

# QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

# Western New Mexico University

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## Quality Checkup team members:

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### 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) or staff 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. Additionally, 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 the institution's Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

Clarification and verification of contents of the institution's *Systems Portfolio*

***In the 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 were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations***

Western New Mexico University's latest Systems Portfolio update resides in the form of an application for a Baldrige Quality Improvement Award. The material translates easily into such a form, but nonetheless differs in its appearance and intent.

The Systems Portfolio is a critical document in establishing the basis for continued accreditation, and as such should be updated with longitudinal measures of improvement or evidence seen in the strategic plans of the institution that the non-improvement issues are being addressed in a manner that is likely to result in improvement. It appears that the Systems Portfolio has not been updated systematically for the last several years. The concern is that the university has gone several years without compiling the systems portfolio data in a comprehensive case for continued accreditation following an AQIP format.

Regardless, the university's performance, based on the evidence and data provided at the time of the visit, is acceptable and adheres to the standards of the Higher Learning Commission and the AQIP principles.

Review of specific accreditation issues identified by the institution's last Systems Appraisal

***In the 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 were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.***

There were no accreditation issues identified by the 2004 Systems Appraisal Report.

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

***In the 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 were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.***

The university has worked to capitalize on the recommendations of the Systems Appraisal with general quality systems work including an "intention to apply" for a Baldrige Award in 2008. Also, there has been specific quality work accomplished by initiating or planning to operate a number of Action Projects in response to several "OO" items, including

- strategic planning
- marketing
- human resources
- organizational communication

Each of the above mentioned items have impacted or will impact the broadest structures of the university and allow for the greatest amount of long term quality change.

Review of organizational commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement

***In the 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 were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.***

In conducting interviews with employees at all levels of the university's operating structure (Board of Regents, senior leadership, middle management, faculty and general staff), each level was at least aware of the work of the AQIP principles in their respective areas of influence.

Although WNMU's Board of Regents is small and made up of political appointments, there is an apparent need for an assertive governance involvement in the AQIP accreditation process, as well as in the financial development and resource allocations of the institution to adequately discharge its fiduciary responsibilities to the state of New Mexico and its citizens. There are excellent governance models that empower Boards to provide leadership and direction without micro-management of an organization. WNMU's institutional AQIP accreditation process would benefit from the leadership commitment demonstrated by the Board's adoption of a governance process that mirrors the institution's efforts at continuous improvement.

Every group of employees was able to talk the language of systematic quality, and most groups were able to identify how the work of quality improvement guided them and allowed them to impact others in the daily functioning of their tasks.

The university has demonstrated a number of times that it is working on quality improvement in that it has won a number of awards, including

- ZIA Award – a State of New Mexico award recognizing high quality organizations
- Road Runner Award – a State of New Mexico award for quality organizations

Also, the university has applied for a Baldrige Quality Award (2004) and is applying again for that recognition (2008). Organizations which apply for the Baldrige Award are usually aware of what is required to win such an award; this indirectly demonstrates commitment to continuing

and sustained quality processes.

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

***In the 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 were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.***

Based on the evidence and explanations provided at the time of the visit, the Quality Checkup Team found no immediate issues related to the federal compliance concerns of this section of the report. The proper documentation was provided to verify continual adherence to all USDE issues related to default rate. However, by the time the Reaffirmation Panel meets and considers the accreditation, the university will have completed another cycle of recertification. Without support from independently audited financial statements, the Team had no access to the financial situation with respect to exigency (though the un-audited and unadjusted 2006 financial reports show three years in a row with operating losses, which should just about deplete the university's unrestricted net assets), or that the university is meeting the GASB financial reporting requirements or DOE benchmarks (given the financial statement management analysis notes re: overspending budgets, liabilities not in the financial reports but rather disclosed in the management analysis notes, and the operating losses for the previous two years). The lack of audited financial statements and Financial Aid Program Reviews creates an uncertainty that should be addressed and considered by the Reaffirmation of Accreditation Panel.

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

***In the 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 were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.***

The university met its requirements in this regard and the team finds that WNMU was in compliance with Commission Policy IV.A.8. The following things occurred to verify compliance:

- newspaper ads placed in all local papers in which the university operates
- the Higher Learning Commission received third-party materials demonstrating the public's awareness of the Quality Checkup Visit

- the Quality Checkup Team (with university knowledge, approval and cooperation) conducted an open public meeting for all interested parties to express their feelings and concerns

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

***In the 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 were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.***

The Quality Checkup Team found that all requirements of the Commission's policy 1.C.7 are being met. Appropriate information exists (catalog copy – hard copy and online material, program plans) to demonstrate compliance with all matters dealing with credits, program length and tuition.

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

***In the 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 were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.***

A wide variety of materials were provided to the team to demonstrate full compliance with the intent of the Commission policy dealing with advertising and recruitment issues.

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

***In the 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 were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.***

No concerns were found by the Quality Checkup Team to suggest any violation of this particular Commission policy.

The University is in good standing with its university-wide accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission.

Additionally, letters of evidence were provided to support full and continued accreditation for specific programs:

- nursing
- social work
- business
- teacher education

Compliance with Commission policy IV.B.4, *Organizational Records of Student Complaints*

***In the 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 were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.***

Records of summary reports and direct evidence of student letters of complaint were provided by the appropriate offices of the university. The academic complaint process is the most developed and systematic, and all other university departments may desire to follow and use the model in place in that unit of the university. This will breed consistency across the campus and will allow the university some uniform sense of policy development.

Other USDE compliance-related issues

***In the 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 were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.***

There are no other USDE compliance-related issues.

### Other AQIP issues

There has been steady forward progress made since the university switched from the PEAQ process to the AQIP process. The 1997 Accreditation Report, Systems Portfolio, Appraisal Feedback Report and Action Projects indicate that the organization understands a quality improvement pathway and has the institutional will to continue with its efforts. The university leadership, faculty and staff are making reasonable decisions and expected progress given the context of the campus, the region it serves and limited resources.

Each of the AQIP Categories will be discussed to further document the work of the university as witnessed by the Quality Checkup Visit Team. None of the items warrant immediate concern regarding continuing accreditation. However, by using a cluster theme analysis comparing **written documents** (Systems Portfolio, Systems Appraisal Feedback Report, WNMU Quality Program Summary, Baldrige Application, Strategic Plan, Action Projects), **on-site visit inspection of documents** (resource room materials), **interviews**, (individuals, committees, community leaders) and **professional peer observations** of the university community by the Team, a number of common themes surfaced from multiple sources over an extended period of time which the university should pay attention to as it continues its quality improvement work.

### Helping Students Learn

As evidenced from the various sources of input mentioned above, the assessment of student learning still needs some work. The programs which are accredited by professional organizations (nursing, social work, business and education) are doing a fair job of assessment. However, this level of assessment is not apparent in all units across the university. As the university prepares for the reaffirmation process, each operating unit should strive to develop a clear set of student-focused learning objectives, demonstrate the ability to select appropriate assessment tools and be able to document how the collected assessment data is being used in a data-based decision-making process. There should develop a sense of shared responsibility regarding the assessment of student learning across all units of the campus.

Organizational systems are in place (or are being put into place) to care for the development of an intellectual climate on this campus which offers a variety of degrees in a number of locations around the state of New Mexico to a population which might not otherwise have access to a quality education.

Key senior leaders (President, VPAA, AQIP Champion) are leading efforts to form a community of scholarship which benefits faculty, staff, administration and students in personal and

professional growth and development.

As mentioned in the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report, the university, overall, is maturing in this aspect of its operations, with some units in the developing stage.

### Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives

The university is involved in a variety of “other distinctive objectives” including:

- providing daycare for the community and leading efforts for early childhood development and education
- collaborating with multiple groups in economic development efforts
- retraining displaced members of the workforce
- collaborating with political, social and economic leaders

The university is using limited resources (human and financial) in meeting its obligations as a social organization tasked with meeting a wide variety of community (local and state) needs. Each of the other distinctive objectives align with the institution’s mission, vision and goals of a quality guided organization. Evaluating the impact on the university’s various constituent groups would provide data in determining continued operation of the program, the educational or social intent of a program and the logistic and strategic use of resources in implementing the program.

The developing stage of the Appraisal Feedback Report has moved to a maturing stage in this category of activities.

### Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs

In general, the university is aware of its students’ and other stakeholders’ needs, as evidenced by its involvement with the community in a number of collaborative relationships. As pointed out by the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report, the institution has worked diligently to care for this particular set of AQIP related standards by devoting an Action Project to marketing and public relations. This should pay off as the office and its operations become part of the day-to-day activities of a university engaging many publics.

Student complaint processes (academic, student development, financial aid) are in place and are being used to identify and document specific concerns, as well as to understand trends over time which might inhibit the organization from better serving its stakeholders. Files are being maintained, and there is a published process (student handbook, website) which is available to any interested parties. The university is in full compliance with all expected internal complaint processes.

At the direction of the Higher Learning Commission, the Quality Checkup Visit Team investigated concerns regarding information it had received through the third party comment process. The Team took the following atypical actions to make inquiry regarding the university's dealing with community stakeholders:

- held a public forum for a variety of viewpoints to be expressed (off-campus community representatives, alums and other interested parties)
- conversed with the Office of the Department of Education of New Mexico
- spoke with a number of concerned individuals
- received multiple documents regarding items of concern

It is the Quality Checkup Team's observation that the major items of concern are being adequately addressed by the university (demonstrated by public testimony and university documents), and that the appropriate steps are being taken by the university's senior leadership to work with community representatives in reaching solutions which will be of benefit for the future of this important educational and social organization in Southwestern New Mexico. For example, special "Town and Gown" meetings co-chaired by the mayor of the city and the president of the university are seeking to publicly deal with the issues of concern. Given the context of the historical demographics and political stresses of the region it serves - as far as the educational operation of the university - the Visit Team is satisfied with the progress of this and other initiatives.

One of the Action Projects initiated by the university deals with communication as it relates to both internal and external aspects of interacting with a variety of constituent groups at multiple levels of engagement. This exemplifies an organization that knows its limitations and is working to turn a weakness into an area of short-term viability and long-term commitment to its own health and the stability of a variety of social organizations.

The university continues in a developing stage for this category of activities related to the AQIP principles of quality.

#### Valuing People

Although not reaching the status of posing accreditation problems, this is an area where the university needs to spend some time and resources. The senior leadership team down to the line-level employee mentioned the "human resources" need as something which needs attention. WNMU is putting into place an Action Project to address this organizational deficiency. WNMU is an organization that recognizes its weaknesses and possesses the institutional will and desire to correct its operations and practices. However, it has taken the university from the fall of '04 to the spring of '07 to begin the process of planning to address this

situation. A more immediate response to this issue would have been expected.

Until the work of the Action Project (Human Resources Plan) is able to take hold on campus and demonstrates its ability to impact organizational change, the university remains in a developing stage for this category.

### Leading and Communicating

There is a strong sense of leadership on campus, but one that is not perceived to involve all stakeholders in the decision-making process. The leader/leadership team does need to continue to cast the vision for the future. The university is a very complex organization, and not all individuals have the vantage point to understand the full picture. However, in developing a campus-wide vision, the senior leadership might improve its chances of multiple stakeholder buy-in by allowing a more collegial decision-making process to exist and to develop on campus.

Transparency remains a significant strategic issue. WNMU's leadership holds information and data close to the vest; some of the specific requests for data had to be repeated, and some data were provided in raw form, while some were simply not provided. Independently audited financial statements were not provided, though the explanation of state regulations and timing that have worked to prevent the completion of and release of that information was accepted by the visitation team. There were financial issues embedded in those financial statements provided that the Team did not specifically raise, trying to be sensitive to employee-employer relationships. Additionally, the statements were nearly two years old at the time of the visit. An annually updated Systems Portfolio was not provided the team, but the intention to apply for a Baldrige award, active AQIP projects, and other data and evidence are accepted by the team as evidence that HLC criterion and AQIP categories are being sufficiently met. However, it is the Team's recommendation that prior to the granting of continued accreditation status the Panel on Reaffirmation be provided with the updated Systems Portfolio, a Program Participation Agreement signed by the Secretary of the U.S.D.O.E., the last three years' DOE financial aid program reviews, and independently audited Financial Statements. The financial statements should be current through the last fiscal year and in final official form, including the financial statement's Management Discussion and Analysis section and all supplemental information. The Team recommends that failure to provide any of these documents may raise "transparency" from a strategic issue to an accreditation issue.

A bit of visionary-collegiality might allow the university to be transformed in this category of activities – whereby the senior leadership vision-casts for the entire university but is able to invite all interested parties to the discussion of who the institution is, why it exists and where it wants to head.

Internal communication could improve in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to the

following:

- creating and sharing the story of the campus with one another
- developing a positive organizational identity, one which is willing and desirous of being shared by the internal stakeholders.

External communication might improve in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to the following:

- public relations efforts to off campus constituent groups
- marketing relationships to a variety of stakeholder groups

As mentioned in a number of interviews with individuals, groups and committees, an area of organizational need is that of improving communication, both internally and externally. The university is moving in the right direction, but it is still in the developing stage for this AQIP Category.

#### Supporting Institutional Operations

In general, the university has systems, processes and policies in place to guide decision-making. What is still needed is for the university to demonstrate, over the course of several years, that the systems, processes and policies are able to develop into a more sophisticated set of operations layered into the very fabric of the environment. This set of operations must be constructed to use collected data in assisting the organization in not only its strategic maneuverings, but also its day-to-day operations. There are no “OO” designations from the Systems Appraisal Feedback; thus, this aspect of the AQIP principles poses no serious threat to the institution’s ability to carry forth with its educational mission. The university has worked on this area via an Action Project focusing on the process and operations of advising. Perhaps the Board of Regent’s direct involvement and participation in strategic planning should be encouraged, especially addressing resource issues.

The Extended University Operations (three external sites) exist in adequate facilities with appropriate systems in place to insure a viable educational experience. There is a dedicated staff servicing each location, which allows for not only “content” to be delivered to the students, but also “care” as part of a WNMU education.

The institution has shown some progress since the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report, but it is still at a developing stage.

#### Measuring Effectiveness

As indicated in university-produced documents, and especially in the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report, “WNMU has no single office responsible for data analysis or sharing data. Plans are to establish such an office ... if funding is available” (only “OO” item). The university now has someone who serves in the role of institutional researcher who also provides oversight to the assessment of student learning. However, that position is not full-time, and the person in that role has no administrative/secretarial support staff to assist him in his duties. The processes of measuring university effectiveness are improving, but the full system needs additional time to mature in order to consistently provide data across the campus community. Given additional resources (time, money, assistance), the plan that is being put into place should begin to yield valuable information by which the university will be able to make better informed decisions. Of note to develop would be a systematic process whereby information is delivered to the needed stakeholders responsible for a decision, a feedback loop established whereby the decision makers report back how the data was used and a recording process established to document decisions and changes.

It is recognized that the quantitative measurements alone do not adequately reflect WNMU’s value-added component to a student’s educational experience. The qualitative results should be reported, along with longitudinal data that reflect WNMU’s success measured in ways appropriate to WNMU’s critical characteristics and the constraints of their particular environment. The updated Systems Portfolio should reflect the additional evidence and rationales that reflect improvements in adding value according to WNMU’s mission and context with explicit alignment within the strategic process and planning for adequately addressing any shortcomings.

An Action Project (Measurement) is tentatively planned for launch during the fall of 2007. The university is making progress in this area, but the manifestations of this AQIP Category are still in the developing stage. With time and dedicated attention by the person in charge of this effort, one would believe that the maturation stage of development will happen quickly and across the campus.

### Planning Continuous Improvement

Although the university has won a New Mexico award for continuous improvement, the leadership team is keenly aware of the need to develop the institution’s planning processes. The institution’s own SWOT analysis declares vulnerability related to processes, funding and institutional mission – all of which connect to planning continuous improvement.

In response to a variety of pressures, the university initiated an Action Project (Strategic Planning Process Revision) to continue its efforts in this category. A new strategic plan was produced and is now guiding the university. Time is needed for systematic strategic planning

involving multiple stakeholders to take hold of short- and long-term planning processes.

The university is maturing in this aspect of its organizational growth and development.

### Building Collaborative Relationships

One of the university's strengths is in the building of collaborative relationships with a wide variety of community-related businesses, educational and social organizations. The university works with the above mentioned groups to assist all involved in making a better life for individuals and groups of people. As evidenced by several of the "O" observations of the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report, it is not evident how collaborative relationships are evaluated as to how they assist the university in fulfilling its mission. A more deliberative measurement of how collaborative relationships align with the university's learning objectives would validate the importance and impact of working with multiple organizations outside the boundaries of the campus setting.

Overall, the institution knows itself, knows areas in which work is needed, and, if coordinated effectively, could work harmoniously with a variety of constituent groups for sustained quality improvement. When all factors are considered, Western New Mexico University is in the maturing stage in relationship to the AQIP requirements for this category.

The Quality Checkup Visit Team thanks the campus community for its receptive spirit and its hospitality during the three intense days of working with many individuals and groups of people.