

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### A. CONCLUSIONS

Niagara College focuses its *Program Quality Assurance* efforts on establishing and implementing clear policies/practices and key processes and on fulfilling its vision statement to “prepare students to pursue and achieve career success”. Its commitment to student success and to valuing its employees and partners was evident throughout the Self-study and during the site visit.

The College in its Self-study recognized its strengths, described its actions and improvements, and outlined its goals for program quality and assurance. The Panel found that the Niagara College Self-study identified wide-ranging, thorough, and transparent practices, (i.e. policies) in support of quality assurance and improvement. The policies are accessible through electronic means with related documents available in college offices. When reviewing the Self-study and during the site visit, it became clear to the Panel that the College program-quality practices and processes work together effectively and holistically to provide strong guidelines and support for quality learning. Also clear was that the College delivers programs that meet students’ career needs, support their success, and provide them with learning pathways, and that meet the needs of industry and the Niagara College broader community.

The College quality assurance process, program reports every three years and program reviews every six years, and its goal to have yearly curriculum reviews completed by every program demonstrate that Niagara College is committed to quality assurance. The College impressed the Panel with its use of external reviewers to evaluate the program review the Self-study. The Panel sees this practice as a strong commitment to quality assurance.

The Panel observed that the College has developed and implemented formal quality assurance practices (policies) and processes and is expanding these within its college community. While the College Self-study identified the formal processes, during the site visit it became evident that also occurring were informal processes that supported quality.

In its Self-study, which was thorough, thoughtful and forthright, the College identified ten Action Items for growth. The Panel believes that these Items are the result of careful reflection by the College on its practices and processes. While recognizing the current practices of the College as being strong, after listening to stakeholders and reviewing the Self-study, the Panel suggests to the College that it could strengthen its quality assurance efforts in four ways. The Panel recommends that the College provide to the review teams consistent, standard data with data analysis for use in the program reports and reviews. Secondly, the Panel affirms that the College needs to make its review and report processes more inclusive and so should embed in the program review and report processes consultation with non-vocational curriculum providers (e.g. general education, math, English), and student and support services providers. Thirdly, the Panel

encourages more follow-up in the QA process through a) the continuation of the development of a tracking and reporting process for recommendations arising from reviews and reports, b) the subsequent communication of the results of the total recommendation-implementation process, and c) expanded formal sharing of identified best practices. Finally, the Panel suggests that the College establish and publish a cycle for the review of its policies and note on the policies the dates of implementation, review and revision.

The Panel, while guided by the five QA criteria established for the audit, and focused, in particular, on the policies and processes that assure and improve quality, wishes to comment on some less direct indicators of quality at Niagara College. The Panel believes that the College supports quality assurance through its relationships with the Board of Governors and Program Advisory Committees, its human resources (faculty, staff, and administrators), its effective standing committees, its human resource and professional development practices, and its strong student services and learning support structures such as, but not limited to, its Library and Learning Resources, Student Services including Counselling, First Nations Student Services, and Special Needs, International Students, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Office, Admission and Scheduling practices, Information Services, Centre for Education and Curriculum Development, and its Educational Pathways, Development and Quality centre. During their focus groups, students were passionate that the faculty and other College employees engaged and supported them in learning and that their concerns and suggestions for quality were valued. All stakeholders interviewed looked to the students as their central focus for quality and provided examples of how they “put students first”. Recognizing the changing face and expectations of learners, Niagara College uses technology extensively to provide student advisement that is available twenty-four hours per day, *Course Information Sheets*, *Blackboard* in almost 100% of courses, the *PeopleSoft* information system for grades input and access, open-access computer laboratories, almost 100% multi-media equipped rooms across two campuses, hybrid courses and an e-learning certificate. Other indicators that quality is important to the College include its website and its written materials such as the *Career Guide*, *Degree Programs*, *At-a-Glance*, and *Continue*. The College supports its internal community (for example, annual *Day of Reflection*, *Awards of Excellence*, *Start-Right*, accommodation for Canadian Forces reservists, student financial aid, bursaries and scholarships, Student Administrative Council’s Food Bank, student technology support) and its broader community, through such efforts as the construction program’s yearly *Habitat for Humanity* project.

Niagara College has achieved much success in its program quality assurance practices and processes and has much to celebrate, beginning, as the College would insist, with its students and graduates. The Panel commends Niagara College for its successes and thanks the College for inviting us to review its program quality assurance processes.

**B. OVERALL FINDINGS OF PANEL**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Partially Met</b>	<b>Not Met</b>
Criterion 1	Met		
Criterion 2		Partially met	
Criterion 3	Met		
Criterion 4	Met		
Criterion 5		Partially met	

**C. COMMENDATIONS**

In the Self-study, the College identified its strengths, areas for continuous improvement, exemplary practices and documentation, initiatives taken to address improvement, and its implementation plans and priorities, and outlined a *Summary Action Plan: Top Ten College Action Items*, which the Panel supports through its review of the Self-study and from the information received from focus groups.

In reviewing the College-identified strengths and exemplary practices and listening to its people, the Panel wishes to recognize the following as exemplifying leadership in quality assurance and improvement.

Self-study

*The Panel found the Self-study to be comprehensive, thorough, and forthright. The methodology used to develop the Self-study was thoughtful, used a variety of resources effectively, and clearly documented the College commitment to align the Quality Assurance policies and processes with student success.*

Program Review - External Reviewers

*The Panel commends the College for its use of external reviewers in its Program Reviews. The Panel believes that the College practice of having external reviewers evaluate the program Self-study during the Program Review cycle strengthens the Quality Assurance and Improvement process and is a practice to be emulated.*

### The Program Report and Program Review Cycle

*The Panel commends the College's Quality Assurance and Improvement cycle that requires program practices be critically looked at and reported on every three years, alternating between the Program Reports and the comprehensive Program Reviews.*

#### **D. AFFIRMATIONS**

The Panel recognizes Niagara College for its comprehensive Self-study, in particular, the identification of its strengths, areas for continuous improvement, exemplary practices and documentation, initiatives taken to address improvement, and action plans and priorities. The *Summary Action Plan – Top Ten College Action Items* that the College provided for the Panel articulated the College's goals and the Panel encourages the College to pursue and implement these Action Items.

The Panel after reviewing the data and evidence outlined in the Self-study and received from focus groups during the site visit, affirms the following statements from the Self-study:

##### Criterion 2

- *“Consistent integration of the General Education component into some programs could be enhanced to reflect the most current General Education themes”* (Self-study p. 9). The College states that it will undertake a review of the general education in fall 2007 (p. 9).
- *“More proactive, consistent and collaborative curriculum mapping to include vocational, General Education and Essential Employability Skills outcomes”* (Self-study p.9).

As noted above, the Panel affirms that the College needs to make its review and report processes more inclusive and so should embed in the program review and report processes consultation with non-vocational curriculum providers (e.g. general education, math, English), and student and support services providers.

##### Criterion 5

- *“The action plan follow-up is still in the implementation stage”* (Self-study p. 21).

In support of this statement, the Panel noted above the need for more follow-up in the QA process through a) the continuation of the development of a tracking and reporting process for recommendations arising from reviews and reports, and b) the subsequent communication of the results of the total recommendation-implementation process, and c) expanded formal sharing of identified best practices.

## **E. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The College, through its Self-study, has identified its strengths as well as areas for continuous improvement. The Panel encourages the College to continue with its implementation of those improvements. As a further, the Panel makes the following recommendations to the College.

- The Panel recommends that the College provide to the report and review teams consistent, standard data and data analysis for use in the program reports and reviews. The provision of the data will contribute to the efficiency of the report and review teams, lessen the burden on them and contribute to more effective reports and reviews.
- The Panel recommends that the College establish and publish a cycle for the review of its policies and note on the policies the dates of establishment, review and revision.