

Washington State Community College Quality Program Summary

A Quality Journey

After nearly six years of participation in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP), Washington State Community College (WSCC) is making good progress on our quality improvement journey. We are beginning to see quality improvement as part of our daily business rather than a response to accreditation requirements. Faculty, staff, and administrators are working to become more consistent in creating systematic, measurable processes that we can evaluate and improve. Continuous improvement is now part of the common language of the institution and, although we are by no means nearing the end of our journey, the path is used more each day.

History

Washington State Community College began discussion of changing from PEAQ to AQIP in the spring of 2003. The college based its self-appraisal on data collected through a strategic planning initiative, input from a wide variety of stakeholders, and results from the AQIP Examiner. WSCC applied for admission to AQIP in June 2003 and was accepted in September 2003. Based on the college's strategic planning effort and feedback from the Strategy Forum in April 2004, the college submitted its first three action projects in July 2004. We administered the AQIP Examiner again in the spring of 2006, and the first Systems Portfolio was completed and submitted in October 2006. The AQIP Planning Team shared the Systems Portfolio appraisal with stakeholders in the spring of 2007, and we began looking for ways to respond to the reviewers' recommendations. The reviewers listed no accreditation issues in their report, but they provided a number of strategic issues for consideration. In the fall of 2007, the college completed its first round of action projects, attended its second Strategy Forum, and declared three new action projects. Two of those action projects, [Measuring Effectiveness](#) and [Responding to Stakeholder Feedback](#), were created as a direct response to our Systems Appraisal. We formed a new Systems Portfolio Team in the fall of 2008 and attended a Systems Portfolio training session in October of that year. In early 2009, the college began preparing for the upcoming Quality Check-Up Visit and the subsequent resubmission of the Systems Portfolio.

Original Action Projects

The three original Action Projects provided an opportunity for broad involvement of faculty, staff, and administrators in quality improvement practices.

Action Project 1: Strengthening Continuous Improvement Processes and Awareness through Mini-Projects

Knowing that AQIP and continuous quality improvement practices were somewhat new to our faculty and staff, we directed one of our initial action projects toward creating broad involvement while promoting learning through action. Over a three-year period, we set out to plan and complete 30 mini-projects aimed at improving college processes related to students' learning outcomes and student services functions. Faculty and staff were empowered to submit mini-project applications related to improving existing processes or creating new processes to better serve students. A Mini-Project team

reviewed each application, provided feedback, and tracked progress. Two training sessions provided participants with an overview of continuous improvement practices and an opportunity to apply continuous improvement tools to their specific project. This project proved to be quite successful, and exceeded our expectations in terms of college-wide involvement. Seventy-one percent of our faculty, staff, and administration participated in one of the 29 projects that were attempted and/or completed during the three-year project. The college shared the success of this project through a [presentation](#) at the 2006 AQIP Colloquium in Chicago.

Action Project 2: Expand Distance Learning Offerings to Improve Student Access

In 2004, the college recognized a need to create a quality distance education program and used an Action Project to accomplish that goal. The project was aimed at creating 30 new online or alternative delivery courses along with the student services infrastructure and faculty professional development necessary for the backbone of a growing distance learning program. The project accomplished all of its goals including course development, creation of a Help Desk, reduction of the attrition rate in online classes, and faculty training.

Action Project 3: Improving Two-Way Communication with an Emphasis on Valuing People

Our third action project focused on improving communication and valuing people. Of the three, we found this project the most difficult to track and manage. Through surveys and focus groups, we discovered gaps in employees' expectations and college practices. Since these gaps existed in multiple areas, we chose to use our mini-project process to tackle a variety of initiatives to improve internal communication and our approaches to valuing employees. We used the AQIP Examiner survey for pre-project and post-project assessment in an effort to gauge our success. Employees completed ten mini-projects ranging from providing pizza for our evening faculty as a way of showing appreciation to creating a leadership conference for faculty, staff and the community. However, we did not see the improvement in the AQIP Examiner results we had set as our measurement of success. In fact, the scores for Valuing People and Leading and Communicating declined slightly in the post assessment. While we would like to have seen a definitive increase in employees' positive perceptions of these areas, we felt that the individual mini-projects were worthwhile and well received. We also noted that each employee defines the concept of valuing people somewhat differently. The personal definition is seldom congruent with the concept as represented through the AQIP Examiner, and our final results may have been flawed by that difference.

Systems Portfolio

More than 60 employees worked together to create the college's first [Systems Portfolio](#) which was submitted in October of 2006. The effort helped the college community clarify our status in terms of each of the nine AQIP categories, and we found that we were clearly in the early stages of developing a coherent continuous quality improvement effort. The Systems Appraisal report listed no accreditation issues but provided us with fifteen strategic issues to help focus our improvement efforts. Many of those recommendations centered on themes of improving our approaches to measuring effectiveness and responding to stakeholder needs. The appraisal report was first reviewed by the AQIP Planning Team and the college's senior management. Next, a summary of the report was shared at faculty and staff meetings and with the college's Board of Trustees. The feedback became a key aspect of our action project planning process.

Second Strategy Forum

In preparation for our second Strategy Forum, the AQIP Planning Team and the Executive Committee worked together to form a new ten-member Strategy Forum Team. That team included two members of the original Strategy Forum Team and eight other team members representing a cross section of the college. The three groups (Executive Committee, AQIP Planning Team, and Strategy Forum Team) worked together to review the Systems Appraisal report and began drafting possible new Action Projects to respond to the challenges identified for the college.

The second Strategy Forum helped us focus our continuous improvement plans and projects. Through discussion with our facilitators, the team decided that a proposed action project on process mapping should be put aside in order to focus more institutional energy on creating a comprehensive and effective system for measuring effectiveness. We realized that without clearly defining and measuring key indicators of success, the college would have difficulty in truly improving the quality of our programs and services.

The Strategy Forum Team also came to the conclusion that the college must move away from thinking of continuous quality improvement as a strategy linked to AQIP and accreditation. We must make an institutional shift in culture so continuous quality improvement is “business as usual” in all we do and AQIP is simply one aspect of that mindset. This idea was brought back to campus and discussed with the Executive Committee, the AQIP Planning Team, and with the college community through various forums. We decided to take the following action steps.

- Begin to use the term “Continuous Quality Improvement” (CQI) or simply “Continuous Improvement” (CI) in relationship to the total effort and move away from references to AQIP except when discussing specific action projects, the systems portfolio, reporting requirements, etc.
- Begin to systematically capture and share information regarding all continuous improvement projects and outcomes rather than just those related to AQIP.
- Change the focus of the college’s internal AQIP webpage (now part of [SharePoint](#)) to reflect the emphasis on continuous quality improvement as an institutional culture and include information about all CQI projects.
- Investigate hiring an individual, on a part-time basis at first, to assist in managing the college’s continuous quality improvement efforts. This step was ultimately accomplished by reorganization of the college’s senior management team, the addition of a Chief Information Officer, and the restructuring of the Chief Academic Officer’s responsibilities.

We also decided to do a better job of communication related to our continuous quality improvement efforts. Those plans included a regular CQI article in the campus newsletter, an enhanced internal website, and more frequent oral reports at faculty and staff meetings.

New Action Projects

The college declared three new action projects in the summer and fall of 2007. Those projects were designed to further improve our distance learning courses, respond to stakeholder feedback, and create a more systematic method for measuring effectiveness.

Action Project 4: Improve and Expand the College's Distance Learning Program

Currently, the college offers online courses and a few short-term certificates but no complete online degree programs. The overall goal of this project is to put into place the online student services that will enable Washington State Community College to receive permission from the Higher Learning Commission to offer an online degree. A secondary goal of this project is to fully migrate all online courses to the Sakai course management system. The migration to Sakai is now accomplished and we are putting in place the student service functions, including an online bookstore and online tutoring services, to make an online degree program successful. We hope to submit our application to the HLC in November or December of 2009.

Action Project 5: Feedback Responding to Stakeholder through Mini-Projects

The college community analyzed stakeholder feedback gained through the AQIP Examiner, the Community College Survey on Student Engagement (CSSE), internally generated surveys, focus groups, and other means to identify and prioritize improvements to systems and processes. Ten mini-projects are in process over a two-year period to implement those improvements. We plan to complete and retire this project in the fall of 2009.

Action Project 6: Measuring Effectiveness through an Integrated Data System

Our goal is to build a high quality data mining infrastructure. We began by assessing what data we were able to generate, determining why we collected that data, and reviewing how the data were used. We then determined if additional data should be collected. We also determined what tools are needed to make our data accessible and identified and trained a number of "Power Users" to regularly access data and appropriately use it. This project will conclude in 2010 as we fully implement an institutional dashboard.

Current State of the Quality Initiative

The college continues to work to create a continuous quality improvement culture. Evidence of this can be found in our movement away from language only pertaining to AQIP and toward a broader discussion of continuous improvement as a way of doing business. We have restructured our committees, teams, and the senior administrative group to support continuous quality improvement.

- Articles in the [On Campus](#) newsletter stated our intention to make this shift in thinking.
- A standing agenda item at President's Cabinet meetings resulted in bi-weekly discussion of continuous improvement efforts around campus.
- The AQIP Planning Team was renamed the Continuous Improvement Team and the group broadened its focus beyond accreditation-related projects.
- The Executive Committee was restructured as the President's Strategic Team and a Chief Information Officer was hired.
- The Continuous Improvement Team is capturing information about our continuous improvement efforts beyond Action Projects. More than 60 of those efforts were [documented](#) for the 2008-2009 academic year.
- The college held a [breakfast and celebration](#) of continuous improvement events on June 15, 2009, and we plan to make this an annual event.
- Through SharePoint, we have created a new [AQIP/Continuous Improvement](#) internal site where we communicate about and track continuous quality improvement efforts in a more consistent way.

- Faculty, staff, and administrators now participate in the continuous quality improvement efforts at multiple levels across the college: the President’s Strategic Team, the Continuous Improvement Team, Action Project Teams, the Systems Portfolio Team, the Committee on Student Learning, and through various continuous improvement efforts at the departmental level.

Use of Systems Portfolio Report

The Systems Portfolio report presented the college with many opportunities for improvement. In the past two years, the college has placed primary focus on responding to strategic issues. We found that the strategic issues also reflected many of the “outstanding opportunities” for improvement.

Strategic Issue 1: Through evidence presented in its Systems Portfolio, Washington State Community College appears to be in the early stages of its Academic Quality Improvement Process journey. The College could demonstrate its commitment to continuous improvement and the integration of a “quality” philosophy into its culture by formally identifying and describing the processes that align with the nine categories of the AQIP accreditation model.

WSCC Response: WSCC’s Strategic Plan, or [Priorities and Initiatives document](#), now shows the relationships between specific priorities and initiatives and the nine AQIP Categories. The 2007-2009 version of this document was also designed to set measurable outcomes wherever possible.

Strategic Issue 2: WSCC has demonstrated progress through its implementation of AQIP projects and goals. The review team recommends that the institution should endeavor to maintain this progress and to integrate the AQIP projects, goals, and best practices into all aspects of its organizational culture including the executive board and executive council.

WSCC Response: (1) The institution is working to create and track measurable objectives at multiple levels: institution, division, department, and program. Objectives are related to the Mission, Vision, Values, Priorities, and Initiatives of the college. Concurrently, we are working to better define, manage, and improve our processes. (2) The senior leadership group has been restructured as the President’s Strategic Team, and a Chief Information Officer position was created to enhance the college’s ability to manage data for improved decision making. (3) The President’s Cabinet now includes a regular agenda item that focuses on continuous quality improvement at the college.

Strategic Issue 3: WSCC candidly recognizes the need to gather and analyze useful data that measures the success of its deployed initiatives and projects. This AQIP Systems Portfolio Appraisal Team encourages WSCC to make data collection, analysis, and target-setting for improved performance a priority. Without obtaining the data needed to drive decisions and without the necessary benchmarking information, the institution risks becoming insular and incapable of recognizing and acting on its weaknesses.

WSCC Response: WSCC created a [Measuring Effectiveness Action Project](#) to address this strategic need. Outcomes include institutional dashboard indicators, an enhanced process for data mining (Datatel’s Data Orchestrator), and use of [SharePoint](#) software to track and manage data. The college is benchmarking its performance against the [Community College Survey on Student Engagement](#) (CSSE)

and the [Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory](#) at the national level. At the state level, the college has set specific targets against the benchmarks established by Ohio's Strategic Plan for Higher Education. Our own Strategic Plan, the Priorities and Initiatives document, sets measurable objectives in each of six priority areas. The college community reviewed and [updated progress](#) on these priorities and initiatives in the fall of 2008. We are now reviewing final outcomes of those priorities and initiatives in preparation for our next strategic planning process.

Strategic Issue 4: WSCC acknowledges that its efforts at measurement lack systematic structure. Further, many of the measures described appear to focus on evaluation more so than on assessment of learning. As WSCC continues with its implementation of quality principles, it has the opportunity to integrate its system of measurements with its strategic vision (measuring what matters), the opportunity to focus on assessment and on improving the use of direct measures.

WSCC Response: This strategic issue is addressed through the Measuring Effectiveness Action Project. We have identified a set of [core indicators](#) which include enrollment targets, CSSE outcomes, student satisfaction measures, and other measurements tied to the state's Strategic Plan for Higher Education. Additionally, we are engaged in a project to refocus our assessment of general education outcomes on direct measures of students' learning. The new [system](#) uses student work artifacts collected from programs across the college which are reviewed on a two-year cycle using rubrics designed to measure four of the five general education skills: communication, critical thinking, understanding values and cultures, and science and technology. The fifth general education goal, independent life-long learning, will be assessed through an annual survey of graduates.

Strategic Issue 5: WSCC recognizes the need to compare itself to other institutions and organizations so that it has some idea of how well it is doing in the larger scheme of organizational effectiveness. This implies that the college is not in ongoing and effective communication with other institutions regarding systems and processes.

WSCC Response: WSCC has made good progress in addressing the need for comparative data.

(1) WSCC began participating in the Community College Survey on Student Engagement in [2007](#). We administered the survey again April [2009](#) following completion of a mini-project aimed at improving outcomes in two of the five CSSE areas. Our goal was to be above the national mean in all five CSSE areas, and we achieved that goal. (2) We have established a set of institutional [objectives](#) with regard to the 10-year Strategic Plan for Ohio Higher Education. (3) We participated in the [Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory](#) in 2009. Our goal is to be above the national average for each of the core indicators for this survey. (4) WSCC participates in the new [Community College Portrait](#) for Ohio which lists key institutional data and allows comparison with other state institutions and with the [average outcomes for two-year colleges in Ohio](#). While this is still in draft form, preliminary results show the college to be performing well in most key areas. (5) The college continues to collect and review comparative data on [licensure and certification exam outcomes](#). (6) A recent project designed to measure and improve the college's [effective use of energy](#) resulted in comparative data showing WSCC to be one of the state leaders in energy conservation and management. (7) Washington State Community College is one of the founding members of the Ohio AQIP Consortium. While this

consortium is in its early stages, one of its goals is to collaborate on a common set of metrics for Ohio AQIP institutions for the purpose of comparative data.

Strategic Issue 6: *Throughout the portfolio, WSCC has identified the need to develop systematic processes for data collection, analysis and decision-making. However, the institution relies on the measurement of short-term data rather than data analyzed over a longer length of time. To align its culture with the continuous improvement philosophy based upon valid and reliable data and processes, the college should develop short-term and long-term strategies to systematically establish an integrated, data-based decision making model that influences projects and activities from initiation to completion.*

WSCC Response: This strategic issue is being addressed through the [Measuring Effectiveness Action Project](#). During the past two years, the college has built the technology infrastructure to provide both short-term and long-term data tracking capabilities. The project included the implementation of a single sign-on system, a data security audit by an outside firm, implementation of and training for the Data Orchestrator add-on for mining our Datatel-based information management system, and identification of key institutional indicators for creation of a dashboard monitoring system. The final year of this project will focus on the completion and integration of each of these initiatives as well as further development of institutional and departmental data points on which to build a more informed decision-making process.

Strategic Issue 7: *Data collection and research at WSCC could be improved if efforts are focused on institutional priorities and with more attention to direct measures rather than indirect or self-reported measures such as satisfaction, self-reported learning or skills acquisition.*

WSCC Response: (1) The [Priorities and Initiatives](#) document was revised to state desired outcomes in more measurable terms. (2) The process for assessment of students' academic achievement, particularly for general education, has been revised to use more student work artifacts and rubrics for measuring the success of that work.

Strategic Issue 8: *Since WSCC has identified many opportunities and goals with respect to economic and workforce development, the institutional leadership should promote more external relationships.*

WSCC Response: During the past two years, the college has worked to broaden collaborative efforts and external relationships including: (1) Regional leadership in the Ohio Skills Bank – a collaborative of education providers with business and industry; (2) Seniors to Sophomores – a collaborative effort with Morgan County Schools; (3) Dual Enrollment initiative – a collaborative effort with four local school districts; (4) a partnership with the Mid-East Career Center in Zanesville, Ohio, to bring Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to our campus; (5) a “Stackable Certificates” project in partnership with ABLE in Morgan County; (6) the Green Academy – a collaborative effort with Cuyahoga Community College; (7) Chemical Operator Online – specialized courses and a short-term certificate program created in conjunction with the chemical processes industry; (8) relocation of the local Port Authority office to the Washington State Campus; (9) creation of a Network Alliance partnership to provide unemployed individuals quick access to educational opportunities along with the human services that can support pursuit of a college certificate or degree.

Strategic Issue 9: WSCC is commended for recognizing the need to focus on diversity in its values. WSCC appears to be a unique environment, however, little touched by ethnic and cultural diversity—unlike so many of the urban and suburban community colleges in the United States. The Team encourages WSCC to integrate a plan that capitalizes on its distinctive Appalachian culture and also develop means and methods for providing students and faculty with a method for viewing and experiencing the broader world. These methods may involve becoming a member of a consortium that provides WSCC students with an opportunity to study abroad, a minority faculty exchange program; or opportunities to seek grant funding for developing curriculum that celebrates the culture of the region and places it in the larger world context.

WSCC Response: WSCC has addressed this issue in several ways although we have not yet employed a specific focus on our Appalachian culture. We have (1) Established a [Diversity Committee](#) and created a framework for ongoing development of diversity training and awareness for both students and employees; (2) Added the Diversity Committee to the list of standing committees of the college giving that committee a permanent role in the shared governance of the college; (3) Brought the Human Race Machine to campus and integrated its use into multiple classes; (4) Focused on identifying and assessing class assignments that support cultural diversity themes; (5) Created classes in African American Literature and Women’s History; (6) Acquired the *Global Road Warrior* research tool for students; (7) Planned equal rights training sessions for full and part-time employees during fall 2009; (8) Participated in the Ohio Chief Diversity Officers group and will host the fall meeting of that group on our campus.

Strategic Issue 10: While WSCC has identified methods for identifying student needs, comparable processes for determining learning support as well as external stakeholder needs do not appear to be as systematic or aligned. The college is encouraged to establish a more formal mechanism to identify, address, evaluate, and improve these processes.

WSCC Response: (1) WSCC created a two-year action project on [responding to stakeholder input](#). Through this project, we systematically responded to stakeholder feedback through ten mini-projects ranging from redesign of our college website to creating efficiencies equivalent to 3% of the college’s budget in response to a mandate by the Ohio Board of Regents. In fall 2009, we will again systematically review stakeholder input and prioritize actions to respond to that feedback. (2) The college now uses Survey Monkey to evaluate training needs of full and part-time faculty. Specific professional development sessions are created to support those needs. For example, in the past two years, five professional development events have been held on Saturday mornings specifically to address part-time faculty needs identified through surveys of those employees.

Strategic Issue 11: Throughout the portfolio, WSCC identifies the lack of measurable outcomes as a shortcoming within its planning process. Though the use of compression planning may satisfy some desires for efficiency among some stakeholders, the Vision document that provides the basis for planning is not suited for continuous improvement processes. WSCC should carefully develop its institutional visions into measurable goals/objectives.

WSCC Response: (1) We revised the [Priorities and Initiatives](#) document to show relationships with AQIP Categories, and we stated the desired outcomes in measurable terms. (2) We completed a formative [update](#) of the Priorities and Initiatives document in fall 2008 to track progress on measurable goals. We

will be completing a summative update during the fall of 2009. (3) We are working with an outside consultant to develop the college's next strategic plan, and we will build upon what we have learned from the 2004 and 2007 plans.

Strategic Issue 12: WSCC has identified many major objectives throughout the portfolio. The institution should maintain its focus on those objectives, align processes with each major objective, carefully and consistently communicate the process methods for achieving the major objectives to all stakeholders, and ensure the completion of the major objectives.

WSCC Response: We believe that our redesign of the [Priorities and Initiatives](#) document, along with the process we have used to review and [update progress](#) on that plan has helped us address this strategic issue. The original document and the updated document are posted on the college's website. The update process itself served to inform and involve internal stakeholders in the ongoing strategic planning/implementation cycle.

Strategic Issue 13: Throughout its systems portfolio, Washington provides evidence about gaps between processes and results. The review team recommends ongoing evaluation of the processes and activities involved with both building and implementing strategies.

WSCC Response: Attention to this issue is ongoing. We realize that we need to have in place a reliable system for tracking and managing data on which to make good decisions. We plan to make more progress on this strategic issue as we move into the final year of our [Measuring Effectiveness Action Project](#).

Strategic Issue 14: While WSCC mentions developmental education, the institution does not demonstrate any emphasis on a systematic approach to discovering and meeting the needs of developmental and under-prepared students. The institution should devote energy to assisting under-prepared students in their efforts to become fully-prepared students.

WSCC Response: These processes certainly exist and perhaps were not emphasized enough in the original Systems Portfolio. WSCC will work to better describe processes related to developmental education in the next version of that document. During the past two years, the college has also taken steps to improve this area. (1) WSCC now employs a full-time [Retention Coordinator](#) who uses a variety of approaches to retain at-risk students by helping them become more academically successful. (2) We began tracking "gatekeeper" course information, and we are implementing interventions aimed at improving students' success in classes that often prove challenging for students. (3) We revised our curriculum to make our study skills class, SUCCESS, a co-requisite for any student testing into a developmental education class. (4) WSCC is now working on an enhanced relationship with Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) that will improve services and options for students requiring remediation. In August 2009 we became an ABLE site and we plan to expand that partnership during 2009-2010 to include ESL classes on the campus. Students who demonstrate very low skill levels will be advised to start out in the ABLE program, an option that will not use up students' financial aid dollars while they are building essential foundational skills.

Strategic Issue 15: WSCC indicates that methods exist for determining faculty needs relative to learning support. However, the process does not appear to be systematic or aligned with specific faculty cohorts. As an example, WSCC indicates that over 98% of the faculty members are white, non-Hispanic. Yet diversity is embedded in the College values and there seems to be no indication that faculty development is aligned with this learning need.

WSCC Response: (1) The newly created Diversity Committee has been tasked with finding ways to help faculty (as well as students) understand and appreciate cultural diversity. (2) Diversity training and Equal Rights training for faculty and staff is planned for fall 2009. (3) The Committee on Student Learning is working with faculty to identify and strengthen specific course assignments related to cultural diversity. These assignments will be used to help the institution assess its success in addressing our World Awareness general education goal.

Next Steps on the WSCC Quality Journey

In the next year, WSCC will take several additional steps on the quality journey. We plan to accomplish the following tasks:

- Complete the action projects for responding to stakeholder feedback and expanding the college's distance learning program.
- Continue working on the action project for measuring effectiveness. Fully implement an institutional dashboard system and begin to implement dashboards at the departmental level.
- Declare a new action project for planning WSCC's change to the semester system. Select an additional action project, perhaps focused on process mapping and process improvement.
- Close out the 2007-2009 Strategic Plan. Measure and analyze the outcomes.
- Engage the college and community in a new strategic planning process and implement a Strategic Plan for 2010-2012.
- Renew our focus on the Valuing People AQIP category and measure progress for this category on the basis of AQIP principles.
- Add continuous quality improvement training to the employee orientation process and provide refresher training for current employees.
- Continue to improve use of student academic assessment data for enhancing students' learning outcomes.
- Continue to improve access to institutional data and use of that data for decision making at all levels.
- Apply CQI principles to help manage state funding cuts while maintaining quality services for stakeholders.
- Complete and submit a new Systems Portfolio.

Conclusion

WSCC has benefited from its participation in AQIP and the feedback we have received as a result of that journey. The faculty, staff, and administration look forward to meeting our Quality Checkup team. We welcome the team's ideas and suggestions for strengthening our continuous quality program.