



September 25, 2012

Ryan Purdy
Interim President
Mid-Plains Community College
601 West State Farm Road
North Platte, NE 69101

Dear Interim President Purdy:

Enclosed is a copy of Mid-Plains Community College's *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report*. It begins with a concise Executive Summary, intended for those general readers that do not require a high level of detail. Your Systems Appraisal Team of quality experts provided extensive detail in the full report by identifying nine distinct groups of what they view as your institution's *strengths* and *opportunities for improvement*, one group for each of the nine AQIP Categories. We are also emailing your institution's AQIP Liaison a copy of this full *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report*.

To receive maximum benefit from your Systems Appraisal, you and your colleagues should plan to invest substantial time in discussing it, considering the team's observations and advice, and identifying which actions will best advance your institution. The enclosed *After Your Appraisal* details what lies ahead and how to use your Feedback Report most effectively, and explains when and how to register for your next Strategy Forum.

To comply with federal requirements, we need the CEO of the institution formally to acknowledge receipt of this report within the next two weeks, and to provide us with any comments you wish to make about it. Please read the enclosed *After Your Appraisal* suggestions *before* you decide how to respond. Limit your acknowledgement and comments to a maximum of two typewritten pages, and understand that your response will become part of your institution's permanent HLC file, to be shared with future peer reviewers who review your institution (including the next Systems Appraisal team, the next Quality Checkup visit team, and the next Reaffirmation of Accreditation panel). Email your response to AQIP@hlcommission.org; call me or Mary Green (at 800-621-7440 x130) if you have any questions about it.

We know you will gain real value from the Systems Appraisal Feedback and the activities it will stimulate within your institution, and we are proud to be working with you as you continue along the never-ending path to improvement.

Sincerely,

Eric V. Martin
Vice President for Accreditation Relations

SYSTEMS APPRAISAL FEEDBACK REPORT

in response to the *Systems Portfolio* of

MID-PLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

September 25, 2012



**Academic
Quality Improvement
Program**

The Higher Learning Commission **NCA**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR MID-PLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The following are summary comments on each of the AQIP Categories crafted by the Appraisal Team to highlight Mid-Plains Community College's achievements and to identify challenges yet to be met.

Category One – Helping Students Learn: MPCC is in the earliest stages of maturity in continuous improvement in Category One. Much work remains to be done, most importantly in the assessment of student learning. Other critical areas which require significant attention on the part of the institution include academic program review and the institution's general approach to integrating a focus on continuous improvement across all of its activities. While evidence is provided that data is being gathered it appears there is a gap in review, analysis, and action as a result of the data. As Mid-Plains settles into a cycle of continuous improvement it will adopt clearly defined processes which will lead to gathering of evidence and results.

Category Two – Accomplishing Other Distinct Objectives: MPCC has identified specific other distinctive objectives and included them in their strategic plan. A number of significant improvements are reported in this category. Establishing systematic processes to link decisions to performance measures will ensure allocating energy and resources most effectively.

Category Three – Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs: MPCC is clearly in the beginning stages and just starting to gather and use data for review. A good amount of useful data is gathered from multiple sources such as PACE, CCSSE, and community input. The College could benefit from the development and implementation of strategic, systematic, targets, and processes for collecting analyzing and using information. This could ensure that it is meeting its goals in understanding and responding to student and other stakeholder needs.

Category Four – Valuing People: MPCC can grow in valuing people by developing and documenting procedures that inform practice. While the PACE survey is a valuable source of information regarding employee satisfaction, the College is in the early stages of systematizing processes related to having established, measurable, goals and intentional assessment efforts. Doing so could provide an opportunity for data collection and an annual review of progress.

Category Five – Leading and Communicating: It is evident that Mid-Plains has focused much time and attention to developing a systematic and comprehensive planning process. The College is to be commended for its efforts to be extremely inclusive in developing the strategic plan itself and then as a leadership style within the institution. Important next steps in the strategic planning process will include setting measurable targets within the plans and reviewing, analyzing and reporting progress towards those targets.

Category Six – Supporting Institutional Operations: As the culture of quality continues to grow at MPCC rather than providing lists of activities for supporting operational objectives, the College can provide documentation of changes made and their resulting impact. Developing systematic processes for data collection and analysis, and sharing data in an accessible location could strengthen results and confirm for College leaders when benchmarked goals are met.

Category Seven – Measuring Effectiveness: Mid-Plains has identified that some improvements have been made in Measuring Effectiveness as the College continues to define its measurement processes. Important next steps would be providing an explanation for identifying key performance indicators. As referenced in Strategic Issues Point #Two as more data is presented, reviewed and analyzed in all categories the College can better represent how it functions as a data driven organization in future portfolios.

Category Eight – Planning Continuous Improvement: MPCC demonstrates a commitment to planning and continuous improvement as evidenced by the “Shaping Our Future” plan. The institution will benefit from continuing efforts to ensure that these planning activities are directly tied to measurable outcomes. This may include the development of formal processes that require well documented timelines, targets, measurable objectives, and expenditures. The College may also want to consider reorganizing the “Shaping Our Future” plan so the goals align with the AQIP Categories 1-9 in the proper order. Doing so may prevent confusion or miscommunication as the campus becomes more familiar with the AQIP categories.

Category Nine – Building Collaborative Relationships: While Mid-Plains has worked very hard to develop key partnerships of benefit to the College and its students it has yet to determine how to measure the effectiveness of the relationships as evidenced by the lack of results reported. Items listed are potential sources of measures rather than actual measures.

The College may benefit from developing strategic, systematic processes for collecting, analyzing and using information to assess its effectiveness and direction with regard to these important relationships.

Accreditation issues and Strategic challenges for Mid-Plains Community College are listed in detail within the Strategic and Accreditation Issues Analysis section of the Appraisal Feedback Report.

ELEMENTS OF MID-PLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE FEEDBACK REPORT

The *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report* provides AQIP's official response to your *Systems Portfolio* by a team of readers trained in evaluation. After appraisers independently reviewed your document, the team reached consensus on essential elements of your institutional profile, strengths and opportunities for improvement by Category, and significant issues for your institution. These are presented in three sections of the Feedback Report: Accreditation Issues Analysis, Critical Characteristics Analysis, and Category Feedback. These components are interrelated in defining context, evaluating performance, surfacing critical issues, and assessing institutional performance.

It is important to remember that the Systems Appraisal Team had only your *Systems Portfolio* to guide their analysis of your institution's strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Consequently, their report may omit important strengths — if you were too modest to stress them in your *Systems Portfolio*, or if your discussion and documentation of them was unconvincing. Similarly, the team may have pointed out areas of potential improvement that are already receiving the institution's attention. Again, the team used its best judgment in identifying improvement opportunities. If some of these areas of potential improvement are now strengths rather than opportunities because of your own focused efforts, that is all to your credit. If the team was unsure about an area, we urged it to err on the side of giving your institution the best possible advice about where investing your efforts might pay off. If some of their advice comes after the fact, after you've already tackled an area, no harm is done.

Executive Summary: Summative statements agreed upon by the Systems Appraisal Team reflecting the reviewers' assessment of the institution's current status in relation to critical quality characteristics: robustness of process design; utilization or deployment of processes; the existence of results, trends, and comparative data; the use of results data as feedback, and systematic processes for improvement of the activities that the Category covers. Since institutions are complex, maturity levels may vary from one Category to another.

Strategic challenges for the institution are listed in detail within the Strategic and Accreditation Issues Analysis section of the Appraisal Feedback Report.

Strategic and Accreditation Issues Analysis: Strategic issues are those most closely related to your institution's ability to succeed in reaching its mission, planning, and quality improvement goals. Accreditation issues are areas where you have not yet provided evidence that you meet the Commission's *Criteria for Accreditation*, or where the evidence you have presented suggests you may have difficulties, now or in the future, in meeting these expectations. If accreditation is essential for your institution then any accreditation issues identified are, by definition, also strategic. The Systems Appraisal Team identified both of these kinds of issues through analysis of your Organizational Overview and the feedback it provided for each Category, as well as by reviewing the Index to the *Criteria for Accreditation* that you provided along with your *Systems Portfolio*. This list of strategic issues offers a framework for addressing ongoing improvement of processes and systems, serving as an executive summary of the Report's key findings and recommendations.

Critical Characteristics: Your Systems Portfolio's Organizational Overview provides context for the team's knowledge of your institution's identity, mission objectives, strategic goals, and key factors related to improvement. Critical Characteristics are those features most important for understanding the institution's mission, environment, stakeholders, competitive position, goals, and processes. Characteristics having the greatest relevance to each Category are identified in the Report.

Category Feedback: The Report's feedback on each of AQIP's nine Categories specifically identifies strengths and opportunities for improvement. An **S** or **SS** identifies strengths, with the double letter signifying important achievements or capabilities upon which to build. Opportunities are designated by **O**, with **OO** indicating areas where attention may result in more

significant improvement. Comments, which are keyed to your *Systems Portfolio*, offer brief analysis of each strength and opportunity. Organized by Category, and presenting the team's findings in detail, this section is the heart of the Report.

STRATEGIC AND ACCREDITATION ISSUES

In conducting the Systems Appraisal, the team attempted to identify the broader issues that present the greatest challenges and opportunities for your institution in the coming years. These are all strategic issues, ones you need to grapple with as you identify your institution's strategies for confronting the future and becoming the institution you want to be. The team also examined whether any of these strategic issues put your institution into jeopardy of not meeting the Higher Learning Commission's accreditation expectations.

Issues Affecting Compliance with the *Criteria for Accreditation*. An important goal for the Systems Appraisal was to review your institution's compliance with the Higher Learning Commission's *Criteria for Accreditation*. The peer quality experts who served on the team were all trained in evaluating colleges and universities using the Commission's *Criteria*, and the Systems Appraisal process they followed included careful steps to ensure the team used the *Criteria* as a major factor in their review. As the team reviewed your presentation of your institution's systems and processes under each AQIP Category, it searched for accreditation-related issues and concerns. In addition, the team used the *Index to the Criteria for Accreditation* that you provided with your Portfolio to perform a comprehensive review of the *Criteria* and each Core Component to ascertain whether you presented compelling evidence that your institution complies with each of these Commission expectations.

The Systems Appraisal team concluded that Mid-Plains Community College has presented evidence that it complies with each of the Five *Criteria for Accreditation* and each of their Core Components. Although the Systems Appraisal does not in itself constitute a review for continued accreditation, the team's conclusion upon reviewing your Portfolio against the Criteria will serve as a telling piece of evidence during the Commission's next scheduled AQIP review of your institution for Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

Issues Affecting Future Institutional Strategies. The Systems Appraisal Team identified the following strategic issues to assist Mid-Plains Community College in prioritizing and taking action on the important broad challenges and opportunities it faces. From these you may discover your vital immediate priorities, shaping strategies that can lead to a quantum leap in the performance of your institution. Implementing these strategies may call for specific actions, so AQIP's expectation that your institution be engaged in three or four vital Action Projects at all times will help encourage your administrators, faculty, and staff to turn these strategic goals into real accomplishments. Knowing that Mid-Plains will discuss these strategic issues, give priority to those it concludes are most critical, and take action promptly, the Systems Appraisal Team identified:

It is the opinion of the review team that while Mid-Plains Community College has met all criteria, the portfolio's evidence with respect to Core Component 2c *"The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement"* and 3a *"The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each education program and make effective assessment possible"* is weak. A key element of MPCC's assessment process, the Area of Assessment of Student Learning Team, has not met for two years (1P18). Also as reported in 8R2 the Program Review Action Team was discontinued with no further explanation. Assessment was an area of concern in the last PEAQ review. MPCC has since participated in the Assessment Academy which yielded limited results (1P18).

An outstanding opportunity exists to demonstrate institutional focus and commitment to meeting HLC expectations for assessment and accelerate development of assessment processes in all nine AQIP categories. Important first steps would be to focus on Category One and demonstrate the College has moved beyond assessment as a compliance issue and fully embraced it as an opportunity to improve student learning and institutional effectiveness. Much depends on full implementation of assessment processes to avoid this strategic issue becoming a possible accreditation issue.

One indication of growth as an AQIP institution is the discovery that assessment is not confined to academics but rather a means of ongoing evaluations providing reliable

evidence of institutional effectiveness across all categories. Elements that would help MPCC document evidence of such progress could include:

- More detailed and specific accounts of processes. This might include both written and visual representations such as flowcharts.
- More extensive use and presentation of data including visual representation of results such as bar graphs, and pie charts in addition to tables.
- The use of longitudinal data.

The portfolio as presented indicates MPCC faces a challenge establishing cohesiveness across the institution (and categories) with regard to a culture of quality and the understanding of the principles of AQIP. (812) The team often found disconnection from category to category making it difficult to ascertain the actual process. For example, the program review response in 1P13 did not outline a systematic established process, the response to 7P1 outlines steps not mentioned in Category One and Table 8-2 indicates the Action Team on Current Program Evaluation was discontinued but offered no further explanation. Since a quality initiative thrives when embedded in the culture rather than held in the hands of a few, the College could accelerate transitioning the campus culture to a continuous improvement mindset by developing a comprehensive strategy to educate all employees about AQIP and the principles of continuous improvement. Doing so will inform employees, develop the skill sets needed to become engaged members of a quality culture, and provide context for understanding how AQIP can move the College forward.

USING THE FEEDBACK REPORT

The *AQIP Systems Appraisal Feedback Report* is intended to initiate action for improvement. It is therefore important that the Report produced by the Systems Appraisal Team stimulate review of organizational processes and systems. Though decisions about specific actions are each institution's, AQIP expects every institution to use its feedback to stimulate cycles of continual improvement. At the next Strategy Forum an AQIP institution attends, its peers will examine in detail how it is using the feedback from its Systems Appraisal.

An organization needs to examine its Report strategically to identify those areas that will yield greatest benefit if addressed. Some key questions that may arise in careful examination of the Report may be: How do the team's findings challenge our assumptions about ourselves? Given our mission and goals, which issues should we focus on? How will we employ results to innovate, grow, and encourage a positive culture of improvement? How will we incorporate lessons learned from this review in our planning and operational processes? How will we revise the *Systems Portfolio* to reflect what we have learned?

How an organization interprets, communicates, and uses its feedback for improvement ought to support AQIP's core values, encouraging involvement, learning, collaboration and integrity.

Based solely upon an organization's *Systems Portfolio*, the Report reflects a disciplined, external review of what an organization says about itself. The report should help an organization identify ways to improve its *Systems Portfolio* so it functions better to communicate accurately to internal and external audiences. But the Report's chief purpose is to help you to identify areas for improvement, and to act so that these areas actually improve. These improvements can then be incorporated into an updated *Systems Portfolio*, guaranteeing that future Systems Appraisals will reflect the progress an institution has made.

Within a year following the Systems Appraisal, an institution participates in another AQIP Strategy Forum, where the focus will be on what the institution has learned from its Appraisal (and from its other methods of identifying and prioritizing improvement opportunities, and what it has concluded are its major strategic priorities for the next few years. AQIP's goal is to help an institution to clarify the strategic issues most vital to its success, and then to support the institution as it addresses these priorities through Action Projects that will make a difference in institutional performance.

CRITICAL CHARACTERISTICS ANALYSIS

The purpose of this section is to identify what team members understood to be the critical and distinguishing characteristics of your institution. They are the shared understanding of the most important aspects of Mid-Plains, its current dynamics and the forces surrounding it, and its internal momentum and aspirations, at least as team members understood them. This section also demonstrates that the Systems Appraisal Team recognized and knew what makes Mid-

Plains distinctive. Should you find some characteristics that you think are critical and missing from this list, you may want to clarify and highlight these items when you revise your *Systems Portfolio* and other literature explaining your institution to the public.

Item Critical Characteristic

- OVa Mid-Plains Community College's (MPCC) application to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to maintain its accreditation via the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) model was accepted in 2008. This is the College's first Systems Portfolio submission.
- OVb Mid-Plains service area encompasses 30% of the state's total area covering 20,000 square miles. However, the service area encompasses only about 5% of the state's population.
- OVc In 17 of the 18 counties, the median household income is lower than the state average, and in all 18 counties, the percentage of the population 25 years and older that hold at least a bachelor's degree is lower than the state average.
- OVd The College experienced high administrative turnover prior to its previous accreditation review in 2004.
- OV1 Mid-Plains has increased its minimum General Education credit hours to meet HLC standards of 15. Assessment of the General Education program will begin once the new categories are fully implemented in Fall 2013.
- OV2 Mid-Plains has defined key organizational services programs to accomplish distinctive objectives. These programs include an exchange program with North Lindsey College, UK, and a Corporate Academy with Union Pacific Railroad.
- OV3a Mid-Plains is unique in that there is only one other provider physically located within its service area which it looks upon as a partner not a competitor. Competition is noted from larger universities located in urban settings which do not have a physical presence on campus.
- OV3b In order to entice students to remain in the local geographic area, but still provide opportunity to complete advanced degrees, Mid Plains created the Center for Advanced Studies which allows three four year university partners to provide upper division coursework and ease transfer for Mid Plains students.

- OV4 Mid Plains Community College has maintained a relatively stable staffing pattern over the last several years. It reviews open positions in order to determine if the position is still required or should be reallocated to an area with a greater institutional need.
- OV5 Lead by the College's Cabinet, Mid Plains embraces a strong team-centered culture with fourteen specific teams representing major areas and functions of the College. A strong effort is made to include both external and internal stakeholders in the process.
- OV6,7 Mid-Plains recognizes that its primary measure of success-graduation rate of first time, fulltime, degree seeking students needs attention and it is taking active steps to improve in this area, including strengthening support services provided to employees and students.
- OV8 Mid-Plains has made a more focused effort to streamline its strategic planning process and modified its strategic plan to align more closely with AQIP's nine categories. Part of this process included researching best practices.
- OV9 Mid-Plains has identified a set of key college partners locally, regionally and nationally and has worked to develop highly collaborative relationships with each to help its students and staff be successful.

CATEGORY FEEDBACK

In the following sections, each of which deals with strengths and opportunities for improvement for one of the nine AQIP Categories, selected *Critical Characteristics* are again highlighted, those the Systems Appraisal Team believed were critical keys to reviewing that particular AQIP Category. The symbols used in these "strengths and opportunities" sections for each Category stand for *outstanding strength* (SS), *strength* (S), *opportunity for improvement* (O) and *pressing or outstanding opportunity for improvement* (OO). The choice of symbol for each item represents the consensus evaluation of the Systems Appraisal Team members, and deserves your thoughtful consideration. Comments marked SS or OO may need immediate attention, either to ensure the institution preserves and maximizes the value of its greatest strengths, or to devote immediate attention to its greatest opportunities for improvement.

AQIP CATEGORY 1: HELPING STUDENTS LEARN

Helping Students Learn identifies the shared purpose of all higher education organizations, and is accordingly the pivot of any institutional analysis. This Category focuses on the teaching-learning process within a formal instructional context, yet also addresses how your entire institution contributes to helping students learn and overall student development. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to learning objectives, mission-driven student learning and development, intellectual climate, academic programs and courses, student preparation, key issues such as technology and diversity, program and course delivery, faculty and staff roles, teaching and learning effectiveness, course sequencing and scheduling, learning and co-curricular support, student assessment, measures, analysis of results, and efforts to continuously improve these areas.

Here are the Key Critical Characteristics of Mid-Plains that were identified by the Systems Appraisal Team as most relevant for its interpretation of its *Systems Portfolio* section covering Category 1, Helping Students Learn:

Item Critical Characteristic

- OV1 Mid-Plains has increased its minimum general education credit hours to meet HLC standards of 15 credits. Assessment of the general education program will begin once the new categories are fully implemented in Fall 2013.
- OV3b In order to entice students to remain in the local geographic area, but still provide an opportunity to complete advanced degrees, Mid-Plains created the Center for Advanced Studies which allows three four year university partners to provide upper division coursework and ease transfer for Mid-Plains students.
- OV6,7 Mid-Plains recognizes that its primary measure of success-graduation rate of first time, full-time, degree seeking students' needs attention and it is taking active steps to improve in this area.

Here are what the Systems Appraisal Team identified as Mid-Plains's most important strengths and opportunities for improvement relating to processes encompassed by Category 1, Helping Students Learn.

Item S/O Comment

- 1P1a S Mid-Plains general education requirements are based on the institution's mission statement and goals for four areas: written, communication, oral communication, social science and science and mathematics.
- 1P1b O The institution has created a process to review and update its general education requirements. The creation of common learning objectives for all students would aid in measuring the success of student learning. In addition, the institution should continue with its plans to enact the long-term process for the ongoing, systematic review of the College's general education requirements.
- 1P2 O Programs at Mid-Plains use a similar process to determine learning objectives across the college. This generic process does not indicate how or if the learning objectives are measured and how the data is used to inform the program. An opportunity exists to formalize the process and assure consistent implementation across all areas of the college
- 1P3 S Mid-Plains identified an opportunity through the Action Project, New Programs, and developed a systematic and consistent process for designing new programs and courses. The process involves faculty, the Area Instructional Services Team (IST), and the Cabinet.
- 1P4 S The process outlined for designing responsive academic programming as presented is inclusive of key stakeholders, thorough in environmental scanning and systematic. It aligns seamlessly with the processes described in 1P3. Mid-Plains Faculty, Office of Institutional Research and Center for Enterprise are actively engaged in collecting data that assists the college in developing programs in response to community needs. The college leverages its revitalized Center for Enterprise to engage its business community and gather data on industries within its service area.
- 1P5a S In 2011, Mid-plains increased the COMPASS cut scores for English and Math for admission requirements, based on committee recommendations and benchmarking with other Colleges demonstrating a data driven organization.

- 1P5b O Mid-Plains has identified an opportunity and is conducting a similar review in mathematics.
- 1P6 O While, Mid-Plains uses a variety of methods of communicating preparation requirements and learning objectives to both current and prospective students, Communication methods include direct mail, advising, community events, and campus visits. Mid-Plains does not have a formal process or procedure for communicating expectations regarding student preparation or learning objectives to prospective students. This is potentially problematic given the new federal requirements around gainful employment. Developing and formalizing this process lends itself to an Action Project.
- 1P7 SS Mid-Plains offers several Career Academies to local high school students interested in health, education or business, providing a unique opportunity to high school students to sample a major. Successful students are awarded a certificate of achievement. In addition, Mid-Plains offers CareerScope testing for undecided students. This career assessment tool helps students identify an area of interest and make career recommendations.
- 1P8 O A process is in place to direct students into developmental coursework in math, reading, and writing based on ACT and COMPASS score ranges. However, the assistance process provided to underprepared students is largely left to the discretion of the advisors who may direct students to the support services available on the campus rather than having specific targeted activities based on score ranges. Mid-Plains may wish to develop processes that more specifically identify the appropriate support services based on various score ranges and evaluate the success of these to determine how each aids students in better preparation for college level course work.
- 1P9 O Mid-Plains currently utilizes the READI assessment for its online students. While administration of the READI assessment is available to other students, no process exists for administering this on a wide scale

basis, nor is there a discussion of how data from the READI assessment is being utilized to aid faculty in understanding student learning needs on a broad basis.

- 1P10 S Given the large geographic area it serves (23,000 square miles) Mid-Plains is proactive in addressing the needs of its remotely located students. Mid-Plains offers degrees in business, transfer, practical nursing and accelerated paramedicine within the region. Mid-Plains serves a large, non-traditional student and senior populations. Mid-Plains has also identified specific services for students with disabilities, distance students, and non-traditional students.
- 1P11a S Mid-Plains identified nine learning outcomes that all graduates should be able to demonstrate. A process for defining, documenting, and communicating learning outcomes is noted involving the Area Assessment of Student Learning Team, IST, and faculties.
- 1P1b1 S New faculty are provided mentors and have a schedule for evaluation. Tenured faculty also have an evaluation plan. The Center for Teaching Excellence supports faculty teaching needs. Expectations are published in the Mid-Plain's instructional handbook.
- 1P12 O While Mid-Plains offers online, dual credit and specially arranged courses on alternative schedules in an effort to meet the needs of its diverse student community, Mid-Plains has an opportunity to more thoroughly develop a systematic process including data review for designing course scheduling. Inclusion of key stakeholders such as advisors is a positive first step. Reviewing and analyzing data from recent years can offer data driven insight leading to more efficient decisions.
- 1P13 OO Though activities directed at ensuring up to date programs and courses appear to take place regularly, the portfolio does not explain a systematic program review process that is utilized to determine programs that are meeting institutional goals and those that should be discontinued.
- 1P14 O Internal processes for changing or discontinuing programs and courses are in place. While these are based on appropriate input, such as

feedback from advisory committees, assessment of industry trends, and initiatives of the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, Mid-Plains might consider establishing a formal, cyclical review process, within an institutional framework, for reviewing programs and courses. This process could include the discussed process for addressing programs with declining enrollments.

- 1P15 S The faculty in partnership with the Student Success Center have identified a number of strategies to first determine and then address the learning support needs of Mid-Plains students. Examples include enrollment in a student success course to improve time management and study skills as well as providing tutoring to students who may be at risk. These strategies could be strengthened by including active as well as passive options. An example of this might be placing tutors in the classroom of traditionally challenging courses such as science or math.
- 1P16 O Mid-Plains offers students a variety of options for engaging in co-curricular activities. However, goals for co-curricular activities and a process for aligning these goals with curricular learning objectives does not seem to be in place.
- 1P17 O While Mid-Plains has an identified process for soliciting feedback on its graduates, it is not clear what Mid-Plains does with the information it receives. There is an opportunity to include this information in the curriculum modification process outlined earlier in this category. The process could be more effective if it also included review, analysis, and action steps taken as a result, thereby completing the assessment loop.
- 1P18 OO Mid-Plains has addressed some of the concerns of HLC evaluators expressed in 2004. Since it participated in the Assessment Academy, Mid-Plains has developed college-wide learning outcomes, institutionalized a learning objective matrix system, expanded faculty involvement in assessment, and made improvements in communication regarding assessment. However, a key element of the assessment process, the Area Assessment of Student Learning Team, has not met for

two years; and this indicates a lack of institutional focus and commitment to meeting HLC expectations for assessment. While Mid-Plains is working to improve this situation by creating a Coordinator of Assessment position, an opportunity exists for central administration to demonstrate through communication and action, its commitment to a viable, ongoing assessment process.

- 1R1 OO Mid-Plains collects and analyzes measures of student learning such as student and employer surveys, course evaluations, CCSSE results, and the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute. However, program and course level student outcome measures are not described. Mid-Plains may wish to consider developing learning outcomes measures tied to college and program outcomes.
- 1R2 OO The College's nine common learning and development outcomes are embedded in the student learning objectives of the various programs/areas and are measured within the context of the courses students take in those programs/areas. Table 1-21 shows the results for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 academic years. The drop in the scores for objectives F, G, H, and I indicates an opportunity to improve in these areas.
- 1R3 OO Mid-Plains provides data on licensure and board exams pass rates for career programs rather than specific results for learning objectives. As Mid-Plains fully develops the student assessment process, (including robust program assessments), more information will be available to report in future portfolios.
- 1R4c O Mid-Plains uses graduate and employer surveys, advisory committee feedback, licensure exam results, and a completer report as evidence of competencies required by employers. There does not appear to be a comprehensive system for compiling and evaluating these results. For instance, Mid-Plains' employer survey revealed that while graduates have the requisite skills to be successful in their jobs, the employers indicate their knowledge and skills are only adequate in terms of advancing within

- those industries. Mid-Plains has not provided information on how it has evaluated this data and plans to address the concern expressed.
- 1R6 O Using CCSSE as a benchmark to ascertain progress is a positive step, however, comparing data from 2003 and not again until 2011 provides quite a gap, making it difficult to benefit from the survey. Mid-Plains might consider administering CCSSE for two to three years consecutively to establish a baseline and then on a rotating basis (every two to three years). Doing so will provide trend data that could prove beneficial when reviewed and analyzed over time.
- 111a OO While Mid-Plains has made progress in implementing a number of improvements in this category, it is deficient in demonstrating how the data it is collecting is used to help students learn through guiding the choices it has made about making these improvements. The responses provided in the portfolio have not demonstrated that the institution has established comprehensive cyclical processes which lead to results that are systematically evaluated and used to determine improvements across the institution.
- 112 OO Mid-Plains readily admits that it has had some challenges in creating a culture that supports and encourages assessment. Although progress has been made, evidence as reported in Category One indicates much activity in data gathering but less in reviewing and analyzing. While the negative feeling the faculty have had regarding assessment has diminished, Mid-Plains should seize the opportunity to encourage assessment and the use of data to improve student learning. Mid-Plains participated in the Academy for Assessment of Student Learning. However, Mid-Plains has not provided processes, results, or improvements which demonstrate that it has made a commitment to integrating assessment into its culture of student learning. Instead, Mid-Plains has provided counter-evidence to embracing a culture of assessment in the fact that its Area Assessment of Student Team is not functioning currently.

AQIP CATEGORY 2: ACCOMPLISHING OTHER DISTINCTIVE OBJECTIVES

Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives addresses the processes that contribute to the achievement of your institution's major objectives that complement student learning and fulfill other portions of your mission. Depending on your institution's character, it examines your institution's processes and systems related to identification of other distinctive objectives, alignment of other distinctive objectives, faculty and staff roles, assessment and review of objectives, measures, analysis of results, and efforts to continuously improve these areas.

Here are the Key Critical Characteristics of Mid-Plains that were identified by the Systems Appraisal Team as most relevant for its interpretation of its *Systems Portfolio* section covering Category 2, Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives:

Item Critical Characteristic

- OVb Mid-Plains' service area encompasses 30% of the state's total area covering 20,000 square miles. However, the service area encompasses only about 5% of the state's population.
- OV2 Mid-Plains has defined key organizational services programs to accomplish distinctive objectives. These programs include an exchange program with North Lindsey College, United Kingdom, and a Corporate Academy with Union Pacific Railroad.

Here are what the Systems Appraisal Team identified as Mid-Plains's most important strengths and opportunities for improvement relating to processes encompassed by Category 2, Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives.

<i>Item</i>	<i>S/O</i>	<i>Comment</i>
O2P1a	S	Mid-Plains has responded to multiple needs within its community through its "Shaping Our Future" Strategic plan. Activities have included expansion of its Center for Enterprise, globalization and diversity.
2P1b	SS	Mid-Plains launched its Corporate Academy in 2011 in partnership with Union Pacific Railroad. The Corporate Academy was a finalist for the Bellwether Award through the Institute of Higher Education at the University of Florida.

- 2P2a S Soliciting feedback from community members through Community Input Sessions provided opportunity for stakeholder engagement in the strategic planning process.
- 2P3 O Mid-Plains uses a variety of methods to communicate expectations regarding non-instructional objectives. However, the College might consider closing the loop by developing processes to improve communication by allowing stakeholders to also provide input.
- 2P4 O Mid-Plains acknowledges non instructional objectives are not assessed at this time. The reports already generated for the Board of Governors could provide the foundation for that assessment. Next steps might include seeking benchmarking opportunities with peers to develop measurable goals with targets to aid in the continuous improvement process.
- 2P5 O Although Mid-Plains makes available an online form to solicit suggestions from faculty and staff, it is unclear what processes are in place to systematically assess faculty and staff needs.
- 2P6 O Mid-Plains acknowledges that while its budget has remained flat (static), the college does work to find resources for the priority non- instructional needs. The process, however; does not appear to be linked to the college's strategic plan and seems to be arbitrary in how those resources are dispersed.
- 2R1 S Using measures to analyze non-instructional objectives is a good to start making data driven decisions. The College may want to consider including measures of Institutional Advancement outcomes to provide a holistic view of those objectives.
- 2R2 O Though some entities responsible for non-instructional objectives report annually to the Board of Governors, there is no process in place for assessing and reviewing non-instructional objectives. In the future, assessment of non-instructional objectives could be incorporated into Mid-Plain's comprehensive assessment planning process to close the loop and aid in continuous quality improvement.

- 2R3 O Mid-Plains has identified peer community colleges that are used for comparison purposes, however; no comparison data was provided. Mid-Plains acknowledges external benchmarking as an opportunity. Mid-Plains may want to seek regional, state, or national opportunities such as the National Community College Benchmarking Project (NCCBP) or American Association of Community College's Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA).
- 2R4 S Mid-Plains has strengthened and increased their awareness of globalization and diversity.
- 2R4 O Evidence of organizational enhancement in non-instructional areas such as the development of international exchanges, improvement of global awareness, increased giving by donors, and ongoing enterprise development is presented. Mid-Plains might consider adopting a more systematic and detailed approach to tracking and reporting such results.
- 2I1 S Mid-Plains has made notable improvements in several areas related to non-instructional objectives. However, Mid-Plains may want to further their efforts to become a data driven institution by creating a systematic process for linking decisions to performance measures.
- 2I2 O Although many improvements have been made in Category Two, the gap in results presented, including targets and benchmarks indicate Mid-Plains is still in the early stages of the quality process. Seeking opportunities to benchmark against peer colleges, setting targets for improvement, measuring and reporting those results are suggested next steps.

AQIP CATEGORY 3: UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS' NEEDS

Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs examines how your institution works actively to understand student and other stakeholder needs. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to student and stakeholder identification, student and stakeholder requirements, analysis of student and stakeholder needs, relationship building with

students and stakeholders, complaint collection, analysis, and resolution, determining satisfaction of students and stakeholders, measures, analysis of results, and efforts to continuously improve these areas.

Here are the Key Critical Characteristics of Mid-Plains that were identified by the Systems Appraisal Team as most relevant for its interpretation of its Systems Portfolio section covering Category 3, Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs:

Item Critical Characteristic

OV2 Mid-Plains has defined key organizational services programs to accomplish distinctive objectives. These programs include an exchange program with North Lindsey College, United Kingdom, and a Corporate Academy with Union Pacific Railroad.

OV3a Mid-Plains is unique in that there is only one other provider physically located within its service area which it looks upon as a partner not a competitor. Competition is noted from larger universities located in urban settings which do not have a physical presence on campus.

OV3b In order to entice students to remain in the local geographic area, but still provide opportunity to complete advanced degrees, Mid-Plains created the Center for Advanced Studies which allows three four year university partners to provide upper division coursework and ease transfer for Mid-Plains students.

Here are what the Systems Appraisal Team identified as Mid-Plains's most important strengths and opportunities for improvement relating to processes encompassed by Category 3, Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs.

Item S/O Comment

3P1 OO While areas of assessment have been established by Institutional Research, the process for identifying, analyzing, and deciding how to respond to student groups is based on survey results. As presented in the survey results, this process can be strengthened by including other sources of information within a comprehensive, cyclical process driven by the units responsible for responding to student groups' needs.

- 3P2 O Mid-Plains employs a variety of appropriate methods of building and maintaining relationships with students that include high school visits, sponsorship of events and alumni activities to name a few. However, these discriminant steps do not demonstrate a strategic process through which relationships with students are developed and maintained. The institution might consider reviewing these individual steps and align these in a way that clearly demonstrates how a student progresses through the process in order to build a relationship with the College.
- 3P3 S Mid-Plains has identified, analyzed, and responded to key stakeholders' needs including, employees, business and industry, and area residents, among others, in its last two strategic planning cycles. These processes include tools for analyzing key stakeholder needs and Mid-Plains has clearly identified those groups which it considers stakeholders. In addition, Mid-Plains provides the opportunity for employee feedback through the use of the PACE survey as part of the Strategic Planning Cycle.
- 3P5 S Mid-Plains relies upon advisory boards, graduate surveys, community surveys and tools such as EMSI and Nebraska Department of Labor data to determine how to target new student and stakeholder groups. In addition, Mid-Plains utilizes the Economic Modeling Specialists Inc. (EMSI) web-based tools in order to analyze local and regional changes in industries, occupation and population demographics to help inform decisions related to new program development. This data is utilized to help the institution in identifying new stakeholder groups and programs to serve these groups.
- 3P O Mid-Plains has published procedures for handling stakeholder complaints. Mid-Plains might consider implementing a procedure for compiling, summarizing, analyzing and sharing complaints and concerns.
- 3P7 S Mid-Plains employs a variety of measures of student and stakeholder satisfaction, including a completers' survey, student evaluations of instruction, CCSSE, advisory committees, and employer surveys.

- 3R2a O Mid-Plains administered the ACT Student Opinion survey in 2009, and scored below national norms in every area. Other surveys administered include a Graduate Survey for 2009-10. While changes can be instituted based on significant outliers in data in a single year, needs are more clearly defined by looking at the change in data over time. Utilizing this opportunity to review this data, discuss needs with students, and develop refined processes as well as ongoing short and long term evaluation procedures which will assist the institution in improving in these areas.
- 3R2b S Student satisfaction is measured through a variety of tools including the graduate survey, course evaluations, ACT Student Opinion Survey and the CCSSE. Results show results that are positive in nature in areas of cultural program activities, class size, campus security and safety, and the college, in general. Areas of least satisfaction are limited and include Food service, course variety and teacher availability, student activity fees, and college media.
- 3R3 O Mid-Plains is in the early stages of developing a systematic process for determining student relationship results and uses both formal and informal feedback. Using data from the CCSSE in 2011 is an important first step to provide a baseline. Mid-plains could benefit from establishing a rotation schedule for administering CCSSE. Moving forward, CCSSE surveys and the resulting trend data can be reported in future portfolios. Without doing so Mid Plains will lack critical information it needs to improve quality across the institution.
- 3R4 S Items scored highest from stakeholder satisfaction include excellence in education, spirit of cooperation among employees, seeing supervisors as open to suggestions, showing confidence in the work of the employee. Employer surveys also score the university as doing a good job overall. However, MPCC may benefit when the data is presented over a period of time provides a greater value when reviewed to reflect continuous improvement.

- 3R5 S Results for the building of stakeholder relationships indicate that Mid-Plains is collecting and responding to information regarding stakeholder relationships. Mid-Plains served 82 of the 250 businesses in its service area between July 1, 2011 and March 2012.
- 3R6 O Mid-Plains uses nationally normed results from the PACE survey to evaluate student focus, teamwork, supervisory relationships, and institutional structure. An opportunity exists to expand its use of benchmarks and incorporate other nationally normed instruments such as Kansas Community College Benchmark Project, Voluntary Framework of Accountability, Noel-Levitz etc. to assist the College to better understand and respond to student and other stakeholder needs.
- 3I1 O Mid-Plains has made numerous improvements in understanding and responding to students' and other stakeholders' needs, including reinstating the CCSSE, community input sessions, strategic planning, establishment of an Institutional Advancement Office, and outreach to the college community from Institutional Research and Planning. However, they have not indicated where these improvements resulted from or how they have been incorporated into a systematic and comprehensive process for improvement across the institution.
- 3I2 O Mid-Plains has taken significant and positive steps toward embedding continuous improvement into its organizational culture through the alignment of the AQIP principles with the College's strategic planning process. In addition, the College is working toward involving the institution as whole and focusing significant effort on developing more data-driven decision making processes in order to create a stronger sense of continuous improvement. However, the act of aligning these processes does not adequately demonstrate that a culture of data-based decision making exists or that it leads to continuous improvement.

AQIP CATEGORY 4: VALUING PEOPLE

Valuing People explores your institution's commitment to the development of your employees since the efforts of all of your faculty, staff, and administrators are required for institutional success. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to work and job environment; workforce needs; training initiatives; job competencies and characteristics; recruitment, hiring, and retention practices; work processes and activities; training and development; personnel evaluation; recognition, reward, compensation, and benefits; motivation factors; satisfaction, health and safety, and well-being; measures; analysis of results; and efforts to continuously improve these areas.

Here are the Key Critical Characteristics of Mid-Plains that were identified by the Systems Appraisal Team as most relevant for its interpretation of its Systems Portfolio section covering Category 4, Valuing People:

Item Critical Characteristic

- OVd The College experienced high administrative turnover prior to its previous accreditation review in 2004.
- OV4 Mid Plains Community College has maintained a relatively stable staffing pattern over the last several years. It reviews open positions in order to determine if the position is still required or should be reallocated to an area with a greater institutional need.

Here are what the Systems Appraisal Team identified as MPCC's most important strengths and opportunities for improvement relating to processes encompassed by Category 4, Valuing People.

<i>Item</i>	<i>S/O</i>	<i>Comment</i>
4P1	O	Written job descriptions exist for all full time staff and administrative positions. Minimum standards are established for faculty positions based on Nebraska and Higher Learning Commission (HLC) guidelines. Requirements for positions are determined by job descriptions. While Mid- Plains follows the recommendations of the HLC with regard to the academic credentials for its faculty, the College admits that it does not have written job descriptions for its full or part-time faculty. In addition,

the Mid-Plains offers that job descriptions for its part time staff and administration have only recently been drafted.

- 4P2 S Transparent and orderly hiring processes overseen by Human Resources and involving the appropriate supervisors are in place. Mid-Plains utilizes position descriptions, job questionnaires and other methods to ensure that individuals hired by the college meet its requirements. In addition, the Mid-Plains uses various skills related assessments as part of the interview process to ensure the candidates possess the skills necessary for the job.
- 4P3 S Mid-Plains issues employment contracts governed by accepted external guidelines and offers a comprehensive benefits package to all full-time employees. The college allows for flexible schedules and provides training and professional development opportunities for all employees. Other mechanisms for employee recognition are noted in 4P11.
- 4P4 S Processes are in place for orienting employees. New employee orientation is offered for all full-time staff and administrators. The mentoring program for new full-time faculty members is particularly notable.
- O While Mid-Plains provides a comprehensive orientation for its new employees it is only provided twice per year. This can be challenging if the College is hiring employees on a year around basis. Mid-Plains might want to consider developing an alternative orientation formant to fill that gap.
- 4P5 SS The College Cabinet maintains a position matrix that supports planning for personnel changes and provides opportunities for professional development.
- 4P6 S Through an annual cycle of employee evaluation, job descriptions are reviewed, performance is evaluated relative to established goals and objectives, and goals and objectives for the forthcoming year are set. Job descriptions are reviewed and updated within the annual cycle of

- employee evaluation. Procedures have been instituted for equitable and fair treatment of employees and a formal grievance process is in place.
- 4P7 S Expectations regarding ethical practices are communicated to employees through publications, such as the Employee Handbook, and interactions, such as new employee orientation and employee evaluations.
- 4P8-4P9 S Mid-Plains has determined employee training needs through strategic planning, AQIP action projects, and an annual Area Enrichment Day. Part-time faculty and staff are invited to participate in training opportunities. A Center for Teaching Excellence has been established and associated activities offered to assist faculty in enhancing their teaching techniques and skills. Full-time employees are eligible for a tuition reimbursement plan.
- 4P10 S Written procedures for evaluation of faculty and staff are in place. Procedures are reviewed and evaluated by college vice presidents and representatives from the Mid-Plains Vocational Education Association and the Mid-Plains Education Association. Evaluation processes are created by Human Resources and approved by the College Cabinet.
- 4P10 O While the College has an employee evaluation system, it appears from the description provided that it can change from year to year and has not been formalized across the institution. It is also unclear how performance improvement is conducted.
- 4P11 O When finances allow, employees receive annual salary increases. Special Initiatives, Awards and Spirit Awards are given to individuals or groups whose efforts are deemed to be of notable value. Four Presidential Appreciation Awards are given annually. An opportunity exists to establish and document an alignment between these awards and other employee benefits and the college mission and goals. The college reports that systematic processes for employee recognition and reward are not in place.
- 4P12 S On a three to four year cycle, the college administers the Personal Assessment of the College Environment to assess issues related to

employee motivation. The College Cabinet compares these data with data from other sources and prioritizes possible improvements. A performance improvement plan is available for individuals to enhance skills, attitude, and behaviors

- 4P13 O Mid-Plains indicates several ways it provides for employee satisfaction, health and safety, and well being such as a benefits package, a wellness program (WOW), and an Area Physical Resources and Safety Team. It is unclear how these are evaluated for their effectiveness in meeting employee's needs.
- 4R1 S Mid-Plains employs a broad variety of measures of valuing people, including PACE, exit interviews, complaints and grievances, and input at campus in-service days.
- O An opportunity exists to specify what aspects of these measures (for example, of IPED's data) are relevant to assessing how people are valued and to compile results from other measures into a formal report to share with the College Cabinet and other administrators.
- 4R2 S PACE survey results with benchmarks and trends are presented, but results from other measures listed in 4R1 are not given. To strengthen evidence of continuous improvement efforts in future portfolios Mid-Plains may want to consider aligning the response to 4R2 to the measures given in 4R1.
- 4R4 O The comparative data provided indicates Mid-Plains is in the earliest stages of using data for decision making. Mid-Plains may find greater value in reviewing data more aligned with the question presented. A greater opportunity exists to develop a broader and more systematic framework for identifying and using comparative data.
- 4I1 S Mid-Plains is engaged in an Action Project focused on improving employee morale and job satisfaction. In addition, it has completed a number of improvements, including, enhancement of the college recognition system, creation of the Center for Teaching Excellence, and a review of instructional technology systems.

- O Several processes in Category Four are not yet systematic or comprehensive and are indicated as opportunities. Developing systematic and comprehensive processes will provide a strong foundation for Mid-Plains continuous improvement efforts.
- 412 O Although many improvements have been made in Category Four, a gap exists in systematic and comprehensive processes including collecting reviewing and analyzing data. This gap makes it difficult to provide specific results or evidence of continuous improvement.

AQIP CATEGORY 5: LEADING AND COMMUNICATING

Leading And Communicating addresses how your institution's leadership and communication structures, networks, and processes guide your institution in setting directions, making decisions, seeking future opportunities, and building and sustaining a learning environment. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to leading activities, communicating activities, alignment of leadership system practices, institutional values and expectations, direction setting, future opportunity seeking, decision making, use of data, leadership development and sharing, succession planning, measures, analysis of results, and efforts to continuously improve these areas.

Here are the Key Critical Characteristics of Mid-Plains that were identified by the Systems Appraisal Team as most relevant for its interpretation of its Systems Portfolio section covering Category 5, Leading and Communicating:

Item Critical Characteristic

- OV5 Lead by the College's Cabinet, Mid Plains embraces a strong team centered culture with fourteen specific teams representing major areas and functions of the College. A strong effort is made to include both external and internal stakeholders in the process.
- OV8 Mid-Plains has made a more focused effort to streamline its strategic planning process and modified its strategic plan to align more closely with AQIP's nine categories. Part of this process included researching best practices.

Here are what the Systems Appraisal Team identified as Mid-Plains's most important strengths and opportunities for improvement relating to processes encompassed by Category 5, Leading and Communicating.

<i>Item</i>	<i>S/O</i>	<i>Comment</i>
5P1	S	The mission and values of the College are defined and reviewed annually by the Board of Governors
5P2	S	Mid-Plains has initiated a new systematic planning cycle that aligns the AQIP categories with the college mission.
5P3	S	Mid-Plains stakeholders are encouraged to provide feedback as part of the planning process.
5P4	S	Instruments have been reviewed and are used to gather input regarding student and program operations, positive and negative and are used to make decisions on program improvement
5P4	O	Although the Systems Portfolio states a heavy reliance upon data, the lack of a systematic assessment plan hampers the ability to fully analyze student learning outcomes.
	S	While Mid-Plains is typical in locating executive decision in a college cabinet or similar structure, its use of standing cross-functional teams to make certain decisions on operational matters and defer to the College Cabinet in others is notable and should contribute to a culture of shared governance
5P5b	O	A cause of concern is the report that the Area Assessment of Student Learning Team is not active. Thus, an area for opportunity exists.
5P6	S	Mid-Plains is in the early stages of transitioning to a data driven model of decision making. The Mid-Plains Trends and Statistics document is a positive indicator of that transition
5P8	S	Mid-Plains employs a variety of means for communicating its mission and values, including hallway displays, semester in-service events, email, and the college portal.

- 5P9a S Mid-Plains offers leadership professional development opportunities through Human Resources. A reimbursement plan for full-time employees pursuing advanced degrees is also available.
- 5P10b O Although several instances of preparation for leadership succession are given, no formal or systematic process is reported. The institution might consider developing such a system to help ensure consistency and continuity in mission, vision, and values.
- 5R1a S The Mid-Plains utilizes the PACE survey on a regular rotation basis.
- 5R1b O Mid-Plains may want to seek additional measures of feedback other than PACE to provide a balanced perspective such as Noel– Levitz, CCSSE, Best Colleges to Work For.
- 5R2a S Reviewing data from PACE over a period of time offers Mid-Plains valuable information that can guide decision making in allocating energy and resources
- 5R2b O Mid-Plains identified five areas in which it scored below the national norm in the PACE survey. While these items may not be significantly below the norm, any performance below a national norm should guide highly data and quality focused institutions to further investigate why this performance below the norm exists and take action to attempt to improve institutional effectiveness in these areas
- 5R3a S The PACE survey provides comparison data with those of other institutions
- 5R3b O As noted earlier the Mid-Plains may want to seek additional measures of feedback on this category as relying on one source of data may not provide a balanced perspective.
- 5I1a S Mid-Plains has embraced collaborative leadership.
- 5I1b O Mid-Plains reports that the AQIP process has “improved this area of leadership and concept development.” The opportunity exists to specify in somewhat more detail the nature of these improvements, perhaps by reporting additional results in the results section.

- 5I2a S Mid-Plains has influenced the college culture by using collaborative decision making. For example, fund raising for the past three years with faculty members closely involved in the planning and design of the new health complex contributed to a campus improvement.
- 5I2b OO Mid-Plains has not clearly stated through its results, and improvement data how it has significantly changed the culture of decision-making across the institution. While the Systems Portfolio lists anecdotal examples, it does not provide quantitative or qualitative evidence. The absence of this data will make it difficult for Mid-Plains to set priorities or identify targets.

AQIP CATEGORY 6: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONAL OPERATIONS

Supporting Institutional Operations addresses the variety of your institutional support processes that help to provide an environment in which learning can thrive. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to student support, administrative support, identification of needs, contribution to student learning and accomplishing other distinctive objectives, day-to-day operations, use of data, measures, analysis of results, and efforts to continuously improve these areas.

Here are the Key Critical Characteristics of Mid-Plains Community College that were identified by the Systems Appraisal Team as most relevant for its interpretation of its Systems Portfolio section covering Category 6, Supporting Institutional Operations:

Item Critical Characteristic

- OVc In 17 of the 18 counties, the median household income is lower than the state average, and in all 18 counties, the percentage of the population 25 years and older that hold at least a bachelor's degree is lower than the state average.
- OV2 Mid-Plains has defined key organizational services programs to accomplish distinctive objectives. These programs include an exchange program with North Lindsey College, United Kingdom, and a Corporate Academy with Union Pacific Railroad.

Here are what the Systems Appraisal Team identified as Mid-Plains's most important strengths and opportunities for improvement relating to processes encompassed by Category 6, Supporting Institutional Operations.

<i>Item</i>	<i>S/O</i>	<i>Comment</i>
6P1	S	Mid-Plains uses a comprehensive set of tools for identifying student and stakeholder support service needs which includes pre-enrollment assessments, satisfaction surveys, enrollment data, and strategic planning.
6P2	S	In addition to discussions with chairs and supervisors, Mid-Plains employs a number of tools for identifying administrative support needs, including an online help desk, surveys, strategic planning and planning at the unit level for equipment, facilities, and technology.
6P3	S	Mid-Plains reports numerous processes for communicating safety and security procedures. Safety teams are currently working with a consultant to update manuals and implement safety inspections.
6P4	S	Appropriate groups have been identified with responsibility for managing support services processes and cooperate in meeting student support needs.
6P5	S	Documentation of support processes is offered through the campus portal and on the college web site.
6R1	S	Mid-Plains uses a variety of tools for measuring student support service processes, including the CCSSE, student learning outcome results, usage logs, and the PACE survey.
6R2	S	Student support service results, including benchmarks, are reported for the CCSSE and the Mid-Plains Completers survey. In future portfolios, the college may want to consider expanding the number and variety of reported results.
6R3	O	Results for administrative support services from PACE are reported in Figure 3-11. An opportunity exists to expand the number and variety of reported results. Mid-Plains has not documented results of administrative

support services that lend themselves to goal setting and on-going improvement efforts.

- 6R4 S Upper-level administration has used the results of PACE and CCSE to form action plans to address areas lower than the norm base. This is an important first step in making continuous improvements. Further refining the goals to include targets and specific forms of measurement may help the Mid-Plains more effectively measure progress. Results for these five goals can be reported in future systems portfolios.
- 6R5 S Mid-Plains has compared its survey results and enrollment data with other small colleges and noted both negative and positive differences. Mid-Plains may want to consider following these results over a three to five year period to provide additional insights.
- 6I1 O Mid-Plains provides a comprehensive list of improvements in support services, including improvements in advising, financial aid, business offices, distance learning, information technology and institutional advancement. However, no linkage is provided between the processes the institution has in place, the results it has identified, and the improvements being made. Thus, no documented, continuous improvement cycle is shown. Building a comprehensive picture of how processes are measured and how measurements are used to make improvements will help the institution provide evidence that it is embracing a culture of quality improvement.
- 6I2 O Mid-Plains has begun to put in place the structures and practices necessary for building a culture of quality improvement. Further progress can be made by linking results to improvement efforts.

AQIP CATEGORY 7: MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

Measuring Effectiveness examines how your institution collects, analyzes, and uses information to manage itself and to drive performance improvement. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to collection, storage, management, and use of information and data – at

the institutional and departmental/unit levels; institutional measures of effectiveness; information and data alignment with institutional needs and directions; comparative information and data; analysis of information and data; effectiveness of information system and processes; measures; analysis of results; and efforts to continuously improve these areas.

Here are the Key Critical Characteristics of Mid-Plains that were identified by the Systems Appraisal Team as most relevant for its interpretation of its Systems Portfolio section covering Category 7, Measuring Effectiveness:

Item Critical Characteristic

OVa Mid-Plains Community College's (MPCC) application to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to maintain its accreditation via the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) model was accepted in 2008. This is the College's first Systems Portfolio submission.

OV6,7 Mid-Plains recognizes that its primary measure of success-graduation rate of first time, full-time, degree seeking students needs attention and it is taking active steps to improve in this area, including strengthening support services provided to employees and students.

Here are what the Systems Appraisal Team identified as Mid-Plains's most important strengths and opportunities for improvement relating to processes encompassed by Category 7, Measuring Effectiveness.

<i>Item</i>	<i>S/O</i>	<i>Comment</i>
7P1-2	S	Data management processes for student-learning outcomes, program performance, student satisfaction, community input, non-instructional programs, and enrollment are identified. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning has a key role in managing these processes. Processes for managing data are employed in strategic planning. This is evidenced in Table 1 and Table 2.
7P3	S	The Area Enterprise Resource Planning Team meets monthly to monitor the Student Information System data. Module managers for the component modules of the system meet quarterly providing feedback to this team.

- 7P4-5 S Benchmarks for certain IPEDS data have been established. Data from the Office of Institutional Research and Planning are used at regular meetings of the College Cabinet. The College does provide data to federal, state, financial, and accrediting agencies. A process is in place, although not presently in use to determine comparative data needs.
- 7P6 O Mid-Plains acknowledges that no systematic process for connecting outcomes for non-instructional areas to the College's strategic goals and objectives exists. An opportunity exists to align these areas to the strategic goals and setting measurable targets for those goals. Alignment will allow Mid-Plains to show evidence of continuous quality improvements.
- 7P7 S Procedures are in place for assuring the efficacy of information transfer and storage in the registration and admissions processes. The Jenzebar SIS appears to be managed in such a way as to avoid data integrity problems. In addition to the use of primary key fields processes for data entry might need to be identified. The use of the active directory, single sign on, and a security module maintained by the database administrator contribute to this cause.
- 7R1 S Mid-Plains provides a list of the measures collected on the performance and effectiveness of its system for information and knowledge management. These measures are reviewed and analyzed by the ERP Team.
- 7R1 O Some indication of the efficacy of information and knowledge management systems is given in the PACE Climate Survey. Hard data exists in the network and software monitoring systems. The opportunity exists to identify specific measures within these data.
- 7R2 O While a list of sources of information regarding the performance and effectiveness is provided no evidence on the actual performance is evident.
- 7R3 O Though common metric for comparing results of measuring effectiveness has not been identified, participation in the Digital Community College

Award competition provides validated comparison information. The opportunity exists to use these data and other national measures of information system development in higher education as sources of results.

- 711 OO A limited number of improvements were provided, Allocating energy and resources to measuring effectiveness are critical early steps in an AQIP institution's quality journey.
- 712 OO The College has emphasized throughout the portfolio the development of the Strategic Plan as the anchor for the AQIP activities. While a Strategic Plan is an important component, that in itself does not ensure a culture of quality. An opportunity exists to expand the range of indicators for measuring effectiveness of data and information management, incorporating an analysis of the data, and closing the loop showing where and how decisions for the organization are made.

AQIP CATEGORY 8: PLANNING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Planning Continuous Improvement examines your institution's planning processes and how your strategies and action plans are helping you achieve your mission and vision. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to institutional vision; planning; strategies and action plans; coordination and alignment of strategies and action plans; measures and performance projections; resource needs; faculty, staff, and administrator capabilities; measures; analysis of performance projections and results; and efforts to continuously improve these areas.

Here are the Key Critical Characteristics of Mid-Plains that were identified by the Systems Appraisal Team as most relevant for its interpretation of its *Systems Portfolio* section covering Category 8, Planning Continuous Improvement:

Item Critical Characteristic

- Ova Mid-Plains Community College's application to the Higher Learning Commission to maintain its accreditation via the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) model was accepted in 2008. This is the College's first Systems Portfolio submission.

- OV5 Lead by the College’s Cabinet, MPCC embraces a strong team-centered culture with fourteen specific team representing major areas and functions of the College. A strong effort is made to include both external and internal stakeholders in the process.
- OV8 Mid-Plains has made a more focused effort to streamline its strategic planning process and modified its strategic plan to align more closely with AQIP’s nine categories. Part of this process included researching best practices.

<i>Item</i>	<i>S/O</i>	<i>Comment</i>
8P1-2	S	MPCC incorporates a planning process that is collaborative in nature, starting with feedback from both internal and external stakeholders including students. Action Projects spring from the planning process. The strategic planning process is entering its second cycle.
8P3-4	S	Action projects developed though the above process are assigned to action project teams. Teams are training by the Area AQIP Team. A process is in place to create action projects in addition to those selected by the College Cabinet. The work of action project teams is documented on the college portal. Provisions are in place to modify the strategic plan as may be necessary during the planning/action cycles.
8P5-8P6	S	MPCC uses cross functional teams to align action plans with the Strategic Plan. The College has established a separate budget to be used solely for strategic planning initiatives. A systematic process has been developed for accessing the funds.
	O	In 7P6 MPCC indicates that it has not yet designed a process to connect the goals and objectives of non-instructional programs units with the College’s overall strategic goals and objectives. Therefore, it is unclear how the College is currently meeting its planning needs adequately for both instructional and non-instructional units.
8P7	O	Though MPCC considers risk in its planning processes, a systematic process for doing so is not in place. As noted by the College in this section, this is an opportunity for improvement.

- 8P8 O The 2012-2015 strategic planning process has identified employee development as a focus area. Certain practices are already in place to this end, including tuition reimbursement, departmental funds allocated for professional development, training for action projects teams, human resources programs, faculty mentoring, and workshops offer by the Center for Teaching Excellence. MPCC has the opportunity to build on this solid foundation as a mechanism to develop a culture of quality.
- 8R1 O While the College provides a list of the measures collected on the performance and effectiveness of its Action Projects it is not clear what measures are collected to determine the effectiveness of planning processes and no information is given regarding analyzing results and taking corrective action. An opportunity exists to create measurable objectives to use to analyze new processes for effectiveness.
- 8R2 S Table 8-2 lists concrete results for accomplishing organizational strategies and action plans. These include a new process for program evaluation, improvements to the facility reservation and scheduling process, and collection of metrics for learning outcomes at the program and course levels.
- 8R4 O The College can benefit from finding external data sources that can serve as comparisons to better access its own improvements and goal setting activities.
- 8R5 O MPCC has taken on a large set of initiative and has provided some data showing how it has made improvements in these initiatives. The College has the opportunity to expand to the use of trend data in this category (and throughout the portfolio) to demonstrate that a pattern of evaluation of evidence over time is being utilized to help inform decision-making.
- 8I1 S In developing its 2012-2015 plan, MPCC has made significant improvements over the previous cycle by focusing on information gathered from input sessions and survey data and acknowledging the need for more measurable outcomes. Specific goals for improving future planning initiatives, such as improving communication of progress

towards goals and defining a clear process for measuring the effectiveness of the planning systems, have been articulated.

- 812 O The College acknowledges that while progress has been made awareness and knowledge of continuous improvement among employees may be limited. To aid in developing a culture of quality the college may benefit from providing education about the principles of AQIP and continuous improvement to all employees.

AQIP CATEGORY 9: BUILDING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Building Collaborative Relationships examines your institution's relationships – current and potential – to analyze how they contribute to the institution's accomplishing its mission. It examines your institution's processes and systems related to identification of key internal and external collaborative relationships; alignment of key collaborative relationships; relationship creation, prioritization, building; needs identification; internal relationships; measures; analysis of results; and efforts to continuously improve these areas.

Here are the Key Critical Characteristics of Mid-Plains that were identified by the Systems Appraisal Team as most relevant for its interpretation of its *Systems Portfolio* section covering Category 9, Building Collaborative Relationships:

Item Critical Characteristic

- OVb Mid-Plains service area encompasses 30% of the state's total area covering 20,000 square miles. However, the service area encompasses only about 5% of the state's population.
- OV2 Mid-Plains has defined key organizational services programs to accomplish distinctive objectives. These programs include an exchange program with North Lindsey College, United Kingdom, and a corporate academy with the Union Pacific Railroad.
- OV3a Mid-Plains is unique in that there is only one other provider physically located within its service area which it looks upon as a partner not competitor. Competition is noted from larger universities located in urban settings which do not have a physical presence on campus.

- Ov3b In order to entice students to remain in the local geographic area, but still provide opportunity to complete advanced degrees Mid-Plains created the Center For Advanced Studies which allows three four-year university partners to provide upper division coursework and ease transfer for Mid-Plains students.
- OV9 Mid Plains has identified a set of key college partners locally, regionally, and nationally and has worked to develop highly collaborative relationships with each to help its students and staff be successful.

Here are what the Systems Appraisal Team identified as Mid-Plains's most important strengths and opportunities for improvement relating to processes encompassed by Category 9, Building Collaborative Relationships.

<i>Item</i>	<i>S/O</i>	<i>Comment</i>
9P1	S	Mid-Plains has ongoing processes in place for building relationships with students-sending organizations. Career services maintains relationships with schools through its Career Pathways program and dual credit offerings. The Center for Enterprise works with businesses to develop customized workforce training. Enrollment management sends recruiters into the schools. The "36 in 36" tour takes the College President, deans, and vice presidents into all of the area high schools.
9P2	S	Mid-Plains has identified its key student and graduate- receiving organizations: business and industry, four-year colleges and universities and other community colleges. Processes for building and maintaining relationships with these organizations include, advisory business and industry member advisory committees, internships, workforce certification, articulation with four-year colleges, and partnerships with other community colleges to offer programs which would otherwise not be available in the region.
9P3	S	Mid-Plains has developed formal relationships with external organizations that provide services to students such as Follett's Bookstore and the food service area. The Center for Enterprise contracts with outside providers for certain workforce training. Career Services contracts with testing companies for certification and placement testing.

- 9P4 O Mid-Plains has long-term relationships with entities that reliably provide materials and services. Competitive bids are required for any requisition exceeding \$10,000. The opportunity exists to specify processes in more detail as to how the reliability of entities in long-term relationships is determined and the process whereby, if necessary, such entities are removed from relationships that are no longer beneficial.
- 9P5 S Mid-Plains Mid-Plains understands the need to create, build, and prioritize relationships with educational associations, external agencies, consortia partners, and the general community. Mid-Plains faculty and staff hold memberships and are active in a variety of local, regional, and national groups and organizations.
- 9P6 S Mid-Plains regularly participates in partnerships and consortium-style projects on a local, regional, state, and national level. College members meet regularly with academic partners to keep lines of communication open. The Chief Instructional Officers and Presidents at Community Colleges across the state meet every other month to discuss shared programming, statewide initiatives, funding, federal regulations, and other common issues of interest.
- 9P7 S Mid-Plains' communication strategy relies on the portal as the cornerstone. Other important components include campus meetings at the start of the fall and spring semesters and an Enrichment Day in the fall. Activities targeted to adjunct faculty are also offered in the fall.
- 9R1 S There are a number of relationship measures that help the College determine the strength of relationships, including employer satisfaction business advisory committee feedback, enrollment numbers, and continuing education, and grantor information. The opportunity exists to show these measures are regularly analyzed and used in the decision making process for Mid-Plains in maintaining or making changes in offerings and projects.
- 9R2 O While limited performance results were provided, results from the employer satisfaction survey were given. Identifying the source of

measurement and what the actual issue at hand is would provide additional clarity. A list of advisory councils was provided, but the performance results were unclear. High school dual enrollment results shared in a narrative format could have a greater impact when shared through visual displays such as charts and graphs. Mid-Plains might find more value in comparing results over a period of time such as three-five years to indicate trends in continuous improvement.

- 9R3 OO MPCC does not collect, report, or analyze comparative data related to the building of collaborative relationships. Identifying relevant sources of data that do provide comparative data is not clearly noted.
- 9I1 S The realignment of the Mid-Plains Center for Enterprise and the establishment of the Institutional Advancement Department are two important steps in building collaborative relationships.
- 9I2 O Mid-Plains has an opportunity to increase campus awareness of the importance of collaborative relationships and develop initiatives aimed at expanding and strengthening employee participation in the building of these relationships.