

CROSSCUTTING COMMITTEE PLANNING DOCUMENT

Continuous Improvement

Crosscutting Committee

June 2004

Date

Signature of Crosscutting Committee Chairperson

I. Environmental Scan

The national context:

There is a pervasive national accountability movement responding to societal attitudes and apparent in governmental regulations, business and industry, health care, and K-12 education. There is increasing emphasis on state accountability requirements for public universities. This movement is increasingly embraced by higher education as both inevitable and desirable.

From a proactive perspective, the continuous improvement movement in higher education is sensible because colleges and universities have traditionally focused on delivering a high quality learning experience for students. Establishing processes that improve the quality of what we do is consistent with what we all aspire to do anyway. Processes and tools that enhance our institutional ability to succeed should be embraced. From a reactive or defensive perspective, it is timely to “do it to ourselves” rather than having others “do it to us.” In effect, some higher education systems and universities are moving ahead with the continuous improvement movement as a substitute for government micro-management. Adoption of self-regulation that embraces accountability and self-improvement strategies is strategic and in the best interests of all involved.

Much of the continuous quality improvement movement in higher education is linked to the evolution of accreditation and peer-based assessment. The Baldrige model of organizational performance excellence has provided a foundation for much of what is now taking place, especially in the NCA Higher Learning Commission’s Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) reaccreditation process. The Baldrige framework is an integrated approach to organizational performance management that results in: delivering ever-increasing value to students and stakeholders, contributing to the quality of education, improving overall organizational effectiveness and capabilities, and integrating systems for organizational and personal learning.

Internal Strengths:

The University’s Mission and Strategic Plan are assets in setting the context for continuous improvement processes. The University Mission Statement begins by saying

that Eastern Michigan University is committed to excellence. One of the institutional shared values is Excellence and states “We believe that the promotion of personal and academic excellence provides a foundation for institutional quality. We are committed to achieving the highest standards through ongoing assessment and continuous quality improvement.”

Consistent with the University Mission and Institutional Values, the University Strategic Plan specifies the importance of continuous improvement. Direction 6 in the University Strategic Plan states “EMU will improve institutional effectiveness reflected through characteristics such as . . . an organizational culture of assessment and continuous improvement, characterized by benchmarking and trend and data analysis, implemented through processes including evaluation of administrative unit effectiveness and academic program review . . .” In the introductory section to the University Directions, the plan notes that the University will monitor its effectiveness by establishing performance and outcome measures to determine success in accomplishing goals and initiatives.

Continuous improvement was first discussed as a result of the University Strategic Plan issued in 2001. In December 2002, a University Continuous Improvement Advisory Committee (UCIAC) was appointed. One of its first formal activities was to facilitate a session introducing continuous improvement and the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) to all senior administrators at a special two-hour meeting in March 2003. AQIP has been presented at Faculty Council and been the topic of discussion at the Deans Advisory Council, Cabinet and Board of Regents sessions.

The University Continuous Improvement Advisory Committee (UCIAC) is composed of campus-wide representatives. The UCIAC is charged with becoming well informed about continuous improvement models for higher education, facilitating orientation of the campus community about continuous improvement, serving in consultant and advocacy roles on behalf of continuous improvement initiatives, promoting an outcome measures approach for strategic planning and decision-making, taking an active role in facilitating and implementing continuous improvement and the AQIP reaccreditation processes, and evaluating and recommending improvements in the continuous improvement processes.

In February 2004, EMU was admitted to the NCA Higher Learning Commission’s Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) for the purposes of maintaining accredited status. Thus, the University is embarking upon a continuous improvement process leading to the reaffirmation of accredited status in seven years (i.e. 2011). AQIP is adapted from the Baldrige framework. There are nine criteria for reaccreditation that are part of AQIP:

Criterion One: Helping Students Learn – focuses on the teaching-learning processes within a formal instructional context, yet also addresses how the entire organization contributes to student learning and overall student development.

Criterion Two: Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives – addresses the processes that contribute to the achievement of the major objectives that complement student learning and fulfill other portions of the mission.

Criterion Three: Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs – examines how the organization works actively to understand student and other stakeholder needs.

Criterion Four: Valuing People – explores commitment to the development of faculty, staff, and administrators.

Criterion Five: Leading and Communicating – addresses how the leadership and communication structures, networks, and processes guide the organization in setting directions, making decisions, seeking future opportunities, and building and sustaining a learning environment.

Criterion Six: Supporting Institutional Operations – addresses the support processes that help provide an environment in which learning can thrive.

Criterion Seven: Measuring Effectiveness – examines how the organization collects, analyzes, and uses information to manage itself and to drive performance improvement.

Criterion Eight: Planning Continuous Improvement – examines the planning processes and how strategies and action plans are helping to achieve the mission and vision.

Criterion Nine: Building Collaborative Relationships – examines the university's relationships – current and potential – to analyze how they contribute to accomplishing the mission.

The AQIP reaccreditation process provides an important stimulus and leverage to integrate continuous improvement in the University.

Fully understanding the demands of AQIP is an evolving process that requires ongoing efforts. Numerous leaders within the University have participated in professional conferences and training sessions that provide an understanding of continuous improvement and AQIP processes. Presentations were made to cohorts of participants in Leadership EMU and Management EMU. A half-day workshop was held in August 2003 with representatives from the first four cohorts of Leadership EMU during which the Trailblazer institutional assessment process and the Baldrige “Are We Making Progress?” instruments were piloted. Among the products of this session were a series of ideas that provide the basis for answering the assessment questions in the Trailblazer process. An overview of the AQIP process was presented to the Faculty Council and Faculty Council representatives are members of the UCIAC.

A number of other processes that are integral to continuous improvement already exist and will complement the foregoing committee structure. First, the University Strategic Planning Committee not only facilitates the biennial strategic planning process but also evaluates the process and outcomes. Second, the Academic Program Review process guides an important assessment and improvement function. Third, accreditation bodies for disciplines and professions accredit the University. All have important elements related to continuous improvement, especially evidence-based assessment and outcomes processes. Finally, several administrative units already have functioning quality improvement groups (e.g. Student Affairs innovation team, employee wellness team). The expectation of disciplinary accreditation bodies for evidence to document outcomes helps enhance the process of gaining acceptance among faculty for continuous

improvement processes and AQIP. Consequently, administrative office directors, academic department heads, staff, and college level faculty leaders are becoming more engaged and aware of the advantages and benefits of continuous improvement processes.

The University is a member of the National Consortium for Continuous Improvement in Higher Education (NCCI) and has had representatives participating in conference and workshop sessions for the past four years. Several members of the University's Continuous Improvement Advisory Committee are examiners for the Michigan Quality Council and one is a member of the Board of Directors. Staff development programs such as Leadership EMU and Management EMU have begun to include an orientation to continuous improvement processes and an introduction to AQIP. The University's College of Technology offers academic programs in quality and the Centers for Corporate Training includes a Center for Quality that conducts non-credit training for business and industry. The Center has been in existence since 1982 and is ISO 9001:2000 certified.

The use of performance measures is critical to continuous improvement and the AQIP reaccreditation process. The University has extensive experience using input measures, has used output/outcome measures in focused ways, but has done relatively little with process and satisfaction measures. Areas impacted by professional or disciplinary accreditations, the academic processes for program and learning assessment, and program review have been in place for several years. The institutional emphasis on evidence-based decision-making and performance measures is part of the University Strategic Plan and is receiving attention and resources as an integrated data warehouse is built to facilitate the overall process.

The University launched major benchmarking initiatives by utilizing an analytical process to select current peer institutions, establishing aspirational peer institution lists, and gathering information about competitors. Two years ago the University began participating in several national benchmarking studies about students. For example, the institution is participating annually in Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), and in both "Your First College Year" and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) biennially in alternate years. A student satisfaction survey has been completed for Enrollment Services in 1996, 1999, 2002 and will be done again in 2005. As part of the overall Employee Wellness program, the University participates in the National Health Risk Assessment study. A housing and dining resident satisfaction survey has been conducted annually for ten years. The University has also been conducting SCOT (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats) analyses with both internal and external stakeholders for the past three years.

Internal Weaknesses:

The University faces several challenges and weaknesses that need to be addressed before the University can successfully implement a continuous improvement environment and succeed in being reaccredited through the AQIP process. The most significant distraction from quality initiatives is the reduction in revenue from the State, resulting in budget

reductions throughout the University. Nevertheless, continuous improvement processes should assist the University in making the tough longer-term decisions it faces. The second significant distraction is the negative publicity the University has received and the resulting low faculty and staff morale. Uncertainty about institutional leadership has been unsettling. In addition, there are numerous key leadership positions that are being filled on an interim basis which also adds to uncertainty pending the outcome of searches to fill these positions. Another factor that may deflect energy away from continuous improvement processes is contract negotiations with several collective bargaining groups.

There is not full understanding of what continuous improvement is and how it should be integrated into the routine processes of the university. Although some progress has been made in informing senior leadership about continuous improvement and the new reaccreditation process (Academic Quality Improvement Program–AQIP), there is still much to be done to fully inform and involve the campus community.

Progress has occurred in breaking down some of the organizational “silos” and replacing them with collaborative efforts. However, the University still has challenges in embracing teamwork by working together to accomplish what is best for the whole rather than just what serves a particular administrative unit.

II. Strategic Issues That Need to Be Addressed

Continuous improvement is a campus-wide endeavor. It involves viewing the institution from a systems perspective with a focus on improving processes that impact stakeholders. It depends on ongoing institutional assessment processes that include metrics to benchmark the current situation and measure progress.

In order to incorporate and integrate continuous improvement processes and prepare for AQIP reaccreditation, four strategic issues must be addressed.

1. A key strategic issue is communicating and educating the campus community about quality improvement processes and the new AQIP reaccreditation process. The University Continuous Improvement Advisory Committee continues to implement activities to disseminate information about continuous improvement and AQIP but needs administrative and faculty leaders to disseminate information and stimulate understanding by including consideration of AQIP in routine meetings, retreats, and other forums. A more fundamental issue is for administrative units to begin to incorporate continuous improvement processes into their administrative decision-making and procedures.
2. Selection of projects for the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) reaccreditation process has critical strategic importance. Both the broad institutional assessment process involving an outside perspective (e.g. the Trailblazer process) and a number of activities that are underway will converge to help identify top priority Action Projects. Examples of processes that are already in place to help inform the selection of projects include: the biennial strategic planning process identifies

strategic opportunities for improvement; comparative benchmarking data and college and disciplinary accreditation studies identify opportunities; and feedback gathered from advisory groups, focus groups, and student survey benchmarking provide data.

The Continuous Improvement Advisory Committee will complete a comprehensive analysis and present a slate of potential Action Projects to the Deans Advisory Council, Faculty Council, and President's Cabinet fall 2004. The analysis will be based on completion of a broad institutional assessment process, analyses of other sources of information (e.g. benchmarking, program review, program assessment, etc.), consideration of input from the Faculty Council and broader campus community, and deliberation by the Deans Advisory Council. The Cabinet and President will make the final selection of projects from the slate of options.

It is critical that administrative units analyze and reflect upon potential projects. Since at least one of the projects must focus on AQIP criterion 1 "Helping Students Learn," the Division of Academic Affairs will need to be active in the selection of the project(s) in this area.

3. The AQIP criteria on "Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs" and "Measuring Effectiveness" focus on how the organization works actively to understand student and stakeholder needs and how the organization collects, analyzes, and uses information to manage itself and drive performance improvement. In order for the University to successfully embrace and implement continuous improvement processes, a robust system for institutional assessment must be in place. Several key elements are in place such as program review processes in Academic Affairs, benchmarking studies; student surveys; and other feedback loops to that help monitor progress and identify opportunities for improvement in existing systems. Surveys of faculty, staff and alumni are being developed and will be administered on a regular basis beginning during the 2004-05 academic year. However, it is important for divisions and colleges to embrace continuous improvement and incorporate institutional assessment as a part of routine administration. The institution as a whole needs to develop metrics for its broad institutional goals and administrative units need to develop metrics and measure progress in achieving goals and initiatives in the strategic plan.
4. The AQIP criterion on "Valuing People" explores the institutional commitment to the development of faculty, staff, and administrators since the efforts of all are required for success. Training and professional development programs for faculty, staff and student employees are important components of a high performing organization. Likewise, human resources processes that provide comprehensive, constructive performance evaluation including a system of reward and recognition are integral to a successful continuous improvement program.

III. Best Practices and Creative Innovations

Since the AQIP reaccreditation process is relatively new and since many of the best practices relating to continuous improvement in higher education evolved from the Baldrige approach, two websites are useful in seeking best practices: www.aqip.org and www.baldrige.nist.gov. It may be most helpful to provide several illustrative examples of what other institutions are doing regarding AQIP Action Projects. Information about each institution's AQIP activities can be obtained from their web sites.

All AQIP institutions are required to work on Action Projects. Action Projects are crafted to (1) help the institution develop the characteristics of a high-performance institution, characteristics articulated in the ten principles of high performance organization, and (2) to simultaneously engage the institution's administrators, faculty, and staff in concrete work that capitalizes on an institutional opportunity for improvement, critical problem-solving, or innovation.

Kent State University is working on three university-wide action projects. (1) Cultivate a Learner-Centered Environment for Success: the multiple facets of this project place students' success at the center of the institution's activities. Stage one will assess student, program, and environmental characteristics necessary to optimize student learning. Stage two will communicate assessment results to appropriate faculty and administrators for review and strategy formulation. Selected strategies will be implemented in stage three. In stage four, assessment of strategies will provide feedback for continuous improvement. Although the immediate priority of this action project is directed to undergraduate student learning and success, similar efforts in graduate education are expected. (2) Increase projects linking research, outreach, and/or workforce development: The University mission includes undergraduate and graduate education, basic and applied research, creative activity, and outreach. External stakeholders help identify "real world" problems and issues that can be addressed through these missions. These external stakeholders include knowledge-based businesses, start-up companies, state and federal agencies, and funding sources. This action project will identify and develop selected projects that advance the mission directions, especially those that use research to address real-world problems, create linkages with commercial and non-profit organizations, and/or promote workforce development for external organizations. (3) Improve the efficiency, effectiveness and communication of cross-divisional administrative processes: the purpose of this action project is to improve administrative processes by increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and communication so that we can direct resources toward the future growth and development of our academic mission. Employing workflow redesign with its standardized practices and principles is a key means to improve administrative processes. Structural reorganization is another means to improve administrative processes. This action project will consider both workflow redesign and reorganization approaches to improving administrative processes, while assuring that process planning and stakeholder communication are consequential elements of both approaches. In addition to these University Action Projects, each department/administrative division has one or more action projects.

Northern Michigan University has three Action Projects. These projects are (1) further development and implementation of a university-wide outcomes assessment plan; (2) creating a new student numbering system not based on social security numbers and an interactive student website, and (3) revising the current student advising system to make it more functional and attractive to both students and faculty/staff.

Ohio University has four Action Projects. The goal of the first is to develop and implement communication and orientation strategies that change expectations, attitudes, and behaviors of first-year students and foster their active engagement in learning, research, and creative activity. The focus of the second Action Project is to support faculty adoption of teaching and learning strategies that value student engagement in learning, research, and creative activity. Action project #3 provides residential programs and instructional spaces that facilitate student engagement in learning, research, and creative activity. Action project #4 is to “implement a revised general education program designed to ensure that students acquire deep, lasting learning through their engagement in learning, research, and creative activity.

Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville has four AQIP Action Projects. (1) refining and developing measures of student learning, (2) reshaping the new student transition, (3) improving student and administrative services, and (4) developing and refining the strategic planning process.

The University of Wisconsin-Stout is working on three AQIP Action Projects: (1) graduate education, (2) assessment of student learning – develop a framework for student learning assessment and develop/implement a process to measure the value created by the e-scholar program. (3) evaluating the Stout Technology Advantage. Develop infrastructure, training and incentives to encourage involvement in systems of leadership at UW-Stout. Currently there is a lack of interest in and incentives for leadership positions that may be caused by a non-supportive climate for leadership. UW-Stout identified the need for campus-level coordination and promotion of assessment and Baldrige-related outreach activities. Create a center that provides leadership and coordination of student learning assessment and offers Baldrige-focused quality training, consulting and other outreach services.

Western New Mexico University is working on three Action Projects: (1) create an academic advising process that enhances student retention. (2) Improve communication processes with all campus constituencies. (3) Increase funding to the University for academics, quality of student life, and infrastructure. Potential sources for increased funding include grants and contracts, donations from alumni and supporters, special projects and appropriations from the state and federal government, increased formula funding due to increased retention of students, and more effective use of internal resources.

IV. Opportunities for Systemic, Cross-College and/or Cross-Divisional Collaboration

Collaboration is the foundation for a continuous improvement environment. As divisions and colleges are involved in strategic planning, it is timely to critically review effectiveness and learning outcomes, and collaborate to address processes that will better serve students and other stakeholders. Similarly, when teams are appointed to work on the AQIP Action Projects, it will be important to have representation that cuts across units within the University.

The University Continuous Improvement Advisory Committee

Chairperson:

Dr. Donald Loppnow, Senior Executive, Strategic Planning and Continuous Improvement

Committee Members:

Dr. Imtiaz Ahmad, Professor, Computer Information Systems, and Faculty Council
Representative

Dr. Daryl Barton, Associate Professor, Marketing, and President of Faculty Council

Dr. James Berry, Associate Professor, Leadership and Counseling

Mark Byrd, Executive Director, Institutional Research and Information Management

Margaret Cline, Chief Information Officer and Executive Director, Information and
Communications Technology

Dr. John Dugger, Dean, College of Technology

Rebecca Figura, Director, Housing Services

Dr. April Flanagan, Director, Organizational Excellence, Human Resources

Ellen Gold, Director, University Health Services

Dr. Raouf Hanna, Department Head, Economics

Barbara Hopkins, Director, Center for Quality

Steve Holda, Assistant to the Vice President, Business and Finance

Bernice Lindke, Assistant Vice President, Enrollment Services

Dr. Mary Sue Marz, Interim Associate Dean, College of Health and Human Services

Vicki Reaume, Director, Alumni Relations

Dr. Robert Neely, Interim Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Bob Salisbury, Associate Director, Academic Advising

Kathleen Tinney, Assistant Vice President, University Relations

Dr. Sandra Williams, Director, Institutional Assessment, Institutional Research and
Information Management