

**Response to the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report**  
**Missouri Western State University**  
October 2007

Western received its Systems Appraisal Feedback Report on March 27, 2007. Since that time, we have shared the Report with the 33 members of our Strategic Planning Steering Committee and with almost four hundred individuals indirectly through the co-chairs for each of seven strategic planning priority areas. In addition to receiving the full Report, we provided individuals a snapshot of the institution's success in moving through the AQIP cycles and alerted them to remaining requirements. We are scheduled for a Quality Checkup Visit in 2008 and for Reaffirmation of Accreditation in 2009-2010. We also provided the group with a matrix illustrating SS's, S's, OO's, and O's across Categories (with a prose summary of Strengths and Opportunities) along with the Executive Summary Category and the Strategic Issues statements. **The Report identified no Accreditation Issues.**

In keeping with the spirit of continuous improvement in AQIP, we are providing this Response as our self-reflective use of the Report as well as a feedback mechanism to AQIP and the Appraisal Team relative to the Report itself.

Self-Reflection

1. We find that the strong ratio of Strengths (either SS, or S) to Opportunities (either OO, or O) provides a picture of the institution as having in place growing, emergent processes that achieve many of the goals put in place; having successful approaches and processes that are adopted and used throughout the institution; having and using data/comparative data on performance in several areas; demonstrating improving levels of performance in several areas; and making significant improvements as the result of strategic initiatives.

At the completion of our first Systems Portfolio and Appraisal, we view Significant Strengths (SS) as areas that we are embedding in our institutional improvement culture and Strengths as potential SS's in another Appraisal; likewise, identified Outstanding Opportunities (OO) focus us on strategic issues where attention may result in significant improvement and Opportunities (O) as areas where attention may result in improvement.

2. Specific Responses to OO's (bold is from Appraisal Feedback Report)

**GPA and retention are key indicators of performance, but cannot capture learning. While all graduates take a standardized test (ETS Academic Profile), it is unclear what process is in place to use the results to improve student performance.**

- 1P13 We need to explain what processes and communications systems we have in place to use data results to improve student performance.

**Western's learning objectives (figure 1.2) contain areas that are not measured by the chosen assessment tool, perhaps additional assessment methods might be employed to provide results on those areas.**

- 1R1- (in relation to Fig. 1.2) Common Learning Objectives exist for 42 semester credit-hours spread across General Education for all Missouri Public institutions. In addition to the ETS Academic Profile and CLA (Collegiate Learning Assessment), we assess at the course level. We have developed AQIP Action Projects in Critical Thinking and in Using Measurement and Assessment that will provide additional data on student learning.

**Missouri Western might consider presenting the data in Figure 1.1 for several consecutive years to identify weaknesses and strengths, as well as trends.**

- 1R2 Suggests we could show trends in accomplishing our strategic planning goals and objectives. We chose to show progress for the current year but have consistently gathered, analyzed, and summarized data related to progress on strategic planning goals. Since receiving the Feedback Report, we have revised the matrices on our electronic Portfolio to show strategic planning progress trends over five years.

**Although Figure 3.5 identifies the range of inputs gathered from various stakeholder groups, faculty's changing needs are not included, and examples of analysis and use of data regarding stakeholder needs are lacking.**

- 3P3 We focused on our external stakeholders and our commitment to engage the community in the strategic planning process. We did not identify faculty or students as key stakeholders, although both have helped to provide input regarding community and regional needs.

**While the results presented with the processes listed in 6P5, Figure 6.3 and 6.4 describe processes, results and analysis would provide meaningful information to guide the institution.**

- 6R1 and 2 We find this statement unclear. 6P5 asks for identification of measures for collecting and analyzing Student Support Processes. Figure 6.3 lists measures for student service processes; Figure 6.4 identifies measures for administrative support services. If the point is that results have not been reported or analyzed, this is inaccurate since this occurs in the Results section where we tie results directly to the measures.

**Western completed its final updates on its first three AQIP Action Projects in September 2006 and will update new AQIP projects in 2007. Projections of performance for strategies and action plans in regards to 8R1 over the next three years are not given. New goals are not noted as part of the annual report with the exception of AACSB International accreditation and sustainability.**

- 8R2 In our Systems Portfolio, we describe strategic planning as a continuous 5-4-1 cycle, consisting of a five-year plan, a fourth year creation of second five-year plan, and annual reports. At the time we submitted the Systems Portfolio, we were writing our second five-year strategic plan. We had three three-year Action Projects that were ready to be retired. We were deciding areas for new Action Projects based upon the new strategic plan, these three launched in April 2007 and reported on in the Annual Update in September 2007. We developed the three new Action Projects from areas that we self-identified as opportunities as we were writing our Systems Portfolio, areas that the strategic planning development process validated.

#### Responses to Other Feedback (SS's, S's, and O's)

We consider the Significant Strengths as either embedded or needing to be embedded in our continuous improvement culture. This includes a process in place for assessing developmental coursework that is excellent (1P3); the use of the strategic plan for alignment of curricular and co-curricular goals, an excellent model, fostered by a focus on applied learning (1P10); the use of feedback from retention and recruitment to change how academic departments handle student visits (3P2); employment of annual faculty self-evaluations focused on teaching, scholarship/creative activity, and service (5R1); use of a rubric at the beginning of each AQIP Category to demonstrate how the strategic planning goals and objectives capture the nine Categories (7P1); increase in applied learning activities from 72% to 80% from

2002-2005, the percentage now 83 % (8R1); the recognition of Western's strategic planning as a "Best Practice" (8R3 and 4).

We appreciate the many strengths identified in the Appraisal and continue to work on their improvement.

We generally accept the feedback in the form of an O as areas where we can continue to improve.

1. Many areas of opportunity include processes that can be more clearly articulated.
2. Some O statements seem not to be clearly distinguished from S statements; for example (1C2), **Most units at Western, including academic departments, routinely assess their practices, monitoring usage patterns, student needs, and student evaluation of services. As a result of assessment, major changes in organizations and services occur routinely.** Exactly what is the actionable item here?
3. Sometimes, a suggestion seems not to reflect an understanding of the culture in which we operate; for example (1P8), **A five year review cycle of programs is very long for rapidly changing programs...** The Missouri State Department of Higher Education, by policy, requires five-year program reviews. Since we received the Feedback Report, we have made this clear in 1P8 and the cross reference to 1C2.
4. We are implementing a Critical Thinking Action Project that will address student performance on foundational skills and senior exit exams (1R1-2).
5. Sometimes, we found that an Appraisal statement was not actionable based on an unclear reference; for example (3R1-3R2) suggests an inconsistency between Figure 1.9 and Figure 3.9, the first presenting percentages of assessment in General Education, and the second, trends in retention for Western students. While we acknowledge that further discussion of trends may be appropriate, the assumed inconsistency seems to describe more about the Appraisers' understanding than the intent of the charts.
6. On occasion, the Appraisal addressed Results in the Context area (4P2): **The Pay-for-Performance evaluation process could include data and assessment over time to ascertain its impact.** We said in our Results section, "During a two-year period (2004-2005), it [Western] expended \$500,000 to make market-

based pay increases that affected 65% of faculty and staff at Western." Since the implementation is recent, we need more time to accumulate and assess data.

7. Sometimes, O statements suggest a lack of close attention to what the Portfolio actually says; for example, (8P1) **The strategic plan reporting process could be more frequently than annually and expand beyond the VP level" and "the process for strategy selection is not clear (8P2).** The Portfolio describes a planning process where a Steering Committee meets regularly and oversees implementation of goals, objectives, and action items, hears reports from implementation teams for each of the seven planning areas, and then publishes an annual report. 8P1 provides the preliminary steps to annual implementation and a timeline for reports. Far from working at the VP level, we involve more than 400 students, community members, Board of Governors, staff, faculty, and administrators in strategic planning and implementation (8R4).

#### Responses to Category Feedback

**Category One-Western's philosophy regarding its mission as an open enrollment institution is not clear.**

**- A number of processes are not clearly delineated, nor fully deployed.**

1. The Appraisers seem to confuse Western's mission and its legislative designation as an open access institution. We have clearly stated our mission: " Missouri Western State University will set the standard for excellence for the new American Regional University focused on the development of students as learners, as persons, and as citizens through applied learning, and on the development of the region through applied research and service."

The AQIP Action Project in Student Engagement addresses enrollment management and retention, a challenge of admissions selectivity. As an open access institution, We have worked to develop and implement a comprehensive enrollment management plan that results in enrolling a mix of first-year students that reflects the national ACT distribution and to maintain a comprehensive research program in support of enrollment management, retention, student success, and graduation rates (Goal One, Objectives A and B of our five-year strategic plan, *The*

*Western Advantage*. The second five-year plan, *Building the New American Regional Universities* continues this emphasis under "Sustaining Institutional Accreditation Priorities."

We agree that a number of processes can be more fully articulated.

**Category Two-The projects identified in "other distinctive objectives" are important to strengthening the institution. In the next round of projects, this AQIP segment might be better met with objectives that connect the institution to the external community.**

2. We made a strategic decision to address AQIP Action Projects and other distinctive projects in Category Two. Building Collaborative Relationships describes connections with the community and region. The new strategic plan identifies Building Connections as an area of opportunity and establishes specific goals and objectives for making these connections.

**Category Three- Internal stakeholders do not appear to be represented.**

3. Due to a focus on the community, we addressed external stakeholders in Category Three and internal stakeholders only indirectly.

**Category Four- There are limited results which serve as actual evidence of valuing people. - The faculty to student ratios is given as 18:1, but actual numbers seem to indicate 31:1.**

**- While we acknowledge the increasing funding for market-based pay increases, it raises the question of how were the increases funded given state contribution reductions and what else was eliminated in the budget to support this initiative.**

4. We recognize that "Valuing People" would be strengthened with the addition of evidence.

This Category does not address the student/faculty ratio, which the Feedback Report says looks to be 31:1 rather

than the 18:1 (provided in the Overview). We report this ratio as FTE Student/FTE Faculty and FTE Student/FT Faculty. It would help us if the Report explained what evidence it used to reach its conclusion.

5. The significant challenges created by state funding cuts in 2002-2007, and the commitments made to people (community, students, faculty, staff, and administrators) and programs led us to protect the jobs of full-time continuing employees, to reduce operations by 1/3 for two years, and to fill new positions selectively. We survived by efficiencies, supportive collaborations, and supportive partnerships.

**Category Five- Western has productively used data to lead and communicate; it can also attain useful data by surveying its stakeholders to learn more from the results in leading and communicating.**

6. We agree that a survey of stakeholders would be useful. Several surveys have been proposed in the new strategic plan in the area of Valuing People.

**Category Six-Continuous improvement goals using data from multiple sources are exemplary. Many of Western's departments set specific and measurable targets for improvement.**

7. We believe this is a "Best Practice."

**Category Seven- A processes [sic] which focuses on the utilization of data that has been collected would close assessment loops and, as such, support effective decision making.**

**- Data could be analyzed at the point of collection. In doing so, it could provide for immediacy of results and better utilization of resources.**

**-Ongoing assessment of Banner utilization will be helpful for understanding the actual effectiveness of the technology.**

8. We have developed an AQIP Action Project "Using Measurement and Assessment" as the direct result of what we learned from writing the Category, "Measuring Effectiveness." The Feedback Report captures our understanding of our need to focus on data, data analysis, data-informed decision-making, and closure of assessment loops.

**Category Eight-The portfolio describes a productive process for planning continuous improvement. The addition and use of measures and tracking systems will strengthen this process.**

9. We believe continuous improvement is a “Best Practice” at Western.

**Category Nine-Clearly, students benefit from the collaboration and relationship building conducted by Western; measurements that track results and impact could strengthen this effort.**

**-Accreditation issues and Strategic challenges for Missouri Western State University are listed in detail within the Strategic and Accreditation Issues Analysis section of the Appraisal Feedback Report.**

10. The Report identifies no Accreditation issues and only five strategic issues. The Report states of collaborations, **Clearly, students benefit from the collaboration and relationship building conducted by Western.** We recognize that tracking results impact and strengthen this effort.

#### Responses to Strategic Issues

1. **From reading the portfolio, it appears Western is pulled between it’s [sic] assigned mission from the State of Missouri to be an open access institution and Western’s desire and attempts to be “more” and position itself with the more selective higher education institutions in the state. This might muddy their mission and spread resources too thin, attempting to be all things to all people.**  
We state our mission clearly: “Missouri Western State University will set the standard for excellence for the new American Regional University focused on the development of students as learners, as persons, and as citizens through applied learning, and on the development of the region through applied research and service.” The Appraisers confuse mission with admissions selectivity or open access. There is no confusion at Western regarding our mission, admission process, and our focus on applied learning.
2. **It often appears that there is confusion between what is the “process” being used and the “results” obtained from using the developed process, i.e., often descriptions of results are presented as being the process.**

We acknowledge that some processes need to be more clearly articulated.

3. **With the discussion about the impact on budgets from reductions in Missouri funding, there is not as much discussion about development and fundraising. The two big priorities seem to be recruitment and retention. Given the process of improvement culture at Western, adding focus toward development may provide some assistance for future projects/improvements.**

Figure 4.6 provides a summary of Foundation funding from 2000 to 2005 and its distribution in support of Valuing People. We recognize that development and fundraising are strategic to our overall budget. In September 2007, we received a \$5 million gift to supplement the Lewis and Clark initiative (\$30.1) from the State to support capital development for science and mathematics.

4. **While the document mentions Western's technology capabilities with pride, it states that 95% of all classes are held during the traditional 9-5 period and that upcoming classes are scheduled based on historic demands. With the increasing utilization of online for adult learners, Western may be well-served in its local community and beyond with increasing the availability of online classes as well as increasing the availability of classes after hours to serve the non-traditional student or the student who needs schedule flexibility to coordinate a job and education.**

We have, in fact, begun expanding and revising course schedules and expect, by 2009, to offer all general studies classes at night, online, or weekends, and to offer total degree programs at night, online, or on weekends by 2012. These action items are part of our new strategic plan, *Building the New American Regional University*.

5. **With the focus on increased student enrollment as well as improved entering student ACT scores as well as new student diversity, there is little to no discussion about**

**Western using the strategy of tuition discounting to improve averages and diversity.**

We could have presented more on this topic in our Systems Portfolio. Figure 6.8 shows the average dollars received per student in five State Financial awards. We have significantly reshaped our scholarships for freshmen, transfer students, and non-traditional students with a goal of improving both averages and diversity, for example, we provide

- Golden Griffon Scholarships (four-year renewable, up to \$10,000 per year, requiring an ACT of 27 and an overall GPA of 3.5)
- President's Academic Scholarship (up to \$4,000 per year, ACT 25, top 15% of high school class or 3.25 GPA, maintain 3.25 GPA)
- Regent's Academic Scholarship (\$2,000 per year, 23 ACT, 3.0 for cumulative renewal)
- Deans' Scholarship (\$1,000 per year, 21 ACT, in top 33 percent of high school class or have 3.25 GPA, 3.0 for cumulative renewal)
- G. E.D. (\$1,500 per year, 2750 on GED or 23 ACT, 3.0 cumulative for renewal)
- President's Community College Transfer (\$4,000 per year, completion of 60 hours at a 2-year college, cumulative GPA of 3.5)
- Regent's Community College transfer, (\$2,000 per year, 60 hours at a 2-year college, cumulative GPA of 3.0)
- Non-traditional Community College Transfer, (\$750 per semester, 60 hours at a 2-year college, cumulative 3.0, enrolled 6-12 credit hours, work 20 hours per week)
- Midwest Student Exchange Program, allows residents of Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota and Wisconsin to enroll in specific designated programs at reduced tuition rates
- Western Neighboring States in-state tuition (Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas), first-time freshmen, (ACT of 21, cumulative GPA of 3.0. Community College transfer students must have an associate's degree and a 3.0 cumulative GPA; non-community college transfer students with less than 60 credit hours, ACT of 21 or higher, cumulative 3.0 college GPA; non-community college transfer students with more than 60 credit hours must have a 3.0 cumulative GPA)

- Western Frontier, (\$1,500 per year, non-residents of Missouri, 23 ACT, 3.0 cumulative)
- In FALL 2007, in support of graduate programs, We committed \$23,500 to graduate scholarships.

### Feedback to AQIP and the Appraisal Team

1. Structure. We believe it would help if the introductory/explanatory materials preceded the Report and were clearly separated from the Report itself. (This should include explanatory information about Strategic Issues and advice for "Using the Feedback Report.") This material appeared in the Feedback between pages 5-7, inserted between the Category Summaries and the Strategic Issues. Following this material, the Feedback would be helped by a clear statement of the Compliance with the Five Criteria for Accreditation followed by Strategic Issues and then the Executive Category Summaries.
2. Explanatory Information. The Feedback Report deleted explanatory information about how the "Executive Summary" was to be used and replaced it with an overall sweeping Executive statement using the rubric initially introduced by AQIP, but since modified. Because this does not happen across Feedback Reports, we believe some inconsistency exists in institutional feedback.
3. Context Statements. The Feedback Report included Context statements labeled as SS's, S's, O,s or OO's, a practice that AQIP has generally abandoned, explaining that the Context provides context and background and need not be viewed as a Strength or Opportunity. Because this was our first Portfolio, we made a strategic decision to answer all questions. AQIP has since instructed institutions that all questions in the Systems Portfolio Guide need not be answered, recognizing the challenging nature of the questions and that not all can be answered equally well.
4. Tone. The use of "It is unclear...", "processes are not...." and "do not appear" could be direct, yet softened, to make a positive, actionable statement such as "Data selection and analysis would strengthen and support continuous improvement in the Student Engagement effort."
5. Just as institutions can help the Appraisal process by connecting Categories and Processes, Results, and Improvements within Categories and making cross references across Categories, the Feedback Report would be more

helpful if it, too, made these connections. It was not always clear that the Appraisers had the full Portfolio in hand when writing a statement in a particular Category. We believe, too, that special interests (with respect to a stakeholder such as faculty; a specialization such as assessment experience or Baldrige) should be introduced only within the context of the whole Portfolio and only then relative to actionable advice.