QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

Eastern Arizona College

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Quality Checkup team members:

Dr. Joseph Collins
Interim Vice President, Academic Affairs
College of DuPage

Linda Stacy
Director, Educational Development
University of Toledo

The Higher Learning Commission
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504
800-621-7440 • www.ncahlc.org
Background on Quality Checkups conducted by the Academic Quality Improvement Program

The Higher Learning Commission’s Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) conducts Quality Checkup site visits to each institution during the fifth or sixth year in every seven-year cycle of AQIP participation. These visits are conducted by trained, experienced AQIP Reviewers to determine whether the institution continues to meet The Higher Learning Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation, and whether it is using quality management principles and building a culture of continuous improvement as participation in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) requires. The goals of an AQIP Quality Checkup are to:

1. Affirm the accuracy of the organization’s online Systems Portfolio and verify information included in the portfolio that the last Systems Appraisal has identified as needing clarification or verification (System Portfolio Clarification and Verification);
2. Review with organizational leaders actions taken to capitalize on the strategic issues and opportunities for improvement identified by the last Systems Appraisal (Systems Appraisal Follow Up);
3. Alert the organization to areas that need its attention prior to Reaffirmation of Accreditation, and reassure it concerning areas that have been covered adequately (Accreditation Issues Follow Up);
4. Verify federal compliance issues such as default rates, complaints, USDE interactions and program reviews, etc. (Federal Compliance Review); and
5. Assure continuing organizational quality improvement commitment through presentations, meetings, or sessions that clarify AQIP and Commission accreditation work (Organizational Quality Commitment).

The AQIP peer reviewer(s) trained for this role prepare for the visit by reviewing relevant organizational and AQIP file materials, particularly the organization’s last Systems Appraisal Feedback Report and the Commission’s internal Organizational Profile, which summarizes information reported by the institution in its Annual Institutional Data Update. The report provided to AQIP by the institution is also shared with the evaluator(s). Copies of the Quality Checkup report are provided to the institution’s CEO and AQIP liaison. A copy is retained by the Commission for the institution’s permanent file, and will be part of the materials reviewed by the AQIP Review Panel during Reaffirmation of Accreditation.
Clarification and verification of contents of the institution’s Systems Portfolio

As members of Eastern Arizona College’s 2007 Systems Portfolio Appraisal Team, the Quality Checkup Team arrived on-site with an in-depth knowledge of the EAC Systems Portfolio. During the visit, the Quality Checkup Team verified and clarified the contents of the Systems Portfolio through discussions with the President, Provost and AQIP Liaison, AQIP Team, and Action Project Team leaders. In addition, the Quality Checkup Team met with a number of cross-functional groups that includes students, administrators, faculty, staff, and the District Governing Board. The Quality Checkup Team also observed a regular meeting of the EAC Planning and Steering Committee.

The various EAC constituency groups agreed that most of the comments presented in the March 2007 Systems Appraisal Feedback Report were accurate. In several instances, however, the original Systems Portfolio lacked sufficient detail or context, or the reviewers’ understanding of the information in the Portfolio was incomplete. Discussions with the various constituencies at the College resolved these issues. Even with the occasional misreading of the Systems Portfolio by the original Appraisal Team, and the limited ability of EAC to completely describe all of its processes and results in a sufficient manner, the personnel at EAC still recognized that the appraisal process identified a number of opportunities that were meaningful and appropriate for the College to address.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Eastern Arizona College presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Review of the institution’s approach to capitalizing on recommendations identified by its last Systems Appraisal in the Strategic Issues Analysis.

The College is addressing each of the three strategic issues identified in the 2007 Systems Appraisal Feedback Report. EAC also has addressed all of the OO comments in the Systems Portfolio, as explained in their Annotated Working Copy of the Feedback Report.

Strategic Issue #1 – Establishment of KPI’s and identification of appropriate assessment tools to measure the progress on the KPI’s, followed by the deliberate analysis of results with the aim of making improvements.
EAC recognizes that a strategic plan will be a valuable tool to move them forward, and has chartered Action Project #4 on Strategic Planning to accomplish this. In the process of strategic planning the college will address this strategic issue related to identifying Key Performance Indicators and developing proper assessment processes to judge their effectiveness. Through the AQIP experience, they recognize that it can help them to define priorities, and can become a way to identify action projects. This is now being viewed as a positive step, and a team has been identified to start the process. EAC has an ambitious goal of becoming a four-year college in order to offer opportunities in an extremely rural area. The development of a strategic plan can be a tool to help them achieve this goal. The college has recently participated in its first Noel Levitz survey and was in the process of completing a staff satisfaction survey. The inclusion of these nationally recognized tools will be valuable in reporting results and determining needed areas of improvement.

Strategic Issue #2 – Fiscal soundness of the College as an end in itself, rather than a means for EAC to carry out its mission.

As a result of discussions with the College, the Quality Checkup Team had the opportunity to understand and appreciate the challenges presented by the extreme rural nature of the College and the local funding mechanisms. This additional information brought clarity to the attention to sound fiscal principles. In this extremely challenging time for many colleges, EAC is debt free, plans to pay cash for a new building, and is able to get more value for their money, as they are able to capitalize on a depressed construction market. As a result of the information shared, in the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, this attention to fiscal soundness is acceptable and necessary.

Strategic Issue #3 – Development of a robust process for planning improvement

The College recognized that many of the OO’s in the Systems Portfolio were the result of the lack of a formal planning process. It should be noted that the President has long been a devoted fan of Deming and quality principles. With this level of support for quality, as the AQIP process matures at the College and the college embarks on a strategic planning process through Action Project #4, in the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, a far more robust process will evolve. The AQIP Team also recognizes the need to provide College personnel with quality training and tools to maximize their effectiveness. The campus has developed “Leadershops” to train EAC employees in quality principles.
In addition to addressing the Strategic Issues cited in the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report, Eastern has made progress on the OO comments identified in the report. Progress was documented in the form of a spreadsheet with all of the OO comments and either next steps or clarifying comments.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Eastern Arizona College presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The Quality Checkup Team reviewed all of the OO comments with the AQIP team. Feedback from the College indicated that this was an extremely valuable process, and one which left them feeling far better prepared to write the next Systems Portfolio. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Review of organizational commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement

It was evident that Eastern has established a commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement:

- Eastern has formed an AQIP Team to guide the quality initiative. The group meets regularly, and has a cross-disciplinary makeup. EAC has involved approximately 50% of its workforce in some form of AQIP activity.

- Throughout the visit, the Quality Checkup Team was impressed with EAC’s demonstrated commitment to continuing its quality journey. Numerous remarks were made that AQIP was a very positive force for the College. The establishment of three new Action Projects that appear to be exactly the main opportunity areas to focus on at this time is a good sign that EAC is making progress on the AQIP journey. EAC has also included many new faculty and staff members on the three new Action Project teams. This inclusion will continue to move AQIP forward at the College. The institution also seems to have the right personnel in leadership positions on the AQIP Team and the Action Projects.

- Eastern has created a process for systematically addressing the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report.

- The Board’s commitment to Eastern’s quality journey was evident during the Quality Checkup visit. All five of the Board members were present for an opening session in which they demonstrated knowledge of the AQIP program.
• Action Project #1 resulted in a change in the approach to employee satisfaction assessment. The PACE survey has been selected and administrative approval has been obtained to administer the survey in Spring 2009. Plans are to continue to administer the Employee Feedback survey intermittently with the PACE survey. And, expectations are that the College’s standing committees will participate to a greater degree in review of those policies germane to their respective missions.

• Action Project #2 resulted in a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) that is equipped with the latest technology and software. An energetic Director was identified from the faculty ranks, and he is making great progress addressing faculty needs in the classroom. Everyone on the campus that we spoke with was very complementary of the CTL.

• Action Project #3 resulted in a new approach to measuring student satisfaction. The college decided to administer the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey over a three-week period in spring 2008. The process was used to establish a benchmark for further assessment and for comparison with other institutions both regionally and nationally. The CAAP and Noel-Levitz surveys will be given every three years and the Plan to Assess Student Academic Achievement will be evaluated every fall semester to determine its currency, accuracy, and relevancy to the institutions’ mission.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Eastern Arizona College presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

USDE issues related to default rate (renewal of eligibility, program audits, or other USDE actions)

EAC does not participate in the Federal Family Education Loan Program and therefore has no issues related to the default rates that concern the USDE. A FFELP default rate can affect an institution’s eligibility to participate in federal financial aid programs. Participation is affected if the default rate exceeds 25 percent for three consecutive years. The relevant data and information contained in the College’s Federal Compliance Material Packet was sent to the
team in advance of the Checkup Visit and provided clear and concise responses to the compliance requirements.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Eastern Arizona College presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Compliance with Commission Policy IV.A.8, Public Notification of Comprehensive Evaluation Visit

The College announced the upcoming Quality Checkup visit using a variety of media. This included the College’s website (www.eac.edu), four weekly newspapers throughout the three-county service area, flyers posted on campus, the monthly newsletter of the local chamber of commerce, and the EAC employee newsletter. A notice was posted on January 23, 2009, on the front page of the College’s Web site in its feature story rotation. On January 23, 2009, a press release was sent to the Eastern Arizona Courier (Graham County), Copper Era (Greenlee County), Arizona Silver Belt (southern Gila County), and the Payson Roundup (northern Gila County). This release was also sent to the following radio stations in Graham County: KATO (AM), SUNY (FM), KAT Kountry (FM), KFMM (FM), and MAJIK (FM). The College also placed display ads in the two newspapers in our primary service area. The ads ran in the Eastern Arizona Courier and the Copper Era for two weeks, February 4 and February 11. The story was published in the February 2009 issue of the Graham County Chamber of Commerce newsletter, The Business Review.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Eastern Arizona College presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The methods utilized by EAC are acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Compliance with Commission policy 1.C.7, Credits, Program Length, and Tuition

The institution’s approach to Commission policy 1.C.7, Credits, Program Length, and Tuition are well documented and approval systems are in place.

Credits
The EAC catalog states: “Credit is given by means of a semester credit system which assigns each course a certain number of credits. A credit usually represents three hours of work each week in a 16-week semester; it may stand for an hour of classroom work and two hours of preparation, for three hours of laboratory work, or for some other combination as the particular course may demand.”

**Program Length**

EAC grants the Associate of Arts (AA), Associate of Business (ABus), Associate of Science (AS), Associate of General Studies (AGS), and the Associate of Applied Science degrees (AAS). Eastern offers various Certificates of Proficiency that enable the student to test for licensure and/or prepare the student to enter the job market. Specific requirements for each of the Associate Degrees and Certificates of Proficiency are identified in the curriculum section of the catalog.

**Tuition**

Eastern has an innovative and student-friendly tuition policy. In-state tuition and fees for 2008-2009 are $120 for up to six credits, then $95 per credit up to $690 for 12 credits. There is no additional tuition for credits taken above the 12 credit load. This policy encourages students to explore college and it also encourages students to take additional courses above the 12 credit payment ceiling. The tuition rate for out-of-state follows the same pattern, but the rates are $240 for up to six credits and $3,720 for 12 credits or more. The in-state tuition rate is the lowest among Arizona community colleges. The out-of-state rate is at the Arizona average.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Eastern Arizona College presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

**Compliance with Commission policy IV.B.2, Advertising and Recruitment Materials**

The College’s Marketing and Public Information Office is responsible for all publications including class schedules, recruiting materials, Academic Catalogs, program brochures, press releases, and radio ads. EAC made samples of its advertising and recruitment materials available to the Quality Checkup Team. The Quality Checkup Team reviewed a number of
publications that the College uses to promote its programs and recruit students, including the college catalog, the Summer/Fall 2009 Class Schedule, and the Experience Eastern promotional materials.

EAC’s public web site (www.eac.edu) is also a primary means of advertising the institution’s programs and services. The web page includes the physical address, phone numbers, and website address for The Higher Learning Commission. Statements that identify the Higher Learning Commission as EAC’s accrediting agency include the Commission’s Web site address and phone number. Future publications will include the physical address as well.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Eastern Arizona College presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Compliance with Commission policy III.A.1, Professional Accreditation, and III.A.3, Requirements of Organizations Holding Dual Institutional Accreditation

EAC provided evidence of its affiliation and accreditation history with the Higher Learning Commission. The College does not have another agency that accredits a significant portion of its programs. However, the College does have five programs that require special licensure:

- Nursing – Arizona Board of Nursing
- Emergency Medical Technician – Arizona Department of Health Services
- Paramedic – Arizona Department of Health Services
- Fire Science – State Fire Marshal
- Cosmetology – Arizona Board of Cosmetology

The College’s programs are all in good standing with their respective licensing agencies.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance are acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Compliance with Commission policy IV.B.4, Organizational Records of Student Complaints
In response to the Higher Learning Commission’s federal requirement to maintain an organizational account of student complaints and disposition of those complaints, EAC maintains a log on the secured, shared drive of the College’s computer network. Authorization is given to Assistant Deans or higher and the backup documentation is stored in the District Office. Policy regarding student complaints has recently been developed and is pending GCCCD Governing Board approval. Students with grievances of a non-academic or academic nature must follow GCCCD Policy 5810.01 or 5810.02. Sexual harassment grievances should follow GCCCD Policy 4730.00. These policies are also found in Eastern’s catalog, pages 34 to 35 and 41 to 42.

In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Eastern Arizona College presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

Other Title IV compliance issues

Eastern Arizona College participates in the Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, Federal Academic Competitiveness Grant and the Federal College Work Study Programs. Trend analysis for federal fund disbursement for the different programs was provided to the Quality Checkup Team. Eastern receives a Title III waiver and is not required to provide matching funds to the Federal Work Study and FSEOG grant programs. Eastern’s annual audit is performed by the State of Arizona Office of the Auditor General. The state acts as a reviewing entity for the applicable federal financial aid programs and reports accordingly to the Department of Education. During the 2006-2007 audit, one Title IV finding was noted and has been satisfactorily addressed in the institution’s corrective plan. No further action was deemed necessary. Audits prior to the 2006-2007 year have been noted as unqualified.

EAC Campus Crime Information is included in the 2008-2009 Academic Catalog, p. 184 and Class Schedules, p. 26. Eastern also provided the Program Participation Agreement (PPA), the Eligibility and Certification Approval (ECAR), the Fiscal Operations Report and Application to Participate (FISAP), and the Audit Letter to the Quality Checkup Team for their review.
In the Quality Checkup Team’s judgment, Eastern Arizona College presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution’s approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP’s expectations.

**Other AQIP issues**

EAC stakeholders, including students and Board members, shared very positive perceptions of the College’s role as a major educational provider in the region. Moreover, the College is viewed as a key participant in the community as well as a local center for the performing arts. EAC has just completed several new building projects and is beginning construction on a new building to house the nursing program. It is impressive to note that the College has no debt and is paying cash for the new building(s). The College has placed a priority on creating a welcoming environment. One example is its extensive and attractive landscaping. Another example is the reception area for visiting students and their parents.

The student leaders who spoke with the Quality Checkup Team held the College and its faculty in high regard, and named the student clubs and co-curricular activities as especially noteworthy in retaining students and providing meaningful learning experiences. The students also noted the community support for their activities.

EAC has a rich history. Many of the participants shared that parents and grandparents had attended the College. The stakeholders all felt very strong connections to the College, and credit the College for providing cultural experiences that otherwise would not be available in such a rural area.

Eastern also has been exploring an attempt to address a community need through offering a four-year baccalaureate degree in select programs. The ability to offer a four-year degree may improve the access to higher education for the local communities served by EAC.

The Quality Checkup Team appreciated the warm hospitality and well-organized structure of the Checkup Visit, as well as the active engagement of faculty, staff and administrators in the various discussion sessions.