

# Northwest College - WY

HLC ID 1724

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OPEN PATHWAY: Open Pathway Year 4 Assurance Review

Review Date: 7/25/2022

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## Context and Nature of Review

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### Review Date

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7/25/2022

### Review Type:

Open Pathway Year 4 Assurance Review

### Scope of Review

- Assurance Review
- 2021–22 COVID-19 Response Form

## Institutional Context

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Northwest College (NWC) is a public, two-year comprehensive community college that recently received approval to offer a Bachelor of Applied Science degree. The College, founded in 1946, currently serves 1,443 credit students across a three-county area. NWC is located in Powell, WY.

NWC offers 45 transfer degrees, 19 occupational degrees, 23 certificate programs, and one bachelor of applied science degree. The support for the students and the degree programs comes from 238 employees which includes 104 faculty of which 61 are full-time. 134 staff members round out the staffing for the College. In the summer of 2022 the Board of Trustees hired a new president to assume the leadership of the College.

NWC has seen a reduction in state allocations in recent years and appears to have made prudent fiscal adjustments to adjust to the reduction in revenue. The NWC Foundation is financially strong and provides students with opportunities to get support as needed.

This review was conducted remotely as a Year 4 Assurance Review so there was no interaction with any college personnel, other than the ALO and the president, nor was there a visit to the campus. The information provided in this report is based solely on the information provided in the Assurance Argument. The review team consisted of five peer-reviewers.

## Interactions with Constituencies

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## Additional Documents

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None

# 1 - Mission

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

## 1.A - Core Component 1.A

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The institution's mission is articulated publicly and operationalized throughout the institution.

1. The mission was developed through a process suited to the context of the institution.
2. The mission and related statements are current and reference the institution's emphasis on the various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, application of research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development and religious or cultural purpose.
3. The mission and related statements identify the nature, scope and intended constituents of the higher education offerings and services the institution provides.
4. The institution's academic offerings, student support services and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.
5. The institution clearly articulates its mission through public information, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans or institutional priorities.

## Rating

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Met

## Rationale

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The new mission statement for Northwest College (NWC) was developed through a collaborative process that began in spring of 2015. Intentional effort was made to include the entire college community in its development with a 50% response rate to the "Institutional Priorities Inventory" from employees. Students' and community members' input was sought as well. The Board of Trustees (BOT) approved the mission statement in March of 2016:

"In the context of our global society, the mission of Northwest College is to: be student-centered; be forward thinking; cultivate community; prepare students for transfer, career, and life; and retain and graduate students." The intended constituents are clearly identified as students and the community. The mission statement is clearly articulated both physically through signage and in print on meeting agendas and other related documents.

Vision 2020, NWC's strategic priorities, was established at about the same time and included key performance indicators to assist the college with tracking progress made toward their Vision 2020 outcomes. Per the BOT meeting agenda dated June 29, 2022, NWC is currently engaged in the development of Vision 2025 among other related plans to support the transformational vision.

Academic program offerings include a healthy mix of workforce-ready (AAS/BAS) and transfer-

intended (AA/AS) credentials poised to meet the needs of their community. Sufficient student support services are provided to students including those who live on campus. The majority of the NWC student body appears to be traditional in age ( $1085/1442 = 75\%$ ) that is likely impacted by their location and student housing.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 1.B - Core Component 1.B

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

1. The institution's actions and decisions demonstrate that its educational role is to serve the public, not solely the institution or any superordinate entity.
2. The institution's educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.
3. The institution engages with its external constituencies and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Northwest College (NWC) includes "cultivate community" as part of the descriptive phrases in its current mission statement. They serve the public, their students, through the courses and programs they offer including service learning opportunities. Several of their departments and programs are also available to the general community regardless of student status. They intentionally serve veterans and seniors through specific programming geared toward their needs.

One of their key performance indicators through Vision 2020, B.4, is "connections within the service area" that also codifies their commitment to serving the public in a measurable manner. There are numerous cultural events hosted at NWC to which the public is also invited. The "Community Facilities Usage" report lists all events held at any campus location for which the public was included.

The College has community representation on several advisory committees that influence program development by community need. The "Partnership Report" lists ten major partnerships with NWC including the type of partnership, when the partnership started and examples of how the partnership is mutually beneficial.

Finally, the President, BOT members, and several Vice Presidents provide their support and expertise to the community by sitting on community boards and attending legislative meetings providing the voice of the college to the community. Communication from NWC to the public is provided regularly and in many formats to ensure the public is well-informed of the college and its work, mission and purpose.

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 1.C - Core Component 1.C

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The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

1. The institution encourages curricular or cocurricular activities that prepare students for informed citizenship and workplace success.
2. The institution's processes and activities demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations.
3. The institution fosters a climate of respect among all students, faculty, staff and administrators from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Northwest College (NWC) demonstrates its commitment to developing a knowledgeable and diverse citizenry in many ways. The Office of Intercultural Programs (OIP) provides oversight to international students attending NWC. The Intercultural House (ICH) also provides a "home away from home" for these students and, as part of the OIP, collaborates in providing diverse programming to meet all NWC students' needs. After a hiatus, the Multicultural Showcase, a pinnacle event, returned to campus. Surprisingly, despite COVID-19 the number of international students and countries represented has remained fairly stable since spring of 2020.

The Diversity Awareness Committee (DAC) also provides programming and training to the college community. According to the website, "the DAC serves its diverse constituencies by creating a socially just and inclusive campus and community." The DAC also supports all voices through an "open exchange of ideas" and is the body responsible for creating a "respect for diversity statement" that is included in each course syllabus.

All NWC degree-seeking students must demonstrate their knowledge of the US and Wyoming constitutions through required coursework. They also develop their interests and leadership skills through student-led clubs and organizations. Relative to the size of the student body, NWC students have an abundance of options - almost 40 different clubs and organizations - in which to participate with nearly as many inactive clubs. There is also a process for adding a new club. Of particular note is the Native Ways Student Club. Their goal is to engage and retain Native American students attending NWC and to honor and recognize their contributions to the College and community.

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## **1.S - Criterion 1 - Summary**

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

### **Rationale**

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Northwest College (NWC) clearly articulates its mission in many ways - both electronically and in print. The focus areas of the mission statement guide the institution in the ways in which they interact with students and the community.



## 2 - Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### 2.A - Core Component 2.A

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The institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff.

1. The institution develops and the governing board adopts the mission.
2. The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, human resources and auxiliary functions.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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In 2019, Northwest College published a comprehensive Board Policy Manual that sets forth the policies that provide guidance for employment, compensation, and operations of the College. The policies span all of the major areas of NWC including the Organization, Board, Faculty and Academics, Students and Student Services, Human Resources, Business and Finance, and General. In a sample review of policies, it is evident that they are reviewed and updated regularly.

Board Policy 2140 details the process by which the Board of Trustees can create, revise, adopt, or revoke a policy. The process is well defined and includes a Policy Review Committee that is made up of a cross-representation of faculty and staff. This process is a good example of how NWC is ensuring not only the voices of many in policy revisions but also how the College is following its own processes for governance.

The College adheres to, and is held accountable for, its academic policies and procedures by publishing them in the catalog, student handbook, course syllabi, and the website. Included with the policies is the process for student appeals and faculty/staff grievances. The integrity of personnel functions is ensured through policy section 3000-Faculty and Academics as well as section 5000-Human Resources.

The Office of Student Services and the Office of Administrative Services provide oversight to policies and procedures that range from residential life, Clery Crime Report, student-athletes and Title IX, to name a few. NWC included, as part of their Assurance Argument, one student Title IX claim and one faculty Title IX claim from 2016 and 2017, respectively. These claims and the resulting resolution provide evidence that the processes outlined for addressing these types of situations were appropriate and followed.

**Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.B - Core Component 2.B

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The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public.

1. The institution ensures the accuracy of any representations it makes regarding academic offerings, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, governance structure and accreditation relationships.
2. The institution ensures evidence is available to support any claims it makes regarding its contributions to the educational experience through research, community engagement, experiential learning, religious or spiritual purpose and economic development.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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All key College program publications such as the catalog, course schedules, directory, admissions (cost of attendance), are easily found on the NWC website. This ease of access provides evidence that both internal and external stakeholders can obtain the necessary information to make informed decisions based on accurate information. Information is kept up-to-date through the assignment of monitors, who are college personnel, to update different pages of the website.

Board of Trustee information such as members, meeting schedules, agendas and minutes are viewable on the website. All accreditation affiliations are also in various publications via the NWC website.

NWC is a residential campus and, as such, has co-curricular programs and activities for students that are intended to contribute to the educational and developmental experiences of its students. Examples of these experiences include inter-collegiate athletics, Skills USA for welding students, speech/debate, livestock and equine judging, student government, multicultural club, and residential assistants to name a few

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.C - Core Component 2.C

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The governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution's integrity.

1. The governing board is trained and knowledgeable so that it makes informed decisions with respect to the institution's financial and academic policies and practices; the board meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
2. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.
3. The governing board reviews the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.
4. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties.
5. The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the institution's administration and expects the institution's faculty to oversee academic matters.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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NWC's elected Board of Trustees (BOT) derives its general authority via WY Statute WS 21-18-303. In alignment with the Statute, the BOT is bound by NWC policies which articulate the responsibilities to include: assurance that the College accomplishes its vision and mission; review and approval of all new degree programs; and full authority to create, revise, adopt, or revoke policy.

In a sample review of BOT meeting agendas and minutes, it is clear that the BOT is kept abreast of college operations via multiple reports from different divisions within the Institution. In addition, the BOT upholds its statutory responsibilities through the approval of the annual budget, reviews of the external financial audit, and a monthly review of monthly college expenditures via consent agenda. Beyond fiscal responsibilities the BOT is engaging in the approval of new degree programs

The Board of Trustees ensures its independence from undue influence from any and all third parties. This is done through a code of ethics, a conflict of interest statement and a disclosure of interest statement (requires Trustee signature). The relationship with the NWC Foundation is governed via an MOU from 2016 that outlines the Agreement for Exchange of Services between NWC and the NWC Foundation. This provides evidence of how the BOT is providing support to and independence from the Foundation.

The day-to-day management of the College is delegated by the BOT to the President. In a review of the NWC organizational chart there are clear reporting lines starting with the President to the BOT and then a cascading from the President down through the rest of the College

**Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.D - Core Component 2.D

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

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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NWC Policy 3400-Academic Freedom supports the College's commitment to freedom in research, publication, and pursuit of professional/vocational areas of expertise. This is further affirmed through Policy 3330-Professional Ethics which emphasizes the delicate balance between respecting and defending the free inquiry of colleagues and students. Additionally, the Policy distinguishes responsibilities of faculty as employees versus as private citizens and affiliations with the Institution.

As part of the shared governance model employed by NWC, there is an Academic Freedom and Grievance committee whose purpose is to "monitors issues concerning academic freedom and other classroom or curricular rights of all faculty."

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.E - Core Component 2.E

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The institution's policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, staff and students.

1. Institutions supporting basic and applied research maintain professional standards and provide oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability.
2. The institution provides effective support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff and students.
3. The institution provides students guidance in the ethics of research and use of information resources.
4. The institution enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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The Institutional Review Committee (IRC) is a standing committee chaired by the Dean of Student Learning with members recruited from the faculty and staff as appropriate for the proposed research. The IRC adheres to guidelines of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services best practices and ethical standards.

Students at Northwest College are introduced to the mechanics of college writing and documentation/citation through ENGL-1010-Introduction to Composition. Further education around proper citation such as APA, MLA, Chicago or discipline-related citation styles is done in many of the 2000-level courses. The library also has library guides that provide information on the responsible and ethical use of information.

Updated general education outcomes (2017) emphasize accepted conventions used in writing, including digital correspondence as well as how to find, analyze, evaluate, and document information correctly. By infusing this education into the general education outcomes, NWC ensures that all students are educated and assessed on these skills.

The Academic Code of Conduct policy, which was updated for Fall 2017, outlines how NWC's commitment to creating and maintaining an environment of academic honesty. The Policy delineates the responsibilities of faculty to include creating a trusting environment in the classroom as well as challenging academic dishonesty. The same policy outlines the student's responsibility of learning and complying with academic expectations. The Academic Code of Conduct defines the different types of violations and the procedures to be followed as well as possible sanctions.

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## **2.S - Criterion 2 - Summary**

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The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### **Rationale**

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The Board of Trustees' authority is governed by Wyoming Statutes. Locally, the Board operates within the parameters of their policies which includes how to operate ethically and free of undue influence from outside parties. They have one college employee, the President, and then delegate the responsibility of the College to her.

The Assurance Review team found that all college policies and procedures are easily accessible to both internal and external stakeholders. The robust and comprehensive policies provide guardrails for students and all staff so that the College can operate in an ethical and acceptable manner for everyone it serves.

Academic freedom and the responsible is embraced and supported for both students and faculty. NWC has both policy and committees to ensure and support the freedom of expression both in and out of the classroom.



## **3 - Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support**

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

### **3.A - Core Component 3.A**

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The rigor of the institution's academic offerings is appropriate to higher education.

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of student performance appropriate to the credential awarded.
2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for its undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate and certificate programs.
3. The institution's program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).

### **Rating**

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Met

### **Rationale**

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NWC awards the Bachelor of Applied Science degree in Professional Studies along with four types of associate degrees: Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate Degree in Nursing, and Associate of Applied Science. The College also offers Skills Certificates and Comprehensive Skills Certificates. All Associates Degree programs have established learning outcomes aligned to the General Education outcomes. The Bachelor of Applied Science learning outcomes are aligned with the professional studies curriculum. Art, Music, and Nursing programs hold specialized accreditation. Certificate and degree requirements are clearly outlined in the course catalog and on the college website. The College articulates clear differences in learning goals for certificates and degrees.

NWC maintains transfer and articulation agreements with the University of Wyoming, other Wyoming community colleges, and four-year institutions in neighboring states including Valley City State University, Montana State University-Billings, Montana State University, and Black Hills State University. Additionally the College maintains a number of 2+2 program transfer agreements.

NWC delivers curriculum in face-to-face, online, hybrid, and concurrent enrollment formats. The team reviewed Moodle course shells for BIOL1010 and HIST1221 in all available delivery modes, as well as ORTM2800, NRST2755, NRST1635, and NURS1100 for evidence of consistency. The team noted differences in outcomes in BIOL1010. Some syllabi list the five Physical and Natural Science general education learning outcomes, one lists only Biology Department outcomes, while others included both general education and Biology Department outcomes. Most HIST1221 syllabi list course-specific learning outcomes and state the course satisfies the US and Wyoming Constitutions

general education requirement. No list of general education learning outcomes are presented. One syllabus presents a different set of course-specific outcomes. The team did not find a syllabus in the ORTM2800 Moodle shell. Nursing courses consistently presented course, program, and clinical student learning outcomes. Most, but not all, syllabi do link to a document titled Universal Syllabus Information. This team reiterates the 2017 team recommendation to consider development of a master syllabus to ensure consistent delivery and format of all course syllabi.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.B - Core Component 3.B

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The institution offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings and degree levels of the institution. The institution articulates the purposes, content and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements.
2. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.
3. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity and provides students with growth opportunities and lifelong skills to live and work in a multicultural world.
4. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their offerings and the institution's mission.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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NWC implemented new general education requirements in AA and AS programs in fall 2017 and AAS program in fall 2018. The requirements include coursework in US and Wyoming Government, a requirement of the state of Wyoming, a first-year seminar, communication, quantitative reasoning, physical and natural world, human condition, and creativity.

The College publishes a philosophy of general education on the Office of Academic Affairs website and in the college catalog to clearly articulate the purpose and rationale of general education. The Human Condition category includes a wide array of coursework to address aspects of diversity and civil society.

The President and Board of Trustees receive monthly updates on faculty and student creative work, contributions to scholarship, and discovery of knowledge. Evidence provided to the team includes a variety of service to community organizations and collaboration between NWC faculty and students and regional K-12 and higher education institutions.

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.C - Core Component 3.C

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

1. The institution strives to ensure that the overall composition of its faculty and staff reflects human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.
2. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance, assessment of student learning, and establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff.
3. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual and consortial offerings.
4. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.
5. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.
6. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.
7. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising and cocurricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their professional development.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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NWC is conscious of the race and ethnicity demographics of the service area, student body, and employees. Like many higher education institutions, the diversity of faculty and staff lags behind the students and service area. The College attempts to increase diversity by recruiting throughout the service region and posting full-time faculty positions nationally. The Diversity Awareness Committee strives to create a socially just and inclusive campus and community by bringing multicultural programs and trainings to campus. The committee also created the Respect for Diversity Statement, which is required to be included on course syllabi.

NWC maintains a 14:1 student to faculty ratio. There is sufficient numbers and continuity of full-time faculty to conduct both classroom and non-classroom roles. Fifty-one of 91 faculty are full-time, with an average tenure of 12 years. Faculty are well represented on the Curriculum Committee, Central Assessment Team, Rank and Tenure Committee, and hiring committees.

Board Policy 3110 identifies faculty qualifications which align with HLC's minimum requirements. Division chairs consult with the appropriate faculty to determine any qualifications beyond the stated minimum. All faculty, including concurrent enrollment, must meet the same credentialing requirements. Nearly half of full-time faculty hold doctorates or other terminal degrees.

Board Policy 3600 establishes faculty evaluation policies. All new full-time faculty, both tenure and non-tenure track, are evaluated annually by their Division Chair. Tenure track faculty are also evaluated by the Rank and Tenure committee in the fall semester of their third year and for decision of tenure in spring semester of the fifth year. Tenured faculty are evaluated by both the Division Chair and Rank and Tenure Committee when they are eligible for promotion. Adjunct faculty are evaluated by the Division Chair or an appointed tenured faculty member during the first semester of teaching and then annually. Faculty evaluations include a written self-evaluation of teaching effectiveness, academic service, and professional development.

Board Policy 3320 clarifies expectations for faculty professional growth and development. Faculty report on their professional development in self-evaluations. According to Board Policy 3420, faculty can request funds through the Professional Development and Travel Fund through their division as well as the Committee on Faculty Development and Morale. The budget includes professional development line items for classified staff, professional staff, faculty, and administration. Many programs and divisions have separate line items for dues/registration/membership and training development. Additionally Human Resources coordinates delivery of numerous in-person and virtual workshops and trainings

Full-time faculty are required to establish regular and adequate office hours to provide students with sufficient opportunity to consult with faculty members. Office hours are submitted to the Division Chair and published in course syllabi. Student evaluations provide feedback about faculty availability. Adjunct faculty have designated office space to hold regular office hours.

NWC establishes qualifications and credentials for student support services personnel. Staff receive regular professional development through the Center for Training and Development and have opportunities to join webinars and in-state conferences. Board Policy 5450 also establishes a Professional Development Leave policy for staff to pursue further study, training, and enrichment experiences to better serve the Institution.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.D - Core Component 3.D

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The institution provides support for student learning and resources for effective teaching.

1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its offerings and the needs of its students.
4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites and museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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NWC offers a variety of student services including pre-enrollment advising, academic and career advising, financial aid, residence life, disability support services, counseling services, TRiO student support services, peer tutoring, library, and intercultural program.

Upon admission, NWC assesses students for college-level math and English preparation using ACT scores, Accuplacer, and ALEKS PPL (math only). The College employs a co-requisite model for developmental support in math and English. Students are also supported through both discipline-specific and general studies First-Year Seminars.

NWC uses a split model of advising, consisting of both an Academic and Career Advising Coordinator and faculty advisors. The Academic and Career Advising Coordinator manages general academic advising, transfer advising, career advising, and the early alert system. Faculty advisors provide disciplinary expertise and help students develop academic plans, select and register for courses, and maintain major-specific transfer agreements.

NWC provides students and faculty the infrastructure and resources necessary for effective teaching and learning. The IT department equips and maintains classrooms with appropriate technology. Faculty receive training with the LMS, classroom technology, and other technologies to support learning.

Computing Services oversees networking, database, and desktop needs. All campus buildings have sufficient wireless coverage.

The library is open nearly 80 hours per week. In addition to all resources housed in the library, students have access to materials and resources from six other Wyoming community colleges and the Wyoming State Library, as well as interlibrary loan. Students can receive tutoring and use computers

in the library. Additionally the library offers laptops and graphing calculators for semester check-out.

The list of current college facilities to support particular programs is impressive. In addition, the NWC Foundation grants include equipment and technology to support students in each of the last five years.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.S - Criterion 3 - Summary

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

### Rationale

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NWC awards the Bachelor of Applied Science degree in Professional Studies along with four types of associate degrees: Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate Degree in Nursing, and Associate of Applied Science. The College also offers Skills Certificates and Comprehensive Skills Certificates. All Associates Degree programs have established learning outcomes aligned to the General Education outcomes. Transfer and articulation agreements with the University of Wyoming, other Wyoming community colleges, and four-year institutions in neighboring states further support students.

NWC delivers curriculum in face-to-face, online, hybrid, and concurrent enrollment formats. The College would benefit from the development of a master syllabus to ensure consistent delivery of student learning outcomes and other critical student support information.

NWC implemented new general education requirements in AA and AS programs in fall 2017 and AAS program in fall 2018. The requirements include coursework in US and Wyoming Government, a requirement of the state of Wyoming, a first-year seminar, communication, quantitative reasoning, physical and natural world, human condition, and creativity. The College publishes a philosophy of general education on the Office of Academic Affairs website and in the college catalog to clearly articulate the purpose and rationale of general education.

NWC maintains a 14:1 student to faculty ratio. There is sufficient numbers and continuity of full-time faculty to conduct both classroom and non-classroom roles. Board policies establish policies for faculty qualifications, faculty evaluation, faculty professional development, and office hours.

NWC offers a variety of student services throughout a student's engagement with the institution including academic and career advising, financial aid, residence life, disability support services, counseling services, TRiO, and tutoring. IT and Computing Services provide students and faculty with the infrastructure, resources, and training necessary for effective teaching and learning.



## 4 - Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

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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

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The institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews and acts upon the findings.
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 ensure 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 ensures 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 ensures that the credentials 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.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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NWC reports select data on programs to the Wyoming Community College Commission on the 2020-2024 schedule that has a 5-year cycle. The VPAA and academic deans review data yearly for all programs, with crossover from the Assessment Committee that allows the discussion of the program learning reports. If concerns arise, the Academic Affairs Office, Division, chairs, and program faculty conduct a more in-depth review. Examples of this in-depth review were provided for English (17-18), Biology (18-19) and Engineering & Computer Science (18-19), and the Dean of Student Learning said that usually one or two of these in-depth review happen per year. The examples provided of the reviews were thorough with a multifaceted look at program success. It may be helpful to develop criteria which programs will undergo this more thorough review. This is also noted in the 2017 Team Report in which the HLC visiting team had difficulty determining whether Program Reviews had been submitted at the required time and only had a few examples. The concern

here is that the yearly data and the data that are sent to WCCC may not present sufficient opportunities for reflection and program improvements, and it might be helpful to formalize the process and have all programs go through the more thorough process of submitting the in-depth reviews to the leadership team on a 5-year cycle.

NWC identified several actions resulting from the program reviews (scheduling, staffing, budget), but for the next comprehensive visit may want to have more evidence that directly connects to these decisions.

The Institutional Effectiveness Committee evaluates non-academic areas, and minutes show that they regularly discuss non-academic units, with several examples of discussion of the completed Support Services Program Review Form. However, it is unclear that these areas are on a particular schedule or rotation to ensure that these are being done systematically.

The Registration and Records Office is responsible for evaluating transfer credit. NWC accepts credits only from regionally accredited postsecondary institutions. International Baccalaureate (IB) credit transfer is evaluated by the Registrar. Students may earn up to 15 credit hours from a Self-Acquired Competency Credit portfolio evaluation by faculty.

Dual credit is awarded at NWC through concurrent enrollment classes in high schools taught by high school instructors and overseen by the department chairs who review syllabi, student evaluations, and conduct classroom visits. An English assessment indicates similar levels of success as for on-campus classes. For the comprehensive visit in four years, the team would expect to see evaluations of courses or other evidence that the coaching/mentoring is taking place by the college faculty.

The NWC Curriculum Committee meets regularly, and minutes from 2021 show that this Committee oversees the new course creation process and determines whether courses should earn general education credit.

Music and Music Technology, Fine Arts and Graphic Design, and the Nursing RN programs are all accredited by outside agencies and are in good standing.

After transferring, students are tracked by the University of Wyoming, and they generally perform similarly to all transfer students. NWC also receives data on the Education students from Valley City State University, which indicate that the 14 transfer students performed well.

A graduate exit survey tracks student ratings of their learning on general education outcomes as well as satisfaction with student services. Ideally, some employment information could be included in these graduate surveys, or in the more-thorough program reviews for career-oriented programs.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 4.B - Core Component 4.B

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The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.

1. The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and cocurricular offerings.
2. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
3. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty, instructional and other relevant staff members.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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NWC has made great strides since the Focused Visit of 2013, the Comprehensive Visit in 2017 and the Interim Report in 2019 to shore up its method and process for assessment, particularly in the assessment of general education. The assessment depends on both instructor-reported outcomes achievement as well as student-reported ratings on 13 learning outcomes over the 7 general education competencies on the Graduate Exit Survey. Graduates reported that they agreed or strongly agreed to have proficiency in 78% of the general education outcomes.

Instructors complete a general education report for each course on rotation in the core that includes the outcome, assessment method, number of students who met and did not meet the outcome, and description of future actions. These reports over the last four years show widespread participation by faculty, diligent collection of the results, and dozens examples each year of very specific changes or improvements to courses and assignments.

The forms show course-level improvements very clearly, but department-level or college-level discussions are less obvious. NWC lists that assessment is used in technology requests, progress toward the Vision, and programming in the Teaching and Learning Center. The Dean of Student Learning and Vice President of Academic Affairs indicated that this happens within the CAT and in their participation with the CAT. Subsequent reviewers will want to see minutes or evidence that documents how these larger-scale, college-level changes are informed by assessment.

In the area of program assessment, there are well-designed processes, form, and rotation schedule.

An important mapping effort in 2018, led to important updates in the assessment plan. The Program Learning Outcome Assessment Report is a concise and useful document, and the examples included showed the process at its best—with concrete examples of changing courses and programs to improve student learning. The process specifies that departments meet to discuss the completed results and improvements. Examples of the reports were provided for the last four years.

Co-curricular assessment is an area that many institutions have struggled to define. The 2019 NWC

assurance argument stated:

To gain clarity on co-curricular assessment, Northwest College sent a group of eight representatives to the HLC Strategic Assessment Workshop held on June 19-21, 2018. Based on clarification received at that workshop on how to determine whether a student organization qualifies as co-curricular, the College determined that co-curricular programs would be those activities with a clear connection to an academic program. Three student organizations fall within that definition: Forensics, Enactus, and Livestock Judging. These organizations have direct ties to academic programs (Communication, Business, and Agriculture) and have credit bearing courses associated with them. Additionally, these courses have assigned course and related program outcomes, which are reported on as part of the current program learning outcomes assessments.

The College's definition is narrowly defined to three experiences that happen in conjunction with courses, and thus are covered by existing curricular program assessment. A separate assessment report is included about the Library, and the Institutional Effectiveness Committee minutes show examples of evaluations of non-academic areas that some institutions would consider co-curricular. Before the next comprehensive visit, the Institution will want to revisit co-curricular assessment using HLC's 2020 definition: "CO-CURRICULAR: Learning activities, programs and experiences that reinforce the institution's mission and values and complement the formal curriculum. Examples: Study abroad, student-faculty research experiences, service learning, professional clubs or organization, athletics, honor societies, career services, etc." and create a schedule for assessing the activities that fall into this expanded definition.

In general, the Institution uses best practices in assessment. They have representatives from each department on the committee. They have effectively made changes to their general education assessment, and look critically at the work of the units to suggest improvements, for example, CAT has compiled the results on the 7 competencies over the last 4 years allowing them to examine trends. CAT analyzes the types of measures (direct/indirect) and rates the suggestions as likely to have an impact, which provides an impressive level of quality control and learning opportunities about refining the assessment process, and documents improvements in the process over time.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 4.C - Core Component 4.C

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The institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve 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, 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.)

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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NWC has clear student success goals within the now completed Vision 2020 plan, along with other kpi's for the institution. Like most other 2-year institutions, retention, and to a lesser extent, completions have decreased over the last two years. The fall first-time, degree-seeking retention for F20 to F21 is 54%, with a completion rate of 46%, and if transfers are included, 59-60% of students graduate or transfer within three years. Notably, NWC had the highest completion rate among Wyoming Community Colleges in 2020-2021

After experiencing some understandable COVID-related delays, the planning is underway with some initial frameworks for the next plan Vision 2025. Given the centrality of student success measures in the previous plan, the team would expect retention, persistence, and completion goals to be a prominent part of the emerging plan.

Northwest College provided the IPEDS completions, IPEDS graduation rate surveys, and National Community College Benchmark Project reports, additionally relies on Wyoming Community College Commission (WCCC) Annual Performance Indicators for in-state cohort performance information. NWC uses IPEDS definitions, or when unavailable, agreed-upon statewide definitions and common measurement methods.

The Institutional Research website gives a dashboard that includes enrollment and student achievement outcomes as well as links to a longitudinal enrollment report, profile, and federal and state reports.

The 2017 Team wrote “The Retention Committee has been instrumental in establishing initiatives that help students to succeed.” These initiatives include the following.

The First Year Seminar was expanded across all degree programs in fall of 2017, and since summer 2020, NWC has offered the course in summer with no charge to the students.

Other initiatives include the HELP early alert notification, a HERO Grant to help students needing emergency financial support, Guided pathways / Student Planner software, and a 15-to-finish initiative that encourages students to take 15-credit hours a term.

Co-requisite math classes were piloted in 2015 and subsequently expanded with impressive completion gains over students taking sequential developmental classes. English also began offering co-requisite education in 2017.

Important evidence to include in subsequent assurance arguments will be continued minutes from the Retention Committee to show their work in recent years, as well as data from the above initiatives to show that they are working and remain warranted by the data.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 4.S - Criterion 4 - Summary

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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.

### Rationale

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NWC shows evidence of their responsibility to engage in the regular assessment of their academic programs.

They conduct program reviews with data reports on programs over a five-year cycle sent to WCCC; programs with any concerns go through a more thorough process. They have three accredited programs. They follow standard practices for the awarding of credit and dual credit awards. The Institutional Effectiveness Committee looks at non-academic units to ensure their effectiveness.

In general, the Institution uses best practices in assessment. They have representatives from each department on the CAT. They have effectively made changes to their general education assessment. They have continued collecting data and implementing the process submitted in the 2019 interim report. At the program level, they conduct yearly program assessment using a thorough report form, and have several examples of improvements from this process. They look critically at the work of the units to suggest improvements.

Overall, the Institution uses data to inform decisions and ensure quality. NWC regularly monitors retention and completion and have several initiatives to improve student success (early alert, HERO grant, co-requisite model, etc.).

There are some areas that warrant attention before the next comprehensive visit.

- 1) Program Review. It might be helpful to formalize the process and have all programs go through the more thorough process of submitting the in-depth reviews to the leadership team on a 5-year cycle.
- 2) General Education. The next review team will want to see examples of minutes or other evidence that shows that discussion of general education at the department and college level, beyond the many course-level improvements that are reported.
- 3) The College will want to revisit its definition of co-curricular learning to align with the HLC's 2020 definition: "CO-CURRICULAR: Learning activities, programs and experiences that reinforce the institution's mission and values and complement the formal curriculum. Examples: Study abroad, student-faculty research experiences, service learning, professional clubs or organization, athletics, honor societies, career services, etc." The College's current definition is too limited, and they have a number of experiences falling into to the HLC definition that would warrant their own assessment plan.

## 5 - Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

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

### 5.A - Core Component 5.A

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Through its administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution's leadership demonstrates that it is effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission.

1. Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.
2. The institution's administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.
3. The institution's administration ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Northwest College maintains structures and processes that are effective in supporting the institutional mission. This is evidenced by the College committee structure and shared governance processes which are reflective of inclusive membership and engagement by all stakeholders. The Shared Governance and Decision Making Guide clearly defines the process for the College and delineates expectations. Regular review and revision of this document, while not required, could provide an opportunity for the Institution to reenforce the shared governance structure.

Data is used across the Institution for the purpose of informing the decision-making process. In addition to the engaging in the process defined by the Shared Governance and Decision Making Guide, the College also captures data from the Program Review process in both Student Services and Academic Affairs to determine viability of programming. In alignment with the shared governance structure, this data is reviewed by assigned committees for recommendation to the President. Data related the budget process is also used to make determinations related to allocation, and most recently, to make recommendations regarding Reduction in Force and costs associated with student fees, housing and meal plan rates. In a memo from President Watson to the Board of Trustees dated April 2, 2022, rationale in clearly presented regarding the data-driven decision-making process for Reduction in Force recommendations.

In addition to being data-driven in decision making, Northwest College utilizes multiple mechanisms



to engage all stakeholders through collaborative structures. As demonstrated through the committee membership document, there is intentionality in ensuring inclusive membership for committees across campus. The Academic Advisory Council, Course Scheduling Committee, and Central Assessment Team include staff membership, and the Curriculum Committee, Library Committee and Retention Committee are inclusive of both staff and students. These collaborative structures allow for inclusive engagement for academic decision-making and demonstrate an intentional effort to by the Institution to embrace collaboration in fulfilling its mission.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 5.B - Core Component 5.B

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

1. The institution has qualified and trained operational staff and infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
2. The goals incorporated into the mission and any related statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources and opportunities.
3. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring its finances.
4. The institution's fiscal allocations ensure that its educational purposes are achieved.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Northwest College has a well developed process for ensuring qualified and trained operational staff. This process includes well developed job descriptions and a thorough selection process detailed in the Board Policy Manual (3110 Faculty Appointment and 5150 Staff Recruitment). Once hired, the College provides ample opportunity for all employees to engage in internal and external professional development. This includes access to courses provided through the Institution, as well as tuition waivers for full-time employees to attend the University of Wyoming. Additionally, employees are required to complete trainings related to Title IX, Office of Civil Rights and the Clery Act. Moreover, the Institution documents compliance and demonstrates adherence to these trainings. Budget allocations provided also reflect a commitment to professional development across areas of the College.

Budgeting processes are in place to ensure a collaborative process, and one that reflects a commitment to quality while recognizing the need to be responsive to changes in revenue. The Institution regularly engages Budget Managers and the Budget Committee in meetings to discuss planning in relation to current economic climate (NWC Budget Managers Agenda-May 5, 2022). Processes are in place to monitor finances including a multitiered expenditure approval process.

NWC maintains a strong commitment to the mission in spite of consistent declines in state funding and other revenue sources. The 2008 Facilities Master Plan, and subsequent update in 2014, drive campus priorities related to the physical structures and needs of the Institution. As demonstrated through Facilities Project Report (June 1, 2022), the Board of Trustees are informed monthly regarding the implementation of the Facilities Master Plan and adjustments are made to timelines based on available funding.

The College engages in a comprehensive budgeting and management process that focuses on ensuring the educational purposes of the Institution are achieved. Stable reserve balances (Schedule of Reserves, June 30, 2021) and strong commitments by the NWC Foundation have provided relief in

times of budget shortfall.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 5.C - Core Component 5.C

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The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement.

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities, including, as applicable, its comprehensive research enterprise, associated institutes and affiliated centers.
2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning and budgeting.
3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity, including fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue and enrollment.
5. Institutional planning anticipates evolving external factors, such as technology advancements, demographic shifts, globalization, the economy and state support.
6. The institution implements its plans to systematically improve its operations and student outcomes.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Northwest College has established multiple planning and improvement mechanisms to ensure forward movement. Among these is the NWC Vision 2020 Key Performance Indicators which provides a roadmap for improvement and growth, along with measurements for accountability.

In addition to the Institution's Vision 2020 documents, the College has established several supplemental plans; this includes a Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan in 2019 that outlines current, ongoing and upcoming areas of focus as relates to recruitment, retention and communication. The SEM plan includes action items, as well as performance measures to determine progress and maintain accountability. NWC has also incorporated a Facilities Master Plan that delineates the physical needs of the Institution with associated priorities. This plan, originally developed in 2008, was updated in 2014 and is reviewed monthly to determine fiscal viability of planning components and assessment of institutional priorities.

In 2017 the NWC President developed the Institutional Effectiveness Committee (IEC) to provide for a more comprehensive assessment of college-wide efforts. More specifically, the IEC is responsible for ensuring appropriate data is available for institutional decision-making and serves as an evaluative body for program review.

To ensure a collaborative planning process NWC actively seeks out stakeholder feedback through a variety of surveys and focus groups (Community College Survey of Student Engagement, College Transformation, Future Summit, and PACE Climate Survey). In 2019 the Institution hosted several Strategic Visioning Listening Sessions for both internal and external stakeholders resulting in a recommendation to establish Champion Student Success, Attract New Students, Innovate Academic

Programming, and Revitalize Facilities.as the 2025 strategic initiatives. As demonstrated by these efforts, the College engages in, and has a strong commitment to systematic and integrated planning and improvement.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## **5.S - Criterion 5 - Summary**

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

### **Rationale**

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Northwest College maintains structures, processes and planning that demonstrate a commitment to the mission of the institution. Despite financial challenges, the College demonstrates a strong commitment to quality of educational offerings and has implemented an inclusive planning process that engages all stakeholder. It is evident that NWC has a solid structure in place to account for both future challenges, opportunities, and the ever-changing student landscape.

## Review Dashboard

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Number	Title	Rating
1	Mission	
1.A	Core Component 1.A	Met
1.B	Core Component 1.B	Met
1.C	Core Component 1.C	Met
1.S	Criterion 1 - Summary	
2	Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct	
2.A	Core Component 2.A	Met
2.B	Core Component 2.B	Met
2.C	Core Component 2.C	Met
2.D	Core Component 2.D	Met
2.E	Core Component 2.E	Met
2.S	Criterion 2 - Summary	
3	Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support	
3.A	Core Component 3.A	Met
3.B	Core Component 3.B	Met
3.C	Core Component 3.C	Met
3.D	Core Component 3.D	Met
3.S	Criterion 3 - Summary	
4	Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement	
4.A	Core Component 4.A	Met
4.B	Core Component 4.B	Met
4.C	Core Component 4.C	Met
4.S	Criterion 4 - Summary	
5	Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning	
5.A	Core Component 5.A	Met
5.B	Core Component 5.B	Met
5.C	Core Component 5.C	Met
5.S	Criterion 5 - Summary	

## Review Summary

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### Conclusion

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The Four Year Assurance Review for Northwest College was conducted by a five person peer-review team. The Team wrote their rationale based on the information provided in the Assurance Argument and did not utilize any additional resources. Kudos to the NWC team for writing a thorough Argument and for their diligence in providing some additional evidence when requested. The information provided by the College was sufficient for the team to do an in-depth review of NWC's progress since their last comprehensive visit in Fall 2017.

The Team was unanimous in determining that the College has met the criteria for accreditation. NWC lives its mission and provides robust programming and support for its students and the community.

NWC continues to make progress in the assessment of student learning, including general education outcomes. Work in the assessment of co-curricular programming still needs to be expanded and evidenced. It will be important for the next peer-review team to ensure that growth in this area is occurring.

### Overall Recommendations

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#### Criteria For Accreditation

Met

#### Sanctions Recommendation

No Sanction

#### Pathways Recommendation

Not Applicable to This Review

*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*