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March 22, 2011

From: Stephen Spangehl, Vice President, Accreditation Relations
RE: Required Institutional Response to Reaffirmation Recommendation

Dear President Hatfield:

Enclosed is the recommendation for reaffirmation of Washington State Community College's accreditation that was produced and approved by the AQIP Review Panel on Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

We have scheduled the recommendation for action on the April 18, 2011 agenda of the Commission's Institutional Actions Council, after which the Higher Learning Commission's Board of Trustees will affirm the action in a letter to you.

In keeping with Higher Learning Commission Policy no. 2.3(f): INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES WITHIN THE PROCESSES, please reply with a written response to the AQIP Review Panel's recommendation, affirming that you have received and reviewed it, and making any comments you choose to make. (A brief letter or email simply acknowledging the recommendation will suffice.) We will need your response by April 5, 2011. If it does not arrive by then, we will have to defer action on your reaffirmation until the next Institutional Actions Council meeting. If this happens, it does not reflect in any way on the merits of your institution; it is merely a matter of complying with our own and with federal regulations.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Reaffirmation of Accreditation Recommendation
for
Washington State Community College
Marietta, OH 45750
of the 2010-11
Academic Quality improvement Program
Review Panel on Reaffirmation

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

March 4, 2011

AQIP Review Panel on Reaffirmation (lead reviewers starred)

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I. Context and Nature of Review

A. Review Purpose, Process, and Materials

AQIP Reaffirmation of Accreditation reviews are scheduled seven years in advance, when an institution first joins the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) or when an institution already participating in AQIP is reaffirmed via the AQIP Reaffirmation of Accreditation process.

In conducting these reviews, the AQIP Reaffirmation of review panel examines the following materials for each institution:

- Current Commission History file of institutional actions
- Current Commission Statement of Affiliation Status
- Current official Commission Organizational Profile
- Annual Updates of year's Action Projects
- AQIP Review Panel Report(s) on Institutional Status Change Requests
- Focused visit report(s) and action letter(s)
- Institutional websites
- Key correspondence between the institution and the Commission
- Last Comprehensive PEAQ Evaluation team report, institutional response, and Commission action letter
- Quality Checkup report(s)
- Summary of Action Projects attempted
- Summary Update (Quality Highlights) of institutional activity and dynamics since the last Quality Checkup, provided by the institution on September 1 of the review year
- Systems Appraisal Feedback Report(s)
- Systems Portfolio Index(es) (to compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation)
- Systems Portfolio(s), including update provided by the institution on September 1 of the review year
- Any other major reports or documents that are part of the institution's permanent Commission files

Two lead panelists from the AQIP Reaffirmation of Accreditation Panel draft a recommendation that is reviewed and approved by the entire panel before it is forwarded to the Institutional Actions Council.

B. Organizational Context

The institution was first accredited by the Commission on July 23, 1979, having been admitted to Candidacy for Accreditation on July 20, 1973.

The institution was admitted to AQIP on September 26, 2003.

It participated in a Strategy Forum April 2004 and September 2007.

Since admission to AQIP the institution has officially declared and attempted eight individual Action Projects, and has provided AQIP with Annual Updates of ongoing projects and received Annual Update Feedback Reports on these.

The institution provided its Systems Portfolio for review on October 30, 2006, and received a Systems Appraisal Feedback Report on March 3, 2007.

The institution proposed a change in its relationship with the Commission that was reviewed by staff and approved on June 6, 2010. The change permitted the institution to add a new site in McConnelsville, OH.

AQIP conducted a Quality Checkup visit to the institution on October 14-16, 2009, and provided a report of the findings of the visiting team in October 2009.

C. Organizational Scope and Structure (including extended physical or distance education operations)

Washington State Community College began operation as Washington County Technical Institute on September 17, 1971. In 1991 the Ohio Board of Regents authorized the re-chartering of Washington County Technical Institute as Washington State Community College. Today, Washington State Community College is a public two-year college serving students in Washington and Morgan Counties as well as students in adjacent counties in both Ohio and West Virginia.

Washington State Community College offers developmental education, technical associate degrees, baccalaureate preparation degrees, personal enrichment, community service experience and customized training for business and industry. WSCC offers the following degrees: associate of applied science (AAS) and Associate of Applied Business in technical education programs, Associate of Arts (AA) and Associate of Science degrees, and the Associate of Individualized Studies.

WSCC serves six counties in Ohio and four in West Virginia. The majority of students served are from Washington County in Ohio. The college serves over 2,000 students annually in day and evening offerings. WSCC has 49 Associate Degrees and serves students from its main campus in Marietta, OH and the Morgan Learning Center in McConnelsville, OH.

D. Notification of Quality Checkup Visit and Solicitation of Third-Party Comment

A Quality Checkup site visit to the institution was conducted on October 14-16, 2009. In compliance with Commission requirements, the institution notified its constituencies and the public of this visit, solicited third-party comment to be sent directly to the Commission. The Commission shared all comments received with the institution and the team, and the team discussed both the comments with the institution and reviewed evidence of the institution's compliance with Commission's notification and third-party comment requirements.

E. Compliance with Federal Requirements

The Quality Checkup team that conducted a site visit to the institution on October 14-16, 2009, examined evidence provided by the institution of its compliance with the Commission's federal compliance program. The Quality Checkup site visit team concluded: The Quality Checkup site visit team concluded WSCC presented satisfactory evidence that it is in compliance with Commission requirements.

F. Evidence of the Organization's Responsiveness to Previous Commission Concerns Regarding Fulfillment of the Criteria for Accreditation

No accreditation issues were identified by the institution's last Systems Appraisal team.

II. Fulfillment of the Criteria for Accreditation

CRITERION ONE: MISSION AND INTEGRITY. The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

A. Evidence that Core Components are met.

The college's vision and mission are published on the college's website <http://www.wsc.edu>.

WSCC publishes an intellectual property policy in its Policy and Procedure Manual.

WSCC employs the organizational structure of the college and the formal standing committee structure to make decisions. WSCC uses three Senate groups to make recommendations to the cabinet and other decision-making bodies (SA, p. 27).

WSCC is governed by a nine member Board of Trustees appointed by the governor of Ohio. The Board of Trustees operates under the auspices of the Ohio Board of Regents (SA, p. 27).

According to the Systems Portfolio "Ethical practices are the cornerstone of college operations. The college has simply created a work environment in which ethical practices are expected of all employees. Deviation from this norm is not tolerated and results in warnings, disciplinary action, or termination" (SP, p. 44).

The Systems Portfolio (p. 52) indicates that:

In addition, the Policy and Procedures Manual, employee contracts, and employee evaluations address ethics and equity, social responsibilities, and community involvement. Section 4.3 of the Policy and Procedures Manual provides guidelines with regard to these issues. Specifically, employees are expected to "establish and maintain a practice of openness and honesty." Further, they are to "refrain from any deliberate misrepresentation or dishonesty in official matters and from fraud, falsification, or exaggeration." The Manual also states that employees should, "Function as a responsible and loyal member of the divisional or administrative unit to which they are assigned, and

represent it to others in a fair and accurate manner.” This section of the Policy and Procedures Manual goes on to list 11 additional expectations of employee conduct.

B. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention, but no specific Commission monitoring or reporting.

None.

C. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require institutional attention and that actions taken and improvements achieved be described in the institution’s Systems Portfolio before its next scheduled Systems Appraisal, to permit Commission follow-up.

None.

D. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up via declaration of a specific Action Project(s) and the submission of Annual Updates.

None.

Recommendation of the Panel:

The Criterion is met, and no Commission follow-up is recommended.

CRITERION TWO: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE. The organization’s allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

A. Evidence that Core Components are met.

WSCC has documented clear evidence of meeting Criterion Two in its Systems Portfolio and Index. It involves participative identification of strategic initiatives in a strategic planning process having a foundation in the institution’s mission, values, and goals (SP, 8P1, Fig. 8.1, PI).

WSCC has a planning process that aligns WSCC’s mission, vision and values with strategic planning, budgeting, and academic planning and provided feedback to assess results or outcomes (SA, p. 35).

WSCC uses current and historical data as well as national/regional employment data and program accreditation agencies in review and design of new programs (SP, 1P2, 7C1, 8P8, Fig. 8.1).

An annual budgeting process involves input from all areas of the college and is tied to eight strategic initiatives emphasizing responsible stewardship (SP, 8P1, Fig. 8.1, 2C1, PI).

Assessment processes exist for student learning (SA, p. 16; SP, 1P6, 1P1, 1P12, 1P13, 5P1, PI), support services (SP, 6P5), and institutional effectiveness (SP, 7C1, 7C2).

B. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention, but no specific Commission monitoring or reporting.

None.

C. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require institutional attention and that actions taken and improvements achieved be described in the institution's Systems Portfolio before its next scheduled Systems Appraisal, to permit Commission follow-up.

None.

D. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up via declaration of a specific Action Project(s) and the submission of Annual Updates.

None.

Recommendation of the Panel:

The Criterion is met, and no Commission follow-up is recommended.

CRITERION THREE: STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING. The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

A. Evidence that Core Components are met.

WSCC communicates its expectations for student preparation and learning objectives through its catalog and other documents (SA, p.15, PI). The institution has a consistent process in place for the review and revision of program learning objectives (SA, p. 14). General education goals exist at institutional, program, and classroom levels (SP, 1P4, 1P5, PI). The program review process and certification/licensing exams provide some evidence of effectiveness in teaching and student learning (SP, 1C2, 1C3, 1P8, 1P11, 3P1, 3P2, 5P4, Fig. 7-1, 7P1, Appendix 5, PI). Full-time faculty teach sixty-six percent of all courses.

WSCC uses a curriculum committee with representation from all areas to review and approve changes to the curriculum (SA, p. 15; SP 1C5, 1P1, 1P2, 5P3).

WSCC has in place a number of ways of gauging teaching effectiveness, including classroom observation, performance evaluation, and students' evaluations, and student feedback; the institution also uses surveys, retention, transfer, and licensure/certification results to measure teaching effectiveness (SA, p. 15; SP, 1P12, 1P13, 1R2, 1P6, 1P9, 2P3, 3P2, 4C1, 4P6, 5P4, 5P6, PI). A "Best Practice" assessment plan is shared with faculty (SP, 1P6).

The budgeting process, technology, and an efficient course delivery system help to build an effective learning environment (SP, 1P9, 8P1, 8P2, PI). Teaching support services include a learning center, tutoring, and work skills workshops (SP, 1P9, 6C2, 6P1, 6P5, 6R1, PI).

Professional development is encouraged and supported (SP, 1P6, 1P9, 4C4, 4P2, 4R2, Appendix 4, VP1, VP6, and PI).

B. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention, but no specific Commission monitoring or reporting.

None.

C. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require institutional attention and that actions taken and improvements achieved be described in the institution's Systems Portfolio before its next scheduled Systems Appraisal, to permit Commission follow-up.

None.

D. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up via declaration of a specific Action Project(s) and the submission of Annual Updates.

None.

Recommendation of the Panel:

The Criterion is met, and no Commission follow-up is recommended.

CRITERION FOUR: ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY, AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE. The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

A. Evidence that Core Components are met.

WSCC promotes a life of learning through cultural events, service organizations, and business and industry training (SP, 1P7, 4C4, Fig. 6-1). The institution engages in active relationships with other colleges and universities to meet life-long learning needs in its stakeholders (SP, 9C1, 9P1). A life of learning is encouraged through general education objectives, continuing education, and extra-curricular opportunities (SA, p. 16; SP, Fig. 1, 1C5, 4C4, 4R2, PI).

WSCC continually assesses the effectiveness of its curriculum through advisory committees, surveys, articulation agreements, college access programs, program review (SA, p. 15; SP, 1P8, 9P2, 9P4, PI).

WSCC has in place employee and student conduct codes (SP, 5C3, 4P3, 1C5, PI) that guide the responsible discovery, acquisition, and application of knowledge; it also provides part-time faculty with a handbook; FERPA training is mandated for all employees (PI).

B. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention, but no specific Commission monitoring or reporting.

None.

C. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require institutional attention and that actions taken and improvements achieved be described in the institution's Systems Portfolio before its next scheduled Systems Appraisal, to permit Commission follow-up.

None.

D. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up via declaration of a specific Action Project(s) and the submission of Annual Updates.

None.

Recommendation of the Panel:

The Criterion is met, and no Commission follow-up is recommended.

CRITERION FIVE: ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE. As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

A. Evidence that Core Components are met.

WSCC describes a formal multi-step student complaint process that involves tracking, analyzing and addressing complaints (SA, p. 22).

WSCC has a planning process that brings together a number of focus groups every two years to review the vision statement, conduct a SWAT analysis, report on progress and as needed refocus the college's priorities (SA, p. 34).

Monitoring of the currency and effectiveness of curriculum is conducted through input from advisory committees, a five-year program review process and surveys targeted at gathering information on preparedness of graduates (SA, p. 15).

WSCC identifies numerous surveys and feedback tools that allow WSCC to assess the value both internal and external constituencies receive from WSCC (SP, 1C2, 1P2, 1P8, 2P3, 3P6, 6P1, 6P2, 6P4, 6P5, 7C2, 8P8, 9P2, 9P4).

WSCC collects quantitative and qualitative data to ensure the success of its collaborative relationships (SA, p. 37).

B. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention, but no specific Commission monitoring or reporting.

None.

C. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require institutional attention and that actions taken and improvements achieved be described in the institution's Systems Portfolio before its next scheduled Systems Appraisal, to permit Commission follow-up.

None.

D. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up via declaration of a specific Action Project(s) and the submission of Annual Updates.

None.

Recommendation of the Panel:

The Criterion is met, and no Commission follow-up is recommended.

Summary of panel recommendations regarding fulfillment of the Criteria for Accreditation:

WSCC fulfills the Commission's requirements for reaffirmation of its accreditation with no required actions. WSCC has provided evidence that it meets each of the five criteria for accreditation through its active participation in AQIP.

III. Participation in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)**A. Comments and counsel on specific improvement projects**

Since inception into AQIP, WSCC has attempted eight Action Projects. WSCC has completed five Action Projects and has three active Action Projects. WCSS is utilizing action projects to drive home key concepts associated with continuous improvement. One current project, Mapping and Improving Ten Major College Processes implements process mapping to understand and improve salient processes to the college's operation. WSCC includes as part of this project training, which is essential to the success of implementing an AQIP focused culture. Also, WSCC does a nice job of defining scope within the Action Projects to make sure that the undertaking is manageable. In Mapping and Improving Ten Major College Processes, WSCC focused on ten key processes; in the Responding to Stakeholder Feedback Through Mini-Projects, the institution focused on ten mini-projects, and in Strengthening Continuous Improvement Processes and Awareness Through Mini-Projects, WSCC identified 30 mini-projects.

Improvements noted by the Quality Checkup Team reflect the strategic use of Action Projects to improve specific opportunities for improvement. WSCC is encouraged to continue to use Action Projects to address the strategic issues identified in the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report.

B. Comments and counsel on key institutional processes and systems

WSCC is integrating AQIP projects, goals, and best practices into all aspects of its culture. This is evident in its mapping of major college processes (QPS, p. 1). It is also evident in its update of its Systems Portfolio <http://www.wsccl.edu/about/systemsport.asp>. The web provides links to the 2010, 2006, and updates to 2006 Portfolios, showing progress throughout.

While WSCC has responded to nearly all strategic issues identified in its Systems Appraisal (QC, p. 3), it has focused specifically upon three Categories in response to feedback from the Quality Checkup Team: Measurement, Helping Students Learn, noted and Valuing People (QC, pp. 4, 5, QPS pp.2, 3).

The Appraisal Team noted that data collection, analysis, and target setting should be an improvement priority and suggested that gaps in the Systems Portfolio between processes and

results should be reduced (SA, p. 8). The Quality Checkup Team noted significant progress in Measuring Effectiveness (QC, p.4). The College is continuing to work on this Category and is constructing a dashboard. The updating of the Systems Portfolio also suggests these gaps are being closed. WSCC may want to follow through on the Appraisers' suggestion to communicate with peer institutions in order to gain meaningful comparative data SA, p. 8).

WSCC is implementing a systematic process for assessing student learning using rubrics aligned with the college's general education areas of critical thinking and science and technology (QPS, p. 2). The Appraisal Team also noted WSCC needs to make sure it is discovering and meeting the needs of its developmental students (SA, p. 8).

WSCC should be commended for bringing in a consultant to address the issue of communication and trust and for developing an action plan to address the consultant's recommendation (QPS, pp. 2-3).

A three-year strategic plan and an academic plan further attest to ongoing quality improvement at the institutional and academic levels (QPS, p. 3).

WSCC continues to be committed to improving processes and looking for new ways to serve its students and other stakeholders. The institution should be commended for completing 130 projects and encouraged to continue with its plans to complete other projects; envisioning completing 150 more between 2010 and 2013, WSCC may want to consider a more focused approach similar to the one taken in strategic planning (QPS, pp. 3, 4).

C. Comments and counsel on the institution's culture of quality and its quality program or infrastructure.

WSCC, beginning its seventh year in AQIP, continues to demonstrate a serious commitment to continuous quality improvement ("a way of doing business") as documented in its Systems Portfolio and Appraisal (online and in the process of being updated for the 2010 October Appraisal), Quality Checkup Report, and its Quality Summary. The institution should

be commended for its systematic approach to updating and keeping its Systems Portfolio current and for linking its AQIP web page to important and relevant documents (QPS, p. 1).

WSCC evidences careful attention to all AQIP processes and to the feedback it garners from Appraisals and Checkup reports; this is clearly supported by its attention to its response to the three recommendations made by the Quality Checkup Team (QC, pp. 4-5; QPS, pp. 2 and 3). In each case, WSCC has responded by continuing implementation and refinement of processes and, in the case of communication and trust, by creating an action plan based on a consultant's recommendation (QPS, p. 3). The Quality Checkup Team also noted this positive response to all strategic issues identified in the Appraisal (QC, p. 4).

The new three-year strategic plan demonstrates that WSCC has learned to focus its continuous quality improvement efforts. The institution should be commended for creating a plan focusing on strategic growth and four core themes (QPS, p. 3). WSCC should be further commended for developing a companion academic plan with a central focus of "Helping Students Learn" (QPS, p. 3).

As noted by the Quality Checkup Team (QC, p. 5), quality improvement has been made into a common language at WSCC shared at all levels of the organization.

Summary of panel comments and counsel about the organization's commitment to continuous quality improvement and its participation in AQIP:

With the completion of the 2010 Portfolio (its second), WSCC clearly shows that it has learned much about AQIP processes and continuous improvement. In many ways, the institution is modeling "a way of doing business" version of quality improvement. Clearly, the partnership between AQIP and WSCC enables both to learn from each other and to improve.

The responsiveness of WSCC to all feedback given throughout the Annual Action Project Updates, Systems Appraisal, Quality Checkup Visit, and current Portfolio all attest to the institution's clear commitment to improvement and to having made much progress in its quality journey.

The approach WSCC has taken to creating and keeping current the Portfolio process may well be a "best practice" that can be shared with other institutions.