

Briefing on:

NCA-AQIP

In November 2000, Grand Rapids Community College was officially accepted into North Central Association's AQIP Project. AQIP stands for Academic Quality Improvement Project and represents a new approach to accreditation, based on quality improvement principles, values, and tools.

What is NCA accreditation?

Accreditation by NCA provides assurance to the public, in particular to prospective students, that an institution has been found to meet the General Institutional Requirements for Higher Education. NCA is a not-for-profit, voluntary, membership organization founded in 1898 and is committed to the improvement of education through evaluation and accreditation.

What is the value of accreditation?

Accreditation provides both public certification of acceptable institutional quality as well as an opportunity and incentive for self-improvement in the institutions accredited. A college that fails to achieve or loses their accreditation is viewed by the public and other institutions as not meeting the general requirements necessary to be an institution of higher education.

What is the AQIP Project?

The Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) is a new, voluntary, alternate accreditation process for the North Central Association that:

- *Concentrates on the academic enterprise – particularly teaching and learning – and involves faculty more directly in all academic process improvement processes;*
- *Provides NCA member institutions with concrete feedback and practical support they can use to reach higher levels of performance and effectiveness in education their students;*
- *Reduces, where possible, the intrusiveness, cost, and slow cycles of improvement associated with current accreditation;*
- *Replaces the current “one-size-fits-all” approach with one that can be tailored to respond to an institution’s distinctive needs and aspirations;*
- *Recognizes and celebrates institutional distinctiveness and outstanding achievements, thereby improving the prestige associated with re-accreditation; and*
- *Supplies the public with more understandable, useful information concerning the quality and value of accredited colleges and universities.*

Why did GRCC apply to join the AQIP Project?

In spring of 1999, members of the GRCC NCA Self-Study Team began to hear reports from other colleges who had shown great success in making system-wide transformational improvement by using a quality approach to re-accreditation. After careful research and study, it was determined that GRCC would be an excellent candidate for this new approach. Our new mission, vision, values, ends statements,

and strategic plan positioned us perfectly to take advantage of this alternative method of accreditation offered by NCA.

The AQIP application process

Official discussions with NCA staff began in the summer of 1999. For 18 months, the NCA Self-Study Team worked toward acceptance into the AQIP pilot. It was not an easy process. Colleges applying to be accepted into AQIP must demonstrate that they are committed to using quality improvement principles, values, and tools.

How does the Michigan Quality Award and Pacesetter Award fit?

Since the AQIP Project requires that a participating college also be actively involved in a state or national quality award system, the last piece to fall into place was the notification that GRCC was to receive the Michigan Quality Council (MQC) Lighthouse Recognition Award on November 16, 2000. We applied for this award after the NCA Self Study Team completed an internal self-assessment during 1999-2000..

In summer, 2001 the College prepared applications for the Michigan Quality Award – Navigator Level and the national Pacesetter Award. Both awards are based on the *Education Criteria for Performance Excellence* as set by the Baldrige National Quality Program (U.S. Department of Commerce/National Institute of Standards and Technology.) Feedback reports from the reviewers of both applications were received and studied by the GRCC Quality Leadership Team. GRCC reapplied for both awards in May, 2002 and we expect to be notified regarding a September site visit in August.

The purpose of preparing the award applications is not to try to win the award, as nice as that might be! The value is the self-assessment against external criteria and the candid feedback received from the external review teams. It has forced us to look at ourselves in new ways and to ask hard questions regarding our performance.

What are the Baldrige quality criteria?

- Leadership
- Strategic planning
- Student, stakeholder, and market focus
- Information and analysis
- Faculty and staff focus
- Process management
- Organizational performance results

How do we get started on quality?

We have already started! Many individuals, departments, and units have a long history of using quality principles and practices to plan and guide improvements. For example, the method we used to create a new mission, vision, values, ends statements and strategic plan used a quality-driven, collaborative process. The **Quality Leadership Team** – has been appointed by the President to guide the quality implementation efforts. This team is made up of people representing various facets of the college including faculty, administration, office personnel, TAPs, and members of the Board of Trustees.

The Quality Leadership Team (QLT) participated in a 2-day intense training using the Baldrige Educational Criteria in January, 2001. The QLT has spearheading the preparation of Michigan Quality Award applications in 2001, 2002, and 2003.

A sub team of the QLT was asked to represent the College at the *CQIN Summer Institute* in Dallas in August, 2002. This team has already made a significant contribution to the College in the form of the *RAIDER PRIDE: GRCC Values in Action* initiative unveiled last year. Additionally this team is focusing on improving communications particularly in the area of staff rewards and recognitions for contributions to the overall college mission, vision, and values.

Quality Leadership Team plans for this academic year include serving as facilitators for the department/unit level planning initiative and working to infuse quality principles directly into the work of the college.

What happened to the NCA site visit originally scheduled for 2001?

Since we were accepted into the AQIP Project, NCA cancelled the scheduled 2001 site visit to determine our reaccreditation status. Instead, based on our commitment to the quality process as demonstrated through our AQIP application and the on-going self-assessment using Baldrige criteria process, we have been given a *re-affirmation of our accreditation* status. This re-affirmation of accreditation will remain current as long as we continue to demonstrate a commitment to quality improvement practices, values, and tools.

What is the AQIP Traveling Team and Strategy Forum?

A subset of the Quality Leadership Team was asked by the President to represent GRCC at the October 24 - 27, 2001 AQIP Strategy Forum held in Lisle, IL. This forum included teams from four other colleges and replaced the traditional NCA campus visit. To prepare for the Forum, the Traveling Team worked with the Quality Leadership Team to prepare an *Institutional Profile* including the identification of three quality action projects. Feedback from AQIP leaders and peer representatives was used to strengthen each project including action plans and indicators of success. Each project has a three-year implementation plan including an annual report outlining project progress sent to AQIP each September.

What are our GRCC Action Projects?

- (1) Improving student learning through curriculum development, assessment, and revision;
- (2) Improving student support systems from “street to seat;” and
- (3) Raider Pride: GRCC values in action.

Detailed action plans and indicators of success are available at [s/groups/public/quallead/AQIP Action Projects](http://s/groups/public/quallead/AQIP%20Action%20Projects).

What is our commitment to NCA?

To remain accredited, we must turn in annual “progress reports” to NCA regarding our work on the three action projects. If we fail to make substantial progress toward our goals, they will send a visitation team to come and “assist” us.

What is the relationship between Baldrige and AQIP?

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award helped inspire most state, local and other continuous quality improvement programs, and also motivated the design of AQIP. But AQIP differs from the Baldrige in several respects: AQIP has 9 criteria (versus 7 for Baldrige), AQIP includes results in every criterion (while Baldrige Criterion 7 aggregates all results), AQIP has separate criteria for different work processes like teaching, partnering, administration, or research and other major goals (while Baldrige Criterion 6 covers all work processes), and, most importantly, AQIP is focused on higher education *exclusively*.

Remember: Baldrige (and the state programs modeled on it) are *award* programs, not *accreditation* processes. As such, they have different goals, and necessarily can use techniques not appropriate for accreditation. AQIP strives to both stimulate continuous improvement *and* assure the public and funding agents of the quality of higher education providers. To serve both ends — assuring and improving higher learning — demands more than most award programs can furnish.

An institution partnering with AQIP can pursue state and national quality awards, but not in lieu of doing periodic Quality System Reviews for AQIP. If planned thoughtfully, award applications complement and reinforce AQIP obligations.

How can GRCC staff participate?

GRCC has commissioned several cross-functional teams who are working on improvement processes including the Strategy Team, the Enrollment Management Team, Street to Seat Team, Assessment Teams, Program Review Team, and several others. These teams are always looking for new members.

Our team/department action planning process directly supports our improvement effort.