

QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

Bismarck State College

Bismarck, North Dakota
October 12 – 14, 2011

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*

Prior to the site visit, the AQIP team was provided with the AQIP Quality Program Summary (August 2011) and Federal Compliance Materials (August 2011). During the visit, the expectations and AQIP processes of Bismarck State College (Bismarck, North Dakota) regarding the construction of the AQIP portfolio were discussed. The College acted in good faith and properly acted upon the information it had been provided.

The team met on three consecutive days (October 12-14, 2011) with Bismarck State College's President, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Planning, Vice President for College Advancement and Executive Director of the Foundation, Vice President of the National Energy Center of Excellence, Associate Vice President of the National Energy Center of Excellence, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, Dean of Academic Affairs, Director of Library Services, Director of Academic Records & Registrar, Director of Admissions & Enrollment Services, Instructional Department Chairs and Program Managers, AQIP Coordinating Team, Assessment Committee, Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, and students.

Action projects were reviewed and discussed. Completed action projects include the successful planning and establishment of the Mystic Advising and Counseling Center. This Center grew out a previous action project to improve freshman advising. Other action projects included: creation of an Office of Innovation to provide seed money for innovative ideas that are identified, helping students to successfully transfer to college, and developing plans and processes for systematizing institutional effectiveness efforts.

In addition to the AQIP team providing a report-out on the final day, the schedule provided private visits with students, staff senate, and faculty senate.

The team confirms the contents of the Systems Portfolio are factual.

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.

Review of specific accreditation issues identified by the institution's last Systems Appraisal

There were no accreditation issues identified in the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report.

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

The Systems Appraisal Feedback Report identified the following four issues affecting institutional strategies:

Topic 1: Developing a formal, timely, and integrated internal feedback loop that uses data being collected and that implements that data into the decision-making processes for the whole college.

Within the last month, the College has been informed that it has been awarded a \$1.9 million Title III grant which is slated to improve institutional use of data and data resources. The grant includes positions which will aid in establishing the infrastructure to utilize, integrate, and communicate data throughout the College. The AQIP team confirmed that data is available in a variety of locations throughout the College. The challenges related to data include enhancing the College's ability to collect, integrate, and communicate data among those who may be gathering data and those who need to use the data. The need for gathering and communicating data is especially critical in gathering information related to student learning. The College is aware that consistent, reliable access to data will increase efficiency and transparency of information about strengths and challenges for the College units. The College is to be commended for pursuing the Title III grant. The grant provides an outstanding opportunity to provide the resources to enable the institution to gather, use, and communicate data more effectively.

Topic 2: The transition to a new leadership and continued energy for cultural evolution and improvement.

The College and the personnel the AQIP team interacted with seem to be thriving under the leadership of President Skogen who began his position in 2007. President Skogen established an Office of Innovation to provide support for all employees of the College to consider innovative strategies and ideas that can move the College forward. The College also now reflects a flatter organizational style which encourages appropriate actions and decisions to be made at or near operational offices. The College has engaged in proactive efforts to expand its programming and/or partnerships with area high schools (training center and career programs), the community (The Aquatic Center, EMT training, Dakota Nursing Program), regional expertise (Lineworker), and national recognition for their Energy programs (designated as a National Energy Center of Excellence).

Topic 3: Continued creation and effective evaluation of placement tests and learning objectives for all on-campus, distance, and online students.

The AQIP team learned that placement test information for new students is gathered from a variety of sources—ACT/SAT scores, COMPASS, and ACCUPLACER. The placement test data has been collected for a number of years and provides a data foundation to build upon. The AQIP team found that several career programs have professional accrediting bodies or professional standards to which they adhere. Such programs provided needed data and reports as required to these entities. While data is gathered in a variety of places from a variety of sources, the College is aware that sifting through this decentralized quantity of data may not be serving it well as it strives to harness and coordinate gathering, analyzing and communicating information to a broader audience.

The College has a dedicated, enthusiastic Assessment Committee who has been working with English and Math faculty to utilize placement scores to inform intervention strategies. Enabling Department Chairs, Program Managers, and the Assessment Committee to collaborate with Academic Administrators to establish the concepts and framework for an integrated assessment of student learning reporting mechanism might provide the critical mass to move this issue forward at a rapid pace for the organization. The AQIP team encourages the College to design and implement a systematic process for gathering, analyzing, and communicating the status of student learning across all programs. Such a process should include the learning outcomes/objectives for general education as well as curriculum majors or career programs. The AQIP team emphasized that the College needs to define a systematic approach documenting student learning that will best fit their own organization. Prior to the start of fall term, Susan Hatfield, a speaker on the topic of assessment, was brought in for a faculty-development presentation. The impression was that the speaker was well received and provided good information for faculty consideration.

Topic 4: It is unclear how AQIP Action Projects become part of the longer-term strategic-planning process.

The AQIP team met with AQIP Action Project Team Leaders and Team Members, from both the past and the present. It was clear that the institution had benefitted from the use of Action Projects as planning efforts that provide focus and generate an institutional will to tackle issues of strategic importance. An example of an Action Project that a wide cross-section of the campus community acknowledged as being important and supported fully through planning and

implementation was the project focused on the creation of an academic advising center. Campus constituents reported that this project had significant cross-functional collaboration behind it and has served to create a venue for student counseling as well as a blend of professional and faculty advising.

Alternately, campus constituents appear to also have AQIP Action Projects that may no longer be as relevant as they were when first initiated, and these seem to have lost momentum. The AQIP team encourages the institution's leadership and planning teams to end AQIP Action Projects that are no longer high priorities for the College, and to ensure that future Action Projects are crafted such that measures can be gathered and used to assess the impact of the initiative. Doing so would ensure that the current roster of AQIP Action Projects at any given point in time would be more likely to be consistently interwoven with broader institutional planning efforts, and allow the College to more effectively assess the impact of completed projects. For example, with even with the widely popular project to create the advising center, the institution did not appear to have success measures identified that would allow it to measure the success of the academic advising center upon becoming operational. The AQIP team encouraged the College to use the data that are already being collected in the advising center to show the efficacy of the initiative. It was reported, for example, that student advising data are collected and could be with student performance or program persistence.

The AQIP team encourages the institution to craft a future AQIP Action Project focused on the development and implementation of systematic approaches to measuring, documenting, and communicating student learning outcomes, especially as it is evident that the College possesses a significant amount of data to use as a springboard for such an endeavor.

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.

Review of organizational commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement

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.

Bismarck State College, as the largest two-year institution in the state, is an institution with a

strong presence in the State of North Dakota. The College has a highly developed competency in creating and nurturing deep partnerships in the Bismarck community, as evidenced by the recent addition of a local parks and recreation fitness and aquatic center located on Bismarck campus. The institution's participation in partnerships also extends beyond the Bismarck community across North Dakota; an example is the multi-institutional North Dakota Nursing degree program. The college's Lineworker program is another example of a regionally recognized curriculum.

The AQIP team also noted that BSC's partnerships are increasingly national and global as well, as evidenced by their designation as a National Energy Center of Excellence and strong industry partnerships with the College's energy programs. At the heart of this ability to partner, the institution does a great job ensuring these relationships benefit students, providing them with dedicated faculty, curriculum support, equipment, supplies, and job opportunities through industry connections.

The AQIP team also witnessed a dynamic campus culture working hard to constantly improve organizational efficiencies, incorporate innovative ideas, and improve learning support systems. The staff governance group was observed, for example, to be in the process of redrafting the articles and bylaws to become more proactive on campus and at the state level.

Clearly a positive campus climate exists where individuals and groups feel empowered to participate in institutional governance. Perhaps most importantly, BSC is particularly focused on improving its ability to make data collection, management, and use more systematic and more accessible to end-users in the administrative and academic units. The AQIP team encourages continued hard work in the area of data management and distribution. The College is to be commended for seeking and being awarded the Title III grant that provides the foundation for addressing the challenges related to data management. The AQIP team witnessed faculty, staff, and administration enthusiastically embracing the challenges associated with developing increased competency measuring student learning, both in the disciplines and in general education. The design and development of AQIP Action Projects related to these areas should bring added focus and an even more specific imperative to these efforts.

Overall, the visiting AQIP team found Bismarck State College to be a vital institution that manifested the energy and dedication for continuous quality improvement.

**WORKSHEET ON
Federal Compliance Requirements**

INSTITUTIONAL MATERIALS RELATED TO FEDERAL COMPLIANCE REVIEWED BY THE TEAM:

- Student Handbook
- College Catalog
- Federal Compliance Report
- Historical Accounting of Student Complaints (last three years)

EVALUATION OF FEDERAL COMPLIANCE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The team verifies that it has reviewed each component of the Federal Compliance Program by reviewing each item below. Generally, if the team finds substantive issues in these areas and relates such issues to the institution's fulfillment of the Criteria for Accreditation, such discussion should be handled in appropriate sections of the Assurance Section of the Team Report or highlighted as such in the appropriate AQIP Quality Checkup Report.

1. Credits, Program Length, and Tuition: *The institution has documented that it has credit hour assignments and degree program lengths within the range of good practice in higher education and that tuition is consistent across degree programs (or that there is a rational basis for any program-specific tuition).*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and affirms that Bismarck State College is following the practices and procedures stated in its previously submitted Federal Compliance Report (August 2011).

2. Student Complaints: *The institution has documented a process in place for addressing student complaints and appears to be systematically processing such complaints as evidenced by the data on student complaints for the three years prior to the visit.*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and was provided with a list of all formal student complaints received by the institution over the last three years. The team verified both the formal and informal complaints procedures in use at the College. The institution's practice is to make best efforts to resolve student complaints where they are encountered, and only escalates these instances to higher levels within the institution when necessary.

3. Transfer Policies: *The institution has demonstrated it is appropriately disclosing its transfer policies to students and to the public. Policies contain information about the criteria the institution uses to make transfer decisions.*

The team reviewed this component of federal compliance and confirmed what the institution reported in its Federal Compliance Report (August 2011).

4. Verification of Student Identity: *The institution has demonstrated that it verifies the identity of students who participate in courses or programs provided to the student through distance or correspondence education.*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and the verified the practices described in its Federal Compliance Report (August 2011). In addition to standard higher education practices where students are issued a user name and password that must be used to access their course materials in the institution's course management system, the institution reported that it continues to follow research in this area, and that it periodically evaluates nascent tools and technologies that are brought to their attention as potential vehicles for identity verification.

5. Title IV Program and Related Responsibilities: *The institution has presented evidence on the required components of the Title IV Program. The team has reviewed these materials and has found no cause for concern regarding the institution's administration or oversight of its Title IV responsibilities.*

- **General Program Requirements:** Bismarck State College was granted re-approval to offer Federal Title IV aid through September of 2014. Bismarck State College does not have any outstanding compliance issues, limitations or termination actions related to compliance issues. Requirement disclosure information is posted on the Bismarck State College web site. The college complies with all Title IV mandated requirements regarding campus crime, fire safety and hate crimes. BSC discloses this information to all enrolled students and all faculty and staff each year via an "Access to Information" pamphlet that is distributed in the early fall.
- **Financial Responsibility Requirements:** The institution has provided the Commission with information about the Department's review of composite ratios and financial audits. It has, as necessary, addressed any issues the Department raised regarding the institution's fulfillment of its responsibilities in this area. BSC's recent audits indicate the college's Title IV program is in compliance with federal regulations. At present, BSC is under no limitations or suspensions by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE). The most recent compliance audit (two-years ending June 30, 2010), conducted by the Office of the State Auditor, found no findings or questioned costs in the college's compliance with the requirements of the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-133 regarding the college's major federal programs. BSC's compliance audit is a two-year audit that is combined at the state level with the State of North Dakota. The audit report can be found at: http://www.nd.gov/auditor/reports/sa_10.pdf .

BSC's annual financial audit is a part of a system audit that is combined at a system level with the North Dakota University System. The latest report (year ending June 30, 2010) can be found at: http://www.nd.gov/auditor/reports/220_10.pdf . BSC had no material findings or recommendations and no concerns have been raised by the Office of the State Auditor, the Commission or the Department of Education as to the college's financial ratios or finances in general.

- **Default Rates, Campus Crime Information and Related Disclosure of Consumer Information, Satisfactory Academic Progress and Attendance Policies:** The institution has demonstrated, and the team has reviewed, the institution's policies and practices for ensuring compliance with these regulations. Bismarck State College participates in the following federal loan programs: Federal Direct Loan, Federal Perkins Loan and Federal PLUS loan. The US Department of Education calculates default rates

for our institution each year. The following is a breakdown of the default rates for the previous five years:

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
3.0	3.1	3.1	3.0	3.9

Bismarck State College also engages in several student loan default management strategies, as follows:

- Requiring on-line entrance loan counseling for all new borrowers of a federal student loan. The entrance counseling reviews the borrower's rights and responsibilities of borrowing student loans. The counseling session provides important borrower information so students understand the student loan borrowing process.
 - Collaboration with the National Student Clearinghouse for enrollment reporting purposes. All students who are enrolled at least half time are reported to the Clearinghouse so their previously held student loans do not go into repayment and instead are processed as in-school deferments.
 - A link is provided on the institution's financial aid web site detailing important loan information for students who are previous borrowers. The information detailed provides additional resources for students to utilize so they do not go into a default status while attending BSC.
 - Requiring online exit loan counseling of all students who withdraw, fall below half time status or do not return to BSC in a subsequent semester. Student borrowers are provided with needed information regarding who and how to contact their loan servicer to stay out of default status.
 - Providing a loan repayment calculator on the institution's financial aid web page so students can estimate the monthly payment amount they can expect. This calculator provides instant feedback to the student so they know how much to borrow and minimize the dollar amount borrowed.
 - **Contractual Relationships:** The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and confirms that BSC does not participate in any contractual relationships for the delivery of its academic programming.
6. **Institutional Disclosures and Advertising and Recruitment Materials:** The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and confirms that the institution provides accurate, timely and appropriately detailed information to current and prospective students and the public about its accreditation status with the Commission and other agencies as well as about its programs, locations and policies. A broad range of methods are employed by BSC to share this information:
- The college catalog
 - Program fact sheets, flyers, brochures
 - Campus visits
 - Social media, such as Facebook

- High school visits and career fairs
- Direct mailings.

7. Relationship with Other Accrediting Agencies and with State Regulatory Boards: The institution discloses its relationship with any other specialized, professional or institutional accreditor, and with all governing or coordinating bodies in states in which the institution has a presence. As such, BSC discloses information regarding its affiliation with the Higher Learning Commission, the State Board of Education for the State of North Dakota, North Dakota University System, and with the following associations whose oversight pertains to specific academic programs offered by the institution:

- National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF)
- National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS)
- Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education (CAAHEP)
- Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET)
- Associated General Contractors of North Dakota
- North Dakota Board of Nursing
- North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC)
- Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI)

8. Public Notification of an Evaluation Visit and Third Party Comment: The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance. The College provided public notification and received no comments. The AQIP team was notified by electronic memorandum dated September 6, 2011, that no third party comments had been received by the Commission.

Bismarck State College
Quality Checkup Visit
October 12-14, 2011

Day/Time/Location	Topic/Purpose	Participants	Materials
Tuesday, October 11			
	Arrive in Bismarck	Site Team	
Wednesday, October 12			
8:30-9:30am NECE 335 Continental Breakfast	Introductions, overview of key AQIP topics for visit, agenda, questions	Cabinet, Dean (12)	Quality Checkup Visit agenda
9:30-10:30am President's Office	Discuss organizational perspective and quality goals	President	Chart of Organization, Student Body Profile
10:30-10:45am	Team break		
10:45-11:45am JSC 115	Discuss Compliance Review and Third-Party Comments	VP Academics; Student Affairs; Finance; AVP IE & SP; Dean; Dist. Ed., AVP NECE (9)	Compliance Report; Third Party Comments Report
11:45-12:45pm Lunch Prairie	Discuss organizational perspective on quality efforts	Faculty Senate (17)	
12:45-1:00pm	Team break		
1:00-1:45pm Alumni	Discuss organizational perspective on quality efforts	Staff Senate (22)	
1:45-2:45 Dakota	Discuss organizational perspective of Systems Portfolio; how feedback was used; response to 'OOs'	VP Academics; Institutional Research; VP NECE; AVP IE & SP; AVP NECE; AQIP Coordinating Team; Dean; AVP Finance; two assessment committee members (16)	
2:45-3:00pm	Team Break		
3:00-4:00pm Dakota	Status Update; review Wednesday's findings; request any additional data needed; preview Thursday's agenda	VP Academics; AVP Inst. Effectiveness and Strategic Planning (2)	

4:00-4:45pm Prairie	Discuss organizational perspective on quality efforts	Student Board of Governors; other students (19)	
Thursday, October 13			
8:45-10:00am NECE 335 Continental Breakfast	Discuss organizational perspective on quality issues related to student learning and assessment of student learning	Dean; Department Chairs; Program Managers; Assessment Committee (28)	
10:00-11:15am NECE 335	Discuss progress regarding strategic issues. Integration of AQIP categories into strategic planning	Executive Council; Operations Council (17)	
11:15-11:30am	Team break		
11:30am-1:00pm Lunch Dakota	Discuss academic and administrative support for helping students learn and other distinctive objectives	Academic and administrative support offices; Student Success Center, Advising and Counseling; Dean; Library; Testing and Assessment (8)	
1:00-2:00pm Dakota	Discuss AQIP status of action projects (past and present)	AQIP Coordinating Team; VP Academics; AVP IE & SP; action team chairs (12)	Faculty Mentoring program information
2:00-4:00pm	Visit off-site program and/or centers, Lineworker; Mechanical Maintenance; MRCC Paramedic; Allied Health Center	VP Academics; AVP IE & SP; VP NECE; AVP NECE (4)	Sample of Program Fact Sheet (Nursing)
4:00-5:00pm Allied Health Center Conference Room	Status update; review Thursday's findings; request any additional data needed; preview Friday's agenda	VP Academics; AVP IE and SP (2)	
Friday, October 14			
8:30-9:00am Dakota	Meet with President, review findings	President	Report Notes
9:00-10:00am Prairie	Report out. Discuss and review findings with BSC	Employees (20)	Report Notes
10:00am	Site team departs Bismarck State College		

JSC 115 – resource room for team