2020 Standards for Accreditation and Eligibility Requirements
Revision

June 2019 Update
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**Introduction**

This update and information are offered as part of the ongoing, iterative process of review and revision, and in accordance with U. S. Department of Education regulations and the NWCCU Bylaws. NWCCU began its cycle of review of its Eligibility Requirements (“ERs”), Policies, and the Standards for Accreditation (“Standards”) in August 2018.

The process of revision has included, and will continue to include, the opportunity for feedback from key constituents, including institutional leadership, faculty, staff, and students, as well as the public. This exercise provides all constituents the opportunity to assess the processes around NWCCU’s accreditation activities (including the cycle of evaluation and the methods of evaluation).

The process is overseen by the NWCCU Bylaws, Standards, and Policies Committee, chaired by NWCCU Commission Secretary, Deneece Huftalin, President of Salt Lake Community College. During its initial meetings, the Committee charged the staff to begin a comprehensive review which provided ample time for engagement and feedback. The goal of the review was to create a new draft of the 2020 Accreditation Standards and Eligibility Requirements that would be concise, reduce burden on institutions, promote consistency, and focus the Commission’s primary activities around student success.

**Revision Timeline and Process**
The timing for feedback and a final decision by the Board of Commissioners is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public Call for Comment Period (Via Confidential Survey)</td>
<td>September 1, 2018 through December 1, 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alaska Town Hall – University of Alaska-Fairbanks</td>
<td>September 24, 2018</td>
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<td>Montana Town Hall – University of Montana-Missoula</td>
<td>September 25, 2018</td>
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<td>Idaho Town Hall – Boise State University</td>
<td>September 28, 2018</td>
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<td>Nevada Town Hall – UNLV</td>
<td>November 5, 2018</td>
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<td>Oregon Town Hall – Portland State</td>
<td>November 6, 2018</td>
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<td>Utah Town Hall – Brigham Young University</td>
<td>November 7, 2018</td>
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<td>Annual Meeting and Listening Session -Seattle, Washington</td>
<td>November 14, 2018</td>
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<td>Online Town Halls</td>
<td>December 6 and 11, 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion and Action by the Bylaws, Standards, and Policies Committee</td>
<td>December 15, 2018</td>
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<td>Event</td>
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<td>Discussion and Action by the Board of Commissioners</td>
<td>January 8, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issuance of First Draft</td>
<td>February 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Call for Comment Period on First Draft of Revised Standards (Via Confidential Survey)</td>
<td>February through March 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online Regional Town Halls</td>
<td>February 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revisions by the Bylaws, Standards, and Policies Committee</td>
<td>April 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Input received online and in person from various constituents, including faculty, and at Town Halls</td>
<td>April 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standards revised by Staff and Bylaws, Standards, and Policies Committee</td>
<td>May 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Recommendation to the Board of Commissioners</td>
<td>June 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Call for Comment Period on Second Draft of Revised Standards (Via Confidential Survey)</td>
<td>July 1 – 19, 2019</td>
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<td>Revisions by the Bylaws, Standards, and Policies Committee</td>
<td>July 22, 2019</td>
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<td>Electronic Vote by Board of Commissioners to Adopt Standards</td>
<td>July 26, 2019</td>
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<td>Electronic Vote by NWCCU Membership</td>
<td>August 5 – 16, 2019</td>
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<td>Notification to Board of Commissioners on Outcome of Membership Vote</td>
<td>August 19, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter to Institutions on Results of Electronic Vote and Institution’s Evaluation Schedule</td>
<td>August 26, 2019</td>
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<td>Orientation and Training on Standards</td>
<td>September through November 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation Team Chair and Accreditation Liaison Officer Training at Annual Conference</td>
<td>November 20, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementation of Revised Eligibility Requirements, Standards, Policies, and Evaluation Cycle</td>
<td>January 2020</td>
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NWCCU has sought feedback from a broad array of stakeholders, including students, institutional leadership, faculty, staff, and the public, with the goal of developing evaluation criteria and efficient processes that supports and recognizes high quality, student-focused
practices. The Standards for Accreditation must be able to respond to diverse institutions facing unique sets of circumstances, provide clarity around compliance, and create opportunities for continual improvement and self-reflection.

The process of feedback collection has centered around five themes (Student Achievement and Success, Governance, Process Efficiency and Effectiveness, Risk-Based Accreditation and Alternative Pathways, and Transparency), which were integrated into Town Hall conversations, NWCCU’s 2019 Annual Meeting, and a survey instrument.

The 2018-2019 Standards and Eligibility Requirements Revision reflects an effort to streamline current standards and processes, provide a comprehensive approach to evaluate institutions within the requirements of the United States Department of Education, and elevate the primary focus of accreditation: assuring academic quality and the success of students within member institutions (https://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation.html).

What We Have Learned So Far
To date, over 700 responses or comments have helped guide the overall process of revision; and over 80 responses were shared regarding the first draft of the 2020 Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation.

The feedback reflects broad consensus around the following:

Student Achievement and Success

“The Standards should enable institutions to reflect on their successes and identify areas of improvement in the core functions required to enable student access and student success across the operations and organizational structure of the College. The Standards should support the institutions articulation of its core values, goals, strategic direction, and assessment protocols.”

“The Standards should specify and differentiate between student achievement data and learning outcomes. Language that supports the goals of learning or education, if indeed accreditation is about educational excellence, should be consistently branded around excellence in education. If standards are not relevant to this mission or consistent, they should not be included. Best practices should be written into the Standards rather than relying on assumptions of best practice and reviewed for continued best practice.”

Efficiency and Effectiveness

“Valuable engagement may be more achievable when conducted more often, but less formal. A lot of energy goes into preparing an institution for an accreditation visit, report etc. If the model was slightly augmented to include a constant conversation (annual or even semi-annual) so that an institution can highlight achievements and express concerns regarding areas that may need improvement, everyone would be more engaged in the process. In this model, the NWCCU and institution would recognize potential pit falls early on and can provide assistance (from a peer institution) to help achieve the desired goals.”
“I have experience with HLC and having a separate federal compliance report helps both the institutions and the review team. As part of a team, I was responsible just for the onsite work. The federal compliance report was reviewed ahead of time by an off-site team, which allowed us to follow up on anything they saw as weak or an area of potential trouble.”

**Risk-Based Accreditation and Alternative Pathways**

“While there should be "class standards" held in common with all institutions in a class, there should be institutionally defined standards that are unique to the institution.”

“There should be separate standards for classes of similar institutions…”

**The Processes Surrounding Accreditation**

Given the feedback from stakeholders, it is clear that NWCCU must continue to evolve its own processes to align with its mission to accredit institutions of higher education by applying evidence-informed standards and processes to support continuous improvements and promote student success (defined primarily by student learning and achievement). Critically, NWCCU’s approach to reviewing and revising its Standards, Policies, Eligibility Requirements, and processes place student learning and student achievement at the forefront, reduce the burdens of institutional reporting and visits, simplify language and requirements to support institutional success, create educational programming and resources to provide consistency and clarity, and build technology around the interactions with institutions, the public, and evaluation committees to streamline efforts and share institutional accomplishments.

Based on feedback from the public comments and discussions during the NWCCU retreat, the Bylaws and Standards Committee recommended additional processes and adjustments to strengthen the accreditation process. These include:

*The creation of an offsite compliance review following the Mid-Cycle report.* This would use a peer-evaluation team with appropriate expertise to undertake a policies, regulations, and financial review (PRFR) in Year Six of the review cycle for compliance requirements. The PRFR Committee would provide a response to the institution and may recommend additional actions or reporting for the Year Seven Evaluation Team.

*Assignment of future Year Seven Evaluation Teams that focus on the areas of student learning, student achievement, institutional effectiveness, and any issues identified in the Mid-Cycle Report and PRFR Report.* The Year Seven Evaluation Team would conduct an on-site review and evaluation of institutional effectiveness, along with issues identified in the Mid-Cycle report and PRFR report.

*Reducing institutional burden on annual reporting by implementing a system that utilizes datasets such as IPEDS and the National Student Clearinghouse in lieu of direct institutional reporting on an annual basis.* The Commission will create a template for a streamlined annual report to include summaries of accomplishments and responses to recommendations from prior reports.
Creation of a region-wide comparative dataset to support institutional success, analysis, and continuous quality improvement.

Creation of a risk-based process of ongoing institutional accreditation and reporting.

Creation of opportunities for institutions to innovate and experiment on approaches to promote student success, primarily defined by measures of student learning and achievement.

Creation of additional educational programming and support resources to enhance the implementation of the new standards, and systems that promote a culture of learning and continuous peer-based improvement throughout the region.

Creation of specialized evaluator training to support the implementation of the 2020 Standards, Eligibility Requirements, and Policies.

Creation of an Accreditation Handbook and revised NWCCU policies to accompany the Standards for Accreditation and Eligibility Requirements which would expand the details surrounding NWCCU expectations, showcase model reports, and provide useful dashboards and templates to further promote consistency and clarity.

Allowing institutions to utilize EITHER core themes or other measures of institutional mission fulfillment, whichever best serves the institution’s own framework.

In consultation with member institutions and the Bylaws and Standards Committee, NWCCU staff is proposing the following process for the 2020 NWCCU Standards and Eligibility Requirements implementation. Comment on this proposal will be solicited as part of an additional round of public comment as outlined above:
Annual Report: Institutions would continue to submit annual data to NWCCU or to third-parties (such as National Student Clearinghouse or IPEDS) on student achievement disaggregated by student populations, along with current financial performance, summary of accomplishments around student learning and achievement, and an update on the status of outstanding recommendations issued by the Commission. These reports will be reviewed by staff and information on significant deviations will be provided to the Commissioners to review and then institutions will be asked to respond on how the deviations are being addressed. Staff will continue to monitor in following annual reports.

Mid-Cycle Report (Year Three): Institutions complete a Mid-Cycle Report focused on student learning outcomes and assessment, with the addition of clarifying the objectives and measures related to student achievement that the institution is using in its continuous improvement cycle. The Mid-Cycle Report would be reviewed by two peer evaluators and include an onsite visit.

Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (Year Six): Institutions will submit a brief report related to financial performance and compliance with NWCCU and USDE requirements related to Standard Two of the 2020 Revised Standards. This will be an off-site review undertaken by a team of peer evaluators with expertise in the areas of finance, governance, policies and regulations, student services, and institutional capacity.

Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (Year Seven): Institutions will submit a report focused on Student Learning and Student Achievement as described in Standard One of the 2020 Revised Standards that will be reviewed on-site by a team of evaluators. Any out-of-compliance issues identified by the Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review team must also be addressed by the institution during this visit.

As training materials and the Handbook of Accreditation are created during Fall 2019, the above draft processes will be reviewed by constituents and Commissioners and revised as needed.

During the first two years of implementation of the 2020 Eligibility Requirements and Standards, institutions choosing to adopt the same will be asked to collect data and information on experiences, challenges, successes, costs, and time and effort invested for Commission Staff to undertake comparative analysis and refinements to the processes to best align them with institutional practices and the success of students as further deployment of the new standards progresses.

Next Steps
The Board of Commissioners will review the public comments, process documents, and current draft of the 2020 Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation at its June 2019 meeting.
NWCCU member institutions, evaluators, and stakeholders have been invited to participate in a two-week electronic conversation around the processes that would be affected by the proposed revisions. This period is intended to help guide the development of process as well as support the creation of an Accreditation Handbook that will provide guidance and support for member institutions.

Individuals interested in participating in these conversations or needing additional information may contact Dr. Mac Powell, Senior Fellow (mpowell@nwccu.org).

This draft reflects the input of stakeholders to the earlier drafts, including:

1. Academic Freedom. While Academic Freedom remains an Eligibility Requirement, comments received demonstrated the desire of the membership that the Standards for Accreditation must explicitly reflect Academic Freedom.
2. Libraries. Library personnel and other stakeholders requested that the Standards for Accreditation must highlight the importance of sufficient staff and resources at the institution. Sufficiency of resources and administrative personnel across all aspects of institutions is referenced and expanded in prior sections of the Standards for Accreditation, and the importance of information literacy was further highlighted along with resources in the NWCCU Eligibility Requirements and the Standards for Accreditation.
3. Core Competencies and General Education. Feedback highlighted the need to clarify whether all programs (including career and technical education) were required to measure core competencies or general education, whether there were required elements to be measured, or whether the institution could select these core competencies or general education requirements within their unique missions, programs, and curricula.
4. Measuring Institutional Effectiveness. As reflected in public comment throughout the process, constituents wanted greater clarity on what is required to demonstrate Institutional Effectiveness and the use of comparative data in the accreditation process.

The below revised draft will be presented to the Board of Commissioners, who will review and provide feedback on the document prior to an additional round of public comment. This latter public comment period will take place in July 2019, following which the document will be revised before final vote by the 160 plus institutional members in August 2019.

In line with the member-approved 2020 Eligibility Requirements and Standards, NWCCU staff will develop relevant educational training materials and modules to be offered to Accreditation Liaison Officers, Peer Evaluation Team Chairs, and other interested individuals during Fall 2019. These resources will also be made available on the NWCCU website. Institutions participating in Year Seven visits in 2020 will be given the opportunity to demonstrate compliance with the 2010 Eligibility Requirements and Standards or the 2020 Eligibility Requirements and Standards. Any questions related to the timing of reports or visits should be directed to an institution’s NWCCU Staff Liaison or to Dr. Mac Powell, Senior Fellow (mpowell@nwccu.org).
The NWCCU staff will continue to analyze current processes around accreditation (including the cycle of evaluation and the methods of evaluation) and make changes as warranted to support continuous quality improvement efforts.
2020 Standards for Accreditation
The Northwest Commission on College and Universities (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 and 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-study 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 element (e.g., 1.A Institutional Mission and Effectiveness). Each Standard is introduced by a narrative summary intended only to provide direction and not to be addressed as a criterion.

STANDARD ONE – STUDENT SUCCESS AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION & EFFECTIVENESS
The institution articulates its commitment to student success, primarily measured through student learning and achievement, and establishes a mission statement, acceptable thresholds, and benchmarks for effectiveness with 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 using meaningful indicators to assure currency, improve teaching and learning strategies, and achieve stated student learning outcomes.

Institutional Mission
1.A.1 The institution has a mission statement 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 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 goals, objectives, and indicators to improve its effectiveness in the context of regional and national peer institutions.

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.

**Student Learning**

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

1.C.2 Granting credit, certificates, programs, or degrees is based on student learning and learning outcomes that include appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning.

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

1.C.4 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.

1.C.5 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.

1.C.6 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 measures, assessing student learning, and improving instructional programs.

1.C.7 Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses institutional learning outcomes and/or core competencies such as effective communication skills, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy that will be assessed across all associate and bachelors level programs or within a General Education curriculum.

1.C.8 The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning support planning and practices are used for continuous improvement of student learning.

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 offers orientation to 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 and in the context of regional and national peer institutions, 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 in relation to 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

The institution articulates its commitment to a structure of governance that is intentional in seeking input from faculty, staff and students. Through its planning, funding, operational activities, and resource allocation, the institution demonstrates financial stability and a commitment to student success, primarily measured through student learning and achievement in an environment respectful of meaningful discourse.

Governance

2.A.1 The institution demonstrates an effective and widely understood governance structure with boards or other governing bodies composed predominantly of members with no contractual or employment relationship or personal financial interest with 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 authority, 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 institutional effectiveness.

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.

Academic Freedom

2.B.1 The institution adheres to the principles of academic freedom and responsibility that protect its constituencies from inappropriate internal and external influences, pressures, and harassment.

2.B.2 Within the context of its mission and values, the institution defines and actively promotes an environment that supports independent thought in the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. It affirms the freedom of faculty, staff, administrators, and students to share their scholarship and reasoned conclusions with others. While the institution and individuals within the institution may hold to a particular personal, social, or religious
philosophy, its constituencies are intellectually free to examine thought, reason, and perspectives of truth. Moreover, they allow others the freedom to do the same.

Policies and Procedures

2.C.1 Admission and completion or graduation requirements are clearly defined and widely published. In the event of program elimination or significant change in requirements, the institution makes appropriate arrangements to ensure that students enrolled in the program have an opportunity to complete their program in a timely manner with a minimum of disruption.

2.C.2 The institution maintains a record of compliance with the institution's program responsibilities under Title IV of the Act, based on the most recent student loan default rate data provided by the Secretary, the results of financial or compliance audits, and program reviews.

2.C.3 To safeguard and ensure high academic quality and integrity of its programs, the institution develops and publishes on its website and in other materials that it follows effective and clearly stated and understandable policies on transfer of credit and credit for prior learning. This will facilitate recognition of competencies demonstrated by students for completing their educational programs and for the efficient mobility of students between institutions. In accepting transfer of credit or credit for prior learning, the receiving institution ensures that credit accepted is appropriate for its programs and comparable in nature, content, and academic rigor and quality.

2.C.4 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, equitable, and consistent manner.

2.C.5 The institution publishes polices 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.C.6 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.D.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.D.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, equitable, and timely manner.

2.D.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.E.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.E.2 The institution demonstrates financial stability through periodic and generally acceptable audit procedures 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.F.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.F.2 The institution provides faculty and staff with appropriate opportunities and support for professional growth and development.

2.F.3 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.

2.F.4 All institutional personnel are evaluated regularly and systematically. Evaluations are based on written criteria that are published, easily accessible, and clearly communicated, and in alignment with institutional mission and goals, educational objectives, and policies. They are applied equitably, fairly, and consistently in relation to responsibilities and duties. Personnel are assessed for effectiveness and are provided feedback and encouragement for improvement.

Student Support Resources

2.G.1 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.G.2 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.G.3 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.G.4 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.G.5 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.H.1 Consistent with its mission, the institution provides access to appropriate library and information resources and personnel with an appropriate level of currency, depth, and breadth to support the institution’s mission, programs, and student services.

Physical and Technology Infrastructure

2.I.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.

2.I.2 The institution’s planning includes emergency preparedness and contingency planning for continuity and recovery of operations should catastrophic events significantly interrupt normal institutional operations.
Eligibility Requirements for Candidates for Accreditation and Accredited Higher Education Institutions

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) requires that all its member and candidate institutions be degree-granting institutions with a higher education mission focused upon student success 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. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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. 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.

5. STUDENT LEARNING The institution identifies and publishes the program length and expected learning outcomes for each of the degrees, certificates, or credential programs offered. 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, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy that will be assessed across all associate and bachelors level programs or within a General Education curriculum.

6. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT The institution identifies and publishes expected outcomes and metrics for student achievement (including but not limited to: course completion, experiential learning, program completion, degree completion, retention, job placement).

7. NON-DISCRIMINATION The institution is governed and administered with respect for all members in a nondiscriminatory manner catering to and meeting 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 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 a 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 on its website and in its public documents, 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 institutional effectiveness.

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 and that facilities and equipment meet state and local safety and fire codes. The institution’s planning includes emergency preparedness and contingency planning.

16. ACADEMIC FREEDOM Within the context of its mission, 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 procedures and 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.
Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is NWCCU revising its Eligibility Requirements and Standards?

The NWCCU Bylaws, federal law, and USDE regulations require a regular and ongoing cycle of evaluation, along with a comprehensive review and revisions as needed no later than once every eight years. In addition to these requirements, NWCCU has undertaken a strategic review of its mission and value to member organizations and hopes to align its Standards, Eligibility Requirements, policies, and practices with a mission to accredit our members by applying evidence-informed standards and processes to support continuous improvements and promote student achievement and learning.

The goal of NWCCU is to “Implement accreditation standards and institutional review processes requiring institutions to demonstrate conclusive outcomes of student achievement and success and to assure overall institutional quality” and to “Provide guidance and policies to encourage responsible institutional innovation and experimentation.”

Over the past year, President Ramaswamy, the Commission, and our stakeholders have called for accreditation Standards, Eligibility Requirements, policies, and practices that promote institutional success, reduce institutional reporting burdens, and foster student success. The revised Eligibility Requirements and Standards ensure alignment with future requirements of federal law and USDE regulations, which are being revised, and to focus the work of Evaluation Committees around the primary focus of our member institutions: Student Learning and Student Achievement.

2. What’s the difference between Student Learning and Student Achievement?

Student achievement is a measure of a learner’s attainment or persistence toward a program, credential, or post-graduation outcome. Student achievement includes graduation, retention, satisfactory academic progress, licensure passage rates, or employment outcomes.

Student Learning is a measure of a learner’s ability to meet or exceed established goals, outcomes, or competencies within a course, program, certificate, or degree. The evidence of learning can and should include both direct and indirect measures.

3. My institution is scheduled for a report or visit within the next three years. What will happen to us?

The 2020 Accreditation Eligibility Requirements and Standards will take effect January 1, 2020. Institutions will have the opportunity to complete Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability Evaluation utilizing EITHER the 2010 Accreditation Eligibility Requirements and Standards Requirements or Institutional Effectiveness and Sustainability Evaluation under the 2020 Accreditation Eligibility Requirements and Standards Requirements through December 31, 2021. Recommendations for compliance or improvement that are carried over from prior reports must be addressed in all future reports
unless otherwise directed. Please contact your NWCCU Staff Liaison to discuss transition options and logistics.

4. Does NWCCU intend to revisit its requirements around Credit for Prior Learning?

Yes! NWCCU is currently revising its policy on Credit for Prior Learning and will launch the new requirements in January 1, 2020, along with the 2020 Accreditation Eligibility Requirements and Standards Requirements. The current draft of the policy does away with the 25% threshold in favor of higher education-institutional best practices around credit for prior learning.

5. The 2020 Accreditation Eligibility Requirements and Standards are much shorter. What happens to the additional requirements?

NWCCU has attempted to reduce redundancies (particularly around planning), align its Standards with USDE regulations, and create plain-language Standards that can be broadly applied across a diversity of institutional types. If an item wasn’t required by USDE or critical to the demonstration or support of student achievement or student learning, it was removed from the 2020 Accreditation Eligibility Requirements and Standards Requirements. An Accreditation Handbook will be published in Summer 2019 providing examples, rubrics, and guidance on the application of the 2020 Accreditation Eligibility Requirements and Standards Requirements. The Commission’s hope is to reduce burden and ambiguity and to promote clarity and transparency.

6. The 2020 Accreditation Eligibility Requirements and Standards reference Core Competencies. Are these required?

NWCCU will NOT mandate the use of any particular core theme, core competency, or general education requirement, but rather require all institutions to measure the improvement of critical core competencies that result in expansion of students’ critical skills, such as problem solving and critical thinking, written and oral communication, team work, and professionalism and ethical behaviors.

7. Is NWCCU utilizing “bright lines” or “benchmarks” to make accreditation decisions?

No. NWCCU asks institutions to provide data related to institutional effectiveness, and to compare those results to peer institutions both within the region and outside the region. The institution will identify its peer institutions and measures of institutional effectiveness, student learning, and student achievement, and evaluate itself against its peer institutions. NWCCU also expects the institution to be consistent in its marketing and publications about the meaningful measures it selects and to create aspirational benchmarks to drive continuous quality improvement.

8. How will NWCCU support the transition to the 2020 Accreditation Eligibility Requirements and Standards?

Beginning in September 2019, the Commission Staff will host a series of online and in-person orientations and trainings for institutions and online and in-person training for evaluators. Additionally, the 2019 Annual Conference will feature sessions on applying and transitioning to the 2020 Accreditation Eligibility Requirements and Standards. Finally, all institutions will have ongoing access and support through their NWCCU staff liaisons. A calendar of synchronous online and in person trainings will be
issued in Summer 2019, and asynchronous online trainings will be available through the NWCCU website in Fall 2019.