



July 9, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dr. Sam Minner, President
New Mexico Highlands University
Box 9000
1005 Diamond Avenue
Las Vegas, NM 87701

Dear President Minner:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning New Mexico Highlands University (“the institution”). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, June 28, 2018. 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. The institution meets Core Components 4.C, 5.A, and 5.D with concerns. The institution is required to host a Focused Visit, as outlined below, no later than June 30, 2020.

Board Rationale

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

The institution has demonstrated that it now meets without concerns Criterion One, Core Component 1.A, “the institution’s mission is broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations,” for the following reasons:

- The institution’s new mission is now clearly connected to the Vision 2020 Plan and to the budget planning process as articulated in the institution’s Annual Operating Budget Process; and
- The strategic planning documents now articulate a process for departments and units to align their goals with those of the strategic plan, thereby facilitating implementation.

The institution has demonstrated that it 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:

- The institution has developed a comprehensive personnel handbook for its visiting and adjunct faculty that was approved by the Faculty Senate, general faculty and ultimately, the Board of Regents;
- Implementation of policies and procedures related to contingent faculty was evident at the time of the team visit; and
- Contingent faculty are now required as part of their contract to complete a new faculty orientation before they begin teaching.

The institution has demonstrated that it 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:

- The Faculty Senate created Minimum Faculty Qualifications Guidelines that are now part of the *Faculty Handbook*; the guidelines clearly define the minimum qualifications by course level and the policies for establishing tested experience;
- The University offers programs at the Center for Teaching Excellence, including professional development activities, to prepare faculty for design and delivery of high-impact practices and online teaching;
- Faculty members can apply for monies through the Pino Endowment for Faculty Development to receive professional development funds in the areas of teaching, research or scholarly activity, and service to the institution and community; and
- The institution’s collective bargaining agreement provides \$1500 travel funding per tenured and tenure-track faculty member as well as a sabbatical in further support of their professional development.

The institution has demonstrated that it now meets Criterion Three, Core Component 3.D, “the institution provides support for student learning and effective teaching,” for the following reasons:

- In the last two years, the institution has improved services and support for student learning at its Centers, in addition to the main campus;
- The institution has taken steps to ensure proper budget allocations, adequate facilities for effective operations, teaching and learning, and effective disposition of student concerns;
- All centers have full-time and part-time staff on site to provide students with appropriate services, and technology is leveraged extensively to connect offices, classes, and people regardless of location; and

- The institution's students, whether studying at centers or online, have access to a full array of library resources, including physical resources.

The institution has demonstrated that it now meets 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:

- The institution now has clearly articulated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning;
- Although activities related to assessment of student learning had appeared to be intermittent in the past, the institution has implemented assessment plans for 100 percent of its academic programs; and
- The institution has in place policies and procedures, outlined in its Assessment Handbook, that work through the shared governance process via the Outcomes Assessment Committee of the Faculty Senate and that are overseen by the Office of Academic Affairs (for academic programs), the Dean of Students (for co-curricular programs), and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research.

The institution has demonstrated that it now meets 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," but with concerns for the following reasons:

- The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that appear to be attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings;
- The institution developed a 2016-2020 Retention Plan that was approved by the General Faculty, Staff Senate, Student Senate and Board of Regents and later updated;
- Despite these developments, the institution has made limited progress in collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs, particularly as related to specific student populations; and
- Given a lack of data in many areas, the institution is unable to use information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted, and a comprehensive enrollment management plan has yet to be implemented.

The institution has demonstrated that it now meets Criterion Five, Core Component 5.A, "the institution's resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future," but with concerns for the following reasons:

- The institution has created and executed new processes to strengthen key areas of financial management, including strategic planning and budgeting, new construction

and renovation planning and oversight, technology tools selection and deployment, and student outreach and persistence strategies;

- The president has successfully executed initiatives to bolster financial resources through new revenue bonds and by hiring a new Vice President for Advancement;
- The institution's resource allocation process ensures that its educational purposes are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations beyond its institutional and mission-execution needs;
- However, the institution's audit finding in its FY17 Independent Audit Draft related to exceeding its budget in five areas reflects continued challenges.

The institution has demonstrated that it now meets Criterion Five, Core Component 5.B, "the institution's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission," because the Board of Regents has demonstrated understanding of its institutional responsibilities, adheres to a formally adopted Association of Governing Boards statement on governance, and participates in governance training, including New Mexico state trainings for board members and Higher Education Regent Council meetings.

The institution has demonstrated that it now meets Criterion Five, Core Component 5.C, "the institution engages in systematic and integrated planning," for the following reasons:

- The institution has demonstrated its ability to engage in systematic planning through the integration of its mission and priorities, and that it has inclusive and transparent processes as evidenced by its strategic planning website postings;
- The institution has demonstrated that it has established processes and requirements that tie together assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting; and
- The budgeting process includes transparent processes for prioritization of budget expenditures and requests from staff, faculty, and administration to efficiently manage the impacts of state funding and enrollment fluctuations.

The institution has demonstrated that it meets Criterion Five, Core Component 5.D, "the institution works systematically to improve its performance," but with concerns for the following reasons:

- The institution has demonstrated that it has the processes in place to develop and document evidence of performance in its operations;
- However, the institution currently lacks specific outcomes of its work that it can demonstrate through data and other tracking measures; and
- Such measures are needed to help the institution provide clear evidence of its efforts, learning, and subsequent improvements toward institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability.

The institution has demonstrated that it is otherwise in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, Assumed Practices, and Federal Compliance requirements and should therefore be removed from Probation, but the institution meets some Core Components with concerns in the areas identified above.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Focused Visit: The Board required that the institution host a Focused Visit regarding Core Components 4.C, 5.A, and 5.D no later than June 30, 2020. The Focused Visit will specifically address the following:

Core Component 4.C

- Completion and implementation of a comprehensive Enrollment Management Plan. This plan should, at a minimum, identify target enrollments with supporting rationale for student population types (e.g., first-time, first-year students, transfer students, graduate students); mechanisms for recruiting students; and targets for retention, persistence, and completion rates for each student type.
- Documentation of improvement in the collection and analysis of data on student retention, persistence, and completion, with consistency in data reporting. These data should include a comprehensive review of the 2017 retention, persistence, and completion goals.
- Increased use of information to make improvements as warranted by the data on student retention, persistence, and completion. Evidence should be provided that demonstrates the use of the evaluation of the 2016 and 2017 retention, persistence, and completion goals for continuous improvement.

Core Component 5.A

- Evidence of a reduction in the reliance on state funding to balance the institution's budget.
- Stabilization or growth in student enrollment through the identification of a clear strategy linked to metric-driven recruitment and student persistence goals.
- Independent audits of the institution, the Foundation, and Isotopes that do not yield any findings or, at minimum, do not yield any repeat findings.
- Continued year-end actual change in net assets at break-even levels or that yield surplus.

Core Component 5.D

- Evidence of the creation and implementation of policies related to new processes for the institutionalization of stakeholder agreements in all areas, including strategic planning and budgeting, student complaint management, the Office of Advancement, and Student Financial Aid administration.
- An executive Strategic Plan Indicators update that includes outcomes that provide evidence that the institution is improving its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, both as a whole and in its component parts.

- A unit and/or department strategic plan update that includes outcomes that provide evidence that the institution is improving its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, both as a whole and in its component parts.

Comprehensive Evaluation: The institution has been placed on the Standard Pathway with its next comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation in 2021-22.

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. If you have questions about any of the information in this letter, please contact your HLC Staff Liaison, Dr. Stephanie Brzuzy.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Enc: Public Disclosure Notice

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, New Mexico Highlands University
Brandon Kempner, Accreditation Liaison Officer, New Mexico Highlands University
Evaluation Team Chair

¹ INST.G.10.010, Management of Commission Information

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

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IAC Hearing Committee Chair

Barbara Damron, Executive Director, New Mexico Higher Education Department

Stephanie Brzuzy, Vice President for Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission

Anthea Sweeney, Vice President for Legal and Governmental Affairs, Higher Learning
Commission