

QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

Indiana University Northwest

Gary, IN
March 26 - 28, 2008

Quality Checkup team members:

Chris Crawford
Assistant Provost for Quality
Management
Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS

Linda Stacy
Director, Educational Development
Lucas County Improvement
Corporation, Toledo, OH

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 Systems Portfolio Indiana

University - Northwest (IU Northwest) submitted a substantially updated Systems Portfolio in preparation for their Quality Checkup Visit (QCV). The QC Team reviewed the first Systems Portfolio and update, as well as the institutional response to the Systems Portfolio Feedback Report prior to the visit. They also reviewed a selection of other publications and internal documents and discussed sections of the Systems Portfolio with AQIP category committee representatives. The QCV team did not find discrepancy between the portfolio updates and the campus environment. Comments from faculty and staff indicated that the Systems Portfolio can provide a history for the institutional record and will function as a dynamic document. This attitude reflects a continuous quality approach.

In the team's judgment, the institution 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.

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

Appraisal

The Systems Appraisal review team identified two accreditation issues. The first issue related to Core accreditation component 2c: "The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement."

The Feedback Report stated, "IU Northwest mentions nine general education goals which align with program-specific outcomes, academic units, and campus mission. The broad general education goals/statements fail to supply an outcome-basis to allow IU Northwest to demonstrate the pattern of knowledge and skills acquisition expected of students upon program completion. Without specific, measurable common student outcomes, IU Northwest will experience difficulty providing direct measures of effective teaching and learning within the university and among peer institution comparisons. Results of student learning will help IU Northwest identify and focus areas of improvement to set the stage for continuous improvement processes surrounding Helping Students Learn."

During the Quality Checkup Visit, the team concluded that IU Northwest is moving toward full compliance in this area. IU Northwest recognized that changes needed to be made to their

general education program and has made significant progress in development of a new General Education program that is tied to measurable direct student learning outcomes. It is obvious to these reviewers that the centerpiece of their new program will be assessment. There appears to have been campus-wide involvement in the development of this program, meeting the mandate by the Chancellor. Collaboration has taken time, and the commitment to quality change has delayed the implementation of the new program, but all stakeholders are pleased with the emerging final product. It appears that the collaboration has resulted in a deeper honest conversation about expectations of general education and impact on faculty workloads. In our opinion, this is no longer an accreditation issue given the amount of work IU Northwest has committed to general education redeployment.

IU Northwest still needs to apply its strong assessment models from the evolving general education program. Clear goals have been constructed (with campus approval), but the assessment models are not yet mature. IU Northwest is making the transition to a learner-centered environment, and has taken great steps by consulting with national speakers to ease this transition. It is the opinion of the review team that IU Northwest will progress in their commitment to build on the assessment model they have articulated, especially with centralized monitoring through the Associate Vice Chancellor's office.

The second accreditation issue dealt with Core accreditation component 1d: "The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission."

The Feedback Report stated, "Interim personnel in key positions leave a leadership gap across many divisions of the university impairing IU Northwest's ability to respond strategically. Process improvement strategies and, specifically, communication may suffer during periods of leadership uncertainty. Through an enhanced succession planning process that ensures effective leadership transition, IU Northwest can improve its strategic direction and performance.

IU Northwest is very aware of the impact of personnel change. The report cited the number of interim designations as a potential deficit to institutional effectiveness. However, IU Northwest has made several permanent appointments and others are in progress. The institution faces a challenge in the near term with the forced retirement of the Chancellor (as per Indiana policy). The institution is beginning to build mental models that will inform the hiring decision, but they are not far along in this process. The campus has also made a commitment to "collaborative processes" through building greater stakeholder involvement in groups like ECHO.

IU Northwest has also made a commitment to the development of a “Leadership Academy” that will facilitate internal growth of their human capital. IU Northwest appears to have the same constraints as most other SCUs regarding the imperative to search for external candidates. It is anticipated that the Leadership Academy will assist in developing skill sets that make potential leaders viable candidates in these search processes. The review team feels that this identified issue does not rise to the level of “accreditation issue,” but will still have a significant impact on the future of the institution and should be monitored as a “strategic issue.”

In the team’s judgment, the institution 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.

Review of the institution’s approach to capitalizing on recommendations identified by its last Systems Appraisal in the *Strategic Issues Analysis*.

The following section discusses strategic issues identified in the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report.

The Systems Appraisal team identified Stakeholder Analysis as the first strategic issue, “IU Northwest has shown a commitment to its various stakeholders by collecting information in a number of ways: comments from Student Advisory Boards, changes in requested services, retention reports, focus group sessions with community leaders, and feedback from different campus stakeholders. IU Northwest has a responsibility to complete the process of identifying, meeting, and assessing stakeholder needs. Elements of this process exist and they have yielded results, such as with the Critical Literacy Program. IU Northwest would benefit from additional effort in this area.”

IU Northwest has recently accomplished two milestones in this area. Much campus-wide effort has been placed on understanding and developing human capital. It is apparent that IU Northwest is genuinely interested in attracting and retaining a qualified talent pool and building a better performance evaluation process. In addition, IU Northwest has recently received the results of a comprehensive enrollment report conducted by an external consultant. Campus personnel are evaluating the report and recommendations and building strategies to build “flat line” enrollment.

These efforts, from the perception of the review team, demonstrate the serious commitment that

IU Northwest makes to understand their stakeholders. Further work needs to be done, but the campus is making an earnest effort in this area.

The Systems Appraisal team identified Learning Assessment Model as the second strategic issue, "IU Northwest's portfolio reveals considerable variation in the approach to learning assessment by the different colleges across the university. Centralized deployment of a learning assessment model could serve to guide more uniform quantitative and qualitative development of aligned measures in this critical area. IU Northwest should consider a strategic initiative to reach agreement across the institution on a unified conceptual framework and approach for learning outcomes measurement."

IU Northwest is approaching the end of their general education revision. This probably will serve the campus well in that there appears to be campus-wide involvement in general education program development, and importantly in general education assessment. This energy will be translated to program-level assessment based on comments and conversations during this QCV. The campus is not at a level with which they feel comfortable and it appears from Quality Checkup conversation that assessment is not seen as an improvement strategy as much as a mechanism forced from outside. There are "pockets" of assessment/student-centered learning, but these tend to be associated with departments engaging in specialized accreditation. IU Northwest should continue to leverage their experience and best practices in those departments and share the information broadly to build greater campus involvement.

The Systems Appraisal team identified Strategic Alignment as the third strategic issue, "AQIP insists that every organization be lucid and direct about what it is trying to accomplish. IU Northwest's portfolio describes many schools with varying and/or conflicting processes. For example, even though IU Northwest's Strategic Outcome 2 criteria sought to establish a "shared collective responsibility," the various units demonstrate different processes and systems. This results in independent and decentralized findings across the schools/disciplines represented by Nursing, SOBE, COAS, SOE, SPEA, and DSW. IU Northwest might well consider their process of alignment of strategic goals of various units through a more fully articulated strategic alignment process."

IU Northwest has had limited progress toward accomplishing any meaningful outcome related to this issue. IU Northwest has recently hired an IR professional who has the responsibility of coordinating the "measuring effectiveness" goal. Again, there are individual units that have embraced the institutional goals and cascaded them to the department level, but that is limited.

To the credit of IU Northwest, there does appear to be substantial interest in alignment, but the primary focus of the institution has been to reform general education and to broaden the assessment process across all departments.

The Systems Appraisal team identified Process Documentation as the fourth strategic issue: “IU Northwest has compiled a Systems Portfolio that conveys an institution committed to process management and continuous improvement, yet challenged with the reality of relevant data collection and data-driven decision making. Additionally, IU Northwest’s individual unit-level decisions about independent school results appear to be founded in activity-oriented findings rather than process-driven improvements. IU Northwest has few processes that it can clearly describe. With documented/mapped processes, defined process measures, and adoption of standardized work, IU Northwest’s systematic improvement efforts can yield results. Clear definition of process will lead IU Northwest to data-driven decision making and focus. IU Northwest should consider a strategic initiative to document its processes beginning with core value stream activities (strategic planning, student learning assessment, stakeholder analysis, employee functions, and communication strategies).”

Most visibly, the institution’s Chancellor and President of the Faculty Organization have worked together to process map the hiring process at IU Northwest as a way to underscore their joint commitment to human capital through collaborative process improvement. Admittedly, IU Northwest has much work to do in this area, but there appears to be a genuine understanding of the need to clearly define processes, and then work to decrease bottlenecks or waste. This review team encourages IU Northwest to broaden their process studies to include other key processes. A deeper understanding of a few key problematic processes may yield quick results if obvious improvements can be implemented.

The Systems Appraisal team identified Results as the fifth strategic issue: “IU Northwest demonstrated initial efforts to become a continuous improvement organization through submission of the November 2005 Systems Portfolio. The institution has not incorporated the presentation and use of results for improvement across all of the units on campus. More widespread use of results to drive continuous improvement will be necessary to move IU Northwest to the next level. Additionally, the absence of benchmarking with other institutions compromises IU Northwest’s ability to view itself comparatively.”

Speaking to the issue of results presentation, IU Northwest is making satisfactory progress in this area. With the hiring of the IR person, and through additional studies in retention and

enrollment management, IU Northwest is at the beginning stages of using data to drive decisions. The cultural change required has obviously not occurred campus-wide, but there is growing acceptance of the need to collaboratively study problems in a growingly transparent environment – requiring faculty and administration to meet in the middle. Examples of such efforts abound at IU Northwest and faculty leadership appears pleased with their ability to collaborate on, influence and learn about processes.

In the team’s judgment, the institution 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.

Review of organizational commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement

The deep culture of continuous quality improvement as THE organizing principle for the institution is not apparent. Campus leaders can relate *ad hoc* instances of success associated with AQIP. This team feels confident in suggesting that administration, staff, faculty and students embrace and practice continuous quality. There was some sense from conversations that the campus community may be aware that AQIP exists; however, the understanding of how quality can pervade the culture is not uniform. Communication strategies and professional development regarding continuous quality, process improvement, results management, and systems thinking training will likely invigorate their culture. Recent workshops designed to build greater buy-in on general education assessment were noted several times, and more such events seem to be one mechanism for building the IU Northwest commitment to quality.

In the team’s judgment, the institution 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)

The QCV team reviewed material related to USDE eligibility and found no compliance issues at IU Northwest at this time. The average default rate is at 4.9%, well below the national average.

In the team’s judgment, the institution 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.

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

The QCV team reviewed material related to this item; no third party comments were filed. Therefore, the Team found no compliance issues at IU Northwest at this time.

In the team's judgment, the institution 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.

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

The QCV team reviewed material related to this item and found no compliance issues at IU Northwest at this time. Program requirements, credits, program length, and tuition practices are consistent with other higher education providers in the region.

In the team's judgment, the institution 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.

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

The QCV team reviewed several advertising brochures, the College website, catalog, and internal documents and found no compliance issues at IU Northwest at this time.

In the team's judgment, the institution 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.

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

The QCV team reviewed material related to this item and found no compliance issues at IU Northwest at this time. IU Northwest has only one institution-wide accreditation relationship, with the Higher Learning Commission. Specialized program accreditations include:

- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (all graduate and undergraduate education programs,
- Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education and National League for Nursing Accreditation Commission,
- Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management,
- Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology,
- Committee on Accreditation for Respiratory Care,
- National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences,
- ADA Commission on Dental Accreditation,
- Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business,
- National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, and
- Council on Social Work Education.

In the team's judgment, the institution 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.

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

Complaints

The QCV team reviewed material related to this item and discussed the complaint process and reports with appropriate personnel. IU Northwest is in compliance with student complaint processes as defined by the IU system. As per IU policy, IU Northwest is allowed to create a local process to respond to student complains for which they are in the process of seeking approval. The Team found no compliance issues at IU Northwest at this time.

In the team's judgment, the institution 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.

Other USDE compliance-related issues

The QCV team found no other USDE compliance issues at IU Northwest at this time.

In the team's judgment, the institution 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.

Other AQIP issues

1. IU Northwest is approaching a critical decision point for continuous improvement. It is apparent that much progress has been made since the Systems Portfolio was submitted, and there is significant stakeholder involvement. The Chancellor is poised to retire (per Indiana policy) within 18 months. The continuous improvement effort still needs the nurturing of senior administration and a key retirement like this may threaten the new found successes. Their succession planning process will be tested during this critical period.
2. Everyone had a button and it was cool! It was obvious that IU Northwest approached their Quality Checkup Visit with great seriousness and a desire to improve. One sign of their seriousness was the large red "AQIP is coming" button worn by personnel and students. The obvious goal of the button was not to put the campus on edge, rather the button appeared to signify a pride in being prepared for a quality improvement and assessment conversation. In the reviewers' opinion, their approach was a model and the campus should be proud of the way they prepared for the visit. By all observations, all relevant details were handled in advance making the conversation richer. The reviewers thank IU Northwest for their commitment to making our visit without incident or problem. The reviewers felt that IU Northwest was glad we visited them.
3. In response to the question "why are we here?" the resounding answer was "we're here for the students." The central role of the students needs in all things considered was evident in most cases. One could point to any number of administrative choices, faculty recommendations, or staff interventions that support student learning as the centerpiece of IU Northwest success. Students were pleased with the quality of education they received at IU Northwest. While there was a short list of concerns expressed by students, the list tended to revolve around typical artifacts of the undergraduate experience at any commuter school – parking and scheduling. From most accounts, IU

Northwest is an unsung hero according to students because of the small class size and personal attention from advisors. Students loved their professors and the outstanding job they did. The reviewers were very pleased to have such a frank conversation with the large student group assembled. Based on the conversation, we recommend that IU Northwest find ways to inform students of potential programming changes resulting from cancelation of classes due to small class size.

4. This review team was pleased with the collegial working relationship between the Faculty Organization and administration. Faculty expressed concerns about recent change in minimum class size, but the conversation appeared to be civil at all levels. Faculty did not express concern over salary or benefits, but noted the flat-line commitment to funding research activity over the last 10 years. Notably, it was obvious that faculty wanted to be included in decision making at IU Northwest, and those opportunities were being presented to faculty in the form of seats at the decision table (ECHO, etc). Faculty were quite protective of traditional activities generally considered owned by faculty – almost too protective and rigid. Related to the general education discussion, it was surprising that recently appointed administrators were *ex officio* (despite the fact most seemed to agree that they had the same knowledge and student-centered focus as they possessed when they were faculty). Under quality improvement models, collaboration must be a two-way street. Credible ideas, no matter their quarter, must be considered. Designations of *ex officio* seem to cut against a collaborative grain that, it appears, faculty and administrators are attempting to jointly foster.
5. Assessment was identified during the 2006 Systems Appraisal as an accreditation issue. It was apparent that IU Northwest has taken significant steps to build an assessment plan that meets the needs of the institution, and at the same time does not overly constrain the academic units through standardization. IU Northwest does collect assessment data, but their general education changes and the recent Arts & Sciences assessment plan will propel IU Northwest forward toward useful collection and analysis of data to improve programs. IU Northwest is encouraged to centrally track both institutional and departmental assessment data. IU Northwest may find it helpful to create a formal AQIP action project relating to department major assessment. Assumedly, the entire campus could then focus on the effort overcoming the current fragmentation by college and department.

6. At IU Northwest, quality management occurs through various channels. One notable channel is the ECHO group comprised strategically of deans, directors, faculty, and others. ECHO serves a gatekeeper function for strategic planning and facilitates operations management through information sharing. Representation is a key feature of this committee structure. At the request of the Faculty Organization they were given a seat at this meeting, which appears to have served the purpose well. IU Northwest appears to be working toward an environment of collaboration, but critical conversations regarding faculty expectations appear to loom in the background, not totally resolved.
7. The meeting with staff members at IU Northwest covered predictable areas. Overall, the staff members at IU Northwest were pleased with their work environment, had concerns about being under funded, and loved the students. Staff members consistently noted a sense of esprit de corps with other staff members at IU Northwest – the reviewers fully realized that this informal network resolves many of the common issues at the university. Staff members noted that more focus could be put on community engagement since most of the staff come from the surrounding locality. Concerns were expressed about the lack of formal training of supervisors and the need for more information about AQIP in a form that was easily understood. Staff did not express concerns about their relationship with faculty.
8. At the institutional level IU Northwest has a serious challenge in that they stand undifferentiated among the many competitors in the area. IU Northwest noted as many as 7 competitive institutions within a 20 mile area. Given the flat line enrollment trends that IU Northwest reports, it appears that they have an opportunity to study points of differentiation. The institution is positioned well with the many fine faculty employed, and great student feedback, and their growing focus on assessment. One faculty commented that IU Northwest is like a “gem we’re trying to turn into a jewel.” This sense of becoming was expressed in nearly every meeting – IU Northwest is a great place but it receives bad ethos from the history of the region. IU Northwest – the institution – is the only master of its destiny, and in order to turn around this bad image it may find benefit in professional brand building.