

Executive Summary
Assurance Argument for Higher Learning Commission Reaffirmation
University of Northern Iowa
March 2021

Criterion 1: Mission: The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

Summary: The University of Northern Iowa's mission focuses on challenging and supporting our students. We serve the state of Iowa, helping students learn the knowledge and skills not only to succeed in the workplace, but to be engaged citizens and active members of their community. We educate Iowans for an increasingly diverse state and for a multicultural, globally-connected world.

Outline of argument:

- Our mission was developed through a participatory process suited to our role as the state's only public comprehensive university, serving mostly in-state students and a high percent of first generation students.
 - The student-success-centered mission references and emphasizes the key parts of our activities and the scope of our activities and constituencies.
 - Our broad array of undergraduate and graduate programs and our comprehensive student success initiatives are consistent with our mission.
- Our mission: "Within a challenging and supportive environment, the University of Northern Iowa engages students in high-quality and high-impact learning experiences and emphasizes excellence in teaching and scholarship."
- Our vision, value statements, and strategic plan support the mission by centering our activities on student success, while emphasizing diversity and community engagement.
- Our academic offerings and support services are appropriate to this mission. They are consistent with our traditional role as a comprehensive university that stresses access.
- We are committed to the public good, emphasizing our educational mission above all other purposes, and engaging with our community in a variety of ways.
- We prepare students for informed citizenship and success in the workplace. We provide students opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world. As part of this, we strive to demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations. We acknowledge our challenges in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and describe recent efforts to more systematically address them.

Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct: The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

Summary: The University of Northern Iowa acts with integrity in all of its functions. Our policies and procedures assure that our governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students operate ethically and responsibly as we pursue excellence in teaching and scholarship.

Outline of argument:

- We have policies in place to assure ethical actions across the board--finances, hiring, academics, and scholarship.
- We present ourselves accurately to the public, ensuring the accuracy of claims we make about the institution and the student experience, including such things as cost; program offerings and requirements; and opportunities for student research, community engagement, and experiential learning.
- The Board of Regents is autonomous, prioritizes the preservation and enhancement of the institution, considers the interests of relevant constituencies, delegates day-to-day management to UNI administration, and expects the faculty to oversee the curriculum
- UNI protects academic freedom and has policies in place to promote and support the scholarly and creative activities of its faculty, staff, and students.

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

Summary: The University of Northern Iowa has dedicated, qualified faculty and staff who provide the challenging academic programs and supportive student services promised in our mission. Our policies and practices promote academic rigor across all programs, degrees, locations, and modes of delivery in order to ensure that our students leave the university with the skills and knowledge to succeed in a quickly changing, multicultural world.

Outline of argument:

- Our programs and courses are current and rigorous. We assure a level of academic rigor appropriate to the credit earned, with standards that are consistent across all modes and locations of delivery.
- Our general education program, the Liberal Arts Core, is appropriate to our mission of challenging students within a supportive environment. It is grounded in a framework that envisions the liberal arts as key to providing students with foundational knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in students' programs of study and in their lives.
 - With its clearly articulated purposes and outcomes for each category, the LAC provides the knowledge and skills that every college-education person should have.
 - We are currently culminating a multi-year process that will revise the general education core to even more closely align with our mission. The University

Faculty Senate has approved learning outcomes, structure, and criteria for populating courses. The new program is expected to begin in Fall '23.

- Through our curriculum (both general education and specific programs) and a variety of co-curricular programs, UNI helps students learn about diversity and provides them with opportunities to grow and develop the skills necessary to live and work in a multicultural world. We acknowledge the work we have to do in this area, citing data that indicate that the experience of our traditionally underrepresented students is different than that of our white students, and we discuss plans to improve.
- We have sufficient numbers of faculty and staff to carry out our educational mission and provide high quality student support. Faculty and staff are appropriately qualified and trained, and are regularly evaluated. Faculty and staff are provided professional development and training to carry out the educational mission of the university and support students. We have made improvements in diversifying our faculty and staff and have plans in place to continue those positive trends.
- We provide a robust array of student support services that start even before admission, continue through orientation, and extend through their time at UNI. This includes high quality academic advising.
- We have appropriate physical infrastructure and information technology infrastructure to support teaching and learning.

Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement: The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

Summary: The University of Northern Iowa's evaluation and assessment processes assure the quality and continuous improvement of our educational programs and support services. Administrators, faculty, and staff use the findings from academic program reviews, learning outcomes assessment, and review of student outcomes to improve the quality of programs, enhance student learning, and promote persistence, timely graduation, and, ultimately, success after graduation.

Outline of argument:

- Through policies at the institutional and state level, the University of Northern Iowa ensures the strength of its academic programs through regular reviews, evaluation of all transcribed credit, curriculum oversight, faculty qualifications, and disciplinary-specific accreditation. Additionally, the university regularly evaluates the success of our alumni through our Office of Career Services which surveys our graduates in order to determine if they have met their career goals.
- Our system of assessment of student learning outcomes has been integrated into our regular systems and is meaningful and sustainable. We integrate assessment throughout the University both horizontally--across programs and divisions--and vertically--carried out by faculty and staff and reviewed and discussed by upper

administration. All academic programs engage in such assessment, as do many co-curricular programs, for the purposes of continuous improvement. Through such practices, UNI has been recognized as a leader in assessment of student learning.

- The University focuses on retention and timely graduation rates of its students. Our strategic plan includes clear metrics to improve these rates and also tracks rates of various sub-populations of students. We monitor these figures and use them to improve our operations and enhance student success. When compared to our Carnegie peers, the university achieves consistently higher student retention and completion rates.

Criterion 5. Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness: The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

Summary: The University of Northern Iowa fulfills its mission of student success through effective administration and shared governance. We integrate our robust evaluation and assessment processes into our budgeting and planning processes, allowing us to direct resources in support of our mission. Such processes, paired with our intentional use of data to inform decisions, has allowed UNI to prosper and to continue to improve on our key markers of student success even in the face of significant budgetary challenges.

Outline of argument:

- The University of Northern Iowa's policies and procedures recognize the centrality of shared governance to the functioning of the university and provide faculty, staff, and students' meaningful opportunities to participate in the important decisions facing the university. Although there was a fracture in shared governance norms in 2012, we have since strengthened shared governance to allow the university to move forward in challenging times and make progress on significant issues. We rely on collaborative processes to set academic requirements and policies, with faculty taking the central role. Throughout the university, we base decisions on data that are widely shared.
- The University of Northern Iowa has appropriately qualified staff and infrastructure in place to support all of its operations as evidenced by its strong human resources practices and well maintained facilities and equipment. UNI's operational personnel and its physical and technology infrastructure allow the institution to deliver programs on campus, through online formats, and abroad. As a result, the goals incorporated into the strategic plan stretch the university but are achievable. The budgeting process and our financial allocations ensure that the university is able to meet these goals.
- UNI strategically allocates its resources in alignment with the Mission and Strategic Plan, assuring that the institution's primary emphasis is on teaching and learning, with additional emphasis given to research and scholarship, community engagement, and economic development. We prioritize resources and institutional attention on three key factors that increase student success: diversity and inclusion, campus vitality, and community engagement. Additionally, the university's comprehensive planning process includes both internal and external stakeholders, and accounts for potential fluctuations

in state appropriations and student enrollment. It also anticipates changes in technology, demography, and the economy. All of the university's planning efforts are geared towards systematic improvement of student learning and the operations that enhance student success.