

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.

4.A - Core Component 4.A

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.
2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.
3. The institution has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It assures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.
5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution assures that the degree or certificate programs it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and Americorps).

Argument

1. Each academic degree program submits an annual [Student Learning Outcomes \(SLO\) Assessment Report](#) (see 4.B). Every five years academic programs complete a [Program Review](#) self-study. The [rotation cycle](#) is staggered, with 5-8 programs submitting reviews each year. Submitted [program reviews](#) are available to reviewers on the college portal. The Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA), the program's Division Chair, and two external reviewers (rotating AAC members assigned by the VPAA) provide feedback to programs before the final report is submitted to the VPAA and President. Before Spring 2017, the VPAA met with program faculty to discuss issues arising in the review. Beginning Spring 2017, the [Institutional Effectiveness Committee](#) evaluates submitted Program Reviews and [annual reports](#) from non-academic programs.

[Program Reviews](#) include quantitative data compiled by the Office of Institutional Research and a narrative prepared by program faculty. Quantitative data includes course enrollments, [faculty load analysis](#), majors, graduates, and transfers. The narrative describes the program's offerings, faculty, administrative procedures, effectiveness, and evidence-based needs and recommendations.

2. and 3. Credit earned at other Regionally-Accredited Postsecondary Institutions will transfer to Northwest College (NWC) upon [evaluation](#) by the Registration and Records Office. Lower division college-level courses completed with a grade of C- or higher may be accepted. Upper division and graduate courses may be accepted to satisfy degree requirements with Division Chair approval. Credit earned at a non-Regionally-Accredited Postsecondary Institution will NOT be accepted for credit, and the transcript will not be accepted for admission purposes.

NWC will award credit for [Advanced Placement \(AP\) tests and Subject Examinations of the College Level Examination Program \(CLEP\)](#). The Registrar will evaluate International Baccalaureate (IB) programs for credit transfer. Finally, NWC awards up to 15 credits of Self-Acquired Competency Credit (SACC) for experiential learning, either as equivalent NWC courses or general credit in an academic area. To obtain SACC credit, “a student petitions for credit in a particular course and submits a portfolio supporting the petition. A team of faculty reviews the portfolio interviews the student (if necessary), and assigns appropriate credit.”

Students may petition for [challenge examinations](#) in any lower division course not carrying prerequisites, except for wellness education activity courses. Students may challenge foreign language courses by enrolling in a higher-level course, earning a "B" or above, and petitioning the college. A student may not earn more than 12 hours of petitioned credit in any foreign language.

4. The Curriculum Committee (CC) evaluates each [new course proposal](#) to ensure that the course outcomes, readings, and assignments match the appropriate number of credits. A course’s prerequisites, co-requisites, expectations for student learning, and general level of rigor are established initially through the new course proposal process. The CC evaluates whether courses should count for [general education credit](#) (see 3.B.). Because NWC recently updated its general education categories, outcomes, and requirements, many previously approved courses went through the CC again during the 2016-17 school year; such review helps to ensure that, among other things, courses continue to have the proper number of credits for the work assigned.

[Revisions](#) to these features are similarly vetted. Faculty members prepare proposals, and academic division faculty and the CC review them. The [committee](#) recommends approval, revision, or denial to the VPAA.

Oversight of rigor and expectations for student learning takes place at the level of the CC. NWC adheres to the federal definition of [one credit hour](#). To determine whether a course meets credit-hour standards, the CC reviews the course syllabus, which outlines course learning outcomes, out-of-class expectations, and a schedule of assignments. Courses meeting General Education Requirements require additional review through the CC (see 3.B.).

NWC defines [dual credit](#) as that which a high school student earns when enrolled in a college course on the NWC campus or through distance education. Concurrent enrollment classes are those taught in the high schools by high school instructors. Credits are transcribed by both the high school and the college. For more information on dual/concurrent courses (see 3.A.). Concurrent enrollment classes are NWC catalog courses, and their registrations are monitored by the Dean of Extended Campus, who checks age levels of students and prerequisite completion. The Dean monitors data to track concurrent enrollment students’ success after graduation from high school and provides these [figures annually](#). The syllabi for concurrent enrollment classes must include the same learning outcomes and evidence the same rigor as the courses taught at NWC. Division Chairs review concurrent enrollment classes annually including classroom visitation and analysis of student evaluations. The English department piloted an [ENGL 1010 assessment](#) which revealed that concurrent enrollment students achieved learning outcomes at similar levels as students taking the same class on campus. This serves

as a model for future concurrent assessment efforts. NWC annually submits concurrent and dual enrollment [information](#) to the Wyoming Community College Commission (WCCC).

As per HLC policy on faculty qualifications, all faculty must have a master's degree, with some exceptions for professional experience. In Fall 2016, the Faculty Organization instituted a committee to recommend credential standards for faculty. Those recommendations have been approved by their relevant divisions. The Ad Hoc Faculty Policy Task Force will take up these recommendations in Fall 2017 and forward its recommendations to the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

NWC maintains and exercises authority over access to learning resources including tutoring services, library services, the TRiO program, and disabilities services. Learning resources staff are employed by NWC, and the services are managed by NWC.

5. [Three programs](#) at NWC have [specialized accreditation](#).

Music and Music Technology are accredited by the [National Association of Schools of Music](#).

Fine Art and Graphic Design are accredited by the [National Association of Schools of Art and Design](#) (NASAD). Only seven community colleges in the US are NASAD-accredited.

The Associate Degree [Nursing Program](#), RN, is fully accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) and approved by the Wyoming State Board of Nursing. The [Licensed Practical Nursing Certificate Program](#), LPN, is approved by the Wyoming State Board of Nursing. Regional or national accreditation is required for eligibility to take the NCLEX-RN or NCLEX-PN offered by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing.

6. NWC evaluates the success of its graduates. To assure that students can transfer to four-year institutions, NWC [maintains articulation agreements](#) with thirty-six potential transfer institutions. The Office of Institutional Research tracks the number of student transfers to identify [most common transfer institutions](#). Students can obtain information and support for transfer through the Advising Center (AC). The AC Coordinator works with the Dean of Student Learning to maintain NWC's articulation agreements.

The University of Wyoming (UW) provides a [comprehensive report](#) of NWC transfer students for each year; the most recent report shows students who transfer to UW have an average first semester GPA of 2.79 as compared with an all transfer student GPA of 2.80. This suggests that NWC transfer students do as well as others who enter programs at UW. A summary report for the years 2008 through 2012 from [Valley City State University Collaborative Teacher Education](#) shows transfer students from NWC have a 92.3% retention rate, further evidence of transfer student success.

NWC's Office of Institutional Research solicits an [annual graduate survey](#). The response rate for the most recent three-year period was 25%.

The WCCC collects licensure data for its annual performance report. The Commission's [2015-2016](#) report revealed the pass rate of NWC nursing graduates taking the exam for the first time was 96% for the NCLEX RN exam and 100% for the NCLEX PN exam. These rates indicate that NWC graduates are well prepared to enter their chosen career.

NWC records enrollment in internships scheduled as courses; see the "internship," "apprenticeship," and "interactive, cooperative education" (no longer offered) courses in the ["Summary Enrollment by Course, Designator, and Department."](#)

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4.B - Core Component 4.B

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

1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.
2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

Argument

Following Northwest College's (NWC) last full re-accreditation visit, HLC reviewers directed NWC to provide evidence that:

1. Programs and general education have stated learning outcomes;
2. Processes of assessment of student learning are in effect, and that assessment provides evidence of student learning;
3. A recurring process is in place that includes reporting of assessment results and use of assessment data to improve instruction;
4. A clear mechanism is in place through which assessment results feed into planning, budgeting, and curricular change.

The March 2013 focused visit report acknowledged NWC's progress but noted the need to "demonstrate a clear mechanism for how assessment results and analyses are feeding into planning and budget development as well as into curricular change." Reviewers recommended that NWC adopt "a single set of general education/all-college goals and a unified process for assessing whether all graduates of the institutions are meeting those goals."

In response, Academic Affairs invited assessment expert Dr. Barbara Walvoord to lead [workshops](#) in August 2013. Dr. Walvoord recommended the appointment of an assessment coordinator and provided a framework for implementing assessment reform. The Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) appointed a [full-time faculty member](#) to the role of [Assessment Coordinator](#). The role of Assessment Coordinator has increased from a three-hour to a nine-hour credit reassignment per semester. Since fall 2013, the Assessment Coordinator and the [Central Assessment Team](#) (CAT) have taken steps toward restructuring assessment.

The CAT has analyzed three years of data (2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016) from academic department assessment reports. The 2016-2017 reports will be submitted in August 2017. Year-to-year data trends are best understood within the context of a continuously evolving system: the student learning outcome forms have undergone minor revisions each year, as have the CAT's [rubric](#) scoring criteria used to provide feedback to programs. Adjustments have been made in the spirit of continuous improvement, to model in administrative actions the same improvement-oriented assessment approach asked of faculty and programs.

1. NWC has clearly stated learning goals and effective assessment processes.

In response to HLC's directive to consolidate general education learning goals, NWC made the following adjustments to the existing outcomes in the interest of assessment:

1. The previously titled "All-College Outcomes" were renamed in [Fall 2013](#) as "[General Education Outcomes](#)" to which program- and course-level student learning outcomes would be aligned for assessment purposes.
2. The previously titled "General Education Outcomes" were renamed "General Education Distribution Requirements." This framework outlined the number of courses students must take in each category, fulfilling NWC's [philosophy of general education](#) and serving as a means for students to meet the "General Education Outcomes."

The Curriculum Committee revised the general education outcomes and distribution requirements in 2016-2017 (see 3.B).

Faculty members revised course and [program learning outcomes](#) to align with the new general education outcomes. The faculty continue to [revise course outcomes](#) as new courses are submitted for general education approval. Analysis of assessment reports demonstrates the quality of program learning outcomes (including measurability and alignment with general education learning outcomes) has steadily improved since 2013. [Mean scores](#) on the outcomes section of the CAT rubric rose by 51% from 2013-2016.

Modeled on the approach outlined in Walvoord's 2010 book, *Assessment Clear and Simple*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass), NWC established an institution-wide assessment process. Stages of this system are:

1. Faculty conduct assessments of student learning outcomes within their courses and programs.
2. Program faculty meet annually to review their assessment data, decide on at least one action item, and assign internal responsibility for follow-up.
3. Each program [reports annually](#) on its learning assessment. Reports are uploaded to an [online repository](#) accessible by program faculty, CAT, and the Office of Academic Affairs.
4. Reports are reviewed by CAT members and scored using a [rubric](#) and written comments. Feedback is communicated to programs by the CAT Chair.
5. A [graduate exit survey](#) collects student feedback and perceptions about their achievement of program learning outcomes.
6. The Assessment Coordinator, CAT Chair, and Institutional Researcher analyze the data.
7. Results of the exit survey are reported to CAT, which makes recommendations to the Curriculum Committee, Academic Advisory Council, and President's Advisory Council as appropriate. Results are shared with program faculty by the Assessment Coordinator.

Implementation of this system has been steady with additional implementation ongoing.

2. The faculty continues to assess student strengths and weaknesses in their courses and programs. The program faculty has developed both direct and indirect measures for evaluating student work. Assessment data from the first three years reveals the following trends:

1. Faculty are creating [direct and indirect measures](#) with stronger alignment to learning outcomes.

The increase in reported number of direct measures from 2013-2016 indicates faculty have a

better recognition of how to assess student learning. While faculty may have been using rubrics for years, they did not recognize that rubrics should be reported as direct measures. There is now a stronger understanding among the faculty of the difference between direct and indirect measures and the difference between activities that help students achieve outcomes (lectures, discussions, papers, other assignments) and measures used to assess student attainment of outcomes (e.g., rubrics, test blueprints, scoring guides, feedback surveys).

Beyond improved reporting, data indicates an increase in actual measurement. SLO reports demonstrate faculty continues to develop new and revise existing measures for alignment with course and program learning outcomes. [Mean scores](#) on the measures section of the CAT feedback rubric rose 120% from 2013-2016, supporting the above conclusions.

2. Faculty are reporting more [direct evidence](#) of student learning.

The reported amount of indirect evidence remained constant from 2013-2016, but the reported amount of direct evidence increased five-fold.

3. Faculty are now extracting [higher quality evidence](#) from both direct and indirect measures.

Evidence was weighted based on its usefulness for diagnostic and planning purposes (1=minimally useful; 2=moderately useful; 3=useful). Average weights for direct evidence increased from 1.3 to 2.4. Average weights for indirect evidence increased from 1.1 to 1.4. [Mean scores](#) on the evidence section of the CAT feedback rubric rose 105% from 2013-2016.

4. The quantity of [student learning evidence](#) reported varies between general education outcomes.

Evidence for the [general education outcomes](#) of analysis and multiple points of view is reported most frequently. Program faculty submitted less evidence on student performance in written and oral communication and information and technology literacy. In 2017-2018, realignment of course and program outcomes with the [new general education outcomes](#) will involve a stronger emphasis on the across the curriculum paradigm. CAT will establish multi-year assessment cycles to ensure that all outcomes are measured. The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) will provide faculty development on this initiative.

5. Program faculty reports tend to [focus on student weaknesses](#).

It is a positive development that faculty are comfortable reporting areas for improvement. In 2017-2018, CAT and the TLC will work to improve collection of student achievement evidence.

6. [Student self-evaluation](#), as reported in the Graduate Exit Survey, shows that more than 90% of students agree or strongly agree that they are skilled at NWC's general education outcomes. This indirect evidence suggests that: 1) students who complete their course of study believe they achieved NWC's general education outcomes, and 2) NWC's learning outcomes are appropriate for NWC's mission, student population, and program offerings.

Plans are in place to scale up assessment of the co-curriculum. Learning outcomes have not been formally identified for our co-curriculum. The academic assessment process will serve as a model for co-curricular assessment. The NWC accreditation team introduced this model to all staff during a Spring 2017 [accreditation prep session](#). The CAT chair developed a proposal for restructuring the Central Assessment Team to incorporate co-curricular assessment.

The Graduate Exit Survey data shows that the [majority of graduating students](#) are either satisfied or very satisfied with NWC's co-curricular offerings including cultural programs, intramural activities, student activities, student government, and student organizations.

3. Assessment data has been used to improve student learning. Evidence from 2013-2016 reveals the following trends:

1. Faculty report more frequent and effective [actions taken](#) to improve student learning.

Faculty reporting of actions taken doubled from 2013-2016. Multiple types of actions were reported (pedagogical, curricular, and logistical/technological). The majority were pedagogical changes. Actions taken were weighted according to the potential for improving student learning (1=minimal potential for effectiveness; 2=moderate potential; 3=high potential). Between 2013-2016, average weights increased from 1.7 to 2.4 for pedagogical actions; 2.3 to 2.7 for curricular actions; and 2.0 to 2.6 for changes made to logistics/technological. [Mean scores](#) from the actions taken section of the CAT feedback rubric rose 112% from 2014-2016.

2. Faculty report [planning more frequent and effective actions](#) in response to assessment evidence.

Planned actions were weighted according to the potential for improving student learning (1=minimal; 2=moderate; 3=high). Between 2013-2016, average weights increased marginally across all types of actions. [Mean scores](#) on the actions planned section of the CAT feedback rubric rose 71% from 2013-2016.

3. Faculty report more evidence of change in student learning as a result of actions taken.

From 2013-2015, [changes in student learning](#) were reported at higher rates across all general education outcomes. CAT encourages faculty to take risks when trying new approaches and assures them that reporting results, whether positive or negative, is important and appropriate. SLO reports indicate that program faculty members are comfortable reporting negative or neutral outcomes, though most reporting indicates [improvements in student learning](#). [Examples](#) of faculty "closing the loop" from assessment evidence to action to positive change were presented to the Board of Trustees (BOT) in October 2016.

4. Increasingly, assessment data is informing budgeting decisions.

[Narrative analysis](#) of SLO reports demonstrates how faculty are using assessment information to inform purchases and budget requests. Examples include purchases of new equipment, technology, and software. [Professional development funds](#) are available to fund innovative classroom teaching.

In 2014-2015, CAT developed a process for linking budget decisions with assessment. That process informed expenditure of a one-time windfall of state funds. CAT [evaluated](#) Academic Affairs budget requests based on alignment with student learning outcomes according to three criteria:

- i. Which of your learning outcomes presents the greatest or most urgent challenge for your students?
- ii. How will the requested funds help you address that challenge?

iii. How will you assess your intervention's impact on student learning should funds be awarded?

The CAT budget subcommittee [sent recommendations](#) to the Presidents Advisory Council and the Academic Advisory Council. The Presidents Advisory Council considered these recommendations in [making decisions](#) about the expenditure of available funds. This process will serve as a template for future distribution of non-standard funding. (See [template guidelines](#))

NWC has provided financial resources for the establishment of a [TLC](#) in response to evidence from the SLO reports and the [Graduate Exit Survey](#) that indicate: 1) students appreciate that NWC faculty are highly qualified, engaged, and approachable; 2) students value the hands-on learning experiences that are available to them; 3) students want even more opportunities for hands-on learning.

4. The institution's processes of assessing student learning involve the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

In the past five years, [faculty involvement](#) in NWC's assessment processes has increased at multiple levels. One of the first steps that the VPAA took after being hired in Fall 2012 was to [establish CAT](#) – a standing committee comprised primarily of faculty from all academic divisions. The committee [meets](#) at least once a month during the academic year.

In Spring 2013, twelve self-selected faculty and staff enrolled in a weekly assessment seminar led by the VPAA. The VPAA offered an all-faculty in-service presentation on assessment and organized a day-long Learning Outcomes Workshop for the Academic Advisory Council, CAT, and Curriculum Committee. NWC has had strong faculty and staff representation at the annual HLC conference each subsequent year.

Workshops by assessment experts ([Dr. Barbara Walvoord in 2013](#) and [Dr. Virginia Anderson in 2014](#)) further advanced campus conversations about assessment. Themes from those workshops have been sustained through [individual meetings](#) between faculty and the Assessment Coordinator, and several [presentations and workshops](#) led by the Assessment Coordinator and/or CAT Chair.

CAT uses the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) results to inform assessment analysis. The Institutional Researcher presents these results to the BOT, President's Advisory Council, Academic Advisory Council, College Council, and CAT and at an all-campus meeting.

NWC has administered CCSSE every other spring since 2007. The 2017 results demonstrate that NWC scored higher for all five benchmarks than the average Wyoming community college and the average CCSSE cohort institution. Four out of five benchmarks have been above the national CCSSE cohort average every implementation (Active and Collaborative Learning, Student Effort, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Support for Learners). The Academic Challenge benchmark has been below the national average for the 2007 through 2015 implementations. The 2017 results show that Academic Challenge is now several points higher than both the Wyoming and the national CCSSE cohorts. Most of the CCSSE questions that contribute to this benchmark have shown significant increases from the 2007 to the 2017 implementation. These increases could be attributed to retention efforts initiated by the Retention Committee (see 4.C.3.) and an increased awareness of and subsequent faculty focus on challenging students to do their best work and emphasizing certain mental activities.

CCSSE 2017 Results	NWC	Wyoming		2017 Cohort	
Benchmark	Score	Score	Difference	Score	Difference
Active and Collaborative Learning	56.2	52.1	4.1	50.0	6.2
Student Effort	54.5	49.7	4.8	50.0	4.5
Academic Challenge	53.3	50.2	3.0	50.0	3.3
Student-Faculty Interaction	57.2	53.7	3.5	50.0	7.2
Support for Learners	51.7	49.1	2.5	50.0	1.7

All faculty have access to the [NWC Assessment online repository](#) for assessment-related resources and reports, and all program faculty are [expected to contribute evidence to their program's SLO report](#). Faculty participation in program assessment has increased, with [mean scores](#) on the collective review section of the CAT feedback rubric rising 59% from 2013-2016. Five programs have developed [curriculum maps](#) to identify gaps in coverage and make changes that ensure repeated student exposure to learning outcomes. Curriculum mapping in all programs is a priority for 2017-2018.

A number of departments have undertaken additional assessment projects on their own:

- Three programs maintain external, [discipline-specific accreditation](#) for which they conduct a variety of assessments.
- Librarians conduct an [assessment of library instruction](#) and report results to the Office of Academic Affairs and CAT.
- The English department assesses [ENGL 1010 sections](#) to investigate patterns relating to modality (face-to-face, online, concurrent enrollment).
- English Instructor Heidi Hansen conducted a [college-wide study](#) of writing instruction through the lens of Writing Across the Curriculum theory and practice. In 2017-2018, she will work with the TLC to share her results and present recommendations.
- The First-Year Seminar Coordinator, working with the Retention Committee, is developing a process to [assess learning outcomes in the First-Year Seminar](#).

NWC has made substantial progress in assessment. To sustain this effort, faculty need ongoing training on assessment measures, guidance on reporting evidence, and opportunities to collaborate on assessment-based action. By facilitating ongoing faculty development, the [TLC](#) will be instrumental in nurturing a more robust culture of assessment for the improvement of student learning.

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4.C - Core Component 4.C

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

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

Argument

1. Northwest College (NWC) has defined goals regarding student retention and completion in both the [2012-13 to 2016-17 Strategic Plan Tracking Report](#) and the current [Vision 2020 Key Performance Indicators](#). These reports demonstrate progress toward the institution's most recent strategic plans.

NWC uses IPEDS definition of fall-to-fall retention rate as the percentage of first-time, degree-seeking students from a specified fall cohort who are still enrolled at NWC or completed their program by the following fall term. Before Fall 2016, NWC used the term persistence to describe retention, in accordance with the statewide terminology at that time. The current state definition of persistence rate is the percentage of first-time, degree-seeking students from the fall cohort who enroll at any institution or complete a program of study by the following fall term.

NWC measures completion through 1) annual program completions, 2) unduplicated completers, and 3) completion rates (also called graduation rates), as reported on the [IPEDS Completions](#) and [Graduation Rate](#) surveys. Completions are defined as the number of degrees or certificates awarded by the institution, regardless of the number of students earning these awards. Completers are the unduplicated number of students being awarded a degree or certificate. The completion rate is calculated for full-time, first-time, degree-seeking students who complete an award within 150% of the normal time to completion.

In the 2012-13 to 2016-17 Strategic Plan, Institutional Imperative #1 stated, "Northwest College shall be the preeminent two-year educational institution in Wyoming." The first goal for this imperative was to have "the highest student completion rates (earned degrees and certificates) of any two-year educational institution in Wyoming." In the related Tracking Report, the indicators by which NWC measured its progress towards pre eminence included completion rates, fall-to-fall retention (then called persistence) rates, and numbers of completions. Information was compiled for a baseline year and updated annually.

The current strategic plan, Vision 2020, focuses the institution on the priorities of Experience,

Connections, and Environment. The Experience priority includes components that measure:

- Fall-to-fall retention rate of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students (Fall 2015 to Fall 2016 retention): 62% (N=339)
- Completion rate of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students (Fall 2013 cohort): 37% (N=372)
- Number of degrees and certificates awarded (2015-16): 333 degrees, 36 certificates

Student retention and completion tie to three of NWC's [mission](#) elements: be student-centered; prepare students for transfer, career, and life; and retain and graduate students. These mission elements are connected to Vision 2020's priority of Experience, which relates to students' collegiate experience, including both academics and student life.

NWC's ambitious but attainable goals aim to maintain or exceed the current institutional performance and meet or exceed state and national benchmarks. [NWC's current retention rates](#) are comparable to the average rate for a national public, 2-year institutions and are typically higher than the Wyoming community college average. NWC's completion rates are well above the national average and are typically above the Wyoming community college average. This demonstrates that goals are appropriate to student populations.

Historically, NWC's retention rates have ranged from upper-50% to low-60%, with two recent exceptions in the low- to mid-50% range. Since 2013, NWC's retention rate has been consistently above 60%. Many of NWC's retention initiatives started in 2012-13, so these consistently high rates lend support to their effectiveness.

The majority of NWC students are degree-seeking. Approximately two-thirds of NWC degree programs prepare students for transferring to a four-year institution, and one-third prepare students for the workforce. NWC offers certificates that are primarily subsets of degree programs. Because successful student transfer to four-year institutions is a large institutional focus, NWC monitors both completion and transfer rates. When combined, the rate of students who complete or transfer has historically been in the mid-50% range. Recent efforts have focused on encouraging students to complete a degree program before transferring. Results show that when completion rates are higher, transfer rates of students without a degree are lower so that the combined rate has stayed relatively constant over the years. This demonstrates that goals are appropriate to educational offerings.

2 and 4. The Office of Institutional Research collects student retention, persistence, and completion data to be published or submitted to external data collectors each year, such as:

- Retention
 - Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) [Fall Enrollment Survey](#)
 - Wyoming Community College Commission (WCCC) [Annual Report: Performance Indicators](#)
 - Consumer Information Disclosures: [Retention Rates](#)
- Persistence
 - WCCC [Annual Report: Performance Indicators](#)
- Completion
 - [IPEDS Completions Survey](#)
 - [IPEDS Graduation Rates Survey](#)
 - [IPEDS Graduation Rates 200 Survey](#)
 - Consumer Information Disclosures: Graduation/Transfer Rates of Students Receiving [Federal Aid](#) and of [Athletes](#)

NWC uses information from these common reports to ensure internal consistency by utilizing the same collection methods each year and external consistency by using standard statewide and national definitions. When additional information is needed, the Office of Institutional Research collects and analyzes data and keeps a record of the process. This allows the process to be replicated the following year or as needed. This practice increases consistency of data collections, demonstrates accountability, and maintains the integrity of institutional research.

The Data Governance and Institutional Research Council (DGIRC) comprises institutional researchers from Wyoming community colleges with liaisons from the Presidents Council, Chief Information Officer Council and Wyoming Community College staff. The DGIRC uses IPEDS definitions because they are the most common definitions and used across all federally funded institutions. When an indicator does not have a standard national definition, the DGIRC collaborates to create a statewide definition and a common measurement methodology.

NWC follows best [practices regarding data analysis](#) include: 1) establishing a regular reporting calendar for data collection, 2) developing key performance indicators to measure effectiveness, 3) monitoring historical trends, and 4) communicating key findings to decision-makers and the campus community. Examples include:

1. NWC's participation in national data collections, such as IPEDS and NCCBP, ensures that NWC collects retention and completion data on an annual basis. Data from these collections are used for internal data usage and analysis. This practice maintains consistency and upholds data integrity.
2. The Vision 2020 Key Performance Indicators include key measures such as retention and completion.
3. NWC's annual [Enrollment Report to the Board of Trustees](#) and the [NWC Dashboard](#) are examples of monitoring retention and completion. The Enrollment Report illustrates historical trends for a variety of indicators including retention rates. Key findings are provided in the report along with a chart depicting trends and findings. This document has been evolving each year since 2013 to become more relevant to the institution's needs. The NWC Dashboard depicts graduation rates, transfer rates, numbers of completions, programs with the largest numbers of completions, and top transfer institutions.
4. The Enrollment Report to the Board of Trustees is published on the Institutional Research website, emailed to college employees, and presented at the All-Employee Meeting and Board Meeting each October. The NWC Dashboard is published annually on the Institutional Research website. The Institutional Researcher annually updates the President's Advisory Council on retention, persistence, and completion. The President shares completion and retention information at All Employee Meetings, as information is available. Retention information, and retention of students enrolled in [first-year experience courses](#) is shared with the Retention Committee and First-Year Experience Coordinator. Completions are shared with employees and posted on the NWC portal.

3. Retention and completion efforts are the specific focus of the Retention Committee (RC). RC members research best practices and analyze NWC data regarding retention and completion.

President Hicswa emphasizes the use of best practices in college operations, including student engagement and retention. NWC has refined existing programs and implemented new initiatives that line up with the practices found to increase student engagement (thus, retention) from the Center for Community College Student Engagement's (CCCSE) initiative on Identifying and Promoting High-Impact Educational Practices in Community Colleges. Examples of high-impact practices

implemented include:

First-Year Experience (FYE)

Extensive research on student persistence conducted by the members of the RC uncovered common reasons why students choose not to complete college after starting. This research led to the development of NWC's First Year Experience Program in 2014.

Before implementing FYE, the RC examined retention rates of three Program Orientation courses, in [Agriculture, Education, and Engineering](#). Retention rates were higher for program majors who took the orientation courses in their first year than for majors who did not.

Program	Retention Rate in Course	Retention Rate not enrolled in Course
Agriculture	80%	59%
Education	65%	33%
Engineering	67%	44%

This evidence supported CCCSE findings that FYE increases student retention. The [First-Year Experience Founding Document](#) elaborates on the rationale behind and details of first-year experience course implementation at NWC. [Curriculum Committee](#) voted to make FYE a requirement for earning a degree. NWC implemented these courses across all programs in Fall 2015.

Advising Center

The RC began researching advising models in [2012](#), which resulted in the creation of the Advising Center (AC). Data analyzed at that time indicated that advising for General Studies majors was a particular need since 20% of students were majoring in General Studies and there was no dedicated advising for that program.

The RC [recommended a split model for academic advising](#) to the Faculty Organization for discussion. The AC opened in Summer 2013 and is staffed by the Advising Coordinator, the First-Year Experience Coordinator, and peer mentors.

The AC provides:

1. General advising: helps to guide students through their academic journey here at NWC;
2. Transfer advising: helps students on their way to their academic careers after NWC;
3. Career advising: helps students identify and follow the correct path to reach the career goals that they set at NWC;
4. Coordinating internships: conducts arrangement through the college to allow students to gain valuable work experience to further their respective aspirations.

The AC coordinates peer mentoring, which allows well-established, successful students to serve as guides to new and struggling students. During the most recent academic year, 2015-2016, the AC had 3328 visits serving over 800 individual students.

HELP (Early Alert)

The RC examined student support services for struggling students and identified issues with a time delay between alert submission and actions taken. As a result, the FYE Coordinator was added to the alert notification, who began following up on alerts by contacting students to arrange an appointment. [Results](#) of this revised HELP (Early Alert) process show that 48% of alert submissions have been resolved.

HERO Grant

One of the barriers which often prohibits student success is unforeseen financial issues. In 2013, RC discussed using unclaimed scholarship money to [assist students facing financial obstacles](#). As a result, the NWC administration and the NWC Foundation implemented the “Hero Grant” program, which provides emergency financial assistance to students encountering unforeseen personal circumstances which may prohibit them from succeeding academically or from continuing their education.

Retention Predictors/At-Risk Students

The RC's 2012 top priority was to [identify at-risk students](#). Members used [at-risk variables](#) from the literature to analyze the most relevant variables affecting the [retention](#) of NWC students.

The committee developed a risk identification system and began monitoring students with three or more at-risk markers. At-risk markers include the following indicators and risk increases for each additional indicator:

- Attempted credits: enrolled part-time in 6 to 11.5 credits
- Developmental classes: enrolled in more than one developmental class
- Online classes: enrolled in more than one online class
- Current student standing: cumulative GPA is less than 2.0
- Incoming GPA: incoming GPA is less than 2.0
- Unmet financial need: has any unmet need

College staff contacted students who had three or more at-risk indicators to offer assistance and support. This proved to be impractical. At present, faculty members have access to students at-risk score and are encouraged to work with the advising center to support struggling at-risk students. At-risk status is used in Help Alert response actions.

Co-requisite math and English courses

Research shows that students are more likely to complete college if they enroll in co-requisite courses than if they follow the traditional pathway of taking multiple developmental courses before enrolling in college-level courses. Co-requisite remediation is encouraged by Complete College America.

In Fall 2015, the math department piloted a co-requisite math class that combined two classes, MATH-0920 Elementary Algebra and MATH-1000 Problem Solving, to provide students the opportunity to develop their mathematics skills and completes a college level in the same semester. Since its inception, there have been four sections of the co-requisite model offered (one per semester) and students have had more success in those courses (63% pass rate) than students enrolled in either the separate MATH-0920 courses (41% pass rate) or MATH-1000 courses (58% pass rate) over the same four semesters. As a result of this success, the math department plans to replace MATH-0920 with the co-requisite model and develop a co-requisite model for MATH-0930 Intermediate Algebra/MATH-1400 College Algebra.

In Fall 2017, the English department will offer a co-requisite course combining ENGL-0610 Basic Writing II and ENGL-1010 Introduction to Composition.

Future Initiatives

NWC is implementing new student success initiatives including:

1. Guided Pathways – establishes prescriptive semester course maps for students to complete their respective academic programs promptly.
2. 15 to Finish - encourages students to complete at least 15 hours of coursework each semester.
3. Gateway courses in the first 30 hours – identify courses which most often cause students to stumble and place those courses in strategic places in the first half (or first 30 hours) of our Guided Pathways.

Academic Affairs is launching a Teaching and Learning Center in Fall 2017, which will promote and provide support for the application of proven best practices in instruction.

Sources

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4.S - Criterion 4 - Summary

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

Northwest College (NWC) fulfills Criterion Four by demonstrating responsibility for and evaluating the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services.

NWC systematically tracks the quality and effectiveness of its educational programs through the following methods:

- Academic program reviews
- Non-academic program reviews
- Student learning outcome reports
- Retention, persistence, and completion reports
- Transfer reports
- Student course evaluations
- Graduate exit surveys

Since the 2013 focused visit, NWC has made significant strides in improving assessment including creation of the Central Assessment Team, development of regular processes for collection and evaluation of evidence relating to student learning outcomes, ongoing professional development, and expansion of the role of the Institutional Effectiveness Committee (see 5.D.) to evaluate program reviews.

Employee Feedback on Criterion Four

The Assurance Argument Team held informational workshops on Criterion Four on March 24th and 30th, 2017. At those workshops, employees were asked to provide [evidence statements](#) about the sub-components of this criterion.

Future Plans

Future continuous improvement efforts will focus on assessment and evaluation of co-curricular programs, non-academic departments, and general education outcomes. The Central Assessment Team will complete curriculum maps in all program areas. The Teaching and Learning Center will launch in 2017 and will develop training for faculty in assessment, online education, and pedagogy. The Retention Committee will implement automated student success monitoring software to increase persistence, retention, and completion.

Sources

- Criterion 4_Workshop Comments