Sinclair Community College

Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)
Quality Checkup
Visit

Quality Program Summary

January 2010

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Quality Program Summary
Prepared in Preparation for the March 2010 AQIP Check-up Visit

January 2010

This Quality Program Summary describes the current state of Sinclair’s quality and continuous improvement culture and processes and provides the following updates:

1. College Update
2. Focus on Quality
3. Strategic Issues Identified in the Systems Portfolio Review
4. Status of Action Projects
5. Process Improvement Opportunities

College Update

Significant changes in Ohio and the Dayton community have occurred since submission of Sinclair’s first Systems Portfolio in 2007 http://www.sinclair.edu/about/aqip/2007systemsportfolio/. The state has been one of the hardest hit in the national economic downturn, and projections indicate that Ohio and other “rust belt” states will recover more slowly than states in other regions of the country. Although the Governor and Legislature view higher education as pivotal in the state’s capacity for recovery and growth, state funding for higher education over the past three years has not offset the cuts of preceding years and has, in effect for Sinclair, declined. In an effort to improve the affordability of Ohio’s colleges and universities, the ability of campuses to increase tuition has been limited or frozen for the past eight years. Concurrent with limiting cost increases to students, the state has moved to create a system of higher education, bringing all public institutions into the University System of Ohio (USO). A strategic plan for the USO was released in 2008 with a series of initiatives designed to graduate more students, keep graduates in Ohio and attract more talent to Ohio. Sinclair has embraced this plan and is responding with its own initiatives to:

- expand enrollment
- increase degree completion rates, especially for low income and minority students and in STEMM fields
- increase the number of college credits earned by students while in high school
- facilitate students’ smooth transfer for baccalaureate degree study, including converting the college’s calendar from quarters to semesters as all of Ohio’s quarter institutions convert
- increase the number of Sinclair students who study abroad as well as the number of international students who study at Sinclair
- increase the number of Sinclair students who complete internship and co-op experiences
- expand the capacity of the college’s Foundation to support students and the college’s strategic goals
- expand opportunities for adults for additional education, including continuing education that leads to work-ready skills
- improve overall efficiency and cost-effectiveness, including collaborations with other institutions in the USO to leverage resources and opportunities
Sinclair tracks and reports its progress on these initiatives annually, using 2006-07 baseline data and annual projections for improvement to 2015. The USO goals are, in most respects, consistent with the college’s long-standing priorities.

The number of unemployed citizens of the Dayton region, which was already feeling the impact of the decline of its manufacturing base, has swelled, and the college is experiencing an accompanying surge in enrollment (headcount for both fall 2009 and winter 2010 was nearly 25,000, an increase of 7% over fall 2008 and winter 2009). Sinclair is committed to providing access to all who need to advance their education and prepare for the changing workforce in the region, as well as ensuring high quality learning experiences for those who enroll. In response to the enrollment surge, over one hundred new adjunct faculty members were hired and oriented prior to fall quarter to meet the need for additional course sections. Department chairs and full-time faculty worked diligently with new adjuncts to ensure quality of instruction while increasing capacity.

Sinclair’s tuition for Montgomery County residents continues to be the lowest in the state, due in part to a local property tax levy. Despite difficult economic times in the region, in 2008 voters again approved this levy, which will provide over $300 million in revenue over the next decade. Sinclair has a long tradition of sound financial management that has ensured the college’s financial stability and health despite declining state funding and state limits on tuition increases. The college’s newer divisions – Institutional Advancement and Workforce Development and Corporate Services – are developing very well, bringing new revenue streams to the college through grants, contracts, gifts and training. The program alignment process carried out during the 2006-07 fiscal year resulted in cost reductions and revenue enhancements that have put the college in a much stronger position to weather the uncertain state funding climate. In the first year of implementation (FY 2007), over $3 million in recurring annual revenue enhancements and cost reductions were achieved. As major changes have been phased-in over the subsequent years, this amount has grown larger. One of the lasting outcomes of the program alignment process has been a stronger culture of efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness at Sinclair.

Regionalization of the college’s service district continues to move forward, with enrollment at all regional sites exceeding projection. In addition to the two learning centers opened in 2006 in partnership with the YMCA in the communities of Englewood and Huber Heights, the college launched a third learning center in Preble County in fall 2009, at the request of the citizens of that county and with their financial support. Classes at the Courseview Campus Center in Warren County, which opened its doors in 2007, are nearing capacity with 1,000 students enrolled, and alternatives for expanding that site are being explored. Growth in on-line enrollment continues, with 6,300 students engaged in on-line classes in winter 2010, a 25% increase over last year. Online students’ success rates are monitored quarterly and continue to mirror overall the success rates of students in face-to-face classes.

**Focus on Quality**

Sinclair has a long history of innovation and a strong focus on continuous improvement. Evidence of this focus is inherent in the recognition of Sinclair as a board member college of the League for Innovation in the Community College and as a Vanguard Learning College. “Vanguard College” signifies that Sinclair is recognized as one of the top twelve two-year institutions in North America that are learner-centered. The “Learning College” culture at Sinclair reflects a long and deep institutional commitment to learner access and success.
Everyone and everything that occurs at Sinclair has an impact on student learning, and everyone and everything is focused on improving student access and success.

Sinclair approaches its quality work through integrating the values, goals and methods of continuous improvement into the existing processes of the college. The President’s Cabinet serves as the college’s quality team, and these leaders are responsible for embedding in the work of their divisions and offices attention to continuous improvement and measurable improvement in outcomes. Members of the Cabinet, chaired by President Steven Johnson, include the Senior Vice Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Chief of Staff. The Cabinet regularly reviews progress on Sinclair’s annual goals, including progress on key metrics. Each Cabinet member, in turn, reviews progress in his/her unit on a regular basis.

The work of the Cabinet and the college as a whole continues to be derived from the strategic priorities established by the college’s Board of Trustees. At its annual “advance,” (as opposed to a retreat), the Board reviews and refines strategic directions for the college and charges the President with priorities for the year ahead. Because of the changing external climate in which Sinclair is operating, including increased accountability, state financial uncertainty, and emerging national opportunities, the Board will consider at its late January advance a revised planning and reporting process. An update on the outcomes of this session will be provided to the team during the check-up visit.

**Strategic Issues Identified in the Systems Portfolio Review**

Sinclair received its first AQIP feedback report on the Systems Portfolio in 2007. During the intervening two years, the organization has undertaken several activities and improvements based on the feedback. Strategic issues identified by the Systems Portfolio reviewers have been given serious consideration by college leaders.

**Strategic Issue #1**

The shortage of examples of the use of benchmark results provided in the Systems Portfolio may have created a misunderstanding on the part of reviewers about the extent to which Sinclair regularly uses benchmarking. Benchmarked results are utilized extensively as important data to inform decisions and lead to improvements across all areas of the college, including multiple academic programs, human resources, information technology, workforce development, student support services, and academic advising.

Although benchmarking is a frequent practice for the college, it also is a practice that can be refined and expanded. Data in some areas of operations has been difficult to access, though with the growing interest in benchmarking at state and national levels, more sources of data are becoming available. The newly established University System of Ohio has provided leadership for collecting and disseminating more data to facilitate comparison among its campuses: [http://regents.ohio.gov/perfrpt/index.php](http://regents.ohio.gov/perfrpt/index.php). As an example, the following data are now easily accessible, making it easier for Sinclair to benchmark against comparable colleges in Ohio:

- Ohio Community College Portraits
- Statistical Profiles of trends in enrollments, student preparation and academic progress, degrees awarded, post-graduation employment outcomes, tuition, financial aid, and costs and expenditures per student at Ohio's higher education institutions
- Fall Survey of Student Charges
Strategic Issue #2

The reviewers’ observation that the portfolio lacked results broken out by population subsets, with only highest-level aggregate data being reported, was correct and cause for attention. Since the portfolio feedback, the college has made significant strides in disaggregating student data on the basis of a variety of variables. Particular attention has been paid to income (using Pell grants as a proxy for income), gender and race. These data are increasingly used at the college to inform planning, action and evaluation.

The usefulness of this approach is illustrated by the discoveries made when student outcomes were disaggregated as part of the college’s participation in the national Achieving the Dream initiative. It became clear that success rates of minority students and Pell grant recipients are significantly lower than those of nonminority students and those who do not receive Pell grants. Male students who are both minority and low income are the college’s most fragile student population. As one response, a best practice form of student mentoring is being piloted with African American full-time students who have completed one year of study and have earned at least a 2.0 GPA. The college has been able to gain a great deal of synergy through the “marriage” of Achieving the Dream (AtD) pilots and AQIP action projects on improving student outcomes in mathematics and writing (discussed below). The college now regularly reports and reviews disaggregated data on retention and success at the course level in the “Top 45” most heavily enrolled classes.

Strategic Issue #3

Given the changed state higher education landscape, the anticipated slow economic recovery for Ohio over the next five years, and emerging opportunities on the regional and national landscape, the planning process described in the systems portfolio is under review. The college is heightening its capacity and processes for responding to increasing calls for external accountability and streamlining its mechanisms for reporting to the Board of Trustees and others. Embedded within the changes to the college’s planning process under discussion is an expansion of the current strong commitment to use data (quantitative and qualitative) to evaluate and improve key college systems.

An example of current implementation of the PDSA model can be found in the organization’s response to CCSSE data. A drop in scores related to active and collaborative learning indicated that students were not as actively engaged in learning in and outside the classroom as expected. Further study was undertaken through mid-quarter interviews conducted by the AtD team with students in a large variety of classes. One conclusion reached from this study was that the college needed to improve the learning support system for full and part-time faculty so that they will be able to effectively employ strategies that are known to increase student engagement.

Based on benchmarking of best practices in faculty development, a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) was established in 2008. Numerous workshops and institutes offered by the Center to date have focused on active learning pedagogies, and these sessions have been well attended. Feedback from faculty regarding implementation of strategies to improve active engagement has
been positive, and follow-up interviews with students will be conducted, as well as administration of another CCSSE survey in winter 2010. Additionally, The First Year Faculty Experience, an orientation to teaching and working at Sinclair, has been revamped as a learning community for new faculty, with more intensive preparation in teaching strategies that increase engagement. The CTL also has implemented a certification program for adjunct faculty that has a strong emphasis on active learning.

An excellent example of full implementation of the PDSA model can be found in Sinclair’s academic program review process. In 2004, the College-Wide Assessment Committee developed a new process and tools to facilitate systematic and consistent program reviews. Each program is reviewed in-depth every five years with annual reports in between reviews. The process begins with a detailed self-study conducted by the department under the leadership of the department chair, with support from Research, Analytics and Reporting (RAR) and the Provost’s Office. A comprehensive annual data set is provided for each program electronically, with much of the data reflecting five-year trends. A cross-functional team led by the Provost and division dean reviews the self-study document and meets with all members of the program under review, providing commendations and recommendations following the meeting.

Each year following the formal review, programs produce an annual update, responding to changes in data and addressing changes and improvements made in response to recommendations from the review team. Assessment data related to program and general education outcomes and improvements made in response to those data are included. In the interest of transparency and to facilitate communication of best practices across the college, all self studies, recommendations and annual updates are posted on the Provost’s website http://www.sinclair.edu/administrative/vpi/index.cfm.

It is evident at the end of the first five years of the new process that continuous improvements based on data are being made by program chairs and faculty. Analysis of findings and recommendations across programs and divisions is giving us a college-wide perspective of successes, challenges, needs and barriers, and we have begun the next phase: improving the review process as we look forward to the next five years.

Sinclair Action Projects:

The college has used the AQIP Action Project process to move improvements forward with good success. Having succeeded with three retired projects - Academic Advising, Taking Assessment to the Next Level, and High School Linkages - the college now is focused on three active action projects, and a fourth was launched in the fall. Each of the active project teams has made significant progress during the past two years. Below are a few key actions and accomplishments.

1. Improving Student Success in Mathematics

The Math AQIP project is intended to expand the search for new or refined teaching methods, curricula and other opportunities to improve math success and retention. In 2004-05 the non-success rates (reflective of students who withdrew or completed courses with a grade of D or F) in four key elementary mathematics courses were 46.6%, 42.9%, 41.3% and 54% respectively. Data demonstrate that student non-success in math has a significant impact on student retention and ultimate accomplishment of educational goals.

During the past two years, faculty teaching developmental math classes piloted guided self-paced instruction using MyMathLab software and improved the uniformity of course
materials, quizzes, and tests across course sections to facilitate comparison of outcomes. In a lower level developmental math course, the pilot group compared to the non-pilot group demonstrated a significant increase in student success, but such improvement was not the case for a higher level developmental math course. For MAT 101-102, elementary algebra, an alternate series was developed (MAT 191, 192, and 193) that addresses the same competencies but with different teaching approaches, embedded math study skills and additional classroom time. Compared to the non-pilot group, the pilot of this new series continues to show a significant increase in student success rates and plans are underway to scale this pilot up in the 2010-11 academic year.

2. Improving Student Success in Writing

The Writing AQIP project is intended to improve collaboration among English Department and Academic Foundations Department faculty to develop new or refined teaching methods and other opportunities to improve student writing success and retention. Faculty feedback generated during the college program review process over multiple years indicated that significant numbers students in various majors were struggling with writing skills after completion of English composition courses. An analysis of student retention patterns demonstrated that students who failed the first college-level composition course were significantly less likely to be enrolled one year later.

Faculty from both the English and Academic Foundations Departments attended workshops and conferences that provided insights on helping at-risk students succeed in college classes. The English Department began crafting an outcomes-based rubric for assessing essays, and faculty members have begun sharing and studying ways to apply what they call "The Personal Touch" to addressing student writing issues.

The Academic Foundations Department is now using a common exit assessment rubric to determine in the aggregate student mastery of course outcomes and is using assessment results to make improvements. These changes include improvements in instruction and increased in-depth mentoring of new adjunct faculty to provide instructional consistency across sections. They also developed modules over all segments of the department's writing curriculum to provide students with opportunities for refreshing and reinforcing skills and increased the number of learning communities pairing DEV courses with the student success course. Data on student outcomes following these revisions are being tracked.

Two additional initiatives targeted to improving the success of developmental students are the establishment of learning communities and the development of "Sinclair 101," an orientation to college course. For each of these initiatives, student outcomes by quarter are reviewed and adjustments to the initiatives made based on outcomes. Sinclair 101 is proving to be a strong positive factor in improving the retention of students, especially first-time students. RAR compared cohorts of students who completed SCC 101 with those who did not enroll in SCC 101, using a matched-pair approach, each quarter of 2008. Findings indicate that student participation in SCC 101 leads to significantly improved persistence and academic success. Consideration is being given to requiring SCC 101 in all academic programs.
3. On-line Student Services

Data from CENTSS (Center for Transforming Student Services) audits and anecdotal reports from students indicated a need for more and better online student services at a time when enrollment in on-line classes is surging. Although Sinclair offers a growing number of online courses (203) and programs (17), our capacity to provide students with collateral online services and support has lagged behind both student demand and accepted good practice in distance learning nationally. Not only do online students want better online services, but face-to-face students do as well.

Improvements in online services have been made in several areas: the delivery of tests for on-line courses to the learning centers using a new web tool; the development of a basic new student orientation on-line; and the development of a smart FAQ database to provide correct and consistent answers to students’ questions. Sinclair is participating in a statewide pilot of a new eTutoring system, and the leader of the AQIP project team is serving as chair of the statewide eServices committee. Additional work on the horizon for this project includes repeating the CENTSS audit in fall 2010, redesigning the current portal landing page, and completely overhauling new student orientation.

4. Improved Employee Evaluation System

As an outgrowth of the most recent AQIP Strategy Forum, the quality team decided to designate the development of a new employee evaluation process and tools as an AQIP action project. The need for this Category 4 project is supported by several indicators. In both the 2004 and 2007 administrations of the PACE survey to all employees, the need for an improved employee evaluation and development system was rated the highest priority for change among support staff, professional staff and administrators. The Staff Senate of the college has repeatedly called for a revised performance evaluation system and includes this issue regularly in its discussions with the college administration. Supervisors and managers indicated a desire for improved performance evaluation processes that will provide a more substantive review and a better link to planning for professional development and succession planning for their staff. In 2009, the Office of Human Resources commissioned a consultant to implement a two-phase project to survey leadership and full and part-time faculty and staff to determine perceptions of HR effectiveness and to assess the processes for effectiveness and efficiency in the operations. The survey results revealed the need to implement a new employee evaluation system. This project began in fall 2009 with benchmarking best practices, including drawing on trend information from HR consulting firms.

Retired Action Projects

1. High School Linkages

Sinclair’s Tech Prep consortium is healthy and expanding. With a focus on career-technical education, 66 well-defined and seamless 2+2 pathways lead students to either an applied associate degree or one of 26 pathways designed for university transfer. In the last two years alone, Tech Prep students have earned 13,302 college credits while in high school,
representing tuition savings totaling $713,374. The new Ponitz High School, a collaborative effort between Sinclair and Dayton Public Schools, began admitting students in fall 2008. Sinclair faculty worked with high school faculty to design the curriculum with a focus on college-readiness, dual enrollment opportunities and Tech Prep pathways.

Coordination and integration of a variety of other pre-college programs has been enhanced through placing them under the umbrella “Early College Credit Options” (ECCO) within the Office of the Senior Vice President, Student Services. Increased emphasis has been placed on identifying and improving common processes for facilitation of dual enrollment and providing opportunities for high school students to complete part or all of an associate degree from Sinclair by high school graduation.

2. Academic Advising

Centralization of Academic Advising has been completed. More students are being served than through the previous decentralized model; a “syllabus” for advising as a learning experience has been developed; and application of college policies and processes is much more consistent. Data on student feedback regarding services received are being collected at point-of-service, and overall service and satisfaction data are reviewed regularly to further improve advising. Recent improvements include the use of new software to manage scheduling and to collect data relative to service to students, including student feedback. In response to student feedback, short session “drop in” advising is being instituted in addition to scheduled, longer advising sessions.

3. Taking Assessment to the Next Level

The integrated Assessment and General Education Committee has completed the fifth year of its five year strategic plan and has created a new plan for the next five years. The program review process has completed a full five year cycle – all programs have now been reviewed and all have been involved in the annual update process. An evaluation of this important cornerstone of Sinclair’s assessment efforts has been initiated as we begin the second five years of the process. A survey was conducted to collect feedback from department chairs and faculty related to the annual update process, and data from this survey will be used to implement process and tool improvements.

Process Improvement Opportunities

Sinclair continues to work in adherence to its long-standing core mission components: access to and affordability of education; close alignment between what the college offers and what the community needs; quality and innovation in student learning and support; and ensuring the college is effective and sustainable over the long term. Throughout this work, Sinclair is committed to taking its use of data to the next level. An example of this commitment is the college’s work to significantly expand its capacity to use predictive analytics to improve its processes and outcomes. A preliminary model that identifies students who are more likely to be unsuccessful in their coursework has been developed by RAR and piloted by three academic departments. In each case, personal attention and focused assistance were provided to those students predicted to withdraw or fail, with intervention beginning in the first week or even prior to the start of the course. Preliminary data indicate that students who received these interventions completed the course in higher numbers than students in other course sections who did not receive the interventions. The model will be tested in additional courses to determine if the results are replicated.
Sinclair also is committed to continuing to embed continuous improvement principles throughout its work, and the processes associated with conversion of the college’s calendar from quarters to semesters represents a prime example of this commitment. In response to a USO call for all campuses to follow a semester calendar, Sinclair’s Board made the decision to convert to a semester calendar effective fall 2012, and work toward this goal began in earnest in spring 2009. Faculty and staff are approaching this major undertaking as an opportunity to improve the curriculum and services for students. Over 1800 courses and 93 academic programs will be redesigned for semester delivery; students will require transitional advising plans; and all other operations of the college will be affected, including classroom scheduling, the bookstore, campus security, parking, etc. This initiative represents a tremendous opportunity to refine key processes that influence the quality of student learning, persistence and degree completion.

This three-year project began with careful study of the experience of institutions that have undergone conversion. Careful consideration has been given to the scope of this project in order to focus on the key processes that have the greatest impacts on students and their learning. Central to the project is the revision of the curriculum, led by the Associate Provost and building on the assessment, general education and department curriculum processes already in place. The Center for Teaching and Learning is providing workshops on curriculum redesign to all department chairs and faculty, with particular attention to structuring classes in ways that promote active learning strategies. Tools and templates are available online, and individual sessions are held at the request of department faculty needing assistance with aspects of curriculum redesign. A three day hands-on “Extreme Course Makeover” based on best practices in curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment has resulted in significant improvements in redesigned syllabi by 28 faculty and now will be offered to additional faculty groups.

Information Technology Services is developing a software solution that will use a student’s degree completion plan to populate his or her course schedule. The software will allow for easy drag-and-drop selection of required course sections and will notify academic staff when a student makes a course selection that is not included within the approved plan. The tool is designed to keep students on degree completion tracks and to enhance communication with academic advisors. The value of this software in conjunction with other on-line student services will continue long after semester conversion has been completed.

Student Services is actively planning ways to leverage the success of the college’s Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) process and it’s supporting Student Success Plan software (SSP) to maximize support for students transitioning to a semester calendar. ILPs have proven successful in increasing retention of the college’s highest risk students, and the support services associated with this process can benefit most all students. Especially noteworthy is that the ILP process helps minority students persist at the same rates as majority students. A new tool - the
software, MyGPS (My Guide for Planning and Success) – is being piloted to test its effectiveness in helping students navigate their learning experiences at Sinclair and to move to self-support and empowerment. If it proves effective, MyGPS could be packaged with quarter-to-semester transitional plans, MAPs (My Advising Plan), to facilitate a holistic approach to student advising and support. These tools will be tested and refined, with the goal of taking academic advising and student support services to a new level to the benefit of all students.