

Eligibility Requirements for Candidates for Accreditation and Accredited Higher Education Institutions

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities requires that all of its member and candidate institutions be degree-granting institutions whose mission is focused upon excellence in higher education and that meet the following Eligibility Requirements. Failure to adhere to meet any Eligibility Requirement may lead to the imposition of a sanction, adverse action, or denial of authorization of a candidate institution.

1. OPERATIONAL STATUS

The institution has completed at least one year of its principal educational programs and is operational with students actively pursuing its degree programs at the time of the Commission accepting an institution's Application for Consideration for Eligibility. The institution has graduated at least one class in its principal educational program(s) before the Commission's evaluation for initial accreditation.

2. AUTHORITY

The institution is authorized to operate and award degrees as a higher education institution by the appropriate governmental organization, agency, or governing board as required by the jurisdiction in which it operates.

3. INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The institution demonstrates and publishes evidence of effectiveness and uses ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning to refine its key processes and measures of institutional mission fulfillment. Through these processes it regularly monitors its internal and external environments to determine how and to what degree changing circumstances may impact the institution and its ability to ensure its viability and sustainability.

4. ACADEMIC QUALITY

The institution identifies and publishes the expected learning outcomes for each of its degree and certificate programs. The institution engages in regular and ongoing assessment to validate student learning and, consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses institutional 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.

5. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The institution identifies and publishes expected outcomes and metrics for student achievement (including but not limited to graduation, retention, completion, licensure and other measures of post-graduation success).

6. OPERATIONAL FOCUS AND INDEPENDENCE

The institution's programs and services are predominantly concerned with higher education. The institution has sufficient organizational and operational independence to be held accountable and responsible for meeting the Commission's standards and eligibility requirements.

7. NON-DISCRIMINATION

The institution is governed and administered with respect for the individual in a nondiscriminatory manner while responding to the educational needs and legitimate claims of the constituencies it serves as determined by its mission.

8. INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

The institution establishes and adheres to ethical standards in all of its operations and relationships.

9. GOVERNING BOARD

The institution has a functioning governing board responsible for the quality and integrity of the institution and for each unit within a multiple-unit institution to ensure that the institution's mission is being achieved. The governing board has at least five voting members, a majority of whom have no contractual or employment relationship or personal financial interest with the institution. In governance system with multiple boards, a centralized board, or related entities, the division of authority and responsibility between the system and the institution is clearly delineated, documented, and publicized, and provides the institution with sufficient autonomy to fulfill its mission.

10. CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The institution employs a chief executive officer who is appointed by the governing board and whose full-time responsibility is to the institution. Neither the chief executive officer nor an executive officer of the institution chairs the institution's governing board.

11. ADMINISTRATION

In addition to a chief executive officer, 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.

12. FACULTY

Consistent with its mission, the institution employs and regularly evaluates the performance of appropriately qualified faculty sufficient in number to achieve its educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies, and ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic programs.

13. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The institution provides one or more educational programs which include appropriate content and rigor consistent with its mission. The educational program(s) culminate in achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes, and lead to collegiate-level degree(s) with degree designation consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.

14. LIBRARY AND INFORMATION RESOURCES

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

15. PHYSICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The institution provides the physical and technological infrastructure necessary to achieve its mission.

16. ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The institution maintains an atmosphere in which intellectual freedom and independence exist. Faculty and students are free to examine and test all knowledge appropriate to their discipline or area of major study as judged by the academic/educational community in general.

17. ADMISSIONS

The institution publishes its student admission policy which specifies the characteristics and qualifications appropriate for its programs, and it adheres to that policy in its admissions procedures and practices.

18. PUBLIC INFORMATION

The institution publishes current and accurate information regarding: its mission; admission requirements and procedures; grading policy; information on academic programs and courses; names, titles and academic credentials of administrators and faculty; rules and regulations for student conduct; rights and responsibilities of students; tuition, fees, and other program costs; refund policies and procedures; opportunities and requirements for financial aid; and the academic calendar.

19. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The institution demonstrates financial stability with cash flow and, as appropriate, reserves to support its programs and services. Financial planning reflects available funds, realistic development of financial resources, and appropriate risk management to ensure short-term solvency and long-term financial sustainability.

20. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

For each year of operation, the institution undergoes an annual external financial audit by professionally qualified personnel in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. The audit is to be completed no later than nine months after the end of the fiscal year. Results from the audit, including findings and management letter recommendations, are considered annually in an appropriate and comprehensive manner by the administration and the governing board.

21. DISCLOSURE

The institution accurately discloses all the information the Commission may require to carry out its evaluation and accreditation functions.

22. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

The institution accepts the standards and related policies of the Commission and agrees to comply with these standards and policies as currently stated or as modified in accordance with Commission policy. Further, the institution agrees that the Commission may, at its discretion, make known the nature of any action, positive or negative, regarding the institution's status with the Commission to any agency or members of the public requesting such information.

23. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

The institution demonstrates that its operational capacity (e.g., enrollment, human and financial resources and institutional infrastructure) is sufficient to fulfill its mission in the present and will be sufficient to do so in the foreseeable future.