



**Southern Association of Colleges and Schools  
Commission on Colleges**

## **REPORT OF THE REAFFIRMATION COMMITTEE**

### **Statement Regarding the Report**

*The Board of Trustees of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is responsible for making the final determination on reaffirmation of accreditation based on the findings contained in this committee report, the institution's response to issues contained in the report, other assessments relevant to the review, and application of the Commission's policies and procedures. Final interpretation of the Principles of Accreditation and final action on the accreditation status of the institution rest with SACSCOC Board of Trustees.*

**Name of the Institution:** **Northwestern State University of Louisiana**

**Date of the Review:** **March 14-16, 2017**

**SACSCOC Staff Member:** Dr. Crystal A. Baird

**Chair of the Committee:** Dr. Melissa Canady Wargo  
Chief of Staff  
Western Carolina University  
Cullowhee, NC

## Part I. Overview and Introduction to the Institution

The Report of the Reaffirmation Committee is the final committee analysis and report that includes the findings of the Off- and On-Site Reaffirmation Committees. It will be forwarded to the institution for a formal response. The report and the institution's response are forwarded to the Commission's Board of Trustees for action on reaffirmation of accreditation.

Northwestern State University of Louisiana, established in 1884, is the oldest member of The University of Louisiana System. The campus grew as the school expanded from a two-year degree for teachers at Louisiana State Normal School to the four-year education degree at Louisiana Normal College in 1921. In 1944, the school became Northwestern State College and Northwestern State University in 1970.

The campus expanded to the south and west as the school grew, and Northwestern State established off campus sites in Shreveport, Alexandria and Fort Polk.

Northwestern State seeks to provide a well-rounded education for its students, allowing them to take part in a variety of extracurricular activities. More than 80 chartered organizations are available to enhance what is learned in the classroom.

In its most recent strategic plan, Northwestern defines its mission as:

*"... a responsive, student-oriented institution that is committed to the creation, dissemination, and acquisition of knowledge through teaching, research, and service. The University maintains as its highest priority excellence in teaching in graduate and undergraduate programs. Northwestern State University prepares its Students to become productive members of society and promotes economic development and improvements in the quality of life of the citizens in its region."*

Northwestern State was originally dedicated to the education of teachers, but now offers more than 50 undergraduate and graduate degree programs (6 associate degrees, 36 baccalaureate degree programs, 26 master's degree programs, and one doctoral degree program) in a wide range of disciplines. In addition, the university offers one specialist degree, 21 post-baccalaureate certificates, and 4 post-master's certificates. Seventeen degree programs are available completely online. One hundred percent of eligible academic programs have received accreditation from national or international accrediting agencies. Northwestern is also home to the Louisiana Scholars' College, the state's designated honors program in the arts and sciences.

In Fall 2015, Northwestern State University had 9,179 students enrolled. Of those, 1,134 were preparatory, 6,925 were undergraduate, and 1,120 were graduate students; 31% of the students were male and 69% were female. In terms of ethnicity, 59% were white, 26% were African American, 5% were Hispanic, 2% were Native American, and 1% were Asian. The university has more than 70,000 alumni in all 50 states and 12 countries.

For its programs in intercollegiate athletics, Northwestern State University is a member of the NCAA Division I Southland Conference and offers 12 men's and women's programs. Northwestern has ranked among state, Southland Conference and even national leaders in two NCAA surveys, the Academic Progress Rates report and the Graduation Success Rate.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee appreciates the travel and accommodation arrangements provided by the staff at Northwestern State University. In particular, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee recognizes Ms. Veronica Biscoe, Accreditation Liaison, for her assistance prior to and during the reaffirmation visit.

## Part II. Assessment of Compliance

### A. Assessment of Compliance with Section 1: The Principle of Integrity

#### 1.1 The institution operates with integrity in all matters. **(Integrity)**

Northwestern State University of Louisiana has provided a truthful and accurate Compliance Certification Report and demonstrated that it operates with integrity in all matters.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee found no evidence of a lack of integrity.

### B. Assessment of Compliance with Section 2: Core Requirements

#### 2.1 The institution has degree-granting authority from the appropriate government agency or agencies. **(Degree-granting authority)**

The institution's degree-granting authority flows from the Board of Regents (BOR) and Board of Supervisors (BOS) of the University of Louisiana System (ULS), both of which are provided for in the State Constitution. These two bodies work in tandem to govern Louisiana's post-secondary institutions. New degree programs are developed in keeping with ULS Board rules and in keeping with BOR Policies and Procedures.

#### 2.2 The institution has a governing board of at least five members that is the legal body with specific authority over the institution. The board is an active policy-making body for the institution and is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the financial resources of the institution are adequate to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by organizations or interests separate from it. Both the presiding officer of the board and a majority of other voting members of the board are free of any contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution.

A military institution authorized and operated by the federal government to award degrees has a public board on which both the presiding officer and a majority of the other members are neither civilian employees of the military nor active/retired military. The board has broad and significant influence upon the institution's programs and operations, plays an active role in policy-making, and ensures that the financial resources of the institution are used to provide a sound educational program. The board is not controlled by a minority of board members or by

organizations or interests separate from the board except as specified by the authorizing legislation. Both the presiding officer of the board and a majority of other voting board members are free of any contractual, employment, or personal or familial financial interest in the institution. **(Governing board)**

The institution is governed by the Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR), which coordinates all higher education activity in the state, and the Board of Supervisors (BOS) for the University of Louisiana System. The Governor appoints all sixteen members of the BOR, and the members elect their own officers. The BOS operates as one of four supervisory sub-groups under the Regents and is structurally similar in that it also features sixteen members who are appointed by the Governor. Both governing bodies are well-established in the state constitution and code of laws. Both feature a robust set of policies and procedures to govern their operations and deliberations.

The institution demonstrates that both the BOR and BOS are active policy-making bodies that operate within established parameters. Key provisions, including term limits and provisions for rotating officer positions, are built into the Boards' infrastructure to ensure that no one individual or faction is able to control the body. The BOR and BOS ensure that the financial resources of the institution are adequate. Additional protections are obtained through the Louisiana Code of Governmental Ethics and demonstrated attentiveness to transparency in the work of the BOR and BOS.

Evidence submitted to support compliance comes from the Louisiana Constitution, state statutes, Board bylaws and policy manuals, and meeting agendas and minutes.

- 2.3** The institution has a chief executive officer whose primary responsibility is to the institution and who is not the presiding officer of the board. *(See the Commission policy "Core Requirement 2.3: Documenting an Alternate Approach.")* **(Chief executive officer)**

The institution has a president who functions as its chief executive officer. The president has a dual reporting role to the chair of the state Board of Regents and to the chair of the ULS Board of Supervisors. The president does not serve as a member of either of those governing bodies. ULS Policy Memorandum FS.III.II.A-1 covers the procedure for selecting presidents of ULS member institutions.

- 2.4** The institution has a clearly defined, comprehensive, and published mission statement that is specific to the institution and appropriate for higher education. The mission addresses teaching and learning and, where applicable, research and public service. **(Institutional mission)**

Northwestern State University of Louisiana has a clearly defined mission that is teaching-focused, based upon a 2012 Board of Regents Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education in Louisiana. The mission statement declares that the University maintains as its highest priority excellence in teaching in graduate and undergraduate programs. The institution states that its mission is unique because of the focus on promoting economic development and improvements in the

quality of life by addressing the needs of low-income and non-traditional students in the workforce, who are the majority of the area's residents because of economic necessity, social tradition, and the responsibilities of jobs and families. The mission is published on the institution's website, in the catalog, in University Fact Book, and on departmental webpages.

**2.5** The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission. **(Institutional effectiveness)**

The institution is in the process of developing a new strategic plan. The institution provided the 2011-2018 strategic plan, *Go for Greatness*. However, the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee did not find evidence of ongoing evaluation processes; ongoing review of the institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; continuing improvement in institutional quality; and effectiveness in accomplishing the mission.

The institution indicated that it is finalizing the new strategic plan, which was scheduled to be delivered by December, 2016. Campus-wide meetings to develop the strategic plan were held. The institution indicated that it was building an institutional effectiveness model with different committees such as the Strategic Budgeting Committee. Additionally, five teams of five employees were assembled to work on the five tenets that has been developed by the new administration. The link to information about external reviews was broken. For this reason, it was not possible for the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee to review the documentation. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee was unable to determine whether the institution engages in planning and evaluation processes that are ongoing, integrated and research-based. Also, the Committee was not able to determine if continuing improvement in institutional quality is occurring and the extent to which the institutional mission is accomplished.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee finds that the institution developed a new institutional effectiveness model, which includes a new IE policy, strategic plan, and strategic planning and budget process, and proposed an IE assessment process and guide. The new strategic plan details a framework for providing evidence of an on-going, integrated and research-based review of its goals and outcomes; continuous improvement in institutional quality; and effectiveness in accomplishing the mission. Interviews with institutional personnel confirmed the current mission statement was reviewed by Past-President, Dr. James Henderson, and has been approved by the University of Louisiana System. Interviews also indicated that the mission statement will be reviewed before the expiration of the current strategic plan, and the process for review will continue for each strategic planning cycle.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee was able to determine that the institution has a new Institutional Effectiveness policy and process that has been approved by Acting President, Dr. Chris Maggio. It was also determined that the institution has a plan to move through maturity levels identified in the IE model and has measures in place to assess completion of each level by Spring 2018.

While it is evident the institution has developed what appears to be a sound and comprehensive plan for engaging in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation, the plan and processes are only in the beginning stages of implementation and the institution needs more time to carry out and evaluate its plan.

**Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that its planning and evaluation processes result in continuous improvement in institutional quality; and demonstrate that it is effectively accomplishing its mission.**

**2.6 The institution is in operation and has students enrolled in degree programs. (Continuous operation)**

Northwestern State University of Louisiana has been in continuous operation since 1884 when it was established by the Louisiana State Legislature through Act 51 of 1884. Created originally as a Louisiana State Normal School (1884), it transitioned to Louisiana State Normal College in 1921, Northwestern State College of Louisiana in 1944, and Northwestern State University of Louisiana in 1970. The institution reports an enrollment of 8,651 during spring semester 2016.

**2.7.1 The institution offers one or more degree programs based on at least 60 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the associate level; at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the baccalaureate level; or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the post-baccalaureate, graduate, or professional level. If an institution uses a unit other than semester credit hours, it provides an explanation for the equivalency. The institution also provides a justification for all degrees that include fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit. (Program length)**

The institution provided documentation that the length of degree programs at the university is monitored by the Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR) and the Board of Supervisors (BOS) for the University of Louisiana System. All programs of exceptional length exceed the minima required under CR 2.7.1. Program length requirements are published in all university catalogs.

**2.7.2 The institution offers degree programs that embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with its stated mission and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education. (Program content)**

The institution has an established curriculum approval process that includes review by appropriate committees, advisory councils, and panels. These groups include faculty and others who have expertise in relevant fields of study. In accordance with the university's Academic Affairs Policy 2.04 and 2.05, standard templates are used to propose new academic programs. One template is a Letter of Intent that addresses program purpose and objectives, content, need, relevance, and student interest. The template, Request for Authority to Offer a New Degree Program, requires greater detail that addresses how the program represents a coherent course of study that is compatible with the institution's mission and higher education.

Degree programs are also approved by the Louisiana Board of Regents and the Board of Supervisors of the University of Louisiana System. External validation of appropriate and coherent content is also achieved through professional and discipline-specific accreditation. The institution ensures that programs continue to meet expectations regarding coherence and compatibility with the mission by conducting periodic program reviews.

- \*2.7.3** In each undergraduate degree program, the institution requires the successful completion of a general education component at the collegiate level that (1) is a substantial component of each undergraduate degree, (2) ensures breadth of knowledge, and (3) is based on a coherent rationale. For degree completion in associate programs, the component constitutes a minimum of 15 semester hours or the equivalent; for baccalaureate programs, a minimum of 30 semester hours or the equivalent. These credit hours are to be drawn from and include at least one course from each of the following areas: humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural science/mathematics. The courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. If an institution uses a unit other than semester credit hours, it provides an explanation for the equivalency. The institution also provides a justification if it allows for fewer than the required number of semester credit hours or its equivalent unit of general education courses. **(General education)**

Each undergraduate program at the institution contains a general education component that is substantial, ensures breath, and is based upon a coherent rationale. The General Education (GE) goal, containing 12 competencies distributed among six areas, is aligned with the Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR) requirements for general education as articulated in the Academic Affairs Policy 2.16:

... all undergraduate academic credentials should contain a broad-based common educational experience that enhances students' ability to describe, interpret, and analyze their world. In addition to building awareness of a wide range of material and enriching the academic experience, general education should promote intellectual inquiry through basic content and methodology and contribute to the graduate's ability to communicate effectively in oral and written English.

Students in associate degree programs must complete 27 semester hours in the general education curriculum and those in baccalaureate degree programs must complete 39 semester hours in the general education curriculum in the following areas: English (6 hrs.), Mathematics (3 to 6 hrs.), Humanities (3 to 9 hrs.), Natural Sciences (9 hrs.), Social and Behavioral Sciences (6 hrs.), and Fine Arts (3 hrs.). The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee's review of the University *Catalog* and the BOR's database of General Education Course Equivalencies, designed to facilitate transfers of credit from institution to institution, revealed that courses do not narrowly focus on skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR) requirements for general education (Academic Affairs Policy 2.16) and

Northwestern State University of Louisiana's general education requirements and mission statement; and interviewed the University's General Education Committee and affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

- 2.7.4** The institution provides instruction for all course work required for at least one degree program at each level at which it awards degrees. If the institution does not provide instruction for all such course work and (1) makes arrangements for some instruction to be provided by other accredited institutions or entities through contracts or consortia or (2) uses some other alternative approach to meeting this requirement, the alternative approach must be approved by the Commission on Colleges. In both cases, the institution demonstrates that it controls all aspects of its educational program. (See the Commission policy "Core Requirement 2.7.4: Documenting an Alternate Approach.") **(Course work for degrees)**

The institution documented that it offers instruction for all course work required for at least one degree program at each level that it awards degrees: associate, baccalaureate, master's, specialist, and doctoral. The Undergraduate Catalog and schedule of classes were provided as evidence.

- \*2.8** The number of full-time faculty members is adequate to support the mission of the institution and to ensure the quality and integrity of each of its academic programs. **(Faculty)**

The institution reports that based on its student-faculty ratios, comparisons of full-time faculty to part-time (adjunct) faculty by academic program, and student credit hours generated by full-time versus part-time faculty, it has an adequate number of full-time faculty for each of its academic programs. Further, when compared with peer institutions, the university's student-to-faculty ratio is consistently lower than other institutions of similar size. For example, the institution stated that one in-state peer institution in the University of Louisiana System had a faculty-to-student ratio in fall, 2015 of 20:1, well above the institution's ratio of 16.56:1 for that semester.

The institution also stated that it has hired more than 85 faculty members to replace retired faculty members or those who have separated from the institution. However, Table 1 showed that the FTE faculty numbers overall have dropped from 411.5 in 2009 to 378.5 in 2015, which is a decline of about 8 percent. Within the Compliance Certification, the institution did not address how this information relates to the adequacy of the number of full-time faculty in each academic program.

The institution provided a description of the duties and expectations of full-time faculty. A description of the duties and expectations of part-time faculty was not provided. The institution also provided six tables to "demonstrate the adequacy of the University's faculty resources to support faculty functions of curriculum design, development, and evaluation; teaching; identification, and assessment, of appropriate student learning outcomes; student advising; research and creative activity; and institutional and professional service." Five of the tables presented overall data or data by college, department or school. One of the tables presented the number of full-time faculty and part-time faculty by content area, delivery mode, and faculty location. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee

presumed that “faculty location” was synonymous with instructional site. The institution did not provide a narrative to address whether or how the data presented in the table supported its claim for an adequate number of full-time faculty members for each of its academic programs. In addition, it was not clear to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee whether the term “content area” was synonymous with “academic program.”

In its Focused Report, the institution explained the almost 8% decline in the number of faculty. The explanation included an intentional academic program review to address the statewide budget crisis and to realign resources to achieve efficiency and avoid duplication within academic affairs. Faculty workloads were adjusted and course duplications and programs were eliminated.

From 2009 to 2016 the student to faculty ratio ranged from a low of 18:1 in 2009, to a high of 22:1 in 2012, with a modal ratio of 20:1, the current ratio. During that same period, enrollment peaked at over 9,800 in 2009, when the faculty-student ratio was at its lowest, and enrollment has remained mostly flat, at around 9,400, since then. According to the Focused Report, the institution replaced 85 faculty who retired or resigned after 2012, but the number of full-time faculty is still lower than 2009, which is 68% of the FTE reported. The number of part-time faculty (adjunct) is 32% of the FTE, overall, with some programs using no adjuncts and other relying on them to deliver general education courses. According to the IPEDS data for 2015-16 reviewed on site, the faculty to student ratio is 1:20. Spring 2017 enrollment is 9,191.

In the Focused Report, the institution clarified that the duties and responsibilities of part-time (adjunct) faculty are found in contracts and letters of appointment. A review of a sample of part-time faculty files and discussions with the Provost confirmed that part-time faculty have expectations specified in contracts and letters of appointment.

The position of Provost was eliminated from 2015-2017 (spring) and the work was carried out by a council of deans, chaired by one dean who served as Chief Academic Officer. In spring 2017, the Provost position was reinstated. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee met with the Provost and confirmed that vacancies are being filled as they arise. This information was confirmed in meetings with deans and department heads.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee concludes that the institution has an adequate number of full-time faculty members to support the mission of the institution and to ensure the quality and integrity of each of its academic programs.

- 2.9** The institution, through ownership or formal arrangements or agreements, provides and supports student and faculty access and user privileges to adequate library collections and services and to other learning/information resources consistent with the degrees offered. Collections, resources, and services are sufficient to support all its educational, research, and public service programs. **(Learning resources and services)**

The Northwestern State University of Louisiana Libraries through ownership or formal arrangements and agreements provide and support student and faculty

access and user privileges to adequate library collections and services and to other learning/information resources consistent with degrees offered. In addition to the resources available, the University Libraries have reciprocal borrowing agreements and memberships in consortia and organizations to ensure timely access to a wide range of resources not already owned by the institution. The library undertook a self-study, and the report from the outside evaluator has served as a framework for implementation of changes and improvements in library services.

The institution provided a comprehensive description of its collections and agreements to provide access and user privileges to a wide variety of collections, services, and library and learning resources. For example, the University Libraries extensive holdings in print books, ebooks, audiovisual materials, microforms, and a selective depository of federal documents. The institution subscribes to more than 380 print journals and more than 102,000 electronic journals. The library also participates in the LOUIS consortium and mini-consortia. The library has access to more than 100 databases that provide access to periodicals, full-text articles, and ebooks for on-campus users, commuter students, distance learners and faculty. Access to EBSCO Discovery search interface, commonly referred to as “*Find It!*” also is provided. The *Find It! Discovery* search permits searches from on-campus or off-campus locations. The institution reports that the most searched database is the *Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL)*.

The institution has a wide variety of services that include Interlibrary Loan, a Friends of the Library program, instruction in information literacy and the use of library services, and online research guides. Assessment of library and learning resources, such as surveys and external reviews, is conducted regularly. The assessment results indicate that library/learning resources and services are sufficient to support students and faculty and the degrees offered.

- \*2.10** The institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that are intended to promote student learning and enhance the development of its students. **(Student support services)**

The institution serves a diverse, rural student population and is recognized as a minority serving institution. Nearly half of the student population is made up of first generation, low income, and/or disabled students. The institution's enrollment is approximately 9,179: 69 % female, 31% male, 59.5% White (non-Hispanic), 26.3% Black (non-Hispanic), 4.8% Hispanic, and <1% international students; 44.7% of students are 20 years old and younger; 33.2% of students are 25 years old and older, and 22% are 21 to 24 years old. Students are served on four (4) campuses: 40.9% (Natchitoches), 6.99% (Shreveport), 2.76 (Leesville), and 1.66% (Alexandria). Also, there appears to be an increasing number of distance learners.

The institution utilizes multiple academic and service units to provide student support programs, services, and activities for prospective and continuing students. These services are provided through the Divisions of Student Experience, Academic Affairs, Business Affairs, University Affairs, External Affairs, Technology, Innovation, and Economic Development, and Information Technology Services. Student Experience Services include Office of Admissions,

Office of Financial Aid, Counseling and Career Services, Health Services, Office of Disability Support, Freshman Connection (orientation programs), First Year Experience, Student Support Services (TRIO program), Greek Life, Student Activities and Organizations, Student Activities Board, Student Government Association, Argus (art/literary magazine), The Potpourri (yearbook), KNWD The Demon (radio station), Current Sauce (newspaper), NSU TV, and Office of Service Learning. Academic Affairs services include Office of the Registrar, Office of Auxiliary Services, Academic Success Center, Academic Advising Services, Testing Center, University Studies, Foreign Language Resource Center, International Student Exchange Program, and National Student Exchange Program. Business Affairs services include Student Accounting and Cashiering. University Affairs services include the International Student Resource Center. External Affairs services include Wellness, Recreation and Activity Center, Intramural and Club Sports, and Intercollegiate Athletics. Technology, Innovation, and Economic Development services include Electronic and Continuing Education. Information Technology Services include computer labs.

The institution appears to provide student support programs, services, and activities that are consistent with its mission to be “a responsive, student oriented institution.” The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources appears to take the lead with distribution of national and university developed assessment tools, and it makes results available online for use by student organizations, faculty, and appropriate committees. Also, there are state legislative mandates (Louisiana GRAD Act) that drive assessment and development of student services, linking institutional performance targets (student success) to increases in tuition authority and certain autonomies.

The On-site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the university mission statement, university catalog, organizational charts, and relevant online links to Student Support Services. Online resources reviewed include Office of Admissions, Office of Financial Aid, Counseling and Career Services, Health Services, Office of Disability Support, Freshman Connection, First Year Experience, Student Support Services, Greek Life, Student Activities and Organizations, the Student Activities Board, Student Government Association, Argus, The Potpourri, KNWD, Current Sauce, Service Learning, Office of the University Registrar, Office of Auxiliary Services, Academic Success Center, Academic Advising Services, Testing Center, Orientation: University Studies, International Student Exchange Program, Student Accounting and Cashiering, Wellness, Recreation, and Activity Center, Intramurals and Club Sports, Intercollegiate Athletics, Athletic Academic Center, Victorious for Life Program, Enhanced Academic Program, Electronic and Continuing Education, Computer Labs, Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and Human Resources.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee also visited a sampling of Student Support Service sites, which include the Student Activities Board, Student Government Association, Office of the University Registrar, Academic Advising Services, Testing Center, Electronic and Continuing Education, Computer Labs, Foreign Language Resource Center, Counseling and Career Services, and Health Services. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with the Registrar, Counseling & Career Services Assistant Director, Admissions Director, Graduate Admissions Coordinator, Auxiliary Services & Academic Support Services Director, Dean of Students, SGA President, VP for Technology, Innovation & Economic Development, and Health Services Director.

Based on the review of these online resources, site visits, and campus interviews, the On-site Reaffirmation Committee affirms the findings of the Off-site Reaffirmation Committee.

- 2.11.1** The institution has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services.

The member institution provides the following financial statements: (1) an institutional audit (or *Standard Review Report* issued in accordance with *Statements on Standards for Accounting and Review Services* issued by the AICPA for those institutions audited as part of a system wide or statewide audit) and written institutional management letter for the most recent fiscal year prepared by an independent certified public accountant and/or an appropriate governmental auditing agency employing the appropriate audit (or *Standard Review Report*) guide; (2) a statement of financial position of unrestricted net assets, exclusive of plant assets and plant-related debt, which represents the change in unrestricted net assets attributable to operations for the most recent year; and (3) an annual budget that is preceded by sound planning, is subject to sound fiscal procedures, and is approved by the governing board. **(Financial resources and stability)**

The institution provided audit reports, management letters from auditor and comparative analysis of unrestricted net assets for the preceding three fiscal years as evidence supporting compliance. The audits and management letters demonstrated that the institution has adequate financial resources and no concerns related to management of financial resources. However, the audited financial statements and management letter for the most recently ended fiscal year was not available at the time of the Off-Site Review.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee received and reviewed the FY16 audit report issued on November 16, 2016 from the Louisiana Legislative Auditor and finds that the institution has adequate financial resources to support the institutional mission.

The audit report did cite, for the second consecutive year, a finding related to inappropriate access to the Banner Student Information System. While allowing this inappropriate access can lead increased risk of errors or fraud, no instances were identified as part of the audit. Corrections to system access were completed on October 14, 2016. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee interviewed the institution's Chief Information Officer, who presented evidence of a formal policy regarding Banner ERP Access and Security (revised as of October 6, 2015) and certified that inappropriate access has been remedied as evidenced in a letter dated October 14, 2016 from the CIO to the Legislative Auditor.

- 2.11.2** The institution has adequate physical resources to support the mission of the institution and the scope of its programs and services. **(Physical resources)**

The institution provided descriptive narrative of 1.2 million net assignable square feet of buildings occupying 869 acres to support instructional activities on the main and three satellite campuses. Further, the institution provided sample

reports made available to campus constituents, executive management, and board of regents that support institutional assertions of campus conditions. This evidence supporting facilities condition, deferred maintenance, utilization and efficiency, maintenance processes and procedures, and constituent surveys demonstrates that the institution's programs and services are supported by adequate physical facilities and resources.

- 2.12** The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that includes an institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment and focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution. **(Quality Enhancement Plan)**

The institution developed an acceptable QEP. See Part III for additional information.

### **C. Assessment of Compliance with Section 3: Comprehensive Standards**

- 3.1.1** The mission statement is current and comprehensive, accurately guides the institution's operations, is periodically reviewed and updated, is approved by the governing board, and is communicated to the institution's constituencies. **(Mission).**

The institution's mission statement is focused on preparing students to be productive members of society, promoting economic development, and improving the quality of life in the university's service region, which includes rural Louisiana parishes. The mission statement also states that the institution will promote economic development and improvements in the quality of life of the citizens in its region. The mission statement also focuses on teaching undergraduate and graduate students by maintaining excellence its highest priority. However, it was not clear from the narrative how research and service fit into the mission of the institution, beyond the simple declaration that mission statement expresses dedication to teaching, research, and service through the delivery of associate, undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs. Additionally, it was not clear to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee whether or not the Board of Regents approved the latest 2011-18 version of the mission statement.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the narrative and supporting documentation in the Focused Report and determined the current mission statement has not changed since it was approved in the 2003 meeting of the Board of Supervisors. In addition, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee found that research and service is expected of all faculty members, according to letters of appointment and the *Faculty Handbook*. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee also reviewed the new strategic plan and found that service is one of the five strategic focus areas in the plan.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee concludes that the mission statement has been approved and communicated to constituents, and that research and service fit into the mission as documented in faculty letters of appointment and the *Faculty Handbook*.

**3.2.1** The governing board of the institution is responsible for the selection and the periodic evaluation of the chief executive officer. **(CEO evaluation/selection)**

The Board of Supervisors for the University of Louisiana System (ULS) is responsible for the selection and periodic evaluation of the institution's president as detailed in Board Bylaws & Rules, Part Two, Chapter III, Section II.A. Information about the search and selection process was provided from the bylaws and rules. The process to identify the search committee and the procedure to select the president were provided. In accordance with the Bylaws & Rules, the president is to be evaluated annually. The institution reported that each president in the ULS submits an Annual Performance Evaluation. The BOS also has access to campus feedback on individual presidents via a survey, a blank copy of which was provided for the institution under review. Evidence of a completed evaluation or other such documentation was not provided for consideration of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee to document the BOS's execution of its duty to evaluate the institution's president.

In its Focused Report, the institution provided the most recent presidential evaluation conducted by the Board of Supervisors, dated June 2016. Based on an interview with Board of Supervisors Chairperson, an annual presidential evaluation system and process is in place, and is being utilized. Dr. Henderson, immediate past president of the institution and current president of the University of Louisiana System, described how he was evaluated as President of the Institution and the on-going evaluation work by the System Board of Supervisors.

Furthermore, based on the interview with the board chair, and comments by the system president, and a review of current actions as it pertains to the presidential search process for the next president of the institution, the Board of Supervisors is fulfilling its duty of selecting the chief executive officer for the institution. Supporting documentation includes the website which contains members of the search committee, documentation of the process and news accounts of public meetings held at the institution. In addition, current members of the institution's leadership team commented freely on the process and the role of the constituencies, and affirmed the authority of the governing board on the selection of the president.

Therefore, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee finds that the institution's governing board is responsible for the selection and periodic evaluation of the chief executive officer.

**3.2.2** The legal authority and operating control of the institution are clearly defined for the following areas within the institution's governance structure: **(Governing board control)**

**3.2.2.1** the institution's mission

Governance of the institution comes from the Louisiana Board of Regents, which is responsible for determining the role, scope, and mission of each public post-secondary institution in the state. In 2010, the BOR, with input from system campuses, released a *Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education in Louisiana*. This document speaks

directly to the institution's mission and links it to the BOR's role as the legal authority with responsibility for governance of the institution.

### 3.2.2.2 the fiscal stability of the institution

The Board of Supervisors for the University of Louisiana System functions as a body corporate and exercises financial oversight of the institution. The institution's budget is prepared based on formula funding from the state and annual legislative action. Final approval of the budget requires action from the BOS for ULS, the state Board of Regents, and the Louisiana Division of Administration Office of Planning and Budget. The University is audited annually by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor (LLA), with a copy of the report and any findings made available on the LLA website. Evidence presented in support of this compliance includes links to relevant provisions of the Louisiana Constitution, legislative enactments, and minutes from recent meetings of the Board of Supervisors for the ULS.

### 3.2.2.3 institutional policy

A mechanism for developing institutional policy is clearly provided for within the larger context of the institution's governance and administrative structures. Both the BOR and BOS publish and maintain rules, policies, and procedures that cover the institution. Internally, policies are developed through a clearly articulated system of shared governance that prioritizes multiple inputs into the policy-making process. Evidence submitted in support of the Compliance Certification includes provisions from the institution's Faculty Handbook as well as (BOS) *Board Bylaws and Rules* and state statutes dealing with oversight of the institution.

### 3.2.3 The governing board has a policy addressing conflict of interest for its members. **(Board conflict of interest)**

The institution has two governing bodies, the Board of Regents and the Board of Supervisors for the University of Louisiana System. Members of both bodies are considered public officials and fall under the requirements of the Code of Governmental Ethics (R.S. 42, §1111), which includes Conflict of Interest. Moreover, Policies and Procedures Memorandum M-(9-a) of the ULS addresses "accepting monetary or non-monetary compensation or gifts." Members of both the BOR and BOS are required by law to undergo at least one hour of training per year to ensure compliance with the Code of Governmental Ethics. New members are required to complete training that includes instruction (documentation provided via the orientation materials) in the Code of Governmental Ethics. The institution notes that there has not been an occasion of where a board member was charged for a violation of the Louisiana Code of Governmental Ethics.

**3.2.4** The governing board is free from undue influence from political, religious, or other external bodies and protects the institution from such influence. **(External influence)**

The institution demonstrates that the Board of Regents and the Board of Supervisors for the ULS are free from undue influence from external bodies. Both governing bodies are statewide entities that are well-established in constitutional and statutory provisions. Requirements for geographic distribution of membership, term limits, and strict compliance with ethics training are all safeguards that help ensure the integrity of BOR and BOS operations and deliberations. Members of both parties are protected from removal from office without due process. Evidence submitted to support compliance with CS 3.2.4 comes from the Louisiana Constitution, state statutes, Board bylaws and policy manuals, and administrative records.

**3.2.5** The governing board has a policy whereby members can be dismissed only for appropriate reasons and by a fair process. **(Board dismissal)**

Both governing bodies for the institution, the BOR and BOS, are stateside entities and thus fall under the provisions of the Louisiana Constitution of 1974. Members of both bodies serve six-year terms and are appointed by the Governor of Louisiana. Removal of members from the BOR and BOS can occur only by process of impeachment (Constitution Article X) in the House of Representatives followed by trial in the Senate. Reasons for removing members by this process are clearly limited to “commission or conviction, during his term of office of a felony or for malfeasance or gross misconduct while in such office.” (Article X, Part 3, §24)

**3.2.6** There is a clear and appropriate distinction, in writing and practice, between the policy-making functions of the governing board and the responsibility of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy. **(Board/administration distinction)**

The evidence submitted by the institution indicates compliance with the requirement that a clear distinction exists between the policy-making function of the governing board(s) and the responsibility of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy. The Board of Regents acknowledges the need for it to avoid “becoming unnecessarily entangled in the day-to day mechanics of operating college campuses” (from the BOR website). Moreover, evidence provided through university and divisional organizational charts and documentation from shared governance units indicate that internal stakeholders are involved in the administration of policy. Committees and councils are active and appropriately engaged in the decision-making process.

**3.2.7** The institution has a clearly defined and published organizational structure that delineates responsibility for the administration of policies. **(Organizational structure)**

The institution has a clearly articulated organizational structure that supports the administration of policy along traditional divisional lines. The institution’s

president meets with members of his senior leadership team regularly and delegates responsibilities as appropriate and necessary. Organizational charts for the institution are current and well-presented. Additional information on responsibilities for administering policy is available in the *Fiscal Policy and Procedures Manual*, the *Staff Handbook*, and *Faculty Handbook*.

- \*3.2.8** The institution has qualified administrative and academic officers with the experience and competence to lead the institution. **(Qualified administrative/academic officers)**

The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee found that the institution appears to employ academic and administrative officers with the credentials and expertise appropriate for the duties and responsibilities associated with their positions. The institution provided experiential summaries and job descriptions for responsible academic and administrative officers. This information included educational attainment, professional experiences, scholarly and/or professional affiliations, as well as position duties and responsibilities.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed a sampling of administrative and academic officers' credentials files and met with administrative and academic officers to verify qualifications and expertise appropriate for the duties and responsibilities associated with their positions. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee that the institution has qualified administrative and academic officers with the experience and competence to lead the institution.

- 3.2.9** The institution publishes policies regarding appointment, employment, and evaluation of all personnel. **(Personnel appointment)**

The institution publishes policies regarding the appointment, employment, and evaluation of all personnel. These include federal and state laws and regulations the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission and the Louisiana Department of State Civil Service. Policies conform to the *Bylaws and Rules* of the Board of Regents of the University of Louisiana System and are published in the *Business Affairs Policies and Procedures User Guides* which describes personnel actions for non-classified positions, classified positions, seasonal/temporary/intermittent/part-time, and volunteers (Part X); in the *Staff Handbook* (pp. 23-30), and in the *Faculty Handbook* (Chapter 4). The *Faculty Handbook* defines the various faculty ranks and includes criteria for promotion and tenure. In addition, it addresses issues such as academic freedom, professional ethics, compensation, evaluation, nonrenewal, attendance, and leave reporting.

University policy mandates that all personnel, regardless of position, be evaluated annually. The *Staff Handbook* (p. 27) outlines procedures to be used in the evaluation of classified and non-classified staff. Procedures for the evaluation of classified staff conform to those of the Louisiana Department of State Civil Service Performance Evaluation System. Redacted examples of classified and unclassified staff evaluations demonstrate that staff evaluation policies and procedures are implemented. The *Faculty Handbook* (Chapter 6) includes procedures for evaluation of faculty regardless of rank. Faculty

members are evaluated in the following areas: teaching, advising students, scholarly achievement, public service, and contributing to the department and the university (p. 35). Academic units may also determine specific criteria for use in evaluation.

**3.2.10** The institution periodically evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators. **(Administrative staff evaluations)**

The institution has policies and procedures related to evaluation of the president, faculty, and classified and unclassified staff; relevant policies and procedures are outlined in faculty and staff handbooks and University of Louisiana System Policy (Chapter III, Section IV-D). Also, these policies and procedures suggest all employees, regardless of classification, participate in an annual, anonymous evaluation of their direct supervisor and suggest employees who disagree with their evaluations may file grievances. Lastly, the appropriate vice president is responsible for filing completed (original) evaluation forms in a confidential (nonpublic) file in his or her office.

The institution described processes for annually evaluating its faculty and classified and unclassified staff; it provided examples of evaluation tools used when assessing unclassified staff, faculty with administrative appointments, and teaching faculty. Beyond annual surveys completed by subordinates, the processes and procedures used to evaluate administrators were not provided. No examples of completed evaluations were provided. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee was unable to assess the institution's implementation of its policies to evaluate administrative staff.

In its Focused Report, the institution provided the self-evaluations of administrative leadership along with the written evaluation documenting the meeting occurring with the President and substantive outcomes. Furthermore, each administrative staff member was asked in individual interviews about the evaluation process over the course of the site visit. In all cases, they affirmed the evaluation process and discussed its effectiveness.

In addition, a discussion was held with the Director of Human Resources about overall evaluations. She confirmed the process and noted to the need to update the tool in the near future as well as provide more opportunities in the process for the reflection and discussion of the goals and accomplishments of each employee member beyond the typical Likert Scale.

Based on this information and responses during the interviews, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee finds the institution periodically evaluates the effectiveness of its administrators.

**3.2.11** The institution's chief executive officer has ultimate responsibility for, and exercises appropriate administrative and fiscal control over, the institution's intercollegiate athletics program. **(Control of intercollegiate athletics)**

As a member institution of the University of Louisiana System, the institution's athletic policies are governed by ULS *Board Bylaws & Rules, Part Two, Chapter V* ("Intercollegiate Athletics"). This document references NCAA guidelines that

mandate presidential oversight of intercollegiate athletics. Additional requirements for presidential oversight of athletics are found in the Constitution of the Southland Conference, to which the institution belongs. Evidence provided through meeting minutes and other documentation indicates that the President is actively engaged with the athletic enterprise through interactions with the Director of Athletics, Faculty Athletics Representative, and the NSU Athletics Council.

However, other than citing general standards and NCAA requirements, the institution provides no evidence to support that the president is actively involved in the fiscal oversight of the athletics program, as per the standard. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee noted that CS 3.2.11 is worded incorrectly in the institution's Compliance Certification report. The SACSCOC requirement that the CEO exercise "appropriate administrative and fiscal control" over athletics is captured in the report as "appropriate administrative control" only. This miswording (inadvertent dropping of the word "fiscal") might help to explain the partial response to the standard.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee finds that the institution has demonstrated compliance with the Board Bylaws & Rules (Part Two, Chapter III, Section IV.A) of the University of Louisiana System (ULS) and the President's job description also includes the affirmation that "the President of Northwestern exercises appropriate administrative and fiscal control over the intercollegiate Athletics program". The University's organizational structure shows direct access to the President through the Vice President of External Affairs. Additionally, the Director of Athletics serves as a member of the President's Leadership Team. The President is a member of the NSU Athletic Council.

**3.2.12** The institution demonstrates that its chief executive officer controls the institution's fund-raising activities. **(Fund-raising activities).**

The institution provides ample evidence to support that the president exercises control over the institution's fund-raising activities. The advancement function falls under the supervision of the Vice President for External Affairs, who reports directly to the president and serves as a member of the institution's senior leadership team. Two institutionally-affiliated foundations, one for athletics and the other of more general scope, exist to assist with fundraising, and the relationship between those entities and the university is governed by a formal affiliation agreement that references the president's role. Copies of the affiliation agreements are provided as supporting evidence, as are relevant organizational charts and a copy of the president's job description.

**3.2.13** For any entity organized separately from the institution and formed primarily for the purpose of supporting the institution or its programs: (1) the legal authority and operating control of the institution is clearly defined with respect to that entity; (2) the relationship of that entity to the institution and the extent of any liability arising out of that relationship is clearly described in a formal, written manner; and (3) the institution demonstrates that (a) the chief executive officer controls any fund-raising activities of that entity or (b) the fund-raising activities of that entity are defined in a formal, written manner which assures that those activities further the mission of the institution. **(Institution-related entities)**

The institution provided Articles of Incorporation and Memoranda of Understanding as evidence supporting legal authority and institutional relationship to NSU Foundation, NSU Alumni Association and Demons Unlimited Foundation. Evidence outlines each of the respective missions, responsibilities, and liability limitations of each. The NSU Foundation's purpose is to contribute to the "educational and cultural welfare" of the institution by providing financial support. The NSU Alumni Association, as an affiliate of the NSU Foundation, shares this focus. The purpose of Demons Unlimited is to support institutional athletics.

- 3.2.14** The institution's policies are clear concerning ownership of materials, compensation, copyright issues, and the use of revenue derived from the creation and production of all intellectual property. These policies apply to students, faculty, and staff. **(Intellectual property rights)**

The institution has an Intellectual Property Policy that applies to faculty, staff, and students. This policy is in alignment with policies of the Board of Supervisors for the University of Louisiana System. The NSU Intellectual Property Policy addresses definitions, rights of ownership, royalty income and proceeds distribution, and the management of intellectual property. Related information can be found in the Graduate School research manual, the Institutional Review Board policies and procedures manual, and the Student Code of Conduct. The institution indicated that it has implemented a training module offered as part of the Online Teaching Boot Camp, to address academic honesty.

- 3.3.1** The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas **(Institutional Effectiveness)**:

- \*3.3.1.1** educational programs, to include student learning outcomes

The institution stated that it is transitioning regarding an operational strategic plan with an expected implementation date of December, 2016. The institution provided assessment reports for the two prior academic years as evidence for this standard. The institution indicated that academic units are responsible for setting student learning outcomes and inputting into the Accreditation Management System. Additionally, a description was provided about what information is required for each assessment report. The institution provided a sampling of assessment reports from 2014-15 and 2015-16, but did not describe how the sample is reasonable and representative. Student learning outcomes were articulated; however, assessments rely heavily on course or project grades, which include extraneous components (e.g. writing mechanics), which do not speak to the specified student learning outcome. It was unclear to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee how these blunt measures provide useful and/or usable data upon which to make changes to improve the academic programs. The "Action is associated with the following Findings" portion of the assessment reports often indicated, "No supporting Findings have been linked to this Action." Evidence that results are used for continuous improvement was limited.

After a review of the Focused Report and supporting documentation, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee finds the institution gives appropriate rationale for the sampling provided. In addition, the institution has named a Director of Institutional Effectiveness to demonstrate commitment to university-wide involvement and oversight with a multifaceted, systematic approach to measuring performance and a cyclical process for continuous improvement. However, the institution's institutional effectiveness model; which includes an IE policy, strategic plan, strategic planning and budgeting process, and assessment process is new. Interviews with the Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources, and the Institutional Effectiveness committee indicated that, while the institution had an assessment process in place prior to the implementation of the new Taskstream system, the process lacked uniformity and oversight in some areas. An examination of the evidence provided for the sample of the institution's academic programs for AY 2014-15 and 2015-16 demonstrated expected outcomes are identified; however, assessment of the articulated outcomes rely heavily on course and/or project grades that do not speak to directly to the student learning outcomes (SLO) identified.

The Committee determined that the new process, tools, and structure will assist the institution in systematically identifying outcomes, including student learning outcomes, assess the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results. However, the institution's process is immature and, therefore, the institution was unable to provide sufficient evidence that it assesses the articulated program outcomes and makes improvement based on those assessments.

**Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it assesses the extent to which it achieves the articulated student learning outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results for each of its educational programs.**

### **3.3.1.2 administrative support services**

The institution has identified expected outcomes for the Division of Business Affairs, the Division of Technology, Innovation & Economic Development, the Department of Athletics, Informational Services, and University Police for academic years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. The expected outcomes for each unit, achievement expectations, achievement assessment, reported information collected, and the use of the information for improvement were provided. However, the section entitled "Information collected about achieving the outcome" provides general summative information and lacks specific evidence in support of the stated "information collected." Evidence of analysis leading to actions for improvement was not evident to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

The following are examples:

- (1) The Department of Athletics indicated: “The Northwestern State University of Louisiana Athletic Department performed over 4,200 hours of community service during the 2015-16 year. Northwestern State University of Louisiana was runner-up for the ‘Southland Strong’ Community Service Award for the 2015-16 year.” However, no evidence to support this assertion (e.g. list of community service activities or sites, information about the number of students participating or dates for the activities) was provided.
- (2) The Informational Services unit asserted that: “Improved best practices increased awareness of campus news, events, etc. Marketing/Informational Services developed strategies to work in tandem through social media, web advertising and traditional print, radio and television. Northwestern State University of Louisiana’s regional audience expanded 25 percent and the web audience an estimated 22 million households. That this is evidence of a website traffic increase by 5%.” Again, there was no evidence presented to support that the regional audience expanded 25% and the web audience to 22 million households.

In addition, a rationale for the reasonable and representativeness of the sampling of units was not provided for the consideration of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

After a review of the Focused Report and supporting documentation, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee finds the institution gives appropriate rationale for the sampling provided. The institution also provided supporting evidence for the assertion of community service hours by the Department of Athletics by way of a spreadsheet detailing hours by each sports program supported by the institution.

The institution has named a Director of Institutional Effectiveness to demonstrate commitment to university-wide involvement and oversight with a multifaceted, systematic approach to measuring performance and a cyclical process for continuous improvement. During an interview with the IE committee, members indicated that assessment results have been gathered by individual units and used to impact practices; however, no documentation was provided. In addition, the institution’s new IE model, which includes an IE policy, strategic plan, strategic planning and budgeting process, and IE assessment process, should have the capability to provide the institution with the tools and structure necessary to assist the institution in systematically identifying outcomes, assessing the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and providing evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results.

However, the institution’s process is immature and, therefore, the institution was unable at the time of the On-Site Review to provide sufficient evidence that it identifies expected outcomes for each of its administrative support service areas, assesses those outcomes and makes improvements based on those assessments.

**Recommendation 3: The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it assesses the extent to which it achieves the**

articulated program outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results for each of its administrative support services units.

### **3.3.1.3 academic and student support services**

The institution has identified expected outcomes for Counseling and Career Services, Health Services, Financial Aid, First-Year Experience and Leadership Development, Office of the Registrar, Student Affairs, and the Watson Libraries for 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. The expected outcomes for each unit, achievement expectations, achievement assessment, reported information collected and the stated use of the information for improvement were provided. However, the “Information collected about achieving the outcome” section only provides general summative information and lacks specific evidence in support of the stated “information collected.” In other words, evidence of analysis leading to actions for improvement was not evident. The excerpt from the Office of the Registrar’s “Information collected about achieving the outcome” is an example.

Use of professional judgment by taking into consideration the most frequent concerns encountered by staff and other essential departments regarding the volume of student, faculty, and parents’ phone calls and emails to find out how to request specific things or not being about to find the needed information online.

Some goals are presented, but there are few targets. For this reason, it was unclear to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee how the institution could determine the extent to which units are achieving stated goals. Also, evidence of analysis aligned with actions for improvement was not apparent.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee finds that the institution has named a Director of Institutional Effectiveness to demonstrate commitment to university-wide involvement and over-sight with a multifaceted, systematic approach to measuring performance and a cyclical process for continuous improvement. In addition, the institution’s new IE model; which includes an IE policy, strategic plan, strategic planning and budgeting process, and IE assessment process; is new and should have the capability to provide the institution with the tools and structure necessary to assist the institution in systematically identifying outcomes, assessing the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and providing evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results.

During interviews on-site, the Committee was able to determine that academic and student support areas such as the Registrar’s Office, had identified expected outcomes and measures to assess those outcomes; however, the institution was unable at the time of the On-Site Review to provide sufficient evidence that it uniformly identifies expected outcomes for each of its academic and student support service areas, assesses those outcomes and makes improvements based on those assessments.

**Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it assesses the extent to which it achieves the articulated program outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results for each of its academic and student support services units.**

#### **3.3.1.4 research within its mission, if appropriate**

The institution stated that it is not a Tier I research university but that faculty members consider research to be of high importance. An assessment report was presented for review; however, there was a lack of clarity pertaining to what is being assessed. A document referred to as a research plan for the Louisiana Folklife Center was included; however, it appeared to be a list of activities completed by the center over the course of 2014-15 academic year, rather than expected outcomes, related assessments to determine the extent to which those outcomes are achieved, and the analysis of results used to make improvements. It was not clear to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee whether research truly is within the institutional mission.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee was unable to determine, beyond the research and service component attached to faculty evaluation as part of its documentation for CS 3.1.1, if the institution has a commitment to research as stated in its mission. The institution's new IE model may provide future evidence to support its commitment; however, the process is immature and, therefore, the institution is unable to provide sufficient evidence at the time of review.

**Recommendation 5: The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it assesses the extent to which it achieves its articulated research outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results.**

#### **3.3.1.5 community/public service within its mission, if appropriate**

The institution states community and public service align with the University's mission because of "improvements in the quality of life of the citizens in its regions." The institution provided opinion surveys, community service hours log, and NSSE data about students; however, institutional effectiveness reports were not provided. While the institution has what appear to be service-oriented units (i.e. the Child and Family Network and the Office of Service-Learning), evidence of expected outcomes, assessments, and use of results to make improvements were not included.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the institution's new strategic plan, which provides a statement of commitment to community enrichment as one of the five focus areas and a plan for assessment and continuous improvement based on assessment. However, because the IE process is new, the institution was unable to provide supporting

documentation of this commitment, assessment, and continuous improvement at the time of the On-Site Review.

**Recommendation 6:** The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it assesses the extent to which it achieves its articulated community/public services outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results.

- 3.3.2** The institution has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that (1) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP; (2) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP; and (3) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. **(Quality Enhancement Plan)**

The institution did not satisfactorily address components parts one and three of this standard.

**Recommendation 8:** The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it has sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the QEP.

**Recommendation 9:** The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it has a plan to assess the achievement of the goals and outcomes articulated in its QEP.

See Part III for additional information.

- 3.4.1** The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded is approved by the faculty and the administration. **(Academic program approval)**

All NSU curricular matters go to the Curriculum Review Council (CRC), which is described as existing “primarily to serve the President in an advisory capacity on curricular matters and standards.” The Faculty Handbook (p. 6) provides a description of the CRC, which is chaired by the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, a member from each academic college, the president of the Faculty Senate, the president of the Student Government Association, the registrar, representatives from the Leesville and Shreveport campuses, and the director of libraries. The institution provided CRC Meeting minutes from 2015 to illustrate that curricular changes are presented, discussed, and approved by faculty and administration.

- 3.4.2** The institution’s continuing education, outreach, and service programs are consistent with the institution’s mission. **(Continuing education/service programs)**

The institution provides continuing education, outreach, and service programs that are aligned with its mission. A relevant element in the university mission statement is “to promote economic development, community service, and improved quality of life in the region.” Continuing education and non-credit

courses are coordinated through the Office of Electronic and Continuing Education (ECE). The ECE mission includes “creating and providing learning opportunities that respond to the constantly changing needs of corporations, organizations, and individuals.” Outreach and service programs include learning experiences for youth; services for businesses owners and entrepreneurs through the Small Business Development Center; services for children, families, and community members through the Child and Family Network; and non-credit, service-learning projects involving faculty staff, and students.

**\*3.4.3 The institution publishes admissions policies that are consistent with its mission. (Admissions policies)**

The institution publishes admissions policies consistent with its mission to maintain “as its highest priority excellence in teaching in graduate and undergraduate programs.” Undergraduate, graduate, and special admission policies for the institution are published in the university catalog and are based on guidelines established by the Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR) and the University of Louisiana System Board of Supervisors (ULS). The institution’s admission policies outline criteria for admission, reference admission exceptions, and identify categories that fall outside of the minimum admission criteria requirements. Also, program-specific criteria (special admissions) are identified for students with appropriate qualifications and presumed ability to successfully complete selected undergraduate and graduate programs.

The On-site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the university catalog, admissions policies (including the guidelines established by the Louisiana Board of Regents and the University of Louisiana System Board of Supervisors) and the minutes from the Registration, Credits, and Graduation Council (RCGC).

Furthermore, interviews were conducted with the Chair of RCGC & Registrar, Director of Admissions, and Coordinator of Graduate School Admissions and Records in support of the institution’s case for compliance and affirms the findings of the Off-site Reaffirmation Committee.

**3.4.4 The institution publishes policies that include criteria for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit for transfer, experiential learning, credit by examination, advanced placement, and professional certificates that is consistent with its mission and ensures that course work and learning outcomes are at the collegiate level and comparable to the institution’s own degree programs. The institution assumes responsibility for the academic quality of any course work or credit recorded on the institution’s transcript. (See Commission policy “Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures.”) (Acceptance of academic credit)**

The institution publishes policies for approval of transfer credit, advanced placement, experiential learning, and professional certificates in the *University Catalog* and on the webpage of the Office of the University Registrar (OUR). Policies concerning transfer credit and credit for correspondence work, Advanced Placement and other examinations (ACT, SAT, CLEP), extracurricular activities, military educational experiences, and Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) are published in the *University Catalog*, (p. 33-35). These processes ensure that

coursework and learning outcomes are collegiate level, comparable to NSU's requirements, and consistent with the university's mission as a "responsive, student-oriented institution" that maintains "as its highest priority excellence in teaching in graduate and undergraduate programs." Policies governing the transfer of credits into graduate programs are also published in the *Catalog*, (p. 132).

The institution also accepts credit for non-collegiate experiences, instruction, and training in some programs for students holding appropriate professional certification and licensure [i.e., the Criminal Justice (*Catalog*, p. 82), Allied Health (p. 98), RN to BSN (p. 103)]. Department faculty consider the award of credit on an individual basis and in accordance with recognized criteria.

The Registration, Credits, and Graduation Council (RCGC), which is composed of faculty, is the policy-making body for undergraduate studies and ensures that transferred coursework and related learning outcomes are at the collegiate level. Articulation and partnership agreements include guidelines that ensure coursework and learning outcomes are at the collegiate level. Signed copies of articulation and partnership agreements are published on the website of the Office of the University Registrar.

- 3.4.5** The institution publishes academic policies that adhere to principles of good educational practice. These policies are disseminated to students, faculty, and other interested parties through publications that accurately represent the programs and services of the institution. **(Academic policies)**

The institution has presented evidence of policies that adhere to good educational practices as mandated by the various educational and professional bodies, and approved by The Louisiana Board of Regents and the Board of Supervisors for the University of Louisiana System. The policies are published in the University Catalog and the appropriate Handbooks.

- 3.4.6** The institution employs sound and acceptable practices for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery. **(Practices for awarding credit)**

The institution follows state and institutional policies for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery. The Board of Supervisors (BOS) for the University of Louisiana System (ULS) and the Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR) define requirements for awarding credit at member institutions. At the institutional level, full-time faculty members of academic departments are responsible for both initiating and reviewing course offerings and curricular proposals and revisions. Department heads or directors then forward proposals to the academic dean for consideration. Proposals affecting undergraduate or graduate teacher education course offerings or programs are also submitted to the Teacher Education Council (TEC); and those affecting graduate courses or programs are submitted to the Graduate Council. Proposals are then submitted to the Office of the University Registrar (OUR). They are reviewed and approved by the University's Curriculum Review Council(CRC), chaired by the chief academic officer (non-voting member) and then forwarded to president for approval.

The ULS Board also establishes uniform policies for course numbering, class meeting, and seat time, as defined in the *Board Bylaws & Rules, Chapter 1, Section II*:

All developmental courses offered at institutions under the ULS Board shall begin with 0; freshman courses shall begin with 1; sophomore courses shall begin with 2; junior courses shall begin with 3; and senior courses shall begin with 4. Graduate-level courses shall begin with 5 or above. Institutions may award graduate credit in certain upper-level undergraduate courses.

Minimum length of courses is defined in *Chapter 1, Section VII*: "For each semester hour of credit, a traditional lecture or laboratory course shall strive to meet a minimum of 750 minutes. Final exam periods may be counted as class time when computing required minutes." Section VII also addresses courses offered through distance learning or as readings/special topic courses, independent study courses, or in other flexible formats, and stipulates the following:

In compliance with the BOR (*Seat Time Policy for Academic Credit*) classes must be of reasonable length and include both content and contact sufficient to maintain high academic quality and standards commensurate with credit hours awarded. The basis for such certification of learning is a valid, credible university assessment system that reliably determines whether a student possesses clearly identified, standards-based knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The institution requires that programs which have associated national accrediting bodies seek accreditation and those without such bodies undergo periodic program review. A review of minutes of the Curriculum Review Council and the Academic Program Review schedule demonstrate that the institution implements its policy for determining amount and level of credit.

- 3.4.7** The institution ensures the quality of educational programs and courses offered through consortia relationships or contractual agreements, ensures ongoing compliance with the *Principles* and periodically evaluates the consortial relationship and/or agreement against the mission of the institution. (*See the Commission policy "Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures."*) **(Consortia relationships/contractual agreements)**

The institution does not participate in any formal educational programs/courses offered through a consortial relationship or contractual agreement in which another institution or entity provides instruction for any of its programs. The institution participates in the *Inter-Institutional Collaborative Agreement to Offer the Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree (IICA)* between Northwestern and the University of Louisiana Lafayette, Southeastern Louisiana University, Southern University and A&M College, and Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center New Orleans. The institution describes the agreement as a course articulation and resource-sharing agreement, covering the following: (a) construct nine credit hour courses (three courses total) that can be transferred to/from each university and be automatically accepted toward the doctorate of nursing

practice degree, (b) share faculty development resources, (c) share faculty involved in capstone project development when requested, (d) share library resources, and (e) share program development/construction resources. The institution notes that each IICA institution is authorized to offer the DNP, and that none of the DNP programs offers joint or dual degrees. The institution provided a copy of the plan and letters of support from other participating universities as documentation.

**3.4.8** The institution awards academic credit for course work taken on a noncredit basis only when there is documentation that the noncredit course work is equivalent to a designated credit experience. **(Noncredit to credit)**

The institution also accepts credit for non-collegiate experiences, instruction, and training in some programs for students holding appropriate professional certification and licensure [i.e., the Criminal Justice (*Catalog*, p. 82), Allied Health (p. 98), RN to BSN (p. 103)]. Department faculty consider the award of credit on an individual basis and in accordance with recognized criteria.

**3.4.9** The institution provides appropriate academic support services. **(Academic support services)**

The institution utilizes multiple departments and academic units to provide academic support services designed to complement classroom experiences and enhance faculty and staff development. These services include advising, registering, counseling, and tutoring, as well as skill development for faculty and staff involved in educational and co-curricular activities. For distance-learning students, academic support services are, to the extent possible, equivalent to services for residential and commuter students.

Academic support services affecting student life and learning within and outside the classroom included myNSU (Student Web portal), academic advising services, Academic Success Center, Office of Disability Support, Student Support Services (TRIO program), Student Help Desk, The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education, Counseling and Career Services, Freshman Connection, Testing Center, Mathematics Laboratory, Computer Labs, Service members Opportunity College, Foreign Language Resource Center, International Student Exchange Program, and National Student Exchange Program. Academic support services responsible for readmission and early warning detection include the Readmit Contract Program and early warning systems. Academic support services for student athletes include the Johnnie Emmons Academic Center, Victorious for Life Program, and Enhanced Academic Program. Academic support services include courses that support academic skill development and new student transition.

Academic support services for faculty and staff include New Faculty Orientation, Office of Sponsored Programs, Endowed Professorships and Chairs, Research Day, Excellence in Teaching Awards, sabbatical, faculty and staff education opportunities, and faculty development courses. The institution's summaries of select departments and academic units make mention of increases in utilization of services, retention and graduation rates, and student satisfaction, as well as faculty and staff access to educational and professional support.

The institution appears to provide appropriate academic support services using multi-layered approaches involving departments and academic units. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources take the lead with distribution of national and university developed assessment tools, and make results available online for use by student organizations, faculty, and appropriate committees.

**3.4.10** The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of its curriculum with its faculty. **(Responsibility for curriculum)**

The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of its curriculum with its faculty. The process and procedures are outlined in the *Curriculum Review Council Procedural Guidelines*, published on the website of the Office of the Registrar. Proposals related to the curriculum may originate with any full-time faculty member of an academic department. A dated copy of each proposal is submitted to the department head or director, who submits to a curriculum committee, composed of faculty representing various disciplines within the academic unit, for review and approval. Proposals affecting teacher education are forwarded to the Teaching, Leadership, and Counseling Curriculum Committee, and those affecting graduate programs are forwarded to the Graduate Council prior to submission to the university's Curriculum Review Council, which must approve all new curricular initiatives or revisions. Final approval rests with the president of the institution.

To ensure that its curriculum is appropriate for its educational programs and mission, the university requires that each program be evaluated. Programs for which there are appropriate national accrediting bodies are required to seek national accreditation. The BOR track statewide accreditation statistics in its *Inventory of Degree and Certificate Programs* and its *Program Accreditation Summary*. Programs with no appropriate national accrediting body are required to complete a regularly scheduled Academic Program Review, including an external peer evaluation component. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee's review of supporting documents, CRC minutes, published on the Registrar's webpage; minutes of the Graduate Council and the TLC; and the *Faculty Handbook*, p. 7, confirm that policies and procedures are implemented.

In addition, some departments use advisory councils/panels comprised of representatives from academia, professional practice, business and industry, and the local community and region to keep them informed of best practices and relevancy of program to current industry practices. Examples from several programs were provided.

**\*3.4.11** For each major in a degree program, the institution assigns responsibility for program coordination, as well as for curriculum development and review, to persons academically qualified in the field. In those degree programs for which the institution does not identify a major, this requirement applies to a curricular area or concentration. **(Academic program coordination)**

A roster listing coordinator's name, title, area of responsibility, academic qualifications, and professional experience was provided as documentation that

the program coordinators hold appropriate academic qualifications in the field. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee found that all appear to be appropriately qualified to coordinate the program(s) to which they are assigned.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee verified the qualifications of a sampling of program coordinator credential files, met with program coordinators and held discussions with deans and the Interim Provost to determine selection of qualified coordinators. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee that the institution assigns responsibility for program coordination, as well as for curriculum development and review, to persons academically qualified in the field.

**3.4.12** The institution's use of technology enhances student learning and is appropriate for meeting the objectives of its programs. Students have access to and training in the use of technology. **(Technology use)**

From the evidence provided, the institution's Information Technology Services demonstrates its institutional commitment to enhance student learning by supporting faculty, students, and staff with the technology infrastructure to meet individual program objectives. Collaboration with academic and administrative units at all campus locations to acquire, deploy, and support technology and to develop proactive solutions to ensure resources are adequate in quality, scope, and condition to support programmatic and user needs is further enhanced by works with academic and administrative university leaders to ensure the integrity of program and course offerings. The ITS staff provides administrative support, academic computing, networking, telecommunications, hardware support, software support, and online learning. The budget funds of pay for staff support, computer hardware and software, network infrastructure, equipment and maintenance, and office operations. The ITS, through the Student Technology Advisory Team manages the student technology fee budget, allocating funds to provide computing equipment and facilities, and to provide on-site technology support and training for students. Training is available for student during freshman orientation, directly from faculty and the Student Technology staff, and through online tutorials.

**3.5.1** The institution identifies college-level general education competencies and the extent to which students have attained them. **(General education competencies)**

NSU has identified twelve competencies that form the General Education Core, and the university has provided a list of the courses (discipline and area) that satisfy these competencies. Further, the university delineates the general education requirements for baccalaureate and associate degrees, as well as for the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science. These requirements and the assessment methodology for the general education competencies are listed in the University Catalog. Although the University states that "departments closest to the competency requirement" are given the responsibility of developing assessment tools, only one "course-wide rubric" (Persuasion Speech Rubric) was provided as evidence. The institution did not address the extent to which students have attained the competencies. A NSSE comparative table was

provided. It was not clear how the NSSE results demonstrated that students had attained the identified competencies.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee finds that the institution provided evidence of institutional assessment of college-level general education competencies in its Taskstream Academic Assessment Workspace. Data were provided for AY 2014-2015 and AY 2015-2016; the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources indicated that assessment results from prior to 2014 were stored in a locally developed program, which became inaccessible after updating to Banner. While there is some evidence of student attainment of several of the competencies, the record is incomplete; the assessments are not always effective measures; and the data are not mature.

Also, in an interview with the General Education Committee, it was clear that while assessment of the core competencies was being undertaken, the information was not being reported out beyond the Department/College level.

While there is now an Institutional Effectiveness Plan—which combines assessment with the strategic plan and the budgeting process—it is just now being implemented, and thus as yet there are no consistent data to indicate the extent to which NSULA students are attaining all the stated general education competencies.

**Recommendation 7: The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee recommends that the institution assesses the extent to which students have attained college-level general education competencies.**

- 3.5.2** At least 25 percent of the credit hours required for the degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree. (*See the Commission policy “Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures.”*) **(Institutional credits for a degree).**

The institution publishes its requirements to ensure that a minimum of 25 percent of coursework required for a degree is completed at the institution. The requirements are published in the University Catalog, and Banner DegreeWorks is used for degree auditing to ensure the requirements are met. The institution did not provide evidence for the consideration of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee to document that 25 percent of the credits required for the degree are earned at NSU.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee finds that the institution has provided evidence to document that 25 percent of the credits required for the degree are earned at Northwestern State. Screen shots from DegreeWorks degree audit system show that students across undergraduate degree programs must complete a minimum of 30 semester hours out of 120 total at NSULA.

- 3.5.3** The institution publishes requirements for its undergraduate programs, including its general education components. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs. (*See the Commission policy “The Quality and Integrity of Undergraduate Degrees.”*) **(Undergraduate program requirements)**

Requirements for undergraduate programs and general education components are published in the University Catalog in electronic and print format. An electronic version of the catalog was provided as documentation. The University Catalog includes the University Core, which is the general education component.

Faculty use commonly accepted standards and practices in establishing program requirements. Some departments engage advisory councils and panels to ensure that the curriculum conforms to accepted professional standards and practices. The university uses common templates to initiate degree programs. The program and curriculum approval process includes faculty with expertise in relevant subject areas. All decisions related to associate, baccalaureate, and undergraduate certificate programs are approved by the university's Curriculum Review Council. Relevant university policies and procedures comply with the policies of the Louisiana Board of Regents and the Board of Supervisors of the University of Louisiana System. Periodic program reviews and reviews by professional and disciplinary accrediting agencies ensure continued consistency with commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs.

- 3.5.4** At least 25 percent of the course hours in each major at the baccalaureate level are taught by faculty members holding an appropriate terminal degree—usually the earned doctorate or the equivalent of the terminal degree. **(Terminal degrees of faculty)**

The narrative stated that the Nursing major did not meet the 25 percent threshold for Fall 2015. All other baccalaureate majors met the threshold for Fall 2015. The narrative stated that for Spring 2016, at least 25 percent of the course work for all baccalaureate majors were taught by faculty members holding the appropriate terminal degree in the field.

The institution provided a list of faculty members by program who were identified as having the terminal degree. However, the degrees held by the faculty members were not included in the list. Another document submitted as verification included the percentage of faculty members with a terminal degree by instructional site, major, and course hours taught, but it was not clear to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee how the percentages were calculated.

In its Focused Report, the institution provided two tables that show the percentage of course hours taught in each major by faculty holding terminal degrees, including an additional column for total course hours taught by major and by instructional site. The column "% hours taught by Terminally Degreed Instructors" is derived by dividing course hours taught "By Instructors Terminally Degreed" by "Total Hours Taught." Percentages are included for the entire program as well as each instructional site (including Internet). The institution has also added information on the areas of concentration for each faculty member holding the terminal degree.

The Department of Nursing did not meet the 25 percent threshold for Fall 2015. However, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed evidence provided by the Department that documented the recent hiring of two tenure-line instructors with the terminal degree in field (replacing two retiring faculty without the terminal

degree in field), bringing their percentage of courses taught by faculty with the terminal degree to 44.95%.

**3.6.1** The institution's post-baccalaureate professional degree programs, and its master's and doctoral degree programs, are progressively more advanced in academic content than its undergraduate programs. **(Post-baccalaureate program rigor)**

At the time of the Off-Site Review, the institution asserted that graduate-level courses require progressively more advanced academic content and that course syllabi stipulate that graduate students must perform at a more advanced level and undertake additional assignments as compared with their undergraduate counterparts. In addition, the institution indicated all graduate students are expected to demonstrate higher levels of cognitive development, to synthesize theories, to demonstrate competencies, to utilize scholarly inquiry, to analyze effects, and to contribute to continuing professional development. It further stated that these "higher levels are distinct from undergraduate outcomes, which focus on integrating theory, utilizing information resources, applying principles, and demonstrating professional development."

As evidence, the institution presented the descriptions with notes for a set of courses--undergraduate and graduate--from three programs: English (Fundamentals of Linguistics), Special Education (Introduction to Students with Disabilities), and Nursing (Research /Project Practicum courses). It further asserted that national accreditation for respective graduate programs underscores the expectations of research, writing, and independent learning in graduate study and provides, using as example the syllabus for Counseling 5840: Advanced Diagnosis and Psychopharmacology, in which all assignments and exams are related to *Specialty Standards* of the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP). However, supporting documentation such as course syllabi were not provided for the courses used in the chart. The notes provided in the chart of courses for the linguistics courses do not clearly demonstrate that the graduate course is more advanced in content than the undergraduate course. The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee could not determine that the institution's graduate programs progressively more advanced in academic content than its undergraduate programs.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed syllabi for graduate courses and compared them to undergraduate course syllabi to determine if rigor exists for post baccalaureate courses. Interviews were also held with program coordinators responsible for graduate curricula, along with the deans of graduate programs, and the Graduate Dean, who is also the Interim Provost, to further confirm that the expectations for student learning and application of learning are higher and greater for graduate students, compared to undergraduate student learning. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee concludes that the institution's post-baccalaureate professional degree programs, and its master's and doctoral degree programs, are progressively more advanced in academic content than its undergraduate programs.

**3.6.2** The institution structures its graduate curricula (1) to include knowledge of the literature of the discipline and (2) to ensure ongoing student engagement in

research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences.  
**(Graduate curriculum)**

The narrative stated that Northwestern State University of Louisiana's graduate programs are structured to include knowledge of the literature of the discipline and engagement in research and/or professional practice and training experiences. A statement of support for these expectations is included in the Graduate School webpage. Guidelines for preparing a final research document are also included on the Graduate School webpage.

Six course descriptions from the catalog were provided as examples of how graduate instruction promotes knowledge of the literature and research or professional practice and training. One syllabus from an internship course was provided to demonstrate student engagement in professional practice and training experiences. The course descriptions did not provide sufficient information for the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee to determine how the graduate curricula is structured to include knowledge of literature and ongoing student engagement in research.

In its Focused Report, the institution provided an explanation of the expectations for graduate programs and cited the University catalog and the Graduate website to support their assertion that, "curricula in graduate programs of study at Northwestern are structures to include knowledge of the literature of the discipline and to ensure continued student engagement in research and/or professional practice and training experiences." Five more graduate syllabi were provided to the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee and a review of those revealed that all but one, Art 5950, Research in Art, reflect learning objectives that include a knowledge of the literature in the discipline and engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and experience. Although the ART 5950 syllabus did not include learning objectives, the assignments required of students accomplish the expectation that students in the course will develop a knowledge of the literature in the discipline.

Through a review of a sample of graduate syllabi and interviews with graduate program coordinators and the Graduate Dean, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee affirmed that the institution structures its graduate curricula (1) to include knowledge of the literature of the discipline and (2) to ensure ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experience.

- 3.6.3** At least one-third of credits toward a graduate or a post-baccalaureate professional degree are earned through instruction offered by the institution awarding the degree. (See the Commission policy "Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures.") **(Institutional credits for a degree)**

The institution requires at least two-thirds of graduate coursework to be completed in-house. This requirement is published in the University Catalog. The institution ensures compliance by being clear about the two-thirds policy on the NSU Application for Transfer of Graduate Credits form, by having the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research complete a degree audit for each graduate

student, and by using Banner DegreeWorks Audit System to monitor/ensure that the requirement is met.

- 3.6.4** The institution defines and publishes requirements for its graduate and post-graduate professional programs. These requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs. **(Post-baccalaureate program requirements)**

The institution defines and publishes requirements for its graduate and post-baccalaureate professional programs in the *Graduate Catalog*. Programs specify admission requirements, the number of required credit hours, the maximum number of allowable transfer hours, course load, grade point average, time to degree, credit hour equivalents, and clock-contact hours among others. Each program specifies curriculum requirements, including foundational courses and concentrations, free electives, and exit requirements (dissertation or thesis, comprehensive exams, projects). Program requirements conform to commonly accepted standards and practices for degree programs.

- 3.7.1** The institution employs competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution. When determining acceptable qualifications of its faculty, an institution gives primary consideration to the highest earned degree in the discipline. The institution also considers competence, effectiveness, and capacity, including, as appropriate, undergraduate and graduate degrees, related work experiences in the field, professional licensure and certifications, honors and awards, continuous documented excellence in teaching, or other demonstrated competencies and achievements that contribute to effective teaching and student learning outcomes. For all cases, the institution is responsible for justifying and documenting the qualifications of its faculty. (See *Commission guidelines "Faculty Credentials."*) **(Faculty competence)**

The institution presented a report stating that "the university considers the highest degree earned in the discipline when determining acceptable qualifications" and that "qualified temporary and/or adjunct faculty members are hired;" however, the university did not define what the highest degrees are for the various disciplines nor did it offer any definitions for qualified temporary/adjunct faculty. In addition, institution stated that "each department head/director and/or dean reviews and verifies transcripts and credentials using the Verification of Faculty Credentials Form,, and that justifications are provided for those faculty who do not meet the credentialing guidelines. A review of the supplied documentation showed many faculty members (full-time and temporary) who do not meet the criteria; the institution did not supply any justification for them for the consideration of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee. A Request for Justifying and Documenting Qualifications of Faculty form has been completed for these faculty members and is attached to this report.

In its Focused Report, the institution shared information about the nine faculty members identified by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee as not having adequate credentials and/or justifications provided. The institution identified the two departments where these nine faculty were assigned; Criminal Justice, History, and Social Sciences, and Family and Consumer Sciences. The

institution explained the highest degree identified in both departments and how faculty qualifications are defined in both.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee met with department heads, deans, and the Interim Provost. In addition, the Committee reviewed faculty credentials files to verify that the missing qualifications were found and that justifications, where needed, were adequate and appropriate. A form in use by Academic Affairs establishes faculty qualifications upon hiring. This pertains to full and part-time (adjunct) faculty.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee concludes that institution provided evidence that it employs competent faculty members qualified to accomplish the mission and goals of the institution.

**3.7.2** The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status. **(Faculty evaluation)**

According to guidelines of the University of Louisiana System Board of Supervisors (ULS), each university under the ULS jurisdiction must evaluate all of its faculty members annually. The NSU Faculty Handbook describes overall guidelines for evaluating faculty for merit, retention, tenure, and promotion. According to the handbook (p. 35), "all units must have published (either in print or on a Web site) guidelines for review of faculty; in some cases, these guidelines may differ from those in this *Handbook*."

No documentation was provided for the consideration of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee to show the criteria used by each unit to evaluate faculty. In addition, the institution did not adequately describe how it evaluates faculty who are not within the definitions of ranked faculty, such as special status faculty (adjunct or term-contract). Memoranda from unit deans were provided as documentation to support that evaluations were completed; however, no completed evaluations were provided as examples.

In its Focused Report, the institution explained that tenure-track faculty are evaluated using a Faculty Activity Report (FAR), annually, beginning in January. The FAR is reviewed by a promotion and tenure committee, department head, dean, Interim Provost, and President. Tenured professors, instructors, and other Special status faculty also complete a FAR but their FARs remain with the department heads. Adjunct faculty are evaluated by supervisors, usually department heads, at the end of each semester in which they teach. All faculty have appraisals of courses completed and grade distributions are considered as part of a faculty member's evaluation.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee concludes that institution provided evidence that it regularly evaluates the effectiveness of each faculty member in accord with published criteria, regardless of contractual or tenured status.

**3.7.3** The institution provides evidence of ongoing professional development of faculty as teachers, scholars, and practitioners. **(Faculty development)**

At the time of the Off-Site Review, the institution documented various ways in which the university provides or intends to provide professional development opportunities for its faculty. Established processes such as Endowed Professorships and Chairs, Excellence in Teaching Awards, and Sabbaticals provide positive examples of ongoing professional development opportunities for faculty. The University Strategic Plan (2011-2018, p. 9) laid out specific strategies to improve professional development across the institution. However, it was not clear to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee whether the strategies for faculty professional development have been implemented. There was no indication that the university has allocated any resources for faculty development in support of the strategic plan. Links to the Faculty/Staff Newsletter and the University's online calendar provided as support did not appear to lead to specific pages for the relevant information.

In its Focused Report, the institution listed five categories of Faculty Development activities implemented on its campus. It also provided a list of specific activities offered between 2013 and 2016, and a list of courses offered for faculty by the Office of Electronic and Continuing Education. Additionally, the Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs provided documentation indicating that monies to support faculty professional development were available via the Academic Enhancement Fee fund, WISE funds, and multiple endowed professorships, available in all colleges and awarded to faculty for two-year periods.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee concludes that the institution has allocated resources for faculty development in support of the strategic plan.

**3.7.4** The institution ensures adequate procedures for safeguarding and protecting academic freedom. **(Academic freedom)**

The institution defines academic freedom as the "right of scholars in institutions of higher education freely to study, discuss, investigate, teach, and publish" (*Faculty Handbook*, p. 28-29). The policy articulates the university's commitment to academic freedom and to fostering an environment whereby faculty, students, and staff may develop to their fullest potential as persons, teachers, artists, researchers, and scholars. The policy is in accordance with that of the Board of Supervisors (BOS) for the University of Louisiana System (*Board Bylaws & Rules*, Chapter 3, Section 1) and reflects the policy of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), as articulated in its *1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*.

The institution noted that the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) and Faculty Senate work together to ensure that these rights and responsibilities are preserved and that problems and concerns of the university community are addressed through the grievance procedure, as described in Chapter 8 ("Grievance Procedure") of the Faculty Handbook, p. 52-54.

The institution reported one case involving 16 tenured faculty members whose positions were terminated due to program consolidation and elimination mandated by the Board of Regents. The institution indicated that this case involved issues of Academic Freedom and resulted in a sanction by AAUP. The institution also reported that the Faculty Senate has found that relations between

administration and faculty are good and has asked that it continue to work to resolve the issue, pending since 2012. It was not clear to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee whether the case actually pertains to academic freedom and whether the institution's actions demonstrate that the institution has adequate procedures to safeguard and protect academic freedom.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed a report of the AAUP with annotations by the University System of Louisiana regarding the termination of 16 tenured faculty members. The report concludes that "without a strong tenure system and chief administration officers who respect it, academic freedom at the institution remains insecure." As such, the report does not actually indicate a violation of academic freedom took place at Northwestern State.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee concludes that the institution ensures adequate procedures for safeguarding and protecting academic freedom.

**3.7.5** The institution publishes policies on the responsibility and authority of faculty in academic and governance matters. **(Faculty role in governance)**

The university faculty are involved in academic and governance matters relating to curriculum and academic programs. As noted in the Faculty Handbook (p. 6) published online, the Curriculum Review Council (CRC) is responsible for all undergraduate and graduate curricula. The CRC includes two representatives from each academic college and reports to the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

According to the Faculty Handbook (p. 11), the Faculty Senate consists of elected representatives of the faculty. The Faculty Senate is identified as an advisory group that makes recommendations to the President of NSU and the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

The Faculty Handbook also describes how faculty are involved in other matters of academic and university governance including: (1) Recruitment and Employment of Faculty; (2) Academic Freedom; (3) Retention, Tenure, and Promotion; (4) Termination of Tenured and Non-Tenured Faculty; (5) Evaluation of Faculty Serving as Administrators; and (6) Filing a Grievance. Faculty through the Faculty Senate participate in numerous institutional committees and task forces.

**3.8.1** The institution provides facilities and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research, and service mission. **(Learning/information resources)**

From the narrative and documentation provided, it is clear that the institution provides facilities and learning/information resources that are appropriate to support its teaching, research and services missions. The assessment instruments and the self-study for external review have helped with providing the framework for improvements in library services and for providing external validation of the appropriateness of the facilities and learning/information resources.

In addition to the main (Watson) library, there are library services provided at the Shreveport and Leesville campuses. The report submitted by an outside evaluator has provided a context for improvements of the library services and resources. Additional learning and information resources (Academic Success Center, Office of Disability Support, Testing Center, Computer Labs, and Foreign Language Resource Center) provide further evidence of adequate support.

**3.8.2** The institution ensures that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning/information resources. **(Instruction of library use)**

The evidence provided sufficiently supports the institution's case that the library instruction program is proactive in ensuring that users have access to regular and timely instruction in the use of the library and other learning and information resources. Information literacy initiatives include face-to-face instruction sessions for students and faculty (such as UNIV 1000), web delivery methods, and targeted digital learning objectives; library instruction sessions that are assignment- and discipline-specific at faculty request; librarians assigned to specific academic departments and embedded within the college/school/department; individual research assistance in person, via online chat, email, phone, or text, online tutorials and web-based research guides at the discipline and course level; and topical presentations and workshops for specific groups.

**3.8.3** The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experiences in library and/or other learning/information resources—to accomplish the mission of the institution. **(Qualified staff)**

The evidence provided in the narrative clearly supports the assertion that the institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff with appropriate education or experiences in library and/or other learning/information resources to accomplish the mission the institution. The professional and support staff also have adequate resources for growth and ongoing professional development.

**3.9.1** The institution publishes a clear and appropriate statement of student rights and responsibilities and disseminates the statement to the campus community. **(Student rights)**

The institution publishes information about student rights and responsibilities. This information is accessible to the campus community through the student handbook (Code of Conduct, Article III, "Student Rights and Responsibilities"). The institution's Code of Conduct Policies are required to conform to guidelines established by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) for the University of Louisiana System (ULS). The Dean of Students, or designee empowered by the University president, facilitates due process rights set forth in the student handbook, adjudicates reports of alleged violations of regulations and/or standards governing student behavior, and ensures that hearing and appeal processes are followed. Also, the institution publishes FERPA, civility and Title IX statement in its student handbook, and it includes civility and Title IX statement on all academic syllabi.

The institution publishes clear and appropriate statements of student rights and responsibilities in the student handbook, syllabi and Office of Registrar's website. Sample syllabi were provided as evidence of publication of civility and Title IX statement on classroom materials. BOS Bylaws & Rules were provided as evidence of the institutional mandate to establish rules and regulations governing student conduct.

**3.9.2** The institution protects the security, confidentiality, and integrity of its student records and maintains security measures to protect and back up data. **(Student records).**

The institution takes appropriate precautions guided by FERPA, HIPAA, American Association of Collegiate Registrars, Admissions Offices, and the American Counseling Association Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics, Information Technology Services and departmental policies and procedures to protect the security, confidentiality, and integrity of student records, including back up of electronic data. The institution is also required to comply with relevant guidelines established by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) for the University of Louisiana System (ULS). The institution outlined practices for safeguarding and storing electronic and non-electronic academic and non-academic records by department and types of student records handled.

The institution appears to protect the security, confidentiality, and integrity of student records and maintain special security measures, to restrict access, to protect, and back up data. Federal and institutional policies, discipline specific standards, departmental procedures, confidentiality/security related forms, and vendor contracts were provided as evidence of institutional measures and safeguards.

**3.9.3** The institution provides a sufficient number of qualified staff—with appropriate education or experience in the student affairs area—to accomplish the mission of the institution. **(Qualified staff)**

The Division for the Student Experience provides an array of programs and services. Each program is led by professionals who possess the appropriate credentials that prepare them to be effective in their respective positions. Because of limited state funding for higher education, the Division provides ongoing training and development opportunities through acquired grants. For professional staff, training and development opportunities are available through the Northwestern Annual Faculty Institute; the Institute offered sessions related to working with the LGBTQ college students, Title IX, and Technology. Also, the institution requires all employees to participate in training related to ethics, campus security, campus crisis (active shooter), blood borne pathogens, safe driving, and preventing sexual harassment. Lastly, the Division annually evaluates its staff, and copies of evaluations are maintained in personnel files in the Office of the Vice President for the Student Experience.

The Division appears to provide qualified staff with appropriate education or experience in student affairs. Resumes and a snap shot of years of experience in higher education were provided for all professional staff. Licensure, certification,

and continuing education of select personnel were provided as evidence of professional qualifications.

**3.10.1** The institution's recent financial history demonstrates financial stability. **(Financial stability)**

The institution provided audited financial statements for the past three fiscal years but was lacking the report for the most recently completed fiscal year, which was supplied to the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee. All other evidence provided, such as enrollment, endowment performance, endowment distributions, financial reports and budget reports, demonstrate financial stability.

**\*3.10.2** The institution audits financial aid programs as required by federal and state regulations. **(Financial aid audits)**

At the time of the Off-Site Review, the institution provided audit reports and management letters for the preceding three fiscal years demonstrating that the financial aid programs are audited as required by federal and state regulations. No findings were noted.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the August 18, 2016 Federal Student Aid audit of programs as authorized pursuant to Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, and conducted interviews with the Acting President. The report contained five audit findings.

- Finding 1: Verification Violation: a verification violation was identified for one student. Evidence has been provided to demonstrate corrective action taken by the institution.
- Finding 2: Inaccurate Student Status Reporting: One student status error was identified and corrected. No further action was required from DOE.
- Finding 3: Exit Loan Counseling Deficiency: No evidence of exit loan counseling for one student was identified. Counseling notification was mailed to the student. No further action requested by the DOE.
- Finding 4: Failure to Update Application to Participate: Notice to the Secretary was not provided for three loan service providers. Notification has been completed and no further action is required.
- Finding 5: Crime Awareness Requirements Not Met – Failure to Accurately Report Crime Statistic (Clery Act): The review noted a discrepancy in the institutions crime statistics. The report notes the exception identified in this finding constitutes a serious violation of the Clery Act that by their nature cannot be cured.

In the committee's on-site interview, the Acting President provided the University's response, dated September 13, 2016, that addresses the five findings contained in the report. Additionally, a September 2016 Clery Act policy statement for the Office of Campus Police was provided and reviewed on-site.

**3.10.3** The institution exercises appropriate control over all its financial resources. **(Control of finances)**

The institution provided financial statements, audit reports, management letters, and a historical comparison of net assets for the preceding three fiscal years as evidence of appropriate control over financial resources. The audit report and management letter for the most recently ended fiscal year was not available at the time of the Off-Site Review.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee has received and reviewed the audit report issued on November 16, 2016 from the Louisiana Legislative Auditor and finds that the institution has adequate financial resources to support the institutional mission and affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee. The audit report did cite, for the second consecutive year, a finding related to inappropriate access to the Banner Student Information System. While allowing this inappropriate access can lead increased risk of errors or fraud, no instances were identified as part of the audit. Corrections to system access were completed on October 14, 2016. An interview was completed by the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee with the Chief Information Officer, who presented evidence of formal policy regarding Banner ERP Access and Security revised as of October 6, 2015 and certified that inappropriate access has been remedied in a letter dated October 14, 2016 from the CIO to the Legislative Auditor.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee determined that the institution demonstrates through written policy and practice, appropriate financial resource control, separate and effective budgeting processes, financial reporting and audit compliance, and a written investment policy.

**3.10.4** The institution maintains financial control over externally funded or sponsored research and programs. **(Control of sponsored research/external funds)**

The institution provided audit reports and management letters for the preceding three fiscal years, which demonstrate that the university maintains financial control over external funds, and sponsored research and programs.

**3.11.1** The institution exercises appropriate control over all its physical resources. **(Control of physical resources)**

The institution provided audit reports, management letters, and a comparative analysis of unrestricted net assets for the preceding three fiscal years. The institution also provided documentation demonstrating appropriate controls for inventory, accounting, and other planning and control activities.

**3.11.2** The institution takes reasonable steps to provide a healthy, safe, and secure environment for all members of the campus community. **(Institutional environment)**

The institution provided evidence of reasonable measures to provide a healthy, safe and secure environment. This evidence includes appropriate and qualified staff. Institutional policies and emergency plans for safety, security and disasters are in place.

- \*3.11.3** The institution operates and maintains physical facilities, both on and off campus, that appropriately serve the needs of the institution's educational programs, support services, and other mission-related activities. **(Physical facilities)**

The institution has demonstrated that it operates and maintains physical facilities that appropriately serve institutionally related activities by providing evidence of regular ongoing maintenance and capital programs. The Facilities Master Plan Annual Update provides building specific level detail for capital replacement, construction, renovation and deferred maintenance as well as progress on annual goals.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee visited the off-campus instructional site in Alexandria. See Appendix B for a summary of the visit and the facility. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

- 3.12.1** The institution notifies the Commission of changes in accordance with the Commission's substantive change policy and, when required, seeks approval prior to the initiation of changes. *(See the Commission policy "Substantive Changes for Accredited Institutions.")* **(Substantive change)**

The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed Northwestern State University of Louisiana's Substantive Change Guidelines specifying the requirements for the submission of significant changes in academic programming and the process for internal review. The University's policy is consistent with SACSCOC Substantive Change notification requirements.

- 3.13.1** The institution complies with the policies of the Commission on Colleges. **(Policy compliance)**

**\*3.13.1. "Accrediting Decisions of Other Agencies"**

**Applicable Policy Statement.** Any institution seeking or holding accreditation from more than one U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting body must describe itself in identical terms to each recognized accrediting body with regard to purpose, governance, programs, degrees, diplomas, certificates, personnel, finances, and constituencies, and must keep each institutional accrediting body apprised of any change in its status with one or another accrediting body.

**Documentation:** The institution should (1) list federally recognized agencies that currently accredit the institution or any of its programs, (2) provide the date of the most recent review by each agency and indicate if negative action was taken by the agency and the reason for such action, (3) provide copies of statements used to describe itself for each of the accrediting bodies, (4) indicate any agency that has terminated accreditation, the date, and the reason for termination, and (5) indicate the date and reason for the institution voluntarily withdrawing accreditation with any of the agencies.

The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the list of accrediting body program reviews and comments. The most recent reviews by each agency were provided with requested follow-up requirements cited. The dates of the most recent review by each agency were provided. The institution was consistent in describing itself to the accrediting bodies. No agencies terminated the accreditation of any program.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the dates of the most recent review by each agency provided. The Committee determined that the institution was consistent in describing itself to the accrediting bodies and that no agencies have terminated the accreditation of any program. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

### **3.13.2 “Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards: Policy and Procedures”**

**Applicable Policy Statement.** Member institutions are responsible for notifying and providing SACSCOC with signed final copies of agreements governing their collaborative academic arrangements (as defined in this policy). These arrangements must address the requirements set forth in the collaborative academic arrangements policy and procedures. For all such arrangements, SACSCOC-accredited institutions assume responsibility for (1) the integrity of the collaborative academic arrangements, (2) the quality of credits recorded on their transcripts, and (3) compliance with accreditation requirements.

**Documentation:** The institution should provide evidence that it has reported to the Commission all collaborative academic arrangements (as defined in this policy) that included signed final copies of the agreements. In addition, the institution should integrate into the Compliance Certification a discussion and determination of compliance with all standards applicable to the provisions of the agreements.

The institution does not participate in any formal educational programs/courses offered through a consortial relationship or contractual agreement.

### **\*3.13.3 “Complaint Procedures Against the Commission or Its Accredited Institutions”**

**Applicable Policy Statement.** Each institution is required to have in place student complaint policies and procedures that are reasonable, fairly administered, and well-publicized. (See *FR 4.5*). The Commission also requires, in accord with federal regulations, that each institution maintains a record of complaints received by the institution. This record is made available to the Commission upon request. This record will be reviewed and evaluated by the Commission as part of the institution’s decennial evaluation.

**Documentation:** When addressing this policy statement, the institution should provide information to the Commission describing how the institution maintains its record and also include the following: (1) individuals/offices responsible for the maintenance of the record(s), (2) elements of a complaint review that are included in the record, and (3) where the record(s) is located (centralized or decentralized). The record itself will be reviewed during the on-site evaluation of the institution.

The institution provided information about its decentralized complaint resolution process. Records of written complaints against the institution are maintained by the institution and records of written student complaints or grievances are available through the Dean of Students Office. The institution described the elements of a complaint that are maintained in the record of complaints. The elements are the date of the filing of the complaint, the name of complainant, the nature of the complaint, the names of persons against whom the complainant lodges a complaint, and the outcome of the complaint process.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee considered the institution's decentralized complaint resolution process and confirmed that the records of written complaints against the institution are maintained by the institution and records of written student complaints or grievances are available through the Dean of Students Office. The institution's record of student complaints includes the date of the filing of the complaint, the name of complainant, the nature of the complaint, the names of persons against whom the complainant lodges a complaint, and the outcome of the complaint process. A review by the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee of the documentation provided affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

### 3.13.4 "Reaffirmation of Accreditation and Subsequent Reports"

**\*3.13.4.a. Applicable Policy Statement.** An institution includes a review of its distance learning programs in the Compliance Certification.

**Documentation:** In order to be in compliance with this policy, the institution must have incorporated an assessment of its compliance with standards that apply to its distance and correspondence education programs and courses and its off campus instructional sites.

During the course of its review, the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee noted that distance education was addressed in some of the applicable standards such as library/learning resources standards and elements of student services standards (e.g., the Testing Center, the orientation class for freshmen, and student complaints). Distance education was not addressed consistently in other applicable standards such as the curriculum, facilities, finances, the institutional mission, organizational structure, and institutional effectiveness.

In its Focused Report, the institution specifically outlined the review of distance education in the context of its mission, curriculum, facilities/finances, organizational structure and institutional effectiveness. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the following documents: the last two iterations of the strategic plan, the NSU Guidelines for Online Programs (May 2016), the 2016 Departmental Guidelines for the Office of Electronic and Continuing Education (ECE), and the ECE organizational Chart. The Committee also interviewed the Vice President for Technology, Innovation, and Economic Development, who leads the ECE.

The Committee determined that NSU, a campus dedicated to serving a large rural region, utilizes distance education as a key means to deliver instruction to place bound students. Online learning is offered at a reduced rate even to those students outside the state.

Moreover, there is a significant investment of finances through the Learning Management System and adequate facilities are provided to the ECE office including a specialized lab for professional development, instructional design, and technical support services. In addition, the university maintains substantial bandwidth for instruction and communication through its participation in the Louisiana Optical Networking Initiative (LONI).

The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education provides primary oversight of guidelines and standards related to distance education courses, which the faculty follow in developing curriculum for distance learning programs. Further, the

university adopted initiatives to strengthen distance learning programs including an institutionally-designed training program for online teaching and the Quality Matters certification process, both of which are monitored by ECE.

A few examples of university guidelines include:

- Online courses must be submitted each semester in accordance with the procedures set forth by Electronic and Continuing Education and the Office of Technology, Innovation, and Economic Development.
- All Internet/Web based courses must use the course management/gateway software package(s) approved by the University.
- All Internet courses will be hosted on designated secure university servers, which are managed and supported by Information Technology Services in accordance with approved electronic data processing policies and procedures.
- Electronic courses should be designed and evaluated according to those standards utilized for regular courses and identified by SREB, SACSCOC, and/or Quality Matters.
- Courses developed under contract with Electronic and Continuing Education will meet expectations of the approved standards rubric.

For purposes of institutional effectiveness, the evaluation of distance learning programs is incorporated into the institution's overall IE process. Distance learning programs, like campus-based programs, gather data to evaluate student learning outcomes, retention and persistence rates, and student satisfaction with course and instructor. For programs offered both on campus and through the distance education, the student learning outcomes are also the same.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee concludes that the institution incorporated an assessment of its compliance with standards that apply to its distance and correspondence education programs and courses and its off campus instructional sites.

**3.13.4.b. Applicable Policy Statement.** If an institution is part of a system or corporate structure, a description of the system operation (or corporate structure) is submitted as part of the Compliance Certification for the decennial review. The description should be designed to help members of the peer review committees understand the mission, governance, and operating procedures of the system and the individual institution's role with in that system.

**Documentation:** The institution should provide a description of the system operation and structure or the corporate structure if this applies.

The institution provided descriptive narrative of the structure of the University Louisiana System, of which it is a part, as well as supporting documentation including relevant articles from the Louisiana State Constitution. An organizational chart Louisiana Public Postsecondary Education Governance Structure further illustrates the institution's relationship to the system.

### **3.13.5 "Separate Accreditation for Units of a Member Institution"**

**\*3.13.5.a. Applicable Policy Statement.** All branch campuses related to the parent campus through corporate or administrative control (1) include the name of the parent campus and make it clear that its accreditation is dependent on the continued accreditation of the parent campus and (2) are evaluated during reviews for institutions seeking candidacy, initial membership, or reaffirmation of accreditation. All other extended units under the accreditation of the parent campus are also evaluated during such reviews.

**Documentation:** For institutions with branch campuses: (1) The name of each branch campus must include the name of the parent campus—the SACSCOC accredited entity. The institution should provide evidence of this for each of its branch campuses. (2) The institution should incorporate the review of its branch campuses, as well as other extended units under the parent campus, into its comprehensive self-assessment and its determination of compliance with the standards, and indicate the procedure for doing so.

The institution indicated that it does not have any branch campuses; therefore, this standard is not applicable.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee confirms that the institution does not have any branch campuses; therefore, this standard is not applicable.

**3.13.5.b. Applicable Policy Statement.** If the Commission on Colleges determines that an extended unit is autonomous to the extent that the control over that unit by the parent or its board is significantly impaired, the Commission may direct that the extended unit seek to become a separately accredited institution. A unit which seeks separate accreditation should bear a different name from that of the parent. A unit which is located in a state or country outside the geographic jurisdiction of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and which the Commission determines should be separately accredited or the institution requests to be separately accredited, applies for separate accreditation from the regional accrediting association that accredits colleges in that state or country

**Implementation:** If, during its review of the institution, the Commission determines that an extended unit is sufficiently autonomous to the extent that the parent campus has little or no control, the Commission will use this policy to recommend separate accreditation of the extended unit. ***No response required by the institution.***

The institution indicated that it does not have any autonomous extended units; therefore, this standard is not applicable.

**3.14.1** A member or candidate institution represents its accredited status accurately and publishes the name, address, and telephone number of the Commission in accordance with Commission requirements and federal policy. **(Publication of accreditation status)**

The institution represents its accredited status accurately and publishes the name, address, and telephone number of the Commission in accordance with SACSCOC's requirements and federal policy.

## **D. Assessment of Compliance with Section 4: Federal Requirements**

**\*4.1** The institution evaluates success with respect to student achievement consistent with its mission. Criteria may include: enrollment data; retention, graduation, course completion, and job placement rates; state licensing examinations, student

portfolios; or other means of demonstrating achievement of goals. **(Student achievement)**

### **Compliance**

The institution monitors enrollment, graduation rates, licensure exam pass rates, and retention as criteria by which to measure student achievement. Additionally, job placement rates, post-baccalaureate admission rates, program accreditation, and student portfolio development are also used to document student success. These criteria are appropriate to its teaching mission and are used to refine and develop programs, services, activities that enhance student success. Data and targets are provided for enrollment, retention, graduation rates, and licensure examinations.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee confirms that the institution monitors enrollment, graduation rates, licensure exam pass rates, and retention as criteria by which to measure student achievement. Additionally, job placement rates, post-baccalaureate admission rates, program accreditation, and student portfolio development are also used to document student success. These criteria are appropriate to its teaching mission and are used to refine and develop programs, services, activities that enhance student success. Data and targets are provided for enrollment, retention, graduation rates, and licensure examinations. Review of the documentation by the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

- \*4.2** The institution's curriculum is directly related and appropriate to the mission and goals of the institution and the diplomas, certificates, or degrees awarded. **(Program curriculum)**

The institution's curriculum aligns with its mission and goals as defined by the university's strategic plan and by the relevant governing boards within the State of Louisiana. The degrees, diplomas, and certificates offered are all in line with generally accepted practices and standards in higher education.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the Louisiana Board of Regents' *Master Plan for Postsecondary Education in Louisiana* and Northwestern State University of Louisiana's Strategic Plan and mission statement; and interviewed Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar in support of the institution's case for compliance and affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

- \*4.3** The institution makes available to students and the public current academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies. **(Publication of policies)**

The institution's academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies are available via the University Catalog and Office of University Registrar's website. Each academic calendar includes advising dates; beginning dates for registration; final day to drop a class and be refunded or have fees adjusted; final day to register, add courses, make section changes; beginning date for dropping classes with a "W" grade; final day to appeal a grade; dates for holiday breaks; final day for undergraduate and graduate students to apply for graduation; dates

classes resume; final day to remove an “I” grade with approved 60-day waiver; last day of classes; final examination dates; date when candidate grades are due to be entered via NSUConnect; date when all grades are due to be entered via NSUConnect; residence halls closure date; date and times for commencement exercises (only for fall and spring semesters) and date the semester ends. The institution’s refund policies are also found on the University’s Consumer Information and Student-Right-To-Know webpages.

The institution appears to make available to students and the public current academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies. A hard copy of the University Catalog 2016-17 was provided as evidence of the above-mentioned.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the university catalog and Registrar’s website and conducted interviews with the Registrar in support of the institution’s case for compliance and affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

**\*4.4 Program length is appropriate for each of the institution’s educational programs. (Program length)**

Documentation provided by the institution confirms that the university complies with the guidelines established by the Louisiana Board of Regents and other state regulatory boards regarding program length. NSU has documented the process for establishing new programs. The University Catalog and Registrar’s website contain specific details regarding the length of each academic program; these appear to be in keeping with commonly accepted practice in higher education.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the catalog and website, and conducted interviews with the Interim Provost, Graduate Dean, department heads, and deans in support of the institution’s case for compliance and affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee, that program length is appropriate for each of the institution’s educational programs.

**\*4.5 The institution has adequate procedures for addressing written student complaints and is responsible for demonstrating that it follows those procedures when resolving student complaints. (See the Commission policy “Complaint Procedures against the Commission or its Accredited Institutions.”) (Student complaints)**

The institution publishes its student complaint and appeal policies and procedures, as well as Non-Discrimination and Title IX related policies, in the student handbook; information about student complaints is also available on the Student Affairs and student complaints webpages. On the student complaints webpage, students are directed to the Dean of Students for additional assistance in lodging and resolving complaints. A dedicated email, deanofstudents@nsula.edu, was established for the purposes of viewing and filing student complaints.

The institution’s policies and procedures are applicable to all students regardless of their location or course delivery method. The institution utilizes a decentralized complaint resolution process, but records of written student complaints or

grievances are available through the Dean of Students Office. Student appeals are not considered complaints and are initiated through offices where a decision is being appealed, but students may seek assistance from the Dean of Students to initiate an appeal. [The institution identified eight (8) appeal categories: Admission (to determine if student may have an exception), Admission Access (to allow registration with balance), Grade/Registration, Credits and Graduation (to change grades or issue credit), Financial Aid and Scholarship (to maintain aid due to drop in GPA and/or hours earned), Residency (to waive out of state tuition), Auxiliary Services (for off campus living and campus dining exemptions), Parking and Traffic (to waive tickets or fees), and Disciplinary (to overturn sanction in conduct hearing).]

The institution appears to have appropriate processes for ensuring resolution of written student complaints and evidence that procedures are being dutifully followed. Two (2) sample complaints, with resolution, were provided as evidence.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the student handbook, the student complaint webpage, and records of written student complaints. Records of written student complaints are maintained in the Dean of Student's office. An interview was also conducted with the Dean of Students in support of the institution's case for compliance and affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

**\*4.6** Recruitment materials and presentations accurately represent the institution's practices and policies. **(Recruitment materials)**

The institution's recruitment materials consist of print and electronic materials, as well as media presentations. To ensure recruitment materials accurately represent institutional practices and policies, the Offices of Creative Services, News Bureau, Recruiting, and Marketing, in consultation with departments, colleges and units on campus, create and proof recruitment materials. Subsequently, materials are submitted to the Vice President for the Student Experience for final approval.

The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee finds that the institution accurately communicates information about its admission requirements, available programs of study, cost of attendance, financial aid, application procedures, and student life. Links to sample recruitment materials were provided as evidence, as well as visual branding and social media policies and guidelines.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the institution's print and recruitment material, including material on display in the Office of University Recruiting, and conducted an interview with a representative from University Recruiting in support of the institution's case for compliance and affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

**\*4.7** The institution is in compliance with its program responsibilities under Title IV of the most recent Higher Education Act as amended. (In reviewing the institution's compliance with these program responsibilities, the Commission relies on

documentation forwarded to it by the U.S. Department of Education.) **(Title IV program responsibilities)**

The institution's audit reports and management letters from the auditor for the preceding three fiscal years were provided. No findings were noted, and there was no evidence of issues or concerns with the institution's Title IV programs.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the August 18, 2016 Federal Student Aid audit of programs as authorized pursuant to Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, and conducted interviews with Acting President Chris Maggio. The report contained five audit findings.

- Finding 1: Verification Violation: a verification violation was identified for one student. Evidence has been provided to demonstrate corrective action taken by the institution.
- Finding 2: Inaccurate Student Status Reporting: One student status error was identified and corrected. No further action was required from DOE.
- Finding 3: Exit Loan Counseling Deficiency: No evidence of exit loan counseling for one student was identified. Counseling notification was mailed to the student. No further action requested by the DOE.
- Finding 4: Failure to Update Application to Participate: Notice to the Secretary was not provided for three loan service providers. Notification has been completed and no further action is required.
- Finding 5: Crime Awareness Requirements Not Met – Failure to Accurately Report Crime Statistic (Clery Act): The review noted a discrepancy in the institutions crime statistics. The report notes the exception identified in this finding constitutes a serious violation of the Clery Act that by their nature cannot be cured.

In the Committee's on-site interview, the Acting President provided the University's response, dated September 13, 2016, that addresses the five findings contained in the report. Additionally, a September 2016 Clery Act policy statement for the Office of Campus Police was provided and reviewed on-site.

**\*4.8** An institution that offers distance or correspondence education documents each of the following: **(Distance and correspondence education)**

**4.8.1** demonstrates that the student who registers in a distance or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the credit by verifying the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the option of the institution, methods such as (a) a secure login and pass code, (b) proctored examinations, or (c) new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identification.

NSU uses secure log-in and passcode to verify identity and uses proctored exams in some courses. The Office of Electronic and Continuing Education and the NSU IT department are responsible for maintaining the integrity of this online security procedure.

The On-site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the institution's secure login/pass code procedures to verify student identity and affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

- 4.8.2** has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in distance and correspondence education courses or programs.

The institution has written procedures in place that protect the privacy of students enrolled in distance education. The procedures are in line with FERPA rules and the Information Technology Policies and Standards on this issue are in line with what is expected in higher education institutions.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the institution's written procedures and policies that apply to protecting the privacy of students in support of the institution's case for compliance. The institution maintains one policy that applies to all (online and resident) students. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

- 4.8.3** has a written procedure distributed at the time of registration or enrollment that notifies students of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity.

The institution notifies students regarding additional charges that may be incurred for proctoring online examinations. Evidentiary documents including the *eNSU webpage* and the tuition and fee schedules provided supporting documentation.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the written public statement that the institution does not have a separate charge associated with verifying a student's identity, except for proctored tests. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

- \*4.9** The institution has policies and procedures for determining the credit hours awarded for courses and programs that conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education and to Commission policy. (*See the Commission policy "Credit Hours."*) **(Definition of credit hours)**

The institution follows state and institutional policies for determining the amount and level of credit awarded for courses, regardless of format or mode of delivery. The Board of Supervisors (BOS) for the University of Louisiana System (ULS) and the Louisiana Board of Regents (BOR) define requirements for awarding credit at member institutions. At the institutional level, full-time faculty members of academic departments are responsible for both initiating and reviewing course offerings and curricular proposals and revisions. Department heads or directors then forward proposals to the academic dean for consideration. Proposals affecting undergraduate or graduate teacher education course offerings or programs are also submitted to the Teacher Education Council (TEC); and those affecting graduate courses or programs are submitted to the Graduate Council. Proposals are then submitted to the Office of the University Registrar (OUR).

They are reviewed and approved by the University's Curriculum Review Council), chaired by the chief academic officer and then forwarded to president for approval.

The ULS Board also establishes uniform policies for course numbering, class meeting, and seat time, as defined in the *Board Bylaws & Rules, Chapter 1*. Minimum length of courses is defined in *Chapter 1, Section VII*: "For each semester hour of credit, a traditional lecture or laboratory course shall strive to meet a minimum of 750 minutes. Final exam periods may be counted as class time when computing required minutes." Section VII also addresses courses offered through distance learning or as readings/special topic courses, independent study courses, or in other flexible formats, and stipulates the following:

In compliance with the BOR (*Seat Time Policy for Academic Credit*) classes must be of reasonable length and include both content and contact sufficient to maintain high academic quality and standards commensurate with credit hours awarded. The basis for such certification of learning is a valid, credible university assessment system that reliably determines whether a student possesses clearly identified, standards-based knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The institution requires that programs which have national accrediting bodies seek accreditation and those without such bodies undergo periodic programs review. A review of minutes of the Curriculum Review Council and the Academic Program Review schedule demonstrate that the institution implements its policy for determining amount and level of credit.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviewed the policies of the Louisiana Board of Regents and the Board of Supervisors in defining and awarding credit hours as well as Northwestern State University of Louisiana's policy on credit hour minimums; and interviewed the Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Registrar in support of the institution's case for compliance and affirms the findings of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

#### **E. Additional observations regarding strengths and weaknesses of the institution. (optional).**

- The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee observed a deep and passionate commitment to the institution from all constituents. This foundational support is critical to the ongoing success of the institution.
- The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee observed that student conduct/complaint paper records appeared to be stored on an open shelf in the Dean of Student's office. FERPA protected information was not visibly displayed and the Dean's office was a single-use lockable office. The committee presumes that this office might possibly be accessible by others whom should not have access to student conduct/complaint records (e.g. custodial staff, unaccompanied visitors). Whereas the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee acknowledges that the student conduct files comply with the institution's policy "Electronic records are password protected. Paper files are in locked rooms, limited to personnel who sign confidentiality agreements," the committee encourages the institution to consider storing paper files out of sight in a secure (locked) container (e.g. file cabinet, drawer) in a room that is secured (locked) when vacant.

- During its site visit to Alexandria, the Committee observed that, while services such as financial aid counseling, mental health counseling, and printing services were adequate, students on site did express desire for some improved services. For example:
  - Students pay a technology fee that includes print services, however, those services are not readily available when the computer labs are in use for instructional purposes, which limits students' ability to access those services. Printing services are available at any time during normal operating hours in the site library; however, those services incur a per-print charge for the students.
  - Financial aid and counseling services have been made available to students, but routinely those are handled at a distance on an *ad hoc* basis and facilitated by a few knowledgeable faculty and staff. Counselors do not have on-site hours at regularly scheduled intervals requiring students in Alexandria to either utilize those services via phone or drive the one (+) hour to Natchitoches.
  - Beyond seeking out a faculty or staff members known personally to them, students are also not aware of formal complaint procedures or security processes. The Committee also noted that faculty on site do not have any formal orientation to site-specific policies and procedures nor any substantive knowledge of emergency procedures, Clery reporting requirements, or security measures specific to the Alexandria site. While administrative personnel are well versed in these policies and procedures, faculty could benefit from that information as well.

<b>Part III.      Assessment of the Quality Enhancement Plan</b>
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**A.      Brief description of the institution’s Quality Enhancement Plan**

*Learning for Life: Experience Your Future* focuses on applied learning strategies and high impact practices to enrich student educational experiences. The principles of experiential education will be embedded into capstone courses for all students. These courses will be re-designed to better prepare NSU graduates for life after college. A faculty development model will be established that aligns with the university mission and fulfills two specific Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Rubrics have been presented to demonstrate various benchmarks and levels of skills mastery.

**B.      Analysis of the Acceptability of the Quality Enhancement Plan**

1.      **An Institutional Process.** *The institution uses an institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment.*

The process utilized by the institution was open, transparent, and was purposeful in gaining information and insights from a wide array of internal and external constituents and stakeholders. This is evident from the committee makeup, the meeting reports, the numerous forums and the outreach to the regional community. Two years of planning for this QEP began in fall 2014 and evolved into a steering committee that presented several iterations of the plan that concluded with a decentralized model designed with both a qualitative and quantitative data construct to demonstrate the two SLOs. The institutional process was carefully designed and relied on: extensive scholarly research, professional development activity, international conference participation, analysis of nationally-recognized student survey data, university faculty information sessions and academic governance committee presentations, and in-house faculty/staff surveys. Additionally, a committee of faculty and administrators was established to construct the QEP draft into a plan that would be focused on enhancing the student experiential learning experience.

2.      **Focus of the Plan.** *The institution identifies a significant issue that (1) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and (2) accomplishes the mission of the institution.*

The topic of the plan, titled “*Learning for Life: Experience Your Future,*” institutionalizes high-impact experiences intended to better prepare graduates to apply their formal education to life after college (e.g. career, graduate school). The plan aligns with the University mission to “[prepare] its students to become productive members of society”; reflects the university goal “to create an environment that supports individual efforts toward academic, career, social and civic success”; and is embedded in the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan.

The institution has defined two student learning outcomes (SLOs), which are aligned to demonstrate the ability of students to critically reflect, apply knowledge

and link theory with practice. Furthermore, these learning outcomes employ the Principles of Best Practice of the National Society for Experiential Education.

SLO #1: During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry-level professionals in their disciplines; and

SLO #2: During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection.

Each of the SLOs have carefully-crafted rubrics with benchmarks and detail four (4) levels of mastery of skills that are tied to the aforementioned Principles of the Society.

By aligning the two SLOs to the University mission, the plan is designed to address and reflect the University's mission through experiential learning capstone experiences. Additionally, the plan reinforces the historical roots of the institution and the commitment to its foundation of teaching and learning in teacher education and preparation.

3. **Institutional Capability for the Initiation, Implementation, and Completion of the Plan.** *The institution provides evidence that it has sufficient resources to initiate, implement, sustain, and complete the QEP.*

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee evaluated institutional capability as measured in three parts. The first is the overall support of all constituents and stakeholders of the institution. In this respect, based on the broad based approach to its selection, commitment to and support of the plan is prevalent. The faculty and staff are very supportive of the goals, objectives and importance of the *Learning for Life* program. Furthermore, students are equally excited and energized by the program and its objectives. In addition, the immediate community is also extremely supportive of the selected QEP and are eager to see its implementation. From this, the institution does have the capability to initiate the QEP.

The second aspect of capability is the human capacity and overall opportunities to implement and sustain the QEP. This includes the necessary faculty and staff time to monitor internships, research programs and performance based events/projects as well as the opportunities within the extended community to support the external demand by students that will be needed. Regarding the former, the understanding of time that will be required by faculty and staff to implement the QEP is uneven. Additionally, students believe, regardless of program of study, that all three experiential learning activities will be made available to them. Also, it was noted in one of the focus groups that some programs (e.g., education and nursing) already have built in experiential learning activities. It is unclear how these programs view their implementation of the QEP as an enhancement and improvement on their efforts. Regarding the latter (external opportunities), the business community is eager and willing to accept more internships; however, they expressed concern on how many they will be able to accept as well as, pay for, the increase in numbers that is being expected of them--especially with the increased growth in enrollment.

The third aspect of capability is in regards to budgetary considerations that will lead to full completion of the QEP. The budget discussion noted that a "robust budget" was first presented and then based on discussions at the leadership team level, the budget was considered too high and it was pared back to the approximately \$204,000 annual budget. The total cost of personnel (human resources and staff positions along with faculty grant stipends of \$15,534 annually) a flat, recurring budget of \$171,310 for each of the five years. A combination of seven part-time individuals are assigned to the plan. No full-time personnel have been allocated to this plan. Additionally, \$1,083,700 will be allocated over the five years of the QEP for faculty development, supplies, recognition, marketing, etc. In sum, the University has committed \$1,974,400 in total funding for the five years.

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee has concerns that this amount is too low to effectively complete the QEP. This was discussed in the open forum, for example, regarding costs of internships and the notion of private gift support will be used. While this may be feasible, no contingency plan exists if these gifts do not materialize. More importantly, the faculty development allocation raises concerns for the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee. It is the consensus of the Committee that this will be a critical component and will require intensive work and significant resources. The Committee realizes that budgets remain stretched and, thus encourages the institution to look at how to reallocate resources within its QEP budget, or to denote which existing resources will be dedicated to the QEP.

Finally, to ensure success, given the number of on-line students, the Committee strongly encourages the institution to define specific strategies and tactics to address on-line students to ensure that complete implementation of the QEP is realized.

**Recommendation 8: The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it has sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the QEP.**

4. **Broad-based Involvement of Institutional Constituencies.** *The institution demonstrates the involvement of its constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the Plan.*

The institution has demonstrated a comprehensive and broad based process that involved faculty, staff and students in focus groups, surveys, committees, etc. in the development of the QEP.

The process formally started in December 2014 with the formulation of a steering committee to review pertinent institutional data to identify potential topics. The team included faculty members representing each of the four colleges, the president of the Student Government Association, an undergraduate student and a graduate student from an online program, and the Executive Director for Academic Advising Services. The team first met on December 3, 2014 and developed a process to collect and analyze data; established a time line, development of a survey process.

The survey was sent to 8,890 potential respondents and had a 7% response rate; of the participants, 51% were students, 27% were faculty, and 22% were staff. The results were discussed and analyzed at the team meeting on January 21, 2015.

Based on this research, in March 2015 the committee began to share findings and topics with institution. Multiple sessions were held at the campus in Natchitoches along with meetings/sessions in Alexandria, Leesville and Shreveport with faculty and staff groups. At these meetings, the findings of the survey were revealed and other suggested topics were received and considered.

Following these meetings, an additional survey was administered and various topics were ranked from highest to lowest. The top three responses included communication, critical thinking, and experiential learning and the resulting proposal submitted focused on experiential learning. The team submitting the proposal included faculty and staff representing Academic Affairs, the Student Experience, and Alumni Affairs.

In October 2015, the plan was shared with the President's Leadership Team, which consists of the University's five vice presidents, the four college deans, the Chief Technology Officer, the Internal Auditor, the Dean of Students, the Athletics Director, the Faculty Senate president, the Executive Director of Institutional Advancement, and the University Planning and Assessment Director. Feedback and concerns around cost, number of personnel required, and the ability to measure learning outcomes were shared with the team. The team was able to address these concerns, and the President's Leadership Team endorsed the plan in December 2015 and began to implement the plan by developing timelines, goals and objectives.

The development of the QEP was then briefly delayed until the summer and fall semesters due to reorganization of Academic Affairs and the President's decision to "decentralize" the QEP and name a faculty member with experience in developing and supervising internships as the QEP Director. A professor, who also serves as the Department Head of Health and Human Performance, was named as the director. Also, a QEP Executive Committee was formed with the following members: the Chief Academic Officer, the QEP Director, the Executive Director of the First-Year Experience, the Faculty Senate President, the Assistant Vice President for External Affairs for University Advancement, the Student Government Association President, and the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources.

The QEP Executive Committee scheduled forums to educate constituents about the QEP and experiential learning: two at the Natchitoches campus and one at the Shreveport campus. The first forum was recorded and posted on the University's electronic course platform, and the third was broadcast to the Alexandria and Fort Polk sites via compressed video. Presentations were made to the Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce and to the Northwestern Foundation Board and the Alumni Association Annual Meeting. The President also addressed the Faculty Senate and gave a presentation on the QEP to the Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance.

A task force (consisting of Executive Committee members, seven faculty, the Director of Counseling and Career Services, and the President and CEO of the

Natchitoches Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the team that wrote the proposal) was created to work on writing the plan. At its November 2016 meeting, the task force selected the QEP title—*Learning for Life: Experience Your Future*—and approved the logo designed by the Director of Marketing.

On January 9, 2017, University faculty and staff were gathered for updates and presentations on the QEP. In February 2017, posters were placed in classrooms and high visibility areas and a QEP Launch Party was hosted on campus.

In sum, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee concludes that the institution demonstrates the adequate involvement of its constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the Plan.

5. **Assessment of the Plan.** *The institution identifies goals and a plan to assess the achievement of those goals.*

The Quality Enhancement Plan, *Learning for Life: Experience Your Future*, clearly identifies two student learning outcomes that relate to three high-impact educational practices, which include internships, undergraduate research, and performance-based events or projects. The SLOs support the institution's mission to prepare students to "become productive members of society and promote economic development" as well as supporting a core value of the institution and tenet of the institution's vision statement. These SLOs include:

1. During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of entry-level professionals in their disciplines; and
2. During the capstone experiential learning course(s), students will reflect critically to link theory with practice and develop applications of knowledge based on the reflection.

Although the institution has defined goals/outcomes, the plan to assess achievement of these goals was not well developed. The institution has developed two rubrics to assess student achievement; however, it is unclear how the rubric for SLO #1 will be employed and by whom. In addition, it could not be determined if a common assessment tool would be utilized by internship site supervisors or if professional development and orientation would be provided to site supervisors.

For SLO #2, five common questions have been developed and will be graded with the identified rubric. Individual programs will determine the manner in which those questions will be provided to the students, which gives programs flexibility in delivery methods. However, it could not be determined at the time of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee visit who will be responsible for collecting and scoring the questions using the rubric.

Some members of the faculty focus group indicated that assessment of the SLOs is one of the areas of biggest concern.

**Recommendation 9:** The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it has a plan to assess the achievement of the goals and outcomes articulated in its QEP.

### **C. Analysis and Comments for Strengthening the QEP**

The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee offers the following ideas for strengthening the QEP:

- 1) The plan to assess achievement of the student learning outcomes requires a more detailed and precise evaluation framework including articulation of assessment responsibilities both at the departmental and institutional level and identification of at least one common institutional assessment measure.
- 2) A clearer, more precise, and uniform process of data collection for assessment of the QEP learning outcomes might be investigated.
- 3) The institution indicated in interviews, as well as in the written plan, that the QEP Director would be a person who is, at the same time, an existing department head, departmental internship coordinator, and faculty member. As the implementation and start-up is a very large administrative task, it remains to be seen if such staffing will be adequate to address the program needs of this plan. The university might evaluate the decision made in the second iteration of the QEP to have the QEP Director as a less-than-full-time administrator.
- 4) More clarification is needed on a decentralized staffing plan as some participants in the faculty focus group indicated that each department would have a release-time faculty member for program coordination and assessment. One might expect that this would be included in the Budget portion of the plan (p. 36).
- 5) The QEP Committee would likely benefit from reviewing accessibility to experiential learning knowledge for its implementation and on-going faculty development.
- 6) A strategic plan for faculty development plan can be a sustainable way for implementing the QEP across the curriculum.
- 7) Integrating the Principles of Experiential Education throughout the curriculum, beginning with the first-year seminar, could be a consideration to strengthen the QEP by preparing students early on for the experiences in the third and fourth year.
- 8) The faculty indicated in interviews with the Committee that they were desirous of curriculum guidance and expertise in experiential education. A well-designed and comprehensive faculty development plan for experiential learning could address this need.
- 9) The five-year timeline for the QEP course implementation could be revisited for a more streamlined and ambitious rollout of six experiential learning credits for all programs.
- 10) Evidence of sustainability of the QEP beyond five years could be designed.

- 11) Expansion of types of experiential education might be revisited to present faculty and students with additional options for learning opportunities.
- 12) Consideration might be given to address the possibility that heavy reliance on internships may result in a glut of students wanting such opportunities in a limited marketplace: Alexandria, Leesville, Natchitoches, and Shreveport.

## Part IV. Third-Party Comments

*To be completed by the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee.*

If an institution receives Third-Party Comments, the institution has an opportunity to respond to those comments and the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee reviews the response as part of its comprehensive evaluation of the institution.

The Committee should check one of the following:

No Third-Party Comments submitted.

Third-Party Comments submitted. **(Address the items below.)**

*1. Describe the nature of the Comments and any allegations of non-compliance that may have been part of the formal Third-Party Comments;*

*2. Indicate whether the Committee found evidence in support of any allegations of non-compliance.*

*If found to be out of compliance, the Committee should write a recommendation and include it in Part II under the standard cited with a full narrative that describes why the institution was found to be out of compliance and the documentation that supports that determination. In this space, reference the number of the Core Requirement, Comprehensive Standard, or Federal Requirement and the recommendation number cited in Part II.*

*If determined to be in compliance, explain in this space the reasons and refer to the documentation in support of this finding.*

## APPENDIX A

<b>Roster of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee</b>	<b>Roster of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee</b>
<p>Dr. Dianne L. Barron - <b>CHAIR</b> Former Associate Provost Dean, Graduate School (<i>Retired</i>) Friendswood, TX</p>	<p>Dr. Melissa Canady Wargo - <b>CHAIR</b> Chief of Staff Western Carolina University Cullowhee, NC</p>
<p>Dr. Kwesi E. Aggrey Professor of Chemistry North Carolina Central University Durham, NC</p>	<p>Mr. Maxwell J. Ammons Dean of Students Morehead State University Morehead, KY</p>
<p>Dr. Cathy J. Duff Associate Vice President, Academic &amp; Curriculum Support Florida Gulf Coast University Ft. Myers, FL</p>	<p>Dr. Robert O. Davies President Murray State University Murray, KY</p>
<p>Dr. La Toya M. Hart Director, Institutional Effectiveness &amp; Assessment Alcorn State University Flowood, MS</p>	<p>Mrs. Angel M. Jowers Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Retention The University of West Alabama Livingston, AL</p>
<p>Dr. J.Carlos Hernandez* Vice President, Finance &amp; Operations Sam Houston State University Huntsville, TX</p>	<p>Dr. Jane M. Kinney Professor of English &amp; Coordinator of Faculty Credentials Valdosta State University Valdosta, GA</p>
<p>Dr. Kenneth D. Kitts President University of North Alabama Florence, AL</p>	<p>Mr. Frank J. McConnell Vice President for Business &amp; Finance University of North Georgia Dahlonega, GA</p>
<p>Dr. Shirley F. Manigault Professor of English, Department of English Winston-Salem State University Winston-Salem, NC</p>	<p>Dr. Rebecca O. Turner Provost &amp; Vice President, Academic and Student Affairs Jacksonville State University Jacksonville, AL</p>
<p>Dr. Joe Mocnik University Librarian Georgia College &amp; State University Milledgeville, GA</p>	<p><b><u>QEP Evaluator</u></b> Dr. Ronald Kovach Provost Mountbatten Institute North American Regional Office New York, NY</p>
<p>Mr. Caesar C. Ross, III Director, Student Health Services Coastal Carolina University Conway, SC</p>	<p><b><u>Observer</u></b> Dr. Gloria Shenoy Director of Assessment The University of Texas at Dallas Richardson, TX</p>
<p><b><u>SACSCOC Staff Coordinator</u></b> Dr. Nuria M. Cuevas Vice President SACS Commission on Colleges Decatur, GA</p>	<p><b><u>SACSCOC STAFF REPRESENTATIVE</u></b> Dr. Crystal A. Baird Vice President SACS Commission on Colleges Decatur, GA</p>

## APPENDIX B

### Off-Campus Sites or Distance Learning Programs Reviewed

Northwestern State University  
1410 Neel Kearby Blvd.  
Alexandria, LA

On March 13, 2017, four members of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee visited the off-campus instructional site maintained by Northwestern State University in Alexandria, LA. During the visit, the Committee met with the Vice President for Technology, Innovation, and Economic Development, the Executive Director, two nursing faculty, and two nursing students. Below is a report of the observations and findings from that visit.

Northwestern State maintains an off-campus site at the England Air Park in Alexandria in The Learning Center for Rapides Parish (LCRP). At this site, NSU offers the following degree programs:

**Associate Degree Program:**

Associate of Science in Nursing (ASN)

**Bachelor Degree Programs**

RN to BSN (online)

Nursing – BSN

Allied Health – BASAH

Radiologic Sciences-BSRT

**Masters Degree Programs:**

Radiologic Sciences - MSRS

Nursing - MSN

**Doctoral Degree Programs:**

Doctor of Nursing Practice – DNP

Northwestern State University is a tenant and partner in the LCRP, leasing approximately 40,000 square feet of space in a contractual agreement with Louisiana State University-Alexandria, the lessee of the facility. As part of the lease agreement, NSU has three dedicated compressed video classrooms, one nursing simulation lab, and a suite of office space. In addition, NSU has shared access to several classrooms, a library, two computer labs, one wet lab, and several meeting rooms. Technology in the shared, smart classrooms, library, and computer lab is maintained by LSU-Alexandria. NSU is responsible for maintaining the technology in its dedicated classroom and lab space.

The site is administered by an Executive Director who is responsible for the fiscal, operational and procedural policies of the site as it relates to campus programs and services. The Executive Director functions under the supervision of the Vice President for Technology, Innovation, and Economic Development (VPTIED) and oversees campus services including enrollment management, instructional support, staff hiring and supervision, faculty management, student and technology services. In addition, the Executive Director represents the University at community events, area recruiting and alumni functions and forges linkages with local governmental agencies including business and industry.

Assisting the Executive Director is a Campus Manager and Administrative Coordinator. In addition, three academic administrators report to the Executive Director including the Nursing Coordinator, the Social Work Coordinator, and the Child and Family Network specialist/trainer.

The site serves as the primary instructional site for approximately 200 NSU students and also as a primary proctoring facility for almost 800 NSU students. Ten faculty are permanently

assigned to the site, and a number of faculty from the main campus teach classes on site on a rotating basis. Instruction on site is offered both as face-to-face and via compressed video. Support services offered at the site include computer lab services, library services, and printing services.

The Committee observed that office space, administrative space, and instructional space are adequate to support the programs offered on site. Further, the Committee found evidence that library services, technology, and computer lab services are sufficient to meet student needs.

In summary, the site in Alexandria is well-appointed and well-staffed and students and faculty are largely satisfied with office and instructional space. Enrollment is stable and the site plays a key role in advancing the economic development and community engagement initiatives for the University. The number of instructional and administrative staff are adequate to support the programs offered at the site. Support services are also sufficient for the size and scope of the student body on site. And, the general health and safety environment maintained on-site are minimally adequate.

## APPENDIX C

### List of Recommendations Cited in the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee

Core Requirement 2.5 (Institutional Effectiveness), Recommendation 1  
The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that its planning and evaluation processes result in continuous improvement in institutional quality; and demonstrate that it is effectively accomplishing its mission.

Comprehensive Standard 3.1.1.1 (Institutional Effectiveness, Educational Programs), Recommendation 2  
The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it assesses the extent to which it achieves the articulated student learning outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results for each of its educational programs.

Comprehensive Standard 3.1.1.2 (Institutional Effectiveness, Administrative Services), Recommendation 3  
The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it assesses the extent to which it achieves the articulated program outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results for each of its administrative support services units.

Comprehensive Standard 3.1.1.3 (Institutional Effectiveness, Academic and Student Support Services), Recommendation 4  
The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it assesses the extent to which it achieves the articulated program outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results for each of its academic and student support services units.

Comprehensive Standard 3.1.1.4 (Institutional Effectiveness, Research), Recommendation 5  
The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it assesses the extent to which it achieves its articulated research outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results.

Comprehensive Standard 3.1.1.5 (Institutional Effectiveness, Community/Public Service), Recommendation 6  
The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it assesses the extent to which it achieves its articulated community/public services outcomes, and provide evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results.

Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1 (General Education Competencies), Recommendation 7  
The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it assesses the extent to which students achieve the general education competencies.

Comprehensive Standard 3.3.2, part 1 (Quality Enhancement Plan, Institutional Capability), Recommendation 8  
The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it has sufficient resources to implement, sustain, and complete the QEP.

Comprehensive Standard 3.3.2, part 3 (Quality Enhancement Plan, Assessment),  
Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the institution provide evidence that it has a plan to assess the achievement of the goals and outcomes articulated in its QEP.