Southwestern College Quality Program Summary

AQIP Timeline

Southwestern College's involvement in AQIP began in fall 2002 when the college undertook a self-assessment based on Baldrige criteria for education. In the spring of 2003 college president Dick Merriman and academic vice president Andy Sheppard attended an AQIP Leadership Seminar. In June 2003 Southwestern applied to participate in AQIP. The college was accepted for participation in August 2003.

In October 2003, a team of eight administrators, faculty members, and the chair of the college's board of trustees participated in a Strategy Forum. The team's work at the Strategy Forum focused primarily on identifying Action Projects. Four such projects were ultimately developed. Their titles were: Mobilize the college to achieve key financial outcomes; Improving student retention and graduation rates; Improving methods of assessing academic programs and student learning outcomes; and Human Resources and Employee Development. These projects were submitted to AQIP and posted in the AQIP Action Projects Directory in December 2003. All four projects were completed and final reports were submitted to AQIP in September 2007. Information about the projects is available in the document "Action Projects Retired" (copied from www.aqip.org).

In June 2007 the college completed and submitted to AQIP our first Systems Portfolio. The Systems Portfolio may be accessed at www.sckans.edu/sciq. The Systems Appraisal Feedback Report was received in September 2007 Feedback Report. Feedback for each category was reviewed and groups were assigned to begin responding to opportunities for improvement. A listing of Appraisal Response assignments and the status of responses may be accessed at "Category Improvement Updates".

In November 2007, a team of eight administrators, a faculty member, and the chair of the college's board of trustees participated in our second Strategy Forum. This Forum focused on category improvement, building the institution's quality infrastructure, and a second round of action projects. The college's AQIP leaders selected Category 1 and Category 3 as focal points for improvement (see www.sckans.edu/improvement-priorities). Changes in performance evaluations and the integration of quality principals and practices into the college's strategic planning were selected as quality infrastructure initiatives (see www.sckans.edu/improvement-of-quality). New Action Projects, commenced in February 2008, include: Analysis of main campus admission and retention issues; Increasing persistence rates of Professional Studies Learners; Addressing administrative information system problems; and Academic outcomes assessment: an institutional focus. Information about these Action Projects is available in the document "Action Projects Current."

State of the College's Quality Program

When the college embarked on its participation in AQIP, the institution's leaders were clear that the principal reason for our participation was the simple need for quality improvement. Knowing that people in higher education often respond negatively to ballyhooed administrative initiatives that feature lots of new jargon and processes, the college's leaders consciously pursued an approach that simply emphasizes "let's get better." In that spirit, a relatively small group of the college's administrators has been actively involved in moving forward prescribed processes on the specified timetables in compliance with AQIP expectations. These people are making sure the right boxes are checked in order to meet accreditation expectations. Many more of the college's employees have been involved in "let's get better" efforts carried out under the banner of SCIQ, Southwestern College Improving Quality.

While these "let's get better" efforts have been successful, it has become increasingly evident that a more explicit commitment to teaching about and employing quality principles is necessary. In many parts of the institution, thinking about quality is still fuzzy, process thinking is still rudimentary, and use of process-level outcome metrics is sporadic. Consequently, the college is working more actively to encourage employees to embed "quality" and "improvement" into their daily routine.

Future Focus of the College's Quality Program

Important leadership for the college's quality program is being provided by Ben Lim, the college's vice president for information technology, who has a strong background in quality management principles. The president of the college has charged Mr. Lim to provide institution-wide leadership in improving quality.

In his leadership role concerning quality, Ben Lim has emphasized that there are three primary issues in any attempt to develop a wide-ranging quality program. First is how we define "quality". Second is defining "improvement". And third is a common nomenclature where everyone understands what is being discussed.

Common Language:
The first step taken by the administration has focused on ensuring that college leaders are familiar with the "language" of quality improvement. The basis of the "language" comes from Six Sigma. Initial Six Sigma training has now been provided to all top level management and most 2nd level management of Southwestern College. As the program continues, more and more people will be introduced to the concepts and verbiage necessary to ensure understanding.

Quality:
There are two major aspects of quality. First is the ability to produce consistent, repeatable product. Second is understanding what the customer wants, when the customer wants it, and what the customer is willing to pay for it.

The college is beginning to use the "Process Maturity Model" to address the first part of quality: the capability of a "process". Process maturity is an indication of the level at which a process is complete and capable of continual improvement. There are qualitative measures and feedback loops to support the continual improvement of the process. A process can be defined in one of 6 levels (from level 0 through 5). These levels are generically called; Person Dependent, Process Documented, Partial Deployment, Full Deployment, Measured and Automated, and Continuously Improving. The target, although it will never be fully realized, is for all our processes to be at level 6. There is a standard analysis and audit process that will allow the college to map our key processes to a specific level. With regard to this, the college has included this past year in our Annual Performance Objectives a specific directive to map out critical processes within each department.

The second aspect of "quality" addresses the issue of the needs the "customer" considers as vital to the products and services. The basic model the college will use for this aspect is called "Critical To (CT) Tree". This model will allow us to link these characteristics to the organization's processes. It uses various tools and surveys to answer the question of customer requirements. One example of what Southwestern has done in this area is the use of an annual employ survey.

Improvement:
Finally, the ability to improve depends on the ability to measure what we **are** doing compared to what we **should** be doing. The two aspects of quality discussed above ensure that we would have consistent and repeatable processes and we know what our customer wants us to achieve. The improvement aspect adds a third tier to our overall model with metrics; (1) of how we are actually performing, (2) of how we compare to our peers and (3) of how we measure up to expectations. This aspect of the program will be the feedback loop to the Process Maturity Model and the Critical To Tree analysis.

We expect that Ben Lim, with the help of his administrative colleagues and wide participation by the college's employees will be able to drive the college's quality program from this conception to reality. The key challenges are: 1) to not view "improvement" as a one-time effort but as a standard of behavior, and 2) to make quality improvement integral to the way the college works, so that quality efforts are not "extra" work but, rather, the way we work.

The results of this work are becoming evident in several of the college's on-going Action Projects (notably, in process mapping in the project on freshman admission and retention and in the project concerning administrative software)

and in the quality infrastructure improvement plans the college is implementing in the realm of performance evaluation and planning, and the college planning process.