



Academic
Quality Improvement
Program
The Higher Learning Commission **NCA**

What AQIP Offers Higher Learning Organizations

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is unique among the regional US accrediting commissions because it provides two distinctive accrediting processes, AQIP (the *Academic Quality Improvement Program*) and PEAQ (the *Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality*), letting already-accredited colleges and universities choose whichever process best maintains their accredited status and delivers the most benefit to them. AQIP is *distinctive* in:

- admitting only organizations accredited for five years or more, not on probation or sanction, with a demonstrated desire to enhance success through systematic process improvement.
- employing the nine AQIP Categories to guide self-probing questions about an organization's key processes and results.
- helping each organization identify Action Projects that will drive assessable improvements and address its specific issues, opportunities, or challenges.
- expecting each organization to create a Systems Portfolio that publically presents the evidence that it is achieving its own goals, incorporating data comparing its performance with its own history, with its peers and competitors, and with best practice organizations.
- enabling an organization to use its Systems Portfolio to present evidence that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation.
- providing each organization periodically with a Systems Appraisal Feedback Report in which trained quality professionals identify actionable strengths and opportunities for improvement in the organization's processes, results, and enhancement strategies.
- assisting an organization in meeting the rising demands for accountability by making public its Action Projects and Systems Portfolio.
- creating frequent, meaningful interactions between an organization and the HLC through annual feedback on Action Projects, participation in Strategy Forums and Systems Appraisals every four years, and periodic Quality Checkups.
- reviewing every seven years each organization's cumulative record of evidence that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation to recommend reaffirmation of accreditation to the Higher Learning Commission.
- supporting an organization that is not making progress on improvement to develop and implement corrective actions, or to return to a more traditional accreditation process.

Both AQIP and PEAQ make sure that HLC-accredited colleges and universities focus on their missions, provide services that meet their students' and other stakeholders' needs, and work to improve the quality of the services they provide. And both AQIP and PEAQ require organizations to:

- pay the same annual dues, regardless of which accreditation program they use;
- file the same Annual Data Update report (with organizational financial indicators, sites, etc.);
- meet the same fundamental expectations for maintaining accreditation – satisfy the HLC's five *Criteria for Accreditation*;
- fulfill the same "Federal Compliance Program" expectations (e.g., invite public comment before visits, keep log of complaints, provide default rate information); and
- observe the same policies regarding organizational change and dynamics (e.g., obtain HLC permission for new sites, new programs).