1: Project Accomplishments and Status

GRCC Response:

We have focused our efforts this year on responding to several suggestions resulting from the HLC change visit in 2012. We have made progress in the following areas.

1. Help Desk

Our goal is to offer assistance to students taking on-line courses 24/7. We have made great progress in this area. The Help Desk is now available until 11:00 p.m. Mon-Fri and 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. on Sat/Sun. Once fall semester begins, the Help Desk will be 24x7 Mon-Friday and same hours as noted above for Saturday and Sunday. These extended hours are in response to the HLC recommendation and were tagged as a mandatory budget item for 13-14.

2. Authentication of student identity.

We are currently piloting a new system, Respondus Monitor to better document the identity of students taking on-line courses. Results of the pilot will be available later this year.

3. Uniformity and improved quality of on-line and hybrid courses

As a result of our newly ratified faculty contract, we are now in the process of creating a Master Course professional development curriculum. This will allow for consistent and uniform presentation of online and hybrid courses. The Online / Hybrid Certification Course (OHCC) also was revised in AY 2012-2013 to add more content and skill-building in copyright compliance and adherence to principles of universal design.

4. Centralized support for students

The Center for Teaching Excellence, Distance Learning & Instructional Technologies, and the Academic Tutoring Labs have collaborated so that students will now have a centralized service to provide support.
Reviewer’s Comments:

Grand Rapids Community College is to be commended for actively engaging in a purposeful effort to strengthen the college’s distance learning infrastructure. The College’s goals seem to be to improve student success by providing better support and technology services (Cat. 3. Understanding Students’ and Other Stakeholders’ needs), addressing quality needs in course construction and instructor (Cat. 8. Planning for Continuous Improvement) and the endless daunting question of student identification. The College has provided an overview of steps to be initiated and is making satisfactory progress on these goals.

2: Institution Involvement

GRCC Response:

This particular AQIP College Action Project seeks to respond to recommendations made by the Higher Learning Commission’s review of our Distance-delivered Education Program. That review was quite comprehensive, involving many faculty, staff, administrators, students, and senior management. With that in mind, the implementation team was comprised of full-time and adjunct faculty, administrators, and staff. Our team held monthly meetings that included follow-up email outlining accomplishments, assignments, next steps, and barriers. The project Champion also provided regular updates to the Provost and Deans.

- Reviewer’s Comments:

The Grand Rapids Community College Action Project team was a cross-departmental one and this is an excellent decision as this project impacts everyone at the College. The implementation teams seems to have been a scaled down version of the same with a single individual as Champion. What was unclear to this reviewer was the global nature of the communication of the information coming out of this committee to the other members of the campus community at large (Cat. 5 Leading and Communicating). Further, how was the data communicated beyond to external stakeholders?

- 3: Next Steps

GRCC Response:

Specific next steps include:

1. Deployment of the Master Course professional development training for faculty to create or revise courses that adhere to a common set of standards (Quality Matters Program).
2. Develop a process to renew the certification of faculty who are certified to teach online via their participation in the Master Course Curriculum.
3. Monitor the usage of tutoring labs for students seeking support for their work in online and hybrid courses. Determine action steps needed to respond to data collected.

4. Include professional development about assurance of copyright clearance in online environments both in the Master Course curriculum and stand-alone professional development.

5. Develop and present an Issue Paper to the GRCC Academic Governing Council seeking their support for Online Eligibility Requirements for students seeking to enroll in online courses. The acceptance of the issue paper by AGC will result in the establishment of a team to work on the issue and monitor team progress toward an acceptable resolution.

6. Develop a comprehensive E-Learning Plan for GRCC

**Reviewer’s Comments:**

Grand Rapids Community College is taking positive steps toward the development of solid distance learning infrastructure. Creating an engaging course on the internet, one in which the student feels the faculty member is there for them and they are part of a digital classroom is just not the same as the traditional brick and mortar sort. Faculty training and course design are key and the college is making good progress. Providing distance students the same services as their traditional student counterpart is requisite (Cat. 5 Leading and Communicating). Data collection and analysis will provide the College insights into the planning for services (Cat 7. Measuring Effectiveness). Consider consulting best practices of other like institutions or looking at other successfully completed action projects http://www.hlcommission.org/component/com_apdsearch/Itemid,126/. Grand Rapids Community College is making steady progress.

**4: Resulting Effective Practices**

**GRCC Response:**

GRCC has invested in membership to Quality Matters Program, a national benchmark for online course development. The Quality Matters Program provides professional development and other resources that increase the quality and rigor of online course design, development, and delivery. Further, the AQIP Team has proposed consideration of a policy or suite of policies that would limit the autonomy of students to self-enroll in an online course, without first showing evidence of ability to be successful in an online course or through completing a workshop or 1-credit course designed to promote skill in online learning environments. GRCC has also hired its first Director of Accessibility who, by position description, works closely with the College’s Center for Teaching Excellence. The Director of Accessibility contributes to faculty professional development efforts designed to help faculty develop online instruction that adheres to principles of universal design.

**Reviewer’s Comments:**
Grand Rapids Community Colleges has selected the use of a well established online course development program. This program offers guidelines that will most assuredly provide guidance in the development of a quality distance learning infrastructure. The proposed policies to improve student success are a bit unclear and while the administrative positions are in place, the data concerning this implementation is not included (Cat. 7 Measuring Effectiveness). This reviewer wonders about issues that may arise from issues with administrative software implementation, new challenges within enrollment services, and the creation and administration of the new course.

5: Project Challenges

GRCC Response:

The greatest challenge we have faced was securing ongoing budget for verifying and authenticating students’ identities while they are completing tests or other “high stakes” assignments in online and hybrid courses. However, the AQIP Team will seek funding from the Strategic Leadership Team to resolve this challenge.

- Reviewer’s Comments:

Sadly, despite the fact community colleges teach half of all students and touch the lives of countless more, limited budget is most often the standard operating mode. Of Grand Rapid Community College’s initiatives to improve distance learning success, it will be interesting to see the cost/benefit data on this aspect. This reviewer offer’s first, the HLC policy on its demands to be in compliance with Federal Regulations- http://policy.ncahlc.org/Federal-Regulation/practices-for-verification-of-student-identity.html. Second, included is an article on dishonesty in academics and the reviewer asks the College to consider whether it reviews student ethical practices equitably across delivery methods. http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring131/watson131.html. Finally, the quality journey for this action project may meaning examining best practices for assessing student learning, not synonymous with testing, and remaining fiscally responsible, accessible, and affordable to community college students.