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Serving the common good by assuring and enhancing the quality of higher learning

October 20, 2010

John Marrin
President
Lamar Community College
2401 S. Main
Lamar, CO 81052

Dear President Marrin:

Enclosed is the report of the team that conducted the Lamar Community College Quality Checkup site visit. In addition to communicating the team's evaluation of your compliance with the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation and with the Commission's Federal Compliance Program, the report captures the team's assessment of your use of the feedback from your last Systems Appraisal and your overall commitment to continuous improvement.

I hope you will read and study the report carefully, because the team invested heavily in preparing for and conducting this visit, and its perceptions and advice are valuable to your institution. Please consider distributing it widely throughout your institution, since its positive feedback can be helpful in strengthening and broadening involvement in your quality improvement efforts.

A copy of the report will be read and analyzed by the AQIP Panel that reviews institutions for Reaffirmation of Accreditation at the time your review is scheduled. Prior to that review, we will send you a listing of the materials the Panel will consider, and give you an opportunity to update or supplement them if you so desire.

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. Your response will become part of the institution's permanent record.

Sincerely,

Stephen D. Spanghel
Vice President, Accreditation Relations

QUALITY CHECKUP REPORT

Lamar Community College

Lamar, Colorado
September 29 - October 1, 2010

Quality Checkup team members:

Nancy Stokes
University of Akron

Joel Schwartzman
Retired

Background on Quality Checkups conducted by the Academic Quality Improvement Program

The Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) conducts Quality Checkup site visits to each institution during the fifth or sixth year in every seven-year cycle of AQIP participation. These visits are conducted by trained, experienced AQIP Reviewers to determine whether the institution continues to meet The Higher Learning Commission's *Criteria for Accreditation*, and whether it is using quality management principles and building a culture of continuous improvement as participation in the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) requires. The goals of an AQIP Quality Checkup are to:

1. Affirm the accuracy of the organization's online Systems Portfolio and verify information included in the portfolio that the last Systems Appraisal has identified as needing clarification or verification (System Portfolio Clarification and Verification);
2. Review with organizational leaders actions taken to capitalize on the strategic issues and opportunities for improvement identified by the last Systems Appraisal (Systems Appraisal Follow Up);
3. Alert the organization to areas that need its attention prior to Reaffirmation of Accreditation, and reassure it concerning areas that have been covered adequately (Accreditation Issues Follow Up);
4. Verify federal compliance issues such as default rates, complaints, USDE interactions and program reviews, etc. (Federal Compliance Review); and
5. Assure continuing organizational quality improvement commitment through presentations, meetings, or sessions that clarify AQIP and Commission accreditation work (Organizational Quality Commitment).

The AQIP peer reviewer(s) trained for this role prepare for the visit by reviewing relevant organizational and AQIP file materials, particularly the organization's last *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report* and the Commission's internal *Organizational Profile*, which summarizes information reported by the institution in its *Annual Institutional Data Update*. The report provided to AQIP by the institution is also shared with the evaluator(s). Copies of the Quality Checkup report are provided to the institution's CEO and AQIP liaison. A copy is retained by the Commission for the institution's permanent file, and will be part of the materials reviewed by the AQIP Review Panel during Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

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

The Team reviewed the Systems Portfolio before arriving for the Quality Checkup visit to gain an understanding of the College. During the visit, the Team verified and clarified the contents of the System Portfolio through discussions held with the President, the Executive Planning Team, each of the five AQIP teams, the Assessment committee, the President's Advisory Committee, the Strategic Oversight Committee, faculty, staff and students. The information and results described in the AQIP Systems Portfolio were consistent with the information and results that the Quality Checkup Team reviewed.

The Systems Appraisal Feedback Report identified a pervasive lack of processes and systems. While it is true that Lamar Community College (LCC) does not have an abundance of formalized processes and systems in place, the College's modest size has allowed many of its less formal processes and systems to function effectively. Discussions with campus groups focused on defining these informal processes and formalizing them, setting targets, and analyzing results. (See Strategic Issues Analysis)

To address opportunities presented in the Feedback Report, each of the five AQIP teams was assigned to develop plans to address issues raised and presented these plans on category improvement worksheets. The teams are divided by categories: Team 1: Criteria 1; Team 2: Criteria 2 and 6; Team 3: Criteria 3 and 9; Team 4: Criteria 4 and 5; Team 5: Criteria 7 and 8. Each team prioritized the opportunities and identified one that was presented to the Strategic Oversight Committee for consideration as an Action Project. As an example, Team 1 has identified the need for an assessment tool for each of the learning outcomes. Currently, assessment of learning outcome 1 - Communication - has been implemented with the final review of samples at an institutional level. Team 3 is working to prioritize collaborative relationships and link these activities to the budget.

In the Quality Checkup Team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

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

None

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

Strategic Issue #1: Development of formal processes and procedures to provide consistent high quality in both the day-to-day services and instruction, and also supports and enhances longer term goals.

Lamar Community College administration, faculty and staff have demonstrated a clear understanding that institutional processes have been largely informal and recognize the need for formalization. They have begun to do so in most criteria categories by identifying the steps of their informal processes and clarifying them to become formal. The review team assisted by walking one of the criteria teams through the process of identifying the elements of the category and what was currently being done. Then, through a series of questions, helped the team to develop a process, generate goals and measurements, and create a process to review outcomes. The Lamar team was energized and excited to move forward with their assignment. Other criteria teams had reviewed the portfolio feedback report and are working to document processes and codify them. The review team believes that this process of documentation will culminate in formalized processes that measure outcomes and can show results.

Strategic Issue #2: Using comparison performance results to regularly analyze data and use this information for data-driven decision making and strategic planning.

Lamar Community College administration, faculty and staff have demonstrated a clear understanding for the need to identify comparison and benchmark institutions. Lamar is currently a member of the Colorado Community College System and has recently become a member of the National Community College Benchmark Project. This new association will facilitate comparisons with like institutions. Selection of peer and aspiration groups is scheduled for Fall 2010. Further, the College has joined the Community College Survey of Student Engagement program which will be implemented Spring 2011.

Strategic Issue #3: Opportunity to create and implement formal and inclusive strategic planning processes that regularly assess, improve, and share information about the processes and systems that support the short- and long- term goals of the institution.

Lamar Community College is implementing a dynamic bottom-up process of strategic planning to encourage ownership as opposed to buy-in and creativity at all levels. The institutional growth target is thirty-three new Full Time Equivalency (FTE) in each of the next three years,

identified as project 33 x 3. The intent is to create a profound knowledge of the strategic plan so that each employee recognizes how his or her job connects to the plan and the future of the institution. Departmental strategic plans are prioritized and aligned with LCC's mission and vision, the system strategic plan for Colorado Community College System (CCCS), and AQIP criteria. Four departments piloted this program during summer 2010 and a training process is in place for all departments. The strategic plans in each department will fold up into an annual report which will include a summary of performance evaluations, professional development and training needs, and budget requests. In institutional dashboard, which includes trend data on student demographics, enrollment, applications, program performance, financial aid, tuition classification from the past five years, has been developed and is available on the intranet. Upper administration will be steering the ship, but the LCC community does the planning.

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

Review of organizational commitment to continuing systematic quality improvement

The Team is convinced that planning for continuous improvement is very much a part of Lamar Community College's culture. Each and every constituent interviewed sees the value in continuous quality improvement. Faculty and staff report that participation in the AQIP process has "opened eyes so that they are seeing things from a different perspective." The Team was impressed with the level of participation in the AQIP process – even physical plant employees were contributing team members.

Of particular interest are the TRiO and Adult Transition programs. Both are tangential to the academic degree programs. TRiO's mission is to be the primary academic and personal support system for first-generation, low income, and disabled students. Students have an opportunity to receive academic advising, tutoring and workshops (study skills, note taking, test anxiety, resume writing) that will assist them as they pursue their education. The Adult Transition program, which provides GED preparation, ESL instruction and career development classes, is a beginning for many potential students and an important service to the community.

The Team observed that the faculty and staff continue to open their minds and hearts to new and improved ways to accomplish work and to provide for students. Adherence to tradition is

lessening as new ways of doing old business are explored. The members of the LCC community are committed to looking for new ways of accomplishing objectives for the good of the students and the LCC community.

In the team's judgment, the institution presented satisfactory evidence that it met this goal of the Quality Checkup. The institution's approach to the issue, documentation, and performance were acceptable and comply with Commission and AQIP's expectations.

WORKSHEET ON Federal Compliance Requirements

INSTITUTIONAL MATERIALS RELATED TO FEDERAL COMPLIANCE REVIEWED BY THE TEAM:

College catalog: includes accreditation status, program requirements, and institutional policies
Student Handbook
CCCS Final Audit Report
State of Colorado Single Audit
Crime and Safety Report
Publications where third party comments were requested
Lamar Community College website www.lamarcc.edu

EVALUATION OF FEDERAL COMPLIANCE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The team verifies that it has reviewed each component of the Federal Compliance Program by reviewing each item below. Generally, if the team finds substantive issues in these areas and relates such issues to the institution's fulfillment of the Criteria for Accreditation, such discussion should be handled in appropriate sections of the Assurance Section of the Team Report or highlighted as such in the appropriate AQIP Quality Checkup Report.

1. Credits, Program Length, and Tuition: *The institution has documented that it has credit hour assignments and degree program lengths within the range of good practice in higher education and that tuition is consistent across degree programs (or that there is a rational basis for any program-specific tuition).*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

COMMENTS: The team finds that credits, program length, and tuition are documented and consistent with good practices.

2. Student Complaints: *The institution has documented a process in place for addressing student complaints and appears to be systematically processing such complaints as evidenced by the data on student complaints for the three years prior to the visit.*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

COMMENTS: The team finds that the process is clearly written in the college catalog and available on the website. It is known to faculty and staff. Because there has been considerable turnover in personnel responsible for maintaining student complaint logs, some data is not available or is in file folders in several offices. Lamar Community College is in the process of

gathering all information at the institutional level in one place and keeping it in electronic format. Best knowledge of the numbers of complaints in the past three years is that none have progressed to the grievance stage and all have been resolved at the instructor or departmental levels.

3. Transfer Policies: *The institution has demonstrated it is appropriately disclosing its transfer policies to students and to the public. Policies contain information about the criteria the institution uses to make transfer decisions.*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

COMMENTS: The team finds that transfer policies are disclosed and contain all pertinent information. Articulation agreements are statewide. However, there is a distinction between transferability and applicability. Some Colorado four-year institutions accept transferred credits, but do not allow all to be applied as meeting criteria for a major. This issue is addressed by advising each student when their programs are being developed. At Lamar, the faculty are the advisors; there is a transfer coordinator who assists. Faculty, in their advising capacity, are encouraged to ascertain whether credits will be applicable.

4. Verification of Student Identity: *The institution has demonstrated that it verifies the identity of students who participate in courses or programs provided to the student through distance or correspondence education.*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

COMMENTS: The state of Colorado has designated that user names, passwords and ID numbers are sufficient to verify student identity in distance courses. It is understood that this may not be enough. The Colorado Community College System is currently working to address this issue and devise new criteria. Lamar Community College uses the financial aid office to verify student identity of on-campus students. This is accomplished by requiring a GED (when high school transcripts are not applicable), a birth certificate, and a driver's license be submitted in color copy to avoid fraudulent applications.

5. Title IV Program and Related Responsibilities: *The institution has presented evidence on the required components of the Title IV Program. The team has reviewed these materials and has found no cause for concern regarding the institution's administration or oversight of its Title IV responsibilities.*

- **General Program Requirements:** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about the fulfillment of its Title IV program responsibilities, particularly findings from any review activities by the Department of Education. It has, as necessary, addressed any issues the Department raised regarding the institution's fulfillment of its responsibilities in this area.*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and finds it in compliance.

- **Financial Responsibility Requirements:** *The institution has provided the Commission with information about the Department's review of composite ratios and financial audits. It has, as necessary, addressed any issues the Department raised regarding the institution's fulfillment of its responsibilities in this area.*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

COMMENTS: The team finds that there are some as yet unresolved issues concerning financial aid. Lamar College has had five financial aid directors in the last five years. The current director is working with College Assist to resolve remaining issues. The College has set aside funds to repay anything that may be outstanding.

- **Default Rates, Campus Crime Information and Related Disclosure of Consumer Information, Satisfactory Academic Progress and Attendance Policies:** *The institution has demonstrated, and the team has reviewed, the institution's policies and practices for ensuring compliance with these regulations.*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance. The team finds default rates, campus crime information and related disclosure of consumer information and attendance policies to be in order.

COMMENTS: The team finds that academic progress policies are currently based on national financial aid progress policies; there is no independent policy. Lamar Community College understands the need to create, publish, and implement an academic progress policy and plans to do so.

- **Contractual Relationships:** *The institution has presented evidence of its contracts with non-accredited third party providers of 25-50% of the academic content of any degree or certificate programs.*

Lamar Community College does not currently have any contractual relationships with third party entities.

6. Institutional Disclosures and Advertising and Recruitment Materials: *The institution has documented that it provides accurate, timely and appropriately detailed information to current and prospective students and the public about its accreditation status with the Commission and other agencies as well as about its programs, locations and policies.*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and finds compliance.

7. Relationship with Other Accrediting Agencies and with State Regulatory Boards: *The institution has documented that it discloses its relationship with any other specialized, professional or institutional accreditor and with all governing or coordinating bodies in states in which the institution may have a presence. Note that if the team is recommending initial or continued status, and the institution is currently under sanction or show-cause with, or has received an adverse action from, any other federally recognized specialized or institutional accreditor in the past five years, the team must address this in the body of the Assurance Section of the Team Report and provide its rationale for recommending Commission status in light of this information.*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance.

COMMENTS: The team finds that Lamar Community College has relationships with the Colorado Boards of Nursing and the Colorado Board of Cosmetology, both of which are disclosed.

8. Public Notification of an Evaluation Visit and Third Party Comment: *The institution has made an appropriate and timely effort to solicit third party comments. The team has evaluated any comments received and completed any necessary follow-up on issues raised in these comments. Note that if the team has determined that any issues raised by third-party comment relate to the team's review of the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, it must discuss this information and its analysis in the body of the Assurance Section of the Team Report.*

The team has reviewed this component of federal compliance and finds compliance.