

QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

Mid-State Technical College

Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin
March 26-28, 2008

Quality Checkup team members:

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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 visit provided numerous discussions focused on clarification and verification of Mid-State Technical College's Systems Portfolio. MSTC stated in the Portfolio that they are committed to six core values; accountability, respect, integrity, exceptional service, commitment, and student centeredness. Discussions with the various stakeholder groups: faculty, staff, community members, and students, verified that these core values are institutionalized, particularly student centeredness.

Students mentioned how friendly and helpful staff and faculty were. As one student put it "teachers want you to succeed." Staff members talked about trying to find ways to "empower students" by providing the necessary services to fit their needs. The website redesign created a website that "moved from a website built by students to one built for students."

In discussions with faculty members several mentioned that they were "struck" with the emphasis on students and the "student centeredness." Faculty who had worked at other colleges, schools, and universities mentioned how much more student centered Mid-State was in comparison. The large and representative group of community members repeatedly mentioned the high quality of MSTC graduates and their strong work ethic. One employer mentioned that MSTC consistently provided "qualified candidates for jobs." Another employer stated that Mid-State's graduates were in "high demand" in the workplace.

In the Portfolio Mid-State described itself as an organization that has institutionalized the continuous improvement process. The visiting team was presented with multiple examples of how continuous improvement is woven into the fabric of the College. The Quality Review Process (QRP) was frequently utilized in large and small improvement projects. Across the College employees discussed their own involvement in QRP projects and how successful this process was in implementing improvements. When the Noel-Levitz survey (SSI) noted a concern on the part of students about the speed of their financial aid disbursements, the QRP process was used to discover that students were applying late for their aid. An effort was made to encourage earlier application and push more electronic applications, resulting in a more timely disbursement of student financial aid.

On an institutional level, long-range planning includes all levels of the College. The Board of Directors sets long-range goals based upon input from community members, employees, students, and other stakeholders. Data is gathered and analyzed throughout the year and a final

plan completed at the annual Board retreat. The Executive Committee members meet weekly to evaluate progress on goals and review information received from all data sources. Departmental faculty meet monthly in departments to assess progress and plan for improvements based on data.

In the team's judgment, MSTC 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

There were no accreditation issues identified by the Systems Appraisal.

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

There were six Strategic Issues identified by the Portfolio team in the Feedback Report. The first Strategic Issue dealt with a perceived lack of a formal process of continuous improvement. The visiting team found ample evidence of not only formal processes but a college that had truly institutionalized continuous improvement. For example, the College has a comprehensive planning process that begins with the Board of Directors and flows through all levels of the institution.

The second Strategic Issue dealt with the use of data as part of a continuous improvement process. Faculty, staff, and administration were able to provide numerous examples of how the quality improvement process is used to collect and analyze data, implement changes, and assess improvement efforts. When the data indicated that nursing students with lower grades in particular courses were less likely to be successful in the program, a preadmissions process was developed that required prospective students to pass key courses with a grade of "B" or better. Data are currently being gathered to evaluate the success of this initiative.

The third Strategic Issue addressed a concern about the College's commitment to diversity. State data indicated that only 3.8% of the district's population were people of color while 4.5% of

the MSTC student population were people of color. Additionally, the College advertizes in several publications that target minority groups. Efforts are under way to better prepare their students to work in a more diverse world through the infusion of more diversity to the curriculum, student exchanges, visiting scholars, faculty training, and student and community events. The College also provides faculty training on various student learning styles including integrating strategies into required state certification courses. Online courses are developed with Universal Design requirements. The College is encouraged to continue its efforts to ensure students are prepared to work and live in an increasingly diverse world.

The fourth Strategic Issue dealt with the College's commitment to a strong focus on students. The College's commitment to student centeredness was evident in conversations with all constituent groups and included in planning documents along with College publications. In particular, students repeatedly mentioned the College's focus on their success. Programs continually request student feedback and student input is collected in a variety of College initiatives. Student representatives were included on the cafeteria and library remodeling projects. In a discussion with students one student explained that MSTC assisted students with their individual issues and "accommodated the non-traditional student." Another student described the College as "understanding of students and their life styles." Mid-State encouraged another student to become involved in student activities and he is now the president of a student club. The students agreed collectively that the College offers a "comfortable and friendly environment." Faculty members were proud of the College's student centered focus and were sensitive to issues that might diminish that emphasis.

Strategic Issue number five centered on a perceived top-down approach to communication and planning. Ample evidence was provided that input was systematically sought and encouraged from all stakeholders. The College president emphasized his desire to hear "what we need to know, not what we want to hear." The Board of Directors members who participated in the visit gave examples of how feedback is gathered from all constituent groups. Community members mentioned the responsiveness of Mid-State to their needs. As one community representative member indicated "Mid-State has always been there for us." MSTC staff members from Admissions, IT, and other front line positions provided anecdotal evidence of how they feel "empowered" to suggest changes or make improvements. One staff member referred to the college's communication system as "not vertical. It is horizontal."

The final Strategic Issue dealt with the perception that the Portfolio document focused on a

more traditional PEAQ approach to accreditation requirements rather than an AQIP approach. As noted above, MSTC has institutionalized a continuous improvement culture throughout the College. The visiting team members regularly observed a climate of openness and high trust at Mid-State. The president emphasized his desire to give faculty and staff a “wide berth” to make decisions in the best interests of the students. Faculty noted that information is readily available which enhances planning for improvements in the classroom. They also indicated that employees had a “voice” in decisions. Long serving support staff discussed a shift in College attitude toward more of a team approach to problem solving.

In the team’s judgment, the institution presented overwhelming evidence that Mid-State is a committed AQIP institution. Mid-State has provided sufficient evidence that the strategic issues identified in the feedback report do not accurately reflect the college’s current status and, in the team’s judgment and based upon observation and evidence, these issues no longer rise to the strategic level. Mid-State has met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Review of organizational commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement

The team noted significant organizational commitment to continuous improvement throughout all levels of the College. The Board has a well established annual process for the continual refinement of College strategic directions which includes a retreat day with the Executive Team and other parties, as appropriate. Students and key stakeholders are the focus of each of the College’s strategic directions. The strategic directions serve as the foundation for College goals which are developed annually. Goal attainment and progress are continuously monitored throughout the year.

The Executive Team meets weekly to plan and assess progress towards goal attainment while departments meet monthly for the same purpose. Input is solicited from the Student Senate, Advisory Committees, business and industry, community groups, and other stakeholders. A variety of data sources are used including national and state trends, internal information, surveys and student focus groups, as well as anecdotal feedback.

Currently there are numerous efforts at different levels of the College to improve processes. One example of such an effort is the registration process. Working with faculty, College staff

revised the way that students were advised prior to registration day. The effort was spurred by feedback from students and faculty. Using this feedback, a collaborative team made changes to the process of scheduling semester classes which made the registration process easier to manage and more accessible.

The visiting team members were particularly impressed with the College's commitment to long-range planning while at the same time using a Rapid Response process to meet emerging or unexpected needs. When local businesses have significant layoffs the College is able to work with state and local government entities and non-profits to provide career guidance and retraining for the workers.

In the team's judgment, Mid-State 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 requested and received documentation from Mid-State Technical College on USDE issues related to default rate, renewal of eligibility, and Title IV Compliance. The documentation indicated that MSTC received initial eligibility for Title IV programs effective April 21, 1967. The most recent re-approval was granted on November 14, 2006 with full certification until September 30, 2012.

According to the findings from the College's annual audit for the year ended June 30, 2007, MSTC does not have outstanding compliance issues related to financial responsibility standards: limitation, suspension, or termination actions, audits, or default rates. The Official Cohort default rates for fiscal years ending 2003-2005 are:

<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>
6.0%	3.9%	3.4%

MSTC's default rates for past years (1991-2005) and the national average for comparison are:

Year	MSTC	National Average, 2-year public	National Average, all institutions
1991	10.4%	14.8%	17.8%
1992	11.0%	14.5%	15.0%
1993	9.4%	13.3%	11.6%
1994	11.8%	13.8%	10.7%
1995	8.9%	14.2%	10.4%
1996	8.9%	13.2%	9.6%
1997	8.3%	12.7%	8.8%
1998	8.9%	10.7%	6.9%
1999	3.7%	8.8%	5.6%
2000	7.0%	9.2%	5.9%
2001	5.4%	8.6%	5.4%
2002	5.8%	8.5%	5.2%
2003	6.0%	7.6%	4.5%
2004	3.9%	8.1%	5.1%
2005	3.4%	7.9%	4.6%

MSTC has maintained a lower than average 2-year public default rate from 1991-2005. Additionally, the College has implemented a Student Loan Default Management Plan to accomplish the following goals:

- 1) Improve students' understanding and respect for the loan repayment obligation through increased communication and loan counseling with the students.
- 2) Reduce defaults related to students' difficulty finding employment through providing career services resources including placement assistance.

- 3) Reduce defaults by dropouts through counseling, academic and financial aid advising, and other services for students including special consideration for “high-risk” students.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Mid-State Technical College presented satisfactory evidence of a fifteen-year history of student loan default rates that is within acceptable guidelines set by the USED and therefore 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. The relevant data and information packaged in a Federal Compliance Material Packet was sent to the AQIP reviewers well in advance of the visit and provided clear and concise responses to the compliance requirements.

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

Mid-State Technical College developed a plan to comply with the Commission’s Third Party Comment requirement which included:

1. Identifying stakeholders for the communications.
2. Identifying the media outlets which would reach stakeholders.
3. Preparing and submitting communications to the media outlets.

Third-party comment was solicited through three venues: In legal notices published in the three largest newspapers in the College’s district, via a generalized press release, and on their web site. The Quality Checkup Team received a memorandum on March 17, 2008 from AQIP indicating that the Commission had received no third party comments.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, MSTC presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The methods utilized by the College are acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

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

Mid-State Technical College’s compliance with Commission policy 1.c.7, Credits, Program Length, and Tuition is well documented with approval systems in place. MSTC is one of the sixteen colleges in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS). The WTCS Board is the coordinating agency and is responsible for setting statewide policy, program standards and

curricula, and distributing aid in alignment with the Department of Education and accrediting policies. The Mid-State Technical College Board of Directors guides the district within the context of state board directives; the WTCS Office staff carries out the operational functions of the WTCS Board.

The following policies are published in (and taken from) the WTCS Educational Services Manual. The policies establish:

- Credit hour equivalencies for transcribed courses
- Credit hour expectations for similar programs in other accredited institutions
- Tuition across the WTCS and system-wide program fees

Program Length

MSTC offers the following program types and adheres to the WTCS policies.

Associate Degree in Applied Sciences - Occupational Programs (Code 10)

- A. Associate degree programs require a minimum of 60 semester credits. Programs with more than 70 credits in the curriculum require written approval by the WTCS President when needed to meet licensure, certification, and other requirements. Curricula with more than the maximum credits shall reflect the additional credits in the technical studies.
- B. The Technical Studies credit requirement range for Technical Studies is 36 to 49 credits.
- C. The General Studies category includes general education program courses which relate to the effective functioning of the individual in both occupational and community settings. The credit requirement range for General Studies is 21 to 30 credits.

Technical Diploma Programs (Codes 30, 31, and 32)

Technical diploma programs have a minimum of two (2) technical credits and a maximum of 70 technical credits.

- A. Technical diploma - Less than One Year (Code 30) - a minimum of two (2) Technical credits and a maximum of 25 technical credits.
- B. Technical diploma - One Year (Code 31) - a minimum of 26 technical credits and a maximum of 54 technical credits.

- C. Technical diploma - Two Year (Code 32) - a minimum of 55 technical credits and a maximum of 70 technical credits.

Apprenticeship Programs (Code 50)

Apprenticeship programs of three (3) or more years of on-the-job training shall have a minimum of 400 hours of paid related instruction. Apprenticeship programs shall maintain minimum common core competencies as identified by industry, BAS, and, where appropriate, by state trade advisory committees.

Certificates

Certificates may be awarded at the option of the local district for participation and/or attendance at any WTC program level and/or adult continuing education course(s), groups of courses or attainment of specific competencies. Advanced Technical Certificates are certificates specifically designed and approved by the System Office.

Credits

Assignment of credits is based on the following standards. One associate degree and technical diploma (1) credit is granted for 54 - 50 minute periods of student effort in any given term whether in classroom, clinical, laboratory, assigned outside study, independent instruction/study, or any combination of the aforementioned.

Tuition and Fees

MSTC is mandated by the State of Wisconsin to charge program and material fees in accordance with the WTCS guidelines. The program fees and tuition approved at the March 28, 2007, State Board meeting for 2007-2008 effective with the 2007 summer session are:

Mid-State Technical College Tuition Rates for summer 2007 for Per Credit Charges:

	Collegiate Transfer	Postsecondary & Vocational Adult
Program Fee (Resident)	\$124.70	\$92.05
Out-of-State Tuition	<u>\$228.70</u>	<u>\$478.50</u>
Total Out-of-State	\$353.40	\$570.55

In the Quality Checkup Team's judgment, MSTC presented satisfactory evidence that it met the goal of the Quality Checkup. The Institutional 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

Mid-State Technical College is part of a state-wide marketing consortium within the Wisconsin Technical College system. The consortium works to develop and distribute system-wide generic advertising that can be customized to feature local institutions. The consortium advertising uses a variety of media, including print, television, radio, and billboards.

The College provided samples of the organization’s advertising and recruitment materials through links to their web site, brochures, videos, and the catalog. The Quality Checkup Team members were able to view multiple documents and videos easily and found satisfactory evidence that MSTC met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

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

MSTC has only one institution-wide accreditation relationship, with the Higher Learning Commission. Academic programs at Mid-State Technical College are reviewed periodically using the Quality Review Process as defined by the WTCS Board. The programs listed below have professional or specialized accreditation or licensure requirements. All accreditations are presently in good standing with the listed accreditation or licensure organization.

Program	Professional/Specialized Accreditation
Nursing Associate Degree	Wisconsin Board of Nursing, National League for Nursing Accreditation Commission
Cosmetology and Barbering	Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing
Respiratory Therapy	Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Programs/Committee on Accreditation for Respiratory Care
Surgical Technologist	Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Programs/Accreditation Review Committee on Education in Surgical Technology
Criminal Justice-Basic Law Enforcement training Academy	Wisconsin Department of Justice
Criminal Justice-Corrections	Wisconsin Department of Justice

Criminal Justice-Law Enforcement	Wisconsin Department of Justice
EMS	Department of Health and Family Services EMS Section, National Registry of EMT's
Medical Assistant	Commission on Accreditation of Allied health Education Programs/Based on the AAMAE
Phlebotomy	National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences

In the team's judgment, MSTC 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

Mid-State Technical College has a well-documented student complaint procedure with a notice to students published in the College Catalog, Student Handbook, and the Right to Know. A Complaint Log is maintained with records of complaints for a two-year period. A copy of the formal Student Complaint Log for 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 was provided in the Federal Compliance Packet.

During the visit representatives from different departments provided additional information about how student and stakeholder complaints are resolved and documented. The Nursing Department in particular has a Nursing Student Council which meets monthly. As part of the process, students regularly bring forward issues or concerns from nursing students to the nursing faculty. These concerns are then addressed in departmental meetings, and have lead to concrete changes and improvements in the program. 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

Discussion occurred during the Checkup visit that was focused on Interwoven Programs between MSTC and Lakeland College which provides opportunities for students to take

coursework from both colleges at the same time. Currently there are 13 combined associate and bachelor's degrees offered through this collaborative effort which allows students to take the Lakeland College courses on the MSTC campus. The Financial Aid department has been instrumental in developing a model in compliance with Federal Law which allows students to utilize their financial aid to cover costs for tuition and fees from both colleges when enrolled in these Interwoven Programs.

In the team's judgment, Mid-State Technical College 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

In the team's judgment, Mid-State is to be congratulated for their ability to be both a college committed to planning and continuous improvement as noted above, while maintaining the ability to respond quickly to emerging needs. Termed a Rapid Response approach, the college is able to respond quickly to external and internal crises, or emerging needs. When a local plant unexpectedly laid-off nearly 500 workers, Mid-State led a rapid response team that met with employees to provide them options for retraining and career guidance. While the team consisted of a variety of local governmental and non-profit agencies, community members made it clear to the team that the initiative was led by Mid-State and is a direct result of its commitment to the community. When the front line receptionist notified admissions that she was receiving a large number of calls requesting information about a new program under development, student services staff and academic affairs moved quickly to develop an informational brochure and web links for people inquiring about the program.

Early in the semester a social science faculty member surveyed new students to ask what three things they needed right now. The responses were sorted and analyzed and three needs were identified. The college quickly responded with expanded information and services to meet the needs of the students.

An emerging issue for the College is its intent to rapidly increase its online offerings. To their credit, the college has already established significant student and faculty support services including 24/7 student support and required faculty training in online techniques. The College may want to do a detailed assessment of how online learning can contribute to access and which programs/courses are best suited for online delivery, particularly in their rural district.

Documentation of the many improvement projects under way and the inclusion of that documentation in reports to its stakeholders and future AQIP Portfolio reports may be of benefit to the College. Models and/or flow charts of the planning processes in place may also be helpful.

The College has a very low rate of employee turnover. Faculty and staff development opportunities are encouraged and available. There is, however, no succession plan in place. A formal succession plan that analyzes the current status of its administration, faculty and staff, anticipates future needs and plans for the recruitment and development of its employees to meet future needs may be beneficial.

Participation by Mid-State Technical College Stakeholders at the Quality Checkup Visit Sessions, March 26-28, 2008

Day	Session	Topic	Participants
1	1	Introduction and Opening Session	6
	2	Federal Compliance	3
	3	Academic Affairs	20
	4	Students	7
	5	Student Affairs	12
2	6	AQIP Project Teams	17
	7	Student Academic Achievement	7
	8	Benchmarking & Trend Data Utilization	8
	9	Community Discussion	29
	10	Human Resources & Diversity Update	7
	11	Faculty Discussion	9
	12	Institutional Support Discussion	9
3	13	Executive Committee Briefing	6
	14	Departure Briefing	41