

AQIP PARTICIPATION APPLICATION
Stark State College of Technology
North Canton, OH
May 4, 2006

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

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.

Core Component-1a: The organization's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization's commitments.

- The Strategic Planning Team spent nine months gathering input from over 700 internal and external constituents regarding Stark State College's mission, vision, and values. Based on the input received, our mission statement was revised to more closely represent the goals that we are striving to meet. The constituents included faculty members, staff members, students, Board members, alumni, and business and community leaders. A focus group session was conducted with each group, which contributed to the development of the mission statement, vision statement, core values, and three-year strategic plan for 2005-2007.
- The President's Cabinet reviewed the mission statement in March 2004 and it was approved by the Board of Trustees in September 2004.
- Stark State's mission reflects our commitment to high-value, student centered associate degree programs, professional development, individual learning, transferable education, career success, and community and business partnerships.
- Stark State's mission is shared with students and the community in the college catalog, student handbook and planner, and on the college's website.

Core Component-1b: In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.

- The mission focuses on high-value, student-centered associate degree programs and professional development. The emphasis on student-centeredness addresses the various diversities of our students.

- The mission emphasizes serving the community through business and community partnerships. It emphasizes transferable higher education for those students who choose to advance their education at other colleges and universities. It also focuses on career success in a global economy.

Core Component-1c: Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.

- As part of our strategic planning process, which began in 2003, various focus groups were held with the faculty, staff, students, Board members, and business and community leaders to discuss the mission of Stark State College. The process provided the opportunity for significant discussion, which resulted in a clear understanding, appreciation for, and support of the organization's mission.
- Stark State College's strategic planning process resulted in identification of five strategic goals, which reflect of our mission.
- Stark State College's strategic plan for 2005-2007 is mission-driven and includes Key Performance Indicators, which reflect the mission. In support of our strategic plan, the College will produce an Annual Performance Report that reflects the Key Performance Indicators the College believes to be critical indicators of our performance.
- An outcome of our strategic planning process was the identification of twenty-six operational projects that the College committed to accomplishing during our strategic plan for 2005-2007. These projects were based on the mission, vision, strategic goals, and strategic measures.
- Enrollment management and institutional effectiveness are evaluated with criteria that are mission driven.
- The mission statement and vision statement are posted throughout the college in classrooms and offices.

Core Component-1d: The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.

- Stark State College is in the process of implementing a shared governance structure to reflect our mission.
- Stark State College supports professional development for faculty members and staff members in support of our mission.

- The College collaborates with business and community partners in support of our mission.
- The College has an Institutional Effectiveness Committee that is charged with policy matters related to governance and quality and continuous improvement, including instructional process evaluation and stewardship of institutional resources.

Core Component-1e: The organization upholds and protects its integrity.

- Stark State College is in the process of reviewing the policies and procedures established by the College to ensure we are supporting integrity at all levels.
- The Board of Trustees oversees the operations of the College to ensure that integrity is maintained.
- Stark State College operates in accordance with local, state, and federal laws as they apply to the College.
- The College operates in accordance with the Ohio Board of Regents.
- The shared governance structure of the College allows faculty members and staff members numerous opportunities to become involved in the decision-making processes of the College. The Strategic Planning Team was composed primarily of faculty and staff, with faculty and staff members serving as the facilitators of the focus groups.
- Stark State College provides updated information about programs and services to the community through news releases, brochures and other printed information, and the College website.
- The College has a student grievance procedure, grade appeal policy, and employee grievance procedure to ensure that integrity is being supported at all levels.

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.

Core Component-2a: The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.

- The strategic planning process included an environmental scan with emphasis on local, state, and national trends.

- Stark State College's continuous planning process includes regular input from program advisory boards and community advisory boards.
- Stark State College serves as a catalyst for economic growth by bringing new degree programs and industries to our community, such as our fuel cell center and our biotechnology program.

Core Component-2b: The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plan for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

- The College's strategic plan includes a resource development plan to improve foundation fundraising and grants.
- An operational project of the College is to develop and implement a strategic staffing plan to assure proper staffing levels, so the College can carry out its mission and vision.
- The College has a strategic technology plan, which includes plans for maintaining technical excellence at Stark State College and integrating new technology into the teaching and learning environment.
- The College budget process includes input from faculty and staff to ensure quality in all departments.

Core Component-2c: The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness and clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.

- The Institutional Effectiveness Committee is charged with reviewing the governance structure and the quality of our improvement on an ongoing basis.
- The College has plans to develop and implement a comprehensive, written enrollment management plan that includes tracking of special populations, minorities, disadvantaged students, and dislocated workers.
- The College plans to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for persistence and student success through expanded support services, educational innovation, and tracking.
- The academic divisions of the College provide adequate instructional evaluation for all classes and in various delivery modes, such as web-based instruction, satellite instruction, and adjunct faculty.

Core Component-2d: All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill its mission.

- Stark State College's strategic planning goals are focused on the mission, vision, and values of the College.
- The budgeting process is linked to the strategic plan.
- Each division of the College has been charged with developing tactical plans to support and implement the strategic plan.

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.

Core Component-3a: The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.

- Student learning outcomes are designed by faculty for each course and program, which gives faculty the opportunity to implement assessment measures for their classes and programs.
- The College utilizes academic assessment and institutional performance data reported to the Ohio Board of Regents and program accreditation bodies to assist in assessing the teaching and learning environment. This data includes graduation rates, passage rate on licensure exams, job placement rates, retention rates, and transfer and articulation rates.

Core Component-3b: The organization values and supports effective teaching.

- Stark State College evaluates teaching for all classes.
- The College recognizes effective teaching through the Distinguished Teacher Award and through publicizing other teaching awards received by faculty members.
- The College encourages and supports faculty members remaining current in their field, on teaching and learning techniques, and on technology in the classroom.
- The College provides resources for faculty to participate in professional development activities and has a plan to improve professional development resources.
- The College is developing a professional development plan for full-time and part-time employees as part of our strategic plan.

- As part of the strategic planning process, the College has developed a program to recruit and retain adjunct faculty, which is integrated into the teaching and learning process.

Core Component-3c: The organization creates effective learning environments.

- The College has expanded its weekend college course offerings and enrollment to meet the needs of weekend students.
- The College has expanded the number of courses offered in the summer.
- The College received a TRIO grant to establish services for first-generation and/or low income students from the Bill Gates Foundation.
- Stark State College has increased the number of web-based course offerings.
- The College is collaborating with local high schools to increase the number of high school graduates enrolling at Stark State College immediately following graduation from high school.
- As part of the strategic planning process, the College plans to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for persistence and student services through expanded support services, educational innovation, and tracking.
- The College plans to develop and implement a comprehensive, written enrollment management plan, including tracking.
- Stark State College has a Disabilities Coordinator and has recently added a second Coordinator position. Both employees review the processes and systems for serving ADA students and make recommendations for improvement.
- The College is designing accelerated and concentrated associate degree and certificate programs.

Core Component-3d: The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

- The College has developed and implemented the strategic technology plan, including plans for maintaining technical assistance at Stark State College and integration of new technology into the teaching and learning environment.
- Stark State College has hired staff members to assist with increasing satellite campus enrollment.

- The College is developing and implementing a strategic staffing plan to assure proper staffing levels, in support of the College mission and vision.
- The College is optimizing facilities and resource utilization through scheduling, while integrating student and faculty needs.
- Stark State College provides resources to support the teaching and learning environment.
- Stark State College provides student with access to web resources through numerous computer labs throughout the campus.
- The Writing Lab and the Center for Accelerated Learning lab provide tutoring resources for students.
- The Learning Support Services department offers seminars and workshops on learning related topics, such as test anxiety and effective note-taking.

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.

Core Component-4a: The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.

- The faculty and staff members of Stark State College are recognized for their years of service at our annual Employee Recognition Dinner. The Distinguished Teacher and Distinguished Staff Member are recognized at the annual dinner as well.
- Each April, the accomplishments of students are recognized at the annual Student Awards Banquet. Scholarship recipients are invited to meet with their benefactors at the annual Benefactors Luncheon each October.
- A Distinguished Alumnus is acknowledged at each graduation ceremony in May.
- The College offers tuition reimbursement to employees who pursue higher levels of education.
- Stark State College provides resources to support ongoing professional development of faculty and staff members.
- The College's marketing department seeks opportunities for future stories in local media, which highlight the academic and career accomplishments of our students, graduates, faculty and staff members.

Core Component-4b: The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.

- Stark State College identified general education competencies that students should obtain prior to completion of their degree program.
- All degree programs have general education integrated into the degree requirements in order to expose students to an educational process that develops skills needed by every citizen and that serves the foundation for self-directed learners.
- Course requirements include service-learning projects, research projects, lab activities, and internships as activities that support the active learning process.

Core Component-4c: The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.

- The College has developed a Curriculum Committee that will review curriculum proposals, including course offerings, programs, and continuing education and community offerings, to ensure their usefulness.
- All academic programs have identified at least one course that is being offered as web-based or web-enhanced as a means to expose students to the technological side of education.
- Program advisory boards and program assessment bodies assist with the review of program curriculum to ensure that it remains current.

Core Component-4d: The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibility.

- Stark State College provides resources to support curricular activities that allow students to acquire, discover, and apply the knowledge gained in their courses.
- The College supports faculty who wish to pursue grant opportunities.
- The College supports ongoing professional development for faculty and staff members.
- Stark State College has established policies and procedures to support intellectual property rights and ethical procedures.

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

Core Component-5a: The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.

- The community was involved in the strategic planning process and in the environmental scanning process.
- Program advisory boards provide ongoing feedback to the programs regarding our ability to serve their needs and expectations.
- Stark State College offers customized training programs and continuing education programs as ways to meet the needs of external constituencies.
- The College has been a leading force in identifying occupations supported by a global, diverse, and technological society and worked with external constituencies to assist in bringing those occupations to the area, such as fuel cells and biotechnology.

Core Component-5b: The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.

- The College's strategic planning process reflects its commitment to provide services throughout the community.
- The student organizations at Stark State College develop projects that work with local organizations to support the cause of the community organization and the student organization.
- The College supports faculty and staff members serving on the boards of agencies in the community.
- The College provides financial support to faculty members interested in attending the Leadership Stark County program, which provides leadership training in support of community leadership succession planning.

Core Component-5c: The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.

- Stark State College has partnerships with a variety of external constituencies that depend on it for service, including health-related industries, business organizations, public service organizations, and engineering and informational technology industries.

- Stark State College has partnered with local high schools, as part of the state's technology preparation program, to provide dual-credit classes to high school students.
- The College has partnered with Timken High School to offer Early College High School.
- Stark State College has numerous articulation agreements with postsecondary institutions across the state to facilitate transfer of courses.
- The College partners with business and industry to offer programs that are specific to their needs.
- Faculty and staff members serve on the boards of local agencies in support of community development and growth.

Core Component-5d: Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.

- The College's facilities are available to and used by the community organizations that it serves.
- The College supports local artists by displaying their artwork in the college.
- The Advanced Technology Center provides customized training, contract training, and continuing education unit offerings. An operational project of the strategic planning process includes expanding the offerings and increasing the enrollment.

2. Answer both parts of this question candidly and substantively.

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?

One of the challenges was to develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach to institutional planning that incorporated technology, budgeting, and evaluation. Stark State College developed strategic and operational plans for 2001-2004. A progress report was submitted to the HLC and was accepted. In 2004, Stark State College hired a new president. In support of continuous quality improvement, we conducted a strategic planning process for 2005-2007 that involved all stakeholders. The stakeholders included faculty members, staff members, students, Board members, and business and community leaders. A focus group session was conducted with each group, which contributed to the development of the mission statement, vision statement, core values, and three-year strategic plan.

A second challenge stated that additional emphasis should be placed on determining student outcomes, documenting student learning within specific courses, and using assessment results to enhance student learning and to facilitate program improvements. Stark State College submitted a monitoring report that focused on assessment of student academic achievement. The report was accepted. In addition, we have added a Dean of Teaching and Learning position to support the value we place on assessment and to assist us with ongoing improvement in the teaching and learning environment.

A third challenge was to develop a comprehensive research effort that compiles and analyzes relevant data to be used for institutional improvement. Stark State College has advertised and is in the process of recruiting a Director of Institutional Research and Planning.

The College supported the suggestion to investigate expanding offerings into area high schools and communities and through dual enrollment and collaborative agreements. The College received an Early College High School grant in collaboration with Timken High School, which is located in an urban area of Canton, OH. The College has also worked with various geographic areas to offer courses at satellite locations. In addition, the College has collaborated with local high schools to increase the number of high school graduates enrolling immediately following graduation from high school.

Stark State College added a Vice-President of Student Services and Enrollment Management position. This position will assist with the development of a recruitment plan that combines the initiatives of marketing, student services, and the faculty. This position will also assist with a seamless approach to our student support programs and foster cross-divisional collaboration. In addition, this position will assist with the development of an institution-wide retention plan that incorporates a comprehensive integrated approach to promoting student success, with particular focus on the student's freshman experience.

The College supported the integration of technology into instructional delivery, which included the development of a smart room, online instruction, web-enhanced and web-based courses, and the addition of technology in some classrooms.

The College took steps to ensure that the addresses and telephone numbers of all accrediting associations were included in publications when referencing its standing with those bodies.

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?

Additional challenges were to develop a systematic process to evaluate the effectiveness of non-academic programs and services and to implement a system of periodic review to authenticate teaching credentials. Although some progress has been made in both of these areas, our plan is to more fully address them as part of the operational projects within the strategic plan for next year.

A suggestion for improvement was to consider the establishment of information resources on this campus rather than depending on the Kent State-Stark library. We are investigating improving the sharing of the Kent State-Stark library, which is now named the "Learning

Resource Center,” as well as adding a virtual library into our main campus and augmenting our college curriculum with the library resources. We will add the Higher Learning Commission’s recommendation to our operational projects within the strategic plan for next year.

To answer questions 3 - 8, present information that will allow the Admission Panel on Admissions to evaluate your organization’s understanding of academic quality improvement and its ability to benefit from participation in AQIP.

3. Why does your institution wish to participate in AQIP? What benefits do you hope to gain as a consequence of participating?

Stark State College began following a systematic approach to quality improvement with the development of our 2001-2004 strategic plans. We demonstrated support for continuous quality improvement with our 2005-2007 strategic plans. Stark State College is also implementing shared governance in order to support internal communication, organizational and decision-making structures, and planning and improvement processes. The AQIP process supports the continuous quality improvement of our strategic plan and its emphasis on shared governance. The use of AQIP to maintain our accreditation from the HLC is a logical step for us to follow. The current strategic plan at SSCT is already aligned with the nine categories of AQIP and the five criteria for accreditation. In addition, we have already given thought to possible action projects by identifying twenty-six operational projects in our strategic plan. Thus, a culture of continuous improvement has already been established at SSCT.

In the last four years, SSCT moved from a “small” sized college (under 5000 students) to a “medium” sized college (around 7000 students), according to the American Association of Community College taxonomy. Given the growth that we have already experienced and the growth that we’ve projected, AQIP will provide us with a system and process to plan for future growth, while remaining a high performing organization.

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?

In 2004, the Institutional Effectiveness Committee began evaluating models for the College to consider that would assist us with institutional effectiveness and continuous quality improvement. A member of our Board of Trustees assisted the Committee with the identification of models to consider. In 2005, the Institutional Effectiveness Committee conducted a thorough examination of the PEAQ and AQIP processes to determine which most closely aligned to the current culture of our college. The Institutional Effectiveness Committee concluded that AQIP is a process that we could use for institutional effectiveness and continuous quality improvement, while also serving as the process to maintain our accreditation from the HLC. At our March 2006 President’s Cabinet meeting, the Institutional Effectiveness Committee recommended to our Cabinet members that AQIP be the process we elect to follow. A presentation was given to the President’s Cabinet by the

chair of the AQIP process. The motion to accept AQIP as the process to follow for reaffirmation of our accreditation status was accepted unanimously by the members of the President's Cabinet. This decision was then passed on to the Board of Trustees. Our unanimous support for following the AQIP process included support for the resources needed for all AQIP activities.

Once AQIP was approved by the President's Cabinet as the model we should follow, we began the process of educating additional faculty and staff members on the AQIP process. The education process will continue this semester and into the next academic year. In order to gain additional training on AQIP, five members of SSCT attended the HLC Conference in Chicago in April 2006. Those who attended included two faculty members, an academic dean, the Vice-President for Advancement, Planning, and College Relations and the Provost.

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?

In support of assessment and continuous quality improvement in our courses and programs, we added a Dean of Teaching and Learning position. We are also supporting the AQIP process by adding a Director of Institutional Research and Planning and a Vice-President of Student Services and Enrollment Management. Each of these individuals has been, or will be upon hire, educated about the AQIP process and how it relates to the strategic plan and shared governance at SSCT. The Director of Institutional Research and Planning will serve as a key person in helping us use performance data to drive our continuous improvement from a systems-process perspective. The Dean of Teaching and Learning will assist with the measurement of student learning and will use the results to improve the teaching and learning 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?

In 2003, we added an Enrollment Management Task Force to assist us with the challenges we were experiencing as a result of our rapid growth. In order to gain a better understanding of student engagement, given our rapid growth, we conducted the Community College Survey of Student Engagement in 2005. The results of the survey will assist us with continuous quality improvement in student engagement.

We are in the process of revising the standing committees that report to President's Cabinet. The Institutional Effectiveness Committee will remain a standing committee but the charge has been modified to include governance and quality and continuous improvement, including instructional process evaluation and stewardship of institutional resources. We plan to split our current Academic Affairs committee into two committees, a Curriculum Committee and an Academic Standards and Procedures Committee. Both committees will assist with

policies that relate to continuous quality improvement in curriculum and academic affairs, including assessment. Our Student Affairs Committee will assist us with policy issues that are of direct concern to students. Our Safety Committee will assist us with policy issues related to safety on the main campus, in the classrooms, and at our satellite locations. The revision of these committees supports shared governance and will enhance our internal communication and understanding of systematic quality improvement. In addition, our focus on shared governance is promoting a culture of involvement and shared responsibility for academic quality.

We have also identified an AQIP Task Force Committee and a chair to lead us through the AQIP process. The AQIP Task Force Committee is composed of members whose positions entail that they be involved in the implementation of the action projects and the systems portfolio. The committee includes a combination of faculty, staff, and administrators with representation at each rank. The chair is also serving as the official organizational liaison with AQIP and the Commission. A sub-committee of the AQIP Task Force will attend the Strategy Forum. We have also devoted financial resources to support all AQIP activities.

In the fall semester of 2006, we will have those who have been trained in AQIP offer training sessions to the various departments throughout the college to ensure that everyone is trained in the AQIP process.

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?

We followed a systems-process focused perspective as part of our last strategic plan with input from over 700 faculty members, staff members, students, Board members, and business and community leaders. We identified twenty facilitators, who included both faculty and staff members. We conducted twenty-one strategic planning focus group meetings, using the SWOT analysis, with our internal and external constituents. We also conducted operational topic focus groups on parking, communication, scheduling, and professional development. The information for all of the focus groups was recorded on flipcharts and then compiled onto a SWOT analysis worksheet. The worksheets from the internal and external focus groups were then consolidated into one report, which summarized recurring themes. A team of writers was identified to draft the strategic plan and another team was identified to do an environmental scan. Both teams were composed of faculty members. The draft strategic plan was then taken to the Board of Trustees for their input. The writing team incorporated the Board of Trustees input into the plan and produced a final strategic plan. The strategic plan was presented to the President's Cabinet at the September 2004 meeting. In October of 2004, a meeting was held that combined the writing team of the strategic plan and the Enrollment Management Task Force Committee. At this meeting, strategic measures were identified for each strategic goal.

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?

Part of our strategic plan included identification of twenty-six operational projects. Some of those projects have already been completed. Three or four projects will be selected from the remaining projects to become action projects. Thus, the action projects have already been identified. During the summer, the chair of the AQIP Task Force Committee will meet with the President to identify the operational projects remaining to be completed. When the faculty return in the fall, focus group meetings will be conducted with each division to identify the top four operational projects they feel should be addressed as part of the AQIP process. The focus groups will also be conducted with staff members from each division. The top operational projects identified will then serve as our action projects. When we begin work on the action items, various mediums will be used to keep everyone updated on our progress. These mediums will include email, presentations, and the posting on information on our Intranet.

Contact Information for Organization's AQIP Liaison

Dr. Lada Gibson-Shreve

Salutation, Name

Chair of the AQIP Task Force Committee/Associate Professor of Social Science

Job Title of Liaison

Stark State College of Technology

Organization Name

6200 Frank Avenue NW

Office address

North Canton, OH 44720

City, State, Zip

330-966-5457, X4326

Office phone(s) and extension(s)

330-494-0571

Office fax

LGibson@starkstate.edu

Email address

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

Dr. John O'Donnell, President

Salutation, Name, Title

Stark State College of Technology

Organization Name

6200 Frank Avenue NW

Office address

North Canton, OH 44720

City, State, Zip

Before you email your *Participation Application* to AQIP@hlcommission.org, make certain it has been reviewed and approved by your organization's CEO.

UNDERSTANDINGS AND EXPECTATIONS OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

A Participating Organization is one that elects to maintain its accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission by regularly providing the Academic Quality Improvement Program with evidence of the vitality of its academic quality improvement initiative and the results that initiative has achieved. Participation is subject to approval by AQIP and the Commission. The Academic Quality Improvement Program's goal is to create a culture, a set of shared understandings, with its Participating Organizations that will:

1. *enhance communication, ongoing learning, and public understanding of systematic academic quality improvement;*
2. *encourage systems-thinking and provide resources that will stimulate continuous improvement and accountability;*
3. *promote, within and among organizations, a culture of involvement and shared responsibility for academic quality, and*
4. *develop the critical judgment, skills, and capabilities required for systematic quality improvement.*

These understandings and expectations relate formal points of agreement between AQIP and the organization that establish the conditions for this accreditation process.

To support Academic Quality Improvement Program operations and activities, the organization will:

- identify an official organizational liaison with AQIP and the Commission, notifying AQIP promptly of temporary or permanent changes affecting this liaison role;
- participate in all scheduled AQIP activities (e.g., Strategy Forum, Systems Appraisal, Annual Updates, Checkup Visit, Reaffirmation of Accreditation), which are essential to the operation of this accreditation process and required by AQIP for its accrediting determinations;
- inform AQIP promptly of major organizational conditions, events, or changes that could negatively affect the organization's viability, operations, or quality improvement efforts;
- pay fees charged for participation in AQIP Workshops, Appraisals, and other activities promptly; and

- continue to meet the Commission's *Criteria for Accreditation*, responding promptly to any inquiries the Commission receives regarding possible violations of these fundamental Commission membership expectations, and observing other Commission policies and obligations of membership (e.g., concerning organizational change and dynamics, annual report, complaints, public information, etc.).

To respond to an organization's needs and requirements, the Academic Quality Improvement Program, its staff, and the Higher Learning Commission will:

- collaborate with a participating organization to help it accomplish its goals;
- make information about an organization public only with the organization's consent;
- respond energetically, quickly, and courteously to requests by a Participating Organization for assistance or information in all quality-related areas;
- keep program costs and the fees charged to a Participating Organization as low as possible, thereby promoting opportunities for broader involvement in AQIP's activities and services; and,
- share information on organizational quality improvement by identifying, evaluating, validating, and sharing best and innovative practices discovered by participating and partnering organizations.

The Higher Learning Commission agrees to:

- maintain the organization's AQIP participation so long as the organization continues to take part in AQIP activities and provides AQIP with credible evidence justifying continuation;
- indicate in the organization's Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) under a section titled "Next Reaffirmation of Accreditation," the scheduling of the date for a reaffirmation seven academic years in the future;
- transition the organization, after appropriate notice and consultation, to the standard accreditation process if (1) the organization so requests, (2) the Commission has evidence that the organization is no longer continuing in its good faith effort to participate in AQIP according to the terms of these understandings and expectations; or (3) AQIP review for Reaffirmation of Accreditation shows a lack of progress in continuous quality improvement and that the organization or the Commission would be better served by a standard process;
- if the organization has participated in AQIP for five years or more, to schedule its next comprehensive visit five years after the year it leaves AQIP; or
- if the organization has participated in AQIP for fewer than five years, to schedule its next comprehensive visit either for the year that it was originally scheduled before the

organization joined AQIP, or at least one full year after the year the organization ceases to be an AQIP participant, whichever is later.

The Commission continuously re-examines its programs and processes to make changes and corrections where appropriate. In the event the Commission makes changes that will affect this agreement, the Commission agrees to notify Participating Organizations in advance of implementation and allow a reasonable period of time for organizations to make appropriate adjustments or request transition to a standard process.

APPLICATION AFFIRMATION

I affirm that the application emailed to AQIP@hlcommission.org presents our institution accurately, and that we agree, if admitted, to abide by the *Academic Quality Improvement Program Understandings and Expectations* and to:

- commit to a systematic initiative to improve continuously our academic and related processes and their results;
- engage faculty, staff, and other constituents in defining and implementing quality improvement efforts so that an institution-wide culture and understanding of systematic academic quality improvement evolves;
- promote and provide broad-based involvement in activities and in professional development that builds awareness and understanding of the principles and practices of systematic quality improvement at all levels of the institution; and
- establish systems for communication across staff, students, and other constituents and stakeholders regarding our institution's involvement and progress in systematic Academic Quality Improvement.

Signature of Organizational CEO

Date

Dr. John O'Donnell, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Stark State College of Technology

Name of Organization

6200 Frank Avenue NW

Address

Address

North Canton, OH 44720

City, State of Organization, ZIP code

**Signature page was faxed to 312-263-7462 on Thursday, May 4, 2006.