

## **2020 Standards for Accreditation**

The Northwest Commission on College and Universities' (NWCCU) Standards for Accreditation support the organization's mission to accredit institutions of higher education on a seven-year cycle by applying evidence informed standards and processes to support continuous improvements and promote student achievement and success.

### **Design and Function**

The Standards for Accreditation define 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 – Student Success and 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). Each Standard is introduced by a narrative summary intended only to provide direction and not to serve as a criterion.

### **STANDARD ONE – STUDENT SUCCESS AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND EFFECTIVENESS**

*The institution articulates its commitment to student success, primarily measured through student learning and achievement, for all students, with a focus on equity and closing achievement gaps, 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 for all groups of students, including underrepresented students, first-generation college students.*

#### **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 assessment of student learning and other support services to facilitate student learning and achievement. The institution uses the 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 define mission fulfillment and improve its effectiveness in the context of and comparison with 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 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. Information on expected student learning outcomes for all courses is 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, assessing student learning, and improving instructional programs.

1.C.6 Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses institutional 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.

1.C.7 The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices that are used for continuous improvement of student learning.

1.C.8 Transfer credit and credit for prior learning is accepted according to clearly defined policies 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 and in the context of and comparison with 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, and postgraduation success. The published indicators of student achievement are disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories to help promote student achievement and close equity gaps.

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

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 and equity gaps.

## **STANDARD TWO – GOVERNANCE, RESOURCES, & CAPACITY**

*The institution articulates its commitment to a structure of governance inclusive and reflective in decision-making. Through its planning, funding, operational activities, and resource allocation, the institution demonstrates a commitment to 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 for all entities.

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 Decision-making structures and processes, which are documented and publicly available, 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 The institution develops, publishes on its website and in other materials, and follows an effective, 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 goals and programs.

2.C.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, equitable, and timely manner.

2.C.3 The institution publishes policies on its website and other materials and adheres to admission and placement policies that guide the enrollment of students in courses and programs through an evaluation of prerequisite knowledge, skills, and abilities to ensure 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, equitable, and timely manner.

2.C.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.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 ensure 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 clearly defined policies that prohibit conflicts 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 accordance with its governance structure.

2.E.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.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, staff, and administrators with appropriate opportunities and support for professional growth and development.

2.F.3 Consistent with its mission, programs, and services the institution employs sufficient qualified faculty, staff, and administrators to achieve its educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies, and ensure 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 Consistent with the nature of its educational programs and methods of delivery, and with a particular focus on equity and closing achievement gaps, the institution creates effective learning environments with appropriate programs and services to support student learning needs.

2.G.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; admission 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.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 are included.

2.G.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.G.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.G.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.G.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.H.1 Consistent with its mission, the institution provides access to library and information resources and personnel with a level of currency, depth, and breadth sufficient to support and sustain the institution's mission, programs, and 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 and sustain the institution's mission, programs, and services.

**Eligibility Requirements  
for Candidates for Accreditation  
and Accredited Higher Education Institutions**

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities requires that every member, applicant, and candidate institution be a degree-granting institutions whose mission is focused on excellence in higher education and meets the following Eligibility Requirements. Failure to meet any Eligibility Requirement may lead to the imposition of a sanction or adverse action for a member institution, denial of application for candidacy, or denial of authorization for 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 and sustaining the Commission's standards and eligibility requirements.

3. **AUTHORITY** The institution is authorized to operate and confer degrees as a higher education institution by the appropriate governmental organization, agency, and/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 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.

5. **STUDENT LEARNING** 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, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy that are assessed across all academic programs and curricula.

6. **STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT** The institution identifies and publishes expected outcomes and metrics for student achievement such as graduation, retention, completion, licensure, and other measures of postgraduation success. The indicators of student achievement disaggregated by race,

ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories are used to help promote student achievement and close equity gaps.

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 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 fulfillment of the institution's mission.

12. **FACULTY** Consistent with its mission, the institution employs and regularly evaluates the performance of qualified faculty members sufficient to achieve its educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies, and ensure the integrity and sustainability 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 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 a level of currency, depth, and breadth sufficient to support the institution's programs and services.

15. **PHYSICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE** The institution provides the physical and technological infrastructure necessary to fulfill and sustain its mission.

16. **ACADEMIC FREEDOM** Within the context of its mission, the institution maintains an atmosphere that promotes, supports, and sustains academic freedom and independence. Faculty, students, and administrators are free to examine and test all knowledge and theories.

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 reserves sufficient to support and sustain 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 understands and accepts the standards and policies of the Commission and agrees to comply with these standards and policies. Further, the institution agrees that the Commission may, at its sole 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 operational capacity (e.g., enrollment, human and financial resources, and institutional infrastructure) sufficient to fulfill and sustain its mission.