Systems Appraisal Feedback Report

in response to the Systems Portfolio of

SOUTHWEST WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE

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for

The Higher Learning Commission
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Elements Of Southwest Tech’s Feedback Report

Welcome to the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report. This report provides AQIP’s official response to an institution’s Systems Portfolio by a team of peer reviewers (the Systems Appraisal Team). After the team independently reviews the institution’s portfolio, it reaches consensus on essential elements of the institutional profile, strengths and opportunities for improvement by AQIP Category, and any significant issues related to accreditation. These are then presented in three sections of the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report: “Strategic Challenges Analysis,” “AQIP Category Feedback,” and “Accreditation Issues Analysis.” These components are interrelated in defining context, evaluating institutional performance, surfacing critical issues or accreditation concerns, and assessing institutional performance. Ahead of these three areas, the team provides a “Reflective Introduction” followed closely by an “Executive Summary.” The appraisal concludes with commentary on the overall quality of the report and advice on using the report. Each of these areas is overviewed below.

It is important to remember that the Systems Appraisal Team has only the institution’s Systems Portfolio to guide its analysis of the institution’s strengths and opportunities for improvement. Consequently, the team’s report may omit important strengths, particularly if discussion or documentation of these areas in the Systems Portfolio were presented minimally. Similarly, the team may point out areas of potential improvement that are already receiving widespread institutional attention. Indeed, it is possible that some areas recommended for potential improvement have since become strengths rather than opportunities through the institution’s ongoing efforts. Recall that the overarching goal of the Systems Appraisal Team is to provide an institution with the best possible advice for ongoing improvement.

The various sections of the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report can be described as follows:

**Reflective Introduction & Executive Summary:** In this first section of the System’s Appraisal Feedback Report, the team provides a summative statement that reflects its broad understanding of the institution and the constituents served (Reflective Introduction), and also the team’s overall judgment regarding the institution’s current performance in relation to the nine AQIP Categories (Executive Summary). In the Executive Summary, the team considers such factors as: 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 each AQIP
Category covers. Since institutions are complex, maturity levels may vary from one Category to another.

**Strategic Challenges Analysis:** Strategic challenges are those most closely related to an institution’s ability to succeed in reaching its mission, planning, and quality improvement goals. Teams formulate judgments related to strategic challenges and accreditation issues (discussed below) through careful analysis of the Organizational Overview included in the institution’s Systems Portfolio and through the team’s own feedback provided for each AQIP Category. These collected findings offer a framework for future improvement of processes and systems.

**AQIP Category Feedback:** The *Systems Appraisal Feedback Report* addresses each AQIP Category by identifying and coding 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. Through comments, which are keyed to the institution’s Systems Portfolio, the team offers brief analysis of each strength and opportunity. Organized by AQIP Category, and presenting the team’s findings in detail, this section is often considered the heart of the *Feedback Report*.

**Accreditation Issues Analysis:** Accreditation issues are areas where an institution may have not yet provided sufficient evidence that it meets the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation. It is also possible that the evidence provided suggests to the team that the institution may have difficulties, whether at present or in the future, in satisfying the *Criteria*. As with strategic challenges, teams formulate judgments related to accreditation issues through close analysis of the entire Systems Portfolio, with particular attention given to the evidence that the institution provides for satisfying the various core components of the *Criteria*. For purposes of consistency, AQIP instructs appraisal teams to identify any accreditation issue as a strategic challenge as well.

**Quality of Report & Its Use:** As with any institutional report, the *Systems Portfolio* should work to enhance the integrity and credibility of the institution by celebrating successes while also stating honestly those opportunities for improvement. The *Systems Portfolio* should therefore be transformational, and it should provide external peer reviewers insight as to how such transformation may occur through processes of continuous improvement. The AQIP Categories and the Criteria for Accreditation serve as the overarching measures for the institution’s current state, as well as its proposed future state. As such, it is imperative
that the Portfolio be fully developed, that it adhere to the prescribed format, and that it be thoroughly vetted for clarity and correctness. Though decisions about specific actions rest with each institution following this review, AQIP expects every institution to use its feedback to stimulate cycles of continual improvement and to inform future AQIP processes.

Reflective Introduction and Executive Summary For Southwest Tech

The following consensus statement is from the System Appraisal Team’s review of the institution’s Systems Portfolio Overview and its introductions to the nine AQIP Categories. The purpose of this reflective introduction is to highlight the team’s broad understanding of the institution, its mission, and the constituents that it serves.

Southwest Tech is a comprehensive two-year college that provides associate, certificate, and workforce preparation and development programs, with customized training and technical assistance to business and organizations in its service area. Collaborations with K-12 schools support opportunities related to college and career options, career pathways and transfer. The College is part of a sixteen-institution state system of technical and community colleges.

Southwest Tech has distinctive characteristics in its students and employees. In fall 2013, the college had a total of 736 full-time and 3,408 part-time students. It employed 88 full-time faculty and 18 part-time faculty, for a total of 94 FTE faculty.

The following are summary comments on each of the AQIP Categories crafted by the Appraisal Team to highlight Southwest Tech’s achievements and to identify challenges yet to be met.

- Category 1: Southwest Tech describes its processes for Category One as moving from systematic to aligned. Southwest Tech identifies the teaching and assessment processes around the six Core Abilities as particular strengths, and leaders are working to better align Technical Skills Attainment (TSA), co-curricular learning assessment, and the Quality Review Process (QRP) with these processes. The College has completed several improvement projects for this category, including the use of master scheduling, a more comprehensive student intake process, and stronger program outcomes assessments. The College has committed to several additional projects in support of two of its seven Strategic Directions—Increase College Access and Improving Student Completion and Success—including alternative course delivery methods, increased offerings at outreach sites, bridge programs, programs offered completely online, and competency-based curriculum design.
Category 2: Non-instructional objectives for Southwest Tech are determined through Wisconsin statutes or by the college’s Board of Directors. The College identifies the following non-instructional objectives: customized training, secondary school partnerships, a collegiate transfer program, community services, basic education, and Foundation services. The College has noted significant growth in these areas since the last Systems Portfolio was completed and includes positive comparative results for some of the selected measures.

Category 3: Southwest Tech uses a variety of surveys and other data collection processes to understand students’ and other stakeholders’ needs. These results are compared historically and with state and national data, and responsible individuals or groups respond with action plans. Recent action plans include remodeling Student Services into a one-stop shop, moving the Career Placement Center, and improving parking and scheduling.

Category 4: Southwest Tech describes the maturity of its processes as aligned to integrated. The College states that it is committed to values such as professionalism and accountability and maintains processes to plan, recruit, hire, orient, evaluate, recognize, compensate, and retain the staff needed for effective, high-quality programs.

Category 5: Southwest Tech is governed by a nine-member Board of Directors, elected by an appointment committee comprised of the school board presidents from the thirty public school districts within the College’s service area. Per Wisconsin statute, the Board consists of two employer members, two employee members, three additional members, one elected official who holds a state or local office, and one school district administrator. The Board has a formal role in defining and approving the College’s mission and hiring the president, who administers and manages the college. Among the eight members of the College’s Executive Team, five, including the president, are new to Southwest Tech since the last Systems Portfolio. The College describes the maturity of its processes in this category as predominantly systematic or aligned. Two critical process areas, communication and use of data in decision making, are described as reacting to systematic, and the College is working to improve these areas.

Category 6: Southwest Tech identifies opportunities to improve support operations through surveys, inventories, the AQIP Systems Appraisal, and other feedback mechanisms, like the Quality Review Process (QRP). The management tools of LEAN and the efforts of dedicated action teams are used to improve performance results and
enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of organizational operations. The institution describes having made improvements in many of these operational areas.

- Category 7: Southwest Tech collects extensive data to meet reporting requirements of the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) and other external agencies. While the College uses available data in identifying annual strategic projects, it acknowledges opportunities to improve the collection and dissemination of metrics. The College has taken several actions in this direction, including the conversion from an ERP system to a more responsive, integrated, and scalable, stand-alone system (CAMS), the creation of a Microsoft Reporting Services site, and the purchase of Mosaic software to create data dashboards designed to support and improve timely data analysis and decision-making.

- Category 8: Key planning processes at Southwest Tech include the three-year strategic plan, the Quality Review Process (QRP), the three-year facility plan, and an annual and three-year budgeting process. Each of these planning processes develops long-term and short-term strategies. The College reports improvements in collecting and communicating information and results to its stakeholders. Additionally, the Quality Review Process (QRP) is designed to enable review teams to use data to determine gaps in performance and to identify and evaluate strategies to improve.

- Category 9: Southwest Tech identifies collaborations as a strategic priority. The College states it has progressively expanded external partnerships with K-12 and higher education institutions, regional employers, economic development organizations, workforce development boards, and the overall Tri-State Region. The College presents positive results for many of these partnerships. Additionally, cross-border partnership grants and customized workforce training engagement have provided federal grant support and joint funding. These efforts may address workforce development and service needs of regional manufacturers with an aligned curriculum, which is important in light of recent declines in enrollments in other programs.

Note: Strategic challenges and accreditation issues are discussed in detail in subsequent sections of the Systems Appraisal Feedback Report.

Strategic Challenges For Southwest Tech

In conducting the Systems Appraisal, the Systems Appraisal Team attempted to identify the broader issues that would seem to present the greatest challenges and opportunities for the institution in the coming years. These areas are ones that the institution should address as it
seeks to become the institution it wants to be. From these the institution may discover its immediate priorities, as well as strategies for long-term performance improvement. These items may also serve as the basis for future activities and projects that satisfy other AQIP requirements. The team also considered whether any of these challenges put the institution at risk of not meeting the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation. That portion of the team’s work is presented later in this report.

Knowing that Southwest Tech will discuss these strategic challenges gives priority to those it concludes are most critical, and take action promptly, the Systems Appraisal Team identified the following issues:

- Southwest Tech has committed to moving beyond compliance reporting to provide data that support decision making. To make progress on this goal, the College has invested in a new Comprehensive Academic Management System for data management and Mosaic software for data visualization. Throughout the Portfolio, however, the College has opportunities to more fully define the outcomes of processes and select appropriate measures of satisfaction, effectiveness, and/or efficiency. Often, results are not provided, and those provided often vary across Categories, in how effectively they are presented. Providing trend data, defining values, setting targets that define the College’s performance expectations, and explaining in a more consistent manner what the data mean for the College, may help to strengthen the understanding and use of data in decision making.

- Southwest Tech has committed to a Quality Review Process (QRP) based on the Plan-Do-Check-Adjust cycle of continuous improvement; the College has also invested in technology to enhance communication, Lean training, and a position dedicated to leading process improvement on campus. Throughout the Portfolio, however, efforts are presented as discrete activities that may or may not constitute a cohesive, systematic process. The College has an opportunity to strengthen process documentation throughout the Categories. Additionally, it is often unclear how data collected align with process objectives and how actions taken stem from analysis of the data. Telling a more complete story of systemic continuous improvement may help internal and external stakeholders see how the College’s activities support improved performance.
AQIP Category Feedback

In the following section, the Systems Appraisal Team delineates institutional strengths along with opportunities for improvement within the nine AQIP Categories. As explained above, the symbols used in this section are SS for outstanding strength, S for strength, O for opportunity for improvement, and OO for outstanding opportunity for improvement. The choice of symbol for each item represents the consensus evaluation of the team members and deserves the institution’s 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. This category identifies the shared purpose of all higher education institutions and is accordingly the pivot of any institutional analysis. It focuses on the teaching-learning process within a formal instructional context, yet it also addresses how the entire institution contributes to helping students learn and overall student development. It examines the 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. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Southwest Tech for Category 1.

Southwest Tech has processes in place in several areas within Helping Students Learn, including the Quality Review Process, program development, and assessing the needs of students, faculty, and employers. The institution collects and reports evidence related to student learning; however, it is not clear how the institution aligns its actions to improve processes with the evidence it collects. As it continues to mature its processes, the College also has an opportunity to further develop, track and analyze direct measures of general education and align its co-curriculum with the Core Abilities.

1P1, S. Southwest Tech has defined Core Abilities for all students and assesses them regularly. The College is working to integrate assessment of these abilities with its Quality Review Process and Technical Skills Assessment.
1P2, S. The College uses its Quality Review and Technical Skills Attainment processes to determine specific program learning outcomes. Faculty, staff, and industry members are involved in the process.

1P3, O. While the College describes clear processes for the approval of new programs and courses that meet identified needs and promote alignment with those offered at other state institutions, exactly how these processes facilitate student learning is unclear. The institution may benefit from being more intentional in incorporating clear student learning outcomes into programs at their inception, as well as mechanisms for tracking data on student mastery of those outcomes.

1P4, S. Southwest Tech maintains a five-year Quality Review Process (QRP) to evaluate educational programs and student services. The College also maintains annual curriculum reviews by program advisory boards and takes input from employer satisfaction surveys into account when making curricular changes.

1P5, S. The College determines preparation of students for specific curricula and has established minimum score entrance standards. Program counselors also interview prospective students to assess preparedness for program entry. This process includes alternative access and developmental course enrollment to address needs via an academic planner and modified curriculum plans.

1P6, S. Southwest Tech employs a multi-faceted approach to communicate preparation requirements to students. Multiple types of media are employed, and the use of information technology appears to be well integrated into the communications strategy.

1P8, S. Southwest Tech has developed a process that not only determines underprepared student needs but provides assistance for students throughout the remediation process. Assistance includes early interventions by faculty, contacts by faculty when students are not regularly attending classes, referrals to the Basic Education site, and reassessment of students upon completion of remediation course work.

1P9, O. While students are advised of the opportunity to take a Learning Styles Inventory and faculty take part in professional development on learning styles, it is not apparent how the College uses the inventory and how many faculty and students choose to participate. Further, it is not clear that a process to address the differences is in place. Engaging students in reflection on their learning styles can be a useful strategy.
for helping them develop as self-directed learners.

**1P10, O.** Southwest Tech has established different support programs to meet the needs of specific sub-groups of students, which include students with non-traditional occupations, single parents, poverty-level students and students unprepared to be successful in college-level courses. It is unclear, however, if there is a systematic, aligned or integrated approach—with predetermined performance indicators and regular analysis of and response to evidence collected—for the ways in which these subgroups are identified and related services developed. Because the process for identifying subgroups remains unclear, other subgroups of students at the College may be overlooked and in need of special attention and support.

**1P11, O.** While Southwest Tech communicates expectations for effective teaching through its New Staff Academy, in-service training, the Mentor/Mentee program, and the Quality Review Program, the College has an opportunity to describe clear processes for setting and defining its expectations for effective teaching and learning.

**1P12, O.** While the College describes actions taken to increase access and provide education via multiple platforms, Southwest Tech may benefit from implementing a systematic, regularized process by which responsible parties first identify measures to track the effectiveness of the College’s decisions around delivery methods, then collect data on those measures, and finally analyze and act on the data collected. The College acknowledges that it is developing a quality assurance program and is encouraged to implement that process.

**1P13, O.** While Southwest Tech has developed a process that consistently reviews courses, it is unclear which stakeholders are involved in the review process or how the College determines if the curriculum is up-to-date and effective. Program advisory committees and employer surveys are mentioned in the Portfolio; however, if or how their use is integrated into an intentional process remains unclear. The College may benefit from establishing one clear process that involves robust, comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data to guide program and course evaluation.

**1P15, S.** Southwest Tech uses various methods to determine learning and support needs of faculty and students: the QRP process, the College’s Student Alert Team, MySkillsTutor, the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, and the Center for Teaching and Learning. These and other tools provide training and resources to address student learning needs.
1P16, O. While Southwest Tech provides examples of the relationship between co-curricular activities and instructional programs and indicates that faculty coordinate and reinforce course and program learning outcomes through such activities, the approach described does not constitute a clearly defined and regularized process in which the College, in an intentional and ongoing manner, tracks data on the effectiveness of its efforts at alignment and then analyzes and responds to the evidence gathered.

1P17, S. Southwest Tech uses a variety of tools to assess whether students have met learning and development expectations, including employer field study evaluations, portfolios, capstone projects, industry certifications, licensing exams, and so on. Advisory committees are in place to review the data and suggest improvements.

1P18. Not reviewed because SS in prior 2010 portfolio.

1R1, O. Although the portfolio lists several measures of student learning and development, the institution has the opportunity to show how the measures directly address student mastery of the expected learning objectives, beyond the course completion rates currently provided for academic and technical skill attainment.

1R2, OO. The College has an opportunity to define more direct measures of student mastery of general education outcomes beyond general education course completion rates. Using more direct measures of student mastery of learning outcomes may help to ensure that evaluation directly reflects student performance and not factors such as class attendance and participation.

1R3, S. The College compares favorably to its Perkins targets and has surpassed the WTCS target performance levels in most measures.

1R4, S. Southwest Tech has developed and implemented a systematic process to assess whether or not students completing its various programs have acquired the knowledge and skills required by its various stakeholders. The process includes the use of employer surveys, certification pass rates, and success in transferring to other institutions, which provide direct and indirect, quantitative and qualitative data about program, degree, and certificate completion and whether or not students have acquired the knowledge and skills required by stakeholders.

1R5, O. The performance results presented relative to the learning support processes and lab use come from the administration of the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory at the College, from 2009-13. The satisfaction survey results might be
complemented and enhanced by the addition of more direct measures of the effectiveness of these support processes.

1R6, O. Southwest Tech is encouraged to pursue its intention of analyzing the comparative WTCS data, to determine how it can improve in Helping Students Learn. In addition, the College might consider broadening the measures it uses beyond those required by the WTCS, through benchmarking and identifying best practices in this area.

1I1, O. While it is clear that Southwest Tech has established a number of important initiatives in Helping Students Learn, it is unclear which initiatives have been completed and when, and which have been successful and how success has been measured. It is also unclear which of the projects resulted directly from Southwest Tech’s processes for Helping Students Learn or from the evidence collected on the goals/targets set. The College may benefit from describing clearly how the actions it takes to make improvements result from the data it collects and analyzes.

1I2, S. The actions taken to date suggest that Southwest Tech is continuing to strengthen a culture and an infrastructure that enhance its ability to set targets for improved student learning.

AQIP Category 2: Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives. This category addresses the processes that contribute to the achievement of the institution’s major objectives that complement student learning and fulfill other portions of its mission. Depending on the institution’s character, it examines the 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. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Southwest Tech for Category 2.

Southwest Tech has identified a clear set of objectives that extend its instructional mission into non-academic areas, such as community engagement, high school transitions, and workforce development. Most of these objectives have associated measures, and performance data are reviewed by responsible parties to guide improvements. By selecting, tracking and assessing performance relative to these measures, the College may become more effective and strategic over time in fulfilling these objectives. The College may enhance its efforts in this area by further refining processes, such as the service delivery process, and by communicating
performance expectations and outcomes to relevant stakeholders. Having a well-designed process for selecting and reviewing distinctive objectives ensures the College is focused on its established priorities and that the institution is delivering effective services to all of its stakeholders. Such information will be important to the College for future planning and maintaining key community relationships.

2P1, O. While these non-instructional programs are integrated with instructional programs and are part of the College’s core operations, it is unclear what processes are used to design and operate non-instructional programs in the areas identified by Southwest Tech. Clarifying how these functions are designed (e.g., how the Career Coach Model was designed to achieve the objectives with secondary schools) may help Southwest Tech ensure such functions meet stakeholder needs and use resources efficiently. Also, without a collaborative effort to establish the design of these objectives, the college may miss critical opportunities to serve the communities it attempts to support.

2P2, S. A formal process, mandated by State statutes, is in place to formulate and review non-instructional objectives. The planning and decision-making processes also include the input of multiple stakeholders, including the Board of Trustees and President’s Cabinet, and a formal process for integrating stakeholder feedback.

2P3, O. While Southwest Tech identifies several mechanisms for communicating its expectations relative to these non-instructional objectives, the College’s intentions are unclear as to how this information is to be used. By being more explicit about its expectations, the College may increase the awareness and understanding of the importance of these initiatives.

2P4, O. While Southwest Tech may be limited in its selection of some of these other distinctive objectives by State requirements, the College has an opportunity to establish more clearly defined and regularized processes to assess and review its effectiveness in fulfilling these objectives. The College may obtain valuable information and improve the focus and achievement of these non-instructional objectives through more intentional, systematic data gathering and analysis, as a part of its planning processes.

2P5, O. Southwest Tech describes various activities used to determine faculty and staff needs relative to non-instructional objectives and operations. These appear to be more informal and/or ad hoc. As a next step, the College may benefit from being more intentional and systematic in collecting and analyzing data to determine the
effectiveness of these activities.

2R1, S. Southwest Tech has in place clearly defined measures for each of its key non-instructional objectives which appear to be effective indicators of the impact of each objective. Processes appear to be in place for analyzing the data and making improvements; the results reported on these measures indicate the College is meeting with success in these endeavors.

2R2, S. Southwest Tech provides evidence of its performance results, including analysis; many of these measures also include a set target for performance levels. The College shows positive results, especially when compared with other WTCS schools.

2R3, S. Southwest Tech makes extensive use of benchmarks to compare itself with peer institutions. The use of such benchmarks provides useful data and supports continuous improvement. The results provided indicate Southwest Tech is performing favorably on its key non-instructional objectives in comparison with other institutions in WTCS.

2R4, O. While the college recognizes the impact of its results to increase student recruitment, retention, and its reputation, it does not appear to have taken advantage of the disaggregation of results to learn more about its students and particular communities it serves. Using results to enhance relationships and, consequently, strengthen the overall organization can lead to additional performance insight and opportunity.

2I1, O. The LERN assessment is an example of a rigorous approach used to assess major non-instructional services, in this case, customized training. Improvements are described in other areas like relationships with secondary schools and the Foundation. However, much of this latter activity appears to be reactive, rather than systematic and integrated with other processes at the College. Southwest Tech has the opportunity to report how the improvements it has made have been done systematically, with a more holistic view of the relationship between non-instructional and instructional activities. Also, the portfolio does not make clear how the improvements made were the result of the collection and use of data.

AQIP Category 3: Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ Needs. This category 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. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Southwest Tech for Category 3.

_The College uses a variety of instruments to collect and measure student and stakeholder feedback and appears to have some alignment with the mechanisms it has in place to translate these data into action items. The College also has mechanisms in place for maintaining relationships with students and external stakeholders. This investment in data collection, analysis and, in turn, developing a culture of data-driven decision-making has the potential of allowing Southwest Tech to realize a return on investment in understanding student and stakeholder needs. The next stage in the College’s quality journey may include defining more specific and comprehensive outcomes measures and targets associated with the processes through which it builds those relationships, so it can collect meaningful feedback beyond satisfaction._

**3P1, O.** While Southwest Tech has established a variety of methods to identify the changing needs of students and provides specific examples of this in its nursing, criminal justice and business management programs, it is unclear what process the College uses to analyze the data and select a course of action. The College may benefit by defining who analyzes the data and creates a course of action, how this person/group makes this decision and prioritizes actions, how targets are set, where actions and data are stored, how information is communicated to other stakeholders, and how the process is evaluated for further improvements to the process itself, which may assist the College in building on its previous improvement successes.

**3P2, O.** Southwest Tech maintains several strategies through which it builds and maintains relationships with students, including a small faculty-to-student ratio, student clubs and organizations, and an integrated Student Services office. For its next step, the College may benefit from implementing a systematic, regularized process by which responsible parties first identify measures to track the effectiveness of the College’s efforts to build and maintain such relationships, then collect data on those measures, and finally analyze and act on the data collected. This approach could lead to better retention and long-term loyalty of students and alumni.

**3P3, O.** While Southwest Tech uses a variety of mechanisms to collect information on
community and other stakeholder needs, including a broadly representational review team in its program review process, regular listening sessions within its local communities, and events to educate employers on the College’s programs and services, the College may benefit from clearly delineating how it uses its Quality Review Process and the annual Foundation event to analyze the changing needs of key stakeholder groups and select courses of action regarding these needs.

3P4a, S. As Figure 3-1: Tools for Maintaining Relationships and Targeting Stakeholder Support demonstrates, Southwest Tech has created, maintained, and used a variety of approaches for building and maintaining relationships with various stakeholders, including relationships with alumni, businesses, community organizations, advisory committees, job fairs, and Raiser’s Edge constituent database.

3Pb, O. The College may now have the opportunity to develop a more systematic, intentional process by which responsible parties first identify measures to track on the effectiveness of the College’s efforts to build and maintain such relationships, then collects data on those measures, and finally analyzes and acts on the data collected. With a more systematic, intentional approach, the College may be able to realize additional gains in its stakeholder relationships.

3P6, O. While Southwest Tech’s process for filing a complaint is outlined in both the portfolio and in the Student Handbook, the process for determining the type of complaints, the actions taken, and the solutions or processes used to solve or prevent future complaints is not provided. The College may benefit and be able to better serve its students by further defining a process that includes who is responsible to review complaints, when this occurs, how follow-up takes place, who analyzes the data for trends or potential improvement opportunities, how targets are set, how improvements are implemented, and what type of review occurs to determine if changes have had a positive impact.

3R1, S. Southwest Tech uses a variety of surveys to determine the satisfaction of students and other stakeholders with various aspects of the College.

3R2, S. The feedback received from various measures of student satisfaction indicate that Southwest Tech students are satisfied with the College’s skill preparation; a focus on practical experiences and applications; welcoming, supportive, caring and helpful employees; and a safe, secure and well-maintained campus. Additionally, the trend data for the College’s performance results indicate that Southwest Tech is performing well
and has been able to identify both strengths and opportunities. Convenience of class scheduling was identified as an area for improvement and actions are in development to address this student issue, including the possible addition of an associate dean who would be responsible for expanding evening course offerings, indicating the College is using the data intentionally for continuous improvement.

3R3, O. Although Southwest Tech describes some actions taken to address concerns about admissions and advising, the College is encouraged to develop a more comprehensive set of measures beyond satisfaction to define the nature of its relationship with students, how this relationship has changed over time, and how this relationship can be strengthened. Developing targets for all of its measures for Category 3 may also assist the College on its continuous quality journey. Results for building relationships with students indicate some decline in advising and little improvement to the levels of satisfaction. Further study of satisfaction results may lead to better understanding of the drivers of student satisfaction in these areas. Southwest Tech does indicate that it has identified areas for improvement in its performance results for building relationships with students and that it has an opportunity to analyze the impact of recent changes it has made.

3R4a, S. The College uses a variety of surveys to gauge external stakeholder satisfaction. Results do not show significant improvements over time; however, they do show strong performance relative to the surveys’ scale (e.g., a 6.11 on a 7-point scale with a 7 being very satisfied). With the use of the employee survey, the College will now have the opportunity to track, report on and respond to data on the key stakeholder group of staff and faculty.

3R4b, O. With the use of the College’s baseline results from the Noel-Levitz Employee Satisfaction Survey, Southwest Tech now has the opportunity to analyze the survey data and determine a course of action, with targets, to improve the overall employee satisfaction level.

3R6, S. Southwest Tech uses the results obtained from various surveys to understand the needs of students and other stakeholders in comparison with the results obtained within the state and nationally. These surveys include the Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, the College Employee Satisfaction Survey, the Graduate Follow-up and Employer Follow-up Surveys. The College’s results compared to state and national trends are consistently higher than national averages and generally higher than
state averages. It is similar to other colleges in trends of its strengths and challenges.

311, S. The College identified a number of improvements completed or in the planning stages based on data from the satisfaction surveys. The College describes specific actions taken to remodel buildings, relocate and reorganize student service areas, redefine and realign staff duties and responsibilities, and revise policies, practices and procedures to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery to students. The College affirms that it is building a culture of continuous improvement relative to this category.

312, O. While it is clear that Southwest Tech has established a number of important initiatives in Understanding Student and Stakeholder Needs, it is unclear how the College uses its culture and infrastructure to select specific processes to improve and set targets to obtain better performance results and how the success of changes will be measured. The College may benefit from describing clearly how the actions it takes to make improvements will be evaluated.

AQIP Category 4: Valuing People. This category explores the institution’s commitment to the development of its employees since the efforts of all faculty, staff, and administrators are required for institutional success. It examines the 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. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Southwest Tech for Category 4.

Southwest Tech appears to have stable processes in place for valuing employees. They are making progress in defining processes such as recruiting, hiring, and orienting employees, and developing a positive, collaborative work environment following Act 10. The college has focused improvement efforts on its orientation process and required evaluation changes, in addition to enhancing data collection. The College utilizes tools that provide it with data on employee satisfaction.

More evidence on the outcomes of these initiatives, its new mentoring programs, and its succession planning process would enable the College to determine how and if it is meeting
employee needs. Developing stronger, intentional processes that include targets, more data collection, and analysis that is aligned with college planning and processes can more fully meet its goals in Valuing People.

4P1, S. Southwest Wisconsin Technical College identifies the specific credentials, skills, and values for employees during the position definition and job posting by following the requirements of the state system and other accrediting agencies, including certification for the WTCS system and input from others working in similar positions and the Executive Team. Hiring guidelines and use of a job description template incorporates college values. Job descriptions are reviewed annually and verification of occupational and teaching experience is conducted before applicant consideration.

4P2, S. Southwest Tech has mechanisms in place to review applicants’ credentials, skills, and values including interviews based on behaviors and work-related experience and reference checks by the appropriate Screening Committee and HR Director. Southwest Tech aligns its hiring practices with its strategic goals through guidelines provided by the Wisconsin Technical College System and collective bargaining protocols which govern credentialing requirements. Other related hiring practices further allow applicants to demonstrate their abilities and alignment with position requirements.

4P3a, S. The College has a hiring process in place that encompasses each stage beginning with the request for new position/vacancy and culminates in periodic review of the position. During the first year of employment, new employees are assigned mentors who establish a working relationship and serve as role models to help them transition into the college community. The College has developed an electronic “Idea Center” in addition to a physical suggestion box to ensure input and offer opportunities for employees and students to state concerns and offer improvement suggestions about the new employee orientation program which are reviewed by a confidential team.

4P3b, O. While the portfolio describes a clearly defined process for hiring with steps and responsible parties outlined, similarly intentional processes are not described for the recruitment of candidates, particularly those from areas identified as underrepresented in the faculty and staff, or for the retention of employees. The College may better be able to recruit and retain the most qualified, diverse candidates if it implements clearly defined processes for doing so—processes that include targeted measures that can be evaluated to determine the success of the College’s efforts at recruitment and retention.

4P4, S. Employees attend a comprehensive orientation program, which includes an
overview of the College’s history, mission and values made available electronically for adjuncts, and utilize informal checklist activities to confirm receipt of key new hire documents. The College initiated an adjunct advisory panel to assist with identifying tools for success in the classroom and engage adjuncts in the College community.

4P5, O. While the Portfolio mentions a succession plan, the only process described is the new Hiring Process (Figure 4-1), and although some processes are in place to develop employees to assume leadership positions, it is unclear how systematic these processes are. A new evaluation which captures the development of potential leaders and participants in the WLDI does not appear to have a systematic approach to planning for changes in personnel or succession activities. A process to plan for changing position requirements and succession may ensure continuity of process improvement for staff and the organization in support of the College mission.

4P6, S. Southwest Tech uses Lean teams to regularly review processes and make improvements. The processes encourage efficiencies and improve employee satisfaction through participation on the teams. The college also uses the Noel-Levitz College Employee Satisfaction Survey to get feedback on work climate.

4P7, O. While the college has processes in place to introduce new employees to the Code of Ethics and has developed, published and publicized its policies and Code of Ethics to communicate what is acceptable and ethical behavior for members of the College Community, it is unclear what processes are used for existing employees to ensure they adhere to ethical practices.

4P8, O. While the college provides training for regulatory requirements, technology, and other topics, it is not evident how the training needs are determined and training topics selected. Evidence collected in a deliberate manner on training needs and clearly identifying the link between the training offered and one or more of the College’s strategic priorities may allow Southwest Tech to more effectively use training to strengthen instructional and non-instructional programs and services.

4P9, O. The College has developed an orientation program that could serve as a foundational process for developing a more comprehensive program to develop employees, so they can contribute fully and effectively throughout their careers. It is unclear if there is a long-term, comprehensive vision of employee development and how it should be implemented systematically at the College. The recently adopted evaluation tool may provide valuable input for this system and support activities that would both
engage and support effective teaching and student success.

4P10, O. It is not clear from the portfolio how the college aligns both the formal evaluation of faculty and the Prospera 360° evaluations with its objectives for both instructional and non-instructional programs and services. Southwest Tech may more effectively achieve its strategic goals by aligning its evaluation processes with its priorities.

4P12, O. While Southwest Tech has an Employee Advisory Committee (EAC) in place, it is unclear how the action plans are developed and how ongoing discussions of the Employee Advisory Committee have been informed by the survey feedback results or specific actions taken by the College to improve the motivation of employees. Further, results or discussion of the committee meeting findings are not provided to demonstrate improvement in these areas. The College may benefit from a process designed to focus this group on specific issues and action planning informed from survey results.

4P13, S. Southwest Tech has established several processes that collect employee satisfaction information to evaluate employee satisfaction, health and safety, and well-being. The College also uses several committees to provide a forum to present concerns, questions or suggestions for consideration, such as the Employee Advisory Committee and Safety Committee.

4R1, S. Southwest Tech uses several surveys and includes custom questions, as well as a 360° feedback survey for supervisors, to provide data on how well they value people. Results are shared with supervisors and action plans are implemented in response to training surveys and participation rates.

4R2, O. Although Southwest Tech provides information and some analysis regarding its use of the Noel-Levitz survey, the College does not provide any information regarding its other measures listed in 4R1. Results indicate communication and the work environment are areas in which the College is underperforming and the College may improve its understanding through review of a more robust data set. The College may also benefit by developing targets for its measures and include metrics for planned improvements.

4R3, O. When presenting trend data, the College has an opportunity to include results from multiple years on the same measure. Results are reported as three-year trends, yet the results for each of the three years are not indicated and strategic data collected are
not included in the Results section. Displaying trend years can assist in understanding both the level of the results and trend direction.

4I1a, S. The College has implemented a number of activities, processes and programs for improvement projects. In part, because of its required participation in the WTCS and its ongoing commitment to AQIP and continuous improvement, Southwest Tech is well positioned to improve processes for the professional development of all of its employees. These projects can provide a foundation for improvement efforts and results analysis that may lead to greater satisfaction and retention.

4I1b, O. The Portfolio does not make clear how systematically and comprehensively the College selects processes to improve and set targets for performance in Valuing People. This represents an opportunity for the College to develop a continuous improvement process, integrating the aspects of its culture and infrastructure mentioned to determine when and how existing processes are evaluated, and to create a more comprehensive approach to its strategies in this category.

**AQIP Category 5: Leading and Communicating.** This category addresses how the institution’s leadership and communication structures, networks, and processes guide planning, decision-making, seeking future opportunities, and building and sustaining a learning environment. It examines the institution’s processes and systems related to leading activities, communicating activities, alignment of leadership system practices, institutional values and expectations, direction-setting, use of data, analysis of results, leadership development and sharing, succession planning, and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Southwest Tech for Category 5.

*Southwest Tech describes a well-defined and overall effective management structure that has necessary elements in place to become a mature and aligned leadership system. Southwest Tech invests considerable energy into collecting information from its stakeholders and has made improvements in its decision-making infrastructure. The College has defined leadership groups and roles, and supports leadership development. As it moves forward, Southwest Tech has an opportunity to move more of its Leading and Communicating processes to aligned by further defining its processes to more fully answer all questions (who, what, where, when, why and how), improving stakeholder communications, more fully utilizing collected data effectively, and setting targets as part of its measurement process.*

5P1, O. Although Southwest Tech’s mission is set by the Wisconsin State Legislature,
the College has its own internally developed mission and vision statements. It is unclear from the process described exactly how the mission and vision are reviewed on a periodic basis, how the decision is made to make revisions, and how the input of students, faculty and staff, and administrators, as well as other vital stakeholders, is gathered and used within the process.

5P2, O. While it appears the College has an established mission, vision, values and commitment to high performance, it is not evident how the leaders set directions to align with these principles. Clarifying the College’s approach to selection and prioritization of projects may enable the effective use of feedback and resources to achieve high performance. Southwest Tech has the opportunity to strengthen its process for setting and aligning its direction by stating how the College seeks and receives input from its various stakeholders when the College is reviewing and revising its Strategic Directions.

5P3, O. Although the College lists many stakeholder groups and activities, it is not clear from the Portfolio what intentional processes—with regularized connections, clear schedules and steps, preselected measures for tracking impact, and parties responsible for reviewing data—the College has put into place to take into account the needs and expectations of current and potential students and key stakeholder groups as leaders set directions.

5P4, O. While everyone is encouraged to look for new opportunities for Southwest Tech, the college-wide approach appears to be less systematic. The Program Array Process and its EMSI data are examples in a positive direction for proposed academic programs; however, the College may benefit from identifying evaluation protocols for other business processes and general continuous improvement, especially improvements that enhance the experience of Southwest Tech students and their learning.

5P5, S. The College has clearly delineated leadership groups and roles, each with a specific responsibility to recommend or make decisions and carry them out. Many decisions benefit from collaborative discussions and feedback from faculty and staff who meet regularly to carry out decisions and identify issues.

5P6, O. The College recognizes its challenge regarding the use of data, information, and performance results in decision-making. It remains unclear which processes incorporate data from which measures and who is responsible for reviewing particular
sets of data and when in making decisions. The College may be better able to present how it uses data in its decision-making by including sample processes and measures.

5P7, O. The College has recently launched the “Idea Center” as a vehicle for communication between and among the levels and units of the organization; as this develops, Southwest Tech may benefit by regularizing its communication methods, by implementing more intentional processes to promote multi-directional communication, and by tracking key measures on the effectiveness of those methods. Taking a more intentional approach to communications may help to improve low satisfaction scores for communication, as identified through the Noel-Levitz College Employee Satisfaction survey.

5P8, O. While the College has values which reflect the principles of high performance organizations and has identified a list of Core Abilities for students, it is not evident how a shared vision is communicated to deepen and reinforce these characteristics beyond orientation and informal conversation. A communication system with regular and renewed commitment to embracing these principles and Core Abilities may strengthen understanding of future college plans and increase ownership of program progress and performance. In addition, clarifying how these communication processes contribute to organizational development (e.g., regular improvements to planning processes that reinforce the use of data), may help to demonstrate an intentional approach to maturing processes.

5P9, S. Southwest Tech supports leadership development through participation in state leadership programs and attendance at conferences to learn best practice and benchmarking college structures and performance. The College also provides financial support for professional development and a formal mentor program for all new employees, with continuous leadership improvement through course and degree completion.

5P10, O. While Southwest Tech received an SS during its last Systems Appraisal related to administrator retirement and its use of WLDI, the College is encouraged to consider a more formal process for succession planning for all executive and administrative leadership positions to ensure continuity of operations during periods of transition.

5R1-2, O. While the College uses numerous mechanisms to gather information on processes, it remains unclear what concrete performance measures the College has in
place to assess the effectives of its leaders and their ability to communicate. Identifying the specific measures or items within the tools being used that indicate the effectiveness of leadership—and then tracking, analyzing and reporting on those specific measures—may benefit the College in its ability to identify areas on which to focus its improvements. Also, clarifying what effective communication looks like at Southwest Tech, for example, may help leaders determine whether they are collecting the right data and improve alignment between feedback collected and actions taken for improvement.

5R2, O. The College alludes to key metrics in its performance data, but these metrics are neither identified nor is the information shared. Southwest Tech may find that the setting of targets for each of its measures will provide the College with a greater opportunity for reaching and measuring its continuous improvement goals. Providing this information may help to demonstrate an intentional approach to aligning outcomes and decision making with systems for measuring effectiveness.

5R3, O. As noted by Southwest Tech, the College may benefit from tracking comparable data on more direct measures of its processes for Leading and Communicating. The preliminary analysis of the data collected from Southwest Tech suggests the need to understand gaps or significant differences in the data. Then, comparing Southwest Tech’s results with those at both the state and national levels may provide some information on the College’s abilities in Leading and Communicating.

5I1, O. Southwest Tech has the opportunity to report how the improvements it has made have been systematic and comprehensive. The Portfolio does not make clear how the improvements made resulted from the collection of and response to data.

AQIP Category 6: Supporting Institutional Operations. This category addresses the variety of institutional support processes that help to provide an environment in which learning can thrive. It examines the 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. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Southwest Tech for Category 6.

*Southwest Tech has devoted a great deal of attention to the academic support needs of students, as well as to the safety and security of the campus. It has also implemented several
improvements, including improved infrastructure for communications and process analysis. As it continues its quality journey, the College has the opportunity to develop more robust measures of effectiveness and efficiency for its student and administrative support services that can guide performance evaluation, including comparisons with other institutions and setting of targets for improvement.

6P1, O. Southwest Tech uses a variety of formal and informal strategies to collect input from students and other stakeholders; however, it is unclear whether data collection processes constitute a regular, systematic approach that identifies emerging needs, ensures the right decision makers receive the information, and guides the institution in setting priorities and targets. Developing a more intentional, planned approach might also include ways to evaluate how well these methods are working.

6P2, S. Southwest Tech employs multiple processes to identify the support service needs of faculty, staff, and administration, including regular meetings with department personnel, an Idea Center, the annual budget process, and informal solicitations from service areas like CTL. Administrative support needs solicited during the budgeting process are prioritized against the College’s Strategic Directions.

6P3, S. Southwest Tech has the designated individuals or groups, and the appropriate policies and procedures to design, maintain, and communicate key support processes that contribute to physical safety and security.

6P4, O. Southwest Tech uses strategies like unit managers, College policies and procedures, and the Idea Center to guide support service processes; however, it is unclear whether these strategies constitute a regular, systematic approach. The College may benefit from establishing regular cycles of measurement and improvement, i.e., clarifying how the outcomes for support service processes are developed, outcome measures defined and tracked, and performance data used in its departmental reviews to guide improvements.

6P5, O. Southwest Tech has in place a number of activities designed to document policies, communicate with employees, and recognize employee contributions. It is unclear, however, how these activities encourage knowledge sharing, innovation, and empowerment. Clarifying, for example, how the College’s SharePoint site is used to stimulate knowledge transfer, process analysis, or Lean thinking could demonstrate a more intentional system for stimulating continuous improvement. Having measures of
the College’s effectiveness in this work might also stimulate the development of more intentional systems.

6R1a, S. Southwest Tech has identified several tools that it uses to provide information on satisfaction with student, administrative, and organizational support service processes.

6R1b, O. Southwest Tech has an opportunity to more clearly define some of the measures associated with support services. In some cases, measures are indirect (e.g., satisfaction with instruction) or unclear as effectiveness measures (e.g., identified training needs). The College may benefit from more careful consideration of how the data tracked are aligned with the effectiveness of the processes.

6R2, O. Southwest Tech has an opportunity to provide a more complete picture of the results collected through its many measures of student support services. Additionally, the College shows an increasing gap on the Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction survey for academic advising effectiveness and fairly consistent gaps in a number of other areas. Describing what SWTC did based on the findings of its survey would not only strengthen the Portfolio but would help the College identify opportunities and successes.

6R3, O. The College has an opportunity to report on more direct measures for its performance results for administrative support service processes. The results that are presented do not appear to align with the tools listed in Figure 6-1: Measures of Effectiveness. By providing a link between the tools it uses and the measures it reports, Southwest Tech could improve its continuous improvement processes and data reporting.

6R4, O. While Southwest Tech describes actions it has taken to improve campus communication, the College does not indicate the processes through which key student, administrative, and organizational support areas use information and results to make improvements. Clarifying how data are analyzed to identify opportunities and take actions may help the institution demonstrate its commitment to data-informed decision making and that it follows a Plan-Do-Check-Adjust process.

6R5, O. While Southwest Tech describes comparing its performance on the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, the only comparison results provided are with the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) cohort in 2012-2013. A broad approach to comparing its results to institutions outside of the WTCS system may lead the College
to understand both its achievement and additional performance areas on which to focus its efforts.

6I1, S. Southwest Tech has taken several actions to improve College operations (e.g., creating a one-stop shop for Student Services) and to begin building an infrastructure to support a more systematic approach to continuous improvement, including improved mechanisms for communication, gathering feedback, and analyzing processes.

6I2, O. While Southwest Tech has made infrastructure improvements that may support a more systematic approach to continuous improvement, it is unclear how the institution selects processes to improve. It is also unclear whether the institution sets targets for improved performance. Having clearly defined process outcome measures and a robust project selection process may help the institution adopt a more planned approach to making improvements.

AQIP Category 7: Measuring Effectiveness. This category examines how the institution collects, analyzes, and uses information to manage itself and to drive performance improvement. It examines the institution’s processes and systems related to collection, storage, management, and use of information and data both at the institutional and departmental/unit levels. It considers 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. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Southwest Tech for Category 7.

Southwest Tech is maturing in its use of data. The College has identified a number of data sources and is building the infrastructure and culture needed to promote the intentional use of data. As a part of its participation in AQIP, the College has demonstrated an increased appreciation of the need for good data and performance measures to manage itself more effectively and efficiently and to achieve its vision, mission and strategic goals.

As it continues maturing, the College may benefit from identifying and tracking indicators of its effectiveness in using data. It may also benefit by aligning measures more closely with objectives. Measures embedded into every process could be used as indicators of effectiveness. The collection and tracking of data using those measures, along with analysis, could be used to plan and implement improvements.
7P1a, S. Southwest Tech has in place a variety of instruments and mechanisms that allow it to select, manage, and distribute data and performance information in support of its instructional and non-instructional programs and services. Southwest Tech’s leadership selects instructional effectiveness metrics based on assessment of national and statewide comparative data and trends. Reports are reviewed annually, and leadership disseminates benchmarked results.

7P1b, O. While Southwest Tech provides a detailed and extensive list of data and performance information, the data that is collected is largely that required by the WTCS, and the federal government through IPEDS. These data, supplemented by other data obtained from the annual Program Viability Review, surveys, and the College’s non-instructional Quality Review Process (QRP), are used for internal analysis of trends and to compare performance with other institutions at the state and national levels. It is unclear, however, how systematic this process is and how it is used specifically to improve management practices at Southwest Tech and drive performance improvement. A more systematic process, tied to performance metrics specific to Southwest Tech, could drive additional improvements.

7P2, O. While the College has in place a variety of instruments and mechanisms that allow for the selection, management, and distribution of data, it remains unclear how performance information is actually used to inform decision making. A more detailed discussion of the collaborative process leading to the selection of strategic projects may provide a better understanding of how information is actually used, and may present the opportunity to evolve measurement activities in support of strategy.

7P3, O. While Southwest Tech describes the process used to collect, store and provide access to data and performance information, it is unclear how the specific needs of departments and units are determined. The College may benefit from being more deliberate in its approach to identifying data needs and selecting measures that can act as strategic indicators of success. This may allow for better focus in meeting the data needs of stakeholders.

7P4, O. While Southwest Tech analyzes institutional data and information, it remains unclear how this information is deliberately linked to strategic goals, and to actions taken to improve performance. A process whereby staff in need of data are provided with the right data to support analysis and decision making might prove useful. The College may benefit from a better understanding of institutional performance, given its focus on
continuous improvement.

**7P6, O.** The College acknowledges an opportunity to more fully align the many measures for which it currently collects data with the strategic plan. Creating better alignment may help to ensure the College is measuring areas of performance most important to its future directions.

**7P7, S.** Southwest Tech has developed a systematic process to ensure the timeliness, accuracy, reliability, and security of its information system(s) and related processes. Figure 7-2 outlines the systems in place to safeguard institutional data.

**7R1, S.** Southwest Tech has identified measures—and collects and analyzes data on those measures—to gauge the performance and effectiveness of program, unit, division and college efforts.

**7R2, OO.** A general discussion of measures and listing of accreditations and metrics is provided in the report, rather than the results themselves. Little evidence is provided that the system for Measuring Effectiveness meets organizational needs for accomplishing institutional mission and goals. The analysis of these results, as well as mapping metrics to specific mission objectives, may help the College better understand overall effectiveness and delineate more clearly how the evidence reviewed is connected to the organization’s ability to meet its needs in accomplishing its mission and goals.

**7R3, O.** Southwest Tech recognizes that it has the opportunity to obtain additional information about how it compares with other higher education organizations and has begun a strategic project to develop a comprehensive set of metrics. Using additional benchmark data institutionally to make improvements and highlight best practices could help support a focus on continuous improvement and effectiveness.

**7I1, O.** Southwest Tech has made improvements in the electronic systems and software tools available to measure the effectiveness and performance of its various processes. The College acknowledges the need to gather and report on data beyond its federal and state required reports. The College is encouraged to continue its efforts to develop a comprehensive set of measures that it can use in its commitment to continuous improvement, and to use these systematically. Gathering and analyzing data related to process and performance evaluation could enable the College to determine the impact of decisions and initiatives on mission accomplishment.
Southwest Tech has worked to improve processes related to data gathering and analysis in support of decision-making. The College is using this evolving capability as a part of its strategic planning process and as a part of its focus on continuous quality improvement.

AQIP Category 8: Planning Continuous Improvement. This category examines the institution’s planning processes and how strategies and action plans are helping to achieve the institution’s mission and vision. It examines coordination and alignment of strategies and action plans; measures and performance projections; resource needs; faculty, staff, and administrator capabilities; analysis of performance projections and results; and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Southwest Tech for Category 8.

Southwest Tech has planning processes at the college and unit levels that incorporate cycles of data analysis and stakeholder input in setting objectives, long- and short-term strategies, and action projects. Financial, personnel, and training needs associated with these plans are considered in planning and budgeting processes. The next stage in the College’s continuous improvement journey may be to more clearly describe how goals and targets are aligned with objectives, strategies, and action projects; how they ensure that actions across multiple levels of the institution are integrated over time; and to clarify how leaders will evaluate the effectiveness of current planning processes. As Southwest Tech continues its quality journey, it might consider how to improve the effectiveness of its planning efforts by reporting for each key planning process the measures that were established to indicate the health of each process, the data collected for each of those measures (preferable over multiple years and in comparison with other institutions), and how the actions taken to improve efforts resulted from an intentional analysis of those data.

Southwest Tech uses several key planning processes that integrate the various aspects of planning and budgeting. The processes include gathering input from both internal and external stakeholders, taking into consideration long- and short-term goals, and aligning the goals with the institutional mission.

Southwest Tech develops short- and long-term strategies through processes that invite stakeholder input. Selection of short- and long-term strategies occurs at multiple levels within the institution, as individual divisions, departments, programs, committees and college leaders review data and create strategies to improve. Long-
term strategies flow logically from the strategic plan.

8P2b, O. While Southwest Tech has many planning groups, all of which set action plans for improvement, the College may benefit from developing a comprehensive approach that ties all the action plans together, and aligns them with the selection and prioritization of strategies in order to make explicit how strategies are selected and why.

8P3, O. While Southwest Tech describes an established process for developing key action plans to achieve the institution’s long-term Strategic Direction, it is unclear what specific steps the College takes to ensure the selected action plans will accomplish the goals for which they are intended. The College may benefit from further clarifying the process to describe how the actions are actually developed, that the actions to be taken have measures and are tied to strategic goals, and that the process is evaluated and improved.

8P4, O. The methods described by Southwest Tech for coordinating and aligning its planning processes, organizational strategies, and action plans across the organization’s various levels appear ad hoc and focused solely on one-way communication (i.e. sharing information on projects already selected). It is unclear how those involved with these various processes coordinate and align their efforts and the outcome of their work. The College may benefit from explaining how the plans are coordinated and aligned throughout the institution by describing who, how, and when the data are shared and acted upon.

8P5, O. While Southwest Tech reports broad input into its strategic planning process, and organizational units identify objectives and set measures and targets annually, it is unclear how objectives are defined, measures are selected, and performance targets are set to accomplish the strategies and action plans. With the acquisition and expected use of new business analytics software, the College will have an opportunity to expand its data gathering, analysis and reporting capability, and improve its ability to make better, data-informed decisions. This may encourage leaders to review and refine the College’s measures and performance targets to achieve its Strategic Directions.

8P6, S. Southwest Tech links its strategy selection to historical data and future influences to project budget planning beyond the current year. This approach could be used as a model for other processes to provide projections that take into account levels of current resources and future needs, while linking strategy selection and action plans.
8P7, O. While the College describes some aspects of its approach to risk assessment and risk management, the mechanisms in place appear to be concentrated in only some areas of the institution. It is unclear how Southwest Tech systematically assesses and addresses risk in its planning process, such as those risks not associated with physical plant, insurance, and safety, including fluctuating enrollments and action plans that do not produce the desired results. A more comprehensive risk identification process could extend mitigation efforts more broadly.

8P8, O. While Southwest Tech determines if current staff can fulfill the requirements of changing institutional actions, and professional development activities are offered, it is unclear how the College ensures that it develops and nurtures the capabilities of faculty, staff and administrators to address these changing requirements in a comprehensive way, rather than the ad hoc and informal approach now used. A systematic approach to identifying needed capabilities and aligning professional development activities to these needs in a proactive and thoughtful approach may better prepare the organization for future change and continued improvement in its programs.

8R1, O. Southwest Tech’s Executive Team evaluates annually the institution’s progress in achieving the goals and objectives contained in the Strategic Plan. However, it is unclear what specific measures are used and what process is followed by the Executive Team. It is also unknown whether the College considers the effectiveness of the strategic planning process and related systems. The College might benefit from identifying specific measures of effectiveness of its planning process and systems to increase the successful completion of goals and objectives.

8R2, O. While Southwest Tech has provided a list of activities and reports improved results, it does not provide the performance results for its metrics. For example, it reports the use of MRS reporting but not the results for usage or the metric comparisons mentioned, nor results that support the contention that it saved the Business Office time and money. Providing results of the metrics mentioned could help the College confirm that it has improved performance and help it assess the magnitude of such improvements over time when trend data are provided.

8R3, O. Most of the projections or targets for performance of strategies and action plans over the next 1-3 years listed by Southwest Tech are not measurable. While qualitative targets can be good, having a wider range of measures that give a more complete picture of how well this system for planning is working may be beneficial to the College.
The College may be better able to track and report its current status and the progress it is making toward its goals—and to identify areas to target for improvement efforts—if it sets concrete, measurable targets that can be reported concisely and tracked for trend data.

8R4, O. While the College lists a number of reports and tools used to help it compare its performance to that of other organizations, particularly schools within WTCS, the Portfolio does not include the actual data points themselves. Southwest Tech may more effectively present its successes and opportunities vis-à-vis other institutions if it provides the comparative data in the Portfolio. The College is encouraged to identify appropriate measures, as well as comparative and trend data, for the performance of its processes for Planning Continuous Improvement.

8R5, O. While Southwest Tech lists a number of reports and tools used to provide evidence that its system for Planning Continuous Improvement is effective, the Portfolio does not include the actual data points themselves, thus preventing any analysis of the data. The College may more effectively present its successes and opportunities in this area by providing the actual data in the Portfolio. Thus, Southwest Tech has an opportunity to identify what direct, and indirect, measures of success it uses to determine the effectiveness of the processes used for planning continuous improvement.

8I1, S. The College provides a list and description of the improvements made to the infrastructure and information management systems. These mechanisms could provide a foundation for the development of an effective system for Planning Continuous Improvement and reporting its analysis of progress and achievement.

8I2, O. While Southwest Tech has restructured its Continuous Improvement Team and created the position of Process Improvement Coordinator, thus creating some infrastructure that may prove useful for its continuous improvement efforts, it is unclear how the activities and decisions of the Process Improvement Coordinator/IT Supervisor and the Executive Team help in selecting specific processes to improve and set targets for improved performance results in planning for continuous improvement.

**AQIP Category 9: Building Collaborative Relationships.** This category examines the institution’s relationships – current and potential – to analyze how they contribute to the institution accomplishing its mission. It examines the institution’s processes and systems related to identification of key internal and external collaborative relationships; alignment of key...
collaborative relationships; relationship creation, prioritization, and building; needs identification; internal relationships; measures; analysis of results; and efforts to continuously improve these areas. The Systems Appraisal Team identified various strengths and opportunities for Southwest Tech for Category 9.

Southwest Tech relies on numerous collaborative relationships to be successful, and it recognizes the importance of maintaining, strengthening, and expanding these relationships. The College recognizes the critical importance of making it convenient for students to enroll in and complete courses and programs, to transfer credits via formal articulation agreements, and to identify and prepare for job opportunities in the region. The institution has undertaken various activities to leverage its historic focus on serving the needs of its students and the local region. While the College has worked to maintain, strengthen and expand these internal and external relationships, it might benefit from a more systematic and comprehensive approach to building relationships, measuring their effectiveness, and ensuring the strategies and approaches used are aligned with strategic priorities. Reporting on the quality and benefits of relationships may help Southwest Tech create relationships beyond state-required associations and consortia. The College may also benefit from replicating its best practices, and the development of additional specific measures and reports of data linked to those measures.

9P1, S. Southwest Tech describes the important collaborative relationships in which it participates in order to attract and provide transfer and employment opportunities to students. The College participates in an extensive set of activities in order to maintain and expand these relationships. The College has eight Strategic Projects to support strengthening partnerships that may lead to long-term loyalty among district K-12 institutions and enable its Employment & Training Job Center to help sustain the economic progress of the constituents it serves. With regard to other community colleges and 4-year institutions in the tri-state area, articulation agreements are used to facilitate the transfer of students. The College also conducts an extensive set of campus activities to encourage regular visits to and interactions on campus relating to preparation for college, and to encourage students to matriculate and be successful.

9P2, O. While Southwest Tech describes in detail the process it follows to establish and maintain collaborative relationships that serve the education, training and employment needs of its students, and the local, regional economy, it is unclear how these relationships are prioritized. It appears that the level of activity involved is strongly correlated with available funding, not necessarily the needs of students or the strategic
priorities of the institution. Southwest Tech may benefit from reviewing the allocation of resources, as a part of its strategic planning and budgeting processes, to ensure alignment of student needs, employer expectations and its strategic direction, mission and vision.

9P3, S. Various committees work together to evaluate student service needs, including the K-12 Action Team, Adult Population Team, and the Retention Team. Southwest Tech relies on survey feedback, along with interactions and requests from students to identify, establish and maintain relationships with a variety of organizations. This includes mental, health and dental care service providers, counseling and psychiatric services, support services for victims of domestic violence and veterans, and an extensive set of activities intended to help students identify job opportunities and obtain gainful employment. The introduction of the Learning Success Initiative and the activities of the three interrelated committees is a positive step toward systematic needs identification and service delivery that are consistent with the strategic directions of the College.

9P4, S. State requirements and the local purchasing policies determine how Southwest Tech creates, prioritizes, and builds relationships with the organizations that supply materials and services. The College follows state procurement policies and procedures, as well as a criteria-based Request for Proposal process when evaluating partnerships that provide College services.

9P5, O. The College describes its processes for creating, prioritizing, and building relationships with several external agencies as being decentralized. An opportunity exists to develop a systematic approach to these relationships in order to better serve the constituents using processes for identifying those relationships which will serve to best strengthen the programs for students and build long-term sustainable resources. The implementation of an intentional process that includes the tracking of data on preselected measures may enable the College to more effectively create, prioritize, build, evaluate, and improve its relationships with external agencies.

9P6, O. While the institution uses various methods to ensure that some of its partnerships meet the needs of its stakeholders, it is unclear how the organization uses these mechanisms to evaluate each of its key partnerships. Southwest Tech’s response to this item suggests a more relaxed, informal, and less intentional approach to obtaining feedback. Since the College prides itself on these partnerships, this may represent an
opportunities to listen to, and respond to, the voice of the stakeholder. This might allow Southwest Tech to address any problems and follow-up on new opportunities quickly, ensuring that relationships are reinforced and strengthened on an ongoing basis.

9R1, SS. The College identifies specific measures and specific tools associated with partnerships that assist with student enrollment, student placement/continuing education, and services to students. Results are provided for these measures which aid the institution in evaluating the effectiveness of these partnerships. Moreover, the numbers are organized in a clear and concise manner, allowing for a review of the effectiveness of efforts in this area.

9R2, O. While measures are in place to assess the degree to which collaborative partnerships are achieving their goals, it is unclear exactly how these measures are analyzed and used by decision-makers to improve, strengthen, or otherwise manage these relationships. More focused efforts to develop specific metrics, and to link those metrics to objectives, could provide opportunities for further research and improvement.

9R3, O. While Southwest Tech has performance results of processes for collaborative relationships that can be compared with other institutions, a more comprehensive system to collect and analyze comparative data, allowing for the identification of best practices, could help improve performance. Comparative data could demonstrate continuous improvement. In addition, by using comparative data, Southwest Tech could highlight successes, identify challenges, and better prioritize resources.

9I1, O. Southwest Tech reports new articulation agreements with college and university partners, enhanced career-oriented activities for current and prospective students, expanded relationships with colleges and other organizations in the tri-state area, and additional capability to obtain, analyze, and utilize appropriate data to make decisions. However, it is unclear whether or not the processes and performance results for Building Collaborative Relationships are systematic and comprehensive. The College could benefit from a more systematic and comprehensive approach to build and maintain collaborative relationships in achieving its established strategic priorities, mission and vision. Such an approach could lead to effective prioritization of resources.

9I2, S. The use of predetermined measures, and the incorporation of hard data into reports, indicates that Southwest Tech is developing a culture and infrastructure that helps it select specific processes to improve and to set targets for improved performance. Southwest Tech is in an early stage of its journey of continuous
improvement and the use of the relevant management tools and techniques. The College is encouraged to continue these efforts, and utilize other *Principles of High Performing Organizations*, to improve how it operates and increase the likelihood of further success in the future.

## Accreditation Evidence For Southwest Tech

The following section identifies any areas in the judgment of the Systems Appraisal Team where the institution either has not provided sufficient evidence that it currently meets the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components, or that it may face difficulty in meeting the Criteria and Core Components in the future. Identification of any such deficiencies as part of the Systems Appraisal process affords the institution the opportunity to remedy the problem prior to Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion 1: Evidence found in the Systems Portfolio</th>
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5P1 & 5P2. HLC Core Component 1.A The institution’s mission is broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations.

- All instructors and instructional supervisors must complete a two-credit course that includes review of the mission and history.
- The Wisconsin State Legislature and the Southwest Tech Board of Directors have formal roles in defining and adopting the College’s Mission Statement.
- Wisconsin State Statute Chapter 38.001 Mission and Purposes outlines the mission and purposes for the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) and its sixteen member colleges.
- Southwest Tech’s Strategic Planning processes are designed and timed to ensure that planning, budgeting, and staffing priorities align with and support the College’s statutory mission and purposes.
- Leaders at Southwest Tech set directions in alignment with the College’s mission, vision, values, and commitment to high performance via three processes: an annual review of the mission set by the state, a revision to the strategic directions every three years, and the annual identification and implementation of strategic projects.
- The mission statement is communicated to stakeholders through electronic and print media.

5P3 & 5P8. HLC Core Component 1.B. The mission is articulated publicly.

- The local vision, mission, purposes, and values are publicly available in print and electronically through the Wisconsin State Statutes, the Board Governance Policy Manual, and the College’s website.
- Southwest Tech’s statutory and local mission and purposes documents are current and closely reflect the College’s emphases and priority activities. They identify the nature, scope, and intended constituents of its programs and services.

1P4 & 1P10. HLC Core Component 1.C. The institution understands the relationship between its mission and the diversity of society.

- Within its Core Abilities, Southwest Tech includes “respect for self and others” and “demonstrate ability to work with a diverse population.” These are expectations Southwest Tech holds for both students and employees.
• Regional diversity is addressed in the Core Ability, “Work Cooperatively.”
• The College creates and fosters diversity awareness through course offerings, student entertainment opportunities, and campus events.
• The College tracks special populations such as Non-Traditional Occupation students, single parent, poverty-level students, and students who lack college preparedness.

3P3 & 3P5. HLC Core Component 1.D. The institution’s mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.

• Southwest Tech’s mission to provide “education and training opportunities responsive to students, employers, and communities,” is supported by the various tools it uses to communicate with prospective students, current students, and alumni, supporters, and community partners.
• Southwest Tech holds regular listening sessions with the local communities it serves; data collected from these meetings are synthesized into SWOT analyses to inform planning. The College also holds Day at Southwest Tech events at which employers can learn about the College’s programs and services.
• The College is working to implement a service learning philosophy across all areas of the College to enhance student learning and provide benefit to the community in high need areas.
• Southwest Tech recently partnered with Nicollet College to meet identified student needs for BA, MA, and PhD degrees in their area. This partnership allows students to begin a BA degree at Southwest Tech.
• Through its Foundation and scholarship programs, the College identifies community needs that can be met through effective partnerships.
• The Rapid Response Teams at Southwest Tech work closely with the Department of Workforce Development to determine how the College can best serve the needs of area residents during plant closures or other mass layoffs and assist residents while they are still employed and invites them on campus for college and career exploration workshops to help them obtain career services or choose a program of interest for retraining; the Rapid Response Team works with individual dislocated workers to address basic education needs and financial challenges or to explore labor market data that better matches their skills with potential job openings.
• The College has a process to identify immediate and future needs and create improvement plans based on recommendations of review teams composed of its key stakeholders. Cycles of improvement to maintain relevance and a service-learning philosophy across divisions and programs allow students to apply their learning while providing services to the communities.

• The College Board meets in local communities to listen to their needs and uses the input to guide strategic planning. Events on campus educate businesses about programs and meeting needs through effective partnerships.

4P7. HLC Core Component 2.A The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it establishes and follows fair and ethical policies and processes for its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff.

• The institution provides some evidence supportive of how it ensures practices of its operational functions follow the fair and ethical policies and procedures as provided in its handbooks, Core Abilities, and annual reviews such as its complaint and appeal process. It is unclear, however, how the institution determines if all stakeholders review expectations and how it identifies policy violations. Clarifying these processes may provide the institution insight about its ability to function with integrity and plan corrective actions.

• The College communicates its expectations for ethical practice through its policies and codes of conduct for Board Members and employees, outlined in the Employee Handbook and Core Abilities, and during initial orientation. A complaint and appeal process is in place for disciplinary actions.

• Southwest Tech has policy and practices in place to assure its integrity in financial, academic, personnel and auxiliary functions. All employees complete an annual review of the institution’s sexual harassment policies, FERPA and related topics on ethical practices.

• Academic integrity is addressed through 1) the College’s academic integrity policy, which is published on the College’s website, in the student handbook and in course syllabi; 2) the use of technology to monitor plagiarism; 3) information and training sessions offered by the library; and 4) the enforcement of these policies.
1P6. HLC Core Component 2.B. The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public with regard to its programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control, and accreditation relationships.

- Southwest Tech communicates to current and prospective students the admission requirements for programs and courses in the College website, in the College guidebook, at local secondary school meetings, during Teacher/Learner Connection Days prior to each semester, and the student handbook.
- All program professional materials include program outcomes.
- Through connections with high school personnel, including meetings, conversations, training, etc., the College provides information regarding its programs and requirements, as well as conducting joint training programs on various educational issues, including learning styles and career pathway development.
- Every program student is required to meet with a program counselor/advisor to review program readiness.
- All programs are approved by the Wisconsin Technical College System Board and the Higher Learning Commission.

5P2. HLC Core Component 2.C. The governing board of the institution is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and to assure its integrity.

- Leaders at Southwest Tech set directions in alignment with the College’s mission, vision, values, and commitment to high performance via three processes: an annual review of the mission set by the state, a revision to the Strategic Directions every three years, and the annual identification and implementation of strategic projects.
- The Executive Team and the Student and Academic Affairs Council jointly review feedback on current projects and recommended new projects.
- The Board’s Governance Commitment commits the Board of Directors to preserve and enhance the institution, stating the Board will “always act in the best interest of the College and the community as a whole.” It further commits the Board “to excellence and to the values which define the College’s operational atmosphere by assuring that it 1) achieves results for its constituencies at an appropriate cost, 2) avoids unacceptable
activities, conditions, and decisions, and 3) self-monitors its processes and performances.”

- As public officials, all Board members as well as the President and the Vice-Presidents must comply with Chapter 19 Subchapter III Code of Ethics for Public Officials and Employees. Board members must also comply with the Board Members’ Code of Conduct contained in the Board Governance Policy Manual.

- Wisconsin state statute defines the composition, organization, appointment process, and duties of the technical college boards and according to statute the district board shall have exclusive control of the district schools established and property acquired.

1P11. HLC Core Component 2.D The institution is committed to freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.

- The College has a statement in its Student Handbook that states the College “promotes a learning-centered environment dedicated to the advancement of personal growth and knowledge.”

- The Core Abilities as outlined in 1P1, “address the acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge for students, faculty, and staff equally” and includes ethical use of information.

1P11. HLC Core Component 2.E. The institution ensures that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.

- Southwest Tech’s Student Handbook addresses through policy its requirements of students to conduct themselves responsibly within their academics. This policy includes the ethical use of information.

- Through its Core Abilities, Southwest Tech delineates its requirements for both faculty and staff regarding the acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge.

- All faculty, staff, and administrators are expected to model Core Abilities, reflect performance indicators, and exhibit behavioral expectations.

- Health-related programs instruct on the handling of sensitive information and consequences of inappropriate use of such information.
1P4 & 1P12. HLC Core Component 3.A. The institution’s degree programs are appropriate to higher education.

- Degree programs must be approved by both the state system and district board to ensure an appropriate level of rigor.
- Southwest Tech uses advisory boards associated with each program to provide input, which helps the College keep program offerings current. These boards meet annually.
- All programs are subject to the Quality Review Program, which is an established process and includes a rubric to evaluate learning outcomes to assure that programs continue to meet required standards.

1P1 & 1P2. HLC Core Component 3.B. The institution demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs.

- Southwest Tech includes solving problems and valuing learning as two of its Core Ability categories required of all students, and instructors assess Core Abilities through embedded assessment activities, which result in data that are reported and analyzed at the institutional level.
- Faculty and staff are expected to model the Core Abilities including illustrating their personal progression in professional development.
- Within its mission, Southwest Tech states that it provides citizens with the occupational education necessary for full participation and advancement in the workforce.”

1P7 & 1P15. HLC Core Component 3.D. The institution provides support for student learning and effective teaching.

- Southwest Tech provides two teams of advisors to assist students with programs and a counselor to assist students with non-academic/behavioral needs.
- The College has developed a Behavioral Intervention Team to discuss and resolve student behavioral issues.
- Southwest Tech has a Student Alert System (SAS) to better identify student needs through faculty and staff referrals.
- The College’s Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) assists instructors and builds more effective teaching through faculty professional development.
• Students may use the Academic Success Center (ASC) and the Auto-Tutorial Lab (ATL) for assistance in upgrading their academic skills.

• The Compass placement test is used to identify those students who do not meet the minimum entrance requirement and are sent to the ASC or ATL for assistance.

• Southwest Tech provides a variety of support services including library research, career exploration, and academic advising.

• Southwest Tech has built and expanded facilities to house programs to support academic and learning support, including new hands-on facilities that mirror industry standards and a Student Services remodel to bundle services in a one-stop approach.

1P16. HLC Core Component 3.E. The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment.

• The faculty at Southwest Tech develops and leads clubs that are aligned with programs and/or student chapters of professional organizations.

• Student club members participate in program-related competitions, industry-related state and national conferences, service-learning projects, etc.

1P4 & 1P13. HLC Core Component 4.A. The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.

• To identify and address program or service quality issues, facilitate continuous improvement, and stimulate innovation, Southwest Tech reviews new programs every three years and established programs every five years using its QRP process.

• Southwest Tech has established processes in place for ensuring that prior learning and dual credit practices are consistent and align with best practices in higher education.

• The College maintains and exercises authority over prerequisites, rigor, and expectations for student learning through the QRP. It tracks the percentage of program curriculum reviewed within the last three years. The target for this measure is 100% with a minimum threshold of 70%.

• Southwest Tech provides guaranteed retraining to eligible graduates of technical diploma and associate degree programs whose employers certify that the graduate lacked entry-level skills.
• Southwest Tech conducts an annual Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, graduate success survey, and employer surveys to ascertain satisfaction with education provided and the overall college experience.

• Faculty credentials align with established criteria of state certification processes and the College monitors prerequisites through the CAMS system to enforce course sequence.

1P2 & 1P18. HLC Core Component 4.B. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

• The College conducts assessment of student learning through embedded Core Abilities and program outcomes, which are performance-based, measurable and observable and provide data, which are then analyzed by leadership for improvement.

• Each program outcome is linked to a specific assessment tool that is documented in the Worldwide Instructional Design System (WIDS), and assessment measures provide an outcome that is analyzed for improvement.

• To measure educational effectiveness, both the Quality Review Process (QRP) and the Perkins Report Card provide outcomes/data that are analyzed and used to identify areas for improvement.

• Southwest Tech develops specific program learning objectives using program teams with the input of division deans and program advisory committees.

• Thirty-six of 47 programs have completed learner assessments of program outcomes. The rest of the programs are working on completing these assessments.

• Program outcomes are linked to specific assessment tools and documented in the curriculum design systems. Program outcomes are developed with input from advisory committees, business/industry standards, certification requirements, and other technical colleges and monitored through annual review and statewide technical skills for assessment are in development.

• Results of the assessment processes are shared with faculty and deans to establish improvement plans and a matrix is maintained of each program and type of assessment.

3P1. HLC Core Component 4.C. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.
• It is apparent through the examples provided within the portfolio that Southwest Tech is committed to educational improvement through ongoing attention to student retention, persistence and completion rates. However, the College’s statement of commitment could be strengthened by including its process for evaluating and improving retention, persistence and completion rates, as well as providing data for the College as a whole. Presenting rates in the form of charts or graphs, and providing comparison and historical data, including trend data, will also strengthen the College’s response.

• Through the use of its QRP, Southwest Tech uses student and alumni survey data as part of the continuous improvement of programs and services. Programs and departments develop improvement plans that regularly incorporate this input in a continuous improvement plan, based on feedback from a variety of instruments like exit surveys and graduate follow-up surveys. Several examples on page 36 of the portfolio demonstrate the use of QRP and data to improve academic and non-academic processes and results.

• Southwest Tech tracks and responds to data on student performance and persistence in its LPN and RN programs using the N-CLEX. The College responded to a concern revealed in a pass rate discrepancy by offering a bridge course. The College also increased retention rates in several of its programs by providing additional support in areas with low retention.

• In its strategic planning processes the College responds to its analysis of data on student satisfaction collected using Noel-Levitz and has, therefore, implemented three projects designed to increase satisfaction and retention: parking, a one-stop shop remodel for student services, and expanding the schedule of course offerings.

8P6. HLC Core Component 5.A. The institution’s resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

• The College has an annual project process in place and a three-year budget process as well; the College monitors budgets to build reserves for the implementation of new instructional programs.

• The deans manage the budgets for their programs. Each program has capital and operational accounts that are used to monitor the program costs.

• As a member of the WTCS, Southwest Tech is monitored closely to ensure adequate
resources and facilities to meet its current educational program needs, and must obtain approval from WTCS for any plans to expand or add new programs, in response to market trends and projected job growth in the region.

- Faculty and administrators at Southwest Tech must meet state certification and accreditation requirements, which reflect ever increasing expectations relative to program rigor, relevance and quality.

- Professional development and in service training opportunities are provided to all faculty, staff and administrators, to upgrade their skills, meet new certification requirements, and strengthen areas identified through the performance management process.

- With the updating in its mission statement, and its commitment to continuous improvement, Southwest Tech, the College is motivated to secure adequate resources to maintain, improve and strengthen its educational programs over time.

**5P5 & 5P9. HLC Core Component 5.B. The institution’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.**

- A number of standing committees exist to encourage collaborative decision making. The Board of Directors is limited in its decision-making role to defining policies and institutional goals, allowing internal leadership to define how those goals will be achieved.

- Major decision-making groups have clearly defined charges, defining their roles in college operations. The College uses ad hoc groups and project teams to address strategic projects.

- At the academic program level, faculty defines the competencies students should learn, the curriculum and pedagogy to deliver those competencies, and the assessment procedures for Core Abilities and Technical Skill Attainment.

- The Board of Directors encourages members to develop and strengthen their individual leadership abilities by funding travel and participation in professional development and leadership activities offered by state and national associations.

- The College provides employees with tuition reimbursement for up to six credits of approved coursework per fiscal year.

- The College administration informs the Board of Directors at a retreat to provide detailed
Many daily decisions benefit from collaborative discussions, recommendations, and feedback from programs and departments, standing committees, and assessment activities. QRP teams and other stakeholders set policy, determine processes, and drive continuous improvement.

The Board of Director’s meets monthly with meetings including opportunities for public input. The meetings also include financial, enrollment, staffing, and other reports.

Major academic, student services, and support divisions have the opportunity to report their activities to the Board on a yearly basis.

5P2 & 5P6. Comment on the evidence provided for Core Component 5.C. The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning.

The College engages in long-term (three-year) and short-term (annual) planning with input from multiple stakeholders. Annual projects are often suggested by reviews of performance data in some areas and through the Executive Team and the Student and Academic Affairs who jointly review feedback and select the list of projects. Creating the list aligns goal and performance setting processes, budget and personnel planning, and assessment of student learning, success, and satisfaction.

Each month’s Board of Directors’ meeting includes the following standing agenda items: Public Input, Financial Report, Enrollment Report, Staffing Report, Board Chairperson’s Report, and President’s Report.

Major academic, student services, and support divisions report their activities to the Board of Directors at least once a year in a rotation set at the Board’s annual meeting in July. These reports are given under an agenda item titled “Board Monitoring of College Effectiveness."

The College’s financial status and processes are audited annually.

Specific reports are generated for internal management decisions as well as for the Quality Review Process (QRP), WTCS Client Reporting, the Perkins Report Card, IPEDS, Cleary Act Report, and other purposes.

Southwest Tech collects, tracks and analyzes data from a number of mechanisms in order to systematically improve its performance: QRP, Perkins FAUPL Scorecard, IPEDS Feedback Report, Noel-Levitz results, Program Viability reports and Graduate Success reports.

Southwest Tech provides examples of performance improvements that have occurred since its last Systems Portfolio in 2010.

The College has acquired new data gathering and analysis capabilities, coupled with the development of key performance measures, that will allow them to monitor, adjust and improve the performance of their processes and adopt management practices that support continuous improvement.

Southwest Tech used its performance metrics to identify a need to improve its registration process, used process mapping and its strategic projects to remodel complementary functions of its Student Services, leading to increased satisfaction.

Programmatic level changes have occurred following a review of QRP and Noel-Levitz SSI data reviewed at the program level. For example, a checklist to clarify the admission sequence for the Nursing Assistant program was developed and a Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) document created to address student process comprehension and more effective question resolution.

Quality of Systems Portfolio For Southwest Tech

Because it stands as a reflection of the institution, the Systems Portfolio should be complete and coherent, and it should provide an open and honest self-analysis on the strengths and challenges facing the organization. In this section, the Systems Appraisal Team provides Southwest Tech with constructive feedback on the overall quality of the portfolio, along with suggestions for improvement of future portfolio submissions.

Southwest Tech has a strategic issue in integrating process documentation, measurement systems, and improvement activities, so that processes represent intentionally designed, systematic approaches, regularly reviewed for improvement. The portfolio itself could better represent such integration where it exists. This could include more sophisticated methods of process documentation and fuller responses to all aspects of the question, especially the first Improvement question. The question asks institutions to document their improvement activities but to also demonstrate to what
extent those activities constitute a systematic and comprehensive approach to continuous improvement. Additionally, the Appraisal Team often learned about aspects of a process from other places in the portfolio, rather than where it ought to have been described.

- The portfolio would have benefitted from more consistent presentations of information across the categories. In some cases, significant background information was provided on surveys or institutional actions after it had already been presented in earlier categories. Reducing repetition might have allowed the institution more space to include more performance results and clarifying examples. Additionally, charts and tables could have been presented more consistently, following well-established practices for data presentation. Finally, a more consistent presentation of category introductions could help readers assess where the institution sees its current level of maturity. In Category 5 Leading and Communicating, for example, each major process is evaluated; whereas in Category 2 Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives no such evaluation is provided.

**Using the Feedback Report**

The AQIP Systems Appraisal process is intended to initiate action for institutional improvement. Though decisions about specific actions rest with each institution, the Commission expects every institution to use its feedback to stimulate cycles of continual improvement and to inform future AQIP processes.

Some key questions that may arise in careful examination of this report may include: 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.

The Commission’s goal is to help an institution clarify the strategic issues most vital to its success, and then to support the institution as it addresses these priorities in ways that will make a difference in institutional performance.