Establishing the Right Tone and Climate for a Constructive Quality Checkup Visit

A Quality Checkup should benefit the institution that hosts one. A visit is not intended as a trial, ordeal, or inquisition, but as an opportunity for a team of quality experts to talk seriously with the administrators, faculty, and staff of an institution committed to systematic quality improvement about the progress they are making, the obstacles they are overcoming, and the challenges they face. The visit should leave the institution proud of its achievements, optimistic about its ability to face problems and future challenges, and energized about the work it must tackle next. Checkup Visits are formative activities, and helping the institution to form positive attitudes and effective strategies are critical outcomes.

Checkup Visits also help inform AQIP as it gathers the evidence for its paramount summative activity, reaffirmation of each institution’s accredited status. Thus, every Quality Checkup team bears the duty of reporting its findings about the institution (Is there evidence that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation? Does it meet the expectations of the Commission’s Federal Compliance Program? Is it seriously engaged in continuous improvement?) But these judgments need to be framed and understood, both by the team and the institution, as part of a broader effort to help the institution progress and excel.

The following sample questions are from the AQIP Quality Checkup Guide and represent typical questions asked by AQIP Reviewers.

About mission, values, and vision

1. How well do the mission statements present the organization as something employees, students, stakeholders, and the community should identify with and admire?

2. How effectively does the institution use its mission statements as rallying points, uniting people so they feel satisfaction in working toward a common goal?

3. How do the mission statements focus on quality, continuous improvement, and stakeholder satisfaction?

4. How well do the mission statements stress the needs of employees with respect to their long-term value to the organization as a critical resource?

5. Do the mission statements take a long-term view, committing the organization to developing new programs and services for the future, and putting resources into training, research, and education?

6. Do they take into account all those concerned with the organization’s ultimate survival, such as stakeholders, vendors, funders, owners, and employees?

7. Will organizational purposes, as established in the mission statement, remain constant despite change in top management?
About collegiality and consensus decision-making

1. Collegiality derives from the word colleague, a member of a group of people united in working toward a common purpose. Are the institution’s common purposes clear enough to encourage collegiality?

2. Consensus refers to decisions or opinions reached by a group as a whole, and can occur only when the group is already composed of colleagues united in working toward a common purpose. How does the institution place value on and strive for consensus in decision-making?

About integrity and ethics

1. How have you identified the core values that define your identity as an institution?

2. How have you translated these values into behaviors that people can observe, emulate, avoid, and evaluate?

3. How do your values shape and inform the decisions you make?

About assessment of student learning

1. How are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, and degrees?

2. What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?

3. In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?

4. How do you ensure shared responsibility for assessment of student learning?

5. How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of assessment of student learning efforts?

About systematic quality improvement

1. Who is in charge of your quality initiative?

2. What power and influence does your quality initiative have?

3. How do you make sure you have the resources your quality initiative requires?

4. What do your people know about your quality initiative?

5. What arouses your quality initiative to action?

6. How does your quality initiative link with your other efforts?

7. How satisfied are you that your quality initiative is working as well as it could?