

Summary, AQIP Quality Checkup Visit Report

Addressing the Six Strategic Issues from the Systems Portfolio

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.

Other high points from the Quality Checkup Visit report

- 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**. [Emphasis added]
- 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.
- 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 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.
- Currently there are 13 combined associate and bachelor’s degrees offered through [a] collaborative effort which allows students to take... 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 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.
- 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.