

Northern Illinois University

HLC ID 1134

OPEN PATHWAY: Mid-Cycle Review

Visit Date: 6/25/2018

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Context and Nature of Review

Visit Date

6/25/2018

Mid-Cycle Reviews include:

- The Year 4 Review in the Open and Standard Pathways
- The Biennial Review for Applying institutions

Reaffirmation Reviews include:

- The Year 10 Review in the Open and Standard Pathways
- The Review for Initial Candidacy for Applying institutions
- The Review for Initial Accreditation for Applying institutions
- The Year 4 Review for Standard Pathway institutions that are in their first accreditation cycle after attaining initial accreditation

Scope of Review

- Mid-Cycle Review

There are no forms assigned.

Institutional Context

Northern Illinois University (NIU) is a public regional institution that has suffered recent financial stress due to the State of Illinois' budgetary hiatus which lasted just over two years, and internal disruption due to leadership transitions. Nevertheless, during the four years since the last HLC visit, NIU developed and implemented a comprehensive Program Prioritization process which has shaped and guided the institution, and tied strategic planning and budgeting together. NIU has improved on its transparency and strengthened its shared governance mechanisms, and is now preparing to launch a search for its next President.

Interactions with Constituencies

Being that this was a year four Open Pathway review, there was no site visit. The Team Chair interacted by phone and email on several occasions with institutional representatives, including the Acting President, the Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness (and ALO), and the Director of Accreditation, Assessment and Evaluation.

Additional Documents

The Team was given remote login access to NIU's Blackboard system, through which program review documents including committee recommendations were available. All of NIU's assessment materials were also reviewed via this system. In addition, faculty rosters and course activity documentation was accessed via remote login through

MyNIU. The team also reviewed institutional websites and the President's Program Prioritization Progress Report dated June 28, 2018.

1 - Mission

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

1.A - Core Component 1.A

The institution's mission is broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations.

1. The mission statement is developed through a process suited to the nature and culture of the institution and is adopted by the governing board.
2. The institution's academic programs, student support services, and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.
3. The institution's planning and budgeting priorities align with and support the mission. (This sub-component may be addressed by reference to the response to Criterion 5.C.1.)

Rating

Met

Evidence

Northern Illinois University (NIU) is a comprehensive university offering degrees from the bachelor's- to the doctoral-level. In AY2011-2012, a revised vision and mission was adopted through a process that improved transparency, shared governance, and an institutional culture of engagement with its diverse constituencies. For instance, NIU's undergraduate, graduate, and law programs are designed to reinforce the university value to provide "access for a broad spectrum of students to high quality undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs that prepare them to be lifelong learners and productive, socially conscious citizens." In addition, the NIU Data Book documents a consistent increase in diversity in undergraduate, graduate, and law students from 2010 to 2016.

NIU has aligned planning and budgeting priorities with its mission through the five themes which have been developed since the last HLC visit in 2014 and during a budget crisis in the State of Illinois: program prioritization, transparency, diversity, NIU PLUS (Progressive Learning Undergraduate Studies) and engagement. Program Prioritization has confirmed NIU's commitment to continuous improvement focused on mission through a systematic self-evaluation process. Although NIU underwent a change in presidential leadership since the 2014 HLC site visit, the Board of Trustees named Dr. Lisa Freeman as Acting President and has reinforced the five themes with defined goals and metrics which align with the institution's mission and vision.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

1.B - Core Component 1.B

The mission is articulated publicly.

1. The institution clearly articulates its mission through one or more public documents, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans, or institutional priorities.
2. The mission document or documents are current and explain the extent of the institution's emphasis on the various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, application of research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development, and religious or cultural purpose.
3. The mission document or documents identify the nature, scope, and intended constituents of the higher education programs and services the institution provides.

Rating

Met

Evidence

NIU's vision and mission statements are publicly available through the main NIU website and linked from various university web pages. All units within the institution have aligned their missions with NIU's overarching goals and objectives, focusing on core values committed to increasing diversity, providing access, engaging with constituencies, serving the public good, and several others. Since the last HLC visit, NIU has continued to employ highly qualified faculty and staff and demonstrate its commitment to teaching and learning via investments in programs, infrastructure, technology, and people. In addition, numerous student support programs provide a variety of services to the diverse populations of students at NIU including those served at locations other than main campus in line with the institution's mission. Thus, consistent with the findings from the HLC visit in 2014, there is sufficient evidence that the mission documents are clear, accurate, and guide NIU's operations.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

1.C - Core Component 1.C

The institution understands the relationship between its mission and the diversity of society.

1. The institution addresses its role in a multicultural society.
2. The institution's processes and activities reflect attention to human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

Rating

Met

Evidence

Since the 2014 HLC review, NIU convened a Diversity and Inclusion Task Force. This group performed a campus-wide study and issued a report which led to: the hiring of NIU's first Senior Associate Vice President for Academic Diversity and Chief Diversity Officer; the reorganization of diversity efforts; and the development of training opportunities. The Committee for Academic Equity and Inclusive Excellence was formed in 2017 to oversee curricular initiatives aimed at narrowing achievement gaps and expanding the impact of degree requirements focused on human diversity. Additionally, in 2018, to address the need to increase the diversity of the faculty ranks at Illinois universities, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Education held a statewide conference. Finally, numerous programs such as Diversity Dialogues and mandatory Title IX and Affirmative Action training keep diversity and respect for others at the forefront. These recent examples indicate that NIU has maintained and expanded its commitment to diversity since 2014.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

1.D - Core Component 1.D

The institution's mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.

1. Actions and decisions reflect an understanding that in its educational role the institution serves the public, not solely the institution, and thus entails a public obligation.
2. The institution's educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.
3. The institution engages with its identified external constituencies and communities of interest and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.

Rating

Met

Evidence

Over the years, NIU has demonstrated its commitment to the public good in many ways and has continued to do so in the past four years. The local and regional economies are impacted by NIU's educational mission through employment of its graduates, and NIU's research and artistry mission leads to the development and sharing of new knowledge and perspectives. As a public institution, NIU does not have external interests which compete with its educational role. NIU's faculty and staff are committed to public and professional service and are encouraged to participate in opportunities locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. The Division of Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development (OERD) serves the region in many ways by providing workshops and continuing education and through entities such as the Center for Economic Education, Center for Child Welfare and Education, and the Center for P-20 Engagement. The evidence indicates that NIU continues to meet its mission by engaging and educating students of all kinds consistent with the needs of the region.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

1.S - Criterion 1 - Summary

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

Evidence

During the four years since the last HLC visit, NIU has experienced significant budgetary challenges due to issues at the State level as well as internal leadership transitions. Nevertheless, the institution has stayed true to its mission and role in the region. New initiatives and organizational structures have emerged to improve the efficiency and impact of the services NIU provides its students and other constituencies. NIU has expanded its emphasis on diversity, engagement and transparency in a manner consistent with its mission as a public institution.

2 - Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

2.A - Core Component 2.A

The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it establishes and follows policies and processes for fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff.

Rating

Met

Evidence

Through changes in leadership and intense financial stress since the last HLC visit, NIU has continued to operate with integrity. For instance, the Board made a decision to hire the Acting President for a two-year period to ensure consistency and stability in top leadership and to allow time for an inclusive and transparent process of selecting a new President. In her letter to the campus community, the Acting President affirmed that her “administration will be guided by principles of shared governance, mutual respect and transparency in decision-making.” Since 2014, new deans have been hired per established shared governance processes in the Colleges of Business, Education, Engineering and Engineering Technology, and Visual and Performing Arts. The NIU Constitution and Bylaws address personnel processes and procedures, committee charges, appeals processes, and grievance procedures. The University Council (UC) bylaw amendment process was modified by vote in 2016 to “ensure the University Council is able to conduct its business effectively and to enable the University Council to effect change it deems necessary in a timely manner” which demonstrates that the institution learns from its experiences and strives for improvement in operations.

NIU has developed a process of program review to maintain integrity in its academic programs. In addition, NIU’s Faculty Credentials Policy establishes the minimum standard for ensuring all instructional faculty and staff are qualified to teach courses to which they are assigned and complies with the Assumed Practices of the HLC. Annual ethics, Title IX and Affirmative Action training are provided and the numbers of students, faculty and staff receiving the training are substantial. For example, in Spring 2017, more than 3,300 employees completed the Title IX module, with more than 10,000 students completing it in Fall 2017. In 2014-2017, 100% of NIU's employees completed online ethics training. Finally, as discussed in more detail under Criterion 5, a new Executive Budget Committee (EBC) and budgeting process has increased transparency and accountability at NIU.

The Illinois Auditor General Report for FY2017 released in March 2018 found that NIU had inadequate control over property and equipment - basically that 0.64% of laptops and other university tagged items were unaccounted for. In response to this report, NIU implemented a new Property Control procedure and for FY2018, only 0.10% of the equipment could not be identified. This rapid

response to a serious concern, with substantive improvement in the first year of implementation, demonstrates that NIU takes its role as a public entity seriously and promotes ethical practices, as reinforced in the 2018 Presidential goal, “Foster an organizational culture that is ethical and accountable.”

Finally, NIU's KPMG Composite Financial Index (CFI) score for 2017 was 0.1, i.e. "In the Zone", and during the course of this review the team was advised that the 2018 CFI was also 0.1. According to HLC policy a financial indicator report will therefore be required. The loss of State appropriations during a two-year hiatus in Illinois is the primary cause for this issue, which has now been resolved. NIU has been diligent with respect to cost controls since the last HLC visit, and has re-organized units and eliminated some programs via Program Prioritization which has led to some savings. The institution is in a remarkably good position given the external pressures it has endured, which speak to the integrity of its people and operations.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

2.B - Core Component 2.B

The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public with regard to its programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control, and accreditation relationships.

Rating

Met

Evidence

According to the available evidence, the institution presents itself accurately to its students and to the public. The NIU web page contains a search feature, an index and is compatible with various electronic devices, both desktop and mobile. The Program Prioritization web pages include reports, narratives and a timeline which are available publicly and describe the process and results for maintaining and improving the quality of academic and administrative programs. The annual Data Book, the Student Profile, the 2018 Assurance Review, and a summary of all accredited programs are publicly available, as are student catalogs and employee handbooks and guides. Information on financial aid and a Net Price Calculator are also available as expected.

NIU responds timely to public records requests in compliance with the federal Freedom of Information Act and Illinois Public Act 096-0542. Additionally, NIU publishes its Clery Report and an annual Fire Safety Report as required by statute. Beyond compliance related matters, the Division of Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications has reorganized the admissions web site to provide information to students in a more straightforward manner. It is clear that NIU has improved on its transparency to both internal and external audiences, and continues to do so.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

2.C - Core Component 2.C

The governing board of the institution is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and to assure its integrity.

1. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.
2. The governing board reviews and considers the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.
3. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties when such influence would not be in the best interest of the institution.
4. The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the administration and expects the faculty to oversee academic matters.

Rating

Met

Evidence

In FY2018 the Board of Trustees (BOT) for the first time publicly approved and posted its own priorities and also goals for the President, which is yet another example of improved transparency and shared governance at NIU. The BOT is composed of seven members appointed by the Governor for six-year terms and one student member elected annually by the student body, very much in line with other public institutions. The Board members receive ethics and conflict of interest training, and annually certify their compliance. Per its own bylaws, the BOT publishes meeting agendas and minutes, and provides for public comment on matters it will consider.

A current example of how engaged the BOT members are with the campus and its constituents is the Presidential Search process. Board members visited with various groups and governance bodies as part of the planning process, and the work of the Presidential Search Preparation Committee is all publicly available. On a much larger scale, the Board established the University Council (UC) which is composed of representatives from various areas (e.g., faculty, students, administrators, supportive professional staff and operating staff) and which has a wide range of powers with respect to institutional policies and shared governance matters. UC seats are apportioned so that 51-60% of the voting seats are for faculty and 25-30% are for students, with the remaining distributed among other constituency groups. There is also a Faculty Senate, and the BOT expects the faculty to have primary control over the curriculum. Finally, in authorizing the Program Prioritization process the Board has provided clear evidence that it consults with stakeholders before making decisions involving substantial changes at NIU.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

2.D - Core Component 2.D

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

Rating

Met

Evidence

Since the last HLC visit, NIU has continued its commitment to freedom of expression by establishing a Freedom of Expression policy (2016). The institution also maintains a Code of Ethics handbook, a reference guide on Employee Conduct, Accountability and Ethics in the Workplace, and provides training in this area as mentioned previously. BOT regulations safeguard academic freedom, and the Academic Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM) outlines the professional conduct expected of faculty as well as their rights and responsibilities with respect to intellectual property. The Student Code of Conduct describes the procedures followed when a violation of standards is alleged against a student or recognized student organization, and the Student Conduct office regularly reports on the number and types of incidents, cases, hearings and sanctions. A final example demonstrating compliance with this Core Component is from a Fall 2017 incident when a group without proper authorization posted hate speech materials on campus which, once discovered, were removed. This was followed by a public statement from the administration as to NIU's commitment to freedom of expression through proper channels as well as maintaining a safe environment for teaching and learning.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

2.E - Core Component 2.E

The institution's policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, students and staff.

1. The institution provides effective oversight and support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff, and students.
2. Students are offered guidance in the ethical use of information resources.
3. The institution has and enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

Rating

Met

Evidence

Since the last HLC evaluation in 2014, NIU has continued to adhere to best practices in the areas of research and academic integrity. As noted previously, the Student Code of Conduct includes policies and procedures that students are expected to follow. NIU provides tutorials and information via syllabus statements so that students may understand what plagiarism is and therefore learn how to avoid it. Students can also receive training in the University Writing Center, and plagiarism prevention software (SafeAssign) is available for use by students and faculty within the learning management system (Blackboard).

With respect to research, the Responsible Conduct of Research Policy covers human subjects via an Institutional Review Board (IRB), animal research via the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), and hazardous materials via a Laboratory Safety Committee and Institutional Biosafety Committee. Training as needed and policy guidelines are provided for students and faculty interested in pursuing research involving these areas, in addition to Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training being required. NIU also maintains a Research Misconduct Policy which aligns with federal expectations and an Authorship Policy which covers books, journal articles, conference proceedings, abstracts, grants and other forms of disseminated scholarly output.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

2.S - Criterion 2 - Summary

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

Evidence

All evidence indicates that NIU has continued to operate in an ethical and responsible manner since the last HLC visit in 2014. Issues that have arisen since that time have been addressed directly and effectively with transparency and positive results. This provides additional validation that the institution acts with integrity.

3 - Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support

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

3.A - Core Component 3.A

The institution's degree programs are appropriate to higher education.

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded.
2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate, and certificate programs.
3. The institution's program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).

Rating

Met

Evidence

NIU offers its students 57 undergraduate majors, 69 graduate programs and a law program, as well as numerous certificates at each level throughout its 45 schools and academic departments. To ensure that these programs are current and require the appropriate level of student performance, NIU has a robust and comprehensive program review system. The Academic Planning Committee (APC) maintains an eight year review cycle as displayed in an evidence document grid provided by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Furthermore, NIU's Constitution and Bylaws require the APC to provide program review information to the institution's Board of Trustees and the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

The Program Prioritization process offered the opportunity to consider factors such as enrollment, student diversity, and employment outlook in making decisions about individual academic programs. Pragmatic recommendations regarding funding, program delivery, and assessment emerged from this analysis. Respondents to a 2016 survey listed in the June, 2018 President's Program Prioritization Progress Report expressed an impact of program prioritization of "Creating, modifying, eliminating curricular programs (60%)", and "Increased data-informed decision making (63%)."

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness website contains student learning outcomes for each NIU degree program. Curricular maps provided as evidence from the B.S. in Special Education program portrayed how curricular elements connect to student learning outcomes as well as NIU's "Baccalaureate" (i.e., general education) student learning outcomes. The office also oversees the requirement that each degree program maintain an assessment plan, including student learning outcomes and the method for collecting data for each outcome. Annual updates and periodic status

reports are also required. All undergraduate programs are expected to align with competencies articulated in the "baccalaureate" student learning outcomes. Eight baccalaureate outcomes support the institution's three primary learning goals of critical thinking, creativity, and communication.

Examples of how program-specific student learning outcomes are differentiated by degree level are demonstrated in the B.S., M.S., and Ph.D Chemistry assessment plans presented in the assurance argument. In examining assessment plans located in the online Blackboard system, student learning outcomes were found to be differentiated at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. Current assessment plans were consistently available. The syllabi reviewed stated student learning outcomes, and these were found to align with the baccalaureate outcomes.

The institution offers courses and programs at various regional sites, including NIU-Hoffman Estates, NIU-Naperville, and NIU-Rockford, as listed on <http://www.niu.edu/regional/>. NIU also offers undergraduate and graduate courses at various partner community college sites, as well as reverse transfer partnerships with 17 community colleges. Although a relatively low percentage (5.7% in fall 2017) of NIU courses are offered online, the institution has taken steps to insure quality in these offerings. The Quality Matters (QM) rubric is utilized for online course design, and includes information on learning objectives, assessment, and accessibility. Courses may be recognized for adhering to the NIU Essential Standards by incorporating elements identified as contributing to student success, and thus receive the NIU Online quality designation.

Consistency of off-site programs is upheld by maintaining the same learning goals, and offering the same degree programs, as those provided at the main DeKalb campus. Consistent methods of assessing student learning outcomes are used at the main and off-site campuses. Section III, Item 23 of the Policies for Distance Education Courses Carrying Undergraduate Credit states expectations and guidelines to ensure quality and rigor of online courses. Syllabi for on-line courses reviewed in the Blackboard system showed expressed learning goals to be consistent with those of face-to-face courses.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

3.B - Core Component 3.B

The institution demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs.

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution.
2. The institution articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.
3. Every degree program offered by the institution engages students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; in mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.
4. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity of the world in which students live and work.
5. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their programs and the institution's mission.

Rating

Met

Evidence

The institution fulfills its goal of engaged learning through its general education program known as Academics PLUS, which consists of 33 credit hours. The Foundational Studies aspect of the general education program is designed to develop specific skills by requiring courses in writing composition, oral communication, and quantitative literacy. The Knowledge Domain aspect of the general education program requires 21 semester hours, and is organized around the framework of three categories: Creativity and Critical Analysis, Nature and Technology, and Society and Culture. The General Education Committee (GEC), operating under the Baccalaureate Council, is responsible for program review and revision. Minutes from an April, 2017 GEC meeting demonstrate the role that the GEC has in assessing baccalaureate student learning outcomes.

Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning through adopting one of the optional Academics PLUS "Pathways", which consist of seven categories of coursework (e.g. Health and Wellness; Sustainability). The pathways offer students early exposure to coursework in the major, and also allow for combinations of study that connect to student interests and career path. The Academics PLUS pathways are intended to align with the general education goals of critical thinking, creativity, and communication, which are further expanded to eight student learning outcomes (e.g. intercultural competence; collaboration to achieve goals).

NIU engages students in key learning outcomes through the baccalaureate student learning outcomes (BSLO's). These are displayed for each degree program on the Accreditation, Assessment, and

Evaluation website. In the application process for Academics PLUS courses, faculty must identify two learning outcomes from the NIU student learning outcomes. The BSLO's may be assessed through NIU's BSLO rubrics, adapted from AAC&U VALUE rubrics. In the example application for a History of Visual Communication course, two learning outcomes were identified, as well as an expected level of proficiency. This same form requires that applications identify a signature assessment to measure performance on the two identified learning outcomes. NIU is currently developing a long-term data management system that will include a database to store all general education assessment data.

NIU enjoys a diverse student body and supports this diversity through its curriculum, co-curriculum, and organizational infrastructure. To comply with Illinois Public Act 87-581, in 2017 NIU began requiring all undergraduate students to complete a human diversity baccalaureate requirement either through a designated human diversity course, or a non-course based experience designated as "human diversity." Two of the university's eight general education student learning outcomes (integrating knowledge of global interconnections and inter-dependencies, and exhibiting intercultural competencies with people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives) explicitly deal with diversity.

The institution has worked to address inclusion by acting on the 2014 Diversity and Inclusion Task Force Subcommittee's report. Some of the items implemented since 2014 include hiring a Chief Diversity Officer, and developing diversity plans within each college, department, and unit. The diversity plans of the College of Education as well as the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences were displayed in the argument materials.

NIU has the Carnegie Classification of a doctoral institution with high research activities. Numerous federally funded research projects occurring at the national and international level were cited in the argument. Several examples of faculty publications and awards for excellence in specific disciplines were noted. The Office of Sponsored Program Administration offers web-based resources to students, faculty and staff on the pursuit and management of grants. Support includes grants, seminars, assistance with research methodology, and professional development funding.

The institution has a particular emphasis on experiential learning, as highlighted in the new (2016) EngagePLUS curriculum. Students may take part in opportunities that emphasize learning outcomes such as leadership, service, and artistic expression. The annual Undergraduate Research and Artistry Day provides students who have been involved in research or artistic endeavor with a faculty member to showcase and be recognized for their work.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

3.C - Core Component 3.C

The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

1. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance; establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning.
2. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial programs.
3. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.
4. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.
5. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.
6. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising, and co-curricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained, and supported in their professional development.

Rating

Met

Evidence

The 2017-2018 NIU Data Book displayed faculty levels of 1,171 persons, including 654 tenured or tenure track faculty (https://www.niu.edu/effectiveness/_files/niu-data-book-2017-2018.pdf). The 13:1 student faculty ratio reported in the argument narrative is improved from the 17:1 level reported in the 2014 HLC comprehensive evaluation, with a fall 2017 enrollment of 18,042 undergraduate, graduate, and law school students.

The NIU Constitution and Bylaws (pp 24-26) stipulate that the University Personnel Committee is responsible for regularly reviewing and recommending policies regarding faculty salary, tenure, promotion, and leaves. The criteria for arriving at personnel decisions (pp 38-42) are centered around considerations of teaching, scholarly contribution, and service. The NIU Academic Policies and Procedures manual serves as a guide for hiring and determining compensation of faculty.

The institution has taken actions to standardize the collection, reporting, and affirmation of faculty qualifications. NIU presented its efforts in this regard at the spring 2018 HLC conference. In this new plan that launched in January of 2017, Human Resources is responsible for entering initial faculty qualifications, hiring data is verified by chairs and departments, credentials are audited by Institutional Effectiveness, and a faculty qualification report is generated in the OnBase platform. A Faculty Credentials Policy adopted 1/26/17 outlines the criteria for teaching qualifications. Exceptions for those teaching doctoral and master's level students are articulated. Consideration for hiring priorities are through Program Prioritization requests, which provide the mechanism for Colleges to

identify priority hiring needs using a matrix to facilitate data-driven decision-making. NIU Bylaws provide criteria for making faculty hiring decisions.

Student evaluation of instruction occurs for all courses with an enrollment of at least 5 students. The Academic Policies and Procedures Manual, Article 7.2 (pp 21-22) of the Collective Bargaining Agreement by and between NIU Board of Trustees and the NIU Instructors' Unit (Local 4100) of the University Professionals of Illinois, stipulates the procedures for annual evaluation of instructors.

The Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center (FDIDC) offers faculty, staff, and teaching assistants a variety of professional development options. A list of FDIDC seminars from the July 2018 schedule offered in the argument included upcoming presentations on technology and pedagogy. Online resources are also made available by the Center. In the 2016-2017 annual report (p. 4), the FDIDC recorded that "... 176 programs for more than 1,807 participants" were offered, and that "1,569 consultations were provided to 590 discreet faculty, staff, and graduate assistants from 92 academic support units."

In support of professional development, the first ever campus-wide Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship conference was held this year (2018) to share best practices in high-impact pedagogies and experiences. The Office of Sponsored Program Administration offers web-based resources to students, faculty, and staff on the pursuit and management of grants, as well as a Grant Administration and Management Series, and a PI Academy (see <http://www.niu.edu/divresearch/funding/index.shtml>).

The Academic Policies and Procedures Manual (Section II. Item 26) requires faculty members to maintain office hours or other modes of student/faculty contact by adhering to the appropriate departmental policy. Office hours are to be listed in syllabi and publicly posted each semester. An example was found at the NIU web link: <http://www.cs.niu.edu/faculty/facultyhours.shtml> which displays the Spring 2018 office hours of Computer Science faculty.

The NIU Office of Human Resource Services (HRS) provides guidelines for hiring staff as outlined in the Supportive Professional Staff Policies and Procedures manual. Search committees are responsible for verifying the credentials of job candidates. HRS also provides testing to ascertain the qualifications of those applying for civil service employment. Performance evaluations are to be conducted on an annual basis with evaluations kept on file by HRS. Numerous professional development opportunities are offered by HRS, from personal interest seminars to mandatory Title IX training.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

3.D - Core Component 3.D

The institution provides support for student learning and effective teaching.

1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its programs and the needs of its students.
4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites, museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).
5. The institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.

Rating

Met

Evidence

The institution provides support for effective teaching and learning through various cultural centers that serve a diversity of student communities. The Center for Black Studies, Latino Resource Center, Gender and Sexuality Resource Center and others provide an array of cultural activities and student support, opportunities for student leadership roles, and a home base for affiliated student organizations.

NIU provides a strong foundation of support services appropriate to the needs of its student body, including classroom accommodations through the Disability Resource Center, six Living Learning Communities and six Special Interest Communities offered by Housing & Residential Services. The University Recreation and Wellness department enjoyed an increase in program participation of more than 10% from FY 2011 to FY 2016 according to the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management FY 2016 report. The Financial Aid & Scholarships Office provides counseling and services to NIU students, 80% of whom receive some form of financial assistance.

NIU requires all students to attend New Student Orientation (NSO). First-Year and Family orientation programs are supplemented by a Transfer orientation, which serves the 50% of NIU students who transfer into the institution. The Division of International Affairs offers an orientation program for incoming international students.

The institution has processes in place for directing students to the appropriate level of coursework. The Testing Services office provides placement exams prior to first-semester registration in order to identify the appropriate course-level for students in the enrollment process. An array of student support programs are offered to prospective and current NIU students, including an Honors Program and the CHANCE program. The CHANCE program provides support to alternatively admitted

students through specialized academic and personalized counseling, monitoring of academic performance, and tutoring. Additionally, first generation students receive support through the same Center offering the CHANCE program.

Numerous units are devoted to supporting student academic success, including the ACCESS Tutoring and Support Services office which offers individual and group study skills and tutoring. In addition, the University Writing Center provides support for undergraduates and graduate students through test preparation, writing and research skill development, and a Summer Boot Camp for those preparing to write a dissertation.

In addition to the academic advising offices within each college, NIU has invested in an Academic Advising Center (AAC) to specifically serve those students who have not chosen a major. The AAC extends the reach of support beyond the Center, by collaborating with partner Colleges. Its approach to advising recognizes the needs of the students it serves, by focusing on life skills and self-advocacy, as well as academic concerns. A March 2015 external review by NACADA identified strengths and challenges to advising at NIU. This review, along with feedback from the Program Prioritization process, led to the convening of a "Complex Conversations" group. The group produced a list of recommendations for improving advisement through a systematic approach to efficiency and professional development.

During the Program Prioritization process, other actions were recommended and acted on. These include the hiring of a Director of Community College Partnerships in 2017 to provide a single point of contact for outside entities, and to establish the infrastructure and efficiencies needed to build partnerships with community colleges. Another prioritization response was to increase the use of data analytics in the Student Success Collaborative platform. Advising interventions that include "tough conversations" with students have resulted from the use of these data.

NIU provides the spaces and programs to support student learning and effective teaching and learning. Founders Memorial Library and two branch libraries, museum spaces, and galleries are cited in the argument. The institution's librarians offer a basic library resource orientation. Additionally, students may take a one hour for-credit course that covers accessing library resources, as well as the ethical and legal use of information. Students may take online academic integrity tutorials which address topics such as plagiarism. Furthermore, course syllabi (p. 6, Item H, Academic Integrity Policy) must include the NIU Academic Integrity Statement.

NIU's Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning (OSEEL) is the umbrella organization for a multifaceted collection of programs and services that connect students to curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities. OSEEL provides global internships, common intellectual experiences, and capstone course programs. The Colleges of Education and Health and Human Services provide numerous internship and practicum sites.

Finally, the Division of Research and Innovation Partnerships (RIPS) provides resources and support to faculty and graduate students for scholarly activity. Professional development (e.g. "PI Academy"), stipends for professional development travel, and linkages to potential research partners are part of the support offered by RIPS.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

3.E - Core Component 3.E

The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment.

1. Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.
2. The institution demonstrates any claims it makes about contributions to its students' educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, and economic development.

Rating

Met

Evidence

The institutional value of "Student success supported through academic and co-curricular programming and activities", is sustained through a wide variety of co-curricular programs. The Student Involvement and Leadership Development office connects students to over 300 student organizations. Housing and Residential Services offers numerous Living-Learning and special interest housing options. In supporting the institutional mission of promoting excellence and engagement in outreach and service, NIU offers numerous service-learning and volunteer experiences. Among these are a food pantry, community garden, awareness week and service events. Volunteer opportunities, and other student engagement events may be accessed through the Huskie Link portal.

In 2014, the Office of Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion unveiled an ambitious three-year plan, as cited in the argument materials, with many of the initiatives launched in 2016. One of the expressed goals was to expand and support diversity programming for students. Five Presidential Commissions advise the president on matters related to minority, women, persons with disabilities, sexual orientation and gender identity communities; a commission on interfaith matters was added in 2016. As mentioned previously, NIU offers strong support of diversity as evidenced by the Centers on campus which serve various student communities. The nearly half-century old Center for Black Studies, along with hubs for Latino, students with disabilities, Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, and Military and Post-Traditional Student Services offices provide resources, cultural events, personal development, and gathering spaces for student organizations.

The institution receives feedback on the educational experience of NIU graduates through the Baccalaureate Alumni Survey. Results for 2012-2016 show positive, and mostly upward trending results on questions pertaining to employment, pursuit of graduate degrees, satisfaction with major, and other markers. In 2017, a task force was appointed by the Acting Executive Vice President and Provost to develop an assessment plan for student engagement and satisfaction. Progress reported on this initiative to-date include the development of a logic model, and a project timeline.

The previously named Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management reported contributions to students' educational experience through an annual report. The 2016 report

catalogued metrics on student participation, connection to constituents such as employers, professional development for practitioners, innovations such as the first Adaptive Sports Day, and a new parent orientation hosted in Spanish.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

3.S - Criterion 3 - Summary

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

Evidence

Northern Illinois University continues to demonstrate that it provides a high quality education in the various settings that instruction is offered - both inside and outside of the classroom. Through the Program Prioritization process, the institution identified ways to support critical academic areas, and to also encourage innovation in the curriculum and co-curriculum. NIU supports faculty and staff through professional development in order to create high impact practitioners. With an emphasis on self-directed learning, the various aspects of the PLUS curriculum allow students to pursue experiences that are hands-on, meaningful, and relevant. A strong collection of student support services, and co-curricular education, enhance the prospects of student success and holistic learning. NIU is encouraged to continue the important work that has begun on the assessment plan for student engagement and satisfaction, as well as the implementation of recommendations to support Academic Advising through the Complex Conversations process.

4 - Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

4.A - Core Component 4.A

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.
2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.
3. The institution has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It assures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.
5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution assures that the degree or certificate programs it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and Americorps).

Rating

Met

Evidence

Since the last accreditation visit in 2014, Northern Illinois University has instituted a comprehensive Program Prioritization process. Although Program Prioritization was initially instituted to align resource allocation with the university's mission and priorities, it provided a rigorous review of the quality of the academic programs. Program narratives were reviewed by a task force of faculty and instructors resulting in recommendations for program continuation, transformation, or phase out and recommendations for associated resource allocation. The process was inclusive and transparent and seemed to effectively discern between programs.

NIU maintains 28 specialized accreditations. The Division of Academic Affairs oversees all

specialized accreditation and reviews all annual, interim, and self-study documents submitted by units to any accrediting agency. NIU also conducts program review every eight years with a mid-cycle review. Since the last accreditation, specialized accreditation has been incorporated into the process providing an independent external review. External review is part of the program review for doctoral programs.

NIU's transfer credit policies are published in the Undergraduate Catalog and are implemented by the Registrar and Records & Admissions offices. These policies follow those established by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). NIU participates in several transfer initiatives that streamlines the transfer of credits from Illinois community colleges and universities. Since 2017 NIU has made a concerted effort to establish new transfer agreements with community colleges and other statewide universities and colleges. The Graduate School and College of Law publish their own transfer policies as well.

NIU maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all programs. A section of the Academic Policies and Procedures Manual sets forth the Curricular Approval Procedures. Prerequisites and co-requisites are enforced through the course registration system. NIU uses the course activity documentation system (CAD) to ensure compliance with the credit hour policy and course syllabus policy. In Spring 2018 an audit was conducted on a sample (N=866, representing 10-12%) of courses to evaluate compliance with the curricular policies. A similar audit will be conducted in Spring 2019 on a different sample of courses. Results were shared with colleges for information and for action if necessary.

The Faculty Credentials Policy ensures minimum qualifications and compliance with HLC expectations. In Spring 2018 an audit was conducted by Academic Affairs that found a reportedly high level of compliance. Results were reported to the colleges for action as needed. Finally, NIU uses certification and licensure exams and an alumni survey to evaluate the success of its graduates. Summary data are available publicly and program-level data are available to faculty, staff and administrators.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

4.B - Core Component 4.B

The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.
2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

Rating

Met

Evidence

NIU has student learning outcomes for all programs and monitors them on a regular basis. Since the last HLC review, Accreditation, Assessment and Evaluation has provided updated resources including guideline templates, sample assessment plans, and detailed rubrics. Academic units submit assessment plans to the University Assessment Panel which provides review and feedback. They also provide feedback on the assessment reports and provide an annual University Assessment Update published on the assessment web page. In addition, since the last HLC review the assessment of all co-curricular activities has been required by the Division of Student Affairs. These plans and reports are reviewed by the Student Affairs Assessment Council which provides feedback to programs.

NIU has an extensive faculty-driven assessment process. Program assessment findings, analysis of assessment plans, results, and action steps, and recommendations for improvement are shared with the colleges and programs. Improvements to student learning occur at the program level and are based on assessment results. NIU provided several specific examples of programmatic changes that resulted from assessment. NIU has an Annual Assessment Expo that provides a forum for units to share best practices in assessment of student learning. In 2018 this expo will include the sharing of data on experiential learning.

There appears to be a campus culture of assessment that is faculty-driven as evidenced by the variety of presentations at the Assessment Expos conducted since 2007. Evaluation of program-level assessment is shared with colleges and departments and result in program improvements. An annual University Assessment update is published on the assessment web page. All evidence indicates that since the 2014 HLC comprehensive evaluation, NIU has continued to expand and improve on its assessment of student learning in both academic coursework and co-curricular programs.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

4.C - Core Component 4.C

The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

Rating

Met

Evidence

The FY2018 Presidential Goals present a modest target for undergraduate recruitment at a 5% increase from 2017 and an overall increase in retention by 0.5% from 2017. There are no goals to increase four and six year graduation rates. Since the last HLC visit, NIU has held Retention Summits, instituted Program Prioritization, and conducted Town Hall Presentations to inform and engage the campus community in conversations around retention, persistence, and completion. In addition, in January, 2015 the Board of Trustees instituted an Ad Hoc Committee on Enrollment which met quarterly for two years. This increased emphasis has pushed ownership of retention, persistence, and completion down to the unit level.

A new Division of Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications has been developed to manage centralized efforts to retain and graduate students. Following confirmation of the Acting President in June 2017, NIU updated its goals for retention and completion and reestablished the Strategic Enrollment Management Committee in Spring 2018. This campus wide committee is charged with developing a comprehensive strategic plan for enrollment management, monitoring key performance indicators, using data analytics to develop strategies, and communicating results and recommendations to the administration and campus community. The committee provided an initial report outlining the concerns they were addressing.

Since the last HLC visit, NIU created the Office of Institutional Effectiveness that has helped develop a coordinated, data-informed culture of strategic planning and decision making using data on assessment, accreditation, evaluation, and institutional reporting. These data are analyzed and shared to inform and improve processes. Data are publicly available in multiple locations including the NIU

Disclosures website. NIU is now using the EAB Student Success Collaborative Campus predictive analytics to inform advising and improve student retention and timely graduation.

Beginning in 2016 increased attention has been given to student subpopulations and an institutional goal to develop a strategy to reduce the equity gap among underrepresented populations and to improve graduation rates for all students. Each college, in collaboration with the Office of Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion developed a college action plan to address academic equity and issues surrounding inclusion and access. In addition, the NIU Equity Team Update and Recommendations Executive Summary (Fall 2017) identified several avenues for improving access and opportunity for underserved populations.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

4.S - Criterion 4 - Summary

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

Evidence

Since the last HLC visit, NIU has invested resources and made significant progress in the areas of assessment and continuous improvement of both academic and co-curricular programs. Most notably is the Program Prioritization process that evaluated programs and aligned institutional resources. A faculty-driven annual review of the assessment of student learning outcomes, including an annual assessment update, leads to action plans to improve programs. In addition, NIU has developed processes to collect, analyze, and use data on retention, persistence, and completion. Program and institutional data are shared among faculty, staff and administrators. Appropriate data are shared publicly demonstrating intentional transparency. NIU is encouraged to set more ambitious goals and key performance indicators in these areas. Based on the evidence cited in this section, the team concluded that NIU successfully meets all components of Criterion Four.

5 - Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

5.A - Core Component 5.A

The institution's resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

1. The institution has the fiscal and human resources and physical and technological infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
2. The institution's resource allocation process ensures that its educational purposes are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations to other areas or disbursement of revenue to a superordinate entity.
3. The goals incorporated into mission statements or elaborations of mission statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources, and opportunities.
4. The institution's staff in all areas are appropriately qualified and trained.
5. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring expense.

Rating

Met

Evidence

NIU had a required embedded monitoring report during this year-four review focused on budgeting and planning, in response to findings of met-with-concern for core components 5.A and 5.C during the Spring 2014 comprehensive evaluation. The most significant change in NIU's operations affecting these areas since 2014 is the implementation of a Program Prioritization process, which will be described here.

Partially in response to the Spring 2014 HLC team's findings, and also in response to external and financial pressures, NIU launched a comprehensive Program Prioritization process in Fall 2014. The intent of this process was to better align resource allocations with NIU's mission and to identify priorities in order to improve the institution's strategic balance. This multi-year process had six distinct phases, and involved input from numerous campus constituencies during the review of more than 200 academic and 200 administrative programs. The outcome of the process was the categorization of all of these programs into one of five groupings: those that will continue with more, the same or fewer resources going forward; those that will be transformed; and those that will be reviewed for possible elimination.

Although Program Prioritization was not intended to be a budget exercise, the efforts to identify

programs critical to NIU's mission – and those not so critical – came at a time when State funding was on hiatus and the institution needed to make difficult decisions about program sustainability and viability, and organizational effectiveness. According to the President's Program Prioritization Progress Report (June 28, 2018), NIU attributes \$2.0 M of enhanced funding to certain programs as directly resulting from, and an additional \$1.5 M being strongly influenced by, this planning process. In addition, internal resource reallocations on the order of \$2.5 M and \$1.2 M, and funding reductions of \$4.7 M and \$1.6M, have respectively been either directly or strongly influenced by this effort. Furthermore, Program Prioritization guided the authorization of tenured and tenure-track faculty searches for Fall 2017 and Fall 2018, with 93 such positions being allocated across the two hiring cycles and 70 filled.

Program Prioritization led to significant structural changes in many areas at NIU, including but not limited to: formation of an Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications unit; establishing an Office of Ethics and Compliance and an Office of Institutional Effectiveness; strengthening the Office of Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and reorganizations in Student Affairs, Affirmative Action & Equity Compliance, and the Office of Undergraduate Studies. In addition, since 2014 an Executive Budget Committee has been established to provide the CFO and Provost (now jointly responsible for making budgetary recommendations to the President) with support and advice, who also obtain input from the Resource, Space and Budget Committee and the Academic Planning Council. In this way, NIU has made its budgeting process much more transparent and increased the level of shared responsibility among campus constituents.

On the academic side, Program Prioritization has led to ten programs being eliminated including an M.S. in Family and Consumer Sciences and an M.A. in French, and fifteen minors and certificates going through the process of elimination. Significant progress toward transformation has been achieved in 28 programs across many disciplines ranging from Engineering and Physics to Economics, Health, Art and Education, and degree levels from minors and certificates to the Ph.D. In addition, a new Doctor of Nursing Practice program has been created, and an M.S./Ph.D in Data Science, a B.S. in Statistics, and a B.S. in Health Information Management are in the process of being established.

In summation, all of these aforementioned changes clearly demonstrate that the Program Prioritization process has had significant influence in strategically and transparently shaping the focus and effectiveness of NIU with respect to budgeting and planning.

Despite the financial challenges experienced due to State funding issues, NIU maintains a substantial workforce to deliver its educational programs and provide service to its students. According to the Fast Facts website (updated June 29, 2017), NIU had 1,174 instructional faculty and a total student enrollment of 19,015. NIU also employed 1,521 operating staff and 891 administrative and professional staff, totaling to more than 3,300 employees. This investment in human capital is reflected in the annual budget, over half of which is allocated to supporting NIU's workforce.

Undergraduate tuition at NIU is guaranteed for nine semesters from the time of enrollment in line with the State's Truth in Tuition statute. However, tuition for incoming student cohorts has risen due to declining State support, making recruiting more difficult and contributing to overall enrollment declines. Nevertheless, NIU has prudently managed its resources, and since FY15 has reduced its institutional tuition and fee waivers for undergraduates slightly from 6.2M\$ to 5.3M\$, and substantially for graduate students from 20.9M\$ to 15.0M\$. These changes indicate that net tuition revenue perspectives are part of the planning and budgeting process at NIU.

The institution has put the revenue from student fees dedicated to maintaining and enhancing campus technology to good use, and has a highly structured distribution of four categories of classrooms based on the technologies available in each location. NIU has recently (March 2018) received \$16M in State funds to begin the process of replacing the boilers in its East and West heating plants, following a proactive approach to educate the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and State legislators as to the need for capital improvements.

In addition to the Program Prioritization process described above, the budgeting process at NIU has changed substantially since 2014. The current process is described as inclusive and transparent, and the available evidence substantiates that this is the case. The Provost and CFO now co-chair an Executive Budget Committee which gives them advice before they make recommendations to the President. Shared governance has been strengthened by including the leadership of the Academic Planning Council and the Resource, Space and Budget Committee in the annual budget development. In addition, the Office of Budget and Planning has provided workshops across the campus to educate units so that many more employees both better understand how the budgets work and can participate in the process.

Primarily due to the loss of State appropriations for two years, NIU's CFI score was 0.1, i.e. "In the Zone", in 2017 and during the course of this review the team was advised that the CFI did not change for 2018. Therefore, according to HLC policy a financial indicator report will be required. This review team is convinced by the evidence that NIU has continued to provide the resources and staffing needed to deliver quality educational programs and to fulfill its mission even in difficult times, and that Core Component 5.A is therefore met.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

5.B - Core Component 5.B

The institution's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.

1. The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; it provides oversight of the institution's financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
2. The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students—in the institution's governance.
3. Administration, faculty, staff, and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.

Rating

Met

Evidence

As a State institution, NIU has a mission and a Board of Trustees (BOT) dedicated to the public good. Fiduciary responsibility and final authority rests with the BOT, but the day-to-day management of the institution is delegated to the President with teaching and research activities under the purview of the faculty. Many governance bodies exist at NIU, including the University Council made up of representatives from across constituency groups, the Faculty Senate, the Supportive Professional Staff Council, the Operating Staff Council, and the Student Association which manages a 6.5M\$ annual budget.

As mentioned previously, the Program Prioritization process involved significant input from faculty and staff, and is evidence of NIU's active pursuit of increased shared governance since 2014. Similarly, the new budgeting process and the Executive Budget Committee structure demonstrate improved transparency and accountability across the institution since the last HLC comprehensive evaluation. An additional example of new initiatives involving shared governance is the Faculty Credentials Policy which was finalized in 2017. Finally, the revision of the BOT Bylaws in 2017 to create four standing committees, and the establishment of a Chief of Staff position in 2015 which serves as a liaison to the BOT, provide further examples of how NIU continues to improve its governance and administrative structures to fulfill its mission.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

5.C - Core Component 5.C

The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning.

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities.
2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting.
3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity. Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue, such as enrollment, the economy, and state support.
5. Institutional planning anticipates emerging factors, such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.

Rating

Met

Evidence

As noted under Core Component 5.A, NIU launched a comprehensive Program Prioritization process in Fall 2014 in order to improve alignment of resources with its mission. This inclusive and transparent process had six distinct phases: planning and launch; process development; data platform development and population; program narrative writing; task force scoring and report development; and implementation. The President's Program Prioritization Progress Report (June 28, 2018) demonstrates that implementation is now taking place. Funding reductions, re-allocations and new investments have taken place including numerous faculty hires and the development of new degree programs in strategic areas.

Decisions about whether to invest in, transform or eliminate academic programs were made holistically, with consideration given to the quality of the current faculty, student outcomes from the assessment process, financial efficiency, mission criticality, internal and external demand, and each program's contribution to diversity at NIU, among other attributes. For the administrative units, similar characteristics were examined, with additional analyses focused on potential cost savings and consolidation of activities. Significant administrative restructuring has occurred, most notably in the areas of diversity and inclusion, enrollment management and marketing, student affairs, ethics and compliance, and institutional effectiveness. All of these changes have occurred since the last HLC comprehensive evaluation, and provide substantial evidence that NIU now has a robust system in place for integrated planning, budgeting and decision making.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

5.D - Core Component 5.D

The institution works systematically to improve its performance.

1. The institution develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations.
2. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts.

Rating

Met

Evidence

Program Prioritization led to the consolidation of five programs under the new Office of Institutional Effectiveness in 2017 which has four main functions: Accreditation, Assessment and Evaluation (AAE); Decision Support and Analysis (DSA); Institutional Research (IR); and Academic Planning. While distinct, these four areas all support strategic planning and data-informed decision making in order to improve the NIU's performance.

As discussed under Criterion 4, AAE primarily manages the assessment of student learning outcomes in the academic programs, academic support services assessment, and alumni surveys. DSA produces comparative reports on enrollment, credit hour production and student demographics, and provides business intelligence, benchmarking and analytics support to various units upon request. IR maintains the official data of NIU and is responsible for reporting to federal and State agencies (e.g. IPEDS and IBHE, respectively). Finally, the Academic Planning function helps units develop and obtain approvals for new degree programs after thorough vetting of market demand and financial aspects.

The BOT adopted a new set of guiding principles in 2014 for annual budget development and multi-year planning and forecasting. The Provost leads in these areas, recommending strategic priorities and resource allocations based on requests from the various units, along with the CFO who advises on financial strategy and stability matters. With the advice of the Executive Budget Committee, recommendations are then made to the President for consideration. This relatively new process has increased transparency and improved understanding across NIU, and helps the institution apply lessons learned on an ongoing basis.

Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.

5.S - Criterion 5 - Summary

The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

Evidence

The results of NIU's 2014 comprehensive evaluation were findings of "met with concerns" for Core Components 5.A and 5.C, as the institution at that time was in a state of flux and did not have a robust budget process with documented ties to strategic planning. However, since that time, and while enduring unprecedented shortfalls in State funding and significant leadership turnovers, NIU has developed and implemented its Program Prioritization process and a new transparent and effective budgeting model. All evidence indicates that the improvements made in these areas have shaped and are shaping the future focus of the institution in strategic ways, and have enhanced both the effectiveness and efficiency of NIU in delivering on its mission. Based on the evidence, this 2018 HLC review team finds that NIU meets the Core Components of Criterion 5, and therefore the Criterion itself. The institution is to be commended for its activities during times of stress, and is encouraged to continue on its path of making strategic resource reallocation decisions to further strengthen the institution for the future.

Review Dashboard

Number	Title	Rating
1	Mission	
1.A	Core Component 1.A	Met
1.B	Core Component 1.B	Met
1.C	Core Component 1.C	Met
1.D	Core Component 1.D	Met
1.S	Criterion 1 - Summary	
2	Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct	
2.A	Core Component 2.A	Met
2.B	Core Component 2.B	Met
2.C	Core Component 2.C	Met
2.D	Core Component 2.D	Met
2.E	Core Component 2.E	Met
2.S	Criterion 2 - Summary	
3	Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support	
3.A	Core Component 3.A	Met
3.B	Core Component 3.B	Met
3.C	Core Component 3.C	Met
3.D	Core Component 3.D	Met
3.E	Core Component 3.E	Met
3.S	Criterion 3 - Summary	
4	Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement	
4.A	Core Component 4.A	Met
4.B	Core Component 4.B	Met
4.C	Core Component 4.C	Met
4.S	Criterion 4 - Summary	
5	Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness	
5.A	Core Component 5.A	Met
5.B	Core Component 5.B	Met
5.C	Core Component 5.C	Met
5.D	Core Component 5.D	Met
5.S	Criterion 5 - Summary	

Review Summary

Conclusion

NIU has provided sufficient evidence that it continues to meet the Criteria for HLC accreditation. The issues raised during the last comprehensive evaluation, namely budgeting and planning processes related to Core Components 5.A and 5.C, have been resolved by the establishment and implementation of new Program Prioritization and budgeting mechanisms.

Overall Recommendations

Criteria For Accreditation

Met

Sanctions Recommendation

No Sanction

Pathways Recommendation

Not Applicable to This Review

No Interim Monitoring Recommended.