

QUICK GUIDE:

Northwest Missouri State University Comprehensive Evaluation Visit – Reaffirmation of Accreditation Higher Learning Commission—October 14-16, 2018



What is accreditation and why is Higher Learning Commission accreditation important?

- Accreditation is the process that ensures and advances the quality of higher education.
- The Higher Learning Commission (“HLC”) is the institutional accrediting agency for Northwest Missouri State University (the “University”). Having HLC accreditation validates the quality of the education provided by the University, as well as the integrity of the University’s operations. Further, the institutional accreditation provided by the HLC is necessary for University students to be eligible for federal student financial aid.
- Certain University programs also hold program-specific accreditation related to a particular field of study (e.g., The University’s dietetics program is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND)).

Why is the University having a HLC Comprehensive Evaluation Visit on October 14-16, 2018?

- The University initially received accreditation from the HLC in 1921. Since that time, the HLC has regularly reviewed the University and reaffirmed its accreditation, most recently in 2012.
- As part of its routine accreditation review cycle, HLC will conduct a comprehensive evaluation visit at the University on Oct. 14-16, 2018.
- The purpose of the visit is to confirm the University continues to meet HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation, engages in institutional improvement and complies with the requirements of the U.S. Dept. of Education.

What will occur during the HLC visit?

- An HLC Evaluation Team will meet with members of the University community, including the Board of Regents, President, members of the Northwest University leadership team, administration, faculty, staff, students and community members.
- Prior to the visit, HLC team members will review an Assurance Argument that the University submitted to HLC in September 2018.
- The Assurance Argument addresses how the University meets HLC’s five Criteria for Accreditation, which can be found at <http://policy.hlcommission.org/Policies/criteria-for-accreditation.html>
- As members of the University community, you are encouraged to participate in the accreditation process.

What am I expected to know in order to prepare for the HLC visit?

- You should know the mission and vision of the University. See: <https://www.nwmissouri.edu/aboutus/mission.htm>
- You should be aware of the HLC accreditation visit and understand why accreditation matters.
- Members of the HLC team reserve the right to visit across the campus and may ask you questions.

What should I do if I am interviewed by a HLC Team member or am asked a question by a Team member?

- Provide your honest answer to the question.
- If you do not know the answer, simply say “I do not know.”
- If you disagree with an individual’s point of view, please feel comfortable adding your perspective.
- If appropriate, share examples with HLC Team members to illustrate your point.

HLC Accreditation Criteria: Summary of the University’s Assurance Argument

CRITERION ONE. MISSION – The University’s mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the University’s operations.

- The mission of the University states: “Northwest focuses on student success – every student, every day.” This mission is widely understood across the institution and guides every aspect of operations.
- The Board of Regents adopted a revised mission statement in 2010 drafted by an inclusive, cross-functional group of campus stakeholders. The mission provides a foundation for institutional efforts and is reaffirmed at the beginning of each strategic planning cycle.
- The mission supports achievement of the Northwest vision: *We will be THE University of Choice for a comprehensive, exceptional student experience.* The mission also incorporates the institutional values of student success, scholarship and life-long learning, intercultural competence, collaboration, respect and integrity, strategic thinking, and excellence.

The University’s mission is aligned with its academic programs, student profile, student support services and institutional budget.

- The University’s academic programs include mission and purpose statements aligned with the institutional mission. These programs are assessed and revised as part of a regular academic program review.

- The University’s academic programs include mission and purpose statements aligned with the institutional mission. These programs are assessed and revised as part of a regular academic program review.
- The University has approximately 6,300 students who represent a diverse demographic group: 35% are out of state; 8% are international; 13% are domestic students of color; 30% percent are first generation; and 32% are Pell eligible. This diverse student body enhances the University’s ability to serve the needs of a diverse population.
- The Student Success Center serves as a centralized hub for student academic success consistent with the institution’s mission and includes academic support; academic advisement and success coaching; academic recovery; orientation; first-year experience; and retention.
- To ensure budgeting is aligned with the mission, resource allocations and investments are based on five strategic objectives and in support of mission critical priorities.

The University’s mission is clear and articulated publicly.

- The mission statement is displayed on the University’s webpage, in the academic catalog, student and employee handbooks, strategic planning documents, and posted throughout campus. Mission relevant information is shared regularly within the President’s newsletter *All That Jazz* and is reinforced during campus events such as all-employee meetings, Summer Orientation and

QUICK GUIDE:

Northwest Missouri State University Comprehensive Evaluation Visit – Reaffirmation of Accreditation Higher Learning Commission—October 14-16, 2018



Registration (SOAR), New Student Convocation and Commencement ceremonies.

- The Mission statement is current and reflects the University's commitment to support student success and provide students with meaningful and rigorous learning opportunities through academic and other educational co-curricular experiences.
- Members of the campus community support the mission in their daily interactions and activities through the "Being a Bearcat" campaign: Bearcats learn, Bearcats connect, Bearcats care, Bearcats practice civility, and Bearcats show pride.

The University's mission reflects its role in a multicultural society.

- The University's mission and values incorporate its responsibility to prepare students to participate in and confidently navigate an increasingly global, diverse, and multilingual society. To this end, the University embeds diversity principles into its University Seminar and more broadly academically through core curricular designs and discussions with curricula committee chairs.
- The University provides robust resources to create a positive campus and community climate to support members of marginalized populations in furtherance of its mission.
- The University's Diversity Statement affirms: "Northwest Missouri State University shares a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We prepare our students to live and work in a diverse and inclusive environment. As a public educational institution, we treat each other in a civil manner where all voices are heard, represented, and valued."

The University mission is committed to the public good.

- Historically, the University was created by the state legislature to serve one of seven college districts in the region. The University retains deep, integrated roots within the Maryville community and region. The campus is designated the Missouri Arboretum and near campus are the R.T. Wright Farm and Mazingo Outdoor Education and Recreation Area.
- The positive aspects of the University's mission and values extend beyond supporting students on campus and into the community and economy, bringing a significant economic benefit to the surrounding region.
- To best serve the needs of the public, the University engages with key external constituencies and communities of interest on a state, regional, and national level.
- The University is a service-oriented, nonprofit entity that is committed to service through its program offerings, community service outreach efforts, service learning, and partnerships.

CRITERION TWO. INTEGRITY: ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT – The University acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

- To ensure institutional integrity, the University is governed by its Board of Regents, which has the authority to govern the University and responsibility to ensure institutional integrity. Day-to-day management of the University is delegated to the University President and administration and the faculty oversees the University's academic programs.

All University functions operate with integrity and are guided by ethical policies and practices.

- Financial integrity is ensured through financial oversight by the Board of Regents, as well as an annual external audit from a

certified public accountant per U.S. Department of Education requirements.

- The University's academic integrity is safeguarded through specific policies for students and employees, a commitment to academic freedom, annual evaluation of program outcomes, ongoing assessment of student learning and five-year program review cycle.
- University personnel are regularly trained to ensure ethical behaviors. Training topics include Title IX, FERPA, and campus safety. Students and employees are expected to model institutional values through the "Being a Bearcat" campaign.
- University employees are governed by laws and policies regarding conflicts of interest (both actual and perceived) and are expected to avoid improper outside influences on their institutionally related decisions and activities.

The University presents itself clearly and completely to the public.

- The University presents itself clearly and completely to its students and the public with regard to its programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control, and accreditation relationships. This information is presented on the University website and in the undergraduate and graduate academic catalogs, undergraduate academic viewbook, and graduate program brochures.
- The University has a process to regularly update its institutional information, policies, and procedures.

The University's governing Board is autonomous, acts with integrity and in the best interest of the University.

- The primary function of the Board of Regents is policy-making, oversight, and responsibility for sound resource management of the University. Each member of the Board is required to take an oath to discharge faithfully, impartially, honestly, and to the best of his or her abilities the duties of the Regent.
- The Board receives input from internal and external stakeholders which it considers during its deliberations, including reports at its public meetings from the Student Senate, Staff Council, and Faculty Senate.
- To preserve the Board's independence and avoid undue influence, Regents are governed by conflict of interest and confidentiality provisions contained within the Board Bylaws. These provisions prevent Board member interests' from prevailing over the University's interests.

The University is committed to integrity through freedom of expression.

- Academic freedom at the University allows students and faculty to explore potentially sensitive issues to gain greater intellectual and personal appreciation for the breadth of academic inquiry.
- The University subscribes to and abides by the American Association of University Professors statements on academic freedom.

University policies and procedures foster ethical discovery and research.

- The University provides strong oversight and support to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff, and students. The Faculty Senate Research Committee has two free-standing sub-committees to ensure the ethics and integrity of research; the Institutional Research Board reviews all proposals related to research involving the use of human participants; and the Animal Welfare Committee reviews all proposals from faculty members involving the use of animals in research and educational activities.

QUICK GUIDE:

Northwest Missouri State University Comprehensive Evaluation Visit – Reaffirmation of Accreditation Higher Learning Commission—October 14-16, 2018



- The University supports faculty, staff, and student research in its acquisition, discovery, and application through the Learning and Teaching Center (LTC) and the Office of Grants Coordination.

Training, guidance and policies ensure the ethical use of information.

- Students receive training and information regarding the ethical use of academic information through University Seminar, classroom components, online tutorials, online materials, and staff within the Library, Writing Center, and Student Success Center.
- The University maintains and enforces policies that prohibit academic dishonesty and unethical behavior (e.g., Code of Academic Integrity).

CRITERION THREE. TEACHING AND LEARNING: QUALITY, RESOURCES AND SUPPORT – The University provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

- The University is dedicated to providing an education that meets high standards for degree programs, curriculum, and student achievement. These high standards are maintained through a number of methods: a curriculum development process; an internal academic program review process; Faculty Senate, administrative feedback, and committee oversight through the Designated Curriculum Matters Committee, Council on Teacher Education, and the Graduate Council; external input from professional advisory councils, the Missouri Department of Higher Education, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, third party consultants, Quality Matters review of online programming, and external articulation agreements.

All programs are appropriate to higher education.

- The University maintains seven Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) that serve as the foundation for the Northwest CORE general education program and co-curricular alignment. All courses in the Northwest CORE are aligned to the ILOs. Likewise, academic departments and schools have sets of measurable learning outcomes for all undergraduate and graduate academic programs that are specific to discipline or program.
- The Undergraduate Catalog describes the requirements for each type of bachelor's degree offered, and the Graduate Catalog does so for the various graduate programs offered. The Graduate School and its faculty Graduate Council verify courses being completed for graduate credit differentiate learning goals or requirements distinct from undergraduate credit.
- Consistency in program quality is assured through implementation of institutional and program learning outcomes through varied modes of delivery and sites. The program outcomes for every degree program and the general education program are communicated by academic units to all instructors teaching in the undergraduate and graduate programs, regardless of instructional delivery mode.

Integral to the University's programs are intellectual inquiry, acquisition and application of knowledge, broad and skill-based learning.

- The Northwest Core general education program is the foundation of the institution's undergraduate academic experience. It is designed to give students the knowledge and skills to lead productive and meaningful lives, practice lifelong learning, engage intelligently and humanely with diverse and global populations, excel in their chosen careers, and act as leaders in their communities.

- All degree programs use learning outcomes specific to undergraduate and graduate majors that include in various ways competency in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information, mastering modes of inquiry or creative work, and developing skills adaptable to changing environments.
- The University committed to a Profession-Based Learning model in fall 2016 to provide a set of immersive, inquiry, and project-based learning experiences developed through disciplinary, industry, and community collaborations and partnerships.
- All degree programs require a professional seminar or capstone course or experience to demonstrate proficiency in the ILOs and all master's-level programs engage students in a comprehensive assessment or performance-based portfolio that requires them to demonstrate the assimilation of content and skills and communicate mastery of broad knowledge of the field effectively.

The University has sufficient faculty and staff, who are appropriately qualified, to meet student needs.

- The University's faculty contribute to scholarship, creative work, and discovery of knowledge appropriate to the institution's mission and programs. Sixty-two percent of Northwest's full-time faculty are in tenure track positions that require engagement in scholarly and creative work.
- Northwest employs 252 full-time and 60 part-time faculty to serve its students; 169 of the full-time faculty are credentialed with doctoral or other terminal degrees. Northwest ensures all faculty meet the criteria of completion of a degree in the appropriate discipline at least one level above the degree program of the students enrolled in the course.
- The high percentage of full-time credentialed faculty and total number of faculty provide sufficient faculty resources to meet the classroom and non-classroom roles of faculty. This allows for delivery and assessment of instruction and full oversight of curriculum and student performance.
- The institution maintains a student to faculty ratio of 21:1 and endeavors to maintain class sizes that maximize the opportunity for individualized instruction and learning support.
- All full-time instructors are evaluated annually in accordance with the Faculty Handbook and guidelines developed by academic departments and schools to further elaborate expectations relative to specific discipline areas. Faculty and instructors are also provided ongoing scholarly and professional development.
- Staff members providing student support services are appropriately qualified, trained, and supported in their professional development. Staff position descriptions define minimum requirements and staff is hired using selection processes that ensure qualified staff.

The University supports student learning and effective teaching.

- The University provides a host of services to support student learning and success. The Student Success Center is the centralized hub for academic success and focuses on transitioning, advising, supporting, and connecting students to maximize their academic potential.
- Northwest provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students beginning with matriculation and a focus on orientation and first-year experience academic programming. During that process, entering students are directed to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared. All undergraduate and graduate

QUICK GUIDE:

Northwest Missouri State University Comprehensive Evaluation Visit – Reaffirmation of Accreditation Higher Learning Commission—October 14-16, 2018



students are provided with personalized advising that ensures their individual major and career goals are aligned and supported.

- The Academic Recovery Program is in place for academically at-risk students and is designed to help get the student's academic career back on track. The University also offers Academic Success Coaching and Strategies for Academic Success to assist these students.
- The Assist Program serves approximately 100 students annually who require additional support transition from high school to college. This is done through the support of an individual academic advisor and success coach, who works to enhance students' study skills, time management skills and their knowledge of the campus community and resources.
- Numerous small-group tutoring, peer-led study groups, and other programs (e.g., Student Athlete Success Program, TRIO program, Writing Center, Math Lab, Library staff) are available to students to support their academic success.
- Students and faculty are provided the infrastructure and resources to support successful learning and teaching environments. The University makes ongoing investments in teaching, research, and learning spaces, as well as computer technology.

The University provides an enriching educational environment.

- Actions that drive student success and enrich the educational experience are built into the University's strategic plan, including the following five strategic objectives: (1) academic programing and strategic enrollment; (2) learning and college completion; (3) diversity, equity, and inclusion; (4) high performance culture; and (5) organizational viability.
- The University provides resources to enhance student health, well-being, and success outside of the academic arena through the Wellness Center, Office for Equity and Accessibility, Office of Financial Assistance, Residential Life, Robert and Virginia Foster Fitness Center, and the Carl and Cheryl Hughes Fieldhouse.
- The University's strategic plan includes establishing an institutional learning framework that connects curricular and co-curricular experiences. Northwest's concept of "co-curricular" is to employ activity outside of credit-bearing courses as learning experiences that engage ILOs to develop skilled and well-educated professionals and citizens.
- The University offers more than 150 student organizations to provide opportunities for co-curricular and extra-curricular learning experiences.

CRITERION FOUR. TEACHING AND LEARNING: EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT –

The University 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.

- The University evaluates the quality, effectiveness and relevance of its educational programs through a systematic process of academic program review: all academic units conduct an annual evaluation of 20 percent of their programs, assuring that every academic program is reviewed every five years, as well as through on-going assessment of student learning.

The University is responsible for the quality of its programs.

- The University's academic program review process utilizes a scorecard to focus on curriculum relevant in six broad categories: competition, student demand, learning outcomes, instructional

environment, placement, and formalized external evaluation. The review concludes with recommendations to address areas for improvement, as well as goals and metrics for improvements.

- To ensure effective learning, the University has clear practices by which it evaluates all credit transcripts, including credit awarded based on experiential and prior learning.
- The University follows the State of Missouri credit transfer guidelines and practices for granting credit for prior learning in the academic catalog.
- The Faculty Senate ensures program quality by exercising authority delegated to it by the Board of Regents over matters related to instruction, student learning, and student development, including setting standards for instruction, curriculum and degree requirements, and admissions and retention policies.
- University program quality also is measured via its program-specific accreditation from seven specialized accrediting agencies.
- The University tracks student-level employment data for all academic programs. Employment and salary data is tracked for all graduates, as well as internship participation and continued education to graduate studies from undergraduate programs.

The University has a comprehensive system to assess student learning.

- The University shares seven Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for curricular and co-curricular programs at the undergraduate level: communicating; critical thinking; managing information; valuing; diversity, equity and inclusion; teamwork; and leadership.
- The ILOs can be tracked for each course, each program, and for the Northwest Core general education program.
- Additionally, each academic program has specific Student Learning Outcomes so student learning for each program can be measured, tracked, and analyzed at the specific program level.
- All outcomes are mapped directly to course activities and collected each term using the Canvas learning management system overseen by the Learning and Teaching Center (LTC). Aggregate data is posted on a program dashboard so it can be reviewed by program or aggregate at the institutional level.
- The Assessment Office also administers three global assessments for undergraduate students on a regular timeline. These surveys assess the undergraduate experience inside and outside the classroom; the quality of student life, student learning, and satisfaction; and general college-level reading, writing, critical thinking, and mathematics proficiencies.
- Information obtained from assessment practices helps the University measure over a multi-year cycle whether program goals have been achieved and the data are used to enhance learning outcomes. Because the curricular and co-curricular programs utilize the same ILOs, the University is able to have a cohesive institutional focus on student learning and student development.

To promote continuous educational improvement, the University dedicates on-going attention to student retention, persistence and completion rates.

- The University's strategic plan envisions an integrated model of student success and retention and focuses on six key areas: academic support; academic advisement and success coaching; academic recovery; new student orientation; first-year experience; and, retention support. In support of the strategic plan, the University set an aggressive goal in 2015 to increase retention and worked to meet this goal by improving the first-year experience,

QUICK GUIDE:

Northwest Missouri State University Comprehensive Evaluation Visit – Reaffirmation of Accreditation Higher Learning Commission—October 14-16, 2018



implementing a student success coaching model, and utilizing professional academic advisors.

- The institution collects and analyzes a variety of data points regarding student retention, persistence, and completion, including freshmen and sophomore retention rates, program-level graduation rates, graduation rates at the academic unit level, rate of deficient grades (D, F, incomplete, or withdrawn), and percentage of students taking at least 15 credit hours each semester.
- The University also uses the Student Achievement Measure to track student movement across postsecondary institutions to provide a more complete picture of undergraduate progress and completion within the higher education system.

CRITERION FIVE. RESOURCES, PLANNING AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS – The University’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 University plans for the future.

Financial Resources

- The University focuses on affordability and access while maintaining and strengthening the quality of its academic programs.
- The University strengthened and maintained a strong financial position despite external economic and financial pressures through an aligned strategic planning process, prudent fiscal management, reallocating resources, and investing in strategic objectives.
- The University’s annual budget process uses a holistic approach to address investments, revenues, reallocations, and expense reductions based on mission critical priorities. The process includes various stakeholders and is designed to be an inclusive process to drive engagement.

Human Resources

- The University’s faculty, staff, and administration are sufficient in quantity and qualified to achieve the University’s mission.
- The University employs the University President and seven members of the leadership team to oversee the major functional units of the University.
- There are 229 full-time and 63 part-time faculty, including adjuncts; there are 452 staff members, including administrative, management, and professional staff.

Physical Resources

- The University’s physical resources are sufficient to support its current programs and encompass numerous facilities for student and employee use on its 375 acre main campus.
- The University focuses on maximizing its physical resources when assessing annual facility improvements and long-range planning.

Technological Resources

- The University’s Office of Information Technology provides full service support to students, faculty, and staff. Its services include laptop assignment for all campus students; onsite repairs; Northwest Online support; student portal services; web development and support; network infrastructure support; access management to secure shared file shares; technology design for student engagement in classrooms; and technical support for all students, faculty, and staff.

University governance and leadership is effective and collaborative.

- The Board of Regents is knowledgeable about the University and its constituents through public meetings (including reports from the

student regent, Student Senate, Faculty Senate, and Staff Council), work sessions, committee meetings, and informational updates provided by email and reports from the leadership team.

- The Board of Regents utilizes a committee structure that includes an Academic and Student Engagement Committee and a People, Finance and Operations Committee.
- Board members receive initial orientation and annual training on their legal and fiduciary responsibilities, as well as regular in-depth sessions on student engagement, financial, operational, legal, and other important higher education issues.
- The University has a long history of shared governance and actively engages all stakeholders, including faculty, staff, administration, students, alumni, and community members to develop, monitor, and promote academic policy and best practice.

The University engages in systematic and integrated planning.

- The University’s strategic plan is driven by the institutional mission, produces goals aligned with strategic objectives, and is supported by the alignment of resources. The plan encompasses five strategic objectives that provide the context within which the annual budgeting process takes place.
- Strategic priorities are adjusted annually in light of changing resources and opportunities as the University addresses investments, revenues, reallocations, and expense reductions.
- The University’s integrated planning is cross-functional and comprises faculty and staff from throughout the institution. The planning process also identifies beneficiaries and collaborators of the strategic plan, including students, employers, the community and region, parents, alumni, professional advisory boards, and community colleges.
- The University understands its current capacity through its Northwest Performance System and utilizes the annual strategic planning process to adjust for changes within enrollment, state funding, and the economy. Recent examples of the need for institutional agility to address changing circumstances include (1) enrollment management improvements in fall 2017, (2) tightened academic programming and creation of Northwest Online in fall 2017, and (3) adoption of a campus master plan fee by the Student Senate in 2016.

The University works to systematically improve its performance.

- The University learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability. Data gleaned from academic program, facility, and other reviews are fed into the strategic planning process to help inform and identify actions to improve institutional effectiveness.
- The University uses other tools to assist with performance improvement, including after-action review for post-assessment of programming, events, and activities generating quantitative and qualitative data; utilization of the Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT) methodology for problem-solving; and utilization of a goal oriented change management model (Prosci ADKAR) to guide individual and organizational change.