

# AQIP Participation Application



Academic  
Quality Improvement  
Program

The Higher Learning Commission **NCA**

Name of Institution Dakota State University City,  
State Madison, SD Application Date- January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005

Check one of these three categories to describe your organization and then answer the application questions accordingly. Answer the questions clearly, directly, and concisely. See *AQIP Application Instructions* for details about length of application etc.

- 4 If it has been **six years or fewer** since the date of the Commission action on its last comprehensive PEAQ site visit of your organization, you need only provide a *brief* summary of the team's overall evaluation of how well your institution met the Criteria for Accreditation. Write **no more than one page** for this summary response to Question 1.
- If it has been **more than six years** since the date of the Commission action on its last comprehensive PEAQ site visit of your organization, you should write a **complete** response to Question 1. Your responses to each item need to be full and complete, probably **2-4 pages for each of the five Criterion**.
- If your organization wishes to participate in AQIP but **not use AQIP participation to maintain your Commission accreditation**, you can skip Questions 1 and 2.

To answer Question 1, present evidence that will allow the AQIP Review Panel on Admissions to evaluate and affirm your organization's continuing compliance with the Commission's accreditation expectations. (See *AQIP Application Instructions* to determine whether you need to answer Question 1.)

How does your organization demonstrate that it meets each of the Higher Learning Commission's five Criteria for Accreditation?

**1A. Criterion One: Mission and Integrity.** The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

**1B. Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future.** The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

**1C. Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching.** The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

**1D. Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge.** The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and

**students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.**

**1E. Criterion Five: Engagement and Service. As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.**

**Most Recent Evaluation of DSU Relative to HLC's Criteria for Accreditation:**

**Accreditation History:** The Higher Learning Commission conducted a comprehensive evaluation of Dakota State University on October 16-18, 2000. The team recommended continued accreditation for the full 10 years with no stipulations. The next comprehensive visit is scheduled for 2010-2011. The results of the 2000 evaluation parallel the 1990 review report when the team recommendation was also accreditation for the full 10 years with no stipulations.

Since the comprehensive visit, the HLC approved a third master's degree program, the master of science in information assurance on August 16, 2004. (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/MSIA\\_Team\\_Report.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/MSIA_Team_Report.pdf)) DSU is also a member of the South Dakota Electronic University Consortium which received HLC accreditation in May 2004. (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/HLC\\_EUC\\_Team\\_Report.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/HLC_EUC_Team_Report.pdf))

**HLC Team Report:** The HLC report from the 2000 comprehensive evaluation (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/HLC\\_NCA\\_Team\\_Report.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/HLC_NCA_Team_Report.pdf)) indicated that "Dakota State University is committed to excellence in its programs and services to students. The institution is financially sound, and, to date has been able to acquire cutting edge technology. The institution has demonstrated its ability to plan, change and grow, and it is enjoying external recognition of its accomplishments." The team's report also noted that careful attention has been given to providing support for distance learning courses. The report identified alumni success in employment as a factor that demonstrates that its "external constituents have a clear understanding of the emphasis on technology and its role in all of the institution's programs." And, the team described the self-study report as "thorough, comprehensive, and well organized and that it was the result of an open process. Having the document on-line was very helpful to all users." Additional strengths identified by the team included:

- DSU students benefit from the advantages of being on a small, intimate campus with a good academic reputation and a reasonable tuition
- There is strong support for the institution and its programs among DSU's various constituencies, including legislators, the Board of Regents, employers and community leaders, and students and alumni
- The institution is to be commended for its acquisition of cutting- edge technology, and there is growing recognition among DSU's constituencies of the institution's distinctive competence regarding information technology
- DSU has a well-prepared faculty that is accessible to students and bridges the gap between classroom and real-life experiences

- A collegial, cohesive, and supportive relationship exists among faculty and staff, which enhances collaboration within the institution
- The university has excellent outreach programs including, but not limited to, the Technology for Teaching and Learning Academy and the Center for Public Higher Education (branch campus in Sioux Falls, now known as USDSU with programming shared by DSU, SDSU and USD)
- The DSU campus has well-kept grounds and facilities

Answer both parts of this question candidly and substantively. (See *AQIP Application Instructions* to determine whether you need to answer Question 2.)

**2A. Through what specific actions has your organization demonstrated its responsiveness to the Commission in addressing specific accreditation concerns or challenges identified by the Commission's last comprehensive evaluation?**

**Challenges Identified by HLC:** The HLC team recommended that DSU receive 10-year accreditation with no stipulations or progress or monitoring reports. The team did identify six challenges for the university:

- The institution will be challenged to continue to maintain its national leadership position with respect to cutting-edge technology.
- The South Dakota Board of Regents policies (and practices) do not appear to encourage and recognize the creativity and academic potential of the DSU faculty and programs.
- The institution will need to evaluate the purpose and scope of the liberal arts in its technology-driven curriculum
- Some students are delayed in their graduation due to course scheduling and the infrequency of course offerings
- Although the institution is aware of the need to address diversity, and a diversity coordinator has recently been hired, there is an absence of a plan to address diversity at all levels and areas of the institution, including the administration, faculty, staff, and the curriculum.
- The increase of enrollments and programs has resulted in workload concerns and strains on faculty.

Many of the challenges identified by the HLC review team have been resolved in recent years. DSU's efforts in those areas are highlighted below.

**Status as a national leader in information technology:** DSU continues to successfully maintain its leadership position in information technology. In the last several years, the university has achieved these accomplishments:

- DSU was recognized by the National Security Agency as a National Center of Academic Excellence in Information Assurance Education. (See <http://www.departments.dsu.edu/gradoffice/MSIA/Default.htm> )
- DSU entered into a partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) national center for Earth Resources Observation and Science (EROS) (See <http://www.departments.dsu.edu/news/spotlight/04/EROS.htm> )
- DSU developed a third master's degree program -- master of science in information assurance) and received HLC program approval in August 2004. (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/HLC\\_EUC\\_Team\\_Report.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/HLC_EUC_Team_Report.pdf) )
- DSU has received a federal earmark of \$250,000 to advance research within the Center for Biometric Research
- DSU was ranked #2 on the list of top public comprehensive colleges in the Midwest by *US News and World Report* <http://www.departments.dsu.edu/news/spotlight/04/DSUrankmidwest.htm>

The university has also pursued a two-pronged strategy to maintain its cutting edge technology. A more aggressive grant writing program has been undertaken and DSU has more aggressively pursued corporate and government partnerships that result in technology donations or deep educational discounts. Specific accomplishments relative to technology include:

- During Fall 2004, DSU launched the Wireless Mobile Computing Initiative (WMCI). All full-time freshmen and sophomores are now provided with a tablet / notebook wireless computing device. (See <http://www.dsu.edu/WMCI/presidentmessage.htm> ) In addition, DSU faculty received \$140,000 in course redesign grants from the Governor's summer grant program to restructure general education courses to support the WMCI. (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/disted/showcase/2004/math021\\_files/frame.htm#slide0001.htm](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/disted/showcase/2004/math021_files/frame.htm#slide0001.htm) for a sample course redesign)
- In 2004, DSU received a Great Plains Education Foundation Grant which included \$50,000 for biometric devices for the Center for Biometric Research and has installed an iris scanning system to provide access to the university's server room and to several high-technology labs on campus.
- In 2002, DSU received a \$300,000 Bush Foundation faculty development grant to assess student learning and the impact of teaching with technology. (See <http://www.departments.dsu.edu/cattl/> )
- In 2003, DSU received an \$894,150 grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education to purchase high-end technology for the newly renovated Technology Classroom Building. Those purchases included technology for several state-of-the-art distance-education classrooms, a state-of-the-art multimedia computer lab, a video-conference production studio, an audio production studio, and a security (hacker's) lab.
- In 2003, DSU was awarded a \$29,470 grant from Cisco Systems for equipment to build out a portion of the hacker lab mentioned above. The equipment grant included routers, switches, firewalls and networking accessories. The university also received

an educational software grant from Guidant Software Company, which provided computer forensics software.

**Board of Regents Policies:** While the university cannot do much to eliminate Board of Regents policies which “fail to encourage and recognize the creativity and academic potential of the DSU faculty and programs”, it should be noted that the BOR have moved forward several policy changes which directly reward faculty for research creativity and development of intellectual property and which result in economic development within the state. (See BOR Policy 4:34 <http://www.sdbor.edu/policy/4-Personnel/documents/4-34.pdf> )

**Purpose and Scope of Liberal Arts:** While the university appreciated the review team’s comments relative to the liberal arts, it must be noted that the university has a legislatively mandated, focused mission to integrate technology across the curriculum. (See <http://www.dsu.edu/discoverDSU/mission.htm> ) As a consequence, DSU does not offer traditional liberal arts degree programs. But, several of the largest degree programs on campus (relative to student enrollments) are programs offered within the College of Arts and Sciences and which include a heavy emphasis on the liberal and fine arts: multi-media/ web development and computer graphic design.

**Delay in Graduation Because of Course Scheduling:** Since DSU’s comprehensive evaluation, the regental system has implemented a new, web-based student information system. This web-based student information system enables students to easily access their grades and current course schedule and to register for courses at any regental university. The system also includes an online degree audit function that allows students to quickly analyze their progress towards degree completion. The university continues to work to improve its course scheduling processes so that sequenced courses are offered in a timely manner and in sufficient quantity to meet student demand.

**Diversity Issues:** The Office of Diversity Services was formed approximately a year prior to the HLC comprehensive visit. Since that time, the office has experienced personnel changes and was without a director for a short period of time. However, a new director was hired in August 2004. He is very interested in grant writing and is currently working with a group of faculty to write a “Women in Technology” grant. The DSU Diversity Committee, a campus-wide committee, has also developed the five-year, Campus Wide Diversity Plan (See [http://www.dsu.edu/presidentoffice/new/diversity\\_plan.htm](http://www.dsu.edu/presidentoffice/new/diversity_plan.htm) ). In addition, the university has entered into a partnership agreement with Sinte Gleska University, a tribal university in South Dakota to seek grant funding for delivery of technology-based programs and for student and faculty exchange programs

**Faculty Workload Concerns:** The enrollment growth that DSU experienced in the late 1990’s (just prior to the HLM comprehensive review) has leveled off, as the table below indicates.

Total Student Enrollment	Fall 2000 1801	Fall 2001 2019	Fall 2002 2263	Fall 2003 2295	Fall 2004 2295
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In addition, DSU has re-written its faculty workload policy and has added formulas that better recognize the teaching load for faculty in lab-based disciplines and in the studio arts.

**2B. What specific actions or activities are you planning to take in order to address any accreditation concerns or challenges from the Commission's last comprehensive evaluation that are still active issues?**

While not directly addressed by the HLC evaluation team, the university has experienced a decrease in retention rates for first-time freshmen. This drop in retention is due, at least in part, to the increase in enrollment mentioned above and the subsequent strain put on student support services. DSU has been working with Noel-Levitz to address these retention issues and has recently received a Title III grant to fund many of the programs and institutional changes recommended by Noel-Levitz.

**3. Why does your institution wish to participate in AQIP? What benefits do you hope to gain as a consequence of participating? ( 300-500 words)**

**Participation in AQIP:** Dr. Douglas Knowlton became the 21<sup>st</sup> president of DSU in January 2004. (See <http://www.dsu.edu/presidentoffice> ) Prior to Dr. Knowlton's arrival, the university had developed a strategic plan but had not operationalized that plan. Through President Knowlton's involvement as a consultant for the Higher Learning Commission and his interest in quality improvement and data-driven decision making, the university has started to more actively evaluate the institution's effectiveness. For example, a campus-wide Institutional Effectiveness Committee (IEC) has developed a systematic process for the campus to use as a framework for evaluation of the campus' efforts relative to the strategic plan. (See <http://www.departments.dsu.edu/hr/newsite/policies/041000.htm> for a description of this committee's mission and membership.) As a result of the institution's renewed emphasis on strategic planning, each functional unit within the university has developed specific goals, outcomes, evaluation measures and standards of performance relative to the university's six strategic initiatives. The outcomes are evaluated on an annual basis using specific standards of performance. The institution is currently developing a new website for the institutional effectiveness process; the new home page can be viewed at <http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/NewHome.htm>.

It should also be noted that the DSU Strategic Plan (see [http://www.dsu.edu/strategic\\_plan.htm](http://www.dsu.edu/strategic_plan.htm) ) includes six strategic initiatives which are directly linked to the nine AQIP criteria. As a consequence, accreditation via the AQIP process is a logical choice for DSU since the AQIP processes align so closely with the University's focus on strategic planning and institutional effectiveness. (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC\\_AAQIP/table1aqip.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC_AAQIP/table1aqip.pdf) .)

**Benefits of participating in AQIP:** The AQIP process encourages the university to look forward and plan for the future, rather than focus on its past accomplishments. As mentioned above, the AQIP process is closely aligned to the University's current quality improvement efforts and its renewed focus on data-based decision making to guide institutional improvement. Like the institutional effectiveness program currently underway at the university, the AQIP

process encourages the university to invest in quality improvement initiatives and will ensure that the institutional effectiveness process continues throughout the next decade.

**4. Since broad understanding of, support for, and commitment to a continuous improvement approach and AQIP are essential for their success, what is the current level and extent of these elements in your organization? What is the evidence that key groups in your organization (e.g., Board, CEO, senior leaders, faculty, and staff) understand the nature of continuous improvement efforts and the demands of AQIP?**

**DSU's Commitment to Continuous Improvement:** As mentioned above, the university has committed both time and resources to the quality improvement process initiated by Dr. Knowlton and the Institutional Effectiveness Committee. IEC membership includes the President's Planning Council, the college deans and faculty and staff representatives from each functional unit within the university. (See <http://www.departments.dsu.edu/hr/newsite/policies/041000.htm>) This committee fulfills an advisory, monitoring, coordinating and regulatory role at DSU in planning and assessment matters and advises the President on the implementation and evaluation of the DSU Strategic Plan and all aspects of institutional assessment.

**Understanding of the AQIP Process within the University:** The president and members of his planning council (who are also members of the IEC) attended AQIP workshops during 2003 and 2004. The campus-wide Institutional Effectiveness Committee discussed quality improvement and the AQIP process during several of its weekly meetings and ultimately recommended to the president that the institution apply for AQIP membership. (See IEC meeting minutes <http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/iec.htm> ) In addition, the President's planning council and the university's Academic Council have expressed strong support for the AQIP process. In addition, the vice president for academic affairs presented an overview of the AQIP process to university faculty and staff during fall orientation in August 2004. The President's planning council also reviewed a document comparing PEAQ vs. AQIP and supported the IEC recommendation. Prior to the president's final decision, he spoke with representatives of other AQIP institutions to discuss the pros and cons of accreditation via AQIP.

**5. What are your plans for integrating participation in AQIP into your organization's current agenda? Are there major events on the horizon (e.g., a change in leadership, a major contract negotiation, budget cuts), and how are you planning to address them or integrate them into your quality efforts?**

**Plans to Integrate AQIP:** The university has already adopted many of the AQIP principles through its campus-wide institutional effectiveness process. (See <http://www.departments.dsu.edu/hr/newsite/policies/041000.htm> for specific information on the Committee's broad-based campus membership and mission.) The vice president for academic affairs chairs the IEC, which meets regularly throughout the academic year. The Committee's responsibilities include "annual evaluation of the progress toward achievement of the institutions strategic initiatives". If DSU is approved for AQIP membership, the IEC will be actively involved in monitoring the action projects and determining if the nine AQIP criteria are being met, since it is already responsible for evaluating the university's strategic initiatives and these initiatives are closely aligned with the AQIP criteria. (See

[http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC\\_AAQIP/table1aqip.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC_AAQIP/table1aqip.pdf) for a table aligning the processes.)

**Major Events on the Horizon:** The University was recently awarded a five-year Title III grant through the Strengthening Institutions program. The Title III grant, *Strengthening Student Success and Retention through Improved Information Access and Services*, focuses on student retention (which is also one of the university's strategic initiatives) and improved student support services. The activity objectives of the Title III grant are aligned with the strategic goals and action plans developed by the colleges and functional units during the institutional effectiveness process. Both the Title III objectives and the institutional effectiveness goals will be used to identify areas that qualify as AQIP action projects.

The University is also working with Noel-Levitz to develop comprehensive plans for student recruitment and retention. The activities associated with these comprehensive university plans have also been aligned with the institutional effectiveness process and will be used to select AQIP action projects. (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC\\_AAQIP/Table2aqip.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC_AAQIP/Table2aqip.pdf) for a table documenting the integration of these events into the AQIP process)

**6. How are you planning to organize your quality effort? Explain which current or new structures (committees, systems, etc.) you will use to organize and run your improvement efforts? What organizational systems, structures, and other resources (e.g., a quality council, quality "champions," task forces, training programs, etc.) currently exist or are planned that will sustain your continuous improvement efforts?**

**Organization of the Quality Effort:** Per DSU Policy 04-10-00, the campus-wide Institutional Effectiveness Committee "fulfills an advisory, monitoring, coordinating and regulatory role at Dakota State University in planning and assessment matters and advises the President on the implementation and evaluation of the DSU Strategic Plan and all aspects of institutional assessment." As mentioned above, the IEC will be responsible for monitoring the institution's quality improvement initiatives. The university's Retention Task Force will also serve a vital role in monitoring and organizing the AQIP processes. This task force is responsible for ensuring that the Title III activity objectives and the Noel-Levitz retention strategies are met. Because this is a small campus, the membership of the IEC and the Retention Task Force has significant membership overlap. Together, these two campus groups will be actively involved in facilitating the AQIP process. Both the Title III Project Director and the Title III Activity Director are members of both committees. (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC\\_AAQIP/Assessment\\_Organizational\\_Chart.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC_AAQIP/Assessment_Organizational_Chart.pdf) for the campus organizational chart for Title III.)

**Sustaining the improvement efforts:** DSU's Title III grant focuses on several areas related to quality improvement and student success. The 5-year grant (total funding \$1,805,593) includes activity components that link to several of the AQIP criteria. (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC\\_AAQIP/Table3aqip.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC_AAQIP/Table3aqip.pdf) for a table linking TITLE III activity objectives and DSU's Strategic Initiatives.) The University's Retention Task Force will monitor the Title III grant activities through 2009 to ensure that grant requirements and strategic goals are being met. The IEC will work closely with the Retention Task force to ensure timely completion of the AQIP action projects and evaluation of the

university's strategic initiatives. The task force will also be responsible for ensuring that the Title III activity objectives and the Noel Levitz retention strategies are met in a timely manner.

**7. Prior to attending a Strategy Forum, how are you planning to meet AQIP's requirement to conduct a preliminary self-assessment from a systems- or process-focused perspective, one that includes input from perspectives external to the organization?**

**Self Assessment Process:** During the past year, the institution has engaged in a preliminary self-assessment through the campus-wide institutional effectiveness process and as a result of the consulting contract with Noel-Levitz. As one of their first tasks, IEC members met with their colleagues within their functional unit to identify and document their strategic goals aligned with the university's strategic initiatives. (See <http://www.departments.dsu.edu/ie> for an overview of the process for documenting strategic goals for each functional unit. The plan is posted to the university's Intranet site to maintain security, please contact the AQIP liaison to obtain more information on the individual IEC plans.)

Through the IEC process, data related to each standard of performance will be evaluated on an annual basis to determine if the initiatives (outcomes) have been met. This strategic planning and evaluation process has also been incorporated into the university's budget process to ensure that data-based decision making is taking place and that funding is distributed based on this data.

**External Perspectives:** Over the past year, DSU has been working with Noel-Levitz to examine recruitment and retention issues and to develop an integrated and comprehensive retention plan for the university. As part of the planning process, over 40 faculty and staff attended a Noel Levitz retention workshop in November 2004. The workshop included an active discussion of retention data and resulted in development of 17 strategies to address retention over the next three years.

Since the last comprehensive evaluation, the Higher Learning Commission has evaluated the university and has approved delivery of a third graduate program (the master of science degree program in information assurance approved on August 16, 2004). And, DSU is a member of South Dakota's Electronic University Consortium which received accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission on May 10, 2004 (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/MSIA\\_Team\\_Report.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/MSIA_Team_Report.pdf) and [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/HLC\\_EUC\\_Team\\_Report.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/HLC_EUC_Team_Report.pdf) to review the HLC team reports.)

**8. Prior to attending a Strategy Forum (within the 12 months following admission), how will your organization identify issues, challenges, problems, or opportunities that might become Action Projects?**

The University has three processes in place that will help identify challenges that might become AQIP action projects:

- The institutional effectiveness process, which includes an annual evaluation of the functional units' progress on their strategic goals, will be used to pinpoint areas of continued university concern. These problem areas would, in all likelihood, be proposed as AQIP action projects

- The faculty and staff who attended the Noel Levitz retention workshop have already identified several strategies to improve student retention. One or more of these retention strategies may be identified as an action project during the next few years. (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/Noel\\_Levitz\\_Retention.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/doc/Noel_Levitz_Retention.pdf) for specific information on the retention strategies.)
- The Title III grant, *Strengthening Student Success and Retention through Improved Information Access and Services*, focused on 9 activity objectives that must be accomplished during the next five years. (See [http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC\\_AAQIP/Table3aqip.pdf](http://www.departments.dsu.edu/assessment/HLC_AAQIP/Table3aqip.pdf) for a table linking the Title III Objectives and DSU's Strategic Initiatives.) One or more of these activity objectives may be identified as an AQIP action project.

*When you submit this application, please name a formal AQIP Liaison for your organization — someone who is centrally involved in your quality initiative. (It need not be the CEO or chief academic officer. We intend to continue to communicate closely with your CEO, CAO, and other members of your leadership, but having someone we can call or email directly and regarding details of your relationship with AQIP will make our communications more efficient. You should inform AQIP whenever you change your AQIP Liaison.)*

**Contact Information for Organization's AQIP Liaison:**

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**Name and address to which AQIP should send invoice for application fee of \$275:**

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Before you email your *AQIP Participation Application* to [AQIP@hlcommission.org](mailto:AQIP@hlcommission.org), make certain it has been reviewed and approved by your organization's CEO. Then have the CEO sign the separate *Application Affirmation* form and fax it to AQIP at 312-263-7462. Questions? Call 800-621-7440 and ask for AQIP.