

2020 Standards for Accreditation

The Northwest Commission on College and University (NWCCU) Standards for Accreditation support the agency's mission to accredit institutions of higher education by applying evidence-informed standards and processes to support continuous improvements that promote student achievement and success. The seven-year accreditation cycle supports a process of continuous improvement within member institutions.

Design and Function

The Standards for Accreditation are statements that articulate the quality, effectiveness, and continuous improvements expected of accredited institutions. The Standards serve as indicators by which institutions are evaluated by peers through a process of self-reflection and evaluation that blends analysis and synthesis into a holistic examination of the institution's ability to fulfill its mission, deliver quality education, and promote student achievement.

Structure

Each of the Standards for Accreditation is designated by a number and title (e.g., Standard One – Institutional Mission and Effectiveness), and is further defined by elements of the Standard, which are designated by the number of the Standard followed by the letter of the element (e.g., 1.A Institutional Mission and Effectiveness). The criteria for evaluation more specifically define the elements and are identified by the number of the Standard, followed by the letter of the Standard element, followed by the number of the criterion (e.g., 1.A.1). Each Standard is introduced by a narrative summary intended only to provide direction and not to be addressed as a criterion.

STANDARD ONE – INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND EFFECTIVENESS

The institution articulates its purpose in a mission statement and defines the parameters for mission fulfillment. Guided by that definition, it identifies an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment through the use of meaningful indicators. The institution's offerings culminate in identified student outcomes leading to degrees, certificates, credentials, employment, or transfer to other higher educational institutions or programs consistent with its mission. Instructional programs are systematically assessed in order to assure currency, improve teaching and learning strategies, and achieve stated student learning outcomes.

Institutional Mission

1.A.1 The institution has a statement of mission that defines the institution's broad educational purposes and its commitment to student learning and achievement.

Improving Institutional Effectiveness

1.B.1 The institution demonstrates a continuous process of assessing institutional effectiveness, including the assessment of student learning and other support services to facilitate student learning and achievement. The institution uses that ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning to inform and refine its key processes, assign resources, and improve student learning.

1.B.2 The institution sets and articulates meaningful and measurable goals, objectives, and indicators to improve its effectiveness consistent with its mission.

1.B.3 The institution provides evidence that its planning processes are broad-based, offer opportunities for input by appropriate constituencies, allocate necessary resources, and lead to improvement of institutional effectiveness.

1.B.4 The institution monitors its internal and external environments to identify current and

emerging patterns, trends, and expectations. Through its governance system it uses those findings to assess its strategic position, define its future direction, and review and revise, as necessary, its mission, planning, the intended outcomes of its programs and services, and indicators of achievement.

Academic Quality

1.C.1 The institution offers programs with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission, culminate in achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes, and lead to collegiate-level degrees, certificates, or credentials with designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.

1.C.2 Awarding of credit, certificates, programs, and degrees is based on student learning and learning outcomes that possess an appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning.

1.C.3 The institution identifies and publishes expected course, program, and degree learning outcomes for all degrees, certificates, and credentials. Expected student learning outcomes for all courses are provided to enrolled students.

1.C.4 Admission and completion or graduation requirements are clearly defined and widely published.

1.C.5 The institution engages in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs. The institution recognizes the central role of faculty in establishing quality and improving instructional programs.

1.C.6 Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses student learning outcomes (or core competencies) such as effective communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and information literacy for all programs.

1.C.7 The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices that lead to enhancement of student learning.

1.C.8 Transfer credit and credit for prior learning is accepted according to procedures that provide adequate safeguards to ensure high academic quality. In accepting transfer credit, the receiving institution ensures that the credit accepted is appropriate for its programs and comparable in nature, content, academic rigor and quality, and comparable to credit it offers.

1.C.9 Graduate programs are consistent with the institution's mission; are in keeping with the expectations of their respective disciplines and professions; and are described through nomenclature that is appropriate to the levels of graduate and professional degrees offered. They differ from undergraduate programs by requiring greater depth of study and increased demands on student intellectual or creative capacities; knowledge of the literature of the field; and ongoing student engagement in research, scholarship, creative expression, and/or appropriate high-level professional practice.

Student Achievement

1.D.1 Appropriate to its mission, the institution recruits and admits students with the potential to benefit from its educational offerings. It orients students to ensure they understand the requirements related to their programs of study and receive timely, useful, and accurate information and advising about relevant academic requirements, including graduation and transfer policies.

1.D.2 Appropriate to its mission, the institution establishes and shares widely a set of indicators for student achievement (such as: course completion, experiential learning, program completion, degree completion, retention, job placement).

1.D.3 Results for student achievement are based on meaningful, institutionally identified indicators aligned with indicators for peer institutions at the regional and national levels; are used for improvement by informing planning, decision making, and allocation of resources and capacity; and are made widely available on its website.

1.D.4 The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student achievement are transparent and are used to inform and implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate achievement gaps and promote equity.

STANDARD TWO – GOVERNANCE, RESOURCES, & CAPACITY

Governance

2.A.1 The institution demonstrates an effective and widely understood governance structure with boards or other governing bodies comprised predominantly of members with no connection to the institution and with clearly defined authority, roles, and responsibilities. Institutions that are part of a complex system with multiple boards, a centralized board, or related entities have clearly defined authority, roles, and responsibilities.

2.A.2 The institution has an effective system of leadership, staffed by qualified administrators, with appropriate levels of responsibility and accountability, who are charged with planning, organizing, and managing the institution and assessing its achievements and effectiveness.

2.A.3 The institution employs an appropriately qualified chief executive officer with full-time responsibility to the institution. The chief executive may serve as an ex officio member of the governing board, but may not serve as its chair.

2.A.4 The institution employs a sufficient number of qualified administrators who provide effective leadership and management for the institution's major support and operational functions and work collaboratively across institutional functions and units to foster fulfillment of the institution's mission.

2.A.5 Decision-making structures and processes, which are documented and publicized, make provision for the consideration of the views of faculty, staff, administrators, and students on matters in which they have a direct and reasonable interest.

Policies and Procedures

2.B.1 The institution develops, publishes on its website and in other materials, and follows an effective and clearly stated and understandable transfer-of-credit policy that maintains the integrity of its programs while facilitating efficient mobility of students between institutions in completing their educational programs.

2.B.2 The institution publishes policies and procedures on its website and other materials available to students regarding their rights and responsibilities—including academic honesty, appeals, grievances, and accommodations for persons with disabilities—which are clearly stated, easily understandable, readily available, and administered in a fair and consistent manner.

2.B.3 The institution publishes policies on its website and other materials and adheres to admission and placement policies that guides the enrollment of students in courses and programs through an evaluation of prerequisite knowledge, skills, and abilities to assure a reasonable probability of student success at a level commensurate with the institution's expectations. Its policy regarding continuation in and termination from its educational programs—including its appeals process and re-admission policy—are clearly defined, widely published, and administered in a fair and timely manner.

2.B.4 The institution adopts and adheres to policies and procedures regarding the secure retention of student records, including provision for reliable and retrievable backup of those records,

regardless of their form. The institution publishes and follows established policies for confidentiality and release of student records.

Institutional Integrity

2.C.1 The institution represents itself clearly, accurately, and consistently through its announcements, statements, and publications. It communicates its academic intentions, programs, and services to students and to the public and demonstrates that its academic programs can be completed in a timely fashion. It regularly reviews its publications to assure integrity in all representations about its mission, programs, and services.

2.C.2 The institution advocates, subscribes to, and exemplifies high ethical standards in its management and operations including its dealings with the public, the Commission, and external organizations, and in the fair and equitable treatment of students, faculty, administrators, staff, and other constituencies. It ensures complaints and grievances are addressed in a fair and timely manner.

2.C.3 The institution adheres to a clearly defined policy that prohibits conflict of interest on the part of members of the governing board, administration, faculty, and staff.

Financial Resources

2.D.1 The institution has clearly defined policies on oversight and management of financial resources, approved by its governing board in adherence with its governance structure.

2.D.2 The institution demonstrates financial stability through audit processes and has sufficient cash flow and reserves to support its programs and services. Financial planning reflects available funds, realistic projections of financial resources, appropriate risk management to ensure short-term solvency and anticipates long-term obligations, including payment of future liabilities, and provides appropriate opportunities for participation by its constituencies. Fundraising activities are clearly defined and comply with government laws and regulations.

Human Resources

2.E.1 Employees are apprised of their conditions of employment, work assignments, rights and responsibilities, and criteria and procedures for evaluation, retention, promotion, and termination.

2.E.2 Consistent with its mission, programs, services, and characteristics, the institution employs sufficient appropriately qualified faculty, staff, and administrators to achieve its educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies, and assure the integrity and continuity of its academic programs.

Student Support Resources

2.F.1 Consistent with the nature of its educational programs and methods of delivery, the institution creates effective learning environments with appropriate programs and services to support student learning needs.

2.F.2 The institution publishes in a catalog, or provides in a manner available to students and other stakeholders, current and accurate information that includes: institutional mission; entrance requirements and procedures; grading policy; information on academic programs and courses, including degree and program completion requirements, expected learning outcomes, required course sequences, and projected timelines to completion based on normal student progress and the frequency of course offerings; names, titles, degrees held, and conferring institutions for administrators and full-time faculty; rules, regulations for conduct, rights, and responsibilities tuition, fees, and other program costs; refund policies and procedures for students who withdraw from enrollment; opportunities and requirements for financial aid; and academic calendar.

2.F.3 Publications and information describing educational programs include accurate information on: national and/or state legal eligibility requirements for licensure or entry into an occupation or profession for which education and training are offered; descriptions of unique requirements for employment and advancement in the occupation or profession.

2.F.4 The institution provides an effective and accountable program of financial aid consistent with its mission, student needs, and institutional resources. Information regarding the categories of financial assistance (such as scholarships, grants, and loans) is published and made available to prospective and enrolled students.

2.F.5 Students receiving financial assistance are informed of any repayment obligations. The institution regularly monitors its student loan programs and the institution's loan default rate, and publicizes these on its website.

2.F.6 The institution designs, maintains, and evaluates a systematic and effective program of academic advisement to support student development and success. Personnel responsible for advising students are knowledgeable of the curriculum, program requirements, and graduation requirements and are adequately prepared to successfully fulfill their responsibilities. Advising requirements and responsibilities are defined, published, and made available to students.

2.F.7 The institution maintains an effective identity verification process for students enrolled in distance education courses and programs to establish that the student enrolled in the distance education course or program is the same person whose achievements are evaluated and credentialed. The institution ensures the identity verification process for distance education students protects student privacy and that students are informed, in writing at the time of enrollment, of current and projected charges associated with the identity verification process.

Library and Information Resources

2.G.1 Consistent with its mission, the institution holds or provides access to library and information resources with an appropriate level of currency, depth, and breadth to support the institution's mission, programs, and services.

Physical and Technology Infrastructure

2.H.1 Consistent with its mission, the institution creates and maintains physical facilities that are accessible, safe, secure, and sufficient in quantity and quality to ensure healthful learning and working environments that support the institution's mission, programs, and services.