?

*Note 4: 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?

*Note 5: 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?

*Note 6: Resource needs might include staff, financial, space, and equipment.*

**8P7** How do you ensure 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(s) for planning continuous improvement do you collect and analyze regularly?

### Results (R)

**8R1** What are your results for accomplishing institutional strategies and action plans?

**8R2** Regarding 8R1, what are your projections of performance for your strategies and action plans over the next 1-3 years?

**8R3** Regarding 8R2, how do your projections for your strategies and action plans compare with those of other higher education institutions and, if appropriate, organizations outside of the education community?

**8R4** What is the evidence that your system for planning continuous improvement is effective?

*Note 7: Results might include, for example, number of participants involved in the planning process and employee and stakeholder satisfaction with your institution's planning process. Address historical trends and patterns, as appropriate.*

## Improvement (I)

**8I1** How do you improve your current processes and systems for planning continuous improvement?

**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 Category Nine Building Collaborative Relationships

*Building Collaborative Relationships* examines your institution's relationships – current and potential – to analyze how they contribute to the institution's accomplishing its mission. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to:

- Identification of key internal and external collaborative relationships
- Alignment of key collaborative relationships
- Relationship creation, prioritization, building
- Needs identification
- Internal relationships
- Measures
- Analysis of results
- Improvement efforts

*Answer these questions about  
Building Collaborative Relationships*

## Context for Analysis (C)

**9C1** What are your institution's key collaborative relationships?

*Note 1: Address specific relationships with educational institutions, 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 Category 4, **Valuing People**.*

*Note 2: External collaborative partners might include organizations that are the sources of your entering students (high schools, community colleges, places of work); organizations that are the destination of your exiting students (4-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; other institutions or consortia of institutions; etc.*

**9C2** In what ways do these collaborative relationships reinforce your institutional mission? If applicable, how do these relationships support changes in your institutional directions as addressed

in Category 8, Planning Continuous Improvement?

*Note 3: Involvement of external collaborative partners in planning processes may also be addressed in Category 8, **Planning Continuous Improvement**.*

## Processes (P)

**9P1** How do you create, prioritize, and build relationships with the:

- educational institutions and other organizations from which you receive your students?
- educational institutions and employers that depend on the supply of your students and graduates that meet these organization's requirements?
- organizations that provide services to your students?
- education associations, external agencies, consortia partners, and the general community with whom you interact?

**9P2** How do you ensure 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 of the education community?

*Note 4: For 9R1 through 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 building collaborative relationships, 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?

### AQIP's Expectations on Assessing Student Learning

Institutions participating in AQIP are part of an intensive, collaborative effort to reshape their cultures and to make a commitment to continuous quality improvement their constant focus. Consequently a major objective of every AQIP institution is the evolution and strengthening of an institutional culture that values using performance data to drive continuous improvement of processes within a systems view of the interdependence of instructional

structures, functions, and policies. Valuing assessment, therefore, forms the core of being in AQIP.

For accredited Higher Learning Commission colleges and universities, this emphasis on the central importance of assessment is not new, for most institutions have been hard at work for years weaving assessment into the fabric of their operations. While participating in AQIP they will continue to measure student learning – and use the results to improve teaching and learning processes directly, and, indirectly, all other institutional processes that contribute to student learning.

AQIP significantly raises assessment's importance, scope, form, and purpose, so significantly that it is critical institutions understand this difference *before* they join.

The most central of the AQIP Categories, **Helping Students Learn**, requires an institution to address specific questions about its teaching-learning processes, about the performance of these processes, and the way the institution uses results data to improve.

An institution joining AQIP will begin to compile its **Systems Portfolio**, presenting concrete evidence answering all of the questions posed under each of the nine Categories in preparation for a **Systems Appraisal** that will occur three years after participation in a **Strategy Forum**. The evaluation and feedback an institution receives from this process will help it to improve its learning assessment practices, and ensure that it receives maximum benefit from them. Institutions judged to be making unsatisfactory progress will receive directed advice and assistance, and give evidence of acting assertively on it, or they will be guided out of AQIP and back to the standard accreditation process (with a different means for documenting evidence of assessment).

AQIP demands that measuring the results of key processes become habitual *throughout* an institution, since knowing how well a process performs currently is vital for improvement. In AQIP, the expectation that institutions will establish performance metrics to gather and analyze data extends beyond **Helping Students Learn**. *Each* of the other eight AQIP Categories deals with a set of key institutional processes (e.g., planning, human resources, stakeholder needs determination, support services), and *each* Category asks, using specific questions, how the institution decides what data to collect, how it gathers it, and what the data reveals about levels and trends in institutional performance. In addition, each Category asks the institution to compare its performance data with that of other organizations, so that it knows clearly whether it should be satisfied with current performance, or whether opportunities exist for improvement. Thus the pattern for student learning assessment found in **Helping Students Learn** is reinforced throughout the AQIP Categories,

building in AQIP institutions a culture of individual and organizational learning that values realistic measurement and its use for improvement and innovation.

AQIP reserves an entire Category, **Measuring Effectiveness**, to examine how an institution collects, analyzes, and uses information to manage itself, to drive performance improvement, and to become what it envisions. Thus AQIP stimulates a participating institution to scrutinize, continuously, the kind of data and information it collects; the measures it uses to evaluate its key processes; its storage, analysis, and distribution of this data; *and, most importantly, the use of data and information*. By triggering an institution to ask itself such penetrating questions, AQIP helps again to drive the development an *information-based* culture that thrives on the effective use of data.

AQIP does not rely merely on conducting a searching comprehensive evaluation every four years, the **Systems Appraisal**, but it also drives institutions to move toward a culture that values measurement and process improvement by requiring participating institutions to identify and begin **Action Projects** soon after they join.

These ambitious projects are crafted to serve two purposes: (1) to help the institution develop the characteristic of a high-performance institution, characteristics articulated in the ten **Principles of High Performance Organizations**; and (2) simultaneously engage the institution's administrators, faculty, and staff in concrete work that capitalizes on an institutional opportunity for improvement, critical problem-solving, or innovation. Essentially, the projects serve as intense action learning cycles that focus the institution on hands-on, useful work that further drives change in the entire institution's culture.

Developing 3-4 **Action Projects** that serve these goals is difficult, particularly for institutions new to AQIP; the **Strategy Forum** provides an event in which peers from other AQIP institutions work together to help institutions craft the most potentially valuable **Action Projects** possible. **Action Projects** promote a culture of learning and assessment when they work toward deepening an institutional culture that values the **Principles of High Performance Organizations** (especially 1, 4, 8, and 9). In addition, at least one of every institution's **Action Projects** must address directly the processes included in **Helping Students Learn**, a requirement that forces an institution to declare measurable targets for improvement of key teaching and learning processes and then to implement changes that will bring that improvement to reality quickly. **Annual Updates** hold institutions responsible for the progress they are making on the **Action Projects** they have undertaken, and provide assistance to institutions that need it.

## Glossary

The Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) provides its Categories as tools for any institution to study itself using the principles and perspectives of continuous improvement. Explanations of some terms used the questions following each Category may be helpful, but AQIP understands that every institution has a unique culture, and that the particular language

an institution uses will reflect and embody that culture. Therefore AQIP encourages institutions to use the Categories with their broad purpose in mind – institutional self-assessment and improvement – and to avoid creating harmful complexity by attempting to narrowly define every term. There are no "trick questions" here and common sense interpretations of words should be sufficient.

**Curricula** The questions use *curricula* to refer broadly to programs, courses, lectures, discussions, laboratories, studio or shop activities, practica, internships, and all co-curricular activities the institution designs and makes available to promote learning.

**Deployment** How extensively a successful system or process is utilized throughout institutional operations critically affects overall performance. To maximize their value, effective processes must be *deployed* widely.

**Design** Questions using *design* ask you to examine and describe how your institution – or its component parts – structures general and specific programs: who does it, when do they do, how long it takes, what steps are involved, what information and resources are used as input to the design process, and what concretely emerges as the output (e.g., paper plans and specifications, written guidelines, tacit understandings among the participants, etc.).

**Determine** An institution can act consciously and deliberately set or define requirements, expectations, or processes, or it can allow its processes to be determined by chance, tradition, or other forces. Questions asking you how you *determine* something ask you to focus on the processes you use to reach these decisions, whether you do so deliberately or not.

**Documentation** Concrete, factual evidence that supports or proves an assertion constitutes *documentation*. This evidence is often, but not exclusively, in the form of documents or numerical indices. Undocumented beliefs, intuitions, and tacit understandings are often accurate, but they may not provide as solid a structure for shared understanding or future action as does documentation.

**Expectations** To improve, an institution must articulate its targets or desired outcomes for student learning and other activities. Educational *expectations* specify the learning—knowledge, skills, competencies, abilities, performance, values, habits, behaviors, attitudes, and preferences – that students will possess upon completion of their educational experience. Your expectations explain what you want your students to know and be able to do after their education that they did not know or could not do before, and when or for how long you expect students to exhibit the benefits of this acquired learning.

**Goals** For simplicity, AQIP does not distinguish between goals and objectives (or short- and long-term goals), and so uses the term objectives consistently in these questions. If you use goals and objectives differently, your responses should capture whatever distinctions you make within your institution.

**Mission** The term *mission* communicates a broad understanding of what an institution does, and whom it does it for. The verb *educate* captures an essential element in the mission of all higher learning institutions, but most mission statements will specify who the institution will educate (e.g., anyone, local high school graduates, would-be welders, physicians) at what levels (e.g., undergraduate, doctoral, etc.), in what localities, etc. In formally stating

these intentions, some institutions use *mission*, some use *purposes*, some *mission and purposes*. Some have *mission statements*, some *vision statements*, and some statements, separate or combined, describing both mission and vision. For simplicity, AQIP uses *mission* for all these, but feel free to translate any statement using *mission* into the words people use in your institution. AQIP distinguishes an organization's broad mission from the specific objectives it sets to achieve its mission. If your institution's mission statement includes both mission and objectives (and many college and university statements do), pay attention to how AQIP distinguishes these in its questions. Interpret *mission* to include vision, institutional values, guiding principles, core principles, and similar concepts.

**Objectives** AQIP uses this neutral word to describe the concrete actions people at an institution engage in so that the institution will accomplish its mission. In many settings, *objectives* is synonymous with *goals, purposes, targets, strategies, expectations*.

**Outcomes** AQIP uses this term to refer to the results actually achieved by a system or process, regardless of its objective or targets, and independent of the wishes or expectations of those involved. Often, *outcomes* refers to achieved student learning, but it can also refer to the measured performance of other institutional systems and processes.

**Pedagogy** The Category questions use *pedagogy* to refer to the instructional methods (including lectures, discussions, case studies, internships, group projects, and the application of technology to learning) that the institution uses to help students learn.

**Process** Often used interchangeably with *system* or *sub-system*, a process is an organized group of related activities that together create a result that is of value to stakeholders. Each of the nine AQIP Categories focuses on a group of interrelated processes, one of an institution's fundamental systems for serving its stakeholders.

**Quality** The degree to which a good or service meets the real, long-term needs of those for whom it was designed and to whom it was delivered determines its *quality*. Commonly used surrogates for quality include the reputation (or name-recognition) of the manufacturer of a product or service, its cost (or the cost of the resources used to produce it), or the socio-economic status of those who purchase it. Although popular because they are easily measurable, none of these proxies correlate directly with how well a product or service satisfies the requirements of those who use it, and so none can serve as reliable indices of quality.

**Requirements** Detailed *requirements* are the specifications or "necessary ingredients" around which a system or process is designed. *Requirements* may refer to the input a process requires, or to the outputs demanded (wanted, expected) by those the process serves. Often people use *specifications, expectations, needs, wants, desires, and requests* as synonyms for *requirements*.

**Stakeholders** An institution's *stakeholders* include all of the people and groups that have a critical stake or investment in the institution's operation and future, including students' families, employers, funding and oversight agencies, and other institutions and organizations with which an institution has established collaborative relationships. Certainly current and former students are primary stakeholders; therefore the Categories refer to "students and other stakeholders." An institution's students and other stakeholders judge whether it is a success or failure in meeting their particular needs, and these judgments ultimately determine the institution's achievement, its well-being, reputation, and its continuation or demise. Some institutions also see their own faculty, staff, and administrators as key stakeholders.



# Academic Quality Improvement Program

The Higher Learning Commission **NCA**

30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400  
Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504  
(800) 621-7440  
Fax (312) 263 7462  
Email: [AQIP@hlcommission.org](mailto:AQIP@hlcommission.org)  
[www.AQIP.org](http://www.AQIP.org)