



January 22, 2015

TO: Ben Cannon, Executive Director, HECC

FROM: Statewide Provosts Council

RE: Statement on Academic Quality

The Provosts Council appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the HECC's Outcomes-Based Funding Technical Workgroup on the issue of academic quality. We concur that Oregon's public universities must provide a rigorous and high quality academic experience. We endorse the principles outlined by the Outcomes-Based Funding Technical Workgroup that were endorsed on October 4, 2014 by the Interinstitutional Faculty Senate (IFS).

On behalf of our university presidents, we outline below how our universities are ensuring and will continue to ensure academic quality. We trust you will see that quality is described and measured in multiple ways and is not a simple quantitative measure that can be built into a formula for funding. The measures and demonstration of academic quality are linked to the evaluation of our institutions and our boards.

Below we list the multiple practices that demonstrate how we already ensure and maintain high quality programs and faculty at our institutions.

1. Regional and professional accreditation

By definition, *"The mission of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) is to assure educational quality, enhance institutional effectiveness, and foster continuous improvement of colleges and universities in the Northwest region through analytical institutional self-assessment and critical peer review based upon evaluation criteria that are objectively and equitably applied to institutions with diverse missions, characteristics, and cultures."* The accreditation process is a rigorous one requiring assessments in year 1, 3, and 7 of a seven-year cycle. It relies on institutional self-examination, assessment by external review teams, and final decisions from the board of commissioners.

The NWCCU Standard 2C in-and-of-itself has 13 measures of academic quality (see list on pp. 3-5 of this document). This Standard 2C requires institutions to demonstrate the cohesiveness, effectiveness, and quality of academic programs.

In addition to NWCCU regional accreditation, professional programs, including business, education, engineering, forestry, law, pharmacy, public health, and veterinary medicine, may also be accredited by various professional organizations. The accreditation process requires a rigorous external review on a periodic basis, which encompasses an assessment of academic programs, student learning and outcomes, and faculty and infrastructure resources.

2. Academic Program Review

Program review requires that academic programs be reviewed on a periodic basis and that learning outcomes be assessed and used for program improvement. Although procedures vary by institution, the process takes a “deep dive” into the quality of programs, resources to support them, demand and outcomes. Many programs include employee surveys and alumni satisfaction surveys as part of the academic review process.

3. National Survey of the Student Experience (NSSE)

Our universities participate in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which annually collects information at hundreds of four-year colleges and universities about first-year and senior students' participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college. NSSE provides participating institutions reports that compare their students' responses with those of students at self-selected groups of comparison institutions.

4. Academic Program Approval

All new academic programs are required to go through a program approval process that has three approval levels: University (academic departments, college committees, deans, university committees, faculty senate and provosts), Institutional Board, and Statewide approval (Provosts Council and HECC).

5. Quality of Faculty

The quality of our faculty has a direct impact on the quality of our programs. Our faculty have demonstrated success in securing grant funding, creative inquiry, national awards, publishing in scholarly journals, and teaching quality and effectiveness. In addition, faculty are evaluated on a periodic basis. We have high standards for tenure and promotion and the NWCCU requires that all faculty are evaluated in a regular, systematic, substantive, and collegial manner at least once within every five-year period of service.

6. Advisory Boards

Many colleges and programs have external advisory boards comprised of industry leaders and practitioners. These boards provide input on strategic priorities, curriculum and career opportunities, and enhancing partnerships with industry and other external organizations.

7. Institutional Boards

The OUS Board and Institutional Boards provide oversight to institutional progress towards strategic goals and performance on key outcome measures associated with student success, academic quality, and research and entrepreneurial activities.

From NWCCU Standard 2:

2.C – Education Resources

- 2.C.1 The institution provides programs, wherever offered and however delivered, with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission; culminate in achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes; and lead to collegiate-level degrees or certificates with designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.
- 2.C.2 The institution identifies and publishes expected course, program, and degree learning outcomes. Expected student learning outcomes for courses, wherever offered and however delivered, are provided in written form to enrolled students.
- 2.C.3 Credit and degrees, wherever offered and however delivered, are based on documented student achievement and awarded in a manner consistent with institutional policies that reflect generally accepted learning outcomes, norms, or equivalencies in higher education.
- 2.C.4 Degree programs, wherever offered and however delivered, demonstrate a coherent design with appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing of courses, and synthesis of learning. Admission and graduation requirements are clearly defined and widely published.
- 2.C.5 Faculty, through well-defined structures and processes with clearly defined authority and responsibilities, exercise a major role in the design, approval, implementation, and revision of the curriculum, and have an active role in the selection of new faculty. Faculty with teaching responsibilities take collective responsibility for fostering and assessing student achievement of clearly identified learning outcomes.
- 2.C.6 Faculty with teaching responsibilities, in partnership with library and information resources personnel, ensure that the use of library and information resources is integrated into the learning process.

- 2.C.7 Credit for prior experiential learning, if granted, is: a) guided by approved policies and procedures; b) awarded only at the undergraduate level to enrolled students; c) limited to a maximum of 25% of the credits needed for a degree; d) awarded only for documented student achievement equivalent to expected learning achievement for courses within the institution's regular curricular offerings; and e) granted only upon the recommendation of appropriately qualified teaching faculty. Credit granted for prior experiential learning is so identified on students' transcripts and may not duplicate other credit awarded to the student in fulfillment of degree requirements. The institution makes no assurances regarding the number of credits to be awarded prior to the completion of the institution's review process.
- 2.C.8 The final judgment in accepting transfer credit is the responsibility of the receiving institution. Transfer credit is accepted according to procedures which provide adequate safeguards to ensure high academic quality, relevance to the students' programs, and integrity of the receiving institution's degrees. In accepting transfer credit, the receiving institution ensures that the credit accepted is appropriate for its programs and comparable in nature, content, academic quality, and level to credit it offers. Where patterns of student enrollment between institutions are identified, the institution develops articulation agreements between the institutions.

Undergraduate Programs

- 2.C.9 The General Education component of undergraduate programs (if offered) demonstrates an integrated course of study that helps students develop the breadth and depth of intellect to become more effective learners and to prepare them for a productive life of work, citizenship, and personal fulfillment. Baccalaureate degree programs and transfer associate degree programs include a recognizable core of general education that represents an integration of basic knowledge and methodology of the humanities and fine arts, mathematical and natural sciences, and social sciences. Applied undergraduate degree and certificate programs of thirty (30) semester credits or forty-five (45) quarter credits in length contain a recognizable core of related instruction or general education with identified outcomes in the areas of communication, computation, and human relations that align with and support program goals or intended outcomes.
- 2.C.10 The institution demonstrates that the General Education components of its baccalaureate degree programs (if offered) and transfer associate degree programs (if offered) have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes that are stated in relation to the institution's mission and learning outcomes for those programs.
- 2.C.11 The related instruction components of applied degree and certificate programs (if offered) have identifiable and assessable learning outcomes that align with and support program goals or intended outcomes. Related instruction components may be embedded within program curricula or taught in blocks of specialized instruction, but each approach must have clearly identified content and be taught or monitored by teaching faculty who are appropriately qualified in those areas.

Graduate Programs

- 2.C.12 Graduate programs are consistent with the institution's mission; are in keeping with the expectations of their respective disciplines and professions; and are described through nomenclature that is appropriate to the levels of graduate and professional degrees offered. They differ from undergraduate programs by requiring greater depth of study and increased demands on student intellectual or creative capacities; knowledge of the literature of the field; and ongoing student engagement in research, scholarship, creative expression, and/or appropriate high-level professional practice.
- 2.C.13 Graduate admission and retention policies ensure that student qualifications and expectations are compatible with the institution's mission and the program's requirements. Transfer of credit is evaluated according to clearly defined policies by faculty with a major commitment to graduate education or by a representative body of faculty responsible for the degree program at the receiving institution.
- 2.C.14 Graduate credit may be granted for internships, field experiences, and clinical practices that are an integral part of the graduate degree program. Credit toward graduate degrees may not be granted for experiential learning that occurred prior to matriculation into the graduate degree program. Unless the institution structures the graduate learning experience, monitors that learning, and assesses learning achievements, graduate credit is not granted for learning experiences external to the students' formal graduate programs.
- 2.C.15 Graduate programs intended to prepare students for research, professional practice, scholarship, or artistic creation are characterized by a high level of expertise, originality, and critical analysis. Programs intended to prepare students for artistic creation are directed toward developing personal expressions of original concepts, interpretations, imagination, thoughts, or feelings. Graduate programs intended to prepare students for research or scholarship are directed toward advancing the frontiers of knowledge by constructing and/or revising theories and creating or applying knowledge. Graduate programs intended to prepare students for professional practice are directed toward developing high levels of knowledge and performance skills directly related to effective practice within the profession.

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