



July 9, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Mike Koon, Interim President
West Virginia Northern Community College
1704 Market St.
Wheeling, WV 26003

Dear President Koon:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning West Virginia Northern Community College (“the Institution” or WVNCC). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, June 27, 2019. In taking this action, the Board considered materials from the most recent comprehensive evaluation, including, but not limited to: the Assurance Filing the Institution submitted, the report from the comprehensive evaluation team, the report of the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) Hearing Committee, and the institutional responses to these reports.

Summary of the Action: The Board determined that the Institution is no longer out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and removed the Institution from Probation and assigned interim monitoring. The Institution meets Core Components 4.B and 4.C with concerns. The Institution is required to submit an Interim Report, as outlined below, no later than December 31, 2020.

Board Rationale

The Board based its action on the following findings made with regard to the Institution:

The Institution now meets without concerns Criterion Two, Core Component 2.A, “the institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it establishes and follows policies and processes for fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff,” for the following reasons:

- WVNCC demonstrates financial integrity by making public the results of its annual external audit, and the results of the prior audits for financial years ending in 2016 and 2017 demonstrate that the Institution is fiscally sound in a period of declining enrollments. The auditors gave the Institution an unqualified opinion for both years, and the Institution has substantial reserves. The Institution has engaged constituents in discussion to develop mini-grants to spend some reserves to enhance various aspects of the Institution. Since the last visit by the Commission, the Institution strengthened the role of the budget committee to assist the Chief Financial Officer in making budgetary decisions.

- A dispute that had erupted among the Institution, the WVNCC Foundation, and several community members regarding unpaid taxes on property acquired by the Foundation has been resolved, and as a result, the Institution, Foundation, and Board of Governors tightened existing procedures and implemented new procedures to prevent a similar issue in the future.

The Institution now meets Criterion Three, Core Component 3.C, “the institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services,” for the following reasons:

- WVNCC has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty to carry out important roles and expectations; the institution employs 55 full-time and 66 part-time faculty, with 70 percent of full-time faculty teaching courses with a 13:1 ratio.
- The Institution defines teaching load and advising load and provides times for a host of teaching and learning activities. It appears faculty participate in key roles throughout the Institution. Many of the important ongoing committees include faculty representation and demonstrate faculty service throughout campus operations. Specifically, the Assessment and Curriculum Committees are key committees led by faculty.
- WVNCC ensures that faculty are qualified and credentialed using a system called WEAVE, which was implemented following the last comprehensive review. There is an evaluation process and verification by the division chair, human resources, and the VPAA.
- The college hiring and credentialing process appears to be collaborative and includes human resources, the division chair, and the VPAA. The credential guidelines appear to be thorough, with educational requirements, teaching and learning competency requirements, occupational experience, state and/or national industry licensure/certification, and other requirements as appropriate for each assigned field, licensed field, or credentialed field. This credentialing ensures that faculty with minimum degree qualifications also have experience and training specifically for the community college population.

The Institution now meets, but with concerns, Criterion Four, Core Component 4.B, “the institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning,” for the following reasons:

- WVNCC has established clearly defined student learning outcomes for its courses, programs, and institutional general education. Course and program outcomes are listed on each Master Course Guide. Program outcomes are also identified and published in the course catalog. Six institutional general education outcomes have been identified in the catalog.
- An Assessment Committee was charged with refining the process, defining a common language, and reinforcing a culture of assessment for the Institution, including all three campuses, both full- and part-time faculty, and multiple layers of assessment as proof of outcomes.
- WVNCC faculty and staff implemented consistent HLC recommendations within a

common framework for assessment; however, time is needed for the Institution to gather additional data sets, develop trend analysis, and note improvements from various assessment processes.

The Institution now meets, but with concerns, Criterion Four, 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,” for the following reasons:

- The West Virginia Community and Technical College System established retention, persistence, and completion goals for all West Virginia community colleges. These were incorporated in WVNCC’s Strategic Plan in 2016, yet the Institution believed they were unrealistic with an 80% growth in enrollment. In fall 2017 these goals were updated to be “ambitious, but attainable.” Persistence, retention and completion goals are still ambitious given the range of responsibilities and activities within an institution.
- The Institution collects information required by IPEDS to analyze student retention, persistence, and completion. Fall-to-fall retention of first-time, full-time students was reported above 50%, which is comparable to similar institutions (NCES Data). Increasing fall/spring retention rates is forecasted at 1% by focusing on registration and graduation. Strategies are listed in the Enrollment Management and Comprehensive Retention Plan to target specific populations: high school students, adult students, veterans, students who have converted from admitted to registered, and students with distance education potential.
- While the institutional reach is admirably large, the targeted goal(s) need to become focused to ensure follow-up and completion. When so many strategies are implemented for change, it is difficult to know what made the difference and to identify successful process and practice.

The Institution has demonstrated that it is otherwise in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, Assumed Practices and Federal Compliance requirements and can therefore be removed from Probation.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Interim Report: The Board required that the Institution submit an Interim Report no later than December 31, 2020, regarding Core Components 4.B and 4.C.

Comprehensive Evaluation: The Institution has been placed on the Standard Pathway with its next comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation in 2022-23.

HLC Disclosure Obligations

The Board action resulted in changes that will be reflected in the Institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status as well as the Institutional Status and Requirements Report. The Statement of

Accreditation Status, including the dates of the last and next comprehensive evaluation visits, will be posted to the HLC website.

Information about this action is provided to members of the public and to other constituents in several ways. In accordance with HLC policy,¹ this Action Letter and the enclosed Public Disclosure Notice will be posted to HLC's website not more than 24 hours after this letter is sent to the Institution.

HLC policy² requires that a summary of Board actions be sent to appropriate state and federal agencies and accrediting associations. It also will be published on HLC's website. The summary will include this HLC action regarding the Institution.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Enc: Public Disclosure Notice

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, West Virginia Northern Community College
Larry Tackett, Vice President for Economic and Workforce Development, West Virginia
Northern Community College
Sarah Armstrong Tucker, Chancellor, West Virginia Community and Technical College
System
Evaluation Team Chair
IAC Hearing Committee Chair
Anthea Sweeney, Vice President for Legal and Governmental Affairs, Higher Learning
Commission

¹ INST.G.10.010, Management of Commission Information

² COMM.A.10.010, Commission Public Notices and Statements