

# **Principles and Categories for Improving Academic Quality**

## **2008 Revision**

**Academic Quality Improvement Program  
Higher Learning Commission**

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### About the AQIP Categories

Originally developed when AQIP began in 1999-2000, the AQIP Categories provide a tool to help any higher education institution examine, analyze, and evaluate the key systems it uses to do its work and achieve its outcomes. AQIP uses the word quality to refer to the never-ending improvement of these systems, individually and collectively, in support of an institution's unique mission. Looking at these systems provides opportunities to ask penetrating questions about critical processes, their interrelationships, and their combined effectiveness in producing the performance levels the institution seeks. The AQIP Categories focus on nine systems common to all higher education institutions, posing a series of questions about each that ask, collectively, "Are we doing the right things to achieve our mission and goals?" and "Are we doing the things we do as well as we could?"

This focus on systems — on processes, their performance results, and how an institution systematically strives to enhance both its processes and results — constitutes AQIP's method for assuring quality and stimulating organizational improvement. By developing and using performance metrics, an institution ensures that it uses its resources effectively, demonstrating its accountability to those who fund and support it. When gaps exist between present results and possible or desirable performance, new strategies for improvement come primarily through understanding those existing systems and processes that produced the current results. Used in this way, the Categories allow AQIP to make accrediting judgments that meet the Higher Learning Commission's quality assurance standards while helping participating colleges and universities improve the quality and effectiveness of what they do.

Moreover, AQIP stresses that higher education institutions are the ongoing creation of the administrators, faculty, and staff that operate them — that employees, individually and collectively, hold responsibility for continuing or changing an institution's operations. If how it is operating now is working well, producing the results everyone wants, then continuing to do things the same way makes sense. But if current processes are not producing the performance people seek — the number and quality of students, the needed faculty and staff, the desired salary levels, student achievement results that would make everyone proud — then the institution needs to change ineffective processes to improve their performance, and its employees must make the changes happen. The AQIP Categories provide a set of "How-do-you..?" questions an institution can ask itself, as a whole or at the level of specific academic units, divisions, departments, programs, or offices. Systems thinking makes it essential for institutions to cascade these questions, posing them at every level. The questions in the AQIP Categories provide tools for systematic and penetrating self-study, and the Systems Portfolio provides an effective tool for communicating the discoveries and insights that emerge.

From January through July 2008, AQIP invited all its participants — both institutions and reviewers — to suggest improvements to the AQIP Category items originally published in 1999-2000. This 2008 version of the Categories includes those improvements, and, from November 2009 on, provides the official structure AQIP institutions must use for their Systems Portfolios. To assist institutions making the transition from the earlier version, the number used for each item in the 1999-2000 version appears in square brackets following each item in the current version. AQIP's Systems Portfolio Guide, which can be downloaded from the AQIP homepage, discusses the rationale behind specific changes and provides advice concerning the construction of Systems Portfolio. AQIP's Systems Appraisal Guide, also downloadable from the homepage, guides reviewers in the analysis of Systems Portfolios and the creations of a Systems Appraisal Feedback Report.

### Principles of High Performance Organizations

Research and experience indicate that common principles — Focus, Involvement, Leadership, Learning, People, Collaboration, Agility, Foresight, Information, and Integrity — permeate colleges and universities that have achieved a systematic approach to continuous quality improvement. These qualities underlie all of the Academic Quality Improvement Program's Categories, activities, processes, and services, and they represent the values to which AQIP itself aspires organizationally.

**Focus.** A mission and vision that focus on students' and other stakeholders' needs provide quality-driven higher education organizations with the foundation they need to shape communication systems, organizational and decision-making structures, and planning and improvement processes. An institution earns the trust, confidence, and loyalty of its current and potential students and its other stakeholders — both external and internal, including faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees — by actively developing and regularly employing listening tools essential for gathering and understanding their diverse and distinctive perspectives. The institution interprets and weighs these expressed needs, preferences, hopes, and requirements to frame ongoing communication, discussion, and refinement of a common mission and vision. Faculty, staff, and administrators integrate this shared focus into their individual work goals and decision-making strategies.

**Involvement.** Broad-based faculty, staff, and administrative involvement encourages better decisions and strengthens individual and group ownership of systems, activities, and initiatives. Individuals understand how what they do affects others within and outside the organization, and appreciate how their work helps further the institution's mission. A culture of involvement draws on the expertise and practical experience of those people closest to a situation and helps leaders across the organization anticipate the complex implications of decisions. Such involvement often helps initiate and implement improvements that better meet student's and other stakeholders' needs. A culture of involvement requires ongoing development of people's skills in making fact-based decisions, working with diverse groups, resolving conflicts, and using quality-based tools to build

consensus.

**Leadership.** Leaders and leadership systems that support a quality culture consistently model those values and behaviors that communicate to all constituents a clear and compelling vision of the future. Leaders have a responsibility to make sure that everyone understands and values the institution's mission, goals, and directions — and uses this understanding to inform individual work goals and decision-making strategies. Leadership must work to help students and other stakeholders share this understanding as well. Further, leadership must ensure that an institution's systems and processes align with its mission and vision, making certain that the necessary resources — people, policies, funds, facilities, equipment, supplies, time, energy, and other assets — are allocated and used to support the overall mission and vision.

**Learning.** A learning-centered environment allows an institution dedicated to quality to develop everyone's potential talents by centering attention on learning — for students, for faculty and staff, and for the institution itself. By always seeking more effective ways to enhance student achievement through careful design and evaluation of programs, courses, and learning environments, both the institution and its employees demonstrate an enthusiastic commitment to organizational and personal learning as the route to continuous improvement. Seeing itself as a set of systems that can always improve through measurement, assessment of results, and feedback, the institution designs practical means for gauging its students' and its own progress toward clearly identified objectives. Conscious of costs and waste — whether human or fiscal — leadership champions careful design and rigorous evaluation to prevent

problems before they occur, and enables the institution to continuously strengthen its programs, pedagogy, personnel, and processes.

**People.** Respect for people and the willingness to invest in them leads the quality-driven institution to prize and support the systematic development of its individual faculty, staff, and administrators.

Recognizing that fully developing and using its people's abilities strengthens its most valuable resource, it consciously invests in all its people as leaders and learners through ongoing education, training, and opportunities for continuing development. Leadership encourages individuals to take responsibility in crafting and following through on professional and personal growth plans aimed at acquiring, practicing, and using new skills and knowledge to better serve students and other stakeholders. It nourishes a sense of responsibility and ownership in which all individuals understand how their role contributes to the measurable success of the institution and how they can become engaged as full participants in its improvement processes.

**Collaboration.** Collaboration and a shared institutional focus promote support for a common mission. A quality-driven institutions encourages active collaboration among and within different internal departments and operational areas, and, externally, between the institution and other institutions or organizations. It removes internal barriers to collaboration, such as the constraints individuals often experience within a hierarchical chain of command or when they find themselves working for a sub-unit rather than the larger organization. The institution provides its faculty, staff, and administrators with the training and resources successful collaboration demands, rewarding effective cooperation and celebrating model collaborative efforts with internal or external partners.

**Agility.** Agility, flexibility, and responsiveness to changing needs and conditions allow high performance institutions to transform themselves. Traditionally colleges and universities have enjoyed more reflective and deliberative cultures than

organizations, but the rapid development of new knowledge and technologies and the rising expectations of external stakeholders are altering these environments. As the pace of change quickens and competition becomes commonplace in higher education, the quality-driven institution develops the flexibility to respond quickly to opportunities, threats, and shifting needs and practices. It redirects its attention and resources in response to new requirements, and accurately monitors its performance in responding to such demands.

**Foresight.** Planning for innovation and improvement allows quality-driven institutions to think into the future, tracking trends in order to better predict how conditions will change, and anticipating how those changes may affect students and other stakeholders, operations, and performance. In dynamic or trying situations, the institution with foresight can innovate proactively, making meaningful changes to improve its services and processes in ways that create new or additional value for its students and other stakeholders. Open to new approaches and techniques, the institution designs, tests, and improves its planning structures and processes through practical use and experience.

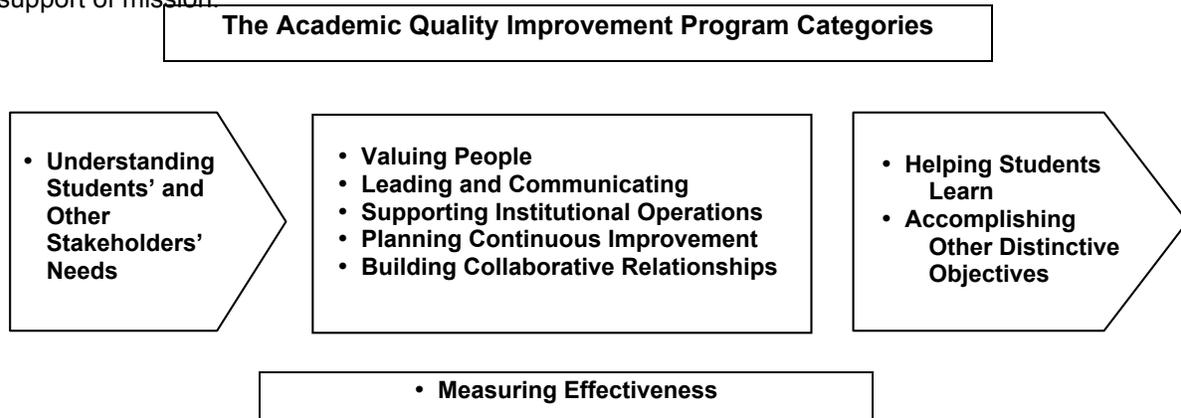
**Information.** Fact-based information gathering and thinking to support analysis and decision-making give the quality-driven institution and its personnel the ability to assess current capacities and measure performance realistically. Faculty, staff, and administrators track progress concretely and consistently, and use performance results to set ambitious but attainable targets that increase and improve the institution's capability to meet its students' and other stakeholders' needs and expectations. Data-enriched thinking nurtures evaluation and a results-orientation that maximizes the benefits and value produced for students and other stakeholders. The institution develops and refines systems for gathering and assessing valuable feedback and data, and continually seeks better methods for obtaining the most useful information on which to base decisions and

improvements.

**Integrity.** Integrity and responsible institutional citizenship allow quality-driven institutions to model their values in both words and deeds. In recognizing and fulfilling its public responsibility, the institution treats people and organizations with equity, dignity, and respect. Demonstrating responsible citizenship, it anticipates and takes into account the consequences of its actions upon the various larger communities to which it belongs, and upon the higher education system, regionally, nationally, and globally. Mindful that education serves society, the institution continuously examines its practices to make certain its effects and results actively contribute to the common good.

## Systems Thinking in the Process-Focused Organization

What most distinguishes AQIP from traditional reaccreditation is its concentration on systems and processes both as the basis for quality assurance and as the lever enabling institutional improvement. The figure below shows how the nine AQIP Categories together describe the interrelationships among systems essential to any effective college or university, using quality to refer to the never-ending improvement of systems and processes in support of mission.



AQIP insists that every institution be lucid and direct about what it is trying to accomplish, and clear about identifying those for whom it is doing the things on which it expends its energies and capital. To do this effectively, every institution needs a system that can decipher precisely the shifting needs of its particular target students and stakeholders. At the left of the figure, Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs examines this system, which reestablishes the basis for accountability by determining the requirements, expectations, and preferences of an institution's stakeholders. Knowing the needs it chooses to serve delineates a higher education institution's mission and vision. In turn, this understanding drives everything else — the design and operation of the other systems and processes an institution establishes to carry out its mission.

On the figure's right end, Helping Students Learn highlights the core processes — such as instructional design and delivery — that contribute directly to student learning, an educational institution's primary purpose and achievement. Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives provides for diversity in the character of higher education institutions by encompassing the variety of processes that institutions administer to pursue additional critical goals, such as research, development of endowment funds, competitive athletics, or service to specific communities. Together, these two Categories examine the key processes that an institution employs to create value directly for its students and its other stakeholders. In the eyes of those an institution serves, the processes included in these systems are the apparent reasons it exists. They are where an institution touches and affects the lives of its stakeholders.

The center of the diagram exemplifies the array of internal systems and processes that every institution must design and operate in order to enable and support those processes that directly impact the people it serves. Valuing People, Leading and Communicating, Supporting Institutional Operations, Planning Continuous Improvement, and Building Collaborative Relationships designate the major systems and activities through which an institution achieves the mission that its students and other stakeholders require. However these systems are enablers, making the delivery of educational and other services possible, and are often themselves invisible to students and stakeholders. The AQIP Categories require searching examination of these internally hidden support systems and processes. These five Categories do not merely review independently operating departments, offices, and divisions, but seek to understand a set of critical systems that must be linked and

aligned in ways that allow an institution to maximize its ability to give its students and stakeholders the services they need.

Underlying everything, Measuring Effectiveness sustains other institutional systems by effectively collecting, storing, retrieving, and interpreting the information needed to improve the entire institution. While AQIP recognizes the importance of inputs and resources, this Category stresses the necessity for an organization to measure accurately its current performance in key processes— to know whether it is delivering what students and stakeholders require and expect. By developing and using performance metrics, an institution ensures that it is using its resources effectively, demonstrating its accountability to those who fund and support it. When gaps exist between present performance and possible or desirable results, new strategies for improvement come primarily through understanding those existing systems and processes that produced the current results.

Together, the nine AQIP Categories analyze interrelationships among systems essential to all effective colleges and universities. To advance the core purpose of all higher education, the Categories take a systemic view, defining and evaluating all of the key systems or processes within an institution as they relate to learning, and demanding concrete indicators that measure the effectiveness of those systems and processes. The questions in each Category provide every institution a roadmap for the examination of its systems by posing two questions repeatedly: Are we doing the right things to achieve our mission? and Are we doing those things well? Mission-focused and holistic, the Categories provide a framework that supports improvement within any organization whose mission targets learning.

### Using the Categories

This 2008 version of the AQIP Categories incorporates several improvements over the previous (1999-2000) version. Beginning November 2009, institutions submitting Systems Portfolios for review should use this new version.

The Overview should be under 5000 words (approximately 10 double-spaced printed pages). The complete Systems Portfolio, including the Overview, should be under 50,000 words (approximately 100 double-spaced printed pages).

In square brackets following each item appears the number used for that item in the 1999-2000 edition of the AQIP Categories. This number may appear more than once because complex items were separated. These references should simplify the task of converting an older Portfolio to the revised Category items.

In each Category, address “in depth” at least 1/3 of the total items P, R, and I items, covering in depth at least one P, one R, and one I item. A Systems Portfolio should include references (item numbers, at a minimum) for all Category items. Items not addressed in depth and thus recognized as future opportunities for improvement may be answered briefly and honestly: “We don’t do this at present.” Or “We currently have no comparative performance results from other organizations for processes in this category.”

Items that represented significant strengths in earlier Systems Portfolios can similarly be answered with a short response rather than an “in depth” discussion: “Our processes in this area are robust and well designed, as our last Systems Appraisal recognized.” (An institution could provide a hyperlink in a statement like this, giving readers who want more information about these “robust and well-designed” processes a means of reading the details.)

Visit <http://AQIP.pbwiki.com> for Notes and Support for Systems Portfolios, an internet-based wiki containing official AQIP guidance as well as advice and tips from the AQIP community higher educators.

**Overview.** Provide an overview of your organization by briefly introducing vital characteristics such as mission, values, strategic vision, history, location, control (public or private) and status (for-profit or not-for-profit), and then answering the following nine items in a total of fewer than 5000 words (approximately 10 double-spaced printed pages). Devote no more than 1000 words (2 pages) to item 1 and no more than 500 words (1 page) each to items 2 to 9. In your Overview, describe the context and constraints within which your organization structures and operates its systems and processes, but use the appropriate AQIP Category P, R, and I items to explain and evaluate the processes themselves.

1. What are your goals for student learning and shaping an academic climate? What are your key credit and noncredit instructional programs, and educational systems, services, and technologies that directly support them?
2. What key organizational services, other than instructional programs, do you provide for your students and other external stakeholders? What programs do you operate to achieve them?
3. What are the short- and long-term requirements and expectations of the current student and other key stakeholder groups you serve? Who are your primary competitors in serving these groups?
4. What are your administrative, faculty, and staff human resources? What key factors determine how you organize and use them?
5. What strategies align your leadership, decision-making, and communication processes with your mission and values, the policies and requirements of your oversight entities, and your legal, ethical, and social responsibilities?
6. What strategies align your key administrative support goals with your mission and values? What services, facilities, and equipment do you provide to achieve them?
7. What determines the data and information you collect and distribute? What information resources and technologies govern how you manage and use data?
8. What are the key commitments, constraints, challenges, and opportunities with which you must align your organization's short- and long-term plans and strategies?
9. What key partnerships and collaborations, external and internal, contribute to your organization's effectiveness?

### **AQIP Category One HELPING STUDENTS LEARN**

HELPING STUDENTS LEARN focuses on the design, deployment, and effectiveness of teaching-learning processes that underlie your organization's credit and non-credit programs and courses, and on the processes required to support them.

#### **Processes (P)**

1P1. How do you determine which common or shared objectives for learning and development you should hold for all

students pursuing degrees at a particular level? Whom do you involve in setting these objectives? [1P1]

1P2. How do you determine your specific program learning objectives? Whom do you involve in setting these objectives? [1P1]

1P3. How do you design new programs and courses that facilitate student learning and are competitive with those offered by other organizations? [1P2]

1P4. How do you design responsive academic programming that balances and integrates learning goals, students' career needs, and the realities of the employment market? [1P2]

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- 1P5. How do you determine the preparation required of students for the specific curricula, programs, courses, and learning they will pursue? [1P3]
- 1P6. How do you communicate to current and prospective students the required preparation and learning and development objectives for specific programs, courses, and degrees or credentials? How do admissions, student support, and registration services aid in this process? [1P4]
- 1P7. How do you help students select programs of study that match their needs, interests, and abilities? [1P5]
- 1P8. How do you deal with students who are underprepared for the academic programs and courses you offer? [1P5]
- 1P9. How do you detect and address differences in students' learning styles? [1P5]
- 1P10. How do you address the special needs of student subgroups (e.g. handicapped students, seniors, commuters)? [1P5]
- 1P11. How do you define, document, and communicate across your organization your expectations for effective teaching and learning? [1P6]
- 1P12. How do you build an effective and efficient course delivery system that addresses both students' needs and your organization's requirements? [1P7]
- 1P13. How do you ensure that your programs and courses are up-to-date and effective? [1P8]
- 1P14. How do you change or discontinue programs and courses? [1P8]
- 1P15. How do you determine and address the learning support needs (tutoring, advising, placement, library, laboratories, etc.) of your students and faculty in your student learning, development, and assessment processes? [1P9]
- 1P16. How do you align your co-curricular development goals with your curricular learning objectives? [1P10]
- 1P17. How do you determine that students to whom you award degrees and certificates have met your learning and development expectations? [1P12]
- 1P18. How do you design your processes for assessing student learning? [1P11]

**Results (R)**

- 1R1. What measures of your students' learning and development do you collect and analyze regularly? [1P13]
- 1R2. What are your performance results for your common student learning and development objectives? [1R1]
- 1R3. What are your performance results for specific program learning objectives? [1R1]
- 1R4. What is your evidence that the students completing your programs, degrees, and certificates have acquired the knowledge and skills required by your stakeholders (i.e., other educational organizations and employers)? [1P12, 1R2]
- 1R5. What are your performance results for learning support processes (advising, library and laboratory use, etc.)? [1R3]
- 1R6. How do your results for the performance of your processes in Helping Students Learn compare with the results of other higher education organizations and, where appropriate, with results of organizations outside of higher education? [1R4]

**Improvement (I)**

- 1I1. What recent improvements have you made in this category? How systematic and comprehensive are your processes and performance results for Helping Students Learn?
- 1I2. How do your culture and infrastructure help you to select specific processes to improve and to set targets for improved performance results in Helping Students Learn?

### **AQIP Category Two ACCOMPLISHING OTHER DISTINCTIVE OBJECTIVES**

ACCOMPLISHING OTHER DISTINCTIVE OBJECTIVES addresses the key processes (separate from your instructional programs and internal support services) through which you serve your external stakeholders — the processes that contribute to achieving your major objectives, fulfilling your mission, and distinguishing yours from other educational organizations.

#### **Processes (P)**

- 2P1. How do you design and operate the key non-instructional processes (e.g., athletics, research, community enrichment, economic development, alumni affairs, etc.) through which you serve significant stakeholder groups?
- 2P2. How do you determine your organization's major non-instructional objectives for your external stakeholders, and whom do you involve in setting these objectives? [2P1]
- 2P3. How do you communicate your expectations regarding these objectives? [2P2]
- 2P4. How do you assess and review the appropriateness and value of these objectives, and whom do you involve in these reviews? [2P3]
- 2P5. How do you determine faculty and staff needs relative to these objectives and operations? [2P3]
- 2P6. How do you incorporate information on faculty and staff needs in readjusting these objectives or the processes that support them? [2P4]

#### **Results (R)**

- 2R1. What measures of accomplishing your major non-instructional objectives and activities do you collect and analyze regularly? [2P5]

- 2R2. What are your performance results in accomplishing your other distinctive objectives? [2R1]
- 2R3. How do your results for the performance of these processes compare with the performance results of other higher education organizations and, if appropriate, of organizations outside of higher education? [2R2]
- 2R4. How do your performance results of your processes for Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives strengthen your overall organization? How do they enhance your relationships with the communities and regions you serve? [2R3]

#### **Improvement (I)**

- 2I1. What recent improvements have you made in this category? How systematic and comprehensive are your processes and performance results for Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives?
- 2I2. How do your culture and infrastructure help you to select specific processes to improve and to set targets for improved performance results in Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives?

### **AQIP Category Three UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS' NEEDS**

UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS' NEEDS examines how your organization works actively to understand student and other stakeholder needs.

#### **Processes (P)**

- 3P1. How do you identify the changing needs of your student groups? How do you analyze and select a course of action regarding these needs? [3P1]
- 3P2. How do you build and maintain a relationship with your students? [3P2]
- 3P3. How do you analyze the changing needs of your key stakeholder groups and select courses of action regarding these needs? [3P3]
- 3P4. How do you build and maintain relationships with your key stakeholders? [3P4]

- 3P5. How do you determine if you should target new student and stakeholder groups with your educational offerings and services? [3P5]
- 3P6. How do you collect complaint information from students and other stakeholders? How do you analyze this feedback and select courses of action? How do you communicate these actions to your students and stakeholders? [3P6]

### Results (R)

- 3R1. How do you determine the satisfaction of your students and other stakeholders? What measures of student and other stakeholder satisfaction do you collect and analyze regularly? [3P7]
- 3R2. What are your performance results for student satisfaction? [3R1]
- 3R3. What are your performance results for building relationships with your students? [3R2]
- 3R4. What are your performance results for stakeholder satisfaction? [3R3]
- 3R5. What are your performance results for building relationships with your key stakeholders? [3R4]
- 3R6. How do your results for the performance of your processes for Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs compare with the performance results of other higher education organizations and, if appropriate, of organizations outside of higher education? [3R5]

### Improvement (I)

- 3I1. What recent improvements have you made in this category? How systematic and comprehensive are your processes and performance results for Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs?

- 3I2. How do your culture and infrastructure help you to select specific processes to improve and to set targets for improved performance results in Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs?

## AQIP Category Four VALUING PEOPLE

VALUING PEOPLE explores your organization's commitment to the development of your faculty, staff, and administrators.

### Processes (P)

- 4P1. How do you identify the specific credentials, skills, and values required for faculty, staff, and administrators? [4P1]
- 4P2. How do your hiring processes make certain that the people you employ possess the credentials, skills, and values you require? [4P1]
- 4P3. How do you recruit, hire, and retain employees? [4P2]
- 4P4. How do you orient all employees to your organization's history, mission, and values? [4P2]
- 4P5. How do you plan for changes in personnel? [4P2]
- 4P6. How do you design your work processes and activities so they contribute both to organizational productivity and employee satisfaction?
- 4P7. How do you ensure the ethical practices of all of your employees? [4P3]
- 4P8. How do you determine training needs? How do you align employee training with short- and long-range organizational plans, and how does it strengthen your instructional and non-instructional programs and services? [4P5]
- 4P9. How do you train and develop all faculty, staff, and administrators to contribute fully and effectively throughout their careers with your organization? How do you reinforce this training? [4P4]
- 4P10. How do you design and use your personnel evaluation system? How do you align this system

with your objectives for both instructional and non-instructional programs and services? [4P6]

- 4P11. How do you design your employee recognition, reward, compensation, and benefit systems to align with your objectives for both instructional and non-instructional programs and services? [4P7]
- 4P12. How do you determine key issues related to the motivation of your faculty, staff, and administrators? How do you analyze these issues and select courses of action? [4P8]
- 4P13. How do you provide for and evaluate employee satisfaction, health and safety, and well-being? [4P9]

### Results (R)

- 4R1. What measures of valuing people do you collect and analyze regularly? [4R1]
- 4R2. What are your performance results in valuing people? [4R1]
- 4R3. What evidence indicates the productivity and effectiveness of your faculty, staff, and administrators in helping you achieve your goals? [4R3]
- 4R4. How do your results for the performance of your processes for Valuing People compare with the performance results of other higher education organizations and, if appropriate, of organizations outside of higher education? [4R4]

### Improvement (I)

- 4I1. What recent improvements have you made in this category? How systematic and comprehensive are your processes and performance results for Valuing People?
- 4I2. How do your culture and infrastructure help you to select specific processes to improve and to set targets for improved performance results in Valuing People?

## LEADING AND COMMUNICATING

LEADING AND COMMUNICATING addresses how your leadership and communication processes, structures, and networks guide your organization in setting directions, making decisions, seeking future opportunities, and communicating decisions and actions to your internal and external stakeholders.

### Processes (P)

- 5P1. How are your organization's mission and values defined and reviewed? When and by whom?
- 5P2. How do your leaders set directions in alignment with your mission, vision, values, and commitment to high performance? [5P1]
- 5P3. How do these directions take into account the needs and expectations of current and potential students and key stakeholder groups? [5P1]
- 5P4. How do your leaders guide your organization in seeking future opportunities while enhancing a strong focus on students and learning? [5P2]
- 5P5. How do you make decisions in your organization? How do you use teams, task forces, groups, or committees to recommend or make decisions, and to carry them out? [5P3]
- 5P6. How do you use data, information, and your own performance results in your decision-making processes? [5P4]
- 5P7. How does communication occur between and among the levels and units of your organization? [5P5]
- 5P8. How do your leaders communicate a shared mission, vision, and values that deepen and reinforce the characteristics of high performance organizations? [5P6]
- 5P9. How are leadership abilities encouraged, developed and strengthened among your faculty, staff, and administrators? How do you communicate and share leadership knowledge, skills, and best practices throughout your organization? [5P7]
- 5P10. How do your leaders and board members ensure that your organization maintains and preserves its mission, vision, values, and commitment to high

## AQIP Category Five

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performance during leadership succession? How do you develop and implement your leadership succession plans? [5P8]

**Results (R)**

- 5R1. What performance measures of Leading and Communicating do you collect and analyze regularly? [5P9]
- 5R2. What are your results for leading and communicating processes and systems? [5R1]
- 5R3. How do your results for the performance of your processes for Leading and Communicating compare with the performance results of other higher education organizations and, if appropriate, of organizations outside of higher education? [5R2]

**Improvement (I)**

- 5I1. What recent improvements have you made in this category? How systematic and comprehensive are your processes and performance results for Leading and Communicating?
- 5I2. How do your culture and infrastructure help you to select specific processes to improve and to set targets for improved performance results in Leading and Communicating?

**AQIP Category Six  
SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONAL OPERATIONS**

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATIONS addresses the organizational support processes that help to provide an environment in which learning can thrive.

**Processes (P)**

- 6P1. How do you identify the support service needs of your students and other key stakeholder groups (e.g., oversight board, alumni, etc.)? [6P1,2]

- 6P2. How do you identify the administrative support service needs of your faculty, staff, and administrators? [6P1,2]
- 6P3. How do you design, maintain, and communicate the key support processes that contribute to everyone's physical safety and security?
- 6P4. How do you manage your key student, administrative and organizational support service processes on a day-to-day basis to ensure that they are addressing the needs you intended them to meet? [6P3]
- 6P5. How do you document your support processes to encourage knowledge sharing, innovation, and empowerment? [6P3]

**Results (R)**

- 6R1. What measures of student, administrative, and organizational support service processes do you collect and analyze regularly? [6P5]
- 6R2. What are your performance results for student support service processes? [6R1]
- 6R3. What are your performance results for administrative support service processes? [6R2]
- 6R4. How do your key student, administrative, and organizational support areas use information and results to improve their services? [6P4]
- 6R5. How do your results for the performance of your processes for Supporting Organizational Operations compare with the performance results of other higher education organizations and, if appropriate, of organizations outside of higher education? [6R3]

**Improvement (I)**

- 6I1. What recent improvements have you made in this category? How systematic and comprehensive are your processes and performance results for Supporting Organizational Operations?
- 6I2. How do your culture and infrastructure help you to select specific processes to improve and to set targets for improved performance results in Supporting Organizational Operations?

### **AQIP Category Seven MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS**

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS examines how your organization collects, analyzes, distributes, and uses data, information, and knowledge to manage itself and to drive performance improvement.

#### **Processes (P)**

- 7P1. How do you select, manage, and distribute data and performance information to support your instructional and non-instructional programs and services? [7P1]
- 7P2. How do you select, manage, and distribute data and performance information to support your planning and improvement efforts? [7P1]
- 7P3. How do you determine the needs of your departments and units related to the collection, storage, and accessibility of data and performance information? [7P2]
- 7P4. How, at the organizational level, do you analyze data and information regarding overall performance? How are these analyses shared throughout the organization? [7P4]
- 7P5. How do you determine the needs and priorities for comparative data and information? What are your criteria and methods for selecting sources of comparative data and information within and outside the higher education community? [7P3]
- 7P6. How do you ensure department and unit analysis of data and information aligns with your organizational goals for instructional and non-instructional programs and services? How is this analysis shared? [7P5]
- 7P7. How do you ensure the timeliness, accuracy, reliability, and security of your information system(s) and related processes? [7P6]

#### **Results**

- 7R1. What measures of the performance and effectiveness of your system for information and knowledge management do you collect and analyze regularly? [7P7]
- 7R2. What is the evidence that your system for Measuring Effectiveness meets your organization's needs in accomplishing its mission and goals? [7R1]
- 7R3. How do your results for the performance of your processes for Measuring Effectiveness compare with the results of other higher education organizations and, if appropriate, of organizations outside of higher education? [7R2]

#### **Improvement (I)**

- 7I1. What recent improvements have you made in this category? How systematic and comprehensive are your processes and performance results for Measuring Effectiveness?
- 7I2. How do your culture and infrastructure help you to select specific processes to improve and to set targets for improved performance results in Measuring Effectiveness?

### **AQIP Category Eight PLANNING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

PLANNING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT examines your organization's planning processes and how your strategies and action plans help you achieve your mission and vision.

#### **Processes (P)**

- 8P1. What are your key planning processes? [8P1]
- 8P2. How do you select short- and long-term strategies? [8P2]
- 8P3. How do you develop key action plans to support your organizational strategies? [8P3]
- 8P4. How do you coordinate and align your planning processes, organizational strategies, and action plans across your organization's various levels? [8P4]
- 8P5. How do you define objectives, select measures, and set performance targets for your organizational strategies and action plans? [8P5]
- 8P6. How do you link strategy selection and action plans, taking into account levels of current resources and future needs? [8P6]
- 8P7. How do you assess and address risk in your planning processes?
- 8P8. How do you ensure that you will develop and nurture faculty, staff, and administrator capabilities to address changing requirements demanded by your organizational strategies and action plans? [8P7]

#### **Results (R)**

- 8R1. What measures of the effectiveness of your planning processes and systems do you collect and analyze regularly? [8P8]
- 8R2. What are your performance results for accomplishing your organizational strategies and action plans? [8R1]

- 8R3. What are your projections or targets for performance of your strategies and action plans over the next 1-3 years? [8R2]
- 8R4. How do your results for the performance of your processes for Planning Continuous Improvement compare with the performance results of other higher education organizations and, if appropriate, of organizations outside of higher education? [8R3]
- 8R5. What is the evidence that your system for Planning Continuous Improvement is effective? How do you measure and evaluate your planning processes and activities? [8R4]

#### **Improvement (I)**

- 8I1. What recent improvements have you made in this category? How systematic and comprehensive are your processes and performance results for Planning Continuous Improvement?
- 8I2. How do your culture and infrastructure help you to select specific processes to improve and to set targets for improved performance results in Planning Continuous Improvement?

### **AQIP Category Nine Building Collaborative Relationships**

BUILDING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS examines your organization's relationships – current and potential – to analyze how they contribute to the organization's accomplishing its mission.

#### **Processes (P)**

- 9P1. How do you create, prioritize, and build relationships with the educational organizations and other organizations from which you receive your students? [9P1]
- 9P2. How do you create, prioritize, and build relationships with the educational organizations and employers that depend on the supply of your students and graduates that meet those organizations' requirements? [9P1]

- 9P3. How do you create, prioritize, and build relationships with the organizations that provide services to your students? [9P1]
- 9P4. How do you create, prioritize, and build relationships with the organizations that supply materials and services to your organization?
- 9P5. How do you create, prioritize, and build relationships with the education associations, external agencies, consortia partners, and the general community with whom you interact? [9P1]
- 9P6. How do you ensure that your partnership relationships are meeting the varying needs of those involved? [9P2]
- 9P7. How do you create and build relationships between and among departments and units within your organization? How do you assure integration and communication across these relationships? [9P3]

### Results (R)

- 9R1. What measures of building collaborative relationships, external and internal, do you collect and analyze regularly? [9P4]
- 9R2. What are your performance results in building your key collaborative relationships, external and internal? [9R1]
- 9R3. How do your results for the performance of your processes for Building Collaborative Relationships compare with the performance results of other higher education organizations and, if appropriate, of organizations outside of higher education? [9R2]

### Improvement (I)

- 9I1. What recent improvements have you made in this category? How systematic and comprehensive are your processes and performance results for Building Collaborative Relationships?

- 9I2. How do your culture and infrastructure help you to select specific processes to improve and to set targets for improved performance results in Building Collaborative Relationships?

### Glossary

The Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) provides its Categories as tools for any institution to study itself using the principles and perspectives of continuous improvement. Explanations of some terms used the questions following each Category may be helpful, but AQIP understands that every institution has a unique culture, and that the particular language an institution uses will reflect and embody that culture. Therefore AQIP encourages institutions to use the Categories with their broad purpose in mind – institutional self-assessment and improvement — and to avoid creating harmful complexity by attempting to narrowly define every term. There are no "trick questions" here and common sense interpretations of words should be sufficient.

**Curricula** The questions use *curricula* to refer broadly to programs, courses, lectures, discussions, laboratories, studio or shop activities, practica, internships, and all co-curricular activities the institution designs and makes available to promote learning.

**Deployment** How extensively a successful system or process is utilized throughout institutional operations critically affects overall performance. To maximize their value, effective processes must be *deployed* widely.

**Design** Questions using *design* ask you to examine and describe how your institution — or its component parts — structures general and specific programs: who does it, when do they do, how long it takes, what steps are involved, what information and resources are used as input to the design process, and what concretely emerges as the output (e.g., paper plans and specifications, written guidelines, tacit understandings among the participants, etc.).

**Determine** An institution can act consciously and deliberately set or define requirements, expectations, or processes, or it can allow its processes to be determined

by chance, tradition, or other forces. Questions asking you how you *determine* something ask you to focus on the processes you use to reach these decisions, whether you do so deliberately or not.

**Documentation** Concrete, factual evidence that supports or proves an assertion constitutes *documentation*. This evidence is often, but not exclusively, in the form of documents or numerical indices. Undocumented beliefs, intuitions, and tacit understandings are often accurate, but they may not provide as solid a structure for shared understanding or future action as does documentation.

**Expectations** To improve, an institution must articulate its targets or desired outcomes for student learning and other activities. Educational *expectations* specify the learning— knowledge, skills, competencies, abilities, performance, values, habits, behaviors, attitudes, and preferences — that students will possess upon completion of their educational experience. Your expectations explain what you want your students to know and be able to do after their education that they did not know or could not do before, and when or for how long you expect students to exhibit the benefits of this acquired learning.

**Goals** For simplicity, AQIP does not distinguish between goals and objectives (or short- and long-term goals), and so uses the term objectives consistently in these questions. If you use goals and objectives differently, your responses should capture whatever distinctions you make within your institution.

**Mission** The term *mission* communicates a broad understanding of what an institution does, and whom it does it for. The verb *educate* captures an essential element in the mission of all higher learning institutions, but most mission statements will specify who the institution will educate (e.g., anyone, local high school graduates, would-be welders, physicians) at what levels (e.g., undergraduate, doctoral, etc.), in what localities, etc. In formally stating these intentions, some institutions use *mission*, some use *purposes*, some *mission and purposes*. Some have *mission*

*statements*, some *vision statements*, and some statements, separate or combined, describing both mission and vision. For simplicity, AQIP uses *mission* for all these, but feel free to translate any statement using *mission* into the words people use in your institution. AQIP distinguishes an organization's broad mission from the specific objectives it sets to achieve its mission. If your institution's mission statement includes both mission and objectives (and many college and university statements do), pay attention to how AQIP distinguishes these in its questions. Interpret *mission* to include vision, institutional values, guiding principles, core principles, and similar concepts.

**Objectives** AQIP uses this neutral word to describe the concrete actions people at an institution engage in so that the institution will accomplish its mission. In many settings, *objectives* is synonymous with *goals*, *purposes*, *targets*, *strategies*, *expectations*.

**Outcomes** AQIP uses this term to refer to the results actually achieved by a system or process, regardless of its objective or targets, and independent of the wishes or expectations of those involved. Often, *outcomes* refers to achieved student learning, but it can also refer to the measured performance of other institutional systems and processes.

**Pedagogy** The Category questions use *pedagogy* to refer to the instructional methods (including lectures, discussions, case studies, internships, group projects, and the application of technology to learning) that the institution uses to help students learn.

**Process** Often used interchangeably with *system* or *sub-system*, a process is an organized group of related activities that together create a result that is of value to stakeholders. Each of the nine AQIP Categories focuses on a group of interrelated processes, one of an institution's fundamental systems for serving its stakeholders.

**Quality** The degree to which a good or service meets the real, long-term needs of those for whom it was designed and to whom it was delivered determines its *quality*. Commonly used surrogates for quality include the reputation (or name-recognition) of the manufacturer of a product or service, its cost (or the cost of the resources used to produce it), or the socio-economic status of those who purchase it. Although popular because they are easily measurable, none of these proxies correlate directly with how well a product or service satisfies the requirements of those who use it, and so none can serve as reliable indices of quality.

**Requirements** Detailed *requirements* are the specifications or "necessary ingredients" around which a system or process is designed. *Requirements* may refer to the input a process requires, or to the outputs demanded (wanted, expected) by those the process serves. Often people use *specifications*, *expectations*, *needs*, *wants*, *desires*, and *requests* as synonyms for *requirements*.

**Stakeholders** An institution's *stakeholders* include all of the people and groups that have a critical stake or investment in the institution's operation and future, including students' families, employers, funding and oversight agencies, and other institutions and organizations with which an institution has established collaborative relationships. Certainly current and former students are primary stakeholders; therefore the Categories refer to "students and *other* stakeholders." An institution's students and other stakeholders judge whether it is a success or failure in meeting their particular needs, and these judgments ultimately determine the institution's achievement, its well-being, reputation, and its continuation or demise. Some institutions also see their own faculty, staff, and administrators as key stakeholders.