Higher Learning Commission Accreditation Updates

Council of Deans Meeting
March 8, 2023

Topics for Today

- Timeline and Preparations for HLC Visit

- HLC Criteria and evidence responsibilities

- Assurance Argument preparation

- Areas where further input is needed

- Discussion and feedback from Academic Affairs Leadership

Background

Accreditation Status

The university was reaccredited by HLC for 10 years (until 2024), the maximum period possible. Following that process in 2014, NIU transitioned into the least restrictive HLC pathway, called the open pathway, for maintaining accreditation.

The **Open Pathway** is unique in that its improvement component, the Quality Initiative, affords institutions the opportunity to pursue improvement projects that meet their current needs and aspirations.

Open Pathway Timeline

NIU is currently within the quality initiative phase of the open pathway timeline, being completed during years 5-9 of the open pathway cycle.

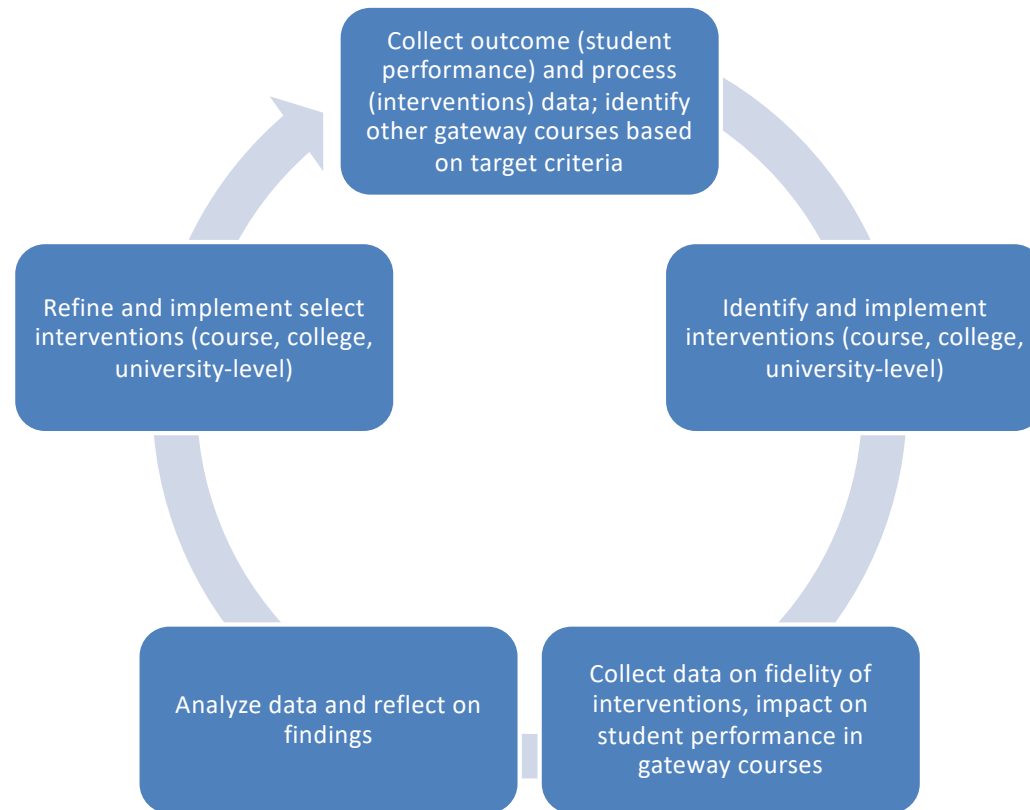| July 2014: Reaffirmation of Institutional Accreditation		Reaffirmation of Accreditation in 2023-2024	
Years 1-3: Annual Assurance Updates	**Year 4: Assurance Review; Interim Monitoring Report**	**Years 5-9: Quality Initiative**	**Year 10: Assurance Review + Site Visit**
2017-2017	**June 2018**	**2018-2023**	**2023-2024**
• Contribute documents to Evidence File annually • Multi-location site visit	• Assurance Argument and Evidence File • Assurance Review – no site visit • Interim Report on Budgeting and Planning	• File Quality Initiative (QI) Proposal • Implement QI • Report QI results to HLC	• Assurance Argument and Evidence File • Federal Compliance Requirements • Assurance Review • Comprehensive Evaluation with site visit

Quality Initiative

Initiative Goals

1. **Identify and redesign gateway courses** with low success rates or high equity gaps.

2. **Assess and deploy support** for course transformation or other improvements in the identified courses to enhance student success.

3. **Monitor data from and engage in continuous quality improvement** of identified courses to enhance student success in courses and beyond (e.g., retention and graduation).

Evaluation of the Quality Initiative

Collect outcome (student performance) and process (interventions) data; identify other gateway courses based on target criteria

Identify and implement interventions (course, college, university-level)

Collect data on fidelity of interventions, impact on student performance in gateway courses

Analyze data and reflect on findings

Refine and implement select interventions (course, college, university-level)

College Discussions – Spring '23

- Fall semester course data shared with colleges along with summary of previously-shared college-specific efforts
- Meeting with QIP Core Team to capture any updates on college-specific interventions since Summer '22 as well as any ongoing plans for continued work
  - Redesigning gateway courses with low success rates or high equity gaps
  - Monitoring student success data
  - Re-assessing student success in target courses and adjusting strategies as needed

Report Due to HLC – May 2023

6,000 words or less, summarizing the following:

- What was accomplished?
- How effective have the interventions been?
- What is the impact of the initiative? (ie: any changes in processes, policies, technology, curricula, programs, student learning and success that are now in place)
- What tools, data, or other information resulted?
- Biggest challenges and opportunities encountered in implementing?
- Individuals and groups involved and their perceptions of impact?
- Plans going forward?
- Lessons learned and best practices identified?

Preparing for HLC Ten-Year Reaffirmation

Framework & Focus

- The goal is to tell NIU's story by:
  - Providing a persuasive argument
  - Using supporting evidence
  - Highlighting our strengths as well as our areas for improvement
  - Presenting an authentic depiction of NIU
- The focus is on the institution as a whole
- The HLC is outcome-oriented, and not prescriptive on process

Timeline of Comprehensive Review

Spring/ Summer 2023	August 2023	Fall 2023	January 2024	February 2024	March 2024
Submit Quality Initiative Report Construct Assurance Argument	Submit Federal Compliance Review	Campus Input on Assurance Argument	Student Opinion Survey	Submit Assurance Argument	Site Visit

Evaluation Framework and Criteria

HLC's Evaluative Framework

Accreditation standards are based on

- 5 over-arching criteria
  - 18 core components
    - 69 sub-components
- A criterion is met only if all core components are met
- Each core component may be:
  - **Met without concerns**; monitoring is not required
  - **Met with concerns** but performance related to some aspect must be improved
  - Judged as **not met**

Criteria for Accreditation

I. Mission

II. Integrity: Ethical & Responsible Conduct

III. Teaching & Learning: Quality, Resources, Support

IV. Teaching & Learning: Evaluation & Improvement

V. Resources, Planning, & Institutional Effectiveness

Criteria, Components and Sub-Components

CRITERION 3. TEACHING AND LEARNING: QUALITY, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT

The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

- 3.C. The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.
  - 3.C.4 Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.

Full set of criteria may be found at

www.niu.edu/hlc/comprehensive-evaluation/criteria.shtml

Assurance Argument

Core Team Members

Chris McCord

Assurance Argument Chair

Jason Rhode

Interim Accreditation Liaison Officer

Chad McEvoy

Criterion 1: Mission

Sarah Garner

Criterion 2: Integrity

Simón Weffer

Criterion 3: Teaching & Learning Quality

Stephanie Richter

Criterion 4: Teaching & Learning Assessment

Betsy Hull

Criterion 5: Resources & Planning

Omar Ghrayeb

Provost's Designee

Sample Assurance Argument

3.C.3   As prescribed by Article 5 and Article 6 of the university's bylaws, NIU evaluates all faculty according to their written approved department/unit-level procedures for merit, tenure, and promotion. Student feedback is solicited for all courses as outlined in the APPM, and this feedback is incorporated into instructional evaluation of all instructional faculty. Online course evaluations are administered through Testing Services. A majority of tenured and tenure-track faculty are currently being represented by the United Faculty Alliance (UFA) (CLAW faculty, faculty who are jointly appointed with external entities, and SPS with faculty rank are excluded from the union) during the negotiation of this group's first collective bargaining agreement with NIU; the agreement is expected to address future faculty evaluation mechanisms. Instructors are represented by the University Professionals of Illinois Collective Bargaining Agreement, which defines the procedures for annual performance evaluations of instructors.

Sample Evidence Files

Sources

- BOARD OF TRUSTEES_Board of Trustees Regulations_Section II Faculty and Administrative Employees
- BOARD OF TRUSTEES_Board of Trustees Meeting – Feb 15, 2018
- BOARD OF TRUSTEES_Instructors Bargaining Unit Agreement
- DIV ACADEMIC AFFAIRS_Academic Policies and Procedures Manual
- DIV HUMAN RESOURCE SERVICES_Types of Employment
- NIU_Constitution and Bylaws
- NIU_Testing Services_Online Course Evaluations
- NIU_University Council_NIU Bylaws Article 5.pdf
- NIU_University Council_NIU Bylaws Article 6

Where Do We Stand?

- We have a lot to celebrate, particularly when it comes to mission and diversity

- We have come through a harrowing time with strength

- At the same time, we have areas where improvement is needed, particularly in assessment and multi-year budget planning, which we're addressing

Shared Responsibility

NIU's model of shared responsibility places several of the sub-components within the responsibility of academic units.

- Be prepared if some of your units are selected for an audit.

3.A.3   Program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations

4.A.4   The institution exercises authority over prerequisites, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all programs, including dual credit programs.

3.C.3   All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual and consortial offerings.

3.C.4   Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.

Shared Responsibility

Help provide illustrative examples to bolster our narrative and evidence files

3.B.4   The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their offerings and the institution's mission.

3.C.5   The institution has processes and resources so that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.

3.C.6   Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.

3.C.7   Staff members providing student support services are appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their professional development.

4.A.5   The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.

Building the Assurance Argument

We will continue to seek input, particularly for the new sub-components:

1.C.1   The institution encourages curricular or cocurricular activities that prepare students for informed citizenship and workplace success.

2.B.2   The institution ensures evidence is available to support any claims it makes regarding its contributions to the educational experience through research, community engagement, experiential learning, …

2.D   The institution is committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.

2.E.1   Institutions supporting basic and applied research maintain professional standards and provide oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability.

2.E.3   The institution provides students guidance in the ethics of research and use of information resources

Building the Assurance Argument

4.B.2   The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.

4.C.2   The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs.

4.C.3   The institution uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.

5.A.2   The institution's administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.

5.C.2   The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning and budgeting.

Stay Updated and Participate

What are we asking?

- Be aware of process and timeline

- Participate in assurance filing creation as needed and requested

- Read and respond to filing as draft is developed and circulated (Fall 2023)

- Be knowledgeable about the content of the document prior to the site visit

NIU HLC website

niu.edu/hlc