

**Northwest Missouri State University: Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Reaffirmation Review Final Report  
11/12/2018: Abridged Version**

The full HLC Reaffirmation Review Final Report is being shared with the Board of Regents, the Northwest Leadership Team, and the executive leadership of the Faculty Senate, Staff Council and Student Senate. Further, it is being sent to all employees via All That Jazz (copied to the Northwest Foundation and Northwest Alumni Association) and will be uploaded to the HLC page on the University's website.

This abridged version includes a summary of the report, re: Assurance Argument and Federal Compliance Review.

Regarding the Assurance Argument, Northwest met 18 of 21 Core Components with the other 3 – Core Components 2E (faculty/staff training related to research integrity), 3A (Learning Goals), and 4B (Assessment) – requiring an Interim Report embedded in Northwest's Year 4 Assurance Review (2022-2023 Academic Year). There are no sanctions and Northwest may choose its Pathways approach.

Regarding the Federal Compliance Review, all components meet HLC requirements and there are no follow-ups required.

### **Assurance Argument**

Note: The full final report includes 5 Criteria with Core Components – Rating, Evidence and Interim Monitoring (if applicable) + a Summary of each Criterion.

#### **1 – Mission: The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.**

##### **Core Component 1.A, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution's mission is broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations.

1. The mission statement is developed through a process suited to the nature and culture of the institution and is adopted by the governing board.
2. The institution's academic programs, student support services, and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.
3. The institution's planning and budgeting priorities align with and support the mission. (This sub-component may be addressed by reference to the response to Criterion 5.C.1.)

##### **Core Component 1.B, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The mission is articulated publicly.

1. The institution clearly articulates its mission through one or more public documents, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans, or institutional priorities.
2. The mission document or documents are current and explain the extent of the institution's emphasis on the various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, application of research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development, and religious or cultural purpose.
3. The mission document or documents identify the nature, scope, and intended constituents of the higher education programs and services the institution provides.

##### **Core Component 1.C, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution understands the relationship between its mission and the diversity of society.

1. The institution addresses its role in a multicultural society.
2. The institution's processes and activities reflect attention to human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

##### **Core Component 1.D, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution's mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.

1. Actions and decisions reflect an understanding that in its educational role the institution serves the public, not solely the institution, and thus entails a public obligation.
2. The institution's educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.
3. The institution engages with its identified external constituencies and communities of interest and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.

**2 – Integrity – Ethical and Responsible Conduct: The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.**

**Core Component 2.A, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it establishes and follows policies and processes for fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff.

**Core Component 2.B, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public with regard to its programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control, and accreditation relationships.

**Core Component 2.C, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The governing board of the institution is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and to assure its integrity.

1. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.
2. The governing board reviews and considers the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.
3. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties when such influence would not be in the best interest of the institution.
4. The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the administration and expects the faculty to oversee academic matters.

**Core Component 2.D, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution is committed to freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.

**Core Component 2.E, Rating: Met with concerns; Interim Monitoring: The team recommends an Interim Monitoring report that addresses the concerns to be embedded in the institution's Year 4 Review.**

The institution's policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, students and staff.

1. The institution provides effective oversight and support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff, and students.
2. Students are offered guidance in the ethical use of information resources.
3. The institution has and enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

**3 – Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support: The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.**

**Core Component 3.A, Rating: Met with concerns; Interim Monitoring: The team recommends an Interim Monitoring report that addresses the concerns to be embedded in the institution's Year 4 Review.**

The institution's degree programs are appropriate to higher education.

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded.
2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for undergraduate, graduate, postbaccalaureate, post-graduate, and certificate programs.

3. The institution's program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).

**Core Component 3.B, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs.

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution.
2. The institution articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.
3. Every degree program offered by the institution engages students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; in mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.
4. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity of the world in which students live and work.
5. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their programs and the institution's mission.

**Core Component 3.C, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

1. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance; establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning.
2. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial programs.
3. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.
4. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.
5. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.
6. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising, and co-curricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained, and supported in their professional development.

**Core Component 3.D, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution provides support for student learning and effective teaching.

1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its programs and the needs of its students.
4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites, museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).
5. The institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.

**Core Component 3.E, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment.

1. Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.
2. The institution demonstrates any claims it makes about contributions to its students' educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, and economic development.

**4 – Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement: The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.**

**Core Component 4.A, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.
2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.
3. The institution has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It assures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.
5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution assures that the degree or certificate programs it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and Americorps).

**Core Component 4.B, Rating: Met with concerns; Interim Monitoring: The team recommends an Interim Monitoring report that addresses the concerns to be embedded in the institution's Year 4 Review.**

The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.
2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

**Core Component 4.C, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose

measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

**5 – Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness: The institution’s resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.**

**Core Component 5.A, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution’s resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

1. The institution has the fiscal and human resources and physical and technological infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
2. The institution’s resource allocation process ensures that its educational purposes are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations to other areas or disbursement of revenue to a superordinate entity.
3. The goals incorporated into mission statements or elaborations of mission statements are realistic in light of the institution’s organization, resources, and opportunities.
4. The institution’s staff in all areas are appropriately qualified and trained.
5. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring expense.

**Core Component 5.B, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.

1. The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; it provides oversight of the institution’s financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
2. The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students—in the institution’s governance.
3. Administration, faculty, staff, and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.

**Core Component 5.C, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning.

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities.
2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting.
3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity. Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution’s sources of revenue, such as enrollment, the economy, and state support.
5. Institutional planning anticipates emerging factors, such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.

**Core Component 5.D, Rating: Met; No interim monitoring recommended.**

The institution works systematically to improve its performance.

1. The institution develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations.
2. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts.

**Review Summary**

Interim Report(s) Required, Due Date 9/1/2022

## **Report Focus**

The team is recommending an interim report to be embedded in the institution's Year 4 Review, and has specific recommendations related to the three Core Components that were met with concern.

First, regarding Core Component 2.E., the notices the institution has received for not meeting requirements related to financial aid, on more than one occasion, are troubling. The institution is encouraged to implement corrective measures in this area. In addition, institutional attention is required to ensure that training for faculty, staff, and students, regarding the ethical conduct of research, is provided systematically and then monitored.

Second, regarding Core Component 3.A., the team was unable to find an articulation of distinct institutional learning goals for its broad credential types including graduate, post-baccalaureate, and post-graduate degrees and certificates. The undergraduate learning outcomes appear to be applied to all credential types. Although the Graduate School statement of mission does contain graduate goals, Northwest faculty and administrators are encouraged to work collaboratively to develop clear and distinct goals for all broad credential types. Also, Northwest has not verified or documented that the quality of its programs are consistent across all modes of delivery (online, face-to-face, and blended). The university should implement appropriate assessment strategies that will both ensure learning outcomes are the same for all delivery modes and that the resulting student outcomes are equivalent.

Third, regarding Core Component 4.B., based on the assurance argument and the institution's QI report, the team believes there is still work to be done regarding the institution's assessment system and use of data. The program assessment plans contain some programs with clear, measurable learning outcomes (LOs) and more nuanced measurement scales that could provide useful models as other programs seek to improve their LOs. Northwest also may benefit from more carefully considering how it aggregates its data, which would encourage more focused work on assessment processes. Sharing and learning from some of the best practices in assurance of student learning that already exists at Northwest could lead to more robust assessment plans and processes for a greater number of Northwest's programs.

## **Conclusion**

The visiting team of five members from the HLC Peer Corps concluded that three Core Components were met with concern during the Open Pathway Re-accreditation Review conducted on-site at Northwest Missouri State University on October 15 and 16, 2018. The three Core Components identified as met with concern are 2.E., 3.A., and 4.B. Our concerns and recommendations are included in the Interim Report section, however, the team has three additional comments.

First, it was noted by all team members during the review that the evidence provided in the institution's assurance argument was sparse. We had to request additional evidence prior to the visit, which was quickly uploaded by the ALO to the Addendum section of the assurance site, and once on campus, we requested more evidence, which was also quickly provided to the team. The institution had what we needed, when we asked, so it was not a matter of evidence availability, but seemed to be a matter of infusing the evidence into the report up-front. For the next review, Northwest is encouraged to provide plentiful evidence in their report, particularly because the Year 4 Review will not be conducted on site and the next review team will need all pertinent evidence in the report to accurately confirm progress. Evidence needs to be prominent, targeted, and infused into each Core Component, particularly the three that were met with concern.

Second, it was noted by all team members that Northwest is gathering data, on many fronts, and it is data connected to its strategic plan and priorities, yet there was some concern about whether or not the data and results are systematically used to make institutional improvement. There was lack of evidence that demonstrated that this was the case.

Finally, it is worth noting that the institution has a new provost, who together with the president and the institution's leadership teams, is designing, creating, and implementing many new systems, structures, and processes on campus.

Together, the president and provost form an impressive leadership team, clearly and unequivocally respected by all constituent groups on campus for their commitment to the institution, students, and performance-based outcomes and focus. This leadership team will benefit from more time to implement their campus-wide strategies and vision, which is another reason why the team is recommending the Interim Report be embedded into the Year 4 Review.

Given the above, the team's hope is that Northwest take to heart our recommendations, including reporting on progress on the Core Components that were met with concern, during their scheduled Year 4 Review in 2022. The team is recommending that the Interim Report be embedded in the Year 4 Review and that the institution remain on the Open Pathway until that review determines there has/has not been progress made, particularly in the areas noted above. We are making this recommendation because we recognize that Northwest is in the process of designing and developing many new internal systems and structures, while also currently operationalizing many new systems, structures, and processes that have recently been created and implemented. As such, it is the team's recommendation that the university needs more time to gather, analyze, and report outcome data across all institutional levels, and demonstrate how it is using that information to improve. A final note to the next review team is that faculty credentials should also be reviewed in 2022, as Northwest was given an extension by the HLC until that time. As such, this visiting team did not fully scrutinize faculty credentials.

To conclude, while an Interim Report is recommended to be embedded in the Year 4 Review, the visiting team believes Northwest has the capacity and enthusiastic willingness to continually improve. The Board of Regents, administrators, faculty, staff, and students are all committed to and supportive of Northwest's leadership team and we believe the outcome is promising given some time to grow and operationalize its systems.

### **Overall Recommendations**

Criteria For Accreditation: Met With Concerns

Sanctions Recommendation: No Sanction

Pathways Recommendation: Eligible to choose

### **Federal Compliance Review**

All components meet HLC requirements.