

To: Members of the Western Illinois University Board of Trustees
Bill Epperly, Vice Chair Bill Griffin
Jesse Andrews Mike Houston
Lyneir Cole

From: Joe Rives, Vice President, Quad Cities, Planning and Technology

Date: November 28, 2011

Re: November 2011 Strategic Plan Update

This month's *Strategic Plan Update* provides a summary of the proposed changes to accreditation processes from the Higher Learning Commission-North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (the Commission) and how these changes relate to the current review/update of *Higher Values in Higher Education*. We are well positioned to successfully integrate institutional strategic planning with accreditation requirements, and this will help to advance the University's vision, mission, priorities and goals at the highest levels of quality.

Background

In March 2011, the Commission published a first (alpha) draft of the revised accreditation process. Summarized in my *2011 Annual Report*, the revision included five criteria, 21 Core Components, and 69 subcomponents—all requiring annual electronic documentation as evidence that the institution meets accreditation expectations. It was also noted that institutions may be required to present electronic evidence that it meets an additional 49 minimum requirements for accreditation, and that institutions will continue to have to demonstrate compliance with federal Title IV eligibility requirements for the receipt of financial aid. The latter included new (yet to be defined) evidence of “outcomes” justifying credit hours granted in a course and out-of-state approvals by the appropriate coordinating/governing board for every state that the University offers distance learning programs.

After the alpha draft was published, the Commission surveyed its members and held regional forums. Based on the feedback received, the criteria were revised, and a beta version was released in June. This was shared with you at your Summer 2011 Western Illinois University Board of Trustees Retreat.

After the beta draft was published, the Commission held eight regional forums for discussion—with more than 1,400 attendees from 525 institutions. The result was the third (gamma) draft of the revised criteria. The Commission has solicited comments on the gamma draft. Comments submitted before January 9, 2012 will be addressed in the final version that will come before the Commission Board for second reading and final approval in February 2012.

Current Status

The gamma draft has five criteria (addressing mission; ethical and responsible conduct; teaching and learning—quality, resources, and support; teaching and learning—evaluation and improvement; and resources, planning, and institutional effectiveness), 20 Core Components and 68 subcomponents that require annual electronic documentation as evidence that the institution meets the criteria for accreditation (see Table 1). It also includes yet to be finalized federal compliance requirements, 53 assumed practices that all institutions enact (see Table 2), as well new reporting for accreditation screening, a three-year quality initiative, and separate on-site visits for off-campus learning locations and branch campuses. All of these reporting and visits occur separately and prior to the ten-year comprehensive accreditation self study and visit.

Next Steps

Once the new criteria and assumed practices are enacted, the Higher Values in Higher Education Review/Update Team will review these materials to ensure that Western is addressing all of the Commission's criteria and practices. The Review/Update Team will provide recommendations to the President's Leadership Team for items to include in the revised strategic plan if there are new areas that the University needs to address. Additionally, a future strategic plan update will describe the procedural, reporting, and on-site visit changes associated with the new accreditation process once they are finalized.

By successfully integrating the University's goals and priorities with accreditation processes, Western will continue to advance its vision and mission at the highest levels of quality. If you have questions about the accreditation materials presented in this month's *Strategic Plan Update* and/or feedback regarding the continued successful advancement of *Higher Values in Higher Education*, please contact me.

cc: President Thomas CSEC Pres. Rupert Associate Provost Neumann
 Provost Hawkinson COAP President Grimm Associate Provost Parsons
 Vice President Bainter Faculty Council Chair Rowson Assistant Vice President Williams
 Vice President Biller Faculty Senate Chair Rock Planning, Budget, and IR Staff
 Vice President DeWees SGA Chairs Copi and Rosenow President's Office Support Staff

Table 1
Gamma Draft of the Higher Learning Commission-North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
Accreditation Criteria, Core Components, and Sub Components

Criterion One: Mission

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

Core Components

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

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

1.B. The mission is articulated publicly.

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

1.C. The institution understands the relationship between its mission and the diversity of U.S. society.

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

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

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

Criterion Two: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

The institution fulfills its mission ethically and responsibly.

Core Components

2.A. The institution establishes and follows fair and ethical policies and processes for its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions.

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

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

1. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.

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Accreditation Criteria, Core Components, and Sub Components

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

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

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

Criterion Three: Teaching and Learning—Quality, Resources, and Support

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

Core Components

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

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded.
2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for 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, etc.).

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

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

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

Table 1

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Accreditation Criteria, Core Components, and Sub Components

1. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty (oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance; establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning; etc.).
 2. All instructors are appropriately credentialed, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial programs.
 3. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures. 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.
 4. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.
 5. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising, and co-curricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained, and supported in their professional development.
- 3.D. The institution provides support for student learning and effective teaching.
1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
 2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for placing entering students in courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
 3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its programs and the needs of its students.
 4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (e.g., technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites, museum collections).
 5. The institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.
- 3.E. The institution fulfills its claims for an enriched educational environment.
1. The institution's co-curricular programs are suited to its mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.
 2. The institution engages its students and contributes to their educational experience through other activities related to its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, economic development, or others.

Criterion Four: Teaching and Learning–Evaluation and Improvement

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

Core Components

- 4.A. The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.
1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.
 2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it accepts in transfer or awards for other forms of prior learning.
 3. The institution affirms that those degree or certificate programs it represents as designed to prepare students for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes.
 4. The institution maintains specialized accreditation as appropriate to its educational purposes.
 5. 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,

Table 1

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Accreditation Criteria, Core Components, and Sub Components

including dual credit programs. It assures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.

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

1. The institution's goals for student learning are clearly stated and processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals are effective.
2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
4. Assessment methodologies and processes reflect good practice. Faculty and other instructional staff members participate substantially.

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

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs.
3. 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.)
4. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to improve its persistence and completion rates as warranted.

Criterion Five: Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

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

Core Components

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

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

5.B. The institution's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes.

1. The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies in governance, including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

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Accreditation Criteria, Core Components, and Sub Components

2. The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution, provides oversight for the institution's financial and academic policies and practices, and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
3. The institution enables the involvement of its administration, faculty, staff, and students in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.

5.C. The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning.

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities.
2. The institution's processes for assessment, evaluation, planning, and budgeting are linked effectively.
3. The planning process takes into consideration the entirety of the institution and appropriate input from internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity. Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue, such as enrollment, the economy, and state support.
5. Institutional planning anticipates emerging factors, such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.

5.D. The institution works systematically to improve its performance.

1. The institution evaluates its operations.
2. Documented evidence of performance routinely informs the institution's processes for evaluation, planning, and improvement in its operations.
3. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts.

Table 2
Gamma Draft of the Higher Learning Commission-North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
Assumed Practices

A. Ethical and Responsible Conduct

1. The institution has a conflict of interest policy that ensures that the governing board and the senior administrative personnel act in the best interest of the institution.
2. The institution has ethics policies for faculty and staff regarding conflict of interest, nepotism, recruitment and admissions, financial aid, privacy of personal information, and contracting.
3. The institution provides its students, administrators, faculty, and staff with policies and procedures informing them of their rights and responsibilities within the institution.
4. The institution provides clear information regarding its procedures for receiving complaints and grievances from students and other constituencies, responds to them in a timely manner, and analyzes them to improve its processes.
5. The institution makes readily available to students and to the general public clear and complete information including:
 - a. Statements of mission, vision, and values;
 - b. Full descriptions of the requirements for its programs, including all prerequisite courses;
 - c. Requirements for admission both to the institution and to particular programs or majors;
 - d. Policies on acceptance of transfer credit, including how credit is applied to degree requirements. (Except for courses articulated through transfer policies or institutional agreements, the institution makes no promises to prospective students regarding the acceptance of credit awarded by examination, credit for prior learning, or credit for transfer until an evaluation has been conducted);
 - e. All student costs, including tuition, fees, training, and incidentals; its financial aid policies, practices, and requirements, and its policy on refunds;
 - f. Policies regarding academic good standing, probation, and dismissal; residency or enrollment requirements (if any);
 - g. A full list of its instructors and their academic credentials; and,
 - h. Its relationship with any corporate parent and any external provider of its instruction.
6. Any studies the institution makes public regarding student achievement of learning or student persistence, retention, and completion are accurate and complete.
7. The institution portrays clearly and accurately to the public its current status with the Higher Learning Commission and with specialized, national, and professional accreditation agencies.
 - a. An institution offering programs that require specialized accreditation or recognition in order for its students to be certified or to sit for licensing examinations either has the appropriate accreditation or discloses publicly and clearly the consequences to the students of the lack thereof. The institution makes clear to students the distinction between regional and specialized or program accreditation and the relationships between licensure and the various types of accreditation.
 - b. An institution offering programs eligible for specialized accreditation at multiple locations discloses the accreditation status of the program at each location.
 - c. An institution that advertises a program as preparation for a licensure examination publicly discloses its licensure pass rate on that examination, unless such information is not available to the institution.
8. The governing board and its executive committee, if it has one, include some “public” members. Public members have no significant administrative position or any ownership interest in any of the following: the institution itself; a company that does substantial business with the institution; a company or organization with which the institution has a substantial partnership; a parent, ultimate parent, affiliate, or subsidiary corporation; an investment group or firm substantially involved with one of the above organizations. All publicly elected members or members appointed by publicly elected individuals or bodies (governors, elected legislative bodies) are public members.
9. The governing board has the authority to approve the annual budget and to engage and dismiss the chief executive officer.

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Assumed Practices

10. The institution documents outsourcing of all services in written agreements, including agreements with parent or affiliated organizations.
11. The institution takes responsibility for the ethical and responsible behavior of its contractual partners in relation to actions taken on its behalf.

B. Teaching and Learning-- Quality, Resources, and Support

1. Programs, Courses, and Credits
 - a. The institution conforms to commonly accepted minimum program length: 60 semester credits for associate's degrees, 120 semester credits for bachelor's degrees, and 30 semester credits beyond the bachelor's for master's degrees. Any variation from these minima must be explained and justified.
 - b. The institution requires that 30 of the last 60 credits earned for a bachelor's degree that the institution awards and 15 of the final 30 for an associate's degree it awards be credits earned at the institution. Institutions that do not maintain such a requirement, or have programs that do not, are able to demonstrate structures or practices that ensure coherence and quality to the degree. (Consortial arrangements are considered to be such structures.)
 - c. The institution meets the federal requirements for credit ascription described in the Commission's Federal Compliance Program.
 - d. The institution adheres to policies on student academic load per term that reflect reasonable expectations for successful learning and course completion.
 - e. Courses that carry academic credit toward college-level credentials have content and rigor appropriate to higher education.
 - f. The institution has a process ensuring that all courses transferred and applied toward degree requirements demonstrate equivalence with its own courses required for that degree or are of equivalent rigor.
 - g. The institution has a clear policy on the maximum allowable credit for prior learning as a reasonable proportion of the credits required to complete the student's program. Credit awarded for prior learning is documented, evaluated, and appropriate for the level of degree awarded. (Note that this requirement does not apply to courses transferred from other institutions.)
 - h. The institution's policy and practice assure that at least 50% of courses applied to a graduate program are courses designed for graduate work, rather than undergraduate courses credited toward a graduate degree.
 - i. The institution maintains a minimum requirement for general education for all of its undergraduate programs whether through a traditional practice of distributed curricula (15 semester credits for AAS degrees, 24 for AS or AA degrees, and 30 for bachelor's degrees) or through integrated, embedded, inter-disciplinary, or other accepted models that demonstrate a minimum requirement equivalent to the distributed model. Any variation is explained and justified.
2. Faculty Roles and Qualifications
 - a. Instructors (excluding teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty) possess an academic degree relevant to what they are teaching and at least one level above the level at which they teach, except in programs for terminal degrees or when equivalent experience is established. In terminal degree programs, faculty members possess the same level of degree. When faculty members are employed based on equivalent experience, the institution defines a minimum threshold of experience and an evaluation process that is used in the appointment process.
 - b. Instructors teaching at the doctoral level have a record of recognized scholarship, creative endeavor, or achievement in practice commensurate with doctoral expectations.
 - c. Faculty participate substantially in:
 - i. Oversight of the curriculum—its development and implementation, academic substance, currency, and relevance for internal and external constituencies;

Table 2
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Assumed Practices

- ii. Assurance of consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in the expectations of student performance;
 - iii. Establishment of the academic qualifications for instructional personnel;
 - iv. Analysis of data and appropriate action on assessment of student learning and program completion.
3. Support Services
- a. The institution monitors and acts upon student indebtedness, default rates, and repayment of student loans as a matter of the welfare of its students.
 - b. Financial aid advising clearly and comprehensively reviews students' eligibility for financial assistance and assists students in a full understanding of their debt and its consequences.
 - c. The institution maintains timely and accurate transcript and records services.

C. Teaching and Learning— Evaluation and Improvement

1. Instructors have the authority for the assignment of grades. (This requirement allows for collective responsibility, as when a faculty committee has the authority to override a grade on appeal.)
2. The institution refrains from the transcription of credit from other institutions or providers that it will not apply to its own programs.
3. The institution has formal and current written agreements for managing internships and clinical placements.
4. A predominantly or solely single-purpose institution in fields that require licensure for practice is also accredited by or is actively in the process of applying to a recognized specialized accrediting agency for each field, if such agency exists.
5. Instructors communicate course requirements to students through syllabi.
6. Institutional data on assessment of student learning are accurate and address the full range of students who enroll.
7. Institutional data on student retention, persistence, and completion are accurate and address the full range of students who enroll.

D. Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

1. The institution is able to meet its current financial obligations.
2. The institution has a prepared budget for the current year and the capacity to compare it with budgets and actual results of previous years.
3. The institution has future financial projections addressing its long-term financial sustainability.
4. The institution maintains effective systems for collecting, analyzing, and using institutional information.
5. The accredited entity undergoes an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or a public audit agency. For private institutions the audit is annual; for public institutions it is at least every two years.
6. The institution's administrative structure includes a chief executive officer, chief financial officer, and chief academic officer (titles may vary) with appropriate credentials and experience and sufficient focus on the institution to ensure appropriate leadership and oversight.