

# Participation Application



Academic  
Quality Improvement  
Program

The Higher Learning Commission **NCA**

*Iowa Lakes Community College*

*Estherville*

*Iowa*

Name of Institution

City

State

Answer the following questions clearly, directly, and concisely. See *Application Instructions* for details. Your responses and explanations should total 3000 words at most – fewer than 10 printed pages. (The blank application form contains 682 words, so using *word count* or a similar word processing feature should indicate 3682 or fewer words for your completed application.)

1. Through what specific actions has your organization demonstrated its responsiveness to the Commission in addressing specific concerns or challenges identified by the Commission's last comprehensive evaluation?

Following are specific responses to the concerns identified by the 1998 NCA on-site team. A document is available upon request for Commission review that also describes Iowa Lakes responses to team recommendations for strengthening the college. This document was prepared for the Iowa Department of Education Interim Accreditation Team on-site visit in October 2003.

### **Team Concerns, Report of the Visit (1998), Section VII, page 30**

1. *"The faculty does not appear to be systematically involved in library acquisitions.*

**Response:** Faculty response to annual memos soliciting requests for purchasing new library materials has increased somewhat, especially among new faculty, those faculty who require student research as part of course work and those searching for alternate format resources.

2. *"The fragmented organizational structure of student services does not provide for a well-coordinated approach for the provision of student services throughout the college district."*

**Response:** A new position, Dean of Enrollment Management, has been added to the President's Cabinet with responsibility for student services functions collegewide.

The College continues to monitor need for expanded services and incorporate expansion in strategic planning processes. After careful study of alternatives for assisting students with childcare to facilitate college attendance, it was determined to be financially imprudent for the college to operate childcare facilities at each of its five campuses/centers. However, Iowa Lakes continues to work with community

partners to support students with childcare needs. Several federal and state grant programs secured by the college provide childcare stipends for students, including a 2002 federal CCAMPIS grant.

Counseling and Career Resource Center services are now provided at all five campuses on a routinely scheduled basis and via virtual counseling services online. Adequacy of these services is monitored through annual student surveys and focus groups. Modifications to services are planned in response to student needs identified through this process and staff observations.

**3. “The organizational structure is not understood by faculty and staff.”**

**Response:** Organizational structure changes have altered the decision-making and communications structures of Iowa Lakes. The new organizational structure has facilitated communications and interaction among the five college campuses. In 2002, the position of Chief Academic Officer was added to the President’s Cabinet with campus deans responsible to this position, as well as responsibility for collegewide academic quality, curriculum and faculty development. Campus Deans are now members of the President’s Cabinet. Each dean holds regular location-wide meetings with faculty and staff to facilitate two-way communication among all employees. An “electronic suggestion box” now collects suggestions for change in college policies, activities, processes. These are reviewed each time the President’s Cabinet meets and actions are published for all staff. A new position, Dean of Enrollment Management, has been added to the President’s Cabinet with responsibility for student services functions collegewide. These changes have resulted in more clarity of the delineated lines of responsibility and reporting.

**4. “The adjunct faculty files reviewed did not contain official transcripts” (p. 8; p. 30)**

**Response:** Procedures have been modified; Office of Human Resources reviews all adjunct faculty transcripts to ensure that each possesses appropriate credential for the courses assigned.

**2. What specific actions or activities are you planning in order to address any concerns or challenges from the Commission’s last comprehensive evaluation that are still active issues?**

As a college, we responded to each of the concerns almost immediately; however, our initial response to the four primary concerns of our 1998 NCA Visitation Team must not be our final response. Ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of these strategies and responses to new concerns as they arise will be the true measure of institutional quality and effectiveness. We believe AQIP’s continuous improvement model will be an effective tool to help us meet our mission, support our core values, and achieve our collegewide goals.

Issues such as faculty and staff understanding of organizational structure, fragmented services, and communication disconnects will continuously challenge a dynamic organization such as Iowa Lakes Community College. Ongoing scanning of environments, thoughtful response to identified needs, comprehensive planning developed by broad based participation, and acknowledgement that we may not always agree on a course of action but that we can find common ground for consensus if we keep students at the center of our deliberations are principles that we will continue to nurture as we proceed with our transition to AQIP participation.

**3. What are your plans for integrating participation in AQIP into your organization’s current agenda? Are there major events on the horizon**

**(e.g., a change in leadership, a major contract negotiation) that might distract your organization from advancing a strong quality initiative at this time?**

Major events on the horizon have been taken into consideration as Iowa Lakes Community College has planned a transition to AQIP as an alternative to traditional self-study and an ongoing operational philosophy. A change in the Iowa Lakes presidency in January 2002 and subsequent reorganization of administrative structures, integration of a collegewide Enrollment Management structure, and conversion of our management information systems to Datatel are major events that have defined our future and consumed our energies during the past three academic years. Datatel conversion will continue to command attention and require a change in operational processes through FY05. For that reason, even though AQIP application has been a collegewide goal since 2000, the application and implementation time frames have been carefully planned so as not to overwhelm schedules, personnel or levels of required change. That is not to say that quality improvement principles have been put on hold until these major events have been reconciled. Three examples of cross-functional, collegewide initiatives employing AQIP processes include [1] the Enrollment Management Team (18 member committee of faculty, administrators and support staff) which has assumed leadership for strengthening recruitment and retention processes within the college, [2] the Assessment Review Committee (20 member committee of faculty, students, administrators and support staffs) responsible for learning and institutional outcomes, accreditation, and student/program assessment initiative, and [3] Technology and Equipment Funding Committee (10 member faculty, support staff and administrator committee) coordinating allocation of institutional resources (state aid, tax levy and grants) to support collegewide and classroom/lab technology and equipment needs. The processes employed by these committees have been lifted up to all college staff as examples of the "AQIP way" in an effort to build grassroots support for and acceptance of AQIP transition. A collegewide AQIP awareness campaign has been implemented during FY04 by the Assessment Review Committee which has included opportunities for campus group discussions of the value and anticipated changes in expectations that will occur as a result of AQIP participation. At the invitation and with the full support of the college president, the Assessment Review Committee began by educating the Board of Trustees and gaining their unanimous support for the move to AQIP. A plan for systematically informing and building consensus for AQIP participation among all college constituencies was then initiated. A six-person subcommittee of the Assessment Review Committee will act as the Steering Committee/leadership for transition through the Vital Focus process.

**4. How would participation in AQIP enhance your organization's ability to document that it meets the Higher Learning Commission's five standard Criteria for Accreditation?**

Because the five criteria are integrated into the nine AQIP Quality Principles, we would be able to systematically review our status/progress in responding to institutional priorities within the framework of the five HLC standard criteria for accreditation rather than every 10 years. In October 2003, Dr. David Claeys conducted an evaluation of whether AQIP participation would be appropriate for Iowa Lakes as part of a site visit as part of our Iowa Department of Education Interim Accreditation Visit. Excerpts from his report support the enhancements the college will gain from AQIP participation:

*"While several examples of quality improvement projects exist, it is not clear that senior leadership, faculty, and staff understand the systematic nature of continuous quality improvement or demands of AQIP. ...Additionally, it is not clear that the college has identified a systematic improvement approach, such as the Plan-Do-Check-Act process. As previously noted, there are examples of successful projects, but consistency of quality improvement techniques is coincidental. Also, there appears to be a lack of tracking team successes and limited or no evaluation of methods used to achieve success.*

*Finally, while data collection and use for decision-making are frequent, it is not clear that performance data are compiled college-wide and tracked or benchmarked vis-à-vis the nine AQIP criteria. Performance data for six areas – persistence, degree completion, critical literacy skills, student satisfaction, placement rate, and employer satisfaction – are tracked and reported to stakeholders in the annual report.*

*The approach to becoming a better college is not limited to AQIP participation for re-accreditation. But a strategic decision to pursue AQIP will significantly increase the likelihood that ILCC will meet and exceed the needs of stakeholders in the college's service area and align the college closer to attributes of high-performing organizations."*

[Excerpted from the Interim Accreditation Evaluation of Iowa Lakes Community College Report (March 2003).

**5. If the Commission has not conducted an on-site evaluation of your organization within the prior six academic years, describe the third-party evidence (e.g., from a state or other accrediting agency review) that documents the health and vitality of your organization? (See Instructions to determine whether you need to answer this question.)**

The last on-site evaluation of Iowa Lakes Community College by a Commission team was in 1998. Iowa code mandates that the state Department of Education conduct an interim evaluation mid-point in a community college's 10-year accreditation cycle. The official report of that October 2003 visit is available for Commission review upon request. As part of the interim evaluation, the Department of Education reviews the college's progress in responding to concerns raised by the last NCA on-site visit, evaluates the college's comprehensive program review processes, and conducts peer review of up to three focus-topics chosen by the college. Enrollment Management, Assessment of Student Learning, and AQIP readiness were the focus topics chosen for the October 2003 site visit. The team's findings are included in the report approved by the Iowa Board of Education in March 2004. Following are excerpts from that report:

### **INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHS**

1. The college is applying attributes of quality improvement in selected areas.
2. Leadership efforts are emerging to establish and accomplish institutional goals.
3. The college's philosophy supports positive relationships with the community and college constituents.
4. There is pride and attention to detail in the appearance of the community college facilities.
5. Faculty and staff support efforts to improve the institution and to meet the learning needs of its students.

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT**

1. The challenge for Iowa Lakes Community College continues to be its journey toward becoming a better college.
2. Data collection, data evaluation, and the continuous improvement systems utilized will be critical to achieving the goals of the college's strategic plan. Like all Iowa community colleges, Iowa Lakes Community College, in partnership with the Department of Education, must continue to develop its data-driven decision-making capability.

## RECOMMENDATION

As a result of its visit to Iowa Lakes Community College in October 2003, the accreditation team will make no recommendations to the Director of the Department of Education and the State Board of Education regarding actions that the college must undertake in order to continue its state accreditation.

## ACCREDITATION STATUS

The interim accreditation team recommends to the Director of the Department of Education and the State Board of Education that Iowa Lakes Community College be granted continuation of its ten-year state accreditation. A ten-year accreditation state visit will be conducted during 2008 to coincide with the Higher Learning Commission accreditation cycle.

**6. What is the evidence that key groups in your organization (e.g., Board, CEO, senior leaders, faculty, and staff) understand the nature of continuous improvement efforts and the demands of AQIP?**

Plans for integrating began in 2000, but were put on hold when our former president announced his retirement. It was determined that pursuing AQIP application should be the decision of the new president. Once Dr. Hupfer gave his endorsement for AQIP participation, The Assessment Review Committee (9 faculty, 3 support program coordinators, 3 senior administrators, 2 campus executive deans, 1 classified support, 1 student) assumed the leadership for collegewide awareness building and establishing a timeline for AQIP application. The committee members first educated themselves about AQIP and came to consensus regarding an appropriate time table for informing the academy and conducting the required elements of comprehensive assessment, application, focused discussion and strategy forum participation.

The Trustees and President's Cabinet were the first campus cohorts targeted for awareness and consensus building activities. The Trustees were engaged in conversation during their July 2003 summer retreat. Board support for the process was unanimous and two Trustees volunteered to participate in the Strategy Forum process. AQIP Readiness was an area of focus chosen for our October 2003 Iowa Department of Education Interim Accreditation Visit. Other campus groups were engaged in AQIP conversations during fall 2003, culminating in a presentation during the January 2004 All Staff In-service day. Additional informal discussion took place during the spring 2004 term.

Throughout the 2003 – 2004 academic year, periodic emails highlighting AQIP principles and processes were distributed to all employees as part of the college's regular Friday *Info in a Minute* electronic newsletter.

Finally, during the fall 2004 all staff in-service week, representatives from an AQIP mentor college will be invited to present break-out sessions for employee groups to discuss the mentor college's AQIP experience and discuss concerns Iowa Lakes staff may have about AQIP participation. These mentors will also meet with senior leadership to discuss changes in their role that may be expected as part of AQIP participation.

**7. What is the level and extent of organizational commitment to a continuous improvement approach? Who are your strongest advocates for a quality initiative?**

In December 2003, the President's Cabinet unanimously endorsed the decision to apply for AQIP participation. The Board of Trustees has firmly endorsed this decision and a Trustee has been identified to participate in the Strategy Forum. Leadership for implementing the Vital Focus process has been assigned to the Assessment Review Committee and a budget for FY05 activities has been developed. Additional documentation of the college's level of commitment may be found in excerpts of our October 2003 Interim Accreditation Visit by the Iowa Department of Education:

*"A Review of the College's Preparedness for the Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)"*

*The final specialized review was included in the interim accreditation visit to assess the readiness of the college for applying to the Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). Based on two days of interviewing stakeholder groups and examining college documents, it appears that ILCC is in the early stages of what AQIP identifies as the Exploratory Phase. The enthusiasm and commitment to quality improvement techniques are very strong among several employees. The college culture is consistent with AQIP values. However, further progress toward AQIP participation will require a strategic decision by senior leadership.*

*There is evidence that the college is applying attributes of quality improvement in selected areas and there is a commitment by the college to become better. The use of data for decision-making is reflected in activities such as student retention, degree completion, placement, literacy skills, employer satisfaction, classroom research, enrollment management, program evaluation, curriculum improvement, transfer success, and strategic planning. A commitment to listening to stakeholders (student, employer, and community) needs is evidenced by using surveys and focus group techniques. The use of teams for improvement is reflected by the work accomplished by the enrollment management and the assessment teams."*

[Excerpted from the Interim Accreditation Evaluation of Iowa Lakes Community College Report (March 2003)].

**8. What organizational systems, structures, and other resources (e.g., a quality council, task forces, training programs, etc.) currently exist that will sustain your continuous improvement efforts? What involvement have you had with other organizations promoting continuous improvement?**

Iowa Lakes Community College made the decision to make AQIP application after thoughtful study and recommendation to proceed by the Assessment Review Committee. The final decision to apply was made after a period of awareness building and opportunities for discussion with the entire faculty and staff, and with the full endorsement and support by the Board of Trustees, Iowa Lakes President, and President's Cabinet.

The Assessment Review Committee (ARC) will provide leadership for transition to AQIP. ARC will continue to provide leadership, general oversight, and annual evaluation of the effectiveness of AQIP processes throughout the Action Projects implementation phase. ARC efforts are coordinated by J. Cook, Executive Director for Planning and Development, and A. Wimmer, Economics Professor. The ARC also coordinates the college's ongoing Comprehensive Program Review and Evaluation and student outcomes assessment processes.

There is a college budget established for these ongoing ARC activities, as well as the activities associated with Vital Focus and Strategy Forum activities for FY05.

Involvement with Other Organizations:

- ✦ 1993: TQM training collegewide.
- ✦ Dr. David Claeys, Eastern Iowa Community College District, chaired a review of Iowa Lakes AQIP readiness during an October 2003 on the Iowa Department of Education Interim Accreditation on-site visit. Dr. Claeys continued to act as a resource for Iowa Lakes during the collegewide awareness building phase.
- ✦ The legislatively-mandated community college accreditation process incorporates annual reporting of comprehensive program evaluation, student outcomes and progress toward achieving strategic college initiatives with a five-year site visit process with a focus on continuous improvement.

**9. What is the extent of your organization's experience using performance measures (other than measures of revenues, expenditures, and enrollment); gathering comparative data from other organizations to identify performance gaps and opportunities; or benchmarking to identify best practices relating to a particular process you have targeted for improvement?**

Each year, as part of the public annual reporting process, Iowa Lakes Community College publishes an institutional effectiveness report. This report is organized around the 13 core indicators of comprehensive community college effectiveness that were identified in 1994 by the Community College Roundtable. For each of the 13 indicators, statewide or national comparison data is used to compare institutional effectiveness, as well as reviewing college longitudinal data for each of the indicators. Student outcomes data are also review by a Collegewide committee (Assessment Review Committee) and by individual programs, disciplines, and special interest committees. Data is used for continuous improvement of college programs, courses and student outcomes. Faculty have been trained in Classroom Research techniques and each general education faculty member completes at least one classroom research project annually. Results of these are discussed among discipline groups and gathered for future use by all faculty.

Career and technical programs use Diploma Technologies software to align program/course competencies with state, regional and national standards and document student outcomes. Each has identified core competencies as minimum standards for successful completers. Program Advisory Committees review and endorse or modify these competencies periodically.

A number of nationally validated instruments are used to evaluate general education outcomes (ACT,ASSET/COMPASS,CAAP) and identify at-risk students (Noel-Levitz) for early intervention, and monitor student expectations, perceptions and satisfaction (Entering Student Survey, Student Opinion Survey, Before Graduation Survey, Alumni Survey). This data is also used for continuous improvement purposes. Learning Styles Assessment used to empower student to improve learning outcomes and assist faculty in understanding and adapting their teaching to meet the needs of learners with multiple learning styles.

Student and Community Focus groups gather feedback regarding satisfaction, emerging trends, disconnects between current educational programs and consumer/community/employer expectations of

graduates. This data is shared Collegewide and used to develop new programs/ services and modify current offerings to respond to the dynamic needs of our constituents.

**10. What is your organization's other experience in continuous improvement (e.g., employee empowerment, process improvement, stakeholder need analysis, root cause analysis, etc.)?**

A number of Collegewide processes are employed annually, based on continuous improvement principles. Many of these have been described above. Examples of current processes in place include:

- Program Review & Evaluation Process (cross-functional teams review program data/outcome and provide recommendations for systemic support/assistance for strengthening program and achieving goals.)
- Entering Student Survey, Student Opinion Survey, Student Focus Groups (data used to gather student perceptions/concerns, evaluate trends and improve programs and services).
- Annual Community Focus Groups (data used to gather community and employer input/perceptions/concerns, evaluate trends and improve programs and services or develop new programming to respond to constituent needs).
- Enrollment Management Team (Collegewide focus groups, compression planning discussions, systemic planning to achieve shared institutional goals to increase student recruitment and retention.)
- Assessment Review Committee (analyzes institutional effectiveness data and makes recommendations for institutional improvement; provides leadership and facilitation for student & program assessment.)
- Technology & Equipment Committee (cross-functional team analyzes institutional technology/equipment needs, allocates funding for new technology/equipment purchases and re-distributes used technology to respond to staff and student needs. As a result, the college has fulfilled more than 90% of faculty and staff technology/equipment requests for two straight years – since committee was initiated. Prior to this, there was no Collegewide process/policy for requesting or approving technology and equipment purchases. As a result, there was lack of consistency among departments/campuses in identifying and fulfilling technology/equipment needs for staff, classrooms, and student labs.)

**11. How are you planning to meet AQIP's requirement to conduct a self-assessment from a systems- or process-focused perspective prior to attending a Strategy Forum?**

- ✚ A six-member Iowa Lakes team participated in Vital Focus Design Training (Lisle, IL) June 14 – 16, 2004. This team will serve as Steering Committee for AQIP Transition
- ✚ An AQIP Mentor College will be invited to lead break-out sessions during August 2004 all-staff in-service day to provide all employees an opportunity to raise concerns and gain a greater understanding of AQIP processes and how it will affect them.

- ✦ Iowa Lakes will employ HLC's Vital Focus resources to conduct Constellation Survey (October 2004) and Focused Discussions (January 2005).
- ✦ Members of Iowa Lakes Assessment Review Committee and Enrollment Management Team will conduct Post-Conversation Day focused-interviews to further refine "Provocative Possibilities list with all college employees. Student leaders will hold public forums with student body to gather their perspective/input. The Steering Committee will further refine the list, and recommend to the ARC and the President's Cabinet up to eight potential action projects to take to Strategy Forum in May 2005.

**12. How will your organization identify prospective Action Projects prior to attending a Strategy Forum?**

Based on priorities identified as part of the Vital Focus process, the ARC/AQIP Steering Committee will review HLC analysis report and recommend up to eight areas of focus to the president's cabinet. The cabinet will discuss recommendations and align with strategic planning priorities for fiscal years 2006 – 2008. List of potential action projects will be refined to six. A Strategy Forum leadership group will be chosen by the President to take this potential group of projects to the Strategic Forum where the final 3 – 4 action projects will be finalized with the assistance of the Strategic Forum Mentor group.

*When you submit this application, please name a formal AQIP Liaison for your organization – someone who is centrally involved in your quality initiative. (It need not be the CEO or chief academic officer. We intend to continue to communicate closely with your CEO and CAO and other members of your leadership, but having someone we can call or email directly and regarding details of your relationship with AQIP will make our communications more efficient. You should inform AQIP that you have changed your AQIP Liaison at any time.)*

**Contact information for institution's Academic Quality Improvement Program Liaison:**

***Ms. Judith Cook, Executive Director/Planning & Development***

Title, Name, and Job Title of Liaison

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Before you email this *Participation Application* to AQIP@hlcommission.org, make certain it has been reviewed and approved by your organization's CEO. Then have the CEO sign the separate *Application Affirmation* form and fax it to AQIP at 312-263-7462. Questions? Call 800-621-7440 and ask for AQIP.