

# **SYSTEMS APPRAISAL FEEDBACK REPORT**

in response to the *Systems Portfolio* of

## **MILWAUKEE AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE**

October 8, 2009



**Academic  
Quality Improvement  
Program**

The Higher Learning Commission **NCA**

30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400  
Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504  
[www.AQIP.org](http://www.AQIP.org)  
[AQIP@hlcommission.org](mailto:AQIP@hlcommission.org)  
800-621-7440

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR MILWAUKEE AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE

The following are summary comments on each of the AQIP Categories crafted by the Appraisal Team to highlight **Milwaukee Area Technical College's** (MATC's) achievements and to identify challenges yet to be met.

- In Category 1, Helping Students Learn, MATC shows that student assessment is a priority for this college. The College is developing a campus tradition of shared governance which will serve it well as it continues as an AQIP institution. A set of processes and systems for Helping Students Learn continues to emerge based on input from all stakeholders, including students, faculty and staff, state governing bodies, external accreditors, and regional employers. While the College is collecting a wide variety of data related to student learning, MATC has an opportunity to analyze the data more systematically, to examine which data are most relevant and most directly measure performance, and to consider how to best communicate and organize results to effectively inform decision making about helping students learn.
- In Category 2, Achieving Other Distinctive Objectives, the College is clearly in the very preliminary stages of understanding exactly what those distinctive objectives are. The lack of consistency in assessing programs plays a vital role in MATC's ability to know and understand how well the College is meeting the needs of its internal and external stakeholders. The results of the economic impact study provide evidence that both the citizens and the state receive significant returns on their investment in MATC. Continued exploration of the context of these non-instructional services, as well as their fit within the mission, vision, and values of the institution, will aid in creating measures and tracking results. MATC has a significant opportunity to develop a clear, coherent strategy to identify, implement, and evaluate distinctive objectives to enhance external stakeholder partnerships.
- In Category 3, Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs, MATC has developed many strategies for obtaining actionable information with regard to current student needs, and has used this information to set improvement goals; however, the College has several challenges that need to be addressed to strengthen the relationship with its students and external stakeholders. Safety and security of the campus present a

significant challenge for MATC. With the use of existing data, MATC would benefit from implementing more processes to improve safety and security for the campus. The College's institutional research model appears to be an enabler and tool to create effective planning and dialogue in the organization to address this category.

- Regarding Category 4, Valuing People, The College has a number of processes that could turn opportunities into strengths. For example, though the College identified use of a systematic way of defining leadership that values people, MATC does not have a systematic process for identifying leadership candidates, ensuring they receive training and development, and preparing them for future leadership positions. Creating a leadership plan that both includes leadership assessment and addresses administrative succession would benefit the College and better demonstrate its commitment to Valuing People. While the elements appear to be in place, the College is in the very early stages of coordinating the various data elements to make improvements. The process does not include explicit steps to recruit minorities, women, and candidates with disabilities. The College's shared governance model appears to be an enabler and tool to create effective planning and dialogue in the organization. However, the institution has an opportunity for improvement by regularly collecting and analyzing direct measures of employee satisfaction and productivity. In addition, MATC has an opportunity to formalize some of its processes in relation to Valuing People, such as determining factors affecting motivation and aligning compensation and recognition programs with College objectives. MATC offers opportunities for professional development, and the College values the philosophy of promoting from within.
- In respect to Category 5, Leading and Communicating, MATC reflects an institution just beginning to understand/appreciate the context in which processes for Leading and Communicating can be developed. The discrete activities described in this section indicate that silo operations predominate and processes have not yet been defined. Where benchmarking data or comparative trend data might have provided some longitudinal view of improvements, the tools have changed and/or been discontinued. PACE, for example, was used in 2003 but another instrument was selected for the next study. MATC has made significant efforts to provide venues to allow for employee participation in decision making, including a shared governance structure and core

committees. However, it is unclear how MATC's system of shared governance works in practice, how strategic directions and targets for improvement are established, and how the needs of stakeholders are identified and incorporated into the process. MATC's description of how it makes and carries out decisions appears to be very much top-down, and results from recent Institutional Priority Surveys confirm that employees identify employee involvement in decision making and dissemination of information as potential areas of opportunity for improvement. MATC is encouraged to document its processes for decision making and communication to enhance transparency and to help the College identify how data might be best used to inform decisions.

- MATC understands the challenges of Category 6, Supporting Institutional Objectives. MATC has presented a significant amount of data; however, there is a need for useful data to be analyzed and interpreted. The College is data-rich but in many instances information poor for assessing its performance in its support operations. The institution is just beginning to gather results to demonstrate successful approaches, processes, and outcomes. Conducting an overall assessment of the assessment methods currently used by the College would be beneficial to MATC.
- As concerns Category 7, Measuring Effectiveness, MATC appears to be positioning itself well to address its data collection and analysis needs in the future; current performance results, however, lack direct relevance to and congruity with the Key Performance Indicators or the Strategic Plan. Therefore, it appears that while the College is in many instances rich with data, it is currently information poor without clear methods to utilize data to assess performance, inform decision making, or shape planning efforts. The move to centralize data collection and analysis within Institutional Research will help to ensure that efforts to utilize information effectively are well-coordinated and aligned with the mission of the College. MATC recognizes the need to develop and implement a systematic approach to select, gather, analyze, and distribute institutional data, and has identified opportunities for improvement including identifying comparative benchmarks and aligning performance indicators with strategic plan outcomes.
- In Category 8, Planning Continuous Improvement, the Portfolio revealed a vague, top-down structure for strategic planning. While the Portfolio Overview addressed key

concerns with competition, preparedness of learners, skyrocketing unemployment rates, and unevenly distributed poverty within the high school district, these do not appear to be addressed in the College's planning processes. It appears that MATC is still in the beginning stages for developing its processes for continuous improvement and has an opportunity to engage its constituents with an outside-in focus. Furthermore, MATC recognizes the need to further develop a culture of shared decision making to foster employee buy-in for action plans, align and link its plans and objectives, and integrate data and results into its planning processes in order to establish targets for performance.

- With respect to Category 9, Building Collaborative Relationship, MATC has demonstrated its ability to build collaborative relationships with other organizations. There is a growing awareness of the need for more coordinated, coherent processes in this area, and the College demonstrates an interest in strengthening and systematizing its work with its partners. Leadership at the College is changing and a new vision of assessing quality seems to be underway. MATC is in a position to implement significant improvements with regard to Building Collaborative Relationships.

Accreditation issues and Strategic challenges for **Milwaukee Area Technical College** are listed in detail within the Strategic and Accreditation Issues Analysis section of the Appraisal Feedback Report.

---

## ELEMENTS OF MILWAUKEE AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE'S FEEDBACK REPORT

The *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report* provides AQIP's official response to your *Systems Portfolio* by a team of readers trained in evaluation. After appraisers independently reviewed your document, the team reached consensus on essential elements of your institutional profile, strengths and opportunities for improvement by Category, and significant issues for your institution. These are presented in three sections of the Feedback Report: Accreditation Issues Analysis, Critical Characteristics Analysis, and Category Feedback. These components are interrelated in defining context, evaluating performance, surfacing critical issues, and assessing institutional performance.

It is important to remember that the Systems Appraisal Team had only your *Systems Portfolio* to guide their analysis of your institution's strengths and opportunities for improvement. Consequently, their report may omit important strengths — if you were too modest to stress them in your *Systems Portfolio*, or if your discussion and documentation of them was unconvincing. Similarly, the team may have pointed out areas of potential improvement that are already receiving the institution's attention. Again, the team used its best judgment in identifying improvement opportunities. If some of these areas of potential improvement are now strengths rather than opportunities because of your own focused efforts, that is all to your credit. If the team was unsure about an area, we urged it to err on the side of giving your institution the best possible advice about where investing your efforts might pay off. If some of their advice comes after the fact, after you've already tackled an area, no harm is done.

**Executive Summary:** Summative statements agreed upon by the Systems Appraisal Team reflecting the reviewers' assessment of the institution's current status in relation to critical quality characteristics: 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 the Category covers. Since institutions are complex, maturity levels may vary from one Category to another.

Strategic challenges for the institution are listed in detail within the Strategic and Accreditation Issues Analysis section of the Appraisal Feedback Report.

**Strategic and Accreditation Issues Analysis:** Strategic issues are those most closely related to your institution's ability to succeed in reaching its mission, planning, and quality improvement goals. Accreditation issues are areas where you have not yet provided evidence that you meet the Commission's *Criteria for Accreditation*, or where the evidence you have presented suggests you may have difficulties, now or in the future, in meeting these expectations. If accreditation is essential for your institution then any accreditation issues identified are, by definition, also strategic. The Systems Appraisal Team identified both of these kinds of issues through analysis of your Organizational Overview and the feedback it provided for each Category, as well as by reviewing the Index to the *Criteria for Accreditation* that you provided along with your *Systems Portfolio*. This list of strategic issues offers a framework for addressing ongoing improvement of processes and systems, serving as an executive summary of the Report's key findings and recommendations.

**Critical Characteristics:** Your Systems Portfolio's Organizational Overview provides context for the team's knowledge of your institution's identity, mission objectives, strategic goals, and key factors related to improvement. Critical Characteristics are those features most important for understanding the institution's mission, environment, stakeholders, competitive position, goals, and processes. Characteristics having the greatest relevance to each Category are identified in the Report.

**Category Feedback:** The Report's feedback on each of AQIP's nine Categories specifically identifies 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. Comments, which are keyed to your *Systems Portfolio*, offer brief analysis of each strength and opportunity. Organized by Category, and presenting the team's findings in detail, this section is the heart of the Report.

---

## **STRATEGIC AND ACCREDITATION ISSUES**

In conducting the Systems Appraisal, the team attempted to identify the broader issues that present the greatest challenges and opportunities for your institution in the coming years. These are all strategic issues, ones you need to grapple with as you identify your institution's strategies for confronting the future and becoming the institution you want to be. The team also examined whether any of these strategic issues put your institution into jeopardy of not meeting the Higher Learning Commission's accreditation expectations.

**Issues Affecting Compliance with the *Criteria for Accreditation*.** An important goal for the Systems Appraisal was to review your institution's compliance with the Higher Learning Commission's *Criteria for Accreditation*. The peer quality experts who served on the team were all trained in evaluating colleges and universities using the Commission's *Criteria*, and the Systems Appraisal process they followed included careful steps to ensure the team used the *Criteria* as a major factor in their review. As the team reviewed your presentation of your institution's systems and processes under each AQIP Category, it searched for accreditation-related issues and concerns. In addition, the team used the *Index to the Criteria for Accreditation* that you provided with your Portfolio to perform a comprehensive review of the

*Criteria* and each Core Component to ascertain whether you presented compelling evidence that your institution complies with each of these Commission expectations.

The Systems Appraisal team concluded that Milwaukee Area Technical College has presented evidence that it complies with each of the Five *Criteria for Accreditation* and each of their Core Components. Although the Systems Appraisal does not in itself constitute a review for continued accreditation, the team's conclusion upon reviewing your Portfolio against the Criteria will serve as a telling piece of evidence during the Commission's next scheduled AQIP review of your institution for Reaffirmation of Accreditation.