

Glossary

The Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) provides its Categories as tools for any institution to study itself using the principles and perspectives of continuous improvement. Explanations of some terms used the questions following each Category may be helpful, but AQIP understands that every institution has a unique culture, and that the particular language

an institution uses will reflect and embody that culture. Therefore AQIP encourages institutions to use the Categories with their broad purpose in mind – institutional self-assessment and improvement – and to avoid creating harmful complexity by attempting to narrowly define every term. There are no "trick questions" here and common sense interpretations of words should be sufficient.

Curricula The questions use *curricula* to refer broadly to programs, courses, lectures, discussions, laboratories, studio or shop activities, practica, internships, and all co-curricular activities the institution designs and makes available to promote learning.

Deployment How extensively a successful system or process is utilized throughout institutional operations critically affects overall performance. To maximize their value, effective processes must be *deployed* widely.

Design Questions using *design* ask you to examine and describe how your institution – or its component parts – structures general and specific programs: who does it, when do they do, how long it takes, what steps are involved, what information and resources are used as input to the design process, and what concretely emerges as the output (e.g., paper plans and specifications, written guidelines, tacit understandings among the participants, etc.).

Determine An institution can act consciously and deliberately set or define requirements, expectations, or processes, or it can allow its processes to be determined by chance, tradition, or other forces. Questions asking you how you *determine* something ask you to focus on the processes you use to reach these decisions, whether you do so deliberately or not.

Documentation Concrete, factual evidence that supports or proves an assertion constitutes *documentation*. This evidence is often, but not exclusively, in the form of documents or numerical indices. Undocumented beliefs, intuitions, and tacit understandings are often accurate, but they may not provide as solid a structure for shared understanding or future action as does documentation.

Expectations To improve, an institution must articulate its targets or desired outcomes for student learning and other activities. Educational *expectations* specify the learning—knowledge, skills, competencies, abilities, performance, values, habits, behaviors, attitudes, and preferences – that students will possess upon completion of their educational experience. Your expectations explain what you want your students to know and be able to do after their education that they did not know or could not do before, and when or for how long you expect students to exhibit the benefits of this acquired learning.

Goals For simplicity, AQIP does not distinguish between goals and objectives (or short- and long-term goals), and so uses the term objectives consistently in these questions. If you use goals and objectives differently, your responses should capture whatever distinctions you make within your institution.

Mission The term *mission* communicates a broad understanding of what an institution does, and whom it does it for. The verb *educate* captures an essential element in the mission of all higher learning institutions, but most mission statements will specify who the institution will educate (e.g., anyone, local high school graduates, would-be welders, physicians) at what levels (e.g., undergraduate, doctoral, etc.), in what localities, etc. In formally stating

these intentions, some institutions use *mission*, some use *purposes*, some *mission and purposes*. Some have *mission statements*, some *vision statements*, and some statements, separate or combined, describing both mission and vision. For simplicity, AQIP uses *mission* for all these, but feel free to translate any statement using *mission* into the words people use in your institution. AQIP distinguishes an organization's broad mission from the specific objectives it sets to achieve its mission. If your institution's mission statement includes both mission and objectives (and many college and university statements do), pay attention to how AQIP distinguishes these in its questions. Interpret *mission* to include vision, institutional values, guiding principles, core principles, and similar concepts.

Objectives AQIP uses this neutral word to describe the concrete actions people at an institution engage in so that the institution will accomplish its mission. In many settings, *objectives* is synonymous with *goals*, *purposes*, *targets*, *strategies*, *expectations*.

Outcomes AQIP uses this term to refer to the results actually achieved by a system or process, regardless of its objective or targets, and independent of the wishes or expectations of those involved. Often, *outcomes* refers to achieved student learning, but it can also refer to the measured performance of other institutional systems and processes.

Pedagogy The Category questions use *pedagogy* to refer to the instructional methods (including lectures, discussions, case studies, internships, group projects, and the application of technology to learning) that the institution uses to help students learn.

Process Often used interchangeably with *system* or *sub-system*, a process is an organized group of related activities that together create a result that is of value to stakeholders. Each of the nine AQIP Categories focuses on a group of interrelated processes, one of an institution's fundamental systems for serving its stakeholders.

Quality The degree to which a good or service meets the real, long-term needs of those for whom it was designed and to whom it was delivered determines its *quality*. Commonly used surrogates for quality include the reputation (or name-recognition) of the manufacturer of a product or service, its cost (or the cost of the resources used to produce it), or the socio-economic status of those who purchase it. Although popular because they are easily measurable, none of these proxies correlate directly with how well a product or service satisfies the requirements of those who use it, and so none can serve as reliable indices of quality.

Requirements Detailed *requirements* are the specifications or "necessary ingredients" around which a system or process is designed. *Requirements* may refer to the input a process requires, or to the outputs demanded (wanted, expected) by those the process serves. Often people use *specifications*, *expectations*, *needs*, *wants*, *desires*, and *requests* as synonyms for *requirements*.

Stakeholders An institution's *stakeholders* include all of the people and groups that have a critical stake or investment in the institution's operation and future, including students' families, employers, funding and oversight agencies, and other institutions and organizations with which an institution has established collaborative relationships. Certainly current and former students are primary stakeholders; therefore the Categories refer to "students and *other* stakeholders." An institution's students and other stakeholders judge whether it is a success or failure in meeting their particular needs, and these judgments ultimately determine the institution's achievement, its well-being, reputation, and its continuation or demise. Some institutions also see their own faculty, staff, and administrators as key stakeholders.