

QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

Missouri Western State University

St. Joseph, Missouri
October 29-31, 2008

Quality Checkup team members:

Dr. Gwen J. Hillesheim
Vice President Academic &
Student Services
Career Education Corporation

Dr. David E. Todt
Provost, Vice President for Academic
Affairs, and Director of Institutional
Planning
Shawnee State University

Academic  Quality Improvement Program

The Higher Learning Commission
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504
800-621-7440 • www.ncahlc.org

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*

The Team reviewed the Systems Portfolio, Systems Appraisal Feedback Report, and Response to Systems Appraisal Feedback Report before arriving for the Quality Checkup visit to gain an understanding of the University. During the visit, the Team verified and clarified the contents of the System Portfolio through review of documentation, particularly the *Quality Journal*, *Assessment Progress* and *October Workshop Response*. In addition, discussions held with the President, University Leadership Team, Strategic Planning Team, Action Project Teams, and various cross-functional groups that included students, administrators, external partners, faculty, and staff were helpful in verifying the contents of Western's Systems Portfolio.

Discussions with campus groups focused on several strategic opportunities identified by the Systems Appraisal and actions taken during the past 18 months since the institution received the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report.

The original review team of the Systems Portfolio expressed confusion regarding the mission of the organization and its alignment with the state requirement of being an open enrollment institution. The visiting team was able to clarify the difference between the charge by the state of Missouri as an open enrollment institution and the mission of focus and opportunity for all students. To a person, the concept of open enrollment was shown to be embraced and accepted. The mission of access was well articulated and processes for serving these students, from enrollment to graduation, were in evidence. The student services area of the institution was especially facile at collection and use of data to identify critical factors affecting opportunities for student success, as well as the follow through of developing interventions for improvement.

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

In the team's judgment, Missouri Western State University presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The Systems Appraisal identified no accreditation issues.

Review of the institution's approach to capitalizing on recommendations identified by its last

Systems Appraisal in the *Strategic Issues Analysis*.

Category One: Helping Students Learn

There is significant use of learning data through MAT and CLA allowing for comparison of learning data with other peer institutions. Individual programs have also identified content based testing mechanisms allowing assurance of student learning by the close of their programs. Most recently 100% of students in the nursing program passed the state board examination. The school's focus on applied learning, in combination with strong external relationships, provides students with opportunities to experience their learning with a career focus satisfying students, external stakeholders, employers.

To the credit of the institution they are researching and attempting additional programmatic accreditations for further means of assuring learning. An observation made by the assessment and IR team, and reinforced by the visiting team, is the need to find appropriate mechanisms to measure learning earlier in the students experience, allowing for interventions supporting students prior to the conclusion of the program.

Category Two: Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives

In conversations with Student Services personnel it is clear that there are multiple measures of data collected. From the earliest engagements with students data is identified and tracked for student interventions. An example is "Admissions with Conditions" for students needing additional readiness preparation for college level courses. The intervention includes developmental course work, limited credits in their first term, special housing and added student services. The retention of entering students in this category has improved.

Weekly student support meetings are held using reports for identification of risk factors. Metrics studied include pre-registration and registration processes, grades, progress, self identification and others. Actions for improvement include changes to the orientation process, student surveys, "Coffee and Conversations" sessions with students, collaborative processes for developmental education between academic faculty and student services staff, specialized identification of categories and staff to support them. These include international students, a focus on diversity, non-traditional students and ADA students. Student Voice, a product based on outcomes and development, and tracking of long term institutional outcomes is being investigated. Institutional support outcomes are in the process of having rubrics developed for

long term assessment. The alignment of many factors demanding collaboration and a single focus on student success is obvious and commendable.

Category Three: Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs

In the original Systems Portfolio response it was noted the inclusion of faculty satisfaction data and other internal stakeholders was not evident.

The Human Resources department has made progress on developing opportunities for staff engagement. Some actions include improved benefits for the current enrollment plan and a robust process for recruitment and hiring of new staff. The stability of the work force is commendable, even though within the past year the turnover rate has doubled. This increase is still not a significant number and can be attributed to the hiring of a new president and some key leadership changes.

Category Four: Valuing People

This category has received significant focus since the earlier Systems Portfolio submission and subsequent recommendations. Evolution of the organization is seen through the choices of strategic goals within the revised five year strategic plan. Valuing people is now viewed as a critical strategic area. An example of this is the Safety and Security plan. Safety was identified by students as a cause for concern. The trend toward violence on college campuses has forced a new level of intervention and Missouri Western State University has responded with a thorough study and response. The current safety plan is in the implementation and testing phase but is well thought out and funded. The goal of investing with a long view is evident. A "mock crisis" drill for all managers to test the response and communication during a crisis is recommended.

In meeting with students, a common response to the query "What is the one best thing about the institution?" was the attention students receive from faculty. Students feel valued and note the "family" environment that mixes challenging study with friendships. There were multiple instances of students articulating their desire to stay on at the institution as a graduate student. In response to the query "What one thing would you change in the institution?" a common theme was improved advising for students. Review of the training process for advisors may serve the institution well.

The original Systems Appraisal review team noted the ongoing challenge for the institution related to increasing faculty pay with limited state funds.

Increases to pay have been difficult, but not impossible. Using data available to the institution the rate of pay is currently viewed as comparable to other similar institutions for nearly all positions. However, the desire of the institution to use “pay for performance” is not endorsed by the state of Missouri. In response the school has developed an Employee and Faculty award mechanism that allows financial awards as part of base pay. Faculty use this process as a Stop Gap for those awaiting promotion through the tenure process. While this process is serving the school well, the implementation and management of this process could be improved, as articulated by the Human Resources Manager.

At this time in the institution there is not a formal succession plan for key positions. This has been identified by the Human Resources Manager as a need and is planned for study and implementation in 2009-2010.

Category Five: Leading and Communicating

The new president of Missouri Western State University has been in place for only four months, with the investiture ceremony having taken place only one week prior to this team visit. He appears to be fully engaged with much of the university, including staff, faculty and leadership. He views himself as a good communicator and has set a goal of communication for himself. He is in the process of meeting each department within the organization and anticipates starting a monthly message to the entire community. He appears to be engaged with the faculty senate and staff council, as well as the management cabinet. He holds regular town hall conversations with all staff and appears committed to both top down and bottom up opportunities for communication.

Category Seven: Measuring Effectiveness

In the original Systems Appraisal of the Systems Portfolio data was observed as being collected but utilization was unclear or sporadic.

The institution has made significant process in this area. The evolution of the five year strategic plan shows a focus on measurement and action items that are grounded in the collection of data, identification of areas for improvement and development of interventions to effect change. Each department is able to articulate the data collected for their areas and each action item to date has a measurement requirement. Student Services is grounded in use of data for identification of issues and improvements. Student enrollment and student retention, financial aid, default rates, safety and security, faculty and staff engagement, and student learning have been positively affected by their use of measurement and improvement.

The 2008-2012 five year strategic plan has a current action project focusing on development of policies and procedures for the collection and use of data, as well as storage and retrieval of data. These are admirable goals and upon completion could be seen as a best practice by the HLC. The comprehensive institutional assessment plan is also in progress. Assessment of student learning and engagement data has been a focus and is thorough and applied. However, the assessment of management processes for the improvement of the effective management of the institution is in its earliest phases. A comprehensive plan has been established as a goal and the staff are aware of the task of teaching ahead of them for the institutional leadership.

Category Nine: Building Collaborative Relationships

Team membership met with members of the institutions external partnerships including the Chamber of Commerce, Superintendent of the Area School District, CEO of the Regional Health Facility and the Metropolitan Community College. The partners were consistent in their support of Missouri Western State University. A ground breaking articulation agreement has been forged between the Metropolitan Community College and MWSU providing seamless transitions and possible funding support for graduates of Metropolitan CC transferring to Missouri Western. Both institutions are pleased with the relationship. In addition, support from the Regional Health facility is clear for the nature of the applied learning and the success of the Nursing Program.

There were no areas of concern noted in the initial Systems Appraisal of the Portfolio. The team has seen that the accreditation and AQIP process are viewed within a continuum that results in continued accreditation and that this Checkup Visit is viewed as preparation for the next phase of the process in 2010.

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to improvement is acceptable and complies with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

Review of organizational commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement

The Quality Checkup Team visiting Missouri Western State University found evidence of the institution's commitment to continuous quality improvement through review of numerous documents, interviews with Governing Board members, faculty, administrators, students, and staff, and during informal discussions at an Action Project Poster reception.

An example of the university's commitment to quality improvement is the significant change in promotion and tenure expectations. The institution has moved from an optional tenure and

promotion process to more traditional “up or out” tenure system. This has been a major change in the culture of the institution that was largely driven by faculty concerns about quality and improving the image of Missouri Western.

The campus AQIP Planning Council has been active in coordinating continuous improvement on campus, selecting the next generation of AQIP Action Projects. Three retired action projects were reviewed by the team and were viewed as successful. These three are now being fully integrated into the organization and are: A focus on 1) Applied Learning 2) Student Engagement, and 3) Communicating Quality. The projects addressed important institutional issues by involving a broad cross section of the campus community in changes aimed at improvement.

New action projects include 1) Building Graduate Programs 2) Enhancing Academic Quality Through Critical Thinking and 3) Using Measurement and Assessment. The Quality Checkup Team was impressed by the level commitment to the continuous improvement activities. When probing about “why” they have been so successfully engaged in the process the response included the funding of the action projects and the staffing that allowed tracking, encouragement, training, and coordination of the AQIP process, the strategic plan, and the action projects. Following the Checkup Visit and the Reaffirmation of Accreditation, the revision of the Systems Portfolio will provide another opportunity to address the integration of planning efforts on campus.

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 team met with a group of administrators responsible for various aspects of compliance with U. S. Department of Education and Higher Learning Commission expectations. The institution prepared a Compliance Material Packet that was shared with the Quality Checkup team.

Missouri Western presented the team with documentation of program participation agreements for Federal Student Aid Eligibility and Certification, recent results of program audits, other USDE actions, and default rate statistics. The documentation was complete and in good order. The

most recent reported default rate for the Stafford Federal loans in 2006 was 5.8 percent. The 1996 default rate was 14.8 percent and a significant downward trend in default rate over the last decade was noted. The Federal Perkins Loan current default rate is 16 percent, an increase from 9.4 percent in 2006-07. The institution attributes the increase to the present economic conditions.

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

A notice soliciting comments was published in the St. Joseph News-Press for seven days in mid-July 2008. A copy of the ad and the press release were provided to the team and included as an e-mail announcement to faculty, staff, and students of the university. A fax from the Commission to the team members noted that no third party comments were received. This information along with the accompanying statement from the Commission was shared with the institution.

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 team collected information from a *Compliance Material Packet* prepared by Missouri Western State University, the university catalogs and handbooks, and the university website. The institution operates on the semester system. The unit of credit is the semester hour. The outside preparation required is approximately twice the time spent in class. Bachelor's degree requirements are a minimum of 124 semester hours. An associate's degree requires a minimum of 62 credit hours. Requirements for undergraduate programs are online at <http://www.missouriwestern.edu/catalog/>.

The team discussed issues related to credits, program length, and tuition with faculty, staff and students. In addition, institutional documents and the website were reviewed to look for

consistent information about credits, curricular structure, and tuition. Western is among the most affordable of institutions in the Missouri state higher education system. 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*

Missouri Western State University provided samples of the organization's advertising and recruitment materials available to the Quality Checkup team. They reviewed a number of publications that the institution uses to promote its programs and recruit students. A focus on branding and alignment is seen in the approach to all publications. This is believed to be a result of Communicating Quality as one of the first Action Projects. The five year strategic plan and update reports figure prominently in many publications. After discussion with various faculty and staff members about its approach to advertising and recruitment materials, the team determined that the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The materials work well together and present a solid and unified approach to Missouri Western State University. 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*

As presented in the Systems Portfolio, the team found the following accreditations to be in place: Technology Accreditation Commission of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (TAC of ABET), American Bar Association (ABA), American Chemical Society (ACS), American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE), Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Science (NAACLS), National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The Steven L. Craig School of Business is seeking The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation. A strong commitment to disciplinary and specialized accreditation was evident in

interviews with faculty and administrators. 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 student handbook, which outlines for the students the appropriate steps for registering a complaint, is accessible to all faculty, staff, and students via the university's intranet. Additionally, all students receive a hard copy of the student handbook at the beginning of the academic year. Copies of this handbook were made available to the visiting team during the Checkup Visit.

The student complaint file made available to the team noted only 2 issues, both of which were related to student housing facility issues. In addition there were 5 grade appeals, each of which were investigated and closed. The process of filing a complaint was noted and was viewed as rigorous. The complaint process was referenced in being present in both school policy and student handbook documents. When reviewing those documents, as well as the website, there were clearly processes for specialized types of complaints or grievances, but the overall process of filing or the management of complaints was not displayed. It appears that the institution is able to resolve the majority of complaints in the informal phase rather than the formal complaint process, but should a member of the community wish to file a complaint it is difficult to access the process.

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

Audits

The Student Financial Planning Office is audited on a yearly basis to assure compliance with Title IV Federal regulations. The last four annual audits showed no material findings with regard to the processing of federal aid.

The United States Department of Education has authorized Missouri Western State University to participate in the Title IV, HEA Program with Provisional Approval until March 31, 2012.

Campus Security Policy and Report

The Campus Security Policy and Report was viewed by the team and is available to the public.

FERPA

Missouri Western State University has complied with FERPA and information was reviewed by the team and is available to the public through the schools website.

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

Category 7: Measurement

As noted by the earlier Systems Appraisal team, data was often presented but longitudinal data was missing or inconsistent. The institution has addressed this issue in some areas but it is not fully implemented. As a new action project and strategic plan foci the institution is clearly embracing a continuous improvement philosophy grounded in data collection and analysis. Over time this area will be will represented. It is reinforced by the team that they continue in this effort.