

**Systems Appraisal Feedback Report**

In response to the *Systems Portfolio* of

Northwestern Michigan College

February 27, 2014

for

**The Higher Learning Commission**

A commission of the North Central Association

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## Elements of Northwestern Michigan College's Feedback Report

Welcome to the *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report*. This report provides AQIP's official response to an institution's *Systems Portfolio* by a team of peer reviewers (the Systems Appraisal Team). After the team independently reviews the institution's portfolio, it reaches consensus on essential elements of the institutional profile, strengths and opportunities for improvement by AQIP Category, and any significant issues related to accreditation. These are then presented in three sections of the *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report*: "Strategic Challenges Analysis," "AQIP Category Feedback," and "Accreditation Issues Analysis." These components are interrelated in defining context, evaluating institutional performance, surfacing critical issues or accreditation concerns, and assessing institutional performance. Ahead of these three areas, the team provides a "Reflective Introduction" followed closely by an "Executive Summary." The appraisal concludes with commentary on the overall quality of the report and advice on using the report. Each of these areas is overviewed below.

It is important to remember that the Systems Appraisal Team has only the institution's *Systems Portfolio* to guide its analysis of the institution's strengths and opportunities for improvement. Consequently, the team's report may omit important strengths, particularly if discussion or documentation of these areas in the *Systems Portfolio* were presented minimally. Similarly, the team may point out areas of potential improvement that are already receiving widespread institutional attention. Indeed, it is possible that some areas recommended for potential improvement have since become strengths rather than opportunities through the institution's ongoing efforts. Recall that the overarching goal of the Systems Appraisal Team is to provide an institution with the best possible advice for ongoing improvement.

The various sections of the *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report* can be described as follows:

**Reflective Introduction & Executive Summary:** In this first section of the *System's Appraisal Feedback Report*, the team provides a summative statement that reflects its broad understanding of the institution and the constituents served (Reflective Introduction), and also the team's overall judgment regarding the institution's current performance in relation to the nine AQIP Categories (Executive Summary). In the Executive Summary, the team considers such factors as: robustness of process design; utilization or deployment of processes; the existence of results, trends, and comparative data; the use of results data as feedback; and systematic processes for improvement of the activities that each AQIP

Category covers. Since institutions are complex, maturity levels may vary from one Category to another.

**Strategic Challenges Analysis:** Strategic challenges are those most closely related to an institution's ability to succeed in reaching its mission, planning, and quality improvement goals. Teams formulate judgments related to strategic challenges and accreditation issues (discussed below) through careful analysis of the Organizational Overview included in the institution's Systems Portfolio and through the team's own feedback provided for each AQIP Category. These collected findings offer a framework for future improvement of processes and systems.

**AQIP Category Feedback:** The *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report* addresses each AQIP Category by identifying and coding strengths and opportunities for improvement. An **S** or **SS** identifies strengths, with the double letter signifying important achievements or capabilities upon which to build. Opportunities are designated by **O**, with **OO** indicating areas where attention may result in more significant improvement. Through comments, which are keyed to the institution's Systems Portfolio, the team offers brief analysis of each strength and opportunity. Organized by AQIP Category, and presenting the team's findings in detail, this section is often considered the heart of the *Feedback Report*.

**Accreditation Issues Analysis:** Accreditation issues are areas where an institution may have not yet provided sufficient evidence that it meets the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation. It is also possible that the evidence provided suggests to the team that the institution may have difficulties, whether at present or in the future, in satisfying the *Criteria*. As with strategic challenges, teams formulate judgments related to accreditation issues through close analysis of the entire Systems Portfolio, with particular attention given to the evidence that the institution provides for satisfying the various core components of the *Criteria*. For purposes of consistency, AQIP instructs appraisal teams to identify any accreditation issue as a strategic challenge as well.

**Quality of Report & Its Use:** As with any institutional report, the *Systems Portfolio* should work to enhance the integrity and credibility of the institution by celebrating successes while also stating honestly those opportunities for improvement. The *Systems Portfolio* should therefore be transformational, and it should provide external peer reviewers insight as to how such transformation may occur through processes of continuous improvement. The AQIP Categories and the Criteria for Accreditation serve as the overarching measures for the institution's current state, as well as its proposed future state. As such, it is imperative

that the *Portfolio* be fully developed, that it adhere to the prescribed format, and that it be thoroughly vetted for clarity and correctness. Though decisions about specific actions rest with each institution following this review, AQIP expects every institution to use its feedback to stimulate cycles of continual improvement and to inform future AQIP processes.

## **Reflective Introduction and Executive Summary for Northwestern Michigan College**

The following consensus statement is from the System Appraisal Team's review of the institution's *Systems Portfolio Overview* and its introductions to the nine AQIP Categories. The purpose of this reflective introduction is to highlight the team's broad understanding of the institution, its mission, and the constituents that it serves.

*Northwestern Michigan College (NMC) is a publicly funded, two-year, rural college, serving an area of six counties since 1951. The college is a well-established institution which has formed extensive relationships with the local community and partner institutions. NMC is pending approval by the Higher Learning Commission, to offer a community college baccalaureate degree in Maritime Technology and was the first community college in the state to offer a baccalaureate degree. The college is in its 9th year in AQIP and is striving to grow its culture of evidence by expanding/broadening its use of Continuous Quality Improvement. NMC provides specific examples of how improvements have been identified and implemented and appears to be an institution well along the path to CQI process maturity.*

The following are summary comments on each of the AQIP Categories crafted by the Appraisal Team to highlight Northwestern Michigan College's achievements and to identify challenges yet to be met.

- Category 1: With more than 60 program areas, 4727 learners in liberal arts and nearly 10,000 students in non-credit courses, NMC provides a broad range of diverse educational opportunities to the service area. The college has participated in HLC student assessment programs and has focused several Action Projects to create an effective assessment of student learning processes. NMC has identified its challenges and continues to demonstrate its commitment to increasing student completion. Although the processes in Category 1 vary in maturity, the trend is towards greater maturity.

Category 2: Northwestern Michigan College appears committed to functioning as an institution that provides outstanding workforce training and to becoming a major force in

enriching its service area communities. NMC's use of the Learning Resources Network is evidence of its efforts to systematically improve the communities it serves. Among the steps taken by NMC to accomplish these goals is to apply an aligned planning process that allows the resource needs of its other distinctive objectives to be considered on an equal basis with its instructional resource requirements. To date the College has developed a detailed list of performance measures it monitors on a regular basis and uses this data to adjust/improve its processes relating to workforce training and community enrichment. NMC has an opportunity to report more exact benchmarking data regarding community enrichment activities. NMC demonstrates progress in this category.

Category 3: NMC has numerous processes resulting in actionable data and results that support efforts to address student and other stakeholder needs. The College uses what it calls a "grasping the situation" approach to its strategic planning process and identifies three stakeholder categories: Listening to Learners, Listening to Employees, and Listening to the Community. The College employs both direct and indirect methods to measure its effectiveness, and benchmarks its results against both state and national norms. It uses its data to make improvements and develop processes on a continual basis. Recent improvements in responding to students and stakeholder's needs have led to continued improvements and revisions to programs and projects that have resulted from the College's culture of continuous improvement.

- Category 4: NMC has directed considerable attention to Valuing People since its last Portfolio and reports improvements in most processes in this category. The College is in the third phase of an Action Project "focused on attracting, developing, and retaining talent." One important outcome has been the creation of a "Competency Model" to "identify the specific credentials, skills, and values required for faculty, staff, and administration." The College is engaged in two initiatives: redesigning the processes for performance planning and assessment as well as reviewing compensation in all employee groups. NMC recognizes the need for alignment and continual assessment of existing activities using data for planning.
- Category 5: NMC has developed a Guiding Principles Map and has worked to align its institutional values with the AQIP principles of high performance institutions. A significant shift in the College's purposes occurred in spring 2013 when the College elected to provide Bachelor's degrees in select areas as a result of student feedback, industry input, and changes in Michigan state law. It appears NMC has aligned leadership, decision-making,

and communication processes to support continuous improvement, especially through the strategic planning process. The College has identified and begun several initiatives that are still in development. These projects will assist the College in moving from a systematic to an aligned level of maturity.

- Category 6: NMC has adopted a systematic approach to supporting institutional operations regarding the support service needs of students and other key stakeholders. It entails three listening modes: Listening to the Community, Listening to Employees, and Listening to Students. The information obtained is aligned with the College's overall strategic planning process. Notably, NMC utilizes a variety of technologies to share information across campus, including network shared drives, Google applications, and the College's intranet home page. It manages day-to-day processes for student, administrative and organizational support service processes by using "help desk" ticketing systems, project work order systems, and data dashboards. It appears that the College is attempting to improve its processes and has the potential to move from a systematic to an aligned level of maturity.
- Category 7: NMC maintains a digital dashboard to provide real-time data essential for decision making in enrollment management, classroom management, and instructional delivery. NMC has also expanded its dashboard to include a "Cost to Educate" model which generates a breakdown of each program's personnel, operating and capital costs, and its revenues from tuition and fees. In addition, the College maintains a "student datamart" with information on admissions, placement, course schedule, transcript, awards, transfer, and student demographics. NMC's intranet system is a key element in gathering and distributing data. The data provided in this portfolio is evidence the institution has expanded its collection and analysis of metrics and has improved how it communicates these data. NMC's approach provides evidence that it wishes to identify and define all potential opportunities for continuous improvement. NMC also has the opportunity to expand its use of comparative data to benchmark its performance, using these data to inform future planning and to identify future strategic opportunities.
- Category 8: NMC has created an initiative it calls the "Aligned Planning AQIP Action Project." This activity has resulted in the creation of a new position to coordinate strategic and operational planning and the creation of a "campus-wide process for planning at both of these levels." The College reports that its process for planning continuous improvement is "stable, consciously managed, and regularly evaluated for improvement." It has recently added a final component aimed at performance planning and assessment to develop links

between the College's organizational, departmental, and individual action plans. Other initiatives include improved process communication, improved performance metrics, and professional development for supervisors.

- Category 9: NMC articulates a strong commitment to collaborative relationships in its institutional value statement and strategic directions. The College employs environmental scanning, community involvement and an analysis of regional priorities to focus its collaborative efforts. NMC has developed an "institute-model" for partnerships that meet specific regional needs—based on a desire to coordinate resources, a shared understanding of the regions assets and strengths, and identification of the necessary skill sets for accomplishing the goals of a partnership. The majority of NMC's relationships appear to center on both feeder and receiver institutions and on those who have impact/influence on students, including programs that support veterans. One major, long-standing collaborative initiative is NMC's University Center through which the institution works with eight educational partners to offer post-Associate degree programs.

**Note: Strategic challenges and accreditation issues are discussed in detail in subsequent sections of the *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report*.**

### **Strategic Challenges for Northwestern Michigan College**

In conducting the Systems Appraisal, the Systems Appraisal Team attempted to identify the broader issues that would seem to present the greatest challenges and opportunities for the institution in the coming years. These areas are ones that the institution should address as it seeks to become the institution it wants to be. From these the institution may discover its immediate priorities, as well as strategies for long-term performance improvement. These items may also serve as the basis for future activities and projects that satisfy other AQIP requirements. The team also considered whether any of these challenges put the institution at risk of not meeting the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation. That portion of the team's work is presented later in this report.

Knowing that Northwestern Michigan College will discuss these strategic challenges, give priority to those it concludes are most critical, and take action promptly, the Systems Appraisal Team identified the following:



- NMC's evaluation of General Education outcomes is in the early stages of development. A strategic issue for NMC is continuing its work with General Education outcomes to develop a deeper level of analysis than was available in the Portfolio. It is important to align learning outcomes with the three broad General Education outcomes. Expanding the outcomes analysis to the program and course level is a strategic issue for NMC to consider.
- NMC has self-defined its need to improve upon its performance in: communicating information in a timely fashion; increasing the number of individuals who review the measures, targets, and goals; and improving how well stakeholders know where to access NMC's data. Improving how information is communicated will aid NMC as it develops mitigation approaches to strengthen these internal processes.
- NMC states it is experiencing an increase in the number of students who are underprepared. This population of students is likely to grow based on national trends at many colleges and universities. Identifying the needs of this student population at a more granular level will be a strategic area for consideration for NMC. Developing finer levels of understanding of different student needs will aid the College in its efforts to increase retention and graduation/academic attainment.
- NMC describes its use of peer benchmarking data, but the outcomes of these analyses and their implications for future planning are not as well described. The benefit of peer benchmarking, and its contribution toward developing future goals that respond to the findings are key considerations for NMC. The need for these data to demonstrate comparable levels of success to peers is essential for understanding where improvement is needed and where NMC is successful. Developing a more robust peer benchmarking process and using the results for future improvement are important strategic issues for NMC to consider.

### **AQIP Category Feedback**

In the following section, the Systems Appraisal Team delineates institutional strengths along with opportunities for improvement within the nine AQIP Categories. As explained above, the symbols used in this section are **SS** for outstanding strength, **S** for strength, **O** for opportunity for improvement, and **OO** for outstanding opportunity for improvement. The choice of symbol for each item represents the consensus evaluation of the team members and deserves the

institution's thoughtful consideration. Comments marked **SS** or **OO** may need immediate attention, either to ensure the institution preserves and maximizes the value of its greatest strengths, or to devote immediate attention to its greatest opportunities for improvement.

**AQIP Category 1: Helping Students Learn.** This category identifies the shared purpose of all higher education institutions and is accordingly the pivot of any institutional analysis. It focuses on the teaching-learning process within a formal instructional context, yet it also addresses how the entire institution contributes to helping students learn and overall student development. It examines the institution's processes and systems related to learning objectives, mission-driven student learning and development, intellectual climate, academic programs and courses, student preparation, key issues such as technology and diversity, program and course delivery, faculty and staff roles, teaching and learning effectiveness, course sequencing and scheduling, learning and co-curricular support, student assessment, measures, analysis of results, and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Northwestern Michigan College for Category 1.

*Northwestern Michigan College has multiple mature processes in-place to help students learn. Its efforts to address its opportunities identified in the last portfolio are evidence the institution is striving to improve and optimize the success of its students. The evidence provided in the 2013 AQIP Systems Portfolio reveals an institution that understands its commitment to student learning, has processes in place at all levels to support and monitor student learning, engages its stakeholders, and embraces a culture of continuous improvement using metrics and benchmarks. NMC has used AQIP Action Projects to further support its focus on student success. Of special note is the work on the student completion project that takes on one of the most visible and highly controversial issues impacting postsecondary education today. The complexity of this issue and how it involves all aspects of College operations makes it a truly monumental challenge and is worthy of praise.*

**1P1, S.** NMC outlines its shared learning objectives for all students in its degree requirements and general education outcomes. NMC's use of the Curriculum Committee for reviewing these requirements and its use of sub teams of the Curriculum Committee for developing the College's three general education outcomes (Communication, Critical Thinking, and Quantitative Reasoning) are proven techniques. Faculty members are responsible for identifying which courses support the general education outcomes. The College is currently implementing a "Global Endorsement" on its transcripts—which

students earn by completing co-curricular experiences. The process described indicates that NMC is an example of a high performing organization, demonstrating broad-based involvement, collaboration, communication, and commitment to learning.

**1P2, S.** NMC's use of faculty and advisory committees in the setting and annual review of specific program learning objectives demonstrates a well-defined and mature level of development and evidence of an inclusive process. Each program sets goals for its learning outcomes, measures them against annual planning documents, and uses those metrics along with past performance to create improvement plans. The institution benchmarks program standards against industry standards, program accreditation requirements, and other outside sources to ensure appropriateness and relevancy. The integration of industry standards and input from other agencies is a practice that ensures students are prepared for the current workplace.

**1P3, S.** The collaborative approach to program design (faculty, advisory boards, and professional associations) assures that NMC offers new programs that are vetted through internal processes with external inputs. The College has created a well-defined, four-stage process for initiating new programs: Idea Summary, Curriculum Committee and President's Council review, Market Research analysis, and Board of Trustee approval. This process vets potential new programs and courses against institutional resources, capabilities, and priorities. The decision-making process appears to be clear, thorough, and efficient.

**1P4, S.** NMC demonstrates a strong desire to involve all key stakeholders in the development of programming that balances learning goals, students' career needs, and the needs of organizations receiving those completing students. The process appears to be systematic and includes an ongoing review process that can react to the changing aspects of employer demands. Once established, programs are subject to annual review on four levels of evaluation: Learner Perception and Behavior, Learning and Program Outcomes, Skill Transfer, and Results. NMC has made substantial enhancements in its planning process for new programs as presented in the Systems Portfolio.

**1P7, S.** NMC describes comprehensive orientation, advising, and career support services which enable students to select programs of study that match their needs, interests, and abilities. The College also bolsters this with frequent meetings with advisors, internships, career/professional growth workshops, and more broad-based career advising from the Department of Learning Services-Advising Center.

**1P8, S.** NMC assesses students' preparedness for college primarily through ACT scores and the COMPASS placement test. Students are encouraged to complete developmental courses before enrolling in college-level classes. The College offers two levels of developmental coursework in both math and English. The College has linked a study skills course to the first developmental English class. NMC offers a BRIDGE Learning Experience program for students with a high school GPA below 2.0.

**1P10, S.** NMC has a well-rounded approach to providing support for students with unique needs. Special needs of student subgroups are addressed by multiple support services (BRIDGE Learning Experience, Early College Program, Outreach Services, Student Success) that provide guidance to special groups such as veterans, returning adult students, students with disabilities, and international students. Support groups for adult learners are a best practice that could be shared with other institutions or could be duplicated in other student groups such as dislocated workers.

**1P11, O.** NMC discusses how it communicates its expectations for effective teaching based on published documents. It refers to the NISOD standards as the basis for its standards for teaching excellence. However, NISOD leaves selection criteria for teaching excellence to the discretion of each institution. It is not evident from the materials provided how the Educational Services Instructional Management Team (ESIMT) determines which standards are applied. The institution has an opportunity to better define and explain how expectations for effective teaching are defined, evaluated, implemented, and communicated across the institution.

**1P12, O.** NMC's approach to refine/improve its course delivery system is largely influenced by its standing process used in developing new programs (figure 1.2) and tracking fill rates and student performance. It may be beneficial to seek additional data from student stakeholders on possible areas for improvement in other forms than the Scheduling Preference Survey. In addition, it would be useful to review new online, face-to-face, and hybrid courses after they have been implemented to identify potential weaknesses or problems.

**1P13, S.** The revised program review process that emanated from NMC's AQIP Action Project has developed a model that measures effectiveness, cost effectiveness, and enhancements to the program's curriculum. This is an integrated approach to academic planning that demonstrates considerable commitment to continuous improvement.

**1P18, O.** The initial work by NMC to develop and implement two AQIP Action Projects to support student learning, student completion, and student learning experience projects, is a valuable activity that will have a significant impact on student success. Emanating from earlier AQIP projects on Enhancing Student Preparation and, in conjunction with the Student Withdrawal Survey outcomes, NMC is poised to make significant strides in both improving the student learning experience and fostering student completion.

**1R1, O.** NMC's metrics for General Education, Program Review and Completion include multiple factors. To get a broader understanding of learning and development processes, it may be beneficial to expand comparisons against peer institutions and consider including more qualitative data.

**1R2, S.** The analysis of the General Education Outcomes is substantial and guides the process of continuous improvement. The evidence presented demonstrates that the institution is asking the right questions and identifying both strengths and areas for improvement. The use of shared rubrics and the evidence from the Graduate Follow-Up Survey provide substantial data on students' perceptions of their learning gains. Together with the rubric analysis for direct outcomes, combined with the evidence from the Graduate Follow-Up Survey, NMC has a solid foundation for identifying areas for improvement and demonstrating its commitment to continuous improvement.

**1R3, O.** Tables 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7 demonstrate performance results on program review outcomes, completion metrics, and service expectations satisfaction; however, it may be beneficial to more specifically analyze the data to create a comprehensive report that includes how the data are used during the decision-making process. The College recognizes the need to work on meeting its targets.

**1R6, O.** NMC's data on its performance in its Program Review, Completion, and Service Expectations demonstrate that the College is performing at or above state levels. The College's set of measures provides a clear opportunity to focus its improvement efforts and celebrate its successes.

**1I1, S.** NMC is focused on student learning as evidenced by AQIP Action Projects related to helping students learn. The project focused on enhancing student preparation determined that students who take developmental courses tend to have higher success rates, and the pathways to completion project led to expanded resources for the writing and reading center, as well as the math and tutoring centers. A recent focus on learning

delivery seeks to encourage active learning through faculty professional development, four new active classrooms and a collaborative system for following up on student absences. Finally, new AQIP Action Projects are focused on the improvement of college readiness and the improvement of student completion rates.

**AQIP Category 2: Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives.** This category addresses the processes that contribute to the achievement of the institution's major objectives that complement student learning and fulfill other portions of its mission. Depending on the institution's character, it examines the institution's processes and systems related to identification of other distinctive objectives, alignment of other distinctive objectives, faculty and staff roles, assessment and review of objectives, measures, analysis of results, and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Northwestern Michigan College for Category 2.

*Northwestern Michigan College NMC indicates that recent progress has been made in accomplishing other distinctive objectives, as identified by divisions working together, data informed decisions, and increased input from external stakeholders to develop plans. The college recognizes its obligations to its community and stakeholders through lifelong learning and workforce training. It has developed a communications plan that is intended to improve identification of community and stakeholder needs.*

**2P1, S.** The alignment of NMC's Extended Education Services with the Learning Resources Network (LERN) provides a means to benchmark the institution's offering against national standards. The institution uses environmental scans of various types to generate the data used by those tasked with program responsibility to design the relevant processes. These processes are integrated into overall institutional planning. By keeping current in changes in industry standards, professional associations, and related trends, the College can better position itself to provide the most beneficial non-instructional support. The College conducts activities within both objectives according to national standards: the Learning Resources Network and the Manufacturing Extension Partnership.

**2P2, S.** NMC's use of an aligned planning process for setting objectives for both instructional and non-instructional processes streamlines the planning process and aids in institutionalizing the continuous improvement effort. NMC hosts the regional office of the Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center, enabling the institution to operate using

internationally recognized quality systems. NMC develops objectives related to its other distinctive purposes through its strategic and operational planning processes. In particular, one of the College's strategic directions commits NMC to "Establish national and international competencies and provide leadership in select educational areas connected to ... regional economy asset areas ...." The College relies on input from internal sources, such as: its Board of Trustees, the Planning and Budget Council, the President's Council, employee group leaders, department directors, and academic chairs. In addition, the College relies on input from external sources, in particular focus groups with local manufacturers to aid in identifying "institutional and individual training needs."

**2P3, O.** The institution discusses its internal communication of objectives associated with workforce development and community enrichment. The institution assumes that availability of Board materials and minutes, in combination with quarterly "community conversations," will communicate these objectives to external stakeholders. The College has an opportunity to create a communications plan that clearly states the objectives, responsible area, and expected outcomes of each of the communications.

**2P5, S.** The comprehensive planning process used by NMC supports informed decisions related to resource allocation and training needs. NMC determines faculty and staff resource needs to support its non-instructional objectives via its aligned planning and performance planning and assessment processes. Since these planning processes occur prior to budgeting, resource and training support can be planned and provided for along with all the other budgetary requirements of the College. As necessary, resource needs are incorporated into the department's budget requests. The College determines training needs through its performance planning and assessment processes.

**2R1, S.** NMC reports that it measures "client impact" in order to determine "performance on ... objectives related to lifelong and professional learning." The office of Extended Educational Services uses course evaluations to measure the effectiveness of community enrichment courses, and the Training Services division uses company impact reports to measure the effectiveness of workforce training—specifically data on utilization, cost, and quality.

**2R2, S.** Data reported by the College indicates that it has an effective program that is well received by those affected by it. The institution tracks the performance of its processes against targets, indicating that the College is gaining maturity in continuous

quality improvement efforts.

**2R3, O.** NMC does not report benchmarking processes or data for its community enrichment efforts. The College has an opportunity to gain significant insights as it develops additional methods to increase the feedback it receives so that it is able to compare itself to other like colleges. NMC may also benefit from performance result comparisons with organizations outside of higher education.

**2R4, O.** NMC reports a variety of potential measures for determining the impact of its other distinctive objectives concerning its relationships with the local community and other regions that it serves; however, beyond listing the measures, the Portfolio does not report the actual impact, making the actual performance in this area unclear. The College may benefit through development of criteria and measurable targets to assess its performance.

**2I2, S.** There is evidence of efforts towards continuous improvement. The plan-do-check-adjust continuous improvement cycle is used. There is some integration of direct reports across division and some achievement of cross-discipline outcomes.

**AQIP Category 3: Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs.** This category examines how your institution works actively to understand student and other stakeholder needs. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to student and stakeholder identification; student and stakeholder requirements; analysis of student and stakeholder needs; relationship building with students and stakeholders; complaint collection, analysis, and resolution; determining satisfaction of students and stakeholders; measures; analysis of results; and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various *strengths and opportunities for Northwestern Michigan College for Category 3.*

*Consistent with its mission, NMC has developed processes to identify the needs of its student groups on several levels: programmatic and service department; institutional; and global. Processes within these levels involve wide-ranging data collection and analysis. NMC recognizes that processes for Understanding Student and Other Stakeholders can be improved through greater communication between units. NMC describes a mixed level of maturity for its processes, and is actively working on projects to build lifelong relationships with students and other stakeholders.*

**3P1, S.** NMC's comprehensive planning process is aligned and identifies the changing



needs of students related to the five processes in understanding their needs. It is inclusive of regular updates; persistence and completion data are reviewed at multiple levels; goals are documented; data is analyzed and is included in the strategic plan; and improvements are made based on the data gathered. This shows a high commitment to data informed decision-making.

**3P2, S.** NMC has established a process for building relationships with students, ranging from prior enrollment to beyond graduation. Prior to enrollment, students and families have multiple opportunities to gather information to make college entry decisions. Once enrolled and oriented, students are encouraged to seek out necessary services but also have additional opportunities to be referred to areas of their specific needs. The College uses multiple touch-points in building relationships with students. These touch-points include advisors, faculty, residential staff, student organizations, and involvement opportunities.

**3P4, S.** The Action Project, Building Lifelong Relationships, supports developing a greater understanding of the students' and stakeholders' needs. Further, NMC works to improve these relationships through implementing new technologies such as a contact relationship management system to foster lifelong relationships.

**3P5, S.** NMC has a robust process of data collection (qualitative and quantitative) that it uses in its decision making regarding whom to target with new offerings/services. The formal process for analyzing internal capacity and the external market demand shows a high level of organization in planning for and responding to changes in demand.

**3P6, S.** NMC has a formal process in place to receive comments, complaints, and suggestions that is widely available. While the action taken to resolve issues is immediate, the input is also reviewed on a regular basis to identify trends. Students with concerns are notified by the College through a variety of means.

**3R1, O.** Although NMC reports how it gathers data about student satisfaction, it is not clear how the targets reported in Table 3.2 were ascertained. It is noted that satisfaction with quality of instruction (item 1, Table 3.2) has declined since 2009 and that the trends of the other two items in the table are flat or declining. Going forward, NMC has the opportunity to identify possible causal factors and potential actions to remediate the results. Identifying the reasons for the decline in fall to fall persistence, and potential actions to mitigate the decline, will be important areas for consideration in the future.

**3R2, O.** Persistence rates for fall to spring and for full-time and part-time students remain below NMC's stated targets and are either flat or declining. This presents an opportunity to further explore the reasons for the lack of positive movement upward for these rates through examining possible interventions and analyzing their success. The AQIP Action Project, Redesigning the Learning Experience, may contribute toward continuous improvement for this set of metrics.

**3R3, S.** The results shown in the Services Effectiveness Survey indicate NMC students are largely satisfied with their relationship with the institution. It is a positive step that NMC is using the data collected to respond to how its stakeholders see the institution (*i.e.* improving accessibility of how students can express their opinions). The addition of the CCSSE survey will provide additional information on how students perceive the College and provide valuable benchmark comparison data.

**3R5, S.** Performance results for building relationships with students and stakeholder satisfaction are well documented, analyzed, and used for continuous improvement. The AQIP Action Project focused on Building Lifelong Relationships is another indication of institutional focus on continuous improvement.

**3R6, S.** NMC's benchmarking of its performance using the NCCBP, Michigan's Governors Educational Dashboard, and IPEDS demonstrates that the College's performance is largely on par with or above peer institutions. By utilizing these benchmarks, the institution can effectively define those processes needing improvement and monitor the remainder for changes in performance.

**3I1, S.** NMC's efforts to initiate improvements in response to students' and stakeholder's needs along with an emphasis on frequent and early feedback to students about performance in courses will prove to be beneficial processes.

**3I2, S.** NMC's administration leads the culture and infrastructure for supporting change and improvement in Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs. The culture and infrastructure of the College appear to provide a good foundation for improvement.

**AQIP Category 4: Valuing People.** This category explores the institution's commitment to the development of its employees since the efforts of all faculty, staff, and administrators are required for institutional success. It examines the institution's processes and systems related to

work and job environment; workforce needs; training initiatives; job competencies and characteristics; recruitment, hiring, and retention practices; work processes and activities; training and development; personnel evaluation; recognition, reward, compensation, and benefits; motivation factors; satisfaction, health and safety, and well-being; measures; analysis of results; and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Northwestern Michigan College for Category 4.

*NMC has developed processes for Valuing People and has made multiple changes since its last Systems Appraisal. In particular, the College has created an Action Project aimed at “attracting, developing, and retaining talent” in its faculty and staff, which includes revising the orientation process for new employees and identifying “the specific credentials, skills, and values required for faculty, staff, and administrators.” This endeavor has led to the creation of a “Competency Model” developed with input from focus groups across campus and has been aligned with the College’s overall values. NMC has defined its hiring processes and maintains a practice of “networked workforce” by which an employee can be “shared” with different departments and with external agencies as well. Another notable item is the work being done regarding the review of “pay, benefits, performance and recognition, and work life, and professional development”. These commonly recognized retention factors are a proven set of input factors that organizations can work on to improve the effectiveness and satisfaction of employees. The issue of planning for changes in personnel is a common challenge amongst the majority of postsecondary institutions in the United States as a large number of faculty and staff are nearing or are at retirement age. NMC may benefit by looking into ways to capture/transfer that institutional data/experience prior to those most experienced personnel departing the institution.*

**4P1, S.** NMC providing the credentials for all faculty and staff on the website demonstrates evidence of integrity and transparency for students, faculty, parents, and external stakeholders.

**4P2, S.** The hiring process is well defined and articulated. The process for determining whether to fill or create a faculty position is supported by reviews of student-teacher ratios, course loads, and classroom efficiency. Pre-set conditions/qualifications are followed by the College in the hiring process with training of search committees working closely with the human resources office to ensure guidelines are followed.

**4P3, S.** The process for identifying the needs for future employees, using NMC’s Resource Guidelines which are approved by the Board, shows a commitment to aligned

planning and strategic investment of resources. The description of the Open Hire and Red Carpet systems also demonstrates the strategic use of technology to identify qualified applicants and manage the recruitment process effectively and rapidly. The work the College is doing to review the compensation process across all positions may prove to be beneficial. The aspects of “pay, benefits, performance and recognition, and work life, and professional development” are commonly recognized by most fortune 500 companies as critical factors in the retention of high skilled employees.

**4P4, S.** NMC has created a comprehensive approach to orienting new employees to its history, mission, and values. The College developed an AQIP Action Project targeted at attracting and retaining talent. The first phase of this project was a revision of the institution’s orientation process to include an initial on-line activity customized for the individual. All employees receive additional orientation through the aligned planning process and through semi-annual presentations by the College president. The addition of a customized online orientation event also demonstrates a commitment to new employees and ensures that employees are fully integrated into the culture of NMC.

**4P5, O.** NMC’s plans for handling changes in personnel focus largely on an analysis of multiple metrics to determine the likelihood of retirement. It may be beneficial to define those positions held by employees with significant amounts of institutional knowledge that may be lost when those individuals leave the College, regardless of reason. Once this is achieved, it may also be beneficial to define a process to have an employee who is retiring pass on the key historical knowledge prior his/her departure, regardless of reason.

**4P8, O.** Employee training needs are currently determined at the organizational, departmental and individual levels. The training appears to be primarily reactive and not yet systematic. For future planning, NMC may consider identifying training needs through the initial discussion with the Board. Further, aligning employee training delivery needs to the goals of the Strategic Plan more specifically may be beneficial. Also, aligning employee training with the Lifelong Learning Division to address future employee training needs may be a beneficial next step.

**4P9, S.** A set allocation for employee training and development along with campus support (the centers for Instructional Excellence, Training Services, Educational Media Technology Department, the Learning Resources and Technologies) enable NMC to provide comprehensive professional development opportunities for employees.

Additionally, participation in activities such as the CQIN Summer Institute provides an excellent opportunity to capture best practices from peer organizations.

**4P10, S.** The redesign of the performance and planning assessment system is a major enhancement in the alignment of staff skills, developmental needs, and performance assessment for the College. The system aligns the goals of the individual with the strategic goals of the College, which demonstrates a high level of integration of the goals of the College cascading down to the individual level. The revision moved from a paper based system to an on-line system and initiated supervisor/employee discussions regarding individual goals and necessary professional development activities. The overall goals for faculty evaluation include promoting teaching effectiveness; identifying and facilitating professional development; and directing and documenting the contribution of faculty expertise to support college and community activities.

**4P11, O.** The compensation review will provide additional mechanisms to ensure equity and integrity throughout the College and assist in continuing to ensure transparency and employee engagement. This is a significant opportunity for NMC.

**4P12, S.** NMC uses an Employee Engagement Survey to identify key issues regarding faculty/staff motivation. The survey gathers data specifically on “employee awareness and connectedness to the strategic direction and institutional effectiveness criteria.” Organizationally, the results of the survey inform the development of action projects and the progress of strategic goals. Department supervisors also use the data in discussions regarding program success/failure.

**4R2, O.** The Employee Engagement Survey is an excellent resource to identify the current perception of employee engagement. The outcomes of the survey indicate that NMC’s goals for employees’ levels of engagement have largely not been achieved nor have the measures been moving in an upward direction. The areas identified for future planning are places where NMC has the opportunity to continue to improve and incorporate into its Talent AQIP Action Project.

**4R4, O.** The discussion of benchmarking against peers to inform future planning is not fully developed. While it is clear that the College uses the National Community College Benchmark Project as a source for comparative data, the Portfolio does not clearly explain the results nor how the College uses those results for improvement.

**4I1, S.** NMC has made several improvements in this category area. The College has

revised its orientation processes for new employees and developed a performance planning and assessment system for staff that aligns individual goals with departmental and operational/strategic goals. In addition, the College has created a Professional Development Institute, and a cross-functional team is engaged in a comprehensive evaluation of total compensation.

**AQIP Category 5: Leading and Communicating.** This category addresses how the institution's leadership and communication structures, networks, and processes guide planning, decision-making, seeking future opportunities, and building and sustaining a learning environment. It examines the institution's processes and systems related to leading activities, communicating activities, alignment of leadership system practices, institutional values and expectations, direction-setting, use of data, analysis of results, leadership development and sharing, succession planning, and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Northwestern Michigan College for Category 5.

*NMC's efforts to have a leadership Group with a broad representation of its governance groups is commendable as it show a desire to be highly inclusive in its decision making processes. This is further evidenced in the use of the "grasping the situation" process. This process includes a good opportunity to set goals that consider the needs and expectations of current and future students and external stakeholders. One possible area for improvement may include exploring the processes relating to the College's communication channels. It is not clear in the portfolio how NMC ensures consistent, accurate communication across its multiple sites.*

**5P1, S.** The Leadership Group at NMC is responsible for reviewing the College's statements of mission, vision, values, purposes, and institutional effectiveness. This group is broadly representative of NMC's primary governance councils: President's Council, Planning and Budget Council, Policy Council, academic chairs, service department directors, and employee council leadership. An important part of this process is the myriad ways in which the College encourages participation of faculty, students, staff, and community members in conversations and surveys, all of which suggest an open atmosphere.

**5P2, S.** NMC sets the overall direction of the institution through its strategic planning process that incorporates the institutional effectiveness criteria and the mission, vision, and values statements. The process appears to include input from all major stakeholders

and includes analysis of multiple internal scans. The fact that this process is incorporated as part of the strategic planning process and is aligned with the AQIP principle for high performing organizations shows a high level of maturity in Leading and Communicating.

**5P3, S.** NMC's leaders set directions and focus on student success by considering the strategic directions that in turn guide strategic and operational goal setting in alignment with the "grasping the situation" process. Since the process includes "Listening to Learners, Listening to Employees, and Listening to the Community" this provides a good opportunity to set goals that consider the needs and expectations of current and future students and external stakeholders.

**5P7, S.** NMC's "intra-organizational communication" is based on several common methodologies to push information both horizontally and vertically. The College's communication modes include an email based employee and student newsletter, web based news poster (NMC *Comunique*) and web posting of meeting minutes and other data. The AQIP Action Project, Enhancing Employee Communication and Collaboration, included a redesign of the College's intranet to better serve the information needs of employees. This project is a promising step towards improving communication with internal stakeholders.

**5P8, O.** The College's leadership uses many means of communicating the College's mission, vision, and values; however, the messages may benefit from being aligned across division activities. An overall communication plan (to be implemented in 2014) may provide a more formalized process of communication planning and reinforce the message being distributed.

**5P9, S.** The Professional Development Institute for NMC is a recent enhancement in the College's efforts to develop its faculty and staff. This is a recent addition as part of the College's AQIP Talent Project. This process, when fully implemented, may provide additional support for faculty and staff and contribute to greater staff and faculty engagement.

**5R1, O.** Although the College currently measures its performances in Leading and Communicating in multiple ways, there may be opportunities to research/review best practices of other like institutions and consider incorporating peer evaluations into its list of metrics. These additional instruments may prove to be helpful to the College for future

planning and as additional methods to identify new planning and Action Projects for continuous improvement.

**5R3, O.** Since the Office of Research, Planning and Effectiveness (ORPE) collects benchmarking data from other Michigan community colleges, it will be beneficial to the College's planning processes to share these data with all internal and external stakeholders. It may also be beneficial to seek other benchmarking sources such as the CCSSE survey deployed at NMC in 2013.

**5I1, S.** NMC use of Action Projects to improve in this category is evidence that the College is moving towards alignment in its improvement processes for leading and communicating.

**AQIP Category 6: Supporting Institutional Operations.** This category addresses the variety of institutional support processes that help to provide an environment in which learning can thrive. It examines the institution's processes and systems related to student support, administrative support, identification of needs, contribution to student learning and accomplishing other distinctive objectives, day-to-day operations, use of data, measures, analysis of results, and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Northwestern Michigan College for Category 6.

*In order to ensure institutional operations provide an environment where learning can thrive, NMC gathers feedback from its constituents through feedback processes it refers to as "grasping the situation" which provide an effective means for understanding the current environmental context of the College. These three feedback loops, "Listening to the Community," "Listening to Employees," and "Listening to Students" are strong processes the College has initiated to better understand the service needs of its stakeholders. The College also uses several highly inclusive strategies to identify the administrative support service needs of employees including, the annual strategic planning process, Campus Master Planning process, and tactical strategies such as the Technology Help Desk ticket system, the Facilities Work Order ticket system, and semester meetings with building representatives to discuss building needs. NMC has also developed a comprehensive process for dealing with safety and security needs. NMC is using AQIP Action Projects, and their strategic planning process, to ensure that institutional operations are effective, comprehensive, well communicated, and implemented and evaluated on an ongoing basis. NMC may have the opportunity to better*



*define how it documents its support services and how it continuously improves its performance measures to achieve its desired outcomes and respond to stakeholder's stated needs.*

**6P1, S.** NMC effectively identifies the support service needs of its students and other stakeholders and gathers feedback on the desired state of these services through a planning process that employs three strategies which NMC refers to under the umbrella term of "grasping the situation." This multifaceted process is evidence of an institution with mature system in place to identify its stakeholders support service needs.

**6P2, S.** NMC's strategies to identify the administrative support needs are a bottom-up process that is embedded in the annual planning process and the Campus Master Planning process. The process appears to be well designed and inclusive in its nature.

**6P3, S.** NMC provides evidence that its safety and security processes are thorough and systematic. The use of an Incident Command Team, extensive communications processes, regular drills on safety procedures, the seven-minute security video required for students each semester, and the use of the Behavioral Incident Report Team demonstrate the institution's commitment to providing a safe learning and working environment.

**6P4, S.** Work flow processes are well-defined and tracked through ticketing systems, project work order systems, and data dashboards. The Red Carpet software system automatically tracks employee orientation requirements and sends reminders, which reduces the amount of time Human Resources staff time need to focus on basic compliance issues.

**6P5, O.** The College has an opportunity to identify how the outcome of the work procedures and flow charts result in the stated, desired outcome: innovation and empowerment. During its planning processes, the College may benefit by exploring with its stakeholders the extent to which the current system is effective and/or if improvements could be made.

**6R1, S.** NMC assesses administrative and organizational support services using a variety of strategies including institutionally derived and nationally deployed surveys. The use of these tools appears to include multiple factors and represents a broad swath of measurement data.

**6R2, S.** NMC administers a Service Effectiveness Survey which provides the leadership and planning personnel with data to better understand their perceived importance and

satisfaction with key services. When the results of the CCSSE are received, they will provide comparison data with peer institutions and increase the College's understanding of the level of performance of college services.

**6I2, S.** NMC aligned strategic planning process is the key element in its infrastructure/climate that has led to improvements in the campus climate and infrastructure. NMC strategic planning process is another factor that has improved communication both horizontally and vertically, resulting in operational action plans that are better aligned with the College's strategic goals.

**AQIP Category 7: Measuring Effectiveness.** This category examines how the institution collects, analyzes, and uses information to manage itself and to drive performance improvement. It examines the institution's processes and systems related to collection, storage, management, and use of information and data both at the institutional and departmental/unit levels. It considers institutional measures of effectiveness; information and data alignment with institutional needs and directions; comparative information and data; analysis of information and data; effectiveness of information system and processes; measures; analysis of results; and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Northwestern Michigan College for Category 7.

*NMC describes processes for data collection that have made significant progress since the last systems appraisal. The inclusion of the digital dashboard is a positive step and provides real-time information and projections for enrollment management and course efficiencies to stakeholders. NMC may benefit by further defining the needs of its data users, and by identifying specific measurement tools needed by individual divisions and departments. By developing a process for determining the college's needs, priorities, and use of comparative data the college will improve its ability to support planning at all levels.*

**7P1, O.** NMC appears to have made significant progress since the last systems appraisal. Data selection, management, and distribution have evolved to ensure alignment of data at multiple levels. At the same time, the College is still working to communicate the "big picture" of institutional effectiveness beyond strategic planning metrics. Once these metrics are developed and deployed, the College will gain a better understanding of its processes and systems and be able to utilize the information to guide its priorities and set goals for improvement.

**7P2, S.** Individual instructional and non-instructional units at NMC, along with the Office

of Research, Planning and Effectiveness (OPRE), select data at the institutional level based on the College's strategic goals and publish the data on the intranet for campus review and decision making. The aligned planning processes and the end-of-year checks are a major step forward in aligning the planning efforts of units within the College with its institution-level strategic goals. The reliance on OPRE to define the College's metrics is a strong process that shows a commitment to supporting planning and improvement efforts at NMC.

**7P3, S.** Coordination between the office of Information Technology Services (ITS), OPRE, and unit administrators is a proven method to assist in defining data collection, storage, and accessibility needs for the College. Recent improvements made to the dashboard will also support decision making by college leadership and other employees.

**7P4, S.** The College's aligned planning process, combined with regular end-of-year checks, provides a mechanism for ensuring that efforts within the College's units are aligned to achieve the College's goals. The regular use of shared drive information, presentations, and videos available on the College's intranet related to improvement initiatives assures that data are routinely used to measure performance and are widely shared throughout the institution. The planning process involves stakeholders from the Board to individual units. These measures, in conjunction with the annual performance evaluation of the President, provide transparency for the planning process, and outcomes.

**7P5, O.** NMC may benefit by further defining the needs of its data users, and by identifying specific measurement tools needed by individual divisions and departments. Developing a process for determining the college's needs, priorities, and use of comparative data will support the college's efforts to use these data to enhance its performance.

**7R1, S.** The College collects employee feedback through its Employee Engagement Survey and its Institutional Effectiveness System Survey. A majority of employees report that they review the measures and targets to make improvements and that they know where to access information. However, a decreasing number of employees report that information is communicated in a timely manner.

**7R2, O.** NMC has self-defined its need to improve upon its performance in: communicating information in a timely fashion; increasing the number of individuals who

review the measures, targets, and goals; and improving how well stakeholders know where to access NMC's data. Improving how information is communicated will aid NMC as it develops mitigation approaches to strengthen these internal processes.

**7R3, O.** NMC identifies several sources it uses for benchmark data on both a state and national level. The College has the opportunity to expand the discussion of its performance by including comparative data for the target areas it identified in 7P5.

**7I1, O.** Implementation of NMC's aligned planning process creates an opportunity to better address the implications of the data collected in this and other categories, utilizing them to inform future planning efforts.

**AQIP Category 8: Planning Continuous Improvement.** This category examines the institution's planning processes and how strategies and action plans are helping to achieve the institution's mission and vision. It examines coordination and alignment of strategies and action plans; measures and performance projections; resource needs; faculty, staff, and administrator capabilities; analysis of performance projections and results; and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Northwestern Michigan College for Category 8.

*NMC continues to progress in its process maturity. Since the last portfolio, NMC has significantly improved its planning processes. It is evident that significant time, institutional attention, and resources have been applied to its focus on continuous improvement. NMC developed its "aligned planning process" in response to feedback on its 2009 Systems Portfolio, including: a more systematic approach to identifying objectives and setting targets; improvements in the integration of data into decision making; an integrated and shared approach to communication; and better alignment of College strategy with operational action plans. It continues to seek improvement in projects like the Planning Communication Plan and ongoing training that will continue to drive its processes for planning continuous improvement to the next level of maturity.*

**8P1, S.** NMC's planning process (Aligned Planning Process) demonstrates an effective use of the plan-do-check approach to improvement. Examples of its success include alignment of department and individual level goals with strategic goals, improvement of planning communication, and improvement in the use of data for decision making.

**8P2, S.** NMC use of different customized processes for selecting its short and long term

strategies shows a good level of maturity in its planning processes. The inclusion of the NMC Scan Team, which reviews planning assumptions in conjunction with the Leadership Group and Board of Trustees, is unique and apparently beneficial step in strategic planning.

**8P3, O.** Goals appear to be adapted to fit available resources rather than being strategic goals (although this may not be attainable at present due to constrained resources) requiring Gap Analysis to identify factors required for attainment. Maintaining the strategic goal, rather than restating it as a currently attainable goal, may help NMC maintain longer horizon focus on its desired outcomes.

**8P4, S.** NMC has designed its planning process to include methods of coordinating organization strategies and action plans both vertically and horizontally. The planning process evidences progress and the next phase of the improvement process is underway.

**8P5, O.** As noted by NMC, “one opportunity for improvement is a refinement of some of the non-instructional departmental outcomes and metrics” to improve alignment in planning across the entire institution.

**8R1, S.** NMC has developed an Overall Planning Index that compiles metrics from multiple instruments and which appear to be effective in supporting the development of setting objectives and setting performance targets.

**8I1, S.** NMC describes an on-going process of improvement in this area, illustrative of increasing maturity. The College continues to seek improvement in projects like the Planning Communication Plan and ongoing training that will continue to drive its processes for planning continuous improvement to the next level.

**AQIP Category 9: Building Collaborative Relationships.** This category examines the institution's relationships – current and potential – to analyze how they contribute to the institution accomplishing its mission. It examines the institution's processes and systems related to identification of key internal and external collaborative relationships; alignment of key collaborative relationships; relationship creation, prioritization, and building; needs identification; internal relationships; measures; analysis of results; and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Northwestern Michigan College for Category 9.

*NMC works to build collaborative relationships with a variety of internal and external stakeholder groups. These relationships appear to have aided in both enrollment increases and the successful transfer of NMC students to receiving institutions. The college has adopted an “institute model” to develop and manage some of its partnerships, including the Great Lakes Water Studies Institute and the Health Education Institute. This institute model is innovative and demonstrates how NMC is working effectively to identify and develop solutions for meeting the needs of its region in areas of critical need. The work that NMC is doing with employer focused working groups is a substantial move to help NMC monitor stakeholder needs and to develop programs that address regional and national educational needs.*

**9P1, S.** Northwestern Michigan College (NMC) has well developed processes to create, prioritize, and build relationships with educational institutions and others in its community. Evidence of this effective process includes the increase in awarded scholarships and the creation of joint programming” in its recruitment efforts. The decline in the number of entering students who need developmental course work, is an impressive outcome for any institution.

**9P2, S.** NMC has developed a high performing relationship with senior universities across Michigan, including transfer and articulation agreements. NMC has signed eleven reverse transfer agreements which provide significant support for its students and help them to achieve their educational goals. NMC has developed a “University Center” which includes eight educational partners who offer fifty post-associate degree programs. NMC also cites a developing practice of targeting “industry-specific employer focus groups” as a way to understand industry needs better and to develop programs and curriculum that meet those needs.

**9P3, S.** NMC has well developed processes to build relationships with external entities that provide services to its students. Partnerships with regional agencies seem significant and broad. Collaborating with regional state and local service agencies (disability, employment, homeless, suicide prevention, etc.) not only increases NMC's involvement with partners but is an efficient use of cross-agency resources for students.

**9P4, O.** NMC discusses who is responsible for building and maintaining relationships with those supplying materials and services to the institution but not the processes by which relationships are built. There is no discussion of policies or controls to prevent these relationships from developing into conflicts of interest or other ethical concerns.

**9P5, S.** NMC has created an “institute model” to develop and manage some of its partnerships. Two of these include the Great Lakes Water Studies Institute and the Health Education Institute. The College’s institute model for developing some of its partnerships shows a high level of commitment to collaboration that will benefit all parties involved. Further, the model clearly identifies the criterion required to be included and gives the institution a better understanding of the ability of the potential partner to achieve the desired results and benefits.

**9P7, S.** The College relies on its strategic planning process as a principal means of building relationships between and among departments so that multiple departments might be responsible for achieving specific targets under a single strategic goal. The College uses its councils, committees, teams, and events to build relationships between and among departments. NMC is in the process of creating a directory “to identify and annotate employee skill sets and affiliations to help ... deliver learning through a networked workforce ....” Coordinating programs across disciplines—which serve multiple purposes for multiple programs—will be an important planning approach to consider, given shifts in enrollment and the volatility of the market.

**9R2, S.** NMC provides multiple results for performance of its key collaborations. Results for both external and internal relationships are measured and reported regularly. In most cases, the results show a high level of performance. The performances of matriculation, foundation contribution, and internal collaborations indicate numerous healthy relationships with the College. For the lower performing internal relationships, the College has self-identified opportunities for improvement.

**9R3, O.** The Portfolio does not report benchmarked results for this category. The College has an opportunity to better understand its performance in this area by comparing NMC data against its peers in similar processes from the NCCBP, CAE, CCSSE, and VSE.

**9I1, S.** NMC reports that it has used the feedback from its previous AQIP Systems Appraisal to create two Action Projects in the area of Building Collaborative Relationships. The first is “Enhancing Partnerships;” its goal is “to strengthen the relationship between NMC and Michigan Works!” The second is “Building Lifelong Relationships;” its stated goals are “to develop a contact relations management system to increase business for the College, expand the ways we communicate with ... stakeholders, increase conversion rates for donors, and to identify learning needs.”

These efforts will help the College expand the ways that it communicates with its partners.

**Accreditation Evidence Northwestern Michigan College**

The following section identifies any areas in the judgment of the Systems Appraisal Team where the institution either has not provided sufficient evidence that it currently meets the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components, or that it may face difficulty in meeting the Criteria and Core Components in the future. Identification of any such deficiencies as part of the Systems Appraisal process affords the institution the opportunity to remedy the problem prior to Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

After intensive review of the evidence provided, no evidence issues were noted by the Systems Appraisal team.

Criterion 1: Evidence found in the Systems Portfolio	Core Component				
	1A	1B	1C	1D	
Strong, clear, and well-presented.	x	x	x		
Adequate but could be improved.				x	
Unclear or incomplete.					
Criterion 2: Evidence found in the Systems Portfolio	Core Component				
	2A	2B	2C	2D	2E
Strong, clear, and well-presented	x	x	x	x	x
Adequate but could be improved.					
Unclear or incomplete.					
Criterion 3: Evidence found in the Systems Portfolio	Core Component				
	3A	3B	3C	3D	3E
Strong, clear, and well-presented.					
	x	x	x	x	x
Adequate but could be improved.					
Unclear or incomplete.					
Criterion 4: Evidence found in the Systems Portfolio	Core Component				
	4A	4B	4C		
Strong, clear, and well-presented.	x	x	x		
Adequate but could be improved.					
Unclear or incomplete.					
Criterion 5: Evidence found in the Systems Portfolio	Core Component				
	5A	5B	5C	5D	



Strong, clear, and well-presented.	x	x	x	x	
Adequate but could be improved.					
Unclear or incomplete.					

**1.A. (5P1 & 5P2)** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC’s mission, vision, values are approved by the Board of Trustees as per the standing Board Policy A-106.00 and are based on feedback from students, employees, and the community. The institution makes its mission publicly available through its website and its publications.
- The planning process NMC has developed ensures that it gathers feedback on potential changes to the mission, vision, values, and strategic directions through extensive surveys and its advisory boards.
- Feedback is reviewed at least annually through the Strategy Retreat Workbook, a synthesis of resource material for the annual strategic retreat. The involvement of a wide diversity of constituents, with steps that formally involve each of these groups in the planning process, demonstrates the alignment of the mission to the institution’s operational decision making.
- NMC’s mission statement is “To provide lifelong learning opportunities to our communities.” This is evidenced by the College offering College for Kids, non-credit courses, occupational training for credit, organizational and customized training, and a Life Academy.
- To realize its mission, the institution offers a wide diversity of programs and is a strong collaborator, providing collaborative degree programs beyond the two year degree programs to foster lifelong learning.
- NMC also has an extensive evaluative process for determining the value and usefulness of new degree offerings based on its planning process which is closely aligned with its mission.
- As part of its planning process, NMC identifies strategic goals and develops budget and resource allocations consistent with its overall mission.
- Planning and budget priorities are aligned with and support the institutional mission through the institution’s aligned planning process. The Leadership Group (Planning and

Budget Council, academic area leaders, and service department directors) sessions are designed to facilitate communication among departments and are held to ensure that shared goals are annotated on the appropriate departments' annual planning documents.

- Regular check meetings throughout the year contribute to integration and communication across aligned planning and budgeting processes.

**1.B. (5P3 & 5P8)** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC's mission, vision and values are publicly articulated through its website, meetings, catalog, and other print and electronic media.
- The NMC Board of Trustees reviews the appropriateness of the mission and recently expanded the mission to include the ability to provide Bachelor's degrees. NMC leaders further reinforce the direction of the College through the purposes, strategic directions, and institutional effectiveness criteria.
- The mission documents clearly identify the nature and scope of the programs and services offered by NMC. These documents are disseminated throughout the region.

**1.C. (1P4 & 1P10)** (components of evidence listed below)

- Northwestern Michigan College (NMC) has processes in place that reflect institutional goals, student needs, and program requirements as well as ongoing methods of assessment and evaluation.
- Every program has an advisory committee and uses market research for new program proposals. Market research identifies and considers the diversity of the communities the College serves.
- Students provide annual feedback through course evaluations and through the student perceptions survey. Student subgroups are tracked to identify gaps.
- The College complies with ADA requirements and provides a dedicated staff person for students who require accommodations. NMC has a BRIDGE Learning Experience for non-traditional adult learners, Outreach Services, and veteran specific support services.
- The College also provides multiple delivery modes to address different student schedules and learning styles.

**1.D. (3P3 & 3P5)** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC relies on surveys, environmental scans, stakeholder relationships, and community representation to identify and analyze changing needs of student groups, but from the evidence presented in the portfolio, it is unclear how data are used to select courses of action and how these sources of information are analyzed and incorporated into action plans. Some limited evidence is provided, but additional examples of an ongoing comprehensive process could strengthen the evidence for this core component.

**2.A (4P7)** (components of evidence listed below)

- Policies are in place at the state and college level to require ethical practices of all employees. NMC's policies on academic honesty and integrity are documented in the Faculty Code of Professional Ethics and in the Student Rights and Responsibilities policy in section #5 of the Academic Code of Conduct D-602.10.
- External audits review the College's practices in light of ethical guidelines, such as the annual financial audit. Additional evidence could be provided for the processes of the governing board and for processes that verify that required ethical practices are adhered to.

**2.B.** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC presents itself clearly to its students and the public through its online catalog and website. Program requirements, prerequisites, costs and other information are communicated through multiple channels to both prospective and current students and to the public. Communications also describe the College's governing authorities and accreditation status.
- Specific program websites identify program requirements and model schedules. Faculty members explain class outcomes through course outlines and syllabi. The College maintains a student data management system.
- Prospective students are informed through mailings, orientation programs, and "College Information Nights."

**2.C (5P3 & 5P8)** (components of evidence listed below)

- During a fall study session regarding the strategic planning process, the NMC Board of Trustees provides input and selects issues for it to monitor during the current year. The Board then reviews its progress on these goals twice during the academic year
- At periodic meetings, the Board reviews progress on its goals twice a year for a mid-year

and end of year check. This ensures that the Board is spending its time on the most important priorities to preserve and enhance the College.

- The NMC Board of Trustees considers multiple constituencies as it makes decisions by: participating directly in the strategic planning process; listening to student presentations; including public comment sessions during Board meetings; participating in community service organizations; and serving on the NMC Foundation.
- NMC leaders set direction that aligns with the mission, vision, and values of the organization through the strategic planning process. The strategic plan is anchored by the mission, vision, and values. The Strategic Directions and Institutional Effectiveness Criteria set direction for the College to guide activity over 5-7 years and delineate the priorities of the College.
- At every regular Board of Trustees meeting, there is an opportunity for public comment. Any interested person, internal or external stakeholder, may speak directly with the Board members.
- The institution has an annual strategic planning retreat, and the Board provides input into the annual strategic planning process at its September meeting.
- The Board of Trustees delegates day to day management of the College to the President per Board Policy B-100.00. The Board preserves its independence from undue influence from special interests or other external parties when that influence is not in the best interest of the College by following the guidelines of the Open Meetings Act and the policies laid out in the Board's bylaws (Board Policy A-100.00).
- Faculty oversee academic matters per the policies of NMC. For example, in Policy D-737.00, the policy states that: "Because faculty play an important role in the shared governance of the College, many faculty are involved in department, division and area leadership outside of the normal contract dates." This statement indicates a formal recognition of the role of the faculty in shared governance at NMC.
- The shared governance policy, D-502.01, states that the governance process "effectively and efficiently administers these processes to ensure fulfillment of its mission and strategic plan, with appropriate involvement of the faculty and staff in decisions of the College."

**2.D** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC explains its commitment to freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in its Employee Guide. Further, the Faculty Code of Professional Ethics contains explicit language regarding the “free pursuit of learning,” and promoting “conditions of free inquiry ... to further public understanding of academic freedom.”
- Research requests are monitored through the NMC Office of Research, Planning and Evaluation (ORPE). Library staff provides instruction to students regarding the ethical use of information resources through the Information Literacy course taught within the freshman composition sequence.

**2.E. (1P11 & 4P7)** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC’s policies on academic honesty and integrity are documented in the Faculty Code of Professional Ethics and in the Student Rights and Responsibilities policy (section #5 of the Academic Code of Conduct D-602.10). NMC provides resources on the ethical use of data and has policies on academic honesty and integrity available online. All syllabi include a statement on academic honesty.
- Students are guided by faculty and by library staff in the ethical use of information resources in the Information Literacy course taught by librarians to all students in the freshman composition sequence.
- The ORPE gathers and monitors research requests in order to ensure compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- Two formal policies state NMC’s position regarding conflict of interest (Conflict of Interest, Board of Trustees Process (A-102-01) and Conflict of Interest staff policy (D-506.01).
- Executive staff and Board of Trustees are required annually to affirm that they follow the College’s conflict of interest policies. Employee handbooks outlining NMC policies and procedures are available on the College’s website.

**3.A. (1P4 & 1P12)** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC’s academic programs go through a thorough approval and annual review process to assure appropriateness and need. The Curriculum Committee reviews course proposals and evaluates the course outline, which defines the course learning outcomes and the supported general education outcomes, assuring that course outcomes are appropriate to the degree or certificate level.

- A recent crosswalk of the skills and capabilities required in the three general education outcomes to the similar skills outlined in Lumina's Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) demonstrates NMC's commitment to ensuring the degree programs are appropriate.
- Learning outcomes by course or program are consistent regardless of delivery modality and are assessed similarly through regular course evaluations and course success metrics.

**3.B. (1P1 & 1P2)** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC's curricula are intended to provide broad exposure to a variety of learning outcomes. Processes are defined; changes are made on a continuous basis; and communication is transparent. NMC's general education program supports scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge relative to its mission.

**3.C. (4P2 & 4P10)** (components of evidence listed below)

- The Talent AQIP action project was developed and has been implemented since 2009. Processes have been improved upon and are more thorough in the hiring of faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services. Models have been developed for the identification of effective employees.
- The strategic use of technology has been aligned throughout the College.
- Collaboration with human resources and external stakeholders provide for a better high quality program.
- The College presents strong evidence in this area that the institution demonstrates a commitment to the hiring of faculty and staff for effective, high-quality programs.

**3.D. (1P7 & 1P15)** (components of evidence listed below)

- The Learning Experiences AQIP Action Project is an example of NMC's support for effective teaching. The Center for Instructional Excellence provides training to faculty.
- NMC provides multiple tools to assist students as part of their first year student enrollment. The Information Literacy course provides guidance on the use of research and information. Other processes are provided to aid student learning including Early College Programs, BRIDGE Learning Experiences, internships, Student Success Center and counseling/advising, financial aid, and academic placement.
- The special needs of student subgroups are addressed by multiple support services

(BRIDGE Learning Experiences, Early College Program, Outreach Services, Student Success Center) that provide guidance to special groups such as veterans, returning adult students, students with disabilities, and international students.

**3.E. (1P16)** (components of evidence listed below)

- In addition to its traditional academic programs, NMC identifies numerous structured co-curricular learning opportunities that are aligned with co-curricular program goals, some academic programs, and the institution's mission.
- The International Services division of Outreach Services creates, develops, and facilitates programs, study abroad opportunities, and intercultural exchanges and events. NMC plans to hire an internship coordinator to build, map, and manage NMC's co-curricular and experiential learning initiatives.

**4.A. (1P4 & 1P13)** (components of evidence listed below)

- As a result of an AQIP Action Project, curriculum is reviewed annually using detailed quantitative metrics and qualitative reflection of the prior year's results. Annual program review includes consideration of Learner Perception and Behavior, Learning and Program Outcomes, Skill Transfer, and Results. Goals and action plans are then set for the coming year.
- All academic programs are required to have an advisory committee to assure that the program's curriculum and programs are responsive to community, employer, and student needs. Most NMC programs are nationally accredited.

**4.B. (1P2 & 1P18)** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC's learning objective development and assessment processes represent broad involvement of both internal and external groups. Multiple inputs (faculty, advisory boards, accreditation standards, and professional associations) support the currency and efficacy of the NMC annual program review process.
- NMC has developed a comprehensive and aligned approach to assessment of student learning. NMC has a published assessment plan, including evidence of the systematic process of yearly assessment in the College.
- NMC has used the results of its General Education assessment to implement improvements across campus, including: new degree requirements, a common textbook, and a writing handbook. Alignment of co-curricular objectives is moving to a more

systematic approach.

**4.C. (3P1)** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC employs a variety of methods to collect and analyze data. These include direct measures such as Perkins Core Indicators, IPEDS, and Michigan's Governor's Educational Dashboard. Additionally, these methods include indirect measures derived from locally designed surveys and a quarterly environmental scan. Data is communicated across campus in a variety of forms
- NMC uses its data to make improvements in several areas: student orientation and enrollment, security, recruitment of dual-enrolled students, and a state-wide initiative to develop reverse transfer and block transfer agreements. The College has the capability to disaggregate these data based on demographic cohorts to identify problem areas and develop interventions to increase student success.
- The College presents strong evidence in this area that it demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through attention to retention and related metrics.

**5.A. (8P6)** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC has a comprehensive planning process in place to assure that fiscal, human, physical, and technological resources are available and able to support institutional operations. The aligned planning process integrates the budgeting process that includes a multitier review and approval process.
- The comprehensive planning process monitors needs and resources to assure that expenses are considered prior to any implementation.
- NMC has a well-established and stable process for annual planning and budgeting; its budget is overseen by its Board and the State.

**5.B. (5P5 & 5P9)** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC's aligned planning process flow chart provides evidence of engagement of internal constituencies, including the governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students and multiple college-wide committees with specific charges.
- The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; it provides oversight for the institution's financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities as detailed in Board policy A-106.00.



- The approach for decision-making among the shared governance councils is to gather input from broad perspectives, formulate a recommendation based on discussion and consensus, and communicate the result of these discussions in the form of committee minutes and memos which are readily available on NMC's intranet site and via email.
- NMC's Governance Councils, committee structures, and organizational structure enable the Board, faculty and staff, and students to be formally involved in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes.

**5.C. (5P2 & 5P6)** (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC considers shifts in technology and funding and develops a business model based on anticipated enrollment for given programs.
- The Cost to Educate model considers current capacity and economic fluctuations.
- The institution's aligned planning process integrates and links all processes across the College.
- The institution has developed an Aligned Planning action project, which provides a framework for aligning strategic goals, operational goals, and individual level goals.
- The aligned planning process is an enhancement of the planning process and ensures alignment of mission and the strategic goals with financial investment.
- The Alignment of Planning Detailed Process Flow chart shows the institution's planning process in detail and provides evidence of the institution's systematic and integrated planning process approach and evidence of wide stakeholder involvement.
- The Cost to Educate model considers current capacity and economic fluctuations.
- NMC's aligned planning process incorporates a plan-do-check-adjust continuous improvement approach. Department directors use inputs in "grasping the situation" to define objectives. Inputs include the formally stated planning assumptions, environmental scanning through the quarterly NMC Scans (further explained in 3P5), community conversations, and results on metrics, which include feedback from external stakeholders such as advisory groups.

**5.D. (7P2 & 7P4)** ) (components of evidence listed below)

- NMC has developed multiple data processes that provide timely, accurate, and secure data for decision-making. Across the institution, data is analyzed and reviewed for

determining institutional improvement pathways.

- All of NMC's AQIP Action Projects are aligned with the articulated goals in the strategic plan. Planning at the program level is part of an annual cycle; each academic program has defined metrics by which its success is measured. Those data are provided by ORPE on the intranet every fall for program review and planning.
- The Planning Calendar, available on NMC's OPRE Web site ([www.nmc.edu/ir](http://www.nmc.edu/ir)), provides evidence of a continuous planning process with identifiable metrics and outcomes designed to improve performance.
- The institution's aligned planning process provides the capability to continuously learn from the success of its planning efforts and continuously improve its performance on an annual basis.
- The Employee Engagement Survey and the Institutional Effectiveness System Survey are both evidence of the institution's commitment to learn from its operational experience and apply that learning to improve its effectiveness

### **Quality of Systems Portfolio for Northwestern Michigan College**

Because it stands as a reflection of the institution, the *Systems Portfolio* should be complete and coherent, and it should provide an open and honest self-analysis on the strengths and challenges facing the organization. In this section, the Systems Appraisal Team provides Northwestern Michigan College with constructive feedback on the overall quality of the portfolio, along with suggestions for improvement of future portfolio submissions.

It is the opinion of the Systems Appraisal Team that Northwestern Michigan College's 2013 Systems Portfolio is both inclusive and well executed. As one of the first institutions to execute the new format including the criterion components, the College should be commended for its attention to detail and focus on components of evidence for the criterion of accreditation. It is apparent to the team that the institution has spent a good deal of time working on and refining this version. The team also recognizes this year's portfolio shows marked improvement over the college's last portfolio. The primary suggestion for improvement would be to consider increasing (where possible) the amount of data shared in the results sections and verifying that the data presented illuminates/validates the comments (text) in the rest of the category response.

## Using the Feedback Report

The AQIP Systems Appraisal process is intended to initiate action for institutional improvement. Though decisions about specific actions rest with each institution, the Commission expects every institution to use its feedback to stimulate cycles of continual improvement and to inform future AQIP processes.

Some key questions that may arise in careful examination of this report may include: How do the team's findings challenge our assumptions about ourselves? Given our mission and goals, which issues should we focus on? How will we employ results to innovate, grow, and encourage a positive culture of improvement? How will we incorporate lessons learned from this review in our planning and operational processes? How will we revise the *Systems Portfolio* to reflect what we have learned? How an organization interprets, communicates, and uses its feedback for improvement ought to support AQIP's core values, encouraging involvement, learning, collaboration, and integrity.

The Commission's goal is to help an institution clarify the strategic issues most vital to its success, and then to support the institution as it addresses these priorities in ways that will make a difference in institutional performance.