

# Eligibility Requirements

## 2020 Eligibility Requirements for Candidates for Accreditation and Accredited Higher Education Institutions

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) requires that every member, applicant, and candidate institution be a degree-granting institution whose mission is focused on excellence in higher education and meets the Eligibility Requirements described in this section.

Failure to meet any Eligibility Requirement may lead to the imposition of a sanction or adverse action for a member institution, denial of application for candidacy, or denial of initial accreditation.

### Eligibility for Accreditation

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) accredits institutions that:

- Are concerned predominantly with higher learning;
- Have characteristics commonly associated with higher education; and
- Meet its Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation.

The principal programs of eligible institutions are degree related and built upon knowledge and competencies normally obtained by students through a completed high school program or its equivalent. Such programs are based on verifiable knowledge that has been subjected to examination by competent academic persons and by established higher education practitioners. Although diversity of requirements is expected among Candidate and Accredited institutions, course and degree requirements of an Applicant institution must also be congruent with those of the broader higher education community that the Commission represents.

Eligible institutions may offer programs or courses that the Commission would not define as higher learning (e.g., subject-based courses that some students may have missed in high school and courses and special programs specifically constructed to assist students to be successful with college-level coursework), but these are offered in addition to the courses and programs relevant to their higher education missions.

### Eligibility Requirements

- 1. OPERATIONAL STATUS:** The institution has completed at least one year of its principal educational programs and is operational with students actively pursuing its degree programs at the time of NWCCU's acceptance of its Application for Consideration for Eligibility. The institution has graduated at least one class in its principal educational program(s) before NWCCU's evaluation for initial accreditation.
- 2. OPERATIONAL FOCUS AND INDEPENDENCE:** The institution's programs and services are predominantly concerned with higher education. The institution has sufficient organizational and operational independence to be held accountable and responsible for meeting and sustaining NWCCU's Standards for Accreditation and Eligibility Requirements.
- 3. AUTHORITY:** The institution is authorized to operate and confer degrees as a higher education institution by the appropriate governmental organization, agency, and/or governing board as required by the jurisdiction in which it operates.
- 4. INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS:** The institution demonstrates and publishes evidence of effectiveness and uses ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning to refine its key processes and measures to demonstrate institutional mission fulfillment. Through these processes, it regularly monitors its internal and external environments to determine how and to what degree changing circumstances may impact the institution and its ability to ensure its viability and sustainability.
- 5. STUDENT LEARNING:** The institution identifies and publishes the expected learning outcomes for each of its degree, certificate, or credential programs. The institution engages in regular and ongoing assessment to validate student learning and, consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses student learning outcomes (or core competencies) examples of which include, but are not limited to, effective communication, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy that are assessed across all associate and bachelor level programs or within a General Education curriculum.
- 6. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:** The institution identifies and publishes expected outcomes and metrics for student achievement, including, but not limited to, graduation, retention, completion, licensure, and measures of postgraduation success. The indicators of student achievement are disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first-generation college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories that are used to help promote student achievement and close barriers to academic excellence and success (equity gaps).
- 7. NON-DISCRIMINATION:** The institution is governed and administered with respect for the individual in a nondiscriminatory manner while responding to the educational needs and legitimate claims of the constituencies it serves as determined by its mission.
- 8. INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY:** The institution establishes and adheres to ethical standards in all of its academic programs, operations, and relationships.
- 9. GOVERNING BOARD:** The institution has a functioning governing board(s) responsible for the quality and integrity of the institution and for each college/unit within a multiple-unit district or system, to ensure that the institution's mission is being achieved. The governing board(s) has at least five voting members, a majority of whom have no contractual or employment relationship or personal financial interest with the institution. Institutions that are part of a complex system with multiple boards, a centralized board, or related entities, shall have, with respect to such boards, clearly defined authority, roles, and responsibilities for all entities in a written contract(s). In addition, authority and responsibility between the system and the institution is clearly delineated, in a written contract, described on its website and in its public documents, and provides NWCCU accredited institutions with sufficient autonomy to fulfill its mission.
- 10. CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER:** The institution employs an appropriately qualified chief executive officer who is appointed by the governing board and whose full-time responsibility is to the institution. The chief executive officer may serve as an ex officio member of the governing board(s) but may not serve as chair.
- 11. ADMINISTRATION:** In addition to a chief executive officer, the institution employs a sufficient number of qualified administrators, with appropriate levels of authority, responsibility, and accountability, who are charged with planning, organizing, and managing the institution and assessing its achievements and effectiveness. Such administrators provide effective leadership and management for the institution's major support and operational functions and work collaboratively across institutional functions and units to foster fulfillment of the institution's mission. Executive officers may serve as an ex officio member of the governing board(s) but may not serve as chair.
- 12. FACULTY:** Consistent with its mission, the institution employs qualified faculty members sufficient in numbers to achieve its educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies, and ensure the integrity and sustainability of its academic programs. The institution regularly and systematically evaluates the performance of faculty members in alignment with institutional mission and goals, educational objectives, and policies and procedures. Evaluations are based on written criteria that are published, easily accessible, and clearly communicated. Evaluations are applied equitably, fairly, and consistently in relation to responsibilities and duties.
- 13. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS:** Consistent with its mission, the institution provides one or more educational programs all of which include appropriate content and rigor. The educational program(s) culminate in the achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes and lead to degree(s) with degree designations consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.
- 14. LIBRARY AND INFORMATION RESOURCES:** Consistent with its mission, the institution employs qualified personnel and provides access to library and information resources with a level of currency, depth, and breadth sufficient to support and sustain the institution's mission, programs, and services.
- 15. PHYSICAL AND TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE:** The institution provides the facilities, equipment, and information technology infrastructure necessary to fulfill and sustain its mission and maintain compliance with all federal and applicable state and local laws. The institution's planning includes emergency preparedness and contingency planning for continuity and recovery of operations should catastrophic events significantly interrupt normal institutional operations.
- 16. ACADEMIC FREEDOM:** Within the context of its mission and values, the institution adheres to and maintains an atmosphere that promotes, supports, and sustains academic freedom and independence that protects its constituencies from inappropriate internal and external influences, pressures, and harassment. Faculty, students, staff, and administrators are free to examine and test all knowledge and theories.
- 17. ADMISSIONS:** The institution publishes student admission policies which specify the characteristics and qualifications appropriate for its programs and adheres to those policies in its admissions procedures and practices.
- 18. PUBLIC INFORMATION:** The institution publishes current and accurate information regarding: its mission; admission requirements and procedures; grading policy; information on academic programs and courses; names, titles, and academic credentials of administrators and faculty; rules and regulations for student conduct; rights and responsibilities of students; tuition, fees, and other program costs; refund policies and procedures; opportunities and requirements for financial aid; and the academic calendar.
- 19. FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND PLANNING:** The institution demonstrates financial stability, with cash flow and reserves necessary to support and sustain its mission, programs, and services. Financial planning ensures appropriate available funds, realistic development of financial resources, and appropriate risk management to ensure short-term financial health and long-term financial sustainability.
- 20. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY:** For each year of operation, the institution undergoes an annual, independent financial audit by professionally qualified personnel in accordance with **generally accepted auditing standards** or **International Financial Reporting Standards** reconciled to US-GAAP. The audit is to be completed no later than fifteen months after the end of the fiscal year. Results from the audit, including findings and management letter recommendations, are considered annually in an appropriate and comprehensive manner by the administration and the governing board.
- 21. DISCLOSURE:** The institution accurately discloses all the information NWCCU may require to carry out its evaluation and accreditation functions.
- 22. RELATIONSHIP WITH NWCCU:** The institution understands and accepts the Standards and policies of NWCCU and agrees to comply with these Standards and policies. Further, the institution agrees that NWCCU may, at its sole discretion, make known the nature of any action, positive or negative, regarding the institution's status with NWCCU to any agency or member of the public requesting such information.
- 23. INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY:** The institution demonstrates operational capacity (e.g., enrollment, human and financial resources, and institutional infrastructure) sufficient to fulfill and sustain its mission. It allocates resources as necessary to achieve its mission and engages in realistic budgeting, enrollment management, and capital planning to support the achievement of its identified strategic indicators of institutional capacity.