

Assurance Argument
Northern Illinois University

Review date: 3/25/2024

1 - Mission

[Link to Criterion 1 Evidence](#)

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 articulated publicly and operationalized throughout the institution.

1. The mission was developed through a process suited to the context of the institution.
2. The mission and related statements are current and reference 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 and related statements identify the nature, scope and intended constituents of the higher education offerings and services the institution provides.
4. The institution's academic offerings, student support services and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.
5. The institution clearly articulates its mission through public information, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans or institutional priorities.

Argument

1.A.1.

The Northern Illinois University (NIU) [Statement of Vision, Mission and Core Values](#) (the Statement) was developed and approved in Academic Year 2018-2019 through a [shared governance process](#) that included faculty, staff, students, alumni and the Board of Trustees (Board). The inclusive process [drew from all corners](#) of the university community, demonstrating and strengthening NIU's commitment to transparent governance and a culture of engagement. The Board approved the Statement at the [March 7, 2019](#), meeting.

The mission, "to empower students through educational excellence and experiential learning as we pursue knowledge, share our research and artistry, and engage communities for the benefit of the region, state, nation and world," articulates the university's purpose as it functions today. The Statement is the foundation of the [strategic planning process](#).

Following the Statement's adoption, NIU's leadership team developed a [Strategic Action Planning Framework](#) to guide future planning efforts and connect the university's mission with its operational plans and objectives. The leadership team, committed to transparency and engagement, met with academic and administrative offices to ensure the framework would accurately reflect the efforts and intentions of individuals and units. The resulting framework is organized into six themes:

1. Empowerment and shared responsibility.
2. Student recruitment, student success and student experience.
3. Academic excellence and curricular innovation.
4. Diversity, equity and inclusion.
5. Research, artistry and engagement.
6. Resource development and fiscal responsibility.

In 2020, the president and the Board began to use these themes to focus the [university's goals](#). The goal-setting process is a collaborative effort of shared governance, university leadership and the Board. Each fall semester, the progress the university has made on the previous year's goals is reviewed. This assessment is then used for evaluation and to develop university goals for the upcoming year. New issues and strategies to address them are identified. After discussion with stakeholders, annual university goals are finalized and presented to the Board for approval. This

annual planning cycle gives NIU flexibility to recognize new priorities and react to changing circumstances.

NIU aligns its strategy with the [Illinois Board of Higher Education \(IBHE\) strategic plan, *A Thriving Illinois*](#). Introduced in 2021, *A Thriving Illinois* has three goals: 1.) Close equity gaps; 2.) Create educational paths that are financially sustainable for students and higher education institutions; and 3.) Foster economic growth for a thriving Illinois. NIU senior and academic leaders meet with IBHE leaders annually to consider relevant data and assess progress and alignment with the goals of *A Thriving Illinois*.

1.A.2.

The Strategic Action Planning Framework and annual university goals establish the university's priorities in fulfilling its mission, vision and core values. Within this ongoing framework, the goals are updated annually to reflect both progress and changing needs and circumstances. The framework and goals direct actions and shape NIU's approach.

Instruction

Under the Strategic Action Planning Framework pillars of *Student Recruitment, Success and Experience* and *Academic Excellence and Curriculum Innovation*, NIU advanced its instructional mission with [2023 goals and action steps](#) such as:

- Achieve total enrollment in the target range for Academic Year 2023-2024 between 15,360 and 15,570.
- Fully integrate the [Huskie First Survey](#) to identify student needs and make connections to campus support resources.
- Ensure multiyear budget plans include dedicated resources to support targeted hiring of faculty with special expertise as well as faculty from underrepresented groups.
- Relieve administrative barriers to curricular experimentation and development of transdisciplinary courses and programs.

Scholarship, Research, Application of Research and Creative Works

The Strategic Action Planning Framework pillar of *Research, Artistry and Engagement* addresses the research mission with focused goals. In 2023 these included establishing the Northern Illinois Center for Community Sustainability (described in 3.B.4.) and strengthening the research infrastructure to better align it with NIU's mission. Objectives to advance the latter include updating promotion and tenure policies to be more inclusive of diverse and evolving forms of faculty work and establishing a university-level position to facilitate and support transdisciplinary research, scholarship, artistry and engagement.

Clinical Service, Public Service and Economic Development

Within the same pillar, NIU advanced its mission of community engagement by creating the Centering Engagement, Driving Impact Task Force, which developed a [definition of engagement](#) and an action agenda to address six key areas of engagement strategy and operations. The [Engagement Roundtable](#) will sustain this work.

The other three pillars—*Empowerment and Shared Responsibility; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and Resource Development and Fiscal Responsibility*—support all aspects of the university by shaping an environment that advances and sustains the mission. Examples of objectives aligned with these pillars include:

- Continue to promote [shared leadership](#) to strengthen institutional culture; build Huskie identity and pride; and create pathways for meaningful [faculty](#) and [staff](#) engagement.
- Continue to administer [climate surveys](#) to gain insight into the experiences and perceptions of individuals in NIU's diverse university community.
- Continue to implement a multiyear, comprehensive [planning and budget process](#).

1.A.3.

The Statement conveys NIU's commitment, as a public institution, to using the breadth of its offerings to benefit students and communities through the educational mission interwoven with, and supported by, research and artistry

and community engagement. The nature, scope and constituencies of NIU academic offerings and services align with its [High Research Activity \(R2\) and Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement Elective classifications](#).

The Statement puts students at the center, making it clear that advancing social mobility through academic offerings and services is a leading priority. It reflects a promise to meet students where they are with programs, processes and support networks that use an equity lens and are mindful of students' diverse perspectives and lived experiences.

NIU serves constituents by being an engine for innovation, one that brings resources to bear on complex societal challenges. Efforts are centered around innovative solutions for responding to environmental change, advancing technology, preparing for shifting demographics and interpreting the world around us. Course offerings in numerous disciplines, online programs, research engagements and global partnerships are reflected in the Statement, which speaks to helping students "become global leaders," using their talents to "confront local, national and global challenges" and bringing benefits to "the region, state, nation and world."

1.A.4.

Academic Offerings

NIU seeks to "empower students through educational excellence and experiential learning." As a comprehensive doctoral university with a [Carnegie Classification of R2](#), NIU's academic offerings include 66 undergraduate majors, 96 graduate programs and the juris doctor as well as degree completion programs, accelerated/integrated undergraduate/graduate degrees and credentials such as certificates of undergraduate and graduate study, post-baccalaureate licensure programs and [advanced professional endorsements](#). Academic programs are housed in the seven colleges under the oversight of the Division of Academic Affairs and the Graduate School.

Experiential learning, research and artistry are woven into educational opportunities. Set forth in detail in 3.B., some examples include curricular and cocurricular experiences in [teacher licensure programs](#); performances in the College of Visual and Performing Arts; undergraduate research at Argonne National Laboratory and Fermilab; the senior design program in the College of Engineering and Engineering Technology; real-world problem-solving in the [College of Business](#); and student-staffed clinics ranging from audiology in the College of Health and Human Sciences to civil justice in the College of Law.

Student Support Services

Academic offerings are complemented by [student support services](#), designed to meet students where they are and to support and empower them to achieve success. To determine where they are, the Huskie First Survey is deployed to newly matriculated undergraduate students during the beginning of the fall semester. Student responses are used to connect students to individualized support resources and information. These are detailed in 3.C. and 3.D., and range from Orientation and First Year Programs; Career Services; the [Huskie Academic Success Center](#) and the [Math Assistance Center](#); to the Honors Program and the [Diversity and Cultural Resource Centers](#) including the Latino Resource Center, the Asian American Resource Center, the Center for Black Studies, the Disability Resource Center, the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center and Military and Veteran Services and the Undocumented Student Resource Center.

NIU has partnered with [Braven](#), a non-profit organization empowering college students with the skills, networks, experience and confidence to secure internships and land strong first jobs. This partnership is at the intersection of experiential learning and student support. Students were introduced to the Braven experience in Fall 2022 with the launch of [UNIV 301: Braven Leadership and Career Accelerator](#), a three-credit hour elective course led by leadership coaches who are working professionals from various industries. During the course, students work in teams to create solutions to real problems for clients and develop résumés, LinkedIn profiles, portfolios and interview skills. They also benefit from mentoring and instruction from their leadership coaches and professionals representing sponsoring companies. Students continue to benefit after the course through mentors who support their academic and professional career planning throughout their time at NIU.

Enrollment Profile

NIU adopted its Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) plan in [2019](#) and updated it in [2022](#) in light of the

COVID-19 pandemic (referenced in Criterion 4). These SEM plans (referred to as SEM 1.0 and SEM 2.0) brought a new level of intentionality and alignment between the mission and the student profile. This is articulated in the SEM plans at the highest level: “Our overarching purpose remains to attract, retain and graduate students representing the diversity of our region, our nation and our world.”

NIU’s student population [represents the diversity](#) of the region served, with 53% of undergraduate students Pell-eligible; 52% first-generation students; and 58% from historically underserved communities. NIU has seen an [absolute increase](#) in its Black and Latinx enrollment, with the latter reaching 25%, positioning NIU as an emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution.

1.A.5.

NIU clearly articulates and integrates the Statement, goals and institutional plans throughout the university’s campus life, [digital presence](#), printed media and orientation videos for new employees.

- The Statement is linked from the main website and various university web pages.
- The Statement, along with the [Strategic Action Planning Framework](#), [the IBHE A Thriving Illinois strategic plan](#), [the Illinois Equity in Attainment Equity Plan](#), [the Division of Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Guiding Principles](#) and [the Research Vision](#), are the foundation of annual planning, as described in 1.A.2.
- The annual alignment with the mission is further reinforced by the [State of the University address](#).
- The Division of Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications distributes content aligned with the Statement via [news releases](#), featured content and [social media](#) to [internal](#) and [external](#) audiences.
- [Divisions](#), [colleges](#) and units within the university have developed mission statements for their areas that are consistent with the university mission.
- NIU’s official huskie dog is named [Mission](#). This fun and informal reference keeps the campus community focused on the greater purpose.

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1.B - Core Component 1.B

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

1. The institution's actions and decisions demonstrate that its educational role is to serve the public, not solely the institution or any superordinate entity.
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 external constituencies and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.

Argument

The institution's commitment to the public good is articulated clearly in its mission statement, which specifically mentions pursuing knowledge, sharing research and artistry and engaging communities "for the benefit of the region, state, nation and world." In pursuing this vision and fulfilling the mission, "we serve society and confront local, national and global challenges."

1.B.1.

NIU fulfills its educational mission and serves the public by developing an educated citizenry, creating new knowledge and sharing knowledge for the greater good. NIU emphasizes the opportunities for social mobility that can be realized by an accessible and affordable education. NIU is proud to be recognized by the [Brookings Institute](#) as being both a ladder (promoting student social mobility) and a lab (producing impactful research).

Improving student success, persistence and graduation is one of three themes in the SEM 2.0 plan. A key initiative is cultivating a sense of belonging and easing the transition to college through Orientation and First Year Programs, the Huskie First Survey and the Navigate software platform. These high-touch, proactive activities and communications link students to individualized support through a network of coordinated support efforts. Another key initiative is reducing equity gaps in gateway courses, an improvement effort initiated through the recent [Quality Initiative](#).

The impact of an NIU degree is seen in the [career paths](#) of alumni. Graduates use their degrees to [contribute to a variety of sectors](#) through their employment in businesses, health agencies, K-12 schools, professional firms, non-profits and government agencies.

The NIU mission is accomplished in an atmosphere of support for the teaching, research, artistry, outreach and engagement that are the hallmarks of a comprehensive university education. Through course offerings and place-based public engagement activities, the university provides counsel, collaboration, services and support to stakeholders throughout the region. NIU provides a wide array of engagement opportunities that simultaneously provide its students with experiential learning while bringing tangible benefits to partners throughout the region. Since 2008, NIU has been recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for [community engagement](#). Criterion 3 includes an extensive discussion of how academic programs contribute to serving the public.

1.B.2.

As a public university, NIU does not have investors, a parent organization or external interests to compete with the university's educational role. As a state institution, NIU follows state laws and regulations. Occasionally, an individual alumnus or donor might express displeasure with the university's mission, vision or core values. When this happens, complaints and concerns receive the same consideration given to any member of the public, as demonstrated by this [correspondence](#).

1.B.3.

NIU's faculty and staff are committed to public and professional service. They are encouraged to serve in academic

and organizational advisement, mentoring and other student-oriented service in both local to international settings. NIU's unique Midwestern, peri-urban location allows NIU to operate effectively on a global stage, sharing teaching and learning, advanced technologies, research, artistry and technical expertise while building relationships with local and regional communities. NIU's strong commitment to community engagement is reflected in the [university's 2024 goals](#) and its recognition in 2020 by the George W. Bush Institute and Opus Faveo Innovation Development consulting firm, where it [ranked third nationally among smaller research universities for its innovation impact on productivity](#).

NIU engages external constituencies at division, college and unit levels. The [Division of Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development](#) has initiated and coordinates a wide range of university/stakeholder collaborations; provides centralized support for numerous outreach activities of the seven colleges; and collaborates with various university units to deliver non-credit programs and regional development activities. A few examples of key engagements organized through the Division of Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development include:

- [Center for P-20 Engagement](#), recognized by the state for its coordinated work in more than two dozen multi-college initiatives, collaborates with community colleges, K-12 school districts, state agencies and other community partners on activities that improve education and inspire innovation.
- [Center for Governmental Studies](#) functions as a "think and do tank" on municipal issues and provides consulting services to regional leaders. Its Civic Leadership Academy offers workshops for elected and appointed leaders and managers in government and nonprofit agencies, with an enrollment of more than 5,000 since its inception in 2004.
- [NIU STEAM](#) promotes Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics literacy through school programs, public lectures, camps, workshops and the popular annual [STEMFest](#). Increasingly, NIU STEAM is strategically focused on underserved youth and partnerships to ensure access for students and their families.
- Regional outreach and engagement centers in [Naperville](#), [Rockford](#) and the [Lorado Taft Field Campus](#) provide locations for NIU classes, non-credit programming, outdoor experiences and community convenings. The centers also house complementary programs such as the Northern Illinois Center for Nonprofit Excellence and Small Business Development Centers.
- The Division of Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development houses a variety of other [community- and outreach-oriented units](#), ranging from the Education Systems Center to Northern Public Radio.

The Division of Research and Innovation Partnerships facilitates innovative research, scholarship and creative activities. The division strives to expand research and economic development; integrate research with instruction and public service; and foster cross-disciplinary collaboration. A few key examples within the Office of Innovation, a unit of the Division of Research and Innovation Partnerships, include:

- Innovation-focused events and programs that explore a wide range of innovation topics through the [Innovation Club](#), [hackathons](#), [innovation challenges](#) and networking events.
- Commercialization support for NIU faculty and staff and industry partners such as sponsor/partner identification, protecting intellectual property and resource identification.
- NIU has taken a significant role in the [Illinois Innovation Network](#), a system of connected university-community-industry-based hubs that work together to drive integrated research, innovation and economic and workforce development. NIU's recently retired vice president for research served as the chair of the Illinois Innovation Network and catalyzed the cross-institution strategy to secure and advance the NIU Hub, the Northern Illinois Center for Community Sustainability. NIU faculty have participated in Illinois Innovation Network workgroups and collaborative research through [Sustaining Illinois Seed Funding](#) and earned [Illinois Innovation Network Innovator of the Year recognition](#).

The Northern Illinois Research Foundation, a 501c3 organization, bridges the gap between the university and industry, magnifying the impact that university-generated intellectual property can have on the region, state, nation and world. The Foundation provides technology transfer, entrepreneurial support, grant management, intellectual property protection, commercialization and economic development services. It also facilitates partnerships between NIU and external groups.

The [Strategic Development Team](#), with members from the Division of Research and Innovation Partnerships; the Division of Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development; University Advancement; and the NIU Foundation,

works to identify external opportunities cutting across organizational boundaries to match donor-, investor- and partner-interest with NIU priorities. Since its inception, the Strategic Development Team has secured \$2.16 million in funding to support projects focused on the [climate](#) and [the fabrication of core digital technology components](#).

The [Presidential Advisory Council](#) is instrumental in near- and long-term efforts to advance NIU's growth as an engine for innovation, creativity and social mobility. The council's input informs strategies that empower students, faculty and staff as they make positive impacts in the community. The 21 members of the council advise the president and the senior leadership team on the development and maintenance of collaborative relationships with individuals, corporations and foundations.

Locally, and in collaboration with the city of DeKalb and the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation, NIU supports efforts to bring industry to the community, including the recent [Meta Data Center](#), [Ferrara Distribution Complex](#), [Amazon Career Choice Program](#), [Syngenta Research and Development Innovation Center](#) and [Kraft-Heinz Distribution Center](#). NIU has also established a deep partnership with Northwestern Medicine, which runs the student health clinic, provides care for student-athletes and offers convenient care for employees. School of Nursing leaders meet regularly with Northwestern Medicine administrators to discuss opportunities to better educate nursing students to provide safe care in medical facilities.

To support immediate community needs, NIU has programs addressing [social justice](#), health, food insecurity and sustainability and community revitalization. Nursing students administer vaccines at local health departments and annually at the NIU Flu Shot Clinic. The [Community Gardens](#) works with the [DeKalb County Community Gardens](#) to provide fresh, local access to food and to teach about sustainable, local food production in the process. The federally funded [Edible Campus](#) initiative, with additional support from local businesses, will transform parts of the campus into a landscape passersby can eat. Many members of the campus community are involved with [Opportunity DeKalb](#), a non-profit community development organization tasked with managing the City of DeKalb's plan for revitalizing the Annie Glidden North community, a community immediately adjacent to campus. Involvement includes NIU students as interns and [student consultants](#) and NIU faculty and staff as board members and advisors.

NIU students engage with external constituencies through many curricular and cocurricular programs. These are described in 1.C.1.

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1.C - Core Component 1.C

The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

1. The institution encourages curricular or cocurricular activities that prepare students for informed citizenship and workplace success.
2. The institution's processes and activities demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations.
3. The institution fosters a climate of respect among all students, faculty, staff and administrators from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.

Argument

1.C.1.

Informed Citizenship

NIU supports several activities focused particularly on developing informed citizenship. In 2019, NIU joined the [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#), a national non-partisan consortium working to promote student awareness and engagement in the voting process. In 2020, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences launched the [Rebuilding Democracy lecture series](#). NIU recognizes and supports more than 250 student organizations, including several with a focus on citizenship and civil society, such as Forensics, Mock Trial, Model Illinois Government and Model United Nations. All of these offer opportunities for students to participate in competitive simulations.

Workplace Success

Many of NIU's degree programs have workplace success woven into them. Students in the College of Health and Human Sciences receive hands-on training through the practicums and clinical experiences, including the Child Development Center and the Couple and Family Therapy, Physical Therapy and Speech-Language-Hearing clinics. Students in all teacher licensure programs participate in a variety of [programs](#), clinical placements and student-teaching experiences. Students in the College of Visual and Performing Arts have multiple performance opportunities. The [College of Business](#) requires all undergraduate business students to take on real-world business challenges. Students in the College of Engineering and Engineering Technology participate in the college's senior design program. In the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, curricular internship opportunities abound in the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities. Recent internships include research experiences at Argonne National Laboratory and Fermilab, clinical experiences in NIU's Psychological Services Center and opportunities with nonprofit organizations, businesses, law firms and government agencies in the region and across the country. The university also has a long-standing Washington, D.C., [summer congressional internship program](#).

These and other activities are informed by advisory boards, trends in the fields and credentialing requirements. For example, the Department of Special and Early Education made curricular changes in courses in areas of professionalism and Individualized Education Program writing supporting the Learning Behavioral Specialist 1 educator licensure degree program in Fall 2022 based on recommendations received from its Professional Advisory Council. The College of Law introduced a series of mandatory cultural competency modules this year to respond to new American Bar Association norms (Rule 303(c)) for law schools.

In 2022, NIU launched a multiyear partnership with [Braven](#), a non-profit organization that empowers college students, particularly those from underserved communities, with the skills, networks, experience and confidence to secure internships and land strong first jobs. Braven is described in more depth in 1.A.4.

The focus on workplace success continues at the graduate level. Many of the advanced degree programs have clinical experience as a required component. For example, the doctoral program in mathematics includes an [Applications Involvement Component](#). Students in the College of Health and Human Sciences get hands-on experiences through clinics such as [Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic](#) and [Physical Therapy Clinic](#). The [Executive and One-Year Master](#)

[of Business Administration](#) delivery formats incorporate consulting projects. [The College of Law sponsors clinics](#) in business innovation, civil justice, criminal defense and health advocacy. It also fosters experiential learning through the Prisoners' Rights Project and local, regional and national competitions.

The [Faculty Mentoring](#) program in the Division of Academic Affairs hosts an annual [Preparing Future Faculty of Color](#) Conference. This statewide conference, supported by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) and aligned with the IBHE Diversifying Faculty in Illinois program, is designed to create a pipeline to increase faculty diversity within the state and nation.

The Graduate School offers graduate [career and professional development assistance](#) for students in graduate degree programs. These opportunities help students build skills and competencies, plan for their futures and transition to academic and non-academic careers. Offerings include:

- Graduate School workshops and events on topics related to professional development and career preparation.
- Access to the online platform, Beyond Graduate School, which offers a full career preparation curriculum including live events, on-demand content, sample interviews and certification.
- University-wide programming such as the Summer Research and Writing Program ([hosted by the Writing Center](#)), Responsible Conduct of Research webinar series (Office of Research Compliance, Integrity and Safety) and the Teaching Assistant Institute (Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL)).

In addition to the skills and aptitudes developed within the degree programs, NIU offers a wide array of [minors](#), [Certificates of Undergraduate Study](#) and [Certificates of Graduate Study](#). These additional credentials allow students to build out their skills and aptitudes, and to document they have done so.

Student organizations provide opportunities for students to develop leadership skills and get involved. Moreover, the university supports a wide array of organizations that promote professional skills and workplace success, ranging from the Association for Computing Machinery to the Women in Business Professions. These organizations plan events that include speakers who present about their fields and provide opportunities to practice the skills learned in the classroom. Among them are organizations that complement Braven's efforts by fostering workplace readiness in students with limited social capital, such as Aspiring Women in Health, the Association of Black Psychologists, and the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers.

All of the above fulfill NIU's responsibility of meeting students where they are and providing them with tools to succeed and share their valuable skills and perspectives with employers and their communities.

1.C.2. and 1.C.3.

NIU serves an incredibly diverse region and seeks to reflect that diversity as a dimension of the university's excellence. As noted in the NIU [SEM plans](#), "diversity is defined broadly," recognizing simultaneously the intersectional identities present within each member of the student body and the ways through which the manifestation and salience of these identities are expressed differently on any given day. These identities can include gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, disability, veteran status, first-generation (undergraduate or graduate), socio-economic status and affiliation with a faith community. The university provides a correspondingly wide array of programs, policies and offices to [celebrate](#) diversity, foster inclusivity and promote respect and equitable treatment.

NIU uses an [equity-minded framework](#) that requires all to be conscious of equity gaps and work to reduce them. Simply put, NIU faculty and staff meet students where they are at. To accomplish this, NIU has adopted a [Shared Equity Leadership model](#) to engage more people in leading and implementing diversity, equity and inclusion goals across campus. Efforts are centered on students' needs and participants are expected to commit to self-awareness and diversity, equity and inclusion values and practices. NIU's mission, vision and core value statements, and their operationalization through the [Strategic Action Planning Framework](#) and SEM plan, make it clear that all units are expected to do their part.

One important tool to inform action is the [Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access \(IDEA\) survey](#). This climate survey was distributed to all employees and students in 2019 with five focus areas:

- Perception of NIU's campus climate.
- Perception of NIU's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and access.
- Awareness of available diversity, equity, inclusion and access support at NIU.
- Exclusionary events and behaviors (personal and observed) at NIU.
- Impact of exclusionary events on perception.

The summary results were shared with the campus community, and an [action plan](#) was developed with strategic priorities of cultivating equity, building an inclusive community and promoting education, awareness and action. We provide here a sample of some of the many institutional efforts. In addition, those with a more academic focus are discussed in 3.B.3.

A second IDEA survey was conducted throughout April 2022. The [results](#) were shared with senior leadership and the Board in 2023.

Structure

In 2015, NIU created the position of chief diversity officer, reporting jointly to the president and executive vice president and provost, and reorganized institutional-level diversity efforts into the [Division of Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion \(ADEI\)](#). In 2020, understanding diversity as a pillar of the mission, NIU elevated the role of [chief diversity officer](#) position to a vice president.

ADEI is an educational resource and collaborative partner that facilitates work central to the NIU academic enterprise. ADEI is comprised of several centers, units, programs and initiatives. Each plays a vital role in facilitating workshops, programs, events, retention programs, curricular offerings; hosting cultural or identity-based honor societies; and facilitating sessions that further develop allyship and broaden cultural competency across the university and community. While each center or unit aligns its work with a community or identity, each also works to support and explore identities and the ways in which they are multiple and intersecting. Every year, ADEI reaches and serves thousands of individuals including NIU students, faculty, staff, administrators and alumni; K-12 students; and community members. The Undocumented Student Resource Center has trained [2,732 allies](#) from the NIU campus and northern Illinois region since 2018. Social Justice Education has trained over 100 facilitators for its [Conversations on Diversity and Equity \(CODE\) Workshops](#). Work conducted through the ADEI team has resulted in a number of honors and recognitions. NIU is one of just 48 campuses to achieve [5 of 5 stars on the Campus Pride Index of LGBT-Friendly Colleges and Universities](#) and was recently named the [best college for LGBT+ students in Illinois](#). For three years in a row, NIU has been awarded the [Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award](#).

Housed within ADEI are:

- [Social Justice Education](#).
- [Asian American Resource Center](#).
- [Center for Black Studies](#).
- [Gender and Sexuality Resource Center](#).
- [Latino Resource Center](#).
- [The Undocumented Student Resource Center](#).
- [The Truth, Racial Healing and Reconciliation Center](#) (ADEI co-facilitates this with Student Affairs).

It is well understood that diversity efforts are not the sole responsibility of ADEI, and many other offices and organizations contribute. For over 40 years, presidential commissions have been an integral part of shared equity leadership practice at NIU. The current commissions include [Interfaith Initiatives](#); [Persons with Disabilities](#); [Race and Ethnicity](#); [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#); [the Status of Women](#); and [Well-being](#). As the needs of and the composition of the community have changed, so have the commissions. In 2016, the Presidential Commission on Interfaith Initiatives was established; in 2020, the Presidential Commission on the Status of Minorities was renamed to the Presidential Commission on Race and Ethnicity to reflect its new charge; and the Presidential Commission on Well-being was established in 2022.

In light of the racial and social justice turmoil of 2020, born from historical inequities, NIU's faculty and staff engaged in efforts to further combat inequalities along intersectional lines. Through shared governance, the Faculty

Senate in 2020 established the [ad hoc Social Justice Committee](#) that transitioned to a standing [Social Justice Committee](#). As part of the 2023 university goals, this committee has developed and disseminated [policy recommendations](#). Second, a group of faculty, students and staff created the [Anti-Racism Collective](#). The purpose of the Anti-Racism Collective is to work in parallel with the other structures within the university (such as ADEI and Faculty Senate) and be a place where students and staff have equal voice and can respond/react to issues or challenges more quickly. The third effort was undertaken by the tenure/tenure-track faculty union. The United Faculty Alliance, working with sister unions in Illinois, has run multiple trainings and workshops on topics such as being anti-racist, allyship and intersectional inequality in higher education.

These efforts have aligned synergistically to advance analysis and improvement of departmental bylaws—focusing closely on tenure and promotion documents—using an anti-racism frame. Twenty-two departments from five of the seven academic colleges had faculty participate in a UFA workshop in 2022, while the Social Justice Committee has taken the lead in advancing [policy changes at the university level](#), an effort targeted for completion this academic year.

This supported ongoing initiatives in the College of Education and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Over the past two years, the College of Education College Council has implemented a series of anti-bias and anti-racist frameworks for implicit bias training sessions. Department personnel committees were tasked with identifying specific examples of bias within the three pillars of teaching, scholarship and service. The College Council expanded its promotion criteria to encompass community-engaged scholarship, recognizing the potential for implicit bias against interdisciplinary or community-based research that is often experienced most acutely by women and BIPOC faculty. The Department of Curriculum and Instruction has set an example by revising its handbook to address potential biases in student evaluations and to use less subjective language.

In the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, working through the College Council, there has been a call for departments and centers to reevaluate their tenure and promotion documents with an emphasis on equity and inclusivity. Half of the college's 18 departments have revised their documents, which have been approved by the College Council and are in the process of gaining approval from the Faculty Senate Personnel Committee. The other half of the units are in the process of considering and drafting changes.

The College of Education Curriculum Committee underwent a social justice review of the college's curriculum in 2021. In the College of Visual and Performing Arts, each of the schools adopted better practices in diversifying not just curriculum but artistic offerings, giving voice and vision to a highly diverse group of arts and artists. Notably, the College of Visual and Performing Arts was central in confronting a racist incident on campus in 2020, marshaling artists across the college and engaging the entire university to confront racism. Arts as social justice action is woven into the events and curriculum of the college.

[The Division of Student Affairs](#) provides supportive environments and opportunities for student involvement. Programs meet the diverse needs of students and create a place where everyone can belong. For example:

- [Center for Student Assistance](#).
- [Disability Resource Center](#).
- [Military and Veteran Services](#).
- [Multicultural Greek Council](#).
- [National Pan-Hellenic Council](#).
- [Interfraternity Council](#).
- [Panhellenic Council](#).

NIU has more than 250 recognized [student organizations](#), many of which are dedicated to the promotion of inclusiveness, equity and belonging for students with diverse identities. Some examples include the [Black Male Initiative](#), Prism (LGBTQ+), the Indian Student Association, DREAM Action, the Asian American Association and multicultural fraternities and sororities.

NIU uses programming during the Week of Welcome each August to encourage and equip students with different lived experiences to live, learn and work together. Activities feature student organizations, cultural centers and support offices giving students the opportunity to learn about campus resources and discover what it means to be part

of the NIU community.

[Orientation and First Year Programs](#) provide mentoring opportunities connecting students to mentors matching their interests. Peer- and alumni-mentoring is also offered through [Diversity and Cultural Resource Centers](#), [student support offices](#) and [academic colleges](#).

Accessibility and Student Support

NIU strives to make higher education, and all the benefits that accompany degree attainment, affordable and accessible. For many NIU students, this involves both financial assistance to meet the formal cost of attendance and support to address access to technology and course materials, food security and clothing needs. [The Center for Student Assistance](#), described in 3.D.1., consolidates and coordinates resources necessary for students to succeed. In addition:

- NIU participates in several need-based scholarship programs (some with merit components) including the [Huskie Pledge Grant](#) funded by the state of Illinois AIM High Program, [Hope Chicago](#), [Rockford Promise](#) and [NIU Advantage Grants](#). NIU also provides financial assistance for students not eligible for federal financial aid, through programs such as [DREAM Action NIU](#) and [International Student and Scholar Services](#) (described in 3.D.1.). Colleges provide emergency funding through [Finish Line](#) and the [Project Graduate Program](#). All students can search [MyScholarships](#), which gives them information on a wide array of merit- and need-based scholarships.
- In collaboration with several other university units, including CITL and the Division of Information Technology, the University Libraries has taken the lead in addressing students' need for low-cost access to technology and course materials. The library offers laptops for circulation to students for short- and long-term use. The library also partnered with CITL to create a program to incentivize the development and adoption of Open Educational Resources by faculty. The program includes training for faculty along with assistance by librarians in locating and adopting appropriate open-source materials. For many courses, the library purchases textbooks to put on reserve so students can use them to prepare for class.
- Students experiencing food insecurity have access to a steady supply of healthy food through the student-led [Huskie Food Pantry](#). The pantry served 650 unique students, which accounted for 1,879 visits during the Spring 2023 semester and during an after-graduation pop-up event.
- Students who need clothing, particularly professional clothing for internships and job interviews, can access several free or low-cost sources of donated clothing on campus, two of which were founded and are still run by students. [Barsema's Closet in the College of Business](#) and the [Dress for Success Clinical Closet in the College of Education](#) both offer professional clothing, while the [Huskie Closet operated by the Center for Non-Profit and NGO Studies](#) offers more casual clothing.

NIU invests in support of first-generation students and students from historically underserved communities in a variety of ways.

- In 2020, NIU moved to a [test-free holistic review](#) application process and no longer considers standardized test scores when awarding merit scholarships.
- [The McKinley Deacon Davis CHANCE Program](#) provides personalized financial, academic, social and organizational guidance to students striving forward despite possible limited preparation or resources to pursue higher education.
- First-generation students move in one day early to provide extra time and attention to their orientation.
- During Week of Welcome, students participate in the Huskie First Survey to assess individual needs and interests. Results are fed into Navigate, which connects students, advisors and services to promote academic planning and success.
- First-generation students are encouraged to join the [Breaking Barriers](#) support group to network with first-generation faculty, staff and peers and access guidance and resources.

As NIU continues to find ways to support international students, programs such as Duolingo English are being used as an option for proof of English for [undergraduate](#) and [graduate](#) admissions. In addition, NIU now accepts the at-home version of GRE/TOEFL/IELTS to make admissions testing requirements more accessible. NIU offers virtual workshops for prospective students on the application process and for admitted students who are preparing for entry

to the U.S. on immediate next steps. During the Week of Welcome, NIU hosts a week-long international student-specific orientation and a welcome-back program. Additionally, International Student and Scholar Services, described in 3.D.1., launched an International Student Ambassador Program that began offering support for incoming international students in Fall 2023.

To become more inclusive at the graduate admissions stage, many degree programs no longer require GRE/GMAT test scores and have increased use of holistic admission review processes.

Several programs enrich NIU's diverse graduate student body. Highlights include:

- Participating in the [Illinois Board of Higher Education's Diversifying Faculty in Illinois program](#) by administering [graduate student fellowships](#) at NIU.
- Hosting the annual [Preparing Future Faculty of Color](#) conference, which brings together graduate students from NIU and other universities across the state.
- Offering the [Rhoten Smith Assistantship Program](#) to recruit and support graduate students who have overcome challenges to succeed in fields where they are underrepresented.
- Supporting student organizations, such as the Latin American Graduate Student Association, to create community among graduate students.

Faculty and Staff Success

The university works to ensure equitable treatment of all through awareness and annual training. [Human Resources Services \(HRS\)](#) starts this process for employees when they are hired. HRS developed a series of programs to develop a sense of inclusion for new employees, such as the in-person Huskie Welcome Sessions and [Leading Employees To Success \(LETS\) programs](#). In addition, HRS developed an implicit bias training program to help search teams and committees understand blind spots when it comes to hiring a diverse workforce. When a search is launched, all members of the search committee must complete [implicit bias training](#) or demonstrate they have completed it in the past year. In Spring 2023, HRS launched campus-wide [Affirmative Action Plan Training for Leaders and Managers](#). HRS meets annually with senior leaders to review the university Affirmative Action Plan, including placement goals and underutilization of specific groups in certain job categories.

All new employees complete [training on harassment and discrimination prevention and sexual misconduct](#) awareness in their first 30 days. Voluntary programming such as the [Active Bystander training](#) and the new [Inclusion in Action](#) professional development program helps staff members create safe and respectful work environments and effective working relationships. Human Resource Services offers a [10-week training series for supervisors](#), which includes a diversity, equity and inclusion component.

In 2021, the position of associate vice provost for Faculty Mentoring and Diversity was created to provide mentoring for all early-career faculty. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Education have director-level positions to lead equity and inclusion activities. These positions have enhanced the training of faculty and graduate assistants through orientations, roundtables and an annual conference.

CITL collaborates with the Social Justice Education on the [Faculty Academy on Cultural Competence and Equity program](#), described in 3.C.5. CITL provides NIU's deployment of the Association of College and University Educators' [course on effective teaching](#), including culturally responsive pedagogy, completed by 108 faculty to date over the past three years. NIU also offers the Association of College and University Educators' micro-credential in [Inclusive Teaching for Equitable Learning](#), completed by 99 faculty and 48 graduate students, which helps develop a deeper understanding of implicit bias, microaggressions, stereotype threat and imposter phenomenon.

The Division of Intercollegiate Athletics, the only two-time recipient of the [NCAA/MOAA Diversity and Inclusion Award](#), mandates diversity, equity and inclusion training for all employees.

NIU's efforts in promoting a welcoming, diverse and inclusive environment have not gone unnoticed. In addition to the recognition and awards mentioned earlier, NIU was the recipient of [Insight into Diversity Magazine's High Education Excellence in Diversity Award](#) in 2021, 2022 and 2023 and was named to the [Great Colleges to Work For](#) list in the areas of diversity, inclusion and belonging in 2021 and 2022.

Policy Support

In addition to the many affirmative and support programs indicated above, NIU puts substance behind its commitment to equitable treatment through a variety of policies that set expectations and provide mechanisms for individuals who believe those expectations are not being met. Policies include:

- [Collegiality Statement on Professional Behavior of University Employees.](#)
- [Consensual Relationships Between Faculty, Staff and Students Policy.](#)
- [Freedom of Expression Policy](#) (see 2.D.).
- [Grievance Procedures for Students.](#)
- [Nondiscrimination, Harassment and Retaliation Policy and Procedures.](#)
- [Northern Pact.](#)
- [Sexual Misconduct Policy and Complaint Procedures.](#)
- [Student Code of Conduct.](#)
- [Whistleblower Policy.](#)
- [Workplace Violence Prevention.](#)

Some of these policies apply specifically to faculty and staff, some to all members of the NIU community and some specifically to students. Important among the list is the [Northern Pact](#). The Northern Pact is grounded in NIU's mission, vision and core values, and translates those into expectations for student behavior. The Northern Pact is featured prominently during the Week of Welcome and forms the starting point for introducing students to NIU's climate of mutual respect and responsibility.

Associated with these are an array of offices and support functions available to individuals, including both offices with investigative authority, such as the Ethics and Compliance Office, the HRS Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity unit, the Office of Student Conduct and ADEI, and offices such as the Ombudsperson and personnel advisors whose roles are more facilitative. To ensure these units and the policies they are responsible for are well-known, NIU provides a variety of ways to [report concerns or file complaints](#).

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1.S - Criterion 1 - Summary

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

Summary

The NIU mission is clear, articulated publicly and lived daily. NIU is deeply committed to its mission of empowering students, its vision as an engine to advance social mobility and to leveraging its distinctive location, experiential opportunities and research profile to do so. Since 2018, NIU has become increasingly intentional and focused, with the mission and vision informing university-wide goals that in turn guide day-to-day operations across the institution. NIU has embraced the rich diversity of its student profile and of the region it serves and has committed to weaving this core asset into every aspect of the university.

Sources

There are no sources.

2 - Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

[Link to Criterion 2 Evidence](#)

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

2.A - Core Component 2.A

The institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff.

1. The institution develops and the governing board adopts the mission.
2. The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, human resources and auxiliary functions.

Argument

2.A.1.

Sub-component 1.A.1. describes the inclusive process that took place related to the development of the university's mission, vision and core values. Upon conclusion, the Statement of Mission, Vision and Core Values was recommended to President Lisa C. Freeman, who introduced it to the Board of Trustees (Board) on March 7, 2019. The Board unanimously approved it. Thereafter, it was widely disseminated across campus and made easily accessible via the [university's homepage](#).

2.A.2.

Northern Illinois University's (NIU) core values include a commitment to ethical behavior, transparency and accountability to stakeholders, which includes compliance with state and federal regulations. NIU embodies this value through a structured system of governance, shared governance and [shared leadership](#).

Dr. Freeman and the Board maintain a [commitment to transparency](#). On September 20, 2018, during an open Board meeting, Dr. Freeman was appointed as the 13th president of NIU. The process to appoint Dr. Freeman was transparent and provided for input from faculty, staff, students and other members of the university community. The process to extend the president's contract allowed for public comment. The terms of Dr. Freeman's initial contract, [contract extension](#) and the factors indicating success are public record.

The president and the university annual goals are reviewed each November during an open meeting of the Board. [The results of the annual reviews are posted online](#). In addition, the president's [travel and event expense information](#) is publicly available, as are the [salaries of senior leaders](#).

The president began hosting [Monthly Leadership Meetings](#) in 2017 to promote communication and shared understanding of the data and context underlying university priorities. Divisional vice presidents and other leadership (such as unit/department heads) attend, questions and provide feedback on topics such as [budget and planning, enrollment, university goals](#) and [re-envisioning campus support services](#).

NIU has promoted transparency with the transition to an online [Policy Library](#), launched in 2019 after extensive input and guidance from shared governance groups. The Policy Library provides an accessible, up-to-date source where all university policies are housed. The Policy Library and associated [Policy on Managing University Policies](#) provide structure, consistency and transparency to the policy-making process at the university. When policies are posted for comment, the campus is notified via the weekly announcements; individuals can see the comments. Shared governance groups also highlight policies that might affect their constituency groups.

Financial

In addition to transparency and accountability, financial integrity involves ensuring resources are used efficiently and

effectively, in alignment with university goals, and that revenue is generated ethically. These values are woven into university financial practices, including:

- Public disclosure of salaries and major purchases.
- Regular public financial updates to the Board.
- Engagement with bodies such as the President's Budget Roundtable, consisting of faculty, staff and students, to provide diverse perspectives, facilitate information-sharing and promote a constructive dialogue on the budget and budgeting process.
- University purchases are made in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. Procurement Services and Contract Management is responsible for adhering to all requirements of the Illinois Procurement Code; the Procurement Rules of the Chief Procurement Officer for Public Institutions of Higher Education; Minority and Female Business Enterprise Act; applicable federal/state laws and regulations; and university policies and procedures.
- Employing internal and external audits as tools to drive continuous improvement. These are further discussed in Criterion 5. Internal Audit not only provides objective assurances on whether the university is adhering to policies, regulations and laws, but also provides independent consultation to divisions and departments on how to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

Academic

Integrity in the academic sphere includes both integrity at the programmatic level and the individual level. At the programmatic level, NIU has fully developed processes for [curricular approval](#), [ongoing assessment](#) and [program review](#) (described in 4.A.1.). At the individual level, the university maintains policies to cover the professional behavior of faculty and staff and conduct of students. As an R2 institution, NIU has developed a mature set of policies and procedures for research integrity. These are discussed in detail in 2.E.

A robust system of shared governance is an integral aspect of academic integrity. At the unit, college and university levels, faculty involvement in decision-making is fully embedded in the operations of the university. That involvement fosters a climate of transparency and administrative integrity.

Human Resources

For human resources, integrity includes equitable policies equitably applied, as well as supporting employees' right to bargain and to be seen, heard and valued. Human Resource Services focuses on providing campus stakeholders with transparent access to information regarding employment. [Job postings](#) clearly state the desired traits for candidates and the knowledge, skills and abilities one must possess to be an acceptable candidate. [Online resources](#) ensure a fair and open recruitment process. In the interest of transparency and data-informed decision-making, Human Resource Services developed a series of [weekly reports](#) to allow campus leaders to review the employment data and activity within their units.

The university's [constitution](#) and [bylaws](#) also address [personnel processes and procedures](#), [committee charges](#), [appeals processes](#) and [grievance procedures](#). Again, the common theme is transparency and ensuring open and full disclosure of the university's operations.

President Freeman created the [Ethics and Compliance Office](#) in 2018. The office provides university-wide collaboration and coordination for compliance with state and federal laws and regulations, particularly those associated with ethical and non-discriminatory practices, data and technology accessibility. The Ethics and Compliance Office collaborates with various departments on campus to provide [required training](#) for new employees (ethics, discrimination and harassment prevention, and sexual misconduct awareness) and annual ethics training for all employees, as part of an overall [compliance calendar](#). It also oversees the [Healthy Relationships and Sexual Misconduct training](#) requirement for new students. The office directs the four staff members supporting investigations relating to violations of [university policy](#) and various federal and state civil rights laws, such as sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment and retaliation. The director of Privacy collaborates with departments to ensure compliance with privacy laws and regulations. This includes updating and drafting policies to guide the storage and maintenance of data on campus. The Information Technology Accessibility officer promotes the purchasing of accessible information technology, responds to accessibility issues and educates the campus on what makes technology accessible.

Auxiliary

NIU Athletics oversight is guided by the NCAA Division I regulations and is supported by its own compliance department working with administration, coaches and student-athletes on issues such as eligibility and name, image and likeness.

NIU's residence halls and Holmes Student Center are financed by university-issued bonds. NIU takes care to ensure the bond covenants are fully honored, including annual internal and external audits.

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2.B - Core Component 2.B

The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public.

1. The institution ensures the accuracy of any representations it makes regarding academic offerings, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, governance structure and accreditation relationships.
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, religious or spiritual purpose and economic development.

Argument

2.B.1.

The NIU website provides clear and complete information to students and the public. For example:

- The website is compatible and accessible with various electronic devices, both desktop and mobile.
- An A-Z index provides easy access to department and other area pages within the website.
- A Quick Links option appears on each page and directs students, faculty, staff and other users to many of the most frequently visited tools.
- [NIU At a Glance](#) summarizes enrollment, student/instructional faculty ratio, academic information, student profile, history and governing structure.
- Information on how students can address a variety of [concerns](#) is on the main webpage.
- Mandated [disclosures](#) in compliance with the Higher Education Opportunity Act, the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act and the Student Right to Know Act are updated annually.
- Details regarding [NIU's accreditation, and the status of accredited programs](#) are identified online.
- Professional licensure disclosures for online programs are [prominently posted online and shared with online students](#).
- The searchable [calendar](#) displays a listing of campus community events.
- Searchable and static [course schedules](#) are readily available to current and prospective students.

The [Undergraduate Catalog](#), [Graduate Catalog](#) and [College of Law Student Handbook](#), which are reviewed, updated and published annually online, detail program and course descriptions, admission policies, expenses, faculty credentials, financial aid, graduation requirements and university services while also identifying NIU as a public institution.

[Transfer Admissions](#) provides information on partnerships with community colleges, transfer admissions requirements, deadlines and application materials, as well as a tool to schedule one-on-one meetings with NIU transfer admissions counselors. Transfer Admissions also has an interactive tool that allows students to search for [course equivalencies](#) across institutions and another that provides an [unofficial estimate of how credits apply](#) to different NIU degree programs. Transfer students who desire more information can connect directly with NIU's Transfer Admissions counselors in English or Spanish.

The Office of the Bursar provides the [NIU Planning and Cost Estimator](#) to estimate tuition, mandatory fees, housing and other costs to prospective and current students and their families. The Financial Aid and Scholarship Office, described in 3.D.1., links to the NIU Planning and Cost Estimator and Net Price Calculator from the [What Are My Costs?](#) web page. In addition, NIU has committed to follow the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities driven [College Cost Transparency Initiative's set of principles and standards](#) to ensure transparency, clarity and understanding around communicating student financial aid offers.

All links and websites contained within the university's domain are updated when changes are needed to maintain the accuracy of information. Website updates are coordinated through Web and Internal Communications in the Division of Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications.

The website maintains a directory in the main navigation. In addition, each academic unit, administrative department and center provides directory information on faculty and staff. When new hires, retirements or departures occur, the information is updated by the department through Web and Internal Communications. Work is underway to automate this process. Examples of faculty and staff rosters are found in the [Department of Earth, Atmosphere and Environment](#) and [Undergraduate Admissions](#).

University information is provided in compliance with the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Illinois Public Act 096-0542. Complex requests are submitted through the [University Information Requests website](#), which is regularly updated with links to reports, minutes, reference documents, statistics, data and resources. From 2018 through 2022, 1,584 FOIA requests were received. The average turnaround time on a FOIA request is four to five business days.

In addition to providing information via the NIU website and through the FOIA process, NIU also adheres to the letter and spirit of the Illinois Open Meetings Act by providing timely access to and information about committees that discuss or act upon university business. As an example, the Faculty Senate posts all its public notices, agendas, minutes and transcripts [online](#).

2.B.2.

While firmly believing in the value of the educational experience of research, community engagement and experiential learning, NIU does not make any claims to this effect in its marketing to prospective students and their families.

Sources

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2.C - Core Component 2.C

The governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution's integrity.

1. The governing board is trained and knowledgeable so that it makes informed decisions with respect to the institution's financial and academic policies and practices; the board meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
2. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.
3. The governing board reviews the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.
4. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties.
5. The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the institution's administration and expects the institution's faculty to oversee academic matters.

Argument

2.C.1.

The roles and responsibilities of the trustees and officers are outlined in the [bylaws of the Board](#). This is a living document that is closely adhered to by the Board and is amended as needed, most recently on [December 8, 2022](#).

NIU's Board is [charged by the State of Illinois](#) with the responsibility to operate, manage, control, and maintain NIU in accordance with the laws of the State of Illinois and the U.S. The eight-member board consists of seven voting members appointed by the governor, with the advice and consent of the Illinois Senate, and one voting member who is an NIU student. Upon appointment, the Board receives [training](#) from state and university leaders on a variety of topics that include the intersection of a public institution and labor law, contract law, ethics, financial oversight and accountability, audits and fiduciary responsibilities. [Information about current members is posted online](#) for purposes of public information. This includes their committee membership; professional experience; education; leadership and public service; and recent awards and recognitions.

Board meetings are at consistent intervals throughout the year. As needed, special board meetings are held. The committees of the Board also meet regularly. [Minutes of past meetings and notices of future meetings are posted online](#) in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. Pursuant to the Open Meetings Act and [Article II, Section 4 of Board Bylaws](#), the Board invites [public comment](#) and has made the ability to do so easy and accessible.

Board regulations and bylaws state the Board will carry out its charge by developing and implementing appropriate governing policies; carrying out public policy and assuring prudent stewardship of university resources; and representing the university to the State of Illinois, the public and other external entities. The Board is specifically empowered to make rules and policies for the management, operation, control and maintenance of the university and its employees, students and property. The Board meets this obligation in a variety of ways: through oversight, direct action and programmatic approval. The Board also instructs the president to update it regularly on university issues, and the Board, in turn, is required to evaluate the performance of the university president periodically. The most recent evaluation of the president took place on [November 10, 2023, during an open Board meeting](#).

The Board and its subcommittees provide oversight of the institution's financial and academic policies and practices, in order to meet its legal and fiduciary responsibilities. The minutes of the board and its subcommittees substantiate this commitment.

2.C.2.

Each year, the president develops, and the Board approves [university goals](#). The university goals are created in alignment with NIU's mission, vision and core values; are organized according to the six themes presented in the

university's [Strategic Action Planning Framework](#); and reflect feedback from across the university community. They are future-focused with annual and multi-year objectives, consistent with the university's need to position for long-term success while continuing to address present challenges.

Board deliberations are initiated at the [committee level](#), with the charge of overseeing a particular aspect of institutional priorities. For example, matters pertaining to the university's budget and financial affairs, and quarterly financial reports, are brought before the Finance, Audit, Compliance, Facilities and Operations Committee for discussion and deliberations before the Board is presented with the information. Additionally, sabbatical and faculty tenure and promotion recommendations are presented first to the Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Personnel Committee.

2.C.3.

The Board regularly interacts with internal and external constituencies during its deliberations and is committed to transparency in its actions. The Board adheres to the Illinois Open Meetings Act, which requires "the Board and its committees [to] perform their duties in open session subject only to the limited exceptions authorized by state law." All reasonable efforts are made to accommodate and provide balanced responses to requests from communication media and citizens who are interested in the actions of the Board.

Per bylaws Article III and Article IV, the Board must publish all agendas and official meeting minutes at least 48 hours in advance of any meeting to inform the public about the matters before the Board and is required to provide time for public comment on issues appearing before the Board. Additionally, trustees interact regularly with the president, Board liaison, committee liaisons and other vice presidents to discuss university matters. The Board receives [regular reports](#) from Board committees and Board liaisons, such as the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the NIU Alumni Association and the NIU Foundation. The Board also solicits advice from shared governance bodies and other university-related groups via the University Advisory Council, which consists of the presidents of the [Faculty Senate](#), the [Supportive Professional Staff Council](#) and the [Operating Staff Council](#). Additional faculty represent the faculty's multiple roles of teaching, research and service.

The Board is apprised by the director of State Relations and the director of Federal Relations of state and federal issues impacting higher education. The individuals in these positions, in turn, provide information to state and national leaders on issues affecting the university.

2.C.4.

Trustees are required to take [training in conflicts of interest](#), to submit conflict-of-interest statements and to participate in annual ethics training. Upon appointment, and on an annual basis thereafter, trustees disclose economic interests to the Illinois Secretary of State's Office and Executive Ethics Commission. The university's ethics officer reviews and approves these annual statements.

Additionally, trustees recuse themselves from any voting in which they have a conflict of interest. Board Bylaw Article VIII provides explicit information regarding the actions that must be taken if an actual or potential conflict of interest exists. This process applies to individuals who acknowledge the conflict themselves and to trustees who reasonably believe other members might pose conflicts.

2.C.5.

Board bylaws present the duties and responsibilities of the president and designate the position of chief executive officer.

The bylaws identify two branches of authority for the university: the president and the University Council. For presidential authority, the Board has designated the president as chief executive officer and has authorized the president to "develop institutional policies, implement procedures and engage the university community in activities which fulfill the purpose of the mission of the university."

In 2020, shared governance was reimagined. Endorsed by the Faculty Senate and approved by the University Council, the Faculty Senate is now the primary body authorized to make policy determinations regarding academic

matters while the University Council is the recognized authority to make policy determinations on non-academic matters.

- The [Faculty Senate](#) is the body empowered to act as an agent for the university faculty, with delegated power to formulate broad policies regarding the educational functions of the university. The faculty, through the Faculty Senate, can present educational policies to the University Council; to the executive vice president and provost; and to the president of the university; with the ultimate approval authority residing in the appeal to the Board. The Faculty Senate voting membership is composed of faculty members, elected from and by the tenured and tenure-track faculty of each academic department or school and the University Libraries. In addition, instructors, a clinical faculty member, Supportive Professional Staff members, Operating Staff members and students have voting membership on the Faculty Senate.
- The Board, through its adoption of the constitution and bylaws of NIU, has empowered the [University Council](#) to participate in making policy for the university; advising the president on priorities for utilization of resources; and providing input on the annual budget. The University Council voting membership is composed of faculty members, one from each degree-granting college and University Libraries, instructional faculty, a clinical faculty member, Supportive Professional Staff members, Operating Staff members, students and administrators.

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2.D - Core Component 2.D

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

Argument

Academic Freedom

Full academic freedom is guaranteed to faculty by the [NIU constitution](#) and Board regulations, which state “the Board recognizes a responsibility to establish and maintain policies which encourage freedom of inquiry, discourse, teaching, research and publication, as well as a responsibility to protect members of the faculty and student body against forces within and without the university that threaten academic freedom.” The university recognizes the right of faculty to determine their [curriculum](#), choose reading and topics, and engage in difficult conversations in their classrooms. Full academic freedom is granted to faculty in their research and in the publication of such work.

These statements of fundamental principles are reinforced by the [Faculty Senate bylaws](#) and the United Faculty Alliance [collective bargaining agreement](#) and further nuanced by policies and procedures addressing [intellectual property](#), [conflict of interest](#) and [professional ethics](#) as well as procedures for handling disputes.

Freedom of Expression

NIU is [committed to supporting students, faculty and staff](#) in their rights to freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning. The [Freedom of Expression policy](#) (adopted in 2016 and updated in 2018) confirms NIU’s commitment to open debate and free speech throughout the campus community. NIU’s website illustrates the university’s commitment to freedom of expression and provides information to students, faculty and staff on how to exercise that right.

As it relates to student speech, the university ensures students are provided the opportunity to discuss openly all matters of public interest in a responsible manner. This is achieved through the established [Freedom of Expression procedures](#), which clarify for students their rights and responsibilities related to freedom of expression and offer assistance with event planning and space reservation.

In an ongoing effort to engage the campus community, students, faculty and staff participate in meaningful dialogue and exchange of ideas. NIU offers multiple opportunities to participate in civil discourse and to listen to, and learn about, complex and often challenging topics. For example, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences hosts a [Rebuilding Democracy Lecture Series](#) that showcases how the liberal arts and sciences are at the center of a healthy democracy. Speakers have included historians, politicians, journalists, and civil rights leaders and advocates. Other events celebrating freedom of expression include student rallies and vigils, such as Take Back the Night. To empower students, staff and faculty to find their voice, even when confronting difficult conversations, NIU provides supportive programming such as [Active Bystander](#), [Conversations on Diversity and Equity \(CODE\)](#) and [Inclusion in Action training](#), described in 1.C.2.

As with any other right, freedom of expression comes with responsibilities. For times when students are engaging in discriminatory or harassing behaviors or other misconduct, the institution has established procedures to investigate what happened and to take appropriate action in accordance with principles of due process and constitutional protections. NIU’s [Student Code of Conduct](#) outlines policies and processes and is intended to hold students accountable through educational interventions and restorative practices. In June of 2018, the provost and dean of students charged a task force to review the Student Code of Conduct [process](#) and to provide recommendations to Student Government Association leadership for its additional review and feedback. A revised Student Code of Conduct resulted, incorporating a larger focus on restorative practices and educational interventions.

Similarly, faculty and staff are held accountable for misconduct through grievance procedures established through personnel processes and procedures, as illustrated in 1.C.2. and 1.C.3.

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2.E - Core Component 2.E

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

1. Institutions supporting basic and applied research maintain professional standards and provide oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability.
2. The institution provides effective support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff and students.
3. The institution provides students guidance in the ethics of research and use of information resources.
4. The institution enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

Argument

2.E.1.

The Division of Research and Innovation Partnerships supports research and scholarship through entities such as the Office of Research Compliance, Integrity and Safety (ORCIS); Sponsored Programs Administration; and Technology Transfer.

For research involving human subjects, NIU has established an [Institutional Review Board \(IRB\)](#), comprised of faculty, to ensure faculty and student researchers are following guidelines in accordance with federal regulations; to establish ethical considerations and best practices; and to review and approve research proposals according to [IRB guidelines](#). The research conducted by NIU faculty, staff and/or students requires IRB approval before the research begins to ensure the health, well-being and ethical rights of human subjects are protected. In addition, student and faculty researchers can use a short screening form to determine whether a scholarly activity constitutes research with human subjects requiring IRB oversight. [The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee](#) offers similar [protections and compliance with regulations](#) for animal research. [The Institutional Biosafety Committee monitors and approves research](#) involving controlled biological agents. These review boards are required by the federal government to ensure ethical, responsible research.

ORCIS houses the [Laboratory Safety Committee](#), comprised of faculty and staff, which creates a safe research environment for faculty, students and staff in the laboratory setting. The committee creates and approves policies regarding lab safety; investigates accidents; and gives approval for laboratory projects that carry a large amount of risk. ORCIS has, and has exercised, the authority to stop any laboratory activity it deems an imminent hazard; it then [takes action](#).

2.E.2.

ORCIS helps NIU researchers and the university achieve and maintain ethical principles and compliance with federal, state and university regulations governing research. ORCIS communicates to researchers via a newsletter and blog about changes in the federal and state government and funding agencies. Unit leaders represent NIU on the Academic Security and Counter Exploitation Program, a consortium of universities developing tools to promote integrity and combat undue influence. ORCIS also provides training on the responsible conduct of research; conflict of interest; research misconduct; authorship and publication; mentoring; and animal care and use.

The Graduate School, in conjunction with ORCIS, offers students an opportunity to earn a [Responsible Conduct of Research transcript notation](#) through the completion of the Responsible Conduct of Research Forum Series. This requires the attendance of at least seven sessions related to Responsible Conduct of Research, such as safe laboratory practices, data management, peer review and conflict of interest. The last of these is [mandatory](#) for all students supported by federal funding.

2.E.3.

Ethics of Research

Inquiry IRB forms are made available to graduate students before the projects start to ensure students and mentors have considered IRB requirements. If the screening form reveals IRB approval is needed, these students undergo IRB training. Other forms of [research ethics training](#) are also available.

Information Resources

The University Libraries provides an onsite research help desk and virtual chat option for students. Librarians can assist students in finding peer-reviewed articles, renewing books or locating specific citations. Video tutorials posted on the library's webpage relate to search strategies, evaluating sources and finding reliable information. The library embeds online learning modules into first-year composition and communication courses. Subject specialist librarians are assigned to departments on campus and provide discipline-specific research assistance to students.

[Academic integrity tutorials](#) are available online to support [students' awareness](#) of academic integrity and to offer strategies for students to protect themselves from academic dishonesty situations. Among these are the tutorial on cheating, falsification, fabrication and sabotage and the tutorial on plagiarism. NIU also encourages faculty to include an academic integrity statement per NIU's [course syllabus policy](#). The Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning provides [training](#) on the ethical considerations of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, for students and faculty.

[The Huskie Academic Success Center](#), which is available to all students, provides guidance in brainstorming, understanding assignments and drafting and revising work. The unit also assists students with avoiding plagiarism and maintaining academic integrity.

SafeAssign, a plagiarism prevention tool, is available through Blackboard to students and faculty. Submitting papers through SafeAssign assists in determining when plagiarism has occurred and can also be used as an educational tool while students are working on papers to see areas where attribution might be missing.

2.E.4.

NIU presents academic honesty policies in graduate and undergraduate catalogs. Faculty, staff and students are encouraged to adhere to the highest ethical and professional standards as they pursue research and scholarly activities.

As described in 2.D., NIU's [Student Code of Conduct](#) outlines student conduct, policies and processes. Academic misconduct is addressed by the Office of Student Conduct. Follow-through on complaints is handled by the Academic Misconduct Hearing Board, which consists of one student and two faculty members.

ORCIS addresses research misconduct. NIU's [Research Misconduct Policy](#) identifies falsification, fabrication and plagiarism as research misconduct and holds researchers accountable for their actions. The policy is modeled after federal regulations and is compliant with the federal Office of Research Integrity's standards.

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2.S - Criterion 2 - Summary

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

Summary

NIU is committed to integrity in all its functions and has established policies and procedures governing ethical and responsible performance in all university endeavors. The Board provides oversight while respecting the role of the administration and shared governance in carrying out the mission of the university. The Board's delegation of operations is supported by an inclusive governance structure of faculty, staff and students through whom academic and fiscal priorities are established and oversight of all aspects of the university mission is accomplished. Execution of the mission and annual goals relies heavily on shared leadership, a model using cross-functional teams that are empowered to think creatively and express their opinions to develop solutions. NIU's commitment to ethical and transparent behavior is reflected, for example, in the public setting and evaluation of annual university goals, the creation and maintenance of the policy library, the establishment of the president's Budget Roundtable, monthly leadership forums and the restructuring of the Faculty Senate and University Council. NIU supports students, faculty and staff in their rights to freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.

As a High Research Activity R2 research university, NIU has a complete and well-established set of protocols in place to support the ethical conduct of research. Access to policies and procedures is provided through the NIU website and is widely communicated both on campus and to constituents elsewhere.

Sources

There are no sources.

3 - Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support

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

3.A - Core Component 3.A

The rigor of the institution's academic offerings is appropriate to higher education.

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of student performance appropriate to the credential awarded.
2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for its 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).

Argument

3.A.1

Northern Illinois University's (NIU) [curricular approval procedures](#) and [program review process ensure](#) courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degrees or certificates awarded. Forty-two schools and academic departments offer over [170 undergraduate and graduate degrees](#). The breadth of majors, minors, certificates, emphases and specializations programs is reflected in the academic catalogs.

Academic programs are housed within NIU's seven colleges where students are taught, advised and engaged in educational experiences by faculty and staff: College of Business, College of Education, College of Engineering and Engineering Technology, College of Health and Human Sciences, College of Law, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and College of Visual and Performing Arts.

- [New programs](#) are initiated in the departments and approved through the shared governance process, the Board of Trustees and the Illinois Board of Higher Education. An [assessment plan](#) including student learning outcomes (SLOs), a curriculum map, undergraduate program alignment with baccalaureate student learning outcomes (BSLOs) and assessment methods are required for approval.
- Departments/schools review course offerings, curricula, bylaws and handbooks as needed, paying particular attention to the [currency of course offerings in the discipline](#).
- Changes are made at the discretion of faculty and their respective departments/schools and as deemed appropriate by [college and university curricular bodies](#).

Prior to Academic Year 2020-2021, the Academic Planning Council and University Assessment Panel were actively involved in directing the program reviews and providing feedback. During the height of COVID-19, the process was paused while shared governance was restructured. [Processes were simplified, decentralized and more closely aligned with the Illinois Board of Higher Education program review requirements](#).

All programs are now reviewed at the [college level, on either an eight-year cycle or a cycle aligned with disciplinary accreditation](#), to ensure quality and currency. The program review process includes [Assessment Plans, Annual Assessment Updates](#) and [Mid-cycle Status Reports](#) that support continuous improvement of student learning. The decentralized process calls upon colleges to be introspective and to act to ensure quality at the local level.

Upon completion of the college review, Accreditation, Assessment and Evaluation receives [Program Review Summary Reports](#) and prepares them for review by the Academic Planning Council, the Office of the Provost and the Board before they are sent to the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

Institutional Effectiveness supports the program review process. Data and materials related to program review, [located on the Institutional Effectiveness website](#), include the [Schedule for Review](#) of Academic Programs and Research and Public Service Centers, [Program Review Findings Template](#), which is aligned with [the Illinois Board of Higher Education standardized format](#), and the [previous year's summary report](#).

Evidence of NIU's adherence to programmatic rigor and requirements is assessed externally. For example, the Department of Computer Science invited external peer review in the creation of its doctoral program. The College of Business degree programs are accredited by AACSB. NIU educator licensure programs are nationally recognized by the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation. [A full listing of accredited programs can be found online](#). When programs don't meet accreditor expectations, actions are taken to [remediate](#).

In addition, the quality of programs can be demonstrated by the pass rate of NIU students/graduates on state and national licensure/certification exams. For example, the pass rate was 75% for the NCLEX-RN exam for nursing, 61% for the Illinois Bar and 100% for the Illinois Licensure Testing System Superintendent content area test in 2022. [More information on pass rates is available online](#).

3.A.2.

NIU courses and programs promote intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application and integration of broad learning and skills. Course numbering differentiates undergraduate, graduate or law credit. [Graduate-level courses for which there exists an undergraduate equivalent cannot constitute more than 50% of the hours applied toward a graduate degree](#), and [syllabi for these courses must clearly address the difference](#) in rigor for undergraduate and graduate credit.

Departments develop degree programs with appropriate SLOs to the level of the program. For example, the [School of Interdisciplinary Health Professions' three Health Sciences assessment plans](#) at the bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels exemplify the articulation of program-specific SLOs. SLOs for all programs are publicly available.

In addition, the university articulates [eight BSLOs](#). These outcomes describe the knowledge, values and abilities students develop during their studies, including general education courses and courses in their major. Undergraduate degree program SLOs are aligned with the BSLOs as documented in program assessment plans.

3.A.3.

NIU ensures consistency by following uniform academic standards and processes applied to each program for curricular review, program review and assessment criteria, regardless of mode of delivery. For instance, the M.S.Ed. in Instructional Technology offers an online mode, while the B.S. in Accounting is offered face-to-face; regardless of the modality, both programs undergo the same academic reviews. When the same degree program is offered in varied delivery formats, such as the [Master of Business Administration program with five delivery formats, the SLOs for each format are the same](#).

NIU colleges, departments/schools provide oversight for applying consistency across modalities, with umbrella support from Academic Affairs; Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development (for logistics); and Information Technology.

- NIU ensures goals, outcomes/objectives and curricula are delivered consistently throughout all delivery modes.
- No matter where a course is taught (at the DeKalb campus or elsewhere), it has [consistent learning goals and holds students accountable to the same academic standards](#).

Faculty, departments, schools and programs all create criteria to measure effective teaching and are using a variety of methods (including student evaluations) to review all courses.

[NIU's credit hour policy](#) applies to all courses (graduate, professional, undergraduate) awarding academic credit regardless of mode of delivery. Curricula committees are charged with following the policy when a new course or revision to an existing course is proposed. This, along with [periodic checks](#), ensures consistency of quality and rigor regardless of delivery mode.

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3.B - Core Component 3.B

The institution offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings and degree levels of the institution. The institution articulates the purposes, content and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements.
2. 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. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity and provides students with growth opportunities and lifelong skills to live and work in a multicultural world.
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.

Argument

3.B.1 and 3.B.2

The Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board and Illinois State Board of Education have adopted a [general education purpose statement and curriculum](#) to ensure consistency across institutions and to ease transferability among Illinois public and private associate and baccalaureate degree-granting colleges and universities.

The [Illinois Articulation Initiative](#), a statewide transfer agreement among more than 100 colleges and universities across the state, facilitates the transferability of courses. NIU, as a participating university, subscribes to a common general education framework to ensure the transferability of a [general education package](#) from two-year Associate of Art and Associate of Science programs. NIU also works within the Illinois Articulation Initiative system to match courses so students can be informed of the equivalent requirements at participating institutions. The Illinois Articulation Initiative general education framework consists of a core curriculum of 37 to 41 semester credit hours in communications; humanities and fine arts; social and behavioral sciences; life and physical sciences; and mathematics.

The [NIU General Education Program](#) is built on the Illinois Articulation Initiative general education framework. It empowers students to customize their general education courses according to their interests and aspirations. The General Education Program helps students attain a sound liberal education and acquire sufficient general knowledge and intellectual versatility to enable them to become informed, resourceful members of society. General education courses include foundational studies (written composition, oral communication and quantitative literacy) and courses in three knowledge domains (Creativity and Critical Analysis; Nature and Technology; and Society and Culture).

The program provides a [rigorous and thoughtful curriculum](#) that integrates with major studies and builds a foundation for lifelong learning, career success and responsible citizenship. It develops competency in [the eight BSLOs](#).

The General Education Program offered 134 unique courses across all six undergraduate colleges in Fall 2023. The engagement of all six undergraduate colleges has created increased university-wide ownership of the general education curriculum and strengthened the indispensable relationship between major and general education studies. It also allows students to count up to six credit hours of general education coursework toward major requirements, relieving a burden for high-credit-load degrees.

In Spring 2023, departments with general education courses were surveyed to reaffirm alignment with the BSLOs. Department chairs verified the alignment of their general education courses with the primary BSLO and one of the

two secondary BSLOs in the Knowledge Domain to which the courses are currently part. Chairs could also indicate if they wished to move their course to different knowledge domains or to remove them as general education courses. An overarching [curriculum map](#) identifies the courses and the BSLOs they address. This highlights the purposeful connection between course-based outcomes and the BSLOs.

From Academic Year 2015-2016 through Academic Year 2023-2024, students could thematically organize and customize their general education coursework within the AcademicsPLUS framework of the [General Education Program](#). This framework offered seven optional paths through which students could fulfill general education requirements with coursework from all three knowledge domains and various disciplinary perspectives. Students earned Pathway Focus transcript designations by completing three courses in a pathway. While the program was innovative, it was complicated and not widely understood or used. As efforts are underway to simplify curricula, [shared governance eliminated AcademicsPLUS](#) from the catalog beginning in Academic Year 2024-2025.

The [General Education Committee](#), a standing committee of the [Baccalaureate Council](#), oversees the General Education Program and is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the program, proposing policies and procedures for program evaluation, advising colleges and departments on continued improvement and approving or removing courses from the program. In line with these responsibilities, the General Education Committee oversees assessment of the BSLOs and reports regularly to the Baccalaureate Council.

3.B.3.

As a university with a diverse student body, growing multicultural awareness is intrinsic to the NIU student experience. Classrooms, residence halls, the student center and the recreational and sports facilities are all places where students of different backgrounds and lived experiences meet and mix. This multicultural learning experience is facilitated by programs such as the [Faculty Academy on Cultural Competence and Equity \(FACCE\)](#) and [Conversations on Diversity and Equity \(CODE\)](#) workshops and by college/department efforts such as:

- The College of Engineering and Engineering Technology faculty incorporated lessons learned through the [Association of College and University Educators Effective Teaching Practices Program](#) into course modules. Modules are now steeped in asset-based philosophy respectful of students' prior knowledge and experiences to develop a culturally responsive learning environment. The College of Engineering and Engineering Technology was granted the Bronze Medal award by [American Society for Engineering Education in 2023](#) for its work on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) for students, faculty, and staff.
- The School of Art and Design created culturally responsive learning environments built around this question: How do I, as an instructor, recognize and leverage the diversity of experiences in my students? Courses such as ARTE 479 and ART 679 Diversity, Disability, and Differentiation in Art and Design Education showcase faculty revising curricula with cultural competency in mind.

These programs are designed to help faculty, staff and students be more intentional in creating a successful multicultural learning environment.

In addition to this overall learning environment, NIU offers a variety of curricular and cocurricular activities that specifically address human diversity and multicultural awareness. Since the Fall 2017 semester, colleges and departments have aligned course offerings with Illinois Public Act 87-581, which requires all undergraduate students in the state of Illinois to satisfy a "Human Diversity" baccalaureate degree requirement, either through a designated course on human diversity or a designated non-course-based experience. This is accomplished through the General Education Program and captured as a student learning outcome: "Exhibit intercultural competencies with people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives." To date, [126 courses have been approved as human diversity offerings](#).

Examples of curricular efforts directed at preparing students for future success in multi-cultural environments include:

- In the College of Education, [Project J.E.D.I.](#) (Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) prepares diverse scholars to serve diverse children and adults who are blind or visually disabled.
- In the College of Business, the [Passport Program](#) encourages students to participate in activities on "seven continents," with topics including professional communication, ethics, experiential learning, global awareness, leadership, service and diversity, equity and inclusion. The global learning and DEI components encourage

students to visit and interact with the Academic Diversity Centers and to make connections to the broader world through speakers, exhibits and activities.

- In the College of Health and Human Sciences, the B.S. in Rehabilitation and Disability Services includes courses designed to facilitate knowledge- and skill-acquisition when working in a multicultural society ([REHB 394](#), [REHB 493](#)). Courses also engage students with community professionals and their diverse clientele to learn about the intersectionality of rehabilitation services and people with differing values ([REHB 394](#), [REHB 492](#), [REHB 495](#)).

NIU provides a variety of certificates and minors as well as academic programming through the Academic Diversity centers:

- [Asian American Resource Center](#).
- [Center for Black Studies](#).
- [Center for Burma Studies](#).
- [Center for Latino and Latin American Studies](#).
- [Center for Southeast Asian Studies](#).
- [Center for the Study of Women, Gender and Sexuality](#).

In parallel with these curricular opportunities, NIU provides numerous cocurricular opportunities for students. Foremost among these are the Diversity and Cultural Resource Centers housed in the Division of Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (cited in 1.C.2.). While the centers can serve as familiar cultural touchstones or as a refuge from microaggressions, they also play an important role in inviting all students to learn, appreciate and participate in diverse cultural events. The Latino Resource Center hosts a variety of events during Latino Heritage Month ranging from the “Grito” celebrating Mexican Independence, to Latin Chill, an evening of Latino music and dance. The Gender and Sexuality Resource Center provides LGBTQ+ and Trans Ally Training to NIU students, faculty and staff and members of the local community. Participants learn how to be effective allies to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (trans) and/or queer. The Gender and Sexuality Resource Center also hosts speakers and films throughout the year. The Center for Black Studies hosts Kwanzaa celebrations during the fall semester and is the epicenter of Black History Month celebrations for the larger DeKalb Community.

In addition to the Diversity and Cultural Resource Centers, NIU offers a wide array of cocurricular opportunities for students to explore human and cultural diversity, ranging from the Ballet Folklorico Aztlan to the Foreign Language Residence Program and from the Muslim Student Association to the NIU World Music Club.

3.B.4.

NIU’s Strategic Action Planning Framework prioritizes teaching, research, engagement and scholarship. Faculty, staff and student activities in these areas continue to uphold NIU’s standing among Carnegie High Research Activity universities, strengthen NIU’s designation as a Carnegie Community Engagement institution and enhance the recognition NIU has received from the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities as an Innovation and Economic Prosperity University.

NIU faculty support these efforts through a wide variety of externally funded training programs and research grants. Students benefit from these efforts, either directly or indirectly, through training, involvement in faculty research projects or classroom learning about leading research in their fields of study. In FY22, NIU received \$61.1 million in awards, with 418 distinct awards and 134 faculty/staff named as principal investigators. This included \$31.8 million in federal awards, \$24.1 million in state awards, \$2.5 million in corporate awards and \$2.5 million in public/non-profit awards. Without COVID-19 relief funding, total funding this year was \$57 million. This represents a 60% increase in sponsored funding since FY19. These awards provide critical funding to sustain and grow research across many NIU disciplines and to provide research training opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students.

NIU strives to prepare students and northern Illinois communities for a [century of change](#) by bringing resources to bear on complex societal challenges. Teams made up of faculty, staff and students with diverse and relevant experiences are empowered to think and act creatively in support of established and emerging opportunities for transdisciplinary research. Efforts are centered around innovative solutions for responding to environmental change, advancing technology, preparing for shifting demographics and interpreting the world around us.

Faculty research and expertise are recognized in publications ranging from [premier scientific journals such as Science](#) to mainstream news media outlets such as [NPR's Science Friday](#), the [Washington Post](#) and the [New York Times](#). For example, over the past three years alone, in addition to their scientific publications, NIU's meteorology faculty have been quoted or cited in thousands of news articles on severe weather and climate trends. Faculty experts in other areas are regularly sought after by the media for their knowledge on diverse topics including [mental health](#), [artificial intelligence](#), [restoration ecology](#) and [entrepreneurship](#).

Creative works are on display at notable venues throughout the country. The NIU Jazz Orchestra was one of 10 collegiate jazz programs invited to participate in the [2023 Jazz at Lincoln Center's Jack Rudin Jazz Championships](#) in New York City. Faculty work has been on display at the [Bridgeport Art Center](#), the [St. Louis Art Museum](#) and the [ARC Gallery in Chicago](#).

Other areas of [existing or growing research strength](#) contributing to NIU's reputation include psychology; accelerator and high energy physics; Southeast Asian studies; research computing and data management; additive manufacturing; the study of family violence and sexual assault; health equity; language and literacy; the study of stress and trauma; non-profit organization leadership; blindness and visual impairment; and youth development and social change through sport.

In keeping with the university's commitment to DEI, NIU is growing its scholarly profile in areas that contribute to it. This includes faculty studying issues of race and gender in sport (College of Education), racial and ethnic health disparities (College of Health and Human Sciences), norm-breaking in the Civil Rights movement (College of Law), the relationship between gender and sexuality (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences) and the influence of anti-apartheid protest theatre on global theater (College of Visual and Performing Arts).

Faculty across campus are often recognized externally for their leadership and excellence by their [professional organizations](#), through federal [Early Career Research Award](#) programs, through prestigious fellowships [such as the Fulbright](#) and even through a [special research creativity award](#) from the National Science Foundation.

As part of the Illinois Innovation Network described in 1.B.4., NIU is constructing a \$23 million [Northern Illinois Center for Community Sustainability](#). This Illinois Innovation Network hub will accelerate job creation and economic growth through groundbreaking education, research and discovery. The center will focus on water resources, environmental change and food systems and complement NIU's established Institute for the Study of Environment, Sustainability and Energy, which offers academic programs in environmental studies. For more than a decade, the institute has fostered transdisciplinary research, education and community engagement related to the environment and sustainability. Diverse areas of faculty and student research include biogeography; biodiversity; ecology; public health; invasive species; environmental restoration; environmental humanities; green technology; water sciences; the economics of overfishing and overharvesting; renewable energy; complex systems; science communication; sustainability policy; the cultural impacts of/on climate change; and local government sustainability management.

An array of programs and academic courses foster faculty-guided student artistry and research at all levels. Through these programs, and through individual student-faculty engagements, NIU students conduct more than 800 research projects each year. The [Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning](#) provides funding, mentoring and organizational support for student/faculty research. The [Research Rookies](#) program, for example, links freshmen, transfers and continuing students with no collegiate research experience with faculty mentors in their areas of interest to conduct research projects. The inaugural 2010 cohort was 17 students; since then, cohorts have ranged from 31 to 50 students. On average, 35 NIU faculty mentors participate each academic year. Additionally, faculty and students work on research and engineering projects with industry, non-profit organizations and national laboratories, such as Argonne National Laboratory and Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. Through [S-STEM grants](#), NIU offers scholarships and support for student involvement in research in STEM disciplines. In addition to the formal programs, NIU faculty frequently involve students in their individual research activities. All students have the opportunity to present their research efforts at the annual [Conference on Undergraduate Research and Engagement](#).

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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 strives to ensure that the overall composition of its faculty and staff reflects human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.
2. 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, assessment of student learning, and establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff.
3. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual and consortial offerings.
4. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.
5. 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.
6. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.
7. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising and cocurricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their professional development.

Argument

3.C.1

NIU continuously strives to recruit and retain a faculty that reflects the diversity of the population served. Recognizing the university must still make progress toward this goal, NIU addresses the diversity of faculty and staff through university- and college-level initiatives (cited in 1.C.2.). To support building diverse candidate pools for faculty hiring, the Division of Academic Affairs mandates search committees have [diversity advocates](#) and [diversity plans](#).

The colleges, in partnership with ADEI, have worked since 2018 to improve the faculty recruitment processes. For example, during Academic Year 2021-2022, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences departments that were recruiting tenure/tenure-track faculty developed diversity plans to improve the dissemination of where the position ads were placed. In Academic Year 2022-2023, the college built on the success of the previous year by having departments identify Ph.D. programs that produce the most African American and Latinx Ph.D.s in their fields, and then to contact those program chairs and directors of Graduate Studies for referrals. This resulted in the most diverse pools in the last five years and led to the hiring of two BIPOC faculty and two LGBTQ+ faculty (of six successful hires in the college).

In supporting the mission of NIU to have a campus composition that reflects human diversity, the [Preparing Future Faculty of Color Conference](#) serves as a pipeline in trying to increase and enhance faculty diversity not only at NIU but at colleges and universities within the state. Established in the fall of 2015, the Preparing Future Faculty of Color Conference seeks to establish and develop meaningful relationships with prospects, especially young scholars traditionally underrepresented in their fields. Although there are Preparing Future Faculty programs at universities across the country, this program is the only one devoted solely to graduate students of color.

To scale diversity, equity and inclusion work and create change, NIU is implementing a [Shared Equity Leadership Model](#) that broadens and shares responsibility for DEI goals and outcomes. Two DEI director positions outside the Division of Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion were created to assist with work on student and faculty DEI issues, one in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and another in the College of Education. To impact recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, an [associate vice provost for Faculty Mentoring and Diversity](#) was added to the Academic Affairs leadership team.

3.C.2.

NIU provides students with a diverse set of high-quality programs and student services. To do so, NIU hires, trains

and provides professional development to a cadre of excellent faculty and staff.

- With a student-to-faculty ratio of [15:1](#), instruction is delivered by tenured/tenure-track faculty at all ranks, a variety of non-tenure-track teaching roles including instructors, (half of whom have been with NIU for five years or more) and clinical faculty.
- NIU participates in the National Survey of Student Engagement. The most recent [Report from 2019](#) shows NIU student-faculty interaction is at or above the median for first-year and senior students when compared to peer schools.
- [Faculty Senate](#) has the responsibility to establish, direct and oversee academic matters, including deployment of qualified faculty teaching assigned courses. New programs and curricular innovation begin at department and college levels through curriculum and personnel committees.

3.C.3.

NIU's [Faculty Credentials Policy](#) outlines clear criteria for teaching qualifications, assuring all instructional staff are qualified to teach the courses to which they are assigned: minimum qualifications reflect the degree earned and the allowable exceptions for both undergraduate and graduate teaching (and teaching in the College of Law). The credentials are assessed by Human Resource Services, and the relevant units, upon hiring and by department chairs before assigning courses. In Spring 2023, [Human Resource Services audited faculty credentials against teaching assignments](#) to ensure alignment with the policy.

Graduate faculty are responsible for advancing the university's mission at the graduate level through research, artistry, pedagogy and instruction of graduate students. As such, established institutional policies determine membership at different levels, and requirements assure graduate faculty have the credentials and record necessary to fulfill this mission. A review of all graduate faculty is conducted regularly. The function and responsibilities of the graduate faculty and the qualifications for [graduate faculty membership and review process](#) are published in the NIU Policy Library.

3.C.4.

As prescribed by [Article VII](#) and [Article VIII](#) of the Faculty Senate 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 Policy Library, and this feedback is incorporated into instructional evaluation of all instructional faculty.

A majority of tenured and tenure-track faculty are represented by the United Faculty Alliance; excluded from the union are College of Law faculty, faculty who are jointly appointed with external entities and Supportive Professional Staff with faculty rank. In the United Faculty Alliance [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#), it notes faculty evaluations on teaching effectiveness must include components aside from student evaluations, in part because of the academic literature on student evaluation shows strong and consistent bias against BIPOC and female faculty. The methods for this additional evaluation vary by department, and can include peer review of syllabi, peer classroom evaluation or training through the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL).

Instructors are represented by the University Professionals of Illinois [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#), which defines the procedures for annual performance evaluations of instructors.

As of Fall 2023, each college will use a [standardized student evaluation instrument](#) for its courses, with departments allowed (and encouraged) to include department- and/or course-specific questions on the survey.

3.C.5.

NIU uses tenure and promotion evaluations, annual merit processes (faculty) and annual evaluations (instructors) as indicators of currency in the discipline and adeptness in their teaching. Participation in these processes is supported by collective bargaining agreements with the [United Faculty Alliance](#) and [University Professionals of Illinois](#).

The university supports ongoing professional development for faculty and staff, particularly in teaching and learning. The mission of NIU's award-winning [CITL](#) is to support faculty, staff and graduate teaching assistants in effective

and innovative teaching in pursuit of transformative learning experiences. CITL provides comprehensive [services, resources](#) and [programs](#), free to all members of the instructional corps and schools/departments. A [full list](#) of programs indicates the variety of important pedagogical topics addressed. For example, the [Teaching Effectiveness Institute](#), offered twice a year, is a signature event for CITL that draws both new and continuing faculty and staff. [A full listing of CITL's activities is available online.](#)

One of the most important services CITL provided was training for the entire campus during the rapid pivot to online learning because of the COVID pandemic and the governor's shelter-in-place order. The myriad of success stories during that time, for students and faculty alike, was due in no small part to the dedication, knowledge and professionalism of the CITL staff. Since then, CITL has helped drive classroom innovation using digital/web-based tools to improve instruction.

The center also provides [programs and support services for graduate teaching assistants](#). These include annual institutes, programs and workshops; consultation services; [graduate teaching certificates](#); and [an awards program](#).

Established in 2022, the [Faculty Academy on Cultural Competence and Equity \(FACCE\)](#) offers professional development for faculty, instructors, staff and graduate teaching assistants on a range of issues related to cultural competence and their connections to curriculum, pedagogy and classroom engagement. FACCE is designed by NIU faculty and staff to address the needs of the campus community. In addition to FACCE, faculty members at NIU can participate in an [Association of College and University Educators](#) course on effective teaching. Participants explore and implement research-based approaches to culturally responsive teaching designed to improve student engagement and persistence and promote deeper learning. Over the past two years, 70 faculty completed the 25-week course in effective teaching practices and earned the designation of "[Association of College and University Educators Distinguished Teaching Scholar](#)" for NIU. This initiative aligns with NIU's mission, vision and values to provide students from diverse backgrounds with classroom experiences that support their success.

The institution offers various mentoring programs to faculty. The [Strategic Transdisciplinary Artistry, Research and Scholarship \(STARS\) Academy](#) engages participants in a community that fosters mentorship and collaborative practice. Starting this year, it will include training for faculty on mentoring undergraduates, grads, and even early career faculty. The [Emerging Faculty Leadership Program](#) helps develop future leaders, while the [Faculty Mentoring Program](#) coordinates activities to inform and encourage effective mentoring of faculty.

3.C.6.

Instructional staff are accessible to students through regular office hours. For tenured and tenure-track faculty, the office hour policies are established at the department and college levels and guided by collective bargaining agreements. The [United Faculty Alliance](#) Collective Bargaining Agreement allows for virtual office hours with department chair approval. For instructors, the schedule of one office hour each week per every three CUEs of instruction is established by the [University Professionals of Illinois](#) Collective Bargaining Agreement. Instructors can also host virtual office hours, per the University Professionals of Illinois agreement. Virtual office hours are particularly important for adult learners, commuters and students who have a heavy work burden as this allows them to meet with faculty outside of 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or outside of the confines of the faculty on-campus office.

3.C.7.

There are three primary employment classifications for individuals at NIU: Faculty, Civil Service and Supportive Professional Staff. The State of Illinois differentiates between those who fall within the Civil Service code and those who do not (known locally as Supportive Professional Staff). By statute, all university positions are considered to be governed by the Civil Service code unless exempted in accordance with state protocols.

Faculty credentialing at the time of hire and ongoing professional development are outlined in 3.C.3. Protocols for Supportive Professional Staff are similar, with the primary responsibility for verifying qualifications and providing training resting with the hiring manager. In the case of civil service employees, testing and credentials assessment are conducted by Human Resource Services staff in compliance with the State Universities Civil Service System. Since 2018, there has been an increasing trend at the state level to classify employees as civil service. As these are subject to very specific qualification guidelines, this has in turn increased the focus on ensuring staff meet position qualifications at the time of hire, during annual performance reviews and during updates of job descriptions (which

are mandated every three years).

Numerous professional development opportunities are provided to all staff members. Workshops and conferences sponsored by NIU and professional organizations further support professional development. For example,

- The [Academic Advising Summit](#) brings together academic advisors and academic support staff for a day-long conference to share resources, training and best practices to improve student advising.
- Human Resource Services provides training support for [well-being](#), [supervisor skills](#) and [operational tasks](#).
- The Division of Information Technology (DoIT) provides training for all employees in [information and technology skills](#).
- The [Staff Professional Development Academy](#) is a year-long, cohort-style professional development and educational program open to all non-academic, full-time civil service employees and Supportive Professional Staff.
- [Colleges](#) support professional development for staff.
- [ADEI](#) provides staff training focused on helping the diverse student body find supportive communities and achieve their educational goals.
- Records and Registration provides [training](#) on confidentiality of student records.

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3.D - Core Component 3.D

The institution provides support for student learning and resources for 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 offerings 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 and museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).

Argument

3.D.1.

NIU's commitment to all students is reflected in the [many offices and services supporting student success](#). Throughout the student lifecycle, services are offered based on the needs of NIU's diverse student population. Services include:

- [The Financial Aid and Scholarship Office](#) is critical to the recruitment and retention of talented and deserving students. Scholarships expand access to academically talented students as well as those who have financial needs. Approximately 80% of NIU's students received some form of financial assistance, totaling over \$24.4 million in grants, scholarships, student loans, federal work-study, waivers and employment-based awards. For FY23, institutional undergraduate scholarship expenditures, in tuition waivers and foundation-funded scholarships, were \$17.8 million.
- [Student Financial Advising Services](#) assists students and families to develop a financial plan and navigate complicated financial processes. They supplement the services provided by the Financial Aid and Scholarship Office and the Office of the Bursar by providing comprehensive financial advising that includes budgeting, loan repayment and other critical real-world financial skills.
- [The Center for Student Assistance](#) consolidates and coordinates the resources necessary for students to succeed. It houses diverse programs ranging from the Huskie Food Pantry (to combat student food insecurity) to Commuter and Off-Campus Programs to Students' Legal Assistance, as well as other facets of care and support.
- [Housing and Residential Services](#) houses 4,100 NIU students. It offers Living Learning Communities and six Special Interest Communities, giving students with shared interests hands-on learning experiences in a [supportive community of peers](#). Residence halls offer the convenience of residential computer labs, dining centers, classrooms, centralized tutoring and social areas.
- [Counseling and Consultation Services](#) provides comprehensive mental health support to students, with a focus on health and wellness. Licensed psychologists, social workers and counselors provide free, confidential individual and group therapy; walk-in appointments; substance use and anger assessments; advocacy services; crisis response; and 24-hour, on-call services. Counseling and Consultation Services helps students address personal challenges to develop the skills, abilities and knowledge to empower them to take full advantage of their college experience.
- [NIU Recreation](#) serves the campus and local community by promoting and advancing healthy lifestyles through educational programs, participation opportunities and support services. By providing inclusive recreation and educational experiences, Recreation fosters community cohesiveness and facilitates engagement, leadership, development and collaboration. Six facility locations offer group classes, nutrition coaching, personal training and outdoor recreation activities.
- [Health Services](#) offers a variety of services to students, including Northwestern Medicine Student Health Center at NIU, Immunization Compliance and Records and Student Health Insurance, and provides sports medicine services for Intercollegiate Athletics.

- [International Student and Scholar Services](#) advises and supports the university's international community with visas; with social and cultural adjustment to the United States; and as a liaison with relevant government agencies.
- [Career Services](#) helps students to connect their academic programs with career interests and goals; to identify and build skills and other qualities employers and graduate programs seek in candidates; to effectively promote themselves for internship and post-college employment; and to make meaningful networking connections within target career industries. Resources for students include the Focus 2 Career assessment and exploration system, software for practice interviews, the Huskies Get Hired job board and many additional online career educational resources.
- [The NIU Alumni Association](#) builds lifelong relationships with alumni, prospective students, corporate partners and friends of the university. The Alumni Association offers programs, hosts special events and partners with various departments/organizations in support of NIU.

NIU's [Resource Centers](#) provide a community of support for a diverse student body. These include the Center for Black Studies, the Latino Resource Center, the Asian American Resource Center, the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, the Disability Resource Center, Military and Veteran Services and the Undocumented Student Resource Center. A full description of these centers can be found in 1.C.2.

3.D.2.

NIU invests in student success through programs designed to properly launch and support students throughout their academic careers. [Testing Services](#) provides comprehensive placement, proficiency, qualifying and core competency testing services through which students can earn credit or placement without credit. Placement exams are taken prior to first-semester registration and help students select courses that correspond to their respective levels of achievement.

- For the mathematics entrance exam, students use [ALEKS](#), an online testing service that allows them to take the entrance exam multiple times and provides modules for them to improve in weak areas and then improve on the exam. For example, if a student initially takes the entrance exam and tests into MATH 110, they could work on multiple modules, retake the exam and place into MATH 155.
- Additional entrance exams are available in [chemistry](#), [foreign languages](#) and [writing composition](#).

Services are in place to assist students in registering for appropriate coursework and programs as they enter NIU and for advising throughout their academic careers. All students are required to attend [new student orientation](#) where they meet with their academic advisors and select courses. For Academic Year 2023-2024, a new, centralized advising program was launched to assist new students in the transition to NIU. Similarly, International Student and Scholar Services, described in 3.D.1., offers an [orientation](#) to meet the specific needs of NIU's international student population. Topics covered include advising, library services, writing support, health and wellness services, international student employment and daily campus life.

NIU recognizes the diverse needs of students and offers additional services for honors students, student-athletes and students with limited college preparation:

- [The University Honors Program](#) transcends disciplinary boundaries to help over 1,000 students broaden their horizons while reaching their goals. Students from every NIU college are represented. Honors seeks to mentor students and connect them with impactful experiences so that they graduate with the ability to adapt to life's ever-changing conditions. Participants are intellectually curious and committed to finding and pursuing their passions. Undergraduates from all academic disciplines are welcome to apply. Honors integrates curricular and cocurricular High Impact Practices, such as research, study abroad, engaged learning and internships.
- [Student Athlete Academic Support Services](#) provides comprehensive academic support to more than 400 Division I student-athletes. This support includes academic coaching, tutoring, mentoring, study tables, life skills/community service, academic plans for student success and cross-campus collaboration. NIU athlete graduation rates consistently rank among the highest in the Mid-American Conference. In Fall 2022, 312 student-athletes held at least a 3.0 GPA and 59 earned a 4.0 GPA while 14 teams posted a cumulative 3.0 (or better) GPA.
- [The McKinley Deacon Davis CHANCE Program](#), as discussed in 1.C.2., provides personalized financial,

academic, social and organizational guidance to students striving forward despite possible limited preparation or resources to pursue higher education.

NIU provides for extensive resources for learning and support at all levels:

- [First-year Success Series](#), recently revamped, is designed with key first-year milestones in mind and is done in partnership with a variety of stakeholders across campus. The First-year Success Series builds on programming during the Week of Welcome. Students participate in activities, programs and workshops that promote their academic success and integration into the campus community, and that support them through key areas of adjustment (cultural, emotional, financial and social). Continued supplemental programming takes place throughout the academic year.
- [The Huskie Academic Success Center](#) offers comprehensive academic services and resources, including supplemental instruction, tutoring, writing assistance and academic coaching.
- The Founders Memorial Library Student Success Librarian facilitates programming for undergraduate students and connects students to library resources.
- [The Mathematics Assistance Center](#) is co-located with the Huskie Academic Support Center in the [Learning Commons in Founders Memorial Library](#).
- [The Graduate School](#) offers career and professional development. See 1.C.1.

3.D.3.

NIU strives to meet the needs of its students, a substantial portion of whom are from underserved populations, through developmental advising. The advising of undergraduate students works in three spheres: the [Academic Advising Center](#), which is responsible for centralized first-year advising and undeclared students; college-level advising; and advising within individual departments/centers/programs.

All first-year students are assigned a first-year advisor. The first-year advisor for the majors in the College of Visual and Performing Arts is located in that college. All others are located in the Academic Advising Center. Once a student earns 24 credits, their primary advisor shifts to the students' college. If a student is undecided or exploring majors, they continue to be advised in the Academic Advising Center.

[Transfer Admissions](#) services include support with unofficial transfer credit evaluations, especially in accordance with the [Illinois Articulation Initiative Core Curriculum](#); guidance for the Guaranteed Admission Program; and assistance navigating unique [community college partnerships](#). Prospective and admitted students are encouraged to connect with Undergraduate Admissions through in-person and virtual appointments, as well as through invitations to large-scale events and transfer-specific presentations. Transfer students are advised through their major colleges or departments.

The [Navigate](#) platform facilitates academic planning and the advisor-student relationship. Student records are centrally stored, improving continuity across major and advisor changes. Navigate helps advisors:

- Identify and prioritize students who could benefit from additional assistance.
- Initiate conversations with students who might be experiencing academic or personal challenges.
- Simplify student intervention through outreach campaigns.
- Issue referrals and early alerts/progress reports to initiate proactive student outreach.

Navigate helps students:

- Register for classes.
- Develop multi-semester curricular plans.
- Track progress toward degree completion.
- Identify remaining requirements and barriers to graduation.

NIU provides reenrollment advising services that engage previously enrolled students who left school without completing degrees. These services include outreach to former students to gauge their interest in returning to NIU as well as to provide procedural and logistical support to these students through the reenrollment process. In Fall 2023, NIU partnered with ReUp, a recruiting and student support organization, to develop a program to target reenrollment

of former students who were last enrolled at the university more than one year ago and left before completing degrees. This program is estimated to reenroll more than 1,300 students over a five-year period.

3.D.4.

NIU provides students and faculty with the following infrastructure and resources to support effective teaching and learning. Key examples follow.

DoIT provides [technological infrastructure and supports academic technologies](#) for faculty, staff and students, including [technology labs](#) and classrooms. When Illinois Governor JB Pritzker issued the shelter-in-place order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DoIT was crucial to the delivery of online materials. With the shift to 100% remote operations during the pandemic, DoIT and CITL assisted faculty, students and staff to transition effectively into the virtual environment. Since the return to face-to-face courses, DoIT has upgraded core instructional facilities, helped with hybrid delivery and enabled NIU to provide flexibility for faculty and staff to work from home as needed. DoIT is also involved with capital planning around updating all academic spaces.

[CITL](#) provides comprehensive support for faculty, instructors and teaching assistants on effective teaching and technology integration in teaching through professional development workshops; individual and group consultations; and online resources. [In FY23, CITL offered](#) 102 programs on fundamental principles of teaching, innovative teaching and learning strategies, flexible teaching and the use of technology for 1,068 participants. Tenure-track faculty (36%), instructional faculty (18%), teaching staff (8%), graduate teaching assistants (32%) and others (6%) participated in more than 4,100 hours of professional development.

[University Libraries](#) is comprised of Founders Memorial Library and two campus branch libraries (the Music Library and Faraday Library), providing access to print and electronic resources, including 2.5 million print items, over 300 databases, 81,000 online journals and 590,000 e-books. Digital initiatives include a Council on Library and Information Resources grant to digitize the Libraries' "House of Beadle and Adams" nickel and dime novels, one of the largest such collections in the U.S. Another grant through the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences supports Preserving digital Objects With Restricted Resources (Digital POWRR), an initiative supporting the digitization efforts of institutions lacking the resources to do it alone.

The Libraries also hosts the Huskie Commons, NIU's institutional repository with more than 4,300 items representing the scholarship of faculty and students. Other distinctive digital collections and exhibits include the [Southeast Asia Collection](#), the [Regional History Collection](#), [Digital Library](#) and [Science on a Sphere](#). In response to the shift to 100% remote operations during the governor's shelter-in-place order, the library became a lending hub for laptops and mobile hotspots for students. Lending services have continued and expanded to ensure equitable access to the [technology](#) and [support](#) necessary for students to succeed. Librarians also coordinate with faculty to deliver bibliographic instruction customized to the needs of individual classes.

[The David C. Shapiro Memorial Law Library](#), located within the College of Law, houses a collection surpassing 250,000 volumes and provides interlibrary loan in addition to research services, off-campus database access, Basic Legal Research guides and Sample Bluebook Citations.

NIU coordinates clinical practice sites for students pursuing degrees or certifications in education, counseling or health and human services. For example, the College of Education partners with 40 Illinois school districts, out-of-state districts and international schools to provide students with experience in different field settings. The College of Health and Human Sciences has over 400 affiliation agreements with health and human service organizations.

NIU's museum spaces and collections provide enriched learning experiences.

- [The Pick Museum of Anthropology](#) serves as a teaching museum and provides opportunities for collection research, exhibition curation and enriched curricula. It specializes in the cultures of Southeast Asia, Native America, Oceania, Latin America and Africa.
- [The NIU Art Museum](#) fosters appreciation of art and the capacity of visual culture to communicate the diversity of the human experience.
- [The Jack Olson Gallery](#) brings exhibitions to the campus and provides a venue for the creative efforts of faculty and students and for the Burma Art Collection.

- [The Blackwell History of Education Museum](#) acquires and preserves artifacts and printed materials representing the history of American education.
- [The Milan Township District #83 One-Room Schoolhouse](#), a reconstructed one-room school, contains late-19th century and early-20th century country school artifacts.

Performance spaces for the School of Music and the School of Theater and Dance are primarily located in the Boutell Memorial Concert Hall and the recently renovated Recital Hall in the Music Building. The Stevens Building houses the School of Theatre and Dance. Recently renovated, the now 106,000 square foot building reopened in May 2018 and provides 55% more space than the original building. The building has several new features for education and performance: a 200-seat, state-of-the-art black box theater; a vastly-expanded scene shop; a revitalized O'Connell Theatre; and a 330-seat lecture hall that can be reconfigured into as many as three smaller lecture spaces. The School of Music also streams live webcasts and recordings through [Recording Services](#) for many of its performances.

Several teaching labs are available throughout campus, ranging from the [M. Joan Popp Motor Behavior Laboratory](#), [the Anatomy Lab](#), [the Digital Signal Processing Laboratory](#), [nursing laboratories](#) and [the De La Vega Innovation Lab](#).

[71 North](#), a collaborative partnership studio, provides industry partners, students, faculty and community members a space to take an idea through the product development life cycle. Located in Founders Memorial Library, the stylish facility features dynamic, state-of-the-art innovation spaces specifically designed to inspire and facilitate ideation. 71 North offers [coworking and meeting spaces](#), [student organization support](#), [hackathons](#), [workshops and seminars](#) supporting interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation.

NIU utilizes many of its outdoor spaces as “living laboratories” to support teaching and learning. For example, students studying sustainability and restoration ecology have been involved in class projects at NIU’s East Lagoon to stabilize the shoreline using native wetland and prairie plants. Other students have been involved in the Edible Campus program, where food gardens around campus are used to teach about sustainable food systems, including food production, harvest and processing. Native prairie research plots on the west side of campus, which are used to examine the change in plant species composition over time, have also provided numerous opportunities for students to learn about restoration ecology and research design. [The Lorado Taft field campus](#) hosts outdoor education activities as well as conferences, meetings and retreats.

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3.S - Criterion 3 - Summary

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

Summary

NIU provides a range of educational programs appropriate to its mission and its institutional priorities. The university employs a comprehensive assessment program and program review process to monitor effectiveness. Intellectual inquiry and experiential learning are important components of NIU's mission. Students appreciate NIU's enriched, active learning environment, community engagement and student support. NIU's educational mission and students' educational experiences are well-supported with extensive curricular and cocurricular opportunities for students at all levels through individual colleges, the Graduate School and other units. NIU values diversity and educational access and supports students holistically through advising, service learning, safe spaces and outreach efforts, benefiting the region, the community and all constituents.

NIU hires, trains and provides professional development for a cadre of excellent faculty and staff and deploys a student-to-faculty ratio of 15:1. Faculty credentials are evaluated at the time of hire and instructional performance is regularly evaluated. Numerous and diverse opportunities are available for faculty and staff professional development and instructional improvement.

Sources

There are no sources.

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 ensures the quality of its educational offerings.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews and acts upon the findings.
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 ensure 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 ensures 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 ensures that the credentials 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.

Argument

4.A.1.

NIU has a [well-established cycle of program review](#), discussed in 3.A.1. The program review process, updated in 2020, starts with academic departments preparing self-study documents that analyze numerous aspects of program quality and viability, such as:

- Student outcomes such as student and alumni perceptions; student recruitment, retention, persistence and completion; assessment of SLOs; and student engagement.
- Current status and future potential of faculty research, scholarship, creativity and artistry.
- Program commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Program operations, planning, growth and/or sustainability.

For programs with external accreditation, the institution program review cycles are aligned with external accreditation review cycles, when possible.

The review process is overseen by collegiate offices. College leadership, including deans, associate deans and other staff, reviews the self-study reports in depth with their programs. The reports are then summarized and [shared with the executive vice president and provost, the Board of Trustees and the Illinois Board of Higher Education annually](#). The executive vice president and provost also provides an [annual report](#) to the Academic Planning Council.

4.A.2.

NIU follows the best practices of accreditation commissions and state agencies when awarding undergraduate credit for transfer, prior learning or by examination. The Undergraduate Catalog and the Faculty and Academics section of the NIU Policy Library outline policies governing the transcription of credit through various means. Registration and Records and Undergraduate Admissions implement these policies.

NIU provides a variety of opportunities for undergraduate students to [obtain college credit by examination](#). Credit can be awarded through the Advanced Placement Program, the College-Level Examination Program, the Defense Activities for Non-Traditional Educational Support program and other NIU proficiency examinations. [Credit for military educational experience](#) can be granted based on recommendations by the American Council on Education. Some opportunities are available to provide credit for prior learning through a portfolio review, as assessed by program faculty, such as in the [B.S.Ed. in Special Education](#), the [B.S. in Early Childhood Education](#) or the [B.S. in Applied Management in the Department of Educational Technology, Research and Assessment](#).

At the graduate level, credit for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning is rare; it is the responsibility of the granting department to assess and award credit. For example, the programs in [special education](#), [early childhood education](#) and [sport management](#) offer opportunities for students to develop a standards-based portfolio to demonstrate evidence of prior learning in their respective areas. These opportunities allow nine to 15 credit hours to be awarded by a committee comprised of faculty from the respective program.

4.A.3.

NIU employs the transfer credit practices established by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers as a guide for interpreting the transferability of courses from other institutions. NIU accepts transfer credit from post-secondary accredited institutions, with departments maintaining oversight of specific course equivalencies. [Provisions and rules](#) explaining the acceptance of credit, transfer grades, repeated courses, concurrent enrollment and senior standing can be found in the Undergraduate Catalog.

NIU participates in the Illinois Articulation Initiative, described in 3.B.1. and 3.B.2. [Course articulation tables](#) for Illinois community colleges are publicly posted to NIU's website as well as resources demonstrating which [Illinois Articulation Initiative codes fulfill NIU's general education requirements](#).

As part of NIU's commitment to the region and to broad academic access, NIU admits a large number of students who have completed general education requirements at Illinois community colleges participating in the Illinois Articulation Initiative. Students entering with the Associate of Arts or the Associate of Science degree from one of these institutions are [enrolled as juniors with all general education requirements completed](#). Approximately 73% of the Fall 2022 transfer students come from two-year [Illinois public colleges covered by the Illinois Articulation Initiative](#).

Requests to accept transfer credit from institutions not covered under Illinois Articulation Initiative or a formal articulation agreement can be reviewed to determine whether the course aligns with the SLOs of an equivalent NIU course. This review can be performed by Registration and Records (lower-division coursework) or the academic department responsible for offering the NIU equivalent course (upper-division coursework, or coursework with enhanced requirements related to licensure preparation or programmatic accreditation). Once reviewed, the results are published in the [Transfer Course Equivalencies](#) table for other students to reference.

The Graduate School publishes its [policy on transfer credits](#) in the Graduate Catalog. While the Graduate School [limits the number of credit hours that can be transferred](#) for a particular degree, it is the responsibility of individual departments to review and approve transfer course work for credit toward a graduate degree at NIU.

The [College of Law follows a transfer policy](#) requiring students accepted for transfer into the second year of the program to have successfully completed the first year at an American Bar Association-accredited institution, following American Bar Association Standards on Legal Education.

4.A.4.

The oversight of academic programs, authority over prerequisites, course-level and programmatic rigor and learning expectations resides in the [multi-level process of curricular decision-making](#). Departments/schools, colleges and governing councils all play roles in developing and maintaining rigorous programs of study. Processes regarding curricular changes are documented in the [Curricular Definitions](#), [Curricular Approval Procedures](#) and the [Curricular Policies and Procedures](#) sections of the NIU Policy Library.

Maintenance of rigor for individual courses is conducted through the [curricular process](#), which requires all new

course submissions to include a draft syllabus that includes SLOs. [Curricular changes require a series of approvals](#) through multiple levels of faculty-driven curricular committees, including department and college curriculum committees, the [Baccalaureate Council/Graduate Council](#) and the [General Education Committee \(GEC\)](#). This [process was streamlined in 2020](#) to provide a quicker process for approval of routine items. Any curricular changes, once approved, are incorporated into MyNIU (the online student information system); the undergraduate and graduate catalogs are based on a standard publication schedule. MyNIU enforces prerequisites and co-requisites through the registration process. Program substitutions and waivers are controlled by departments/schools; college-level substitutions and waivers are controlled by college offices; and university substitutions and waivers are controlled by the vice provost for Academic Affairs or the dean of the Graduate School. While the majority of program requirement changes are in the form of substituting a previously taken course for an NIU requirement, mechanisms are also in place for limited granting of credit by examination, proficiency credit and military experience credit, as noted in 4.A.2.

[NIU ensures faculty, instructors and teaching assistants are well-qualified](#) to teach students enrolled in credit-bearing courses. [NIU's Faculty Credentials Policy](#) establishes minimum qualification standards and complies with the Higher Learning Commission Assumed Practices, which is discussed in more detail in 3.C.3.

NIU does not participate in any dual-credit courses or programs for high school students.

4.A.5.

NIU maintains appropriate accreditation at the program and college levels, both as external validation of the quality of a program as well as to ensure students have access to careers and licensure associated with their degrees. Currently, [57 academic programs are accredited](#) by 21 unique disciplinary/programmatic accrediting agencies. The Division of Academic Affairs oversees all specialized accreditation; Institutional Effectiveness partners with academic departments on the preparation and review of all annual, interim and self-study documents submitted by units to any accrediting agency.

The Office of Educator Licensure and Preparation is responsible for university-wide oversight and implementation of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation continuing accreditation and Illinois State Board of Education continuing approval.

4.A.6.

NIU evaluates the success of graduates, including pass rates on licensure examinations and career placement and success via the ["First Destination"](#) survey of graduates.

Certification and licensure requirements for professional degree candidates require students to pass the appropriate content area licensure examinations. [From 2018 to 2021, around 4,600 students sat for 87 different licensure examinations](#), including law, accountancy, speech-language pathology, nursing and various teaching certifications. In general, when sufficient data is available for comparison, NIU pass rates meet or exceed national and/or state pass rates; for exams where pass rate information was available, [NIU had a 96% pass rate overall](#) (some exams do not report pass rate information, or do not report it when the number of students who completed an exam is fewer than 10).

NIU surveys graduates from the previous academic year through the "First Destination" survey that collects information from graduates on their current employment or education status three to 11 months after graduation. First Destination survey data are reported annually by Accreditation, Assessment and Evaluation. Summary data are publicly available and program data (undergraduate and graduate) are available through secure login for faculty, staff and administrators. These data are incorporated into program reviews and other assessment initiatives.

Trends in employment as reported by Academic Year 2019-2020 to 2021-2022 graduates on the First Destination survey indicate alumni are well-served in the job market.

- 60% of undergraduate students were employed full-time within three to 11 months post-graduation; 16% were enrolled in a program of continuing education.

- 80% of undergraduate students who were employed full-time or part-time reported their primary employment was related or closely related to their most recent NIU degree program.
- 85% of graduate students were employed full-time within three to 11 months post-graduation.
- Nearly 90% of graduate students who were employed full-time or part-time reported their employment was related or closely related to their most recent NIU degree program.

NIU has recently invested in Steppingblocks, a data platform that collects, verifies and summarizes education outcome and workforce information. While still exploring the many use cases for the data, the Division of Enrollment Management and Marketing Communications will begin to use it to [tell the NIU alumni story](#) in meaningful ways for broad and targeted recruitment. Data will also be shared with academic programs for ongoing data-informed decision-making and program review. Initial Steppingblocks data show the following for NIU undergraduate and graduate degree holders:

- Top five employers: Chicago Public Schools, Northwestern Medicine, Abbvie, Discover Financial Services, Walgreens.
- Top five job titles: Owner, President, Teacher, Project Manager, Software Engineer.
- Top five industries: Education, Health Care, Information Technology, Finance, Manufacturing.
- Average Salary: \$94,216.
- Top skills: Leadership, Customer Service, Management, Strategic Planning, Public Speaking, Sales.

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4.B - Core Component 4.B

The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.

1. The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and cocurricular offerings.
2. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
3. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty, instructional and other relevant staff members.

Argument

4.B.1.

At NIU, assessment of SLOs is an expectation and requirement supporting program reviews; external reviews; disciplinary and programmatic accreditation reviews; assessment of cocurricular activities; and general education review. The program review process is described in detail in 3.A.1. and 4.A.1.

The University Assessment Panel (UAP) supports campus-wide assessment activities and advises Accreditation, Assessment and Evaluation (AAE) staff on processes. AAE supports campus-wide implementation.

AAE collects and publicly posts the [SLOs for each academic program](#). AAE also provides [guidelines, templates and workshops for developing assessment plans](#) that demonstrate how program SLOs are mapped to the NIU baccalaureate SLOs, how the SLOs are addressed through the program curriculum and how the SLOs will be assessed for program review purposes. The [UAP reviews and provides feedback on assessment plans for academic programs](#) to ensure they adhere to the guidelines and adequately address the measurement of SLOs. [Assessment plans are posted](#) to the AAE website. Academic programs submit data on student achievement of SLOs annually and as part of their mid-cycle review, at which point AAE and UAP provide consultative feedback on ways to further strengthen their assessment of SLOs and use of data for programmatic improvements.

[The GEC](#) monitors and evaluates the general education program, with input and guidance from the UAP and AAE. [NIU adopted the current baccalaureate SLOs in 2010](#). A general education assessment process was implemented in 2017. This process required faculty who teach general education courses to assess student achievement on two general education SLOs addressed by their courses. Each general education SLO was assessed by a [rubric](#), either via a manual process or a digital rubric in the learning management system. The rubrics were adapted from the American Association of Colleges and Universities VALUE rubrics by a committee of faculty. While some data was collected from 2017 to 2019, the process proved to be cumbersome and resulted in low participation. It was suspended to allow for the development of a more efficient, streamlined approach that values and leverages local faculty expertise.

The GEC began [updating the general education assessment process in Fall 2022](#). To ensure alignment between general education courses, knowledge domains and baccalaureate SLOs, the GEC worked with academic departments to [realign general education courses](#) with the baccalaureate SLOs as described in 3.B.1. and 3.B.2. [A review of the rubrics and data collection system is planned for Academic Year 2023-2024](#).

Learning takes place in and outside of the classroom, both as part of academic degree programs and in cocurricular activities. Cocurricular learning is an important way NIU fulfills its mission "to empower students through educational excellence and experiential learning as we pursue knowledge, share our research and artistry, and engage communities for the benefit of the region, state, nation and world." The UAP began reviewing assessment reports from academic and student affairs cocurricular units in 2001 with a five-year reporting schedule. [These programs reported on their objectives, methods, evidence, use of results, further information needed and timeline for collecting additional information](#). Beginning in Academic Year 2014-2015, Student Affairs assumed responsibility for its assessment review process and UAP stopped reviewing reports from this subset of cocurricular units.

Many formal cocurricular assessment processes were paused because of the COVID-19 pandemic, including cocurricular program review. In the meantime, cocurricular programs have used a combination of [surveys](#), evaluations and focus groups to assess outcomes. The UAP began revising expectations for the [assessment of cocurricular programs](#) in Spring 2023. During Academic Year 2023-2024, the UAP will develop a cycle for cocurricular assessment reporting, a template for reporting and a rubric for providing feedback. AAE will provide resources, workshops and consultations to support units with developing outcomes, measurement tools and assessment plans. All programs will submit Assessment Plans to UAP in Academic Year 2024-2025.

4.B.2.

NIU has a mature university-wide assessment system that capitalizes on faculty and staff involvement in collecting SLO data to inform curricular and programmatic changes, as described in 4.B.1. UAP and AAE involvement in this well-established assessment structure supports continuous improvement and learning at the unit level by providing programmatic feedback on an annual basis, encouraging internal consultations on assessment practices.

Accredited programs also engage in assessment aligned with their specialized accrediting bodies (approximately every five to 10 years). As part of an established process, all materials (such as annual updates, self-study, interim reports or progress reports to be submitted to any external programmatic/disciplinary accrediting agency) are reviewed by AAE staff on behalf of the Office of the Provost before their external submission. This model allows for quality checks and ongoing communication between central administration and program-level administration regarding the strengths and needs of discipline-specific accredited programs.

Modifications and improvements to programs are made based on the assessment process and are [reported in a summary table on the AAE website](#). For example:

- Faculty found students in the M.S. in Nutrition and Dietetics were not adequately demonstrating mastery of SLO1: Integrate knowledge of nutritional needs and human behavior, as well as the economics and management aspects of health. The program now places more emphasis on application of this information into authentic scenarios, and data from subsequent semesters has shown improvement in meeting the SLO target.
- Students in the B.A. and B.S. programs in Geography had lower scores in analyzing geospatial information (SLO3) and needed to improve their ability to convey information through maps and other products (SLO4). The program is considering streamlining projects with new data analytics techniques so students can be better prepared in SLO3, and has increased the number of required writing assignments and the variety of visual communication assignments to address SLO4. These changes were identified in the 2022-2023 mid-cycle assessment status report, so no data on impact has been gathered yet.

4.B.3.

As a centralized function, AAE has helped to ensure assessment processes and methodologies are of high quality, reflect sound assessment practices and involve substantial participation of faculty and staff. [AAE provides workshops and individualized consultations](#) to academic degree programs and academic support units.

Academic programs are reviewed by the UAP approximately every five to eight years; the exact timing can vary by department to align with disciplinary accreditation cycles. Approximately halfway through the program review cycle, programs are scheduled for mid-cycle assessment reviews where they receive formative feedback from the UAP to improve their assessment practices. Programs also submit [Annual Assessment Updates](#) to provide a central reporting mechanism of programmatic efforts related to student learning outcome assessment. This report was put on hiatus for Academic Years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 to support programs during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, a task force of the Faculty Senate reviewed the university's assessment practices and identified several areas to streamline the annual assessment reporting. Programs now submit these reports through a simplified survey; they can also substitute the reports with copies of the annual reports required by their disciplinary accreditors, provided this includes actions and decisions related to SLOs. Results of the [assessment reports are summarized and published](#) on the AAE website.

The UAP is comprised of 14 tenured and tenure-track faculty representatives distributed across the university's seven colleges who are elected by the college councils of the colleges they represent. It also includes representatives from academic support and/or Student Affairs, the University Libraries, an associate dean responsible for curriculum

assessment, AAE staff, the associate director of Educator Licensure and Preparation and two students.

General Education assessment is overseen by the GEC and includes strong faculty representation. The GEC [continues work](#) to develop a revised assessment plan to more closely align to the baccalaureate SLOs with general education course offerings and to utilize practices that achieve greater efficiency in the assessment process.

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4.C - Core Component 4.C

The institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve 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, 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.)

Argument

4.C.1

NIU has consistently placed issues of student retention, persistence and completion at the forefront of planning and actions. Current data, programs and actions to improve retention, persistence and completion have been center stage in the [Strategic Enrollment Management \(SEM\) 1.0 and 2.0 plans](#) and [the Illinois Equity in Attainment Equity Plan](#). Retention, persistence and completion targets have been part of the university goals, updated annually and [shared publicly on the university website, since 2019](#). These goals are used for presidential evaluation, to assess the university's progress and to inform planning and priorities.

The first SEM plan was developed by a cross-institutional steering committee comprised of associate deans from each college and representatives from Enrollment Management, Admissions, Academic Advising, Student Affairs and Institutional Communications. The first SEM plan was introduced in January 2019 to provide a roadmap through 2023. [Goal three of the SEM 1.0 plan](#) established clear objectives for overall retention and graduation rates as well as targeted objectives for specific populations:

- Increase the overall first-year retention rate to 75% by Fall 2023 (from 73% in Fall 2018).
- Improve the overall six-year graduation rate by five percentage points (51%) by Fall 2023 (46% in Fall 2018).
- Increase the first-year retention rates for Latinx and Asian-American students by 5% by Fall 2023.
- Increase six-year graduation rates by reducing equity gaps for Latinx students to 5% or less by Fall 2023 and remain consistently with gaps no greater than 5%.
- Increase first-year retention rates by reducing equity gaps for Black new freshmen to 10% or less by Fall 2023, understanding that success will mean consistently staying within 1% to 2% of that range for at least three years.

The Illinois Equity in Attainment Equity Plan includes benchmark goals that align with the SEM 1.0 plan.

Because of a significantly changing landscape, largely caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee revised the plan and introduced [SEM 2.0](#) in 2022, ahead of the planned cycle. The revised SEM 2.0 plan addresses student persistence and graduation through a multi-faceted approach that helps students transition successfully into the Huskie experience; provides holistic and coordinated student experiences that promote student success, equity, inclusion and belonging; and supports the mental, physical, social and emotional needs of students. The goals of the SEM 2.0 plan are nearly identical to those in the SEM 1.0 plan, with a stronger focus on retention, demonstrating consistency in NIU's approach across the two plans.

The SEM 2.0 plan is co-owned by the NIU campus community. As such, [six new working groups](#) were created in

Fall 2023 to set short- and long-term goals related to administrative processes and barriers; advising and student pathways; faculty academic experience; Hispanic-serving institution planning; student academic success and student engagement; and well-being. Using a shared equity leadership model, faculty, staff and students will come together to think creatively and develop solutions centering on the needs of NIU students.

NIU's 2020-2023 Higher Learning Commission [Quality Initiative](#) focused on operationalizing the institutional goals on retention, persistence and completion by implementing strategies at the course level. NIU's Quality Initiative established a goal of reaching an 80% success rate (grade of C or higher) in gateway courses (those courses students need to take within a major or are required to complete general studies requirements) and of reducing equity gaps in gateway course to below 10%. The purpose of the Quality Initiative was to improve student success so students can achieve their academic goals.

4.C.2.

As mentioned in 4.C.1., metrics on student retention, persistence and completion of academic programs are a pivotal component of the annual university goals, which necessitates having reliable data on these outcomes. NIU analyzes the effectiveness of student retention, persistence and completion initiatives through a number of reporting mechanisms. At the institutional level, Institutional Research prepares and submits state- and federal-mandated data on retention and four-, five- and six-year graduation rates. NIU provides current retention, persistence, graduation and student-outcomes information on the NIU Disclosures website in compliance with the Higher Education Opportunity Act, the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act and the Student Right to Know Act. University leadership meets each year with the Illinois Board of Higher Education to discuss [university alignment](#) of student retention, persistence and attainment with the [benchmarks](#) set in the Illinois Board of Higher Education's *A Thriving Illinois* strategic plan.

Beyond the required reporting, NIU uses [EAB's Academic Performance Solutions \(APS\)](#) platform and custom Tableau reports. APS is a decision-support platform that enables individuals at the department level to access data and peer benchmarks. APS is used to optimize course planning by allowing programs to look at historical data based on fill rate and success rates in prior offerings; this helps to identify bottlenecks to student progress. Institutionally, APS provides critical analysis of NIU's program portfolio, including enrollment, retention and graduation across programs.

Institutional Effectiveness maintains reports in Tableau to provide course- and student-level data and trends on admissions, enrollment, retention, course success and degree completion. Senior administrators, deans, associate deans, department chairs, assistant chairs, center directors and faculty with shared governance leadership roles have access to the reports: approximately 320 individuals in all. The custom nature of the reports allows the data to be disaggregated in ways the APS reports cannot, including by race, gender, rank, origin (e.g., transfer status, high school, country), Pell eligibility and first-generation status. These reports have been valuable for identifying retention issues, informing outreach campaigns to improve registration rates and correlating data between orientation registration, housing registration and course registration to ensure students are prepared for the start of the semester.

The data included in the Tableau reports was also the cornerstone of NIU's 2020-2023 Quality Initiative project. That project identified all gateway courses with success rates lower than 80% or equity gaps of 10% or higher.

4.C.3.

NIU recognizes the importance of using data-informed strategies to improve retention, persistence and completion. The annual goal-setting process to establish the university goals is a prime example of how data on retention, persistence and completion are used to establish strategic direction. Similarly, the SEM 1.0 and 2.0 plans were based on extensive data on enrollment and retention trends to select appropriate strategies for improvement.

While the university has been using disaggregated data on retention, completion and course success since 2016 to inform college-level equity teams, those efforts increased as part of NIU's recent [Quality Initiative](#). Using course-level data, the university identified gateway courses with high DFUW rates (20% of greater) or at least a 10% equity gap. This process identified and prioritized 80 courses for review, transformation and student-support interventions. Based on this data, college associate deans for curriculum worked with their college equity teams to establish a plan for reviewing and ultimately transforming identified courses. As a result of the data-driven conversations, the

university implemented four keystone initiatives and numerous localized interventions:

- Key Central Interventions:
 - [Faculty Academy for Cultural Competence and Equity](#): A faculty-driven initiative to provide professional development for faculty, instructors and graduate teaching assistants on a range of issues related to cultural competence and their connections to curriculum, pedagogy and classroom engagement.
 - [Scaffolded Support for Teaching Gateway Courses](#): Timely newsletters created and distributed by the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning to faculty teaching gateway courses provided specific and actionable strategies that could be incorporated immediately in their courses.
 - [Association of College and University Educators Course on Effective Teaching Practices](#): A partnership with the Association of College and Educators to provide faculty teaching gateway courses with high-quality, rigorous curriculum on teaching practices promoting student success and equitable outcomes.
 - [Navigate Coordinated Care Model](#): A two-pronged initiative to further leverage Navigate, EAB's student success platform: (1) Increase faculty communication regarding the importance of early alerts for gradable activities and class participation, and (2) expand coordinated care model via Navigate alerts.
- Examples of Key Localized Interventions:
 - [Eight-week Courses](#): A pilot of 20 general education courses opened in the second eight weeks of the semester to provide opportunities for students who dropped courses early in the semester to maintain full-time enrollment and financial aid eligibility.
 - [Credit Recovery Modules for Failed Courses](#): An opportunity (piloted in PSYC 102: Introduction to Psychology) for students who failed gateway courses to demonstrate competence in key areas so they could pass the courses, keeping students on track to earning their degrees.
 - [Alumni Mentoring Programs](#): The College of Business has launched new [alumni mentoring programs](#), pairing Black, Hispanic and Asian alumni with students for ongoing engagement and mentorship. The Dr. [LaVerne Gyant Alumni Mentoring Program](#) connects Black/African American students in the College of Education with Black/African American alumni of the College of Education.
 - [Faculty Showcases](#): A series of informal sessions for faculty to share ideas and practices for altering their course design and delivery in support of student success, developed by the College of Health and Human Sciences.
 - [Curriculum Audits](#): A comprehensive review of the entire curriculum of the School of Theatre and Dance by the school's Diversity and Belonging Committee to identify areas where the curriculum can be more inclusive.

While still considered pilots, the improvements were able to improve DFUW rates in 40 of the 80 courses and to reduce equity gaps in 19 courses. The university will continue to intentionally monitor student success data and use this data to inform faculty supports and student-success efforts.

4.C.4.

NIU uses IPEDS definitions and methodology for tracking and reporting retention, persistence and completion rates, and augments that with additional measures that follow the same protocols (e.g., fall-to-spring retention). In addition, NIU tracks fall-to-fall retention rates at each level for first-year and transfer students as well as course-level academic equity data.

NIU's [Institutional Effectiveness](#) team is committed to creating a data-informed culture that supports strategic planning and decision-making efforts in realizing NIU's mission and enhancing the success of students, faculty and staff. Institutional Research conducts research, prepares analytical studies and reports and is tasked with gathering, summarizing and analyzing data relevant to students, faculty, staff, costs, programs and policies. Using tools such as Tableau, NIU's Institutional Research team delivers a flexible mix of standardized reports and custom analysis while also providing approximately 325 data consumers across the university with the ability to explore further themselves.

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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.

Summary

NIU demonstrates responsibility for quality educational programs through comprehensive and regular review of programs, annual monitoring of achievement of published SLOs and well-defined curricular policies. A multilevel shared governance curricular process ensures programmatic rigor. Commitment to educational achievement and improvement is instituted and sustained through effective and established assessment of student learning. Assessment processes, particularly the assessment of general education and of cocurricular activities, are being reviewed and updated. Throughout the university, assessment data are acted upon to improve student learning.

NIU's comprehensive Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strategic plan (2015–2020), followed by the SEM plans (2018–2023 and 2020–2025) and Illinois Equity in Attainment Equity Plan (2020-2025), put a strong focus on the need to close equity gaps in retention, persistence and graduation. The university's response has included increased availability and use of data to monitor and assess efforts. Those efforts have included the Higher Learning Commission Quality Initiative, which monitored and remediated equity gaps in gateway courses.

Sources

There are no sources.

5 - Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

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

5.A - Core Component 5.A

Through its administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution's leadership demonstrates that it is effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission.

1. Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.
2. The institution's administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.
3. The institution's administration ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.

Argument

5.A.1.

[Shared governance](#) is a core value in Northern Illinois University's (NIU) [Statement of Vision, Mission and Core Values](#). [NIU's Constitution](#) recognizes that this shared governance process involves faculty, students, administrative officers and staff with oversight from [the Board of Trustees \(Board\)](#). In addition to the Board, NIU's governing bodies include the University Council, Faculty Senate, Supportive Professional Staff (SPS) Council, Operating Staff Council and the [Student Government Association](#). Whenever possible and constitutionally appropriate, NIU includes faculty and instructors in department, college and division governance.

University Council, in accordance with the Board policies:

- Participates in the selection of faculty committees.
- Advises the president or the Board on the appointment of administrative officers, including the selection of a president.
- Participates and advises the president and the vice presidents in preparing and administering the annual budget; setting goals and priorities for the utilization of resources; and providing periodic evaluation of progress in achieving goals and priorities.
- Participates and advises the president in determining basic policies with respect to campus planning and building construction and utilization.
- Aids in developing basic policies for the university.
- Establishes standing and temporary committees as might be necessary for the discharge of its responsibilities; to define the membership, jurisdiction and authority of such committees; to resolve disputes among committees thus established; and to act on the reports submitted by such committees.
- Advises the president, and the vice presidents, on policies affecting the quality of student life on campus.

[Per NIU Bylaws, Article 1](#), the University Council membership consists of eight tenure-track faculty members; two instructors; one clinical faculty member; four student members; four members of the SPS Council; five members of the Operating Staff Council; and four administrators.

The Faculty Senate:

- Makes policy decisions related to the faculty personnel system, the university curriculum and admissions and academic standards.

- Promotes a climate of academic freedom for the university community.
- Advances the instructional mission of the university by maintaining an optimal learning environment throughout the university.
- Encourages research and artistry and the appreciation of the intellectual values of the arts, the humanities, the sciences and the professions.
- Serves as the legitimate representative of faculty concerns vis-à-vis the university administration.
- Defines and establishes standards and procedures of accountability concerning professional faculty ethics and responsibilities and promotes adherence to those standards and procedures.
- Encourages an informed, continuing and academically responsible participation in those faculty governance roles defined in the university constitution and bylaws.

Faculty Senate membership is outlined in its bylaws.

[The SPS Council](#) was established in 2003 as a means of communicating among SPS employees and as a vehicle for articulating the interests and concerns of SPS to other constituents of the university community. It comprises 22 elected representatives from the SPS ranks, 22 alternates and one council president. Two members of the SPS Council serve on the University Council and as ex officio members of the Faculty Senate.

[The Operating Staff Council](#) represents NIU's operating staff (civil service) employees and is an integral part of the university governance system through its participation, communication, advisement and assistance on the resolution of issues and the formulation of policies relevant to the general welfare of operating staff employees. Through its council, made up of 17 operating staff representatives, three alternates and two ex officio members, the operating staff communicate concerns to the university administration and to the Board. Two members of the Operating Staff Council serve on the University Council and as ex officio members of the Faculty Senate.

The university supports a strong [Student Government Association](#) that plays a critical role in shared governance, serves as the voice of the students to the administration and acts on behalf of student interests by allocating a portion of its \$1.5 million budget to [more than 250 recognized student organizations](#). The Student Government Association also explicitly encourages students to serve on any of the university-level committees and councils. For example, the President's Budget Roundtable includes the president of the Student Government Association.

In shared governance, management of curricular processes starts at the department level. Proposals proceed to college curriculum committees before moving to the Baccalaureate Council or Graduate Council. As needed, curricular proposals can go to the Faculty Senate and the Board. Faculty, administrators and students have a voice in the process.

Personnel committees participate in tenure and promotion, sabbatical and annual merit decisions. Faculty set and apply policy at the department, college and university levels.

NIU also earned distinction on the roster of Great Colleges to Work For in 2021 and 2022. The top categories in the selection included [shared governance and diversity, inclusion and belonging](#).

NIU has adopted a shared leadership model empowering cross-functional teams to address complex institutional problems and pursue opportunities in alignment with NIU strategic priorities. This model fosters co-ownership of goals and adoption of processes that emphasize adaptability, interdependence and collaboration. Over the past two years, NIU has built organizational capacity for shared leadership at the organization, team and individual levels through on-the-job learning experiences via action teams, networking opportunities and purposeful professional development for [faculty](#) and [staff](#). Shared leadership has already produced positive outcomes. It propelled the Administrative Efficiency Project, the Budget Planning Resource Group and the Remote Working/Flexible Scheduling Task Force.

5.A.2.

NIU aims to use data to inform decision-making in all aspects of university academic and administrative operations. Institutional Research collects, summarizes and analyzes data relevant to students, faculty, staff, costs, programs and policies. Institutional Research makes university data available on its website through the interactive Tableau tool. The Division of Academic Affairs uses [EAB's Academic Performance Solutions](#) for real-time course planning

optimization and to identify bottlenecks to student progress. Both tools are described in 4.C.2.

Another example is NIU's work with EAB to assist with [financial aid optimization](#). NIU provides enrollment data to EAB to analyze. Each year, EAB provides an institutional aid recommendation to inform NIU's merit scholarship strategy and financial aid packaging strategies. NIU meets with EAB every two weeks to review current data, and after the census each fall, EAB prepares a final report that informs the strategies for the upcoming year(s).

In addition to these ongoing uses, there are more episodic uses of data. In 2019, an analysis of admission criteria found high school GPA had the highest predictive value for measuring student success, and standardized test scores had little predictive value. This was instrumental in NIU's decision to move to test-free admissions and merit scholarship awards.

In 2021, the executive vice president and provost-initiated [Learning Spaces Shared Leadership teams](#) (coordination team; shared leadership team comprised of faculty, students and staff; and Information Technology Learning Spaces team). These teams use data (utilization data, facility work orders, Information Technology tickets and age of equipment) to prioritize decisions about campus learning spaces, including technology, use, furniture and other aesthetic updates. The team provides timely stakeholder feedback with additional feedback solicited from those who utilize the space being updated. The data assists the university in making investments where they will have the most significant impact. It has allowed the university to repurpose some spaces to meet student demand for informal collaboration and study areas.

5.A.3.

NIU's shared governance structure, described above, enables the university to involve key constituents in setting academic requirements, policies and processes while also remaining responsive to the needs of students and the marketplace. This includes setting admissions policies and degree requirements.

An example of collaborative and data-informed decision-making is NIU's test-free admissions process, for which discussions began in 2017. After analyzing institutional data and finding little correlation of test scores with student success, it was recommended to [Faculty Senate at the October 2019 meeting](#) to remove standardized tests (ACT/SAT) from undergraduate admission criteria. The senate approved a resolution supporting test-free undergraduate admission requirements. [In November 2019, the same recommendations were made to the Baccalaureate Council](#), which approved them in [December 2019](#) and forwarded them to University Council, which approved them in [January 2020](#).

[Graduate admissions requirements](#) are being decentralized to ensure local control. Graduate programs are in the process of re-evaluating their requirements in light of a reduction of centralized degree requirements.

The introduction of new degree programs originates at the department level. Most recently, the Ph.D. programs in [Kinesiology and Physical Education](#), [Mechanical Engineering](#), [Electrical Engineering and Systems and Industrial Engineering](#) were introduced by their departments, reviewed and approved by the college curriculum committees, graduate council, the Board and the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

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5.B - Core Component 5.B

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

1. The institution has qualified and trained operational staff and infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
2. The goals incorporated into the mission and any related statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources and opportunities.
3. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring its finances.
4. The institution's fiscal allocations ensure that its educational purposes are achieved.

Argument

5.B.1.

Operational Staff

Similar to what is described in 3.C.7. for academic support staff, NIU has standards in place to ensure operational staff are qualified and have access to training opportunities. [Each position has a description](#), qualifications and a listing of essential duties and responsibilities. Several [collective bargaining agreements](#), including those for [police officers](#), [sergeants](#) and [telecommunicators](#) contain commitments to university funded training.

NIU has created a variety of structures to support staff professional development through networking. As an example, in FY18, the Administration and Finance team established the Budget, Resource, and Information Network of Business Managers (BRAIN). The working group of business managers, representatives from the Budget and Financial Planning Office, the Controller's Office and others meets regularly to share information, provide mentoring opportunities and work through business administrative matters in a collegiate and collaborative setting.

In addition, the President's Office initiated [Monthly Leadership Meetings](#) that serve as a platform for communication to be disseminated from divisional vice presidents/associate vice presidents and other leadership to unit/department heads. The goal of these meetings is to share priority updates and answer questions about these updates or other priorities to campus leadership. Meetings include division heads, college heads and unit/department heads.

Finally, Human Resource Services initiated regular [Supervisor Sessions in FY22](#). Supervisors of all levels are invited to professional development sessions focusing on various areas of supervisory responsibilities and/or concern. The sessions provide a forum for training, feedback and networking for the supervisor community. These sessions are in addition to the tools and training offered by Human Resource Services and are archived for on-demand viewing.

Technology Infrastructure

NIU's technological infrastructure is maintained and made accessible through the Division of Information Technologies. They maintain NIU's networks and information security; implement, maintain and support core academic applications systems; and, together with decentralized Information Technology units, provide user support. They also provide data network connectivity to NIU students, faculty, staff and customers throughout northern Illinois. With connections to both the global internet and the high-speed academic and research community on Internet2, NIU offers a robust network management service that includes high-speed physical and wireless connections in all buildings.

In response to the pandemic and its impact on the modality of course delivery, along with the coordinated efforts of the Learning Spaces Shared Leadership teams described in 5.A.2., NIU invested over \$400,000 in updates that improve the functionality available to faculty. In addition, in FY21, NIU invested over \$300,000 in mobile technology for faculty and staff in the form of laptop computers. The investment launched a multiyear refresh plan to transition the workforce to 100% mobile technology within four years, providing efficiency and cost-savings in

hardwired connections.

In FY22, the Board approved a project to move the legacy phone system to Microsoft Teams Voice. The Division of Information Technologies is currently working with a vendor to execute a phased rollout of Teams Voice to campus. Teams Voice provides modern calling options, such as voicemail-to-email, call history, call-blocking, call-transferring, call-forwarding and more. Teams Voice allows employees to take their numbers with them wherever they are working in support of the university's Remote Work Policy, which outlines expectations of employees whose job responsibilities afford them the ability to work outside their university offices.

NIU provides anti-virus tools for employees, students and retirees for work and personal computers to ensure computer security. [Policies](#) set by the Division of Information Technologies help protect data from external and internal compromises; ensure successful recovery by backing up data; maintain information integrity; confirm user identity; and ensure data confidentiality.

Physical Infrastructure

NIU's physical infrastructure is managed through the Division of Administration and Finance. NIU operates from a main 750-acre campus in DeKalb and three regional sites in nearby communities. The DeKalb campus is comprised of approximately 80 buildings that provide about 7.5 million square feet of space for university operations. The overall replacement value of the NIU campus is about \$3 billion, which represents the wide variety of spaces used to support academic, research, student support and administrative functions for the overall university operations.

The Physical Plant is responsible for providing an optimal physical environment for teaching, learning, research and community through the maintenance and improvement of university facilities. The associate vice president for Facilities Management and Campus Services, reporting to the chief financial officer (CFO), submits an annual report to the Board, including data and analysis on expenditures and deferred maintenance, as seen in [Board reports](#).

To support this campus infrastructure, the university has invested an average of \$20 million annually between the categories of maintenance, major repairs and enhancements over the past 10 years. In Fall 2023, actions were taken to initiate the [transfer of ownership of the Chessick Practice Center and Yordon Center](#) from the University Foundation to NIU ownership. Additionally, [NIU is projected, over the next five years, to significantly increase infrastructure investments](#) because of increased state capital authorizations with authorizations for \$92 million for select new construction initiatives and \$52 million for major repair investments. Some near-term, state-funded capital projects expected over the next few years include the following projects:

- Health Technology Center new construction; \$77 million.
- Northern Illinois Center for Community Sustainability new construction; \$15 million.
- Main campus boiler replacement; \$18.4 million.
- Steam tunnel distribution repairs; \$6.2 million.
- Visual Arts building structural repairs; \$4.9 million.
- Swen Parson Hall roof repairs; \$5.6 million.
- Gabel Hall and Music Building roof repairs; \$4.2 million.

Some illustrations of major (more than \$1 million) capital improvements completed in recent years without state funding include the following projects:

- Holmes Student Center main floor renovation; \$20.9 million.
- Neptune residential complex renovations; \$5.4 million.
- Campus Access Control upgrades; \$1.4 million.
- Electrical infrastructure improvements; \$2.5 million.

Recent examples of facility decisions are the sale of the [regional center](#) located in Hoffman Estates, Illinois; the leasing of the off-campus building that housed the [School of Nursing](#) and siting the Health Technology Center on the site of Lincoln Hall, which is slated for demolition. These decisions were made to consolidate the campus footprint and respond to market needs.

5.B.2.

NIU has developed an annual planning cycle where each year's progress toward goals is evaluated and used to inform the next year's goal setting. This process demonstrates the university's ability to set, pursue and achieve realistic goals.

In 2019, President Freeman asked university leadership to develop a framework to guide future planning efforts. This framework was needed to connect the university's mission with its operational plans and objectives. The group met with academic and administrative offices to make sure the framework would accurately reflect the efforts and intentions of individuals and units at NIU. The group also considered other planning documents, including:

- [Strategic Enrollment Management Plan](#).
- [Illinois Equity in Attainment Equity Plan](#).
- [Division of Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Diversity Plan](#).
- [Research Vision](#).
- [Higher Learning Commission Quality Initiative](#).

The group then created a framework organized into six themes:

- Empowerment and shared responsibility.
- Student recruitment, student success and student experience.
- Academic excellence and curricular innovation.
- Diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Research, artistry and engagement.
- Resource development and fiscal responsibility.

In 2020, the president and Board began to use these themes to focus the university's goals, publicizing them in the [Strategic Action Planning Framework](#), discussed in 1.A.1.

Each fall, progress on [the previous year's university goals](#) is reported to the Board and is used to develop university goals for the upcoming year. New issues are also identified along with strategies to address them. After discussion with stakeholders, annual university goals are finalized and presented to the Board for approval.

This annual planning cycle gives NIU flexibility to recognize new priorities and react to changing circumstances. For example, a [Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats \(SWOT\) Analysis](#) was conducted to inform the [2021 university goals](#). The analysis showed a need for stronger organizational alignment and a closer connection between planning and resource allocation. NIU is committed to moving in this direction.

Further, the FY23 University Goals demonstrate NIU's ongoing commitment to those needs as it seeks to grow student enrollment and success. The Board's evaluation of the president provides evidence NIU is meeting these university goals.

Departments and academic units have also been encouraged to undergo strategic planning efforts that align with the refined vision, mission, goals and values. This alignment has furthered the adoption of plans and the creation of metrics that are realistic and attainable. Some examples of these departmental and academic strategic plans include:

- [College of Engineering and Engineering Technology](#).
- [School of Allied Health and Communicative Disorders; College of Health and Human Sciences](#).
- [College of Education](#).
- [College of Business](#).
- [College of Visual and Performing Arts](#).
- [University Libraries](#).
- [Navigate](#)

5.B.3.

To enhance strategic alignment, NIU's president, provost and CFO established a [Budget Planning Resource Group](#) in FY22 to provide [input and recommendations](#) on a new multiyear planning process that:

- Focuses on the mission, vision and values of the university.

- Fosters and promotes shared leadership.
- Provides shared accountability for decision-makers.
- Accommodates multiyear planning.
- Optimizes the budget and addresses the historical structural deficit.
- Creates an environment for innovation and entrepreneurship around revenue generation.

The Budget Planning Resource Group recommendations were presented to senior leadership and endorsed in October 2022. [The CFO and finance team have taken the lead on implementation](#), with the goal of a multiyear, all-funds budget and planning process. The tentative schedule follows.

- Commitment to FY25 budget deficit reduction.
- Piloting a Strategic Innovation Fund (FY23).
- Implementation of a “recurring” budget concept and view [with quarterly budget reports to the Board](#) (FY23 rollout).
- Multiyear planning framework (October 2023 rollout).
- Budget 101 training (December 2023 rollout).
- Auxiliary gainsharing plan (FY24 rollout, continued expansion into FY25).

Details of the implementation are given in 5.B.4.

In addition to actions recommended by the Budget Planning Resource Group, other changes to increase transparency and accountability have been introduced. For example, the basis for presidential budget decisions is now documented by a “memo to advise” that records the rationale, goals and requirements of the proposal. This process was deployed for the reenrollment campaign, described in 3.D.3.

Budgeting Process

While these strategic changes are evolving, NIU continues to operate a tactically mature budgeting process system. NIU’s system of resource planning and expenditures is tied to the State of Illinois budgeting process and calendar. University leadership has created a budget process that has been shared and adopted by the entire university. As part of its commitment to shared leadership and transparency, NIU solicits a broad range of campus participation in the process and takes advantage of shared leadership to manage resources and improve operational processes and outcomes.

The internal operating budget process involves planning, development, implementation, management and reporting. The internal budget is approved by the Board, which is given quarterly updates at its Finance, Audit, Compliance, Facilities and Operations Committee meetings. Day-to-day management of the budgeting process is overseen by the Office of Budget and Financial Planning (OBFP), as outlined in the [internal budget process flowchart](#).

Revenue is widely sourced, including tuition and fees, state appropriations, extramural grants and contracts, private gifts and auxiliary enterprises. NIU plans, evaluates and prioritizes fiscal resources to meet changes in student demographics, [human resources](#) and [infrastructure needs](#) while monitoring changes in state-level fiscal commitments.

Each year, the Office of Budget and Financial Planning prepares [In-Year Budget Guidelines](#) that provide guidance for balanced, revenue-justified and unbalanced budget transfer requests. The guidelines are renewed or changed annually concurrent with budget development. The responsibility of managing the overall budget development process resides in the Division of Administration and Finance. The annual budgeting process is multi-staged and involves funding sources that include general revenue, local and capital expenditures to maintain more than 4,500 cost centers. Beginning with the creation of internal budgets for each cost center, and with department/school and college approval, institutional priorities are determined.

Departments and units submit budget worksheets (designed by the Office of Budget and Financial Planning) to college and division leaders for the upcoming fiscal year using the In-Year Budget Guidelines.

Upon completion of a preliminary annual budget, NIU submits the [budget proposal to the Board](#) in June of each year,

reflecting the anticipated income and projected operating expenditures for both appropriated and non-appropriated funds.

NIU representatives then meet with staff from the Illinois Board of Higher Education and legislative committees to inform the budget development process. Following budget hearings in the Illinois General Assembly and the enactment of a state budget bill signed by the governor, appropriations are directed to the university.

The approval of a preliminary budget in June allows NIU to continue operations until the enactment of a budget bill from the Illinois General Assembly. At the same time as the current fiscal year's internal operating budget is approved, the Board acts on the budget guidelines for the next fiscal year.

Monitoring Expense

Throughout the year, the Office of Budget and Financial Planning assists campus units about budget development, budget transfers, [budget reviews](#) and other budgetary needs, and coordinates with Human Resource Services during salary increments. Finance and Treasury Services also provides an extensive range of services and information to the campus community. The office is responsible for helping to ensure the university's long-term financial viability, maintaining efficient use of resources and providing financial information to the internal and external campus community.

NIU undergoes external audits including a financial audit, a compliance examination and a single audit. The Controller's Office serves as the liaison to other units on campus and the external auditors to ensure a timely and accurate annual audit process. These audits are conducted by external auditors under the direct supervision of the Illinois Office of the Auditor General. The [annual audit reports for the financial audit, compliance examination and single audit](#) are available online.

Audit findings are presented to the Board along with corrective action plans. NIU also undergoes other external audits and reviews annually. Reports from such are submitted to various local, state and federal agencies.

NIU's Internal Audit Department provides independent and objective assurance and consulting services to assist the Board and university management through evaluations and recommendations for improvements to risk management, internal control and governance processes.

5.B.4.

NIU's recurring budget is funded by operating appropriation funds allocated by the Illinois General Assembly through the General Revenue Fund and funds generated locally from sources including tuition and fees, room-and-board charges, grants and contracts as well as other auxiliary operations. The expected recurring revenues for FY24 are \$398.6 million, which is \$31.8 million less than expected recurring expenses, representing a structural deficit. The deficit is reflected in recent reporting that shows a draft Composite Financial Index (CFI) value of 0.81. NIU is taking steps to eliminate this deficit by FY27.

The past decade has seen ongoing enrollment challenges as well as two major external disruptions. First, the State of Illinois experienced a two-year budget impasse in FY16 and FY17. While some of the state appropriations were eventually restored to the university, a full year of state appropriations was irretrievably lost. Second, as the university sought to find a new balance, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. This confronted the university with both significant loss in recurring revenues and urgent one-time expenses, offset by state and federal emergency funding of \$51.6 million. This trend is shown in the University's stronger CFI in 2021 and 2022, when emergency funding was made available. While the emergency funding allowed NIU to sustain through the pandemic, the crisis environment hindered NIU's ability to address its underlying recurring budget deficit. The University is currently implementing a multi-year budget strategy to balance the budget and strengthen the CFI.

As the pandemic has receded, a more stable fiscal environment and enrollment profile have re-emerged, positioning NIU to take on its budget imbalance. Preparatory steps toward this have included:

- Hiring a CFO with experience in establishing strong financial foundations and sustainable budget processes in higher education.

- The president, provost and CFO established a Budget Resource Planning Group in FY22 to provide [input and recommendations](#) on a new planning process to aid the university in tackling the ongoing deficits and budget challenges.
- Increasing clarity by disaggregating one-time and recurring revenue and expenses.
- Providing a public acknowledgement of the budget imbalance in a detailed report to the [Board](#) at its June 15, 2023, meeting. The budget picture has also been presented in a variety of venues such as the [Faculty Senate](#), Council of Deans, monthly leadership meetings hosted by the [president](#) and the [provost](#) and BRAIN forums.

These preliminary steps have positioned NIU to begin a multiyear effort to erase the deficit.

The university's recurring revenues and expenses are laid out in detail in the Board report. The most significant revenue sources and expenses are as follows:

(amounts in thousands)	FY20 Actuals (With Grants)	FY21 Actuals (With Grants)	FY22 Actuals (With Grants)	FY23 Projected (No Grants)	FY24 Projected Recurring Budget (No Grants)	Variance FY24-FY23
OPERATING REVENUE						
Tuition and Student Fees	\$166,713	\$168,548	\$164,425	\$164,724	\$163,983	\$-741
State of Illinois	\$87,825	\$87,824	\$492,217	\$92,195	\$98,648	\$6,454
Gifts, Grants, and Contracts	\$64,953	\$82,975	\$106,582	\$39,744	\$36,168	\$-3,576
Rental and Room Income	\$25,220	\$18,354	\$31,850	\$34,881	\$37,390	\$2,508
Sales	\$26,572	\$17,432	\$26,229	\$25,575	\$37,858	\$12,283
Other Revenue	\$31,459	\$15,407	\$17,805	\$23,709	\$24,590	\$882
Total Revenue	\$402,742	\$390,540	\$439,108	\$380,828	\$398,637	\$17,810
OPERATING EXPENSES						
Personnel Services	\$227,218	\$214,245	\$230,845	\$212,044	\$223,090	\$11,046
Contractual Services	\$78,914	\$70,033	\$79,571	\$74,876	\$86,718	\$11,842
Scholarships	\$58,447	\$65,455	\$80,234	\$69,614	\$68,566	\$-1,048
Debt Service	\$28,091	\$24,458	\$15,914	\$17,812	\$22,074	\$4,263

Other Expenses	\$25,324	\$17,275	\$28,729	\$25,916	\$29,970	\$4,052
Total Expenses	\$417,994	\$391,466	\$435,293	\$400,262	\$430,418	\$30,155
NET INCOME/LOSS	\$-15,252	\$-926	\$3,815	\$-19,434	\$-31,781	\$-12,345

In FY23, to sharpen the focus on ongoing revenue and expenses, grant funding was largely removed from budget planning (enrollment-based grants such as Pell grants and the State of Illinois AIM HIGH program are still included). For FY24, Pell grants and regular capital repairs spending were included. The resulting budget picture is referred to as the university's recurring budget.

To responsibly manage its deficit reduction process, the university leadership has discussed a challenging but manageable schedule. The current fiscal year is a planning year. For FY25, the goal is to reduce the deficit to \$20 million. By FY27, the goal is to eliminate the deficit. [NIU has investments and cash reserves](#) totaling approximately \$127 million as of June 30, 2023. The unrestricted portion will be used to sustain this deficit reduction program.

While the ongoing deficit is a significant issue the university is addressing, the underlying fiscal health of the university remains strong, as reflected in [Moody's recent assessment of NIU](#):

- Large regional public university with FY22 operating revenue of nearly \$500 million, including state funded on-behalf payments for fringe benefits.
- Relatively good overall wealth and liquidity.
- Recent improvement in first-year matriculants illustrates prospect of improving student market conditions.
- Near-term improved state funding supports prospects for steady operating performance.
- Continued cost containment efforts, including modifying of campus footprint, provides potential for long-term operating sustainability.
- Continued strengthening of operating performance and debt service coverage.
- Improvement of the state's fiscal condition and sustained financial support for higher education improving NIU's operating environment.
- Enrollment and net tuition revenue growth.

Moody's performed its annual rating review for the university and, as a result, [upgraded NIU's rating from Ba1 to Baa3 with a stable outlook](#). The upgrade was primarily because of NIU's improved operating performance, the healthy increase in state support, increased MAP funding and stable enrollment. Moody's also upgraded the current Ba2 rating on the Certificate of Participation to Ba1.

The most recent IPEDS reporting (FY22) showed 50% of NIU's spending goes to instructional support, with an additional 15% going to academic support and student support. The median spending levels for NIU's peer institutions were 41% and 21% respectively. This spending profile has remained relatively unchanged for the past five years, reflecting NIU's priority on its students.

To arrive at a balanced budget, NIU will pursue revenue growth, reallocation and cost reduction. NIU understands significant revenue growth will have to come locally rather than from state appropriations. While planning is currently underway, steps already taken include:

- In 2020, [NIU refinanced \\$175.5M of outstanding Series 2010 and 2011 Auxiliary Facilities System \(AFS\) bonds](#) without any extension of the final maturity on the refunded bonds. The university achieved an all-in true interest cost of 2.95% that generated net present value savings of \$43.1M on Series 2020A/B Bonds. A significant portion of the savings (\$23M) was directed toward FY20-23, followed by an average of \$1.6M annually thereafter. NIU also modernized its bond resolution with more favorable provisions allowing for greater financial flexibility going forward.

- In 2021, [NIU issued Series 2021 Bonds](#) to acquire two residence hall facilities built and owned by the Collegiate Housing Foundation (CHF) to achieve operational efficiencies and reduced costs. The Series 2021 bonds defeased related CHF’s Series 2011 bonds without extending the final maturity date on the defeased bonds resulting in net present value savings of \$65.5M to NIU. A significant portion of the savings (\$27.1M) was directed toward FY22-25, followed by an average of \$3.2M annually thereafter. Both the resulting Series 2021 bonds and Series 2020A/B bonds were structured to maximize savings in front years (FY20-FY24) to help mitigate the budgetary impact of closing the structural budget gap.
- As part of the renovation of the [Holmes Student Center](#), NIU invested in [restaurant franchises](#) that secure greater ongoing revenue than would be available from leasing out the space.
- As noted in 5.A.2., NIU works with EAB to find an optimal financial aid packaging plan that is consistent with its mission and student profile.
- NIU has grown and diversified enrollment by entering into agreements with [Harper College](#) and [McHenry County College University Center](#), delivering NIU degree completion programs at the community college campuses.
- The Graduate School recently created the position of executive director of Graduate Enrollment to bring focused attention to graduate student recruitment and retention.
- The university is reexamining its policies and procedures for allocating tuition waivers. There is limited discretion to offer undergraduate and graduate tuition and fee waivers. These waivers follow Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) guidelines that include mandatory waivers, not reimbursed by the state, for children of employees, ROTC cadets, veteran grants and scholarships, along with institutional waivers for athletes, graduate assistants and cooperating professionals such as preceptors and student-teaching mentors. Within the limits of those obligations, NIU is evaluating policies and use patterns to enhance student success and fiscal sustainability.
- Recent piloting of a Strategic Innovation Fund provides seed funding to initiatives with promise of positive financial return on investment. In February 2022, NIU’s senior leaders were invited to present revenue-generating proposals at a collaborative design workshop, with the expectation that one-time seed funding would be used in FY23-FY24 to support the start-up costs. The proposals were evaluated and narrowed to four whose seed funding was approved. Development of those projects is underway.
- As described in 3.D.3., NIU has partnered with [ReUp](#) to conduct a reenrollment campaign. In a similar effort at the unit level, the Department of Accountancy has partnered with [Miles Education](#) to recruit international students to the Master of Accounting Science program. The Department of Curriculum and Instruction has partnered with [the Golden Apple Foundation](#) to recruit students for the M.A. in Teaching degree program.

As NIU gives focused attention to its recurring operating budget, other components of the portfolio are important to the university’s financial health and have a material impact on the fulfillment of the educational mission. These include the capital budget, external grants and the NIU Foundation.

The state capital budget provides permanent improvement funds appropriated through the Capital Development Board, typically deriving from sales of state bonds. As noted in 5.B.1., state capital funding is slated for a new Health Informatics Technology Center and the Northern Illinois Center for Community Sustainability. In addition, the state has allocated \$52 million for major repairs, which will both bring direct improvements to several classroom buildings and take pressure off the operating budget by reducing the need for expensive emergency repairs. Quarterly, semiannual and annual capital project reports are submitted to the Board to ensure the members understand the investment decisions and priorities being determined for major repairs and mission enhancement projects.

As described in 3.B.4., faculty and staff continue to be successful in securing external funding. Excluding COVID-19 relief funds, NIU’s sponsored funding portfolio has grown steadily year over year, both in the number of sponsored awards and in the amount of funding.

Sponsored Funding	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23
Number of Awards	231	322	332	364	414

Funding Awarded	\$35.6M	\$36.4M	\$38.2M	\$42.4M	\$56.8M
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This includes an average of \$6.5 million per year in instructional funding.

As stated above, NIU received a significant amount of federal and state relief funds, including HEERF I, II, III (CARES, CRRSAA, ARP and SIP) Institutional Funds, GEER and others.

	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23
Relief Funding (Institutional)	\$27.6M	\$21M	\$1.8M	\$41.2M
Relief Funding (Student)	\$14.8M	\$21M	-	-

Another important component of the university's financial picture is the [NIU Foundation](#), the official endowment management and fundraising arm of NIU. As such, it raises and manages private support solely to enhance the academic, innovation, artistic and research mission of NIU. Gifts are used for student, faculty and programmatic priorities as articulated through university- and college-level strategic planning.

Generally, Foundation funds are raised through four separate programs: Annual Giving; Major and Planned Giving; Campaigns; and Corporate and Foundation Giving. Over the last three decades, private support has increased significantly. From 1990-1999, the Foundation raised \$36.5 million compared to \$140.4 million raised from 2000-2009 (including the True North Campaign) and \$110.7 million from 2010-2019.

In 2020, University Advancement began the pre-planning and planning stages of a comprehensive campaign focused on four campaign commitments designed to increase philanthropy in the areas of student scholarship and support; program enhancement; experiential learning; and investments in innovation and research, entrepreneurship and creativity and artistry. Since 2020, private giving toward the campaign, currently in its leadership phase, has surpassed \$76 million and continues on a course to grow to over \$250 million by FY2025.

The Foundation also manages funds raised on behalf of the university. The Investment Committee of the NIU Foundation Board of Directors is charged with [oversight](#) of the NIU Foundation's portfolios. As of June 2023, total assets of the Foundation were \$170 million. The Foundation [reports annually](#) on its endowment fund performance to the NIU Foundation Board and publicly through the IRS 990 and [Impact Reports](#) to donors.

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5.C - Core Component 5.C

The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement.

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities, including, as applicable, its comprehensive research enterprise, associated institutes and affiliated centers.
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, including fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue and enrollment.
5. Institutional planning anticipates evolving external factors, such as technology advancements, demographic shifts, globalization, the economy and state support.
6. The institution implements its plans to systematically improve its operations and student outcomes.

Argument

5.C.1

From 2014 to 2015, NIU undertook a [Program Prioritization](#) initiative that reviewed 459 academic and administrative programs. Program Prioritization moved NIU toward a more transparent, data-informed culture that realigned resources and positioned NIU for continued realignment of resources with mission and priorities. The process guided \$8.1 million in reductions, \$4.3 million in internal reallocations and \$3.7 million in enhancements, as well as widespread organizational changes.

In 2018, President Freeman began to revise the planning process, starting with an [update to the university's statements of mission, vision and core values](#). The revised statements were used to inform the development of a framework for future planning efforts. Since 2020, this [Strategic Action Planning Framework](#) has informed the [creation of annual and multiyear goals](#) for the university. For example:

- Growing the Division of Academic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion significantly, including creating the Undocumented Student Resource Center, finding new space for the Asian American Resource Center and elevating the chief diversity officer position to vice president and recently refilling the position.
- Creating a sense of belonging on campus through the [Holmes Student Center renovations](#) and through the creation of the [Center for Student Assistance](#), described in 3.D.1., and of the [Founders Learning Commons](#) in the library.
- Shifting the admissions process to holistic review and refocusing student financial aid awarding to align.

NIU's investment in research illustrates the alignment of resource allocation to priorities. Recent commitments include the [Northern Illinois Center for Community Sustainability](#) (described in 3.B.4.) and the [Transdisciplinary Research Incubator for STEM Education](#), as well as strengthening of the research infrastructure through the formation of the [Office of Research Development](#) and the [Strategic Development Team](#).

5.C.2.

NIU has several inter-related advisory groups that serve to connect functions across divisions and provide coordination of planning and operations. At the highest level is the President's Budget Roundtable (described in 2.A.2.). In more focused areas, the Division of Information Technology has a multipronged [IT governance](#) structure that coordinates efforts, as illustrated by the Learning Spaces Shared Leadership Team effort described in 5.A.2. Similarly, Facilities Management and Campus Services regularly convene leadership groups from across campus to review and prioritize capital projects, major renovations and minor renovations. Sample planning documents for [divisional facilities planning](#) and [university-level capital planning](#) are included. Finally, shared leadership has propelled *ad hoc* efforts such as the [Administrative Efficiency Project](#), the [Budget Planning Resource Group](#) and the

[Remote Working Task Group.](#)

5.C.3.

Planning efforts involve not only budget planning. They also inform policies and guide activities. Planning occurs at multiple levels and routinely takes into consideration the views of constituent bodies, [surveys](#) or informal outreach to interested parties. For example:

- There are external advisory boards at multiple levels, including university, division, college, department, program and athletics. These include but are not limited to:
 - [Presidential Advisory Council.](#)
 - [College of Law Board of Visitors.](#)
 - [College of Business Sales Advisory Board.](#)
 - Huskie Fan Advisory Board.
- The [presidential commissions](#) and [Budget Roundtable](#) provide focused expertise. These are described in 1.C.2. and 2.A.2. respectively.
- Several campus-wide committees are in place to evaluate NIU's information technology needs and serve in the capacity of [IT governance](#). For instance, the [Computing Facilities Advisory Committee](#) advises the chief information officer regarding computing and networking policies and campus information technology planning. This committee strives to improve communication regarding information technologies to faculty most likely to be affected.
- [The University Fee Advisory Group](#) is established to advise the executive vice president and provost and the vice president for Administration and Finance/CFO on proposals for mandatory student fees and to recommend fee levels to be considered in the university budget. Membership includes representatives from shared governance (Faculty Senate, University Council, Operating Staff Council and Supportive Professional Staff Council) as well as five areas of NIU administrative leadership and five students representing the Student Government Association, the Diversity and Cultural Resource Centers and the Graduate or Law Schools.
- Many departments/schools, colleges, committees and units engage student advisory councils to encourage participation and engagement with university operations and institutional decision-making, further enhancing NIU's dedication to shared governance. Each college has a College Student Advisory Committee comprised of student representatives from departments in the college who advise the dean on academic policies and procedures; program quality and viability; and ways to honor outstanding student achievements and service. This feedback contributes to the overall improvement of the student experience in the college.

5.C.4.

At the undergraduate level, NIU carries out forecasting to estimate enrollment, and from there, to forecast tuition and fee revenue. On an annual basis, enrollment forecasts are used to adjust instructional capacity; the revenue forecasts are used to build the budget. At the graduate level, programs accept a number of students aligned with their capacity. The Graduate School has just created an [executive director of Graduate Enrollment](#) position, charged, in part, with developing similar capacity and demand analyses. Tools such as [Academic Performance Solutions](#) provide data to support these decisions.

Operationally, NIU has recognized budget restrictions and enrollment declines have led to staff reductions that have impacted the institution's ability to deliver some services.

An example of planning in accordance with capacity is the recent contract renewal of health services provided by Northwestern Medicine. The initial contract, commenced in 2019, was recently reviewed by a collaborative team of NIU staff and Northwestern Medicine leaders. In response to the growing need for mental health services, additional psychiatric services were requested and approved in the new contract. Additional medical tests also were requested and approved based on student demand. The fee structure of the Northwestern Medicine contract was also revised to correlate with billable credit hours versus the flat fee in the original contract. The new fee structure now aligns with fluctuating enrollment and student health fees.

Another outcome related to current capacity was the 2021 Board decision to close the in-house print shop. The need for its services has steadily declined, particularly during the pandemic, which compelled a greater reliance on digital student resources, tests and forms. Declining utilization of the shop, along with aging equipment that would require a

significant investment to maintain or replace, and recognition that this was not a core function, were factors in the decision to engage an outside partner. As a result, printing costs declined by over 25% in the first year following the closing of the print shop.

Space is another capacity consideration. To make optimum use of classroom space, the university activated [25Live](#), a room-scheduling program, in 2019. This tool played an important role in allocating classroom space during the pandemic. Post-pandemic, the Provost's Office and the Division of Information Technologies are coordinating efforts to make the fullest possible use of technology-equipped classrooms. The goal is to reduce the number of fully equipped classrooms while ensuring those rooms have the best possible instructional technology. To improve NIU's understanding of its available space and space utilization, [the space survey](#), launched in 2018 but paused by the pandemic, is being rebooted.

5.C.5.

Demographic Shifts

NIU recognizes the changing demographics of the region. There are fewer, and a more diverse population of, college-age students in the region, making for a very competitive marketplace. The overarching purpose remains to attract, retain and graduate students who represent the diversity of the region, nation and world. To pursue this, NIU is adjusting the ways it recruits and retains students. Diversity is woven into the fabric of NIU and informs recruitment and retention in strategic and tactical ways, including closing equity gaps, increasing student belonging, creating more inclusive marketing and targeting academic support. [The Strategic Enrollment Management 1.0 and 2.0 plans](#), accompanied by [Accountability Plans 1.0 and 2.0](#), detail milestones and completion timelines for each strategy. Prioritized goals and metrics related to student recruitment, student success and student experience are reflected in these university goals. For example, NIU addressed the growing Latinx population of the region and is now an emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution.

Economic Shifts

NIU has responded to changing workforce expectations. NIU adopted a progressive family leave policy, including a parental leave policy as well as the Huskies Give Back program, which allows one paid day to volunteer with approved organizations. The pandemic, meanwhile, led the university to pivot to a remote working environment. In response, the university drafted and approved a [remote work policy](#) in September 2022. The policy recognized that, where feasible and appropriate, offering the option to work offsite can benefit individual employees and the university.

Environmental Factors

Out of concern for the environment, NIU has created a Sustainability and Climate Action Plan to serve as the university's strategic road map to a more sustainable future, pairing long-term goals with near-term actions collectively designed to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 or earlier. In 2023, NIU earned one of nine pro bono consulting awards given to higher education institutions throughout the country. As NIU explores options for solar energy production as part of a transition to renewable energy and more efficient use of resources, NIU is partnering with consulting firm Coho Energy to determine which solar projects to pursue.

Technology Advancements

Evolving technology prompted several actions to remain current and relevant. The Division of Information Technologies has moved a majority of NIU's enterprise applications to the cloud; as such, this has reduced the existing data-center footprint on campus by as much as 80%. Enterprise application management has improved as well, as most cloud software-as-a-service providers self-perform patching/system upgrades, something previously managed manually—a far better outcome with regard to resource management. This move to the cloud also aligns with larger trends in academia; NIU is at or ahead of the curve with leveraging the cloud for enterprise services.

The cyber threat landscape continues to grow year over year. NIU has undertaken two important initiatives over the past several years:

- Information Security developed a [comprehensive cyber-training course](#) that is mandatory for all faculty/staff. This training is focused on the [primary elements](#) that make up the threat-landscape facing higher education (e.g., phishing, malware, ransomware), and importantly offers concrete examples of how to detect attacks across the user population.
- In partnership with all other Illinois public universities, NIU's chief information security officer participates in an ongoing knowledge-sharing engagement with colleagues from around the state to share program inventory and knowledge and to identify potential opportunities for shared strategy/purchasing. NIU actively leverages this group when large-scale attacks occur (in the public domain) to assess changes/actions necessary to protect NIU's information.

State Support

NIU leadership is in ongoing communication with the IBHE, particularly the [IBHE Commission on Equitable Public University Funding](#), as well as the governor's office and general assembly. There is an annual "[big picture](#)" meeting with the IBHE at which NIU presents its budget, addresses alignment with the IBHE's strategic plan *[A Thriving Illinois](#)* and receives insight into IBHE, executive branch and legislative priorities.

5.C.6.

Three areas in which NIU has made systematic improvements to operations and student outcomes include: 1.) A focused plan for addressing enrollment, see 4.C.1.; 2.) Multiyear university strategic planning and goal setting, see 1.A.1.; and 1.A.3.) Infusion of diversity, equity and inclusion into the fabric of the university operations, see 1.C.2.

In addition to these high-level linkages, systematic efforts to improve operations and outcomes include an Administrative Efficiency Project and a Space Master Planning Initiative.

[A university-wide initiative](#) launched in February 2020 works to identify administrative practices, policies and procedures to transform, simplify or eliminate. In response to the pandemic, these efforts focused on digital transformation of paper-based processes. [For example:](#)

- [Electronic signatures.](#)
- Secure transmission of sensitive student financial aid documents.
- Inventory.
- Add, Drop, Withdrawal, etc. registrar transactions.

An outgrowth of this initiative was a statewide collaboration around information technology procurement. This has led to collaborations among chief information officers from Illinois public universities on cybersecurity and shared purchasing agreements for hardware and software.

[A Master Planning Framework](#) is being developed to guide future campus planning efforts based on determined strategic objectives/principles. The approach envisioned for this project is to model the concept of the university's Strategic Action Planning Framework in providing a guidance framework that will guide capital planning efforts in future years.

This framework is intended to capture key objectives/principles where the university wants focus and will drive consistency with each subsequent planning effort developed in future years. This Master Planning Framework is expected to be focused more on how planning is done while subsequent detailed planning efforts will focus on what planning is done. The resulting framework and subsequent detailed planning actions will collectively form a living master plan for the campus-built environment that will be agile while still grounded by consistent principles.

Talented NIU students, staff and faculty deserve to work and learn in structurally sound, well-maintained classrooms, laboratories and buildings with modern technology and equipment. To achieve this in the context of resource constraints, aging infrastructure and maintenance demands, the university needs to be thoughtful when considering the evolution of the physical plant. Accordingly, NIU is adopting a master planning methodology that delivers both strategic direction and flexibility.

Specifically, a master planning framework was determined to be the preferred planning method, because it provides

agility for future campus planning and preserves alignment with long-term objectives for NIU's built environment. A consultant was engaged in April 2023 and proceeded to gather information from diverse groups including students, faculty, and staff. These engagements included discussions with each division and a senior leadership planning exercise to refine the key overarching principles for the physical environment that enhance NIU's vision, mission and values. The resulting Master Planning Framework, anticipated to be completed by Spring 2024, will codify these long-term guiding principles and ingrain them into a process that will be used to inform future capital planning and project decisions.

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5.S - Criterion 5 - Summary

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

Summary

NIU is intentional about aligning resources, structures and processes to its mission. This is accomplished by ensuring the university's mission, vision and core values remain reflective of the university's current culture and course and recognizable in plans. NIU's [Strategic Action Planning Framework](#) and its six themes were designed specifically to connect the mission with operational plans and objectives. Under this framework, university goals can be formulated to appear under more than one theme, and, in fact, this occurs frequently to emphasize the integration of the strategic priorities as well as the opportunities to coordinate across divisions to work towards a common future vision.

The university goals include annual and multiyear objectives are revisited and refreshed on an annual basis. This schedule helps the university to continually establish milestones; assess progress and course-correct; and adjust to new challenges and opportunities that arise with changes in NIU's operating environment. Specific examples of the university goals shaping planning across divisions, departments and colleges have been cited throughout the Assurance Argument. Notable examples of the annual goal-setting process supporting agility and resilience can be seen in NIU's responsiveness to the pandemic and the actions taken to update enrollment goals, strengthen student support services, embrace hybrid working options, address employee compensation and realign revenues and expenses to support the updated goals.

Current resource allocation is reflective of the university's mission, values, goals and priorities. The university is striving to stabilize enrollments and achieve a structurally balanced budget. The pandemic disrupted both efforts, while state and federal emergency funding mitigated the budget impact. NIU has developed realistic enrollment goals and is taking steps to implement a multiyear budget plan that will align expenses with revenue.

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