2023-2024
Higher Learning Commission
COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW
Sept. 19, 2023
HLC Accreditation Process

Open Pathway: a 10-year cycle is focused on quality assurance and institutional improvement

Final year of the cycle: Comprehensive Evaluation

- Years 1-3: Prepare Assurance Filing
- Year 4: Assurance Review
- Years 5-7: Quality Initiative Proposal
- Years 7-9: Quality Initiative Report
- Year 10: Comprehensive Evaluation
Comprehensive Evaluation

- Assurance Argument
- Federal Compliance Review
- Student Opinion Survey
- On-Site Peer Review Visit
The university will release five, criteria-specific sections of the draft assurance argument to the campus community beginning in October for review and feedback.
Faculty and Staff Participation

• Review the draft argument for each criterion and provide additional examples of ways we demonstrate that NIU is following the HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation.

• Review and update content that is posted on the NIU website to ensure evidence is accurate.
HLC Accreditation

• NIU has been accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) since 1915.

• HLC is one of the seven regional accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

• NIU’s last comprehensive evaluation occurred in 2014 and the university was reaccredited by HLC for 10 years (until 2024), the maximum period possible.
The Importance of Accreditation

• It’s required for NIU to receive federal funds.

• Together with specialized accreditations, it assures the public of our legitimacy.

• It’s an opportunity to take stock of, and celebrate, our accomplishments.
Timeline

September 2022 - December 2022
• Begin drafting 2023-2024 assurance argument outline
• Create template based on HLC format and institutional themes
• Survey evidence sources

January 2023 - May 2023
• Finalize assurance argument outline
• Draft argument based on outline for each criterion
• Evidence collection and editing begins

May 2023 - August 2023
• Prepare penultimate draft of the assurance argument
• Evidence collecting and editing begins

September 2023 - December 2023
• Evidence collecting and editing continues
• Make the assurance argument available for comment
• Incorporate assurance argument comments
• Prepare the final version of assurance argument
• Complete federal compliance review

Spring 2023
• Finalize assurance argument outline
• Draft argument based on outline for each criterion
• Evidence collection and editing begins

Summer 2023
• Prepare penultimate draft of the assurance argument
• Evidence collecting and editing begins

Fall 2023
• Evidence collecting and editing continues
• Make the assurance argument available for comment
• Incorporate assurance argument comments
• Prepare the final version of assurance argument
• Complete federal compliance review

Spring 2024
• HLC survey of NIU students
• Submit the assurance argument report to HLC

February 2024
• Assurance system lock date

March 2024
• HLC site visit: March 25-26, 2024
Assurance Argument

- NIU will submit an assurance argument, along with materials of evidence, to demonstrate that we follow HLC’s criteria for accreditation.
- The peer review team will review these materials in preparation for their on-site visit.
Criterion 1  
Mission  
The institution’s mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution’s operations.

Criterion 2  
Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct  
The institution’s mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution’s operations.

Criterion 3  
Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support  
The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.
Criterion 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.

Criterion 5
Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

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

Our evidence should do the following:

• Substantiate the facts and arguments presented in our institutional narrative.
• Respond to the prior peer review team’s concerns and recommendations.
• Explain any nuances specific to our institution.
• Strengthen our overall record of compliance with HLC’s requirements.
• Affirm our overall academic quality and financial sustainability and integrity.
Core Team Members

Chris McCord
Interim Associate Dean for Academic Administration
Assurance Argument Chair

Amy Burhow
Assistant Vice Provost for Assessment and Accreditation
Accreditation Liaison Officer

Jason Rhode
Associate Vice Provost for Teaching, Learning, and Digital Education
Provost's Designee
Core Team Members

**Matt Streb**  
Chief Strategy Officer  
and Board of Trustees Liaison  
**Criterion 1. Mission**

**Sarah Garner**  
Ethics and Compliance Officer  
and Title IX Coordinator  
**Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct**

**Simón Weffer**  
Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
**Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support**

**Stephanie Richter**  
Director of Teaching Excellence and Support  
**Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement**

**Betsy Hull**  
Director of Strategic Initiatives and Innovative Practice  
**Criterion 5. Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning**

Northern Illinois University
Core Team Members

Carrie Zack
Associate Director
Accreditation, Assessment and Evaluation Office

Tawanda Paul
Senior Research Associate
Accreditation, Assessment and Evaluation Office

Susan Smith
IT Associate
Director/Project Manager
Office of the Exec VP and Provost
Senior Leadership Review

The initial draft assurance argument will be shared with senior leadership for review prior to soliciting campus feedback.

- Week of Sept. 11: Provost
- Week of Sept. 25: President
- Week of Oct. 2: SRT & Council of Deans
Federal Compliance Review

NIU must submit a federal compliance filing demonstrating that we are meeting our Title IV program responsibility and complying with the expectations of specific regulations set by the U.S. Department of Education.
Student Opinion Survey

• Distributed via email two months prior to the peer review team’s on-site visit.

• Gives students an opportunity to participate in the evaluation process and to help identify questions for the peer reviewers to ask while on site.
On-Site Peer Review Visit

• March 25-26, 2024
• Agenda for visit typically includes meetings with leadership and board, and open forums with faculty, staff and students.
Campus Communications

- Keep stakeholders informed and engaged in the accreditation process.

- Encourage the campus community to provide input and feedback for the assurance argument.

- Build awareness of the ways NIU meets the accreditation criteria and how everyone plays a part in fulfilling the mission.
Communications Channels

- Presentations to campus groups
- NIU HLC website
- Weekly email announcements for employees
- NIU Today
- The Provost Post (Academic Affairs e-newsletter) and college news blogs
- Digital signage
- Message on Blackboard
- PPT slides for classrooms and meetings
- Screensavers for labs and classrooms
- NIU Calendar
- Push notifications through NIU Mobile app and Huskie Hub
- Northern Star
- “Weekly Scroll” email for students
- Posts in class Facebook Groups
- Student Life website