



Ontario College Quality Assurance Service

*Service de l'assurance de la qualité des
collèges de l'Ontario*

Program Quality Assurance Process Audit

Final Audit Report – Executive Summary

NORTHERN COLLEGE

May 2009

This report represents the findings of the Program Quality Assurance Process Audit for Northern College; the on-site portion of the audit was performed during the period **May 4-6, 2009**.

This report has been prepared, reviewed, and accepted by all parties to the Audit, including the college personnel, members of the Review Panel, and the Management Board of the OCQAS. The signatures of the representative parties demonstrate their acceptance of the content of this Report.

For the College:

Signature

Date

For the Review Panel:

Signature

Date

For the Management Board:

Signature

Date

Review Panel Membership

Chair: Hans van der Slagt, Consultant, Vancouver, British Columbia

Members: Dr. Christine Wihak, Director PLAR, Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, British Columbia

Janice Priest, Dean, Centre for Teaching and Learning;
Georgian College, Barrie, Ontario

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. CONCLUSIONS

The Audit Team finds that Northern College has, substantially and satisfactorily, met Criteria 1, 3 and 4 and partially met Criteria 2 and 5.

It was clear, throughout the on-site portion of the audit, that students feel they are taking part in a valuable educational experience at Northern College and that their professors, support and administrative staff and systems are ready, willing and able to assist students in pursuing their academic goals. Similarly, professors appear to be motivated and anxious to provide the best possible educational experience for their students. A significant number of members of the advisory committees, for the two programs reviewed in detail, attended the meetings with the Audit Team. Again, these individuals showed a strong and long-standing commitment to the College and the programs for which they act as advisors.

While there are a number of areas where college-wide policies and processes have yet to be put in place, this seems to be well understood, particularly at the senior level of the College, and there is every indication that such policies and processes will be put in place in the near future. The plans that have been prepared to address the gaps identified by the College and the Audit Team are a clear indication that action will be taken.

B. OVERALL FINDINGS OF PANEL

Criterion	Met	Partially Met	Not Met
Criterion 1	X		
Criterion 2		X	
Criterion 3	X		
Criterion 4	X		
Criterion 5		X	

C. COMMENDATIONS

The Audit Team identified a number of areas where Northern showed exemplary practice and leadership in the field of quality assurance and improvement. A number of these would be worthy of emulation by other colleges. A short description of each follows:

- Although Northern is a relatively small college, it maintains three full-service campuses in addition to the main Porcupine (at Timmins) Campus; the College has worked particularly assiduously to provide consistent program delivery and support services at all four campuses; for example, the College has developed innovative ways to deliver programming (video, audio and web-based delivery) particularly where enrolment levels preclude the traditional classroom setting.
- The College should be congratulated on its ability to maintain highly functioning program advisory committees with members who show a dedicated and long-term commitment to the College; meetings are held frequently and attendance is generally high; as well, a considerable amount of time is devoted to significant program issues.
- The College showed considerable initiative by providing most of the evidence required by the Audit Team in a DVD format making it much easier and more convenient to locate material as well as reducing the amount of physical material that needed to be handled by Audit Team members.
- A special commendation is also extended to the staff in the Social Work program who organized their material very effectively; in essence the Audit Team was able to perform an entire mini-audit of the program quality assurance processes at Northern using this program as a sample of one.

D. AFFIRMATIONS

Northern has prepared a “Program Quality Assurance Process Audit Gap Identification and Resolution Strategy 2009” identifying seven areas that require further work.

The gaps to be addressed include:

- Standardization and central control of program maps
- Provision of general education courses to conform to MTCU requirements
- Uniform application of PLAR across the College
- Improvement in the measuring tools used to support the choice of teaching methods

D. AFFIRMATIONS, continued

- Modification of processes to ensure that evaluation of faculty takes place on a consistent basis across the institution

- Advancement of professional development opportunities related to and derived from evaluations for part-time staff and part-time faculty
- Development of a college-wide process for program reviews

The Audit Team is in agreement with the gaps identified by Northern and congratulates the College for identifying these issues in a clear manner and for developing realistic work plans to address them.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Audit Team identified several areas that will assist in improving program quality at the College. A short description and rationale for each of these items follows:

- While the College has provided two charts outlining its proposed PQAP Annual Audit and Five-Year Audit, the processes outlined require further refinement:
 - the processes outlined, particularly in the five-year Audit, seem focused primarily on program viability concerns rather than program quality issues
 - explicit consideration should be given to incorporating issues around performance feedback, professional development, teaching and learning research, program mapping, environmental scans and other issues that impact on program quality
 - other Ontario colleges that are more advanced in their development of program review and quality assurance processes are typically very ready and willing to share their processes with sister colleges
 - it should also be noted that there are examples of excellent quality assurance practices within some of the College's own programs and schools that provide an excellent starting point
- While the College is to be commended for continuing its funding for a PQAP Project Leader, the position is currently part-time with the incumbent continuing to be responsible for a number of other functions; consideration should be given to strengthening the PQAP function by providing additional resources to support this function