AQIP Quality Program Summary
August 2011

Prepared for the AQIP Quality Checkup Visit
September 21-23, 2011
History and Background

Bismarck State College has a history of involvement with quality improvement going back to the 1980s. Total Quality Management (later Total Quality Improvement) principles and techniques were shared with all employees and, for a time, Total Quality Management (TQM) was the vehicle promoted to improve campus processes and activities. Even though TQM faded on campus, there remained an institutional understanding of the value of quality improvement processes.

When AQIP was offered as an alternative to the traditional accreditation process, we developed a team to look seriously at applying to become an AQIP college. We reviewed the AQIP process, investigated other AQIP colleges, and had a representative of an AQIP college come to BSC and present more in-depth information about AQIP. After more study and discussion we decided that AQIP would be beneficial to the college and that it would bring us back to a quality improvement focus that was future oriented. Bismarck State College was accepted as an AQIP institution on April 27, 2005.

A group of employees attended the first strategy forum, and a subsequent Conversation Day helped us identify two sets of issues that we felt most needed to be addressed. One category of need consisted of relatively simple, yet vexing problems. That list became our “quick fix” list. The second category of issues gave rise to a number of action projects. As the campus worked its way through that list we felt a need to revisit and refresh our priorities. In February 2009, therefore, a mini-conversation day for all employees yielded the next set of action projects to be undertaken.

Systems Portfolio writing teams were formed in 2006-2007, ahead of the arrival of our new president, to gather information and to draft responses to the questions in each of the categories of the portfolio. This was a process that engaged many employees and deepened the value of the AQIP program as we looked closely at college processes, results, and improvements. Our first Systems Portfolio was submitted to the Higher Learning Commission on June 1, 2009.

They Systems Appraisal report was received in October 2009. The report has been used to stimulate review and analysis of the feedback. A second Strategy Forum was attended in November 2010 and work continues on the action projects.

AQIP is viewed on campus as formal process for sustaining our regional accreditation that embodies that principles and concepts of continuous quality improvement. It allows us to focus on our most pressing needs and promising opportunities. AQIP, and continuous quality improvement, provides the core of our emerging campus culture of innovation and empowerment. The concomitant development of a flat operational structure has put decision-making at the lowest level possible and encourages everyone to be responsible for improving quality.
First Strategy Forum

Eight team members participated in a Strategy Forum October 5-8, 2005. Discussions at the Strategy Forum helped the team formulate ideas for the conversation day, in addition to fostering discussion about potential ideas for action projects.

After the Strategy Forum, an AQIP Coordinating Team was formed with the purpose of keeping the campus on track with action projects and other aspects of AQIP. The AQIP Coordinating Team still serves as an oversight group that assists in communicating AQIP activities and principles to the campus. The team helps plan conversation days and other events, as well as working with teams that write and/or edit the Systems Portfolio.

Systems Portfolio

The Systems Portfolio was developed by employee writing teams, each consisting of four or five people. These teams met regularly and often for about 18 months during which they gathered information to appropriately answer the required questions. Answers were drafted, reviewed, and then put into final format for the Portfolio which was submitted in June 2009. This effort was very helpful in identifying areas in which more work was needed, as well as helping us to see the college strengths.

Systems Appraisal

We awaited the Systems Appraisal report with much anticipation and were pleased to learn that the review team concluded that Bismarck State College complies with the Criteria for Accreditation. We were also interested to learn more of the four strategic issues that were identified by the review team. Two of the issues center around the need to develop feedback loops and improve evaluation processes.

The Appraisal report was reviewed by a diverse group of employees, including members of the Executive Council, the Operations Council, the AQIP Coordinating Team, and the Academic Assessment Committee. The Portfolio and Appraisal were placed on the campus website along with a power point presentation that explained the AQIP process and encouraged all campus employees to familiarize themselves with the documents. In addition, the Portfolio and Appraisal were the focus of a strategic planning retreat.

A key theme illuminated by the Systems Appraisal was the opportunity for improving the gathering and use of data for decision-making. This is a need that resonated with many employees and was seen as critical for improving evaluation activities and providing necessary feedback.
Second Strategy Forum

In November 2010, eight team members attended our second Strategy Forum. In preparation of the Forum, the team members reviewed the Systems Appraisal and completed the required documents for the Higher Learning Commission. The AQIP Quality Culture and Infrastructure Survey completed by numerous employees helped the team members pinpoint the AQIP category that needed the most attention and effort. We believed that significant improvement by BSC in Category Seven: Measuring Effectiveness, would provide the impetus to making equally significant progress with our strategic issues and other areas that need improvement.

At the Strategy Forum the team members focused on the need for improving our data gathering capacity and for using data for informed decision-making. The team identified the problems, opportunities, and key stakeholders. Through numerous discussions it became apparent to the team that many of our colleagues were confused by the overlapping initiatives on campus (i.e., AQIP, CQI, Innovation, Empowerment, and “Flat Campus”) and failed to see them as part of an overall culture of quality toward which we are growing. The team determined a timeline and an organizational approach to achieving success with this project.

After the team returned to campus employees were given the opportunity to attend one of four campus forums that were held to share the results from the Strategy Forum. These Quality Initiative Forums focused, in part, on our initiatives in innovation, quality improvement, empowerment, and improving data capacity. The President, Provost, and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs were the presenters at the forums that were attended by approximately 120 employees. It was the goal of the presenters to increase employee awareness of the linkages among our various campus initiatives and to understand that they are all focused on improving quality to meet the needs of students and other stakeholders. A number of the attendees remarked that they felt the forums helped employees connect the dots with the various quality initiatives on campus.

Strategic Issues Identified in the Systems Appraisal

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

BSC employees recognize the need to develop our capacity for data gathering and use for decision-making. A Title III grant was submitted expressly for the improvement of data and its use. We are awaiting word about whether we will be awarded the grant, but have received favorable indication that we will receive the grant. We are planning to participate in a national benchmarking project that will provide comparative data the college can use in making decisions for improvement in many areas.
**Strategic Issue 2:** The transition to a new leadership and continued energy for cultural evolution and improvement.

A culture of innovation is emerging as a result of new leadership for the college. Quality improvement is closely linked to innovation. The college has a flatter decision-making structure (see diagram below) that fosters empowerment and employee involvement. These changes have taken some time to be assimilated but are gradually becoming enculturated.

![Flattened Operational Structure](image)

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

Improving data gathering capabilities are needed to continue to develop methods that can effectively evaluate placement tests and learning objectives. Improving assessment methods and using assessment data is an ongoing effort. At the faculty inservice sessions prior to the start of fall semester a speaker will present to the faculty about assessment and will spend time with the assessment committee to provide advice. One of our goals is to better leverage the use of TracDat as one way of documenting evaluative data.
**Strategic Issue 4:** It is unclear how AQIP Action Projects become part of the longer-term strategic planning process.

AQIP action projects were incorporated into the [2010-2012 college strategic plan](#). The current plan is linked to AQIP categories and, thus, provides a natural connection with AQIP and action projects, as well as other quality improvement projects.

**Action Project History**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Start/Finish</th>
<th>Description/Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee Training in Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Principles and Practices</td>
<td>01/2006 - 12/2010</td>
<td>When this AQIP project began the main focus was to introduce the continuous quality improvement process to our campus culture. This goal was met and is producing spin-off type projects, all relating to the continuous quality improvement process. The project resulted in both training for current employees, as well as the development of a training program for new employees.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding Your Way with Campus Connection</td>
<td>1/2006 - 1/2010</td>
<td>CampusConnection, the North Dakota University System data management software, is a means of managing and finding personal and campus information. The primary goals of this project were met through educating users of CampusConnection so they could effectively use this tool. It was critical that new and returning students were competent with the software as it was introduced in 2006.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigate and Improve the Incoming Freshman Advising Process</td>
<td>1/2006 - 1/2010</td>
<td>This project addressed what had long been seen as a major weakness on campus, i.e., providing effective, accurate and timely advising to new students on campus. It was a forerunner to the development of an advising center. The project focused on concerns surrounding student advising, orientation, and registration. These processes were improved and students are now required to see an advisor prior to registration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing an Advising Center for Students at Bismarck State</td>
<td>01/2005 - 12/2010</td>
<td>Growing out of the previous action project addressing the freshman advising process, the primary goal of this project was to create and fund an advising center that would increase student satisfaction with their overall</td>
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experience at BSC and increase student engagement in their education and career plans. The Mystic Advising and Counseling Center is operational and meeting the advising needs of students.

**Fostering a Culture of Innovation through an Office of Innovation at Bismarck State College**

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<th>Project Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Developing a One-Card System at Bismarck State College</td>
<td>9/2007 -</td>
<td>Continuous quality improvement, in order to keep an organization fresh, vital, and progressive, requires the application of innovation to the solutions for the problems facing higher education in the twenty-first century. The creation of an Office of Innovation and application of innovative processes has contributed to the culture of innovation. With the establishment of the Office of Innovation, ongoing training for current and new employees, and providing support for innovative ideas on campus, the project is nearing completion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing Plans and Processes for Systematizing Institutional Effectiveness Efforts</td>
<td>3/2010 -</td>
<td>This action project will address the need for developing a model and plan for institutional effectiveness, identifying performance indicators, instituting data-informed decision making, and increasing accountability and transparency. Through the project we will improve planning processes and develop an institutional effectiveness plan for the college. An important component of the project is to foster a culture of evidence-based practice and to educate employees about their role in effectiveness and accountability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping Entering Students Succeed in College</td>
<td>4/2010 -</td>
<td>The goal of this project is to ensure that students enrolling in Bismarck State College make a good transition to college life. A student success project will help students be successful both in and out of the classroom. The project will assist students in acclimating</td>
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to the college, add to their sense of belonging, and will provide them with tools that will enable them to succeed as students.

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<th>Improve and Enhance Service Learning</th>
<th>4/2010 -</th>
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<td>The project goal is to improve and enhance a service learning program at BSC in a way that integrates community service with the college curriculum. A comprehensive service learning plan and systematized processes will be developed to provide more meaningful service learning opportunities for students. Through this action project, student lives will be impacted through a curriculum of increased relevance to the community.</td>
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**Future Activities**

In the next year, BSC will focus attention on the following tasks:

- making progress on our current action projects
- developing greater capacity for data gathering and use through:
  - developing a campus inventory of the various kinds of data sources and capabilities for data use
  - implementing the Title III grant
  - work on developing a culture of evidence for the college
  - expanding the role of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness
- improving access to institutional data and us of data for decision-making at all levels
- creating an institutional effectiveness plan for the college
- closing out the 2010-2012 strategic plan
- engaging the campus and community in a collaborative and inclusive strategic planning process that will result in a new five-year plan that integrates planning and budgeting
- improving the use of assessment data and make necessary changes that will increase student learning and ensure that activities, such as placement tests, are effective
- developing a process for the evaluation of administrative units
- continuing the revision and improvement of the Systems Portfolio.