Richland Community College
AQIP Fact Sheet and Update

What is accreditation?
Accreditation by nationally recognized agencies provides objective, public assurance that an institution has met clearly stated requirements and criteria and that the institution will continue to meet these requirements. The accrediting agency establishes standards or criteria to assess the formal educational activities of the institution. Also evaluated are governance and administration, financial stability, student personnel services, institutional resources, student academic achievement, institutional effectiveness, and relationships with internal and external constituencies. In the United States, accreditation is voluntarily sought by institutions and is conferred by non-governmental bodies. Richland Community College’s accrediting body is the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

What is AQIP?
The Higher Learning Commission adopted the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) in 1999 as an alternate to the “traditional” accreditation process for 2- and 4-year colleges and universities. AQIP uses as its foundation a Continuous Improvement Process model for analyzing and improving systems and processes at an institution. AQIP utilizes three basic questions related to continuous improvement:

- Are you doing the right things—the things that are most important in order to achieve your institution’s goals?
- Are you doing things well—effectively, efficiently, in ways that truly satisfy the needs of those you serve?
- How do you know—how do you monitor outcomes and make changes based on what you have learned?

Based on common best practices of colleges and universities, AQIP developed nine categories for clustering institutional systems, processes, and initiatives. The Categories reflect the missions of higher learning—to educate, to develop leadership skills, and to promote individual achievement. The nine AQIP Categories consist of the following:

- Helping Students Learn
- Meeting Other Distinctive Objectives
- Measuring Effectiveness
- Building Collaborative Relations
- Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs
- Valuing People
- Leading and Communicating
- Supporting Institutional Operations
- Planning Continuous Improvement
Who is participating?
Currently, over 180 institutions in 19 states, as of August 2013, are using AQIP for accreditation. These include 30 Illinois community colleges and 4-year colleges and universities, the largest being Southern Illinois University/Edwardsville and National Louis University. Illinois community colleges participating in AQIP (12/4/13) include the following:
Blackhawk College*
City College of Chicago-Wilbur Wright
College of DuPage
College of Lake County
Heartland Community College*
Highland Community College
Illinois Central College*
Illinois Valley Community College
Joliet Junior College
Kankakee Community College
Kaskaskia College
Kishwaukee College
Lincoln Land Community College*
McHenry County College
Moraine Valley Community College
Richland Community College
Southwestern Illinois College*
Waubonsee Community College

*indicates peer institutions as identified by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)
When did Richland join?
Richland applied for participation in AQIP and was accepted in 2000.

What are the components of accreditation through AQIP?
The AQIP reaccreditation process is structured around quality improvement principles and processes and involves the following structured goal-setting, networking, and accountability activities in a seven-year cycle:

**Systems Portfolio**—An institution explains the major systems and processes used to accomplish its mission and goals by addressing processes, results, and improvements in the framework of the nine AQIP Categories. In addition, institutions include descriptions of processes related to the U.S. Department of Education’s Core Components.

**Systems Appraisal**—A team of trained reviewers reads the Portfolio and produces an Appraisal Feedback Report that assesses the maturity of and identifies strengths and opportunities within each of the nine AQIP Categories. The reviewers also address the institution’s efforts to meet the Core Components.

**Quality Check-up**—A team of trained evaluators conducts a visit to a) affirm the accuracy of the organization’s Systems Portfolio; b) review Action Projects and strategies identified to capitalize on the strengths and opportunities for improvement; c) assure continuing quality improvement commitment; and d) confirm the institution’s compliance with accreditation expectations established by the U.S. Department of Education.

**Action Projects**—AQIP institutions commit to three or four projects that create a foundation for an institution’s improvement initiatives and demonstrate the vitality of its commitment to quality. At least one action project must relate directly to Category 1, Helping Students Learn. Annual reports on progress must be submitted to the HLC.

**Strategy Forum**—After an institution receives its Appraisal Feedback Report, an institutional team participates in the Forum with other AQIP institutions to, critically examine strengths and opportunities and to identify goals and processes for Action Projects.

How is Richland addressing AQIP requirements?
The training in the Continuous Improvement Process began in Fall 2002; from Fall 2002 through Spring 2003, 30 teams were trained, totaling 127 people. In addition, 16 people completed Facilitator Training to serve as support/resource for future teams, committees, and taskforces. Training of new employees occurs each semester. As of November 2013, 86% of current employees have completed the 7-hour training.

The Strategic Plan is developed to connect to the AQIP categories and the requirements of Continuous Improvement that make Richland a quality institution. The 2011-2014 Strategic Plan was approved by the Board of Trustees in April 2011, with an emphasis on student...
access, engagement and success; institutional sustainability; and community engagement and partnerships. Each year, Strategic Annual Priorities are identified related to the goals and strategies of the Plan. [http://www.richland.edu/effectiveness стратегический план]

Richland has completed three Systems Portfolios. The Portfolio is “a concise description of the organization's fundamental issues for getting its work done and its goals accomplished.” The most recent Portfolio was submitted in May 2013. [http://www.richland.edu/effectiveness аттестация]

The Portfolio begins with an Institutional Overview, explaining the College structure, improvements since the last Portfolio, and an analysis of the quality maturity in each category. The body of the Portfolio addresses a set of questions related to systems or processes common to all higher education institutions for each of the nine AQIP Categories. For each category, questions relate to key processes the organization uses to accomplish its goals, the performance results the organization is obtaining with its current process, and the use of results data to identify targets for improvement and enhance the system and the organization's operations. The Portfolio does not require that Richland examine ALL processes at one time, nor does it require the extensive review of every element of the College. A team of peer reviewers creates and returns a Systems Appraisal that suggests ways to continue the journey of quality. Richland received its most current Systems Appraisal in September 2013.

Teams have attended four Strategy Forums, the most recent in February 2014, learning ways to meet more advanced goals of continuous improvement. Team members interact with teams from other AQIP institutions, sharing best practices and learning strategies for improvement.

In March 2014 the Quality Check-up occurred, with a team visiting Richland to review federal compliance documentation, meet with College employees, and offer practical suggestions related to quality and continuous improvement.

Richland received its Reaffirmation of Accreditation in 2008. The Reaffirmation process includes a review of all components identified above. The next Reaffirmation review will occur in 2014-2015.

What are Richland’s current Action Projects?
Based on the research and analysis completed for the Systems Portfolio, Richland’s Institutional Effectiveness Group and Quality Council identified new Action Projects for implementation:

1. Using Data for Improved Institutional Planning—Program Review The goal of this Action Project is to streamline and centralize the process for program review, including Career and Technical Education Programs, Academic Programs, Cross-Disciplinary
Programs, and Student and Academic Services. This Action Project will formalize current processes for division, discipline and service area results reporting by

- Regularizing institutional processes for requiring data for evaluation and validation of programs and services;
- Determining common data needs and developing common data collection modules;
- Validating common data definitions to include in the institutional glossary;
- Identifying external comparison data, where appropriate, and implementing a common rubric for comparison;
- Training stakeholders in the revised process, including the development of program improvement plans; and
- Determining program improvements through use of a developed process.

2. **Improving the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**

The goal of this Action Project is to expand the current student learning outcome assessment process to document both cross-disciplinary (institutional) and program outcomes, to use the results for improvement, and to provide evidence of metrics in program review and other College reports. A major question under investigation for this project is *How do faculty use data on student learning to make meaningful improvements in their respective courses?*

This Action Project will formalize the course and program assessment process through the following:

- Assessment and achievement
- Faculty identification of program metrics tied to student learning
- Implementation of mechanisms for collection and reporting of identified metrics
- Clarification of program, discipline, and service area student learning outcomes
- Implementation of Program/Discipline/Service Areas Improvement Plans, with regularized reporting plan

3. **Advancing the Completion Agenda**

The goal of this Action Project is to achieve the benchmarks established in Richland’s Balanced Scorecard (Level 1 or include Level 2 and Level 3) in the area of completion. To accomplish this goal, which will foster a culture of completion, Richland will address the following:

- Key components and best practices implemented by other community colleges to increase completion;
- Methods of student placement in developmental education, including alternative pathways;
- Curriculum alignment (both vertical and horizontal);
- Optimal course scheduling formats;
- Processes to improve student course completion; and
- Methods to improve student transitions to a career.

4. **Institutionalizing the Balanced Scorecard**

The goal of this Action Project is to use meaningful data for decision-making by institutionalization of the Balanced Scorecard through

- Full operation and use of Levels 1, 2, and 3;
• Informational sessions to provide a general understanding of the measures/
  indicators in the Scorecard;
• Formalize process of including additional outcomes measures to be placed into the
  Scorecard;
• Formalize process for proposing definitions for institutional glossary;
• Clarification of peer institutions and indicators to be used for benchmarking; and
• Determine an internal location for housing completed Dashboard and Balanced
  Scorecard.

5. Implementing the Framework for Evidence-Based Decision-Making   The goals of this
Action Project are to improve processes for data gathering and analysis; to enhance
understanding and confidence in decisions; and to provide evidence of successes and
identify additional challenges. In order to do so, the following components are also
needed:
  • Oversight by the Evidence-based Strategy Team
  • Implementation of a communication plan for all related CIP Teams to deliver a
    consistent message
  • Regular reporting of progress, results, and improvement to the Quality Council,
    Institutional Effectiveness Group, and College community
  • Clear timeline.

How can I learn more about AQIP at Richland?
Training each semester is a great way to learn about Richland’s AQIP commitment and
how continuous improvement strategies are used in decision-making. In addition, the AQIP
website, www.ncahlc.org, explains all elements of the Program. Contact the Office of
Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, Ext. 258 or Ext. 364, for more information.