

AQIP Examiner, Spring 2005

Executive Overview

Illinois Central College's participation in *AQIP Examiner* in spring 2005 was a first step in the college's move to a new accreditation model. The Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) is open only to those institutions that can demonstrate a commitment to continuous process improvement. It requires institutions conduct a self-assessment of their key systems and take actions to address and improve those systems. Institutions achieve the same goals of assuring quality but through a different means. Instead of a two year self-study conducted every 10 years, institutions demonstrate compliance with Higher Learning Commission standards through activities that show they are working to continuously improve.

AQIP Examiner was administered to provide the College a way to understand how faculty and staff view the institution's essential systems and processes and as a springboard for an All-College Conversation to be held in October. On these dates, all employees of the college community will be invited to discuss "what matters most" at ICC and what needs to be done to ensure that the College fulfills its mission. From these discussions, we will prioritize the actions that the College will take as part of its AQIP activities. The College will send representatives to the Strategy Forum sponsored by AQIP to review our proposed Action Projects. Upon review at the Strategy Forum, the Action Projects will be incorporated into the Blueprint for the Future and assigned to a Blueprint, Six Sigma, or AQIP team for implementation.

What, exactly, did *AQIP Examiner* ... "examine?"

There are three main parts of *AQIP Examiner*. The first concerns what is called "organizational perspective," or how well employees at Illinois Central College understand the "big picture." This is a rough measurement of how comfortable employees are in their knowledge of the college's mission, vision, goals, and environment. Institutions that score high in organizational perspective tend to be better prepared to engage in process discussions and to act toward improvement. The second area assesses what employees know about different processes at the college and what they believe makes them effective. The third area of *AQIP Examiner* asks respondents to rate the effectiveness of each of the processes underlying the nine AQIP Criteria. For example, under "Criterion 3: Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs," questions address processes like how the college identifies who it serves and how it listens to the needs of those it serves. Additionally, a small number of demographic questions (four of them) are asked which the college can use to study the responses of different groups.

What have the results of *AQIP Examiner* told us?

First, and foremost, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions posed in *AQIP Examiner*. In fact, the results presented in the full institutional report tell institutions very little in the absence of discussion among as many of the college's employees as possible. *AQIP Examiner* assists in determining the college's strengths and opportunities for improvement.

A total of 525 employees completed *AQIP Examiner* – that was 37.5% of possible respondents, a solid return. The demographic characteristics of the sample should be taken into consideration when examining the survey results. Compared to the college's whole employee "body," the sample of returned surveys showed that faculty members and P/S/S employees were slightly underrepresented, while administrators and support staff members were represented in somewhat larger numbers. Also, full-time employees had a larger representation in the sample than what is typical of the employee body.

The overall organizational perspective (OP) score is, again, a rough estimate of how up-to-speed employees feel about fundamental issues at the college. Adding up the average scores on eight individual OP questions, an institution can have an overall OP score of 0 to 40. The overall OP score for ICC was 28.40, but the OP scores by themselves allow the college to draw only limited conclusions. Instead, the scores can be thought of as signposts in guiding discussions about the other *AQIP Examiner* findings. The table on page 8 of the *AQIP Examiner* Feedback Report illustrates the differences in overall OP scores among the groupings of respondents. The same breakdowns by groups of employees for each of the *individual* OP questions can be seen in the table on page 9 of the Feedback Report. The goal of the college should be to explore the reasons why such differences exist and strive to elevate them by creating broader awareness of the college's internal and external environments.

ICC employees showed a fairly high degree of awareness of the characteristics of effective processes, represented by the scores for the fourteen process questions. This could be due to the college's involvement in Process Management and now Six Sigma, and a common understanding of these concepts seems apparent. Compared to the scores for other organizations (and illustrated in the tables on pages 12 and 13 of the Feedback Report), ICC employees generally showed a greater degree of agreement with one another on the importance of each characteristic. However, discussing the relative "high" or "low" of a particular question's score is best considered in light of the differences between and among employee groups. The many perspectives that underpin these differences can show an institution where employee development opportunities might exist.

Once again, AQIP is a process-oriented approach to quality improvement – it catalogues the processes of an institution's key systems into nine separate "buckets," or Criteria. Each process underlying the nine AQIP Criteria can be removed from its bucket, placed under a microscope, and examined for what it can tell the college about its strengths and weaknesses. ICC's evaluation of where these strengths and weaknesses exist is captured in *AQIP Examiner* by the last fifty items of the survey that directly address the nine AQIP Criteria. Where differences exist among employee groups is again where the college can derive value from these data. The tables beginning on pages 15 and 16 of the Feedback Report highlight for the reader where these gaps occur.

What's next?

The AQIP Steering Committee has arranged for the *AQIP Examiner* findings to be addressed at the upcoming discussion days in October. The full *AQIP Examiner* Feedback Report is available on the Staff and Faculty website at <http://www.icc.edu/facultyStaff/>. Narrative comments – edited only for privacy concerns – are provided as well. All employees are encouraged to read the reports in preparation of the upcoming discussion days. Individuals or departments/units may contact the Office of Institutional Research with any questions regarding the *AQIP Examiner* results.

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