Quality Program Summary

Academic Quality Improvement Program

Prepared in support of the AQIP Quality Check-Up Visit

September 18-19, 2014

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Introduction

Northcentral Technical College joined the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) in 2001 because of the institutional focus on continuous quality improvement. NTC has benefited from building on more than a decade of positive improvements through AQIP. In 2006, Dr. Lori Weyers became NTC’s president. During her tenure, Continuous Quality Improvement has remained one of the College’s Strategic Directions.

NTC’s Quality Program Organization

NTC’s quality program is driven by the mission and vision of the College. All quality initiatives are selected based upon how they support or enhance NTC’s strategic initiatives.

**NTC’s Mission:** Northcentral Technical College is the customer-focused, accessible provider of innovative life-long learning that builds a globally competitive workforce.

**NTC’s Vision:** Building futures one community, one workplace, one learner at a time.

**NTC’s Strategic Directions:**

**Innovation and Growth** - The College implements new products or services to meet current and future stakeholder needs.

**Strategic Partnerships** – The College becomes the preferred strategic partner of area businesses and industries, K-12 districts, local communities, entrepreneurs, and other institutions of higher education to support learning and economic development, establishing NTC as an educational leader.

**Continuous Quality Improvement** - The College develops innovative ways to continually improve learning, support systems, and processes, and the responsible use of natural resources that enhance organizational effectiveness and demonstrate sustainability. The College encourages and supports professional growth and team development throughout the organization.

**Fiscal Strength** – The College prudently manages and strengthens its financial resources in order to thrive in a complex and changing environment.

**Student Success** – The College promotes student retention, degree completion, career and job placement and engages a diverse student population through its programs, support services, and campus settings.

**NTC’s Key Quality Program Components**

NTC’s quality program is strategic, integrated, and intentional in how NTC employees approach their tasks. Quality is embedded in the culture of the College and its key processes and starts at the top of the organization with the president. The quality philosophy spills down to the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and to employees and is engrained in how the College plans, evaluates, and executes tasks. The heart of NTC’s quality journey is its evaluation model that provides an ongoing process of data collection, analysis, and continuous improvement.
**Instructional Vitality Process/Service Quality Review Process**

NTC’s evaluation processes provide a framework for identifying areas of continuous quality improvement for both academic and service teams. Academic program teams are evaluated annually using the Instructional Vitality Process, while service teams are selected for review by Executive Leadership Team members each year using the Service Quality Review Process. NTC’s Instructional Vitality Process provides a program evaluation framework in the categories of Student Success, Customer Satisfaction, and Program Health. Program performance data and environmental scanning data are provided to faculty as they analyze performance in each category. NTC continues to grow in its direct assessment efforts by assessing student learning in program outcomes, general education outcomes, and soft skill outcomes; these data are utilized by faculty to guide program improvement. The Service Quality Review Process promotes effective practices within the non-instructional units through customer feedback, environmental scanning, data analysis, problem solving, and process improvement. When appropriate, value stream mapping is utilized to help define and streamline current processes. The Instructional Vitality Process and Service Quality Review Process are assessed on a yearly basis through the collection of feedback from process stakeholders. All process owners (faculty, deans, and other participants) are surveyed regarding the evaluation. All facilitators review the survey results, and continuous improvement of evaluation processes takes place yearly. Instructional Vitality Process and Service Quality Review Process evaluation results are part of the conversation and culture of quality at the College.

**Employee Performance Management**

Individual employee performance management provides a mechanism for supervisors and employees to set goals at the employee level. The new Employee Performance Management model (current Action Project) helps define the expectations of supervisors and employees. The model, which includes goal setting, mid-year check-in, and final appraisal, is designed to create an ongoing evaluation conversation that promotes continuous improvement at the employee level.

**Stakeholder Satisfaction Data**

NTC employs additional strategies to ensure quality including systematic gathering of stakeholder satisfaction. Listening Sessions held by the President and the Executive Leadership Team/Student Services help the College identify community/stakeholder, employer, graduate, employee, and student concerns. Listening Session feedback regarding new program or course needs is captured on the Product Development Plan for further exploration. Surveys and feedback forms are other ways NTC gathers feedback proactively. NTC gathers this feedback and prioritizes it for continuous improvement.

**Connecting NTC's Key Planning and Continuous Improvement Processes**

Quality is intertwined with NTC’s planning processes. The NTC Board of Trustees develops and approves a strategic plan of action to achieve the College’s mission and goals based on stakeholder needs. After the Board sets College Strategic Directions, the Executive Leadership Team identifies operational strategies to support each Strategic Direction. From the Executive Leadership Team Action Plan the process cascades down to the division or team level. Divisions and individual teams list their operational strategies on their Team Action Plan. The Team Action Plan Process ensures each team’s plan supports NTC’s Strategic
Directions. The Strategic Direction of Continuous Quality Improvement is tracked, monitored, and addressed on the Executive Leadership Team Action Plan and on individual Team Action Plans. Both the Executive Leadership Team and individual teams can determine quality initiatives. Individual teams also list their team-level quality initiatives for continuous improvement on their Team Action Plan.

Quality initiatives are recorded within the Team Action Plan to ensure these goals are monitored and to ensure that quality improvements are not separate activities. Team Action Plans also provide a centralized plan for both teams and supervisors to reference thereby providing accountability for completing not only College and team initiatives, but also quality initiatives. College, team, and quality initiatives are tracked at the employee level through Performance Management goals.

College/Team/Individual Goal Setting and Planning Processes 2014-16

- Two-year plan completed in July
- Service Teams two-year plan completed in September
- Academic Teams two-year plan completed in October
- Employees submit annually

All Team Action Plans support the Strategic Directions set by the Board of Trustees. Service and Academic Team Action Plans reference the ELT Action Plan to determine how employees contribute to the goals relating to a team/department/division. Employee developmental and performance goals for Performance Management may include Team Action Plan items.

NTC’s Quality Initiatives

NTC’s program and service area evaluation model has matured since the last Systems Appraisal. NTC aligned major College decision-making processes resulting in focused program evaluations that are completed in tandem with yearly strategic planning activities. Up-to-date program student performance data and environmental scanning information is accessible to faculty and administrators each year. Process and other focused evaluations in the service area have provided the College with process and quality improvements. Service teams have utilized value stream mapping to streamline and improve the
quality of key student, administrative, and institutional student support processes. NTC’s new Employee Performance Management System (current Action Project) complements NTC’s team evaluation practices. It allows employees to set performance and developmental goals that align with Team Action Plans and helps to align professional development activities with team/individual performance goals.

Feedback Mechanisms

To maintain quality, NTC intentionally solicits feedback and improves its feedback collection processes. NTC continues to collect feedback directly from students, staff, and stakeholders through Listening Sessions, surveys, and comment/complaint collection. Recent improvements include:

- Adding customer comment boxes throughout the College, with several located specifically in Student Services.
- Instituting quarterly Listening Sessions with students.
- Increasing the frequency of Personal Assessment of the College Environment and Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory surveys from every 3 years to every 2 years.
- Collecting course feedback through EvaluationKIT, a web-based evaluation software that gathers student feedback electronically.
- Gathering security concerns from every department. In response to staff feedback, all classroom locks were upgraded and faculty and administrative areas of the College were secured to only allow keycard access.

Changes directly resulting from Student Listening Sessions include:

- Improvements to the College advising structure evidenced by improved Noel-Levitz SSI results.
- A number of safety enhancements occurred including installation of a covered walkway canopy between the main building and the Center for Health Sciences. Speed bumps were installed along the College’s private drive. Stoplights were installed at the intersection onto Merrill Avenue.
- Additional offerings of soft-skill and job readiness programming were offered in 2013-14 by Student Life. Recognizing the success of events in Wausau, Student Life expanded its program offerings to the regional campuses ensuring students are receiving consistent opportunities.
- NTC launched a new vision for food service that directly incorporated much of the feedback gathered from students including the utilization of swipe cards to pay for cafeteria food.
- Student Life remodeled its space/added equipment at the direct recommendation of students.
- As a result of Student Listening Session feedback, the ELT representatives requested quarterly Student Listening Sessions.

Infrastructure Improvements

NTC has made strategic investments in quality, hands-on student learning environments. In April 2010, NTC dedicated the Wood Technology Center of Excellence in Antigo to support the wood industry. In June 2011, NTC’s 110-acre Agriculture Center of Excellence opened to support the agricultural science division programs. The 14,500-square-foot Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering (AME) Center of Excellence opened in fall 2012, allowing additional opportunities for manufacturing programs to
collaborate on projects and to provide a flexible space for both students and businesses. In April 2011, NTC’s Public Safety Center of Excellence was hit by a tornado and rebuilt in 2011-13. The new facility includes not only classroom space, but also a driving training track, an emergency village, and multiple simulation areas that allow learners to move from in-depth classroom discussions to real-life simulation experiences. In 2013-14, NTC piloted seven collaborative classroom learning environments to engage students and promote student-to-student interaction. In fall 2013, the Antigo campus was updated to have a uniform appearance with all NTC campuses, to more effectively utilize the workspace, and to improve building security. In January 2014, NTC’s Medford campus was moved to a new, larger site to improve the learning environment and to better serve this rural community. In the last four years NTC has remodeled its Spencer campus building, rented a new Wittenberg campus site (option to purchase), and constructed two Phillips campus additions. This summer NTC is renovating its Technical and Trades area. Renovations include an updated physics room, remodeled 11,000 sq. ft. welding lab to include state-of-the-art robotic and laser technology, and new faculty office space. In June 2015, the Graphic Design area will be remodeled with state-of-the-art technology as well. NTC is in the process of creating an Information Technology Entrepreneurial Center (ITEC). Many of the courses taught at NTC require team projects, especially in the area of information technology. To better incorporate students from regional campuses into a group project during class, ITEC will provide regional collaboration project rooms with technology to allow Wausau-based student teams to connect with team members from regional campus locations. ITEC will also provide a place in Wausau for students at all campuses to receive faculty support during office hours and a comfortable and inviting location to complete homework. This fall NTC is also opening an Academic Resource Center for student academic support and a Geriatric Center of Excellence to provide healthcare and service providers with a learning lab for students to understand the unique needs of the aging population.

Student Success Measures
The College has been proactive in working with state leaders and the Wisconsin Technical College System to develop system-wide measures of student success. The College has the opportunity to communicate and to educate its staff regarding state-wide student success measures and to identify institutional goals for student achievement. The College is developing data reports so all faculty and middle leaders can monitor student success within programs by providing IVP data that includes state student success measures and relevant state performance-based funding measures. Measuring and monitoring these student success measures institutionally and programmatically is another current Action Project. In addition, the College also monitors all state of Wisconsin performance-based funding measures and provides departments/teams and academic programs with this data.

Partnerships
To address the College’s resource needs, NTC continues to follow the strategy of creating mutually beneficial partnerships to provide the College with additional resources. The following are recent activities/results showing how NTC continues to builds its partnerships to strengthen the College:

- Received Miller Electric $800,000 donation of welding equipment.
- Awarded $283,500 Youth Apprenticeship grant.
• Received $150,000 Wisconsin Fast Forward Blueprint for Prosperity: High School Pupil Workforce Training Program award through Department of Workforce Development; will provide instruction for 40 students in CNA and manufacturing in regional high schools with the goal of 85% of participants employed within 6 months after high school graduation.

• Awarded $347,000 of Workforce Advanced Training grants to provide funding for customized training with business and industry partners.

• Conferred $2,264,000 Blueprint for Prosperity grant to expand programming in high demand fields of Diesel Technician, Welding, Machine Tool, and IT-Software Developer.

• Received more than $150,000 in grants to host and train international students.

• Invited to present at Department of Labor’s Region 5 TAACCCT conference in Chicago in July share NTC’s best practices in the areas of leadership and state collaboration in the TAACCCT 3 INTERFACE grant.

• Assisted WTCS college grant writing consortium in the submission of the Department of Labor’s Region 5 round four of TAACCCT grant application.

• Beginning a partnership with the Medical College of Wisconsin to share space at NTC for medical student learning laboratories and a simulation center. Medical students will begin sharing facilities on campus in July 2016.

• Participated in the Parade of Homes in June 2014 with the NTC Foundation/Residential Building house, a collaboration between NTC Foundation, Residential Building program, and business donors; more than 1,600 people toured the home; anticipate selling with a $40,000 to go to scholarships and student initiatives.

• Raised more than $130,000 to date towards Day for NTC Students—Wausau.

• Presented more than 500 scholarships worth $310,000+.

• Hosted 4th annual Timberwolf Run/Walk—more than 125 people ran/walked/volunteered, including 23 alumni and 63 community members.

• Expanding the number of transfer agreements with Michigan Technological University.

NTC’s Commitment to Quality Distance Education, Correspondence and Off-Site Educational Environments

NTC is committed to ensuring quality educational experiences for all students. This includes evaluating the effectiveness of distance education and correspondence offerings. NTC evaluates the effectiveness of academic program offerings by analyzing student success by mode of delivery at the course level on a yearly basis through the Instructional Vitality Process. In cases where there is consistently low student performance issues, course curriculum or the delivery method may be altered to improve student success. NTC’s Virtual College, which offers instructor-led online programs, annually reviews Instructional Vitality Process performance data for its online students. Because correspondence courses are limited to one program area, student success data is evaluated through the Instructional Vitality Process.

NTC provides a quality infrastructure for distance education offerings. Quality begins with curriculum design. Distance education courses must meet College course standards for online and other flexible
learning formats. All courses are reviewed to ensure quality standards are met. In addition, a Virtual College faculty coach (current faculty member) supports instructors teaching online. Virtual College faculty also meet monthly to discuss best practices as well as areas of concern. Virtual College admissions and advising processes also contribute to ensuring quality. Before students are admitted in Virtual College, they must evaluate their readiness to be a successful online student. Once admitted, Virtual College students have a dedicated student advisor who provides proactive advising with students to ensure their progress in their self-paced courses. The Virtual College advisor is also in contact with faculty to address course issues that may be due to miscommunication. Faculty are supported collaboratively by the Virtual College advisor to address student performance issues.

To fulfill its mission, NTC has sites throughout its 10-county district. The College strives to provide consistent quality educational offerings at all locations. NTC has invested in synchronous and asynchronous distance delivery options for students throughout the district, including Interactive Video Conferencing (IVC), online, computer-based training, and hybrid formats. To ensure quality, two regional deans oversee operations in the east and west regions of the district. Each provides a consistent presence and ensures the continuity of practices between main campus and regional locations. Evaluation data is collected to analyze the effectiveness of services by location. Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory data, Personal Assessment of the College Environment data, and Service Quality Review Process data is evaluated by location to detect any disparity in services or student satisfaction. As listed previously, NTC has made numerous infrastructure investments at regional sites and centers of excellence to assure quality learning environments at all locations.

Quality Initiatives Prompted by 2010 Systems Appraisal Feedback

In October 2010, NTC received feedback on its AQIP Systems Portfolio. Two key growth areas emerged as high priorities: 1. Assessment; 2. Measuring Effectiveness and Communicating Progress. The following are improvements based on Systems Appraisal feedback:

1. **Assessment:** Growth opportunity in overall assessment process and the reporting of assessment results.

   **NTC Response:**
   a. Integrated assessment responsibilities with Educational Support Services and Curriculum to ensure appropriate measure of course and program outcomes and the college-wide collection of assessment information/trends.
   b. Hired a Curriculum and Assessment Coordinator in 2012.
   c. Continued to create, implement, and collect data on Technical Skill Attainment program assessments.
   d. Revitalized the Assessment Committee in 2012.
   e. Began process of identifying General Education Outcomes with assessment rubrics starting in 2012.
g. Dedicated an entire two-day College Initiative Days to assessment training/best practices in fall 2013. Sessions were facilitated by faculty assessment team members. This group continues to emphasize assessment practices in each College Initiative Days.

h. Adopted General Education Outcomes (rubrics) in spring 2014.

i. Piloted the collection of General Education Outcome data in spring 2014, with full implementation in fall 2014.

j. Reaffirmed NTC Soft Skills (formerly called Core Abilities) 2013-2014. (Current Action Project)

k. Hosting WTCS Assessment Conference in February 2015.

2. **Measuring Effectiveness and Communicating Progress:** Identify (in addition to growth measurements) meaningful and comparable measures of success relating to Human Resources, organizational development, and student and administrative support areas and improve the accessibility of pertinent College information and analysis.

**NTC Response:**

a. Developed metrics in the areas of Enrollment Management and Foundation. Increasing the use of benchmarks (Foundation Dashboard).


c. In 2013-14, NTC incorporated student success measures and performance-based funding measures in the Board Dashboard.

d. Created data and report specialist position to the develop data report services to streamline report creation, provide systematic data analysis, and enhance accessibility. Position filled in spring 2014.

e. Purchased Economic Modeling Specialists International (EMSI) in spring 2014. EMSI provides access to comprehensive labor market data at the district, state, and national level. These data now inform NTC’s environmental scanning process and provides district specific labor market data for program development and the Instructional Vitality Process.

f. Integrating program-related state of Wisconsin Performance-Based Funding measures into Instructional Vitality Process. Communicating state of Wisconsin Performance-Based Funding measures and updates to relevant college departments/divisions.

g. Starting in fall 2014, program performance measures will be refreshed at the end of the semester to provide instructional teams with even more timely data to allow faculty to determine if strategies implemented are effective from semester to semester.

h. Documented and analyzed current NTC data reports. In the process of holding college-wide focus group sessions with data users to determine additional report needs. Also studying best practices of other institutions. Determining additional benchmarking data (system, state, or national). Considering the feasibility of joining the Community College
Benchmarking Project. Also identifying enhanced non-instructional measures of success. Currently in progress summer 2014.

NTC’s Current AQIP Action Projects

AQIP Action Projects are selected in alignment with NTC’s strategic priorities. Action Projects support and enhance College goals and objectives. Prior to the arrival of Dr. Weyers, Action Projects were not necessarily aligned with key College initiatives which resulted in that fact they were not always embraced or sustained. Because of this change, recent and current Action Projects represent significant College initiatives with long-term impact to the quality of the College.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Project Title/Status</th>
<th>NTC Strategic Direction</th>
<th>AQIP Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Development of metrics for measuring and monitoring Student Success (ACTIVE)</td>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Measuring Effectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrating and Assessing NTC Soft Skills in Academic Programs (ACTIVE)</td>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Helping Students Learn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implement Performance Management System (ACTIVE)</td>
<td>Continuous Quality Improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess the Effectiveness of Nursing Program Interventions (COMPLETE)</td>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Helping Students Learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate Learning Center Operations and Determine Program Improvements (COMPLETE)</td>
<td>Student Success</td>
<td>Helping Students Learn</td>
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Examining student success has become a national initiative, which the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) and NTC have embraced. Ensuring students are successful in meeting their educational goals is critical. Project goals include: establishing College performance measures for student success based on national student success initiatives; benchmarking student success goals based on state and national data; providing data to identify improvement areas; developing strategies to improve student performance; and collaborating with WTCS to gather benchmarking data.

This project represents a three-year phased approach to fully integrate and assess NTC Soft Skills throughout the academic programs. Project goals are specific to each year of the Project: Validate NTC’s Soft Skills with employers, develop a common rubric for assessing Soft Skills within NTC programs, integrate Soft Skills into course curriculum and programs identifying linkages with course competencies and program outcomes, and collect Soft Skills assessment data.

Implement a new performance management system to align individual employee performance toward the Mission, Vision, Core Beliefs, and Strategic Directions of the College. The system includes goals setting, a mid-year check in, and a final appraisal. Each employee group will be assessed with specific competencies.

Results: 100% of employees completed performance management training and developed performance goals.

Assessing the effectiveness of nursing program interventions to ensure Northcentral Technical College’s Associate Degree Nursing Program graduates are meeting the program standards and exit outcomes.

Results: NTC implemented a competitive admissions process for the Associate Degree Nursing Program. Due to these improvements, NTC’s nursing program had a 95% pass rate in Quarter 1 of 2013, compared to 81% in Quarter 1 of 2011.

Evaluate Learning Center operations and determine program improvements based on identifying
underserved populations and better serving existing populations, best practices to aid remedial students, and areas of strength/improvement in current services.

**Results:** A College Prep Orientation was launched. In 2012, 33% of students that received a Learning Center Referral enrolled in a program within a year compared to 47% of students in 2013.

**Action Project Title/Status:** Alumni Engagement (COMPLETE)

**NTC Strategic Direction:** Strategic Partnerships  **AQIP Category:** Building Collaborative Relationships

The goal of this project is to create a process to identify and utilize College data resources to ensure the College properly identifies alumni and consistently collects accurate alumni information.

**Results:** An Alumni Association was created, generating 581 members. In August 2012 an NTC Alumni Association Council was launched. Link to [NTC Alumni Association](#).

**Action Project Title/Status:** Resource Conservation (COMPLETE)

**NTC Strategic Direction:** Fiscal Strength  **AQIP Category:** Supporting Institutional Operations

The action project goal was to design and implement a resource conservation system to lower its energy and paper consumption to reduce operating costs.

**Results:** This project was narrowly targeted towards paper reduction and BTU reduction which gave the project a clear focus. NTC’s goal was met that year. IT changes allowed major processes including accounts payable, employee reimbursement, hiring, and application process to go paperless.

**Action Project Title/Status:** Increase Online Course Completion and Retention (COMPLETE)

**NTC Strategic Direction:** Student Success  **AQIP Category:** Helping Students Learn

Create an online learning environment supporting student success for select pilot programs. The College will pilot an Online Learning Specialist position to provide case management for online students to increase online course completion and retention.

**Results:** Proactive Advising strategies included hiring an Online Learning Specialist to serve students. An electronic referral form was implemented. Flexible, walk-in hours for advising, registration, and other student services and a consistent process for advising students on academic and/or financial aid probation were implemented. The electronic referral form and advising strategies continue to be utilized today.

**Action Project Title/Status:** Listening Sessions Capturing Stakeholder Needs for Setting Strategic Directions (COMPLETE)

**NTC Strategic Direction:** Strategic Partnerships  **AQIP Category:** Leading and Communicating

NTC President Dr. Lori Weyers will host listening sessions throughout NTC’s 10-county District to gather information on stakeholder needs. Feedback from these listening sessions will be pivotal in setting NTC’s Strategic Directions for the next three years.

**Results:** Community stakeholders, employees, and students attended listening sessions. A Community Forums Report was developed and distributed to the College’s Executive Leadership Team (ELT), NTC’s Board of Trustees, and to all College faculty and staff. Using the information collected, ELT proposed changes to the College’s Strategic Directions and Core Beliefs. The Listening Session model is used at NTC today.

**Conclusion**

By continuing its quality journey with AQIP, NTC seeks to effectively serve its 10-county district by responding to district workforce training needs. NTC will continue to build on its close partnerships with business, industry, K-16, government, and community entities to fulfill its mission to be a customer-focused, accessible provider of innovative life-long learning that builds a globally competitive workforce.