QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

Waubonsee Community College

Sugar Grove, IL
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Quality Checkup Team Members:

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Background on Quality Checkups conducted by the Academic Quality Improvement Program

The Higher Learning Commission’s Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) conducts Quality Checkup site visits to each institution during the fifth or sixth year in every seven-year cycle of AQIP participation. These visits are conducted by trained, experienced AQIP Reviewers to determine whether the institution continues to meet The Higher Learning Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation, and whether it is using quality management principles and building a culture of continuous improvement as participation in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) requires. The goals of an AQIP Quality Checkup are to:

1. Affirm the accuracy of the organization’s online Systems Portfolio and verify information included in the portfolio that the last Systems Appraisal has identified as needing clarification or verification (System Portfolio Clarification and Verification);

2. Review with organizational leaders actions taken to capitalize on the strategic issues and opportunities for improvement identified by the last Systems Appraisal (Systems Appraisal Follow Up);

3. Alert the organization to areas that need its attention prior to Reaffirmation of Accreditation, and reassure it concerning areas that have been covered adequately (Accreditation Issues Follow Up);

4. Verify federal compliance issues such as default rates, complaints, USDE interactions and program reviews, etc. (Federal Compliance Review); and

5. Assure continuing organizational quality improvement commitment through presentations, meetings, or sessions that clarify AQIP and Commission accreditation work (Organizational Quality Commitment).

The AQIP peer reviewer(s) trained for this role prepare for the visit by reviewing relevant organizational and AQIP file materials, particularly the organization’s last Systems Appraisal Feedback Report and the Commission’s internal Organizational Profile, which summarizes information reported by the institution in its Annual Institutional Data Update. The report provided to AQIP by the institution is also shared with the evaluator(s). Copies of the Quality Checkup report are provided to the institution’s CEO and AQIP liaison. A copy is retained by the Commission for the institution’s permanent file, and will be part of the materials reviewed by the AQIP Review Panel during Reaffirmation of Accreditation.
Clarification and verification of contents of the institution’s System Portfolio

Having reviewed the Systems Portfolio before arriving for the Quality Checkup, the Team verified and clarified the contents of the Systems Portfolio through discussions held with the AQIP liaison, President’s Cabinet, Student Senate, WCC Board of Trustees and WCC Foundation Board Members, and various cross-functional groups that included students, administrators, faculty, and staff. In addition, the AQIP Systems Portfolio was consistent with the information and results outlined in other WCC documents that the Quality Checkup Team reviewed.

Discussions with campus groups focused on Systems Appraisal conclusions that included the alignment between long- and short-term plans, and establishment of key quality indicators and quality measures for each of the college’s major support functions. For the most part, information presented in the Portfolio was generally understood and the Waubonsee Community College Team agreed the Appraisal feedback was accurate.

In instances where the Systems Portfolio information was not detailed enough or the reviewers’ understanding of the answer was not complete, inconsistencies were clarified by onsite discussion. The college teams were able to document that processes are in place that produce specific program learning objectives that are tied to its core outcomes and the Illinois Transfer Curriculum. Documentation showed that student learning objectives are aligned with the institutional mission, vision, values, and philosophy through course syllabi, and degree sheets. General education outcomes are published in the college catalog, and other marketing materials.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Waubonsee Community College presented satisfactory evidence that it met Quality Checkup goals. The institution’s responsiveness in providing, documentation, and demonstrating its commitment to address Portfolio review comments were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Review of specific accreditation issues identified by the institution’s last Systems Appraisal

There were no specific accreditation issues identified by the institution’s last Systems Appraisal.
Review of the institution’s approach to capitalizing on recommendations identified by its last Systems Appraisal in the Strategic Issues Analysis.

The Team was provided with evidence that Waubonsee Community College has taken action on the opportunities for improvement identified within the AQIP Systems Portfolio and the comprehensive review of all feedback reports. A crosswalk was generated illustrating how WCC will address comments from the AQIP Systems Appraisal Feedback. In some cases, comments will be addressed through the clarification of responses in the Systems Portfolio. The remaining comments are all targeted by WCC’s AQIP Quality Plan Action Project by either 1) establishing evidence, or measures, to be captured to drive improvement efforts and/or 2) revising and aligning current, or creating new, processes.

The college is making progress in all four strategic issues identified in the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report (February 2008).

1. *Compartmentalizing the Strategic Planning Framework.* Waubonsee Community College has established an action project entitled, *Quality Plan: A Quality Infrastructure for Planning, Support and Accountability* to facilitate systematic planning and execution through assessment, analysis and reporting of the college’s quality improvement and operational processes. The college is working toward greater specificity of the planning process that will result in more clearly focused improvement efforts.

2. *Establishing Key Performance Indicators.* Waubonsee has established a Strategic Planning Council to provide leadership for the development of college’s Major Support Plans. These plans serve as a critical feature of the Strategic Planning Framework to align long- and short-term plans, and establish key quality indicators and quality measures for major support functions. Major Support Plans fall into two main categories: (1) Strategic Support Plans and (2) Programmatic Support Plans.

3. *Applying Direct Measures.* The college’s Major Support Plans will include defined quality indicators, quality measures and achievement targets. The Major Support Plans will reach across many functional areas of the college and require a degree of action planning and specificity beyond that of strategic goals and objectives.

4. *Aligning Processes, Results and Improvements.* The Strategic Planning Council will develop a six-section Major Support Plan following a format that comprises: 1) an Environmental Analysis that will share three levels of internal and external data relevant to
each major support plan to serve as a baseline to gauge future quality improvement results; 2) a Mission Statement for each major support plan that will show how it contributes to and supports the college’s overall mission, vision and core values; 3) Outcomes, measures, and targets that will inform planning and improvement; 4) an Action Plan created for each Outcome; 5) a Summary for each section of the Major Support Plan that will share how the plan addresses factors found in the Environmental Analysis, how the plan is aligned with the college’s strategic planning framework, and how the plan facilitates quality improvement; and 6) a Major Support Plan Team structure that will consist of cross-functional membership that reflects multiple perspectives.


The Programmatic Support Plans are informed by the college’s strategic goals and shaped by the Strategic Support Plans. These plans support the viability of college programs and services. The seven Programmatic Support Plans scheduled to be created/updated are the Community Relations Plan, Program Development Plan, Program Review Plan, Student Development-Services Plan, Enrollment Management Plan, Marketing and Communications Plan, and Resource Development Plan.

These actions will enhance the college’s work in Category 7, Measuring Effectiveness, and Category 8, Planning Continuous Improvement. This will assist the college in determining the effectiveness of institutional areas by examining specific quality indicators and measures in the Major Support Plans. It will also provide an important link in the college’s quality infrastructure by connecting the institutional strategic planning process with annual goal-setting at the division and department levels. The ultimate goal of these actions is to develop a process to facilitate improvement efforts focused on operating functions throughout the institution. Weave Online, an assessment management system that aligns planning, assessment, and improvement processes at all levels of the institution provides a system that will enable the college to track progress. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.
Review of organizational commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement

There was much evidence of the college’s continuing commitment to systematic quality improvement at all levels within the organization as well as with external constituents.

The Quality Checkup Team met with the President during the visit and found a strong commitment to the quality journey. In addition, many of the employees and students provided additional information about the college that reinforced the President’s commitment to continuous quality improvement.

The Board’s commitment to the quality journey was evident while meeting with the Quality Checkup team, both formally and informally. The Board members are fully knowledgeable about AQIP and other quality improvement efforts along with their role and responsibility in these efforts. Furthermore, the Board’s knowledge and commitment to the quality journey is augmented by its long history with the college. Many Board members have longevity with ten years or more of service. The Board has a clear focus on ends rather than means.

Waubonsee Community College has strategically established a network of community partners. This group of business and community representatives also met with the Checkup Team and presented strong support of the college to make improvements in its efforts to connect with and serve the community interests, and further expand educational, training, cultural, and workforce development initiatives.

The college has established many systems that enable all internal stakeholders to be engaged in continuous quality improvement. The development and implementation of WCC’s Strategic Planning Council and the Major Support Plan were major actions taken as a result of AQIP and other quality efforts and processes. The Major Support Plan is in its early stages of implementation and continues to be discussed and refined.

The strengths from the AQIP Portfolio review, as observed by the Quality Checkup Team, are listed below:

- A leadership structure and the Ad Hocracy model of governance that fosters a collaborative approach to problem solving and decision making;
- Investment is made in professional development to ensure that all employees have the requisite skills to serve institutional and student needs;
Several processes are fully developed and ongoing that address valuing staff and administrators;

Formal and informal cross-functional and departmental teams that utilize information to drive decision making;

WCC provides a variety of support systems for student learning which allow the college leadership to identify campus needs;

WCC is nationally recognized for its financial reporting and accounting;

WCC has taken steps to establish methods to measure effectiveness through the ASIP AQIP Action Project, and incorporate the WEAVE online data management system. With those processes in place it is now possible to establish key performance indicators and methods to measure the degree to which the systems are performing in order to identify and establish targets for improvement; and

WCC has developed relationships with a number of community organizations and has various offices to oversee these partnerships. WCC has established key collaborative relationships with an array of educational, business and agency entities.

There is a wealth of energy and enthusiasm around each of Waubonsee Community College’s AQIP Action Projects and other key endeavors. The Quality Checkup Team observed that the members of the AQIP Action Project Teams and the other Project Teams were genuinely enthusiastic and engaged in these projects. This being said, the Quality Checkup Team did observe that some of the teams were unable to articulate the linkage of their project with a quality improvement cycle. The Team suggests that Waubonsee Community College formalize a process for the identification of the quality improvement cycle and the language associated with it for a stronger culture of evidence.

It was clear to the team that Waubonsee Community College had a strong organizational commitment to systematic quality improvement, from the Board down and throughout the college. A wide range of staff, students, and stakeholders attended sessions held during the checkup visit, and interactions were candid and positive.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Waubonsee Community College presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to
the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

USDE issues related to default rate (renewal of eligibility, program audits, or other USDE actions)

During the meeting with the AQIP liaison and the Quality Checkup Team, Waubonsee Community College presented satisfactory evidence that it met federal compliance. The following are brief descriptions for each Commission policy.

Default Rate

The cohort default rates for the past 3 years are as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Default Rate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
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</tbody>
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Appropriate measures are employed by the college to educate students and keep the default rates low.

Title IV Compliance

WCC complies with the Title IV requirements of the Higher Education Reauthorization Act. Compliance, external and internal accountability, and safeguard measures are evidenced by the results of (1) the FY2008 audit of the college’s financial systems and by (2) a 2008 Department of Education Program Review. No adverse findings were found.

Compliance with Commission policy 1.C.7, Credits, Program Length, and Tuition Credits

Credits, Program Length, and Tuition Credits

The majority of WCC’s fall and spring semester courses are offered in a 15-week format with a 16th week exam period. Classes are 50 minutes of instruction per credit hour for 15 weeks, equaling 750 minutes of instructional time plus a two-hour final exam period. WCC also offers 14, 12, 8 and 4 week part-of-term courses that equate to the traditional 15-week 750 minute format.
Program Length

WCC degrees vary in length from 63 to 66 semester hours.

Certificate Programs

As of the spring 2009 semester, WCC offered 92 certificates in 25 occupational areas.

Non-Credit Programs

WCC offers non-credit program options to students through its Workforce Development area. Customized training is developed to meet the needs of individual employers as identified through assessment and corporate learning plans.

Tuition

- Resident/online $79.00 per credit hour
- Non-Resident $264.56 per credit hour
- Out of State/International $291.59 per credit hour
- All WCC students are also assessed a $3.00 per credit hour student fee.

Compliance with Commission policy IV.B.2, Advertising and Recruitment Materials

The accreditation statements included on the college Web site and in the 2008/2009 College Catalog and Student Handbook are as follows: Waubonsee Community College is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) and is recognized by federal and state agencies administering financial aid. Advertising and marketing materials were reviewed prior to and onsite during the AQIP Quality Checkup Visit.

Compliance with Commission policy III.A.1, Professional Accreditation, and III.A.3, Requirements of Organizations Holding Dual Institutional Accreditation

Professional Accreditation

WCC programs with professional accreditation include the following:
• Automotive Technology – National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF)
• Medical Assistant – Medical Assisting Education Review Board (MAERB)
• Surgical Technology – Accreditation Review Committee on Education in Surgical Technology (ARC-ST).

Additionally, courses in the Fire Science Technology department are accredited by the Illinois Office of the State Fire Marshall (ILOSF). No issues exist related to professional accreditation.

Dual Accreditation

WCC does not hold dual institutional accreditation.

Compliance with Commission policy IV.A.8, Public Notification of Comprehensive Evaluation Visit

WCC used the following venues to disseminate basic information about the visit and to invite the public to provide written comments to the Higher Learning Commission:

1) College Public Web site
2) Press Release
3) Purchased Ads

College Public Web Site

WCC dedicated a Web page on the college’s Web site to the AQIP Quality Checkup Visit (http://www.waubonsee.edu/aqip/checkup.php).

Press Release

Press releases and purchased ads were created to solicit third party comments and were also distributed to radio.

Compliance with Commission policy IV.B.4, Organizational Records of Student Complaints

Student Complaints
The Quality Checkup Team found WCC had defined processes and procedures for the disposition of student complaints and are published in the Student Handbook. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Other USDE compliance-related issues

None noted.

Other AQIP issues

Meetings with both student and community stakeholders revealed very positive comments with regard to the college’s role in supporting educational need, economic development, and the introduction of culture and diversity within the college’s service area. It is clear that both students and the general community it serves hold Waubonsee Community College in high esteem. The Quality Checkup Team commends the college on the welcoming environment. There was broad participation in all of the sessions from individuals from across the college.

The college has well-maintained facilities in Sugar Grove. The wooded setting is especially attractive and an asset to the community. The college has placed a great deal of effort on making student spaces welcoming. The new Student Center with a “one-stop” shop is an excellent example of form and function through the simultaneous planning for improving academic services that drove the design of the new facility. Although the Quality Checkup Team did not visit the other sites, there was interaction with faculty and staff from them.

The college has been an efficient and strong steward, maintaining services and responding to community needs despite a challenging financial environment. The team met with faculty members on the second day, to get their perspective on the college’s continuous improvement efforts. The faculty members indicated a strong knowledge base of how assessment informs teaching and learning. The All-College Celebration and Reception allowed the Quality Checkup Team to meet with students, faculty, and administrators in an informal and pleasant setting.
The college and its staff are held in high esteem and Waubonsee Community College is integrated in its communities. Community members were enthusiastic about college events and unanimous in asserting that the college and staff are responsive to expressed needs.

Students were passionate about the college and its support. The students were especially excited about the impact of the new Student Center. Although the students are very happy with Waubonsee Community College, they perceived a lag time in acquiring financial aid information. The college has employed a new director of financial aid who has improved operations and is planning to use the My WCC website portal to apprise students of the status of financial aid application.

The Waubonsee Community College AQIP liaison provided the reviewers with an extensive list of improvements occurring at the college since February 2008 with the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report. The response list included accomplishments such as the creation of new plans for program review, community relations, student development, enrollment diversity, human resources, quality, communications, IT, and resource development. This list represents a developing quality culture in the college that is focused on documenting processes and improvements. Finally, the college provided the reviewers with a document that included two concrete actions of how Waubonsee Community College is improving their quality program goals.

While the visit was well planned and scripted, the team would have liked to have had more time for closing conversations with the AQIP liaison and team time for review of materials.