

**Reaffirmation of Accreditation Recommendation
for
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751**

**of the 2008-09
Academic Quality improvement Program
Review Panel on Reaffirmation**

**The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools**

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I. Context and Nature of Review

A. Review Purpose, Process, and Materials

AQIP Reaffirmation of Accreditation reviews are scheduled seven years in advance, when an institution first joins the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) or when an institution already participating in AQIP is reaffirmed via the AQIP Reaffirmation of Accreditation process.

In conducting these reviews, the AQIP Reaffirmation of review panel examines the following materials for each institution:

- Current Commission History file of institutional actions
- Current Commission Statement of Affiliation Status
- Current official Commission Organizational Profile
- Annual Updates of year's Action Projects
- AQIP Review Panel Report(s) on Institutional Status Change Requests
- Focused visit report(s) and action letter(s)
- Institutional websites
- Key correspondence between the institution and the Commission
- Last Comprehensive PEAQ Evaluation team report, institutional response, and Commission action letter
- Quality Checkup report(s)
- Quality Program Summary provided by the institution for the Quality Checkup
- Summary of Action Projects attempted
- Summary Update of institutional activity and dynamics since the last Quality Checkup, provided by the institution on September 1 of the review year (Quality Highlights)
- Systems Appraisal Feedback Report(s)
- Systems Portfolio Index(es) (to compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation)
- Systems Portfolio(s), including update provided by the institution on September 1 of the review year
- Any other major reports or documents that are part of the institution's permanent Commission files

Two lead panelists from the AQIP Review Panel on Reaffirmation draft a recommendation that is reviewed and approved by the entire panel before it is forwarded to the Institutional Actions Council.

B. Organizational Context

The institution was first accredited by the Commission in 1928 as a teacher-training institution and in 1932 was transferred to the list of colleges and universities.

The institution was admitted to AQIP on August 17, 2001.

It participated in Strategy Forums on June 5-7, 2002, and January 23-25, 2007.

Since admission to AQIP, the institution has officially declared and attempted nine individual Action Projects, and has provided AQIP with Annual Updates of ongoing projects and received Annual Update Feedback Reports on these.

The institution provided its Systems Portfolio for review in 2005 and received a Systems Appraisal Feedback Report on March 23, 2006.

AQIP conducted a Quality Checkup visit to the institution on May 2-4, 2007, and provided a report of the findings of the visiting team.

C. Organizational Scope and Structure (including extended physical or distance education operations)

The University of Wisconsin-Stout (UW-Stout) is one of the 13 publicly supported universities in the University of Wisconsin System. UW-Stout enrolls 8416 students in an array of 30 undergraduate and 17 graduate degree programs, which taken as a whole, are unique in the country. UW-Stout's programs are delivered on campus and via distance learning technologies.

D. Notification of Quality Checkup Visit and Solicitation of Third-Party Comment

A Quality Checkup site visit to the institution was conducted on May 2-4, 2007. In compliance with Commission requirements, the institution notified its constituencies and the public of this visit, soliciting third party comment to be sent directly to the Commission. The Commission shared all comments received with the institution and the team, and the team both discussed the comments with the institution and reviewed evidence of the institution's compliance with Commission's notification and third-party comment requirements.

E. Compliance with Federal Requirements

The Quality Checkup team that conducted a site visit to the institution on May 2-4, 2007, examined evidence provided by the institution of its compliance with the Commission's federal compliance program. The Quality Checkup site visit team concluded that the institution provided evidence that it fully meets all expectations of the Commission's Federal Compliance Program.

F. Evidence of the Organization's Responsiveness to Previous Commission Concerns Regarding Fulfillment of the Criteria for Accreditation.

UW-Stout responded to feedback from the Systems Appraisal, from the Quality Check-up Report and from the 2007 Strategy Forum to initiate a number of improvements – described in the Quality Highlights 2006-2008. The 2007 action projects specifically address issues identified through the 2007 Strategy Forum.

II. Fulfillment of the Criteria for Accreditation

CRITERION ONE: MISSION AND INTEGRITY. The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

A. Evidence that Core Components are met.

The University of Wisconsin-Stout (UWS) is very clear about its Mission—integrated theoretical and practical instruction reinforced by extensive technology laboratories and experiential learning described as “hands-on, minds-on” active learning. In 2006, the Strategic Planning Group proposed that UWS “brand” itself as “Wisconsin’s Polytechnic University.” The UW System Board of Regents approved this designation in March 2007. (SA, p. 18; SU, p. 1)

Leadership skills are encouraged, developed, and strengthened at UWS through the performance evaluation process, regular leadership meetings focused on team building, the Women’s Leadership Program, and growth and enrichment programs for program directors and department chairs. (SA, p. 32)

Senior leaders use the strategic planning process to set short- and long-term goals that are aligned with the mission, vision, and values of UWS. The process includes assignment of responsibilities, timelines for completion of action plans, and accountability to the Chancellor’s Advisory Council. (SA, p. 31)

To identify emerging needs and opportunities, always studied in the light of the UWS mission, the Provost’s Council, the Administrative and Student Life Services Council, and the Chancellor’s Advisory Council all have regular processes for “listening to and learning from” the full range of campus constituencies. (SA, p. 22)

To identify the specific credentials, skills, and values required of faculty, staff, and administrators, units with openings identify their needs, justify how the needs are aligned with mission, goals, and priorities, and develop an appropriate position description. Permission to hire, therefore, is dependent on mission. (SA, p. 26)

A three-day orientation program is conducted each fall to orient new faculty and staff on the organization’s mission, vision, values, policies, benefits, and the focus on continuous improvement. (SA, p. 26)

Professional development at campus, departmental, and individual levels is aligned with goals and priorities of the current strategic plan for the organization. (SA, p. 27)

B. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention, but no specific Commission monitoring or reporting.

None.

C. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require institutional attention and that actions taken and improvements achieved be described in the institution’s

Systems Portfolio before its next scheduled Systems Appraisal, to permit Commission follow-up.

None.

D. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up via declaration of a specific Action Project(s) and the submission of Annual Updates.

None.

Recommendation of the Panel

The Criterion is met, and no Commission follow-up is recommended.

CRITERION TWO: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE. The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

A. Evidence that Core Components are met.

UWS has the distinction of being the first post-secondary institution to receive the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in March 2002. (SU, p. 7-8; QPS, p. 3)

Guided by its vision, values, and mission, UWS has adopted seven strategic challenges for overall institutional quality improvement. (QPS, pp. 6-7)

UWS conducts strategic planning with the involvement of key leaders and key stakeholders in a comprehensive cycle of planning and improvement. The strategic planning process drives the annual priorities development, budget, and resource allocation processes. The final plan is communicated through organization-wide forums and is posted on the web. (SA, p. 40)

Faculty and staff needs are gathered through campus-wide advisory councils and committees, surveys, and focus groups. Student input is obtained through advisory councils and annual surveys such as the ACT Student Opinion Survey. These reports on strengths, needs, and opportunities are integrated into new strategic goals and recommendations for improvement. (SA, p. 19)

The QCU team listed among "exemplary activities on campus" the continuous improvement approaches that are exhibited throughout the whole organization. Each program on campus uses a number of direct and indirect methods to assess student learning. (QCU, p. 4; SA, p. 16)

In terms of resources for the future, enrollment data exhibit favorable trends for UWS, particularly in the growth of targeted programs. As a result, the institution has been generating tuition revenue beyond its targets, which enables it to invest in program improvement and diversification of offerings. (SA, pp. 19 and 38)

The Strategic Planning Group provides resource principles for making resource allocation decisions, and the organization has developed a process to identify human, fiscal, and facility needs as part of the annual priority setting process. The process for identifying needs and allocating resources is open and participatory and includes checks and balances to ensure that the overall organizational mission is supported. (SA, p. 41)

The culture at UWS is clearly one of continuous and overall quality improvement. Unit leaders monitor user feedback and performance indicators to identify new needs, targets for improvement, and ways to improve the quality processes themselves. (SA, p. 35)

B. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention, but no specific Commission monitoring or reporting.

None.

C. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require institutional attention and that actions taken and improvements achieved be described in the institution's Systems Portfolio before its next scheduled Systems Appraisal, to permit Commission follow-up.

None.

D. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up via declaration of a specific Action Project(s) and the submission of Annual Updates.

None.

Recommendation of the Panel

The Criterion is met, and no Commission follow-up is recommended.

CRITERION THREE: STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING. The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

A. Evidence that Core Components are met.

The Systems Appraisal Team recognized that excellence in teaching with high quality, student-centered and active learning is a “critical characteristic” of UWS. (SA, p. 9)

Effective teaching and learning are determined through assessment plans developed by each program director which contain both formative and summative assessment techniques to measure student achievement of intended learning outcomes. Results are documents in the annual “Assessment in Major” report submitted to the Provost to ensure results are used to improve teaching and learning. In addition, evidence of effective teaching is required of faculty members to obtain annual contract renewal, tenure, or promotion. (SA, p. 15)

The institution uses a participatory process for determining common student learning objectives and specific program objectives; this process draws on input from program directors, the General Education Committee, Faculty Senate, and advisory committees that include faculty, students, alumni, and employers. (SA, p. 13)

Needs for student support services are identified through a variety of methods that include surveys, focus groups, analysis of regulatory changes, and the annual strategic planning process. (SA, p. 34)

According to the 2007 ACT Student Satisfaction Survey, UWS students continue to rate the overall campus environment higher than students at other colleges rate theirs. (SU, p. 6)

The organization provides training and development opportunities for faculty, staff, and administrators—all of them focused on improving student learning and support services and based on principles of continuous improvement. (SA, p. 27)

State-of-the-art technology is a critical characteristic of teaching and learning at UWS. All undergrads receive laptop computers (refreshed every two years), and all faculty and staff have computers (replaced every three years). All classrooms and residence halls are wired to the Internet, and all areas of the campus are wireless “hot,” thus providing 24/7 access to support services. (SA, p. 11)

To document for potential employers the learning that occurs outside classrooms, UWS is developing a “dual transcript” system that will ensure the alignment of co-curricular development goals with curricular learning goals. (SU, p. 4)

B. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention, but no specific Commission monitoring or reporting.

None.

C. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require institutional attention and that actions taken and improvements achieved be described in the institution’s Systems Portfolio before its next scheduled Systems Appraisal, to permit Commission follow-up.

None.

D. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up via declaration of a specific Action Project(s) and the submission of Annual Updates.

None.

Recommendation of the Panel

The Criterion is met, and no Commission follow-up is recommended.

CRITERION FOUR: ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY, AND APPLICATION OF

KNOWLEDGE. The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

A. Evidence that Core Components are met.

UWS has remained focused on its unique mission within the UW System to provide applied educational offerings leading to careers that address the needs of employers and society. It offers 30 undergraduate and 17 graduate programs, half of which are not offered elsewhere in the UW System, and several are not offered anywhere else in the USA. (QPS, p. 4; SA, p. 10; OP, p. 1)

In addition to HLC and State of Wisconsin accreditation, UWS maintains 14 specialized or program accreditations in order to fulfill its mission to provide applied educational offerings with the highest possible quality. (QCU, pp. 9-12)

To monitor the currency and effectiveness of the curriculum and to change or discontinue low quality programs, UWS uses key indicators such as enrollments, course evaluations, placement rates and employer and student satisfaction; the Academic Program Review Process; and the Program or Course Modification Process. Program review is scheduled every one to seven years, depending on the findings of previous reviews, and the course modification process occurs every year as part of strategic planning. (SA, p. 15)

UWS promotes the life of learning among its faculty by recent increases in funds available for professional development grants and by supporting sabbaticals equal to or above seven out of ten competitors. External recognition of the institution's quality of faculty is indicated by the fact that the number of named chairs at UWS exceeds the level at nine out of ten competitors. (SA, p. 29)

Faculty and staff are actively engaged in research and application of knowledge, as shown by favorable trends in grant proposals submitted, grants awarded, and contract dollar amounts. UWS ranks fifth among eleven competitors in federal dollars awarded. Another very favorable trend is the increase in the number of student research articles published. (SA, p. 20)

The Mission to provide applied educational programs that address the needs of employers and society requires ongoing investment of time and energy at UWS in The New Program Development Process for Degree Programs. The process is partly a marketing dimension of strategic planning but more essentially a study of mission fulfillment. (SA, p. 14)

Placement data by program show 99-100% placement of graduates in five out of six high demand fields. Alumni Ratings of Program Effectiveness show a favorable trend increasing from 65% for 1992 graduates to 82% for the Class of 2000. Alumni Ratings in Key Competency Areas since 1999 have been consistently between 3.9 and 4.4 on a five-point scale. (SA, p. 16)

B. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention, but no specific Commission monitoring or reporting.

None.

C. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require institutional attention and that actions taken and improvements achieved be described in the institution's Systems Portfolio before its next scheduled Systems Appraisal, to permit Commission follow-up.

None.

D. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up via declaration of a specific Action Project(s) and the submission of Annual Updates.

None.

Recommendation of the Panel

The Criterion is met, and no Commission follow-up is recommended.

CRITERION FIVE: ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE. As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

A. Evidence that Core Components are met.

UWS uses a participatory process to involve stakeholders in decision making. Facilitated group sessions each fall are used to gather faculty, staff, and student input on past organizational decisions and directions and to listen to ideas concerning future issues, priorities, and goals. The Chancellor's Advisory Council is the primary decision-making group, and it includes representatives from all stakeholder groups. (SA, p. 31)

From 2005 to 2008 (and involving two AQIP Action Projects), the institution engaged in an expansion of academic programs as a direct result of listening to students who chose not to come or who left UWS, to employers who communicated need for educated employees in specific areas, and to faculty who saw opportunities for program development. (SU, pp. 1-2)

Relationships are built and maintained with key stakeholders through alumni gatherings, technology outreach organizations, internships, participation with community organizations and governance groups, and participation of key stakeholders on campus committees and advisory councils. These methods build long-term relationships and encourage the development of additional programs to attract new stakeholders. (SA, p. 23)

Student and other stakeholder satisfaction is determined through a variety of surveys related to satisfaction, dissatisfaction, engagement, utilization, learning, and general and career competencies. Survey data are supplemented by data on enrollment trends, freshman retention rates, and drop/withdrawal rates. Peer and national comparisons are used to analyze the data and identify opportunities for improvement. (SA, p. 24)

The economic impact of UWS services to constituents from 1999 to 2004 has been positive and increasing. The number of annual technical assistance services ranged from 191 to 211

activities, providing service to 90 to 107 companies. These services produced savings in millions of dollars, and jobs created or maintained varied from 107 to 140. (SA, p. 45)

The number of conferences and workshops offered by UWS increased from 20 in 2000-01 to 35 in 2004-05, and the number of registrations increased from just over 5,000 to about 10,000 in the same time period. The increases represent a good measure both of the institution's efforts to serve its local communities and also of the high regard in which these communities hold such services. (SA, p. 45)

B. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention, but no specific Commission monitoring or reporting.

None.

C. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require institutional attention and that actions taken and improvements achieved be described in the institution's Systems Portfolio before its next scheduled Systems Appraisal, to permit Commission follow-up.

None.

D. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up via declaration of a specific Action Project(s) and the submission of Annual Updates.

None.

Recommendation of the Panel

The Criterion is met, and no Commission follow-up is recommended.

Summary of panel recommendations regarding fulfillment of the Criteria for Accreditation

The Systems Appraisal team (SA, p.6), the Quality Check Up team (QCU, p. 3), and the current Reaffirmation Panel are all in agreement that the University of Wisconsin-Stout meets all five Criteria for Accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission.

III. Participation in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP).

- A. Comments and counsel on specific improvement projects**
- B. Comments and counsel on key institutional processes and systems**
- C. Comments and counsel on the institution's culture of quality and its quality program or infrastructure.**

Documents created by the University of Wisconsin-Stout for its Quality Check-up (Quality Program Summary - May 2007) and for the Reaffirmation Process (Quality Highlights -- 2006-2008) relate how the institution uses AQIP processes and feedback for continuous improvement.

These documents also point to integration among all of the UW Stout's institutional improvement processes – AQIP as a continuous accreditation process, strategic planning as an annual objective and goal setting process, and Baldrige as an annual quality assurance process.

This level of integration is not an easy task for any institution, and while the AQIP Systems Portfolio originally morphed from the Baldrige Award Application process, the two approaches are not identical. Specifically, AQIP review processes produce feedback that is iterative, and requires attention and response for the next round of AQIP reviews. UW-Stout clearly understands this “continuing conversation” with AQIP. In the Quality Highlights (2006-2008), the writers state:

“During the time period 2006-2008, several improvement actions were taken in response to feedback included in the AQIP Systems Appraisal Feedback Report, from the AQIP Quality Checkup Report, or from other sources, in each of the AQIP Categories. This document provides a summary of these actions; more information will be provided in the 2009 Systems Portfolio” (p.2).

AQIP Action Projects: UW Stout is an early AQIP institution, joining in 2001. The campus used its first Strategy Forum to set new action projects. At the second Strategic Forum, the campus decided to integrate strategic planning and AQIP action projects, using action projects as a tool to implement the university's annual priorities. Comprehensive strategic planning is a Baldrige-recognized strength of UW Stout. Strategic planning integrates campus planning with the budgeting process and is both systematic and highly participatory.

Because UW Stout AQIP Action Projects are closely aligned with strategic planning objectives, the Action Projects themselves are very broad. Current projects include: 1) improving effectiveness of internal communication, 2) developing a brand around the new polytechnic identity of the institution, 3) preparing students for global society and workforce, and 4) reaching new markets and providing new programs.

Systems Appraisal Feedback and Quality Check-up Visit Feedback: Using feedback from the Quality Check-up Report and the Systems Appraisal, the institution has responded to “strategic issues” feedback from the 2005 Systems Appraisal to clarify how the campus 1) develops leaders, 2) uses process measures and multi-year data points, and 3) sets targets for improvement.

UW Stout has used the portfolio and the feedback from it within the campus's strategic planning process and for new employee training, and for presentation to the UW System Board of Regents.

Summary of panel comments and counsel about the organization's commitment to continuous quality improvement and its participation in AQIP.

UW Stout is a role model nationally and internationally on quality improvement in higher education. In 2001, the campus was the first higher education institution to win the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. The institution continues to support in Baldrige outreach activities. Participation in AQIP allows the institution to use AQIP tools, such as action projects and systematic feedback, to enhance organizational learning and development. UW-Stout exemplifies an institution on its own quality journey- responsive to all sources of AQIP feedback, while seeking new channels for the use of feedback in continuous improvement.