

Comprehensive Evaluation Plan  
2019-2020 Reaffirmation of Accreditation  
September 2017



South Dakota State University  
Brookings, South Dakota



South Dakota State University

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## Introduction

South Dakota State University (SDSU) will undergo a comprehensive evaluation during academic year 2019-2020 for continued accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). As an *Open Pathway* institution of higher education, the comprehensive evaluation process includes an Assurance Review, a review of federal compliance requirements, an on-site visit and student opinion survey (conducted by HLC).

Another key component of the overall re-accreditation process is the Quality Initiative (QI). SDSU is participating in the *HLC Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning* for the *Open Pathway* QI beginning in summer 2015. The institution is now in its 3rd year of implementation with the final report due to HLC in 2019.

The University will use a committee structure to complete the requirements for the comprehensive evaluation, ensuring broad participation across the university.

## Overview of Reaffirmation of Accreditation Requirements and Process

### *Assurance Review/Argument*

The purpose of the Assurance Review/Argument is to determine whether or not an institution continues to meet the Criteria for Accreditation. SDSU will need to demonstrate that the institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation by preparing an Assurance Filing, which includes an Assurance Argument and evidence. The materials are submitted using the online HLC Assurance System. Selected members of each work group will be provided access and training.

### *Federal Compliance*

The United States Department of Education requires HLC and all of its affiliated institutions to ensure compliance with specific regulations accreditors must enforce in order to be federally recognized, including compliance with Title IV responsibilities. Adherence with these requirements is necessary to be eligible for federal financial aid.

The Federal Compliance program includes three steps. First, SDSU must address the federal requirements in the materials submitted to HLC *prior* to the site visit. Second, additional information on Federal Compliance must also be made available during the actual visit. And, third, peer reviewers must complete and submit the required worksheet to validate they have conducted a thorough review of SDSU's compliance with requirements.

### *Student Opinion Survey*

Two to three months prior to the on-site visit, the HLC will conduct an online survey of student opinions. The purpose of the survey is to provide a tangible way for students to participate in the accreditation process and to provide information from the survey to the peer review team. HLC does not use the results for ranking or comparison purposes and does not publish the results.

### *Peer Review/On-Site Visit*

A team of peer reviewers will visit campus some time during fall term 2019 or spring term 2010 to evaluate and validate the institution's Assurance Filing. The review of the Federal Compliance filing takes place prior to the actual visit; however, if the team members have additional questions or would like to see additional evidence, these requests can be made during the site visit.

### *Quality Initiative*

The Quality Initiative (QI) is required of all *Open Pathway* institutions. SDSU was required to select one major improvement project to meet a current need and/or aspiration. The QI project takes place between years 5 and 9 of the overall 10-year re-accreditation cycle. SDSU began its QI project in June of 2015 and will complete the project in Summer 2019. As noted earlier, SDSU decided to apply to the *HLC Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning* and was accepted. The title of the SDSU QI project is *Academic Quality Assurance and Improvement: A Focus on Assessment*.

Goals are:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the current SDSU Assessment Plan with particular focus on the examination of the undergraduate and graduate academic programs and co-curricular assessment plans.
- Provide training to three cohorts of campus-wide assessment coordinators/designees in developing sound assessment plans.
- Make assessment of student learning more visible through greater transparency.
- Identify an assessment management software system for assessment data to build an interactive data base and reporting mechanism
- Review and strengthen the university- wide commitment to assessment.
- Continue to work toward a successful transition of assessment to the new Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

## Outcomes and Goals for Reaccreditation for SDSU

As noted earlier, SDSU will undergo a comprehensive evaluation during academic year 2019-2020 for continued accreditation through HLC. The preparation of the assurance argument and federal compliance report, review of assumed practices, and implementation of the identified Quality Initiative are the mechanisms whereby the University prepares for the comprehensive review and site visit.

The process involves rigorous assessment of strengths and challenges with the University. Determining strengths will provide a base for continuing and enhancing them. Identifying challenges will provide a starting point to strengthen the University, support the strategic plan and plan for the next decade. The result of these processes will be greater institutional effectiveness.

### *Proposed outcomes of the reaccreditation process*

1. Review and reaffirm SDSU's heritage, mission and strategic goals.
2. Evaluate institutional effectiveness in meeting the SDSU mission and strategic goals at all levels.
3. Summarize the institution's overall strengths and challenges.
4. Suggest paths for continuous improvement.
5. Create sustainable systems that will continue to provide useful organizational learning opportunities.
6. Strengthen diversity, inclusion and equity focus.
7. Enhance shared governance across all levels.
8. Review alignment between goals, strategies and financial priorities.
9. Achieve reaccreditation with no qualifications.

### *Process goals*

1. Invite and involve the entire University community at various stages of the process as a venue to provide organizational learning.
2. Maintain regular and effective communication links with institutional constituencies.
3. Build naturally on existing and ongoing self-evaluation processes.
4. Draw on expertise, credibility and interests of recognized and emerging leaders throughout the institution.
5. Utilize an equity lens to review the reaccreditation process and outcomes.
6. Emphasize and celebrate the distinctive nature of the institution.
7. Use data and relevant information to analyze strengths and weaknesses.

## Roles and responsibilities

*Director* – Dennis Hedge, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs - appoint or serve as the chair the Steering Committee; appoint the coordinators, work groups and work group chairs; provide leadership and encourage interest and participation by the entire University community and external constituents throughout the re-accreditation process; direct the preparation of the Assurance Argument and Federal Compliance report; serve as the primary resource person to the HLC peer review team; approve plan for the team visit.

*Coordinators*: Mary Kay Helling, Vice Provost and Jana Hanson, Director of Institutional Assessment – serve on the core leadership team, lead and direct the re-accreditation process; oversee and coordinate the Steering Committee, Work Groups and Teams; communicate with President, Provost/VPAA, Senior Staff, Executive Team, Faculty Senate, Students' Association, Professional Staff Advisory Council, Civil Service Advisory Group and other groups as identified; solicit third-party comment, implement HLC student survey, coordinate the HLC site visit, lead preparation of institutional response to review report.

*Steering Committee* – represent the entire SDSU community; understand the *Open Pathways* process; review evidence used to document that SDSU meets the HLC criteria; review assurance argument and provide feedback to work groups; review SDSU compliance with Assumed Practices; serve as key resource people during the site visit; promote the interest and involvement in the self-study process to the SDSU community and other groups; make recommendations for long range planning based on findings of the self-study and strategic planning process. Members of the steering committee are:

- Faculty Senate Chair - Jose Gonzalez, Associate Professor - Agronomy, Horticulture & Plant Science
- Dean – Nancy Fahrenwald, College of Nursing
- Associate/Assistant Dean – Nicole Lounsbery, Graduate School
- Department Heads/Directors
  - David Reynolds, Professor, Music
  - Jay Trenhaile, Professor, Counseling and Human Development
- Students’ Association President – Tailyn Albrecht
- Civil Service Advisory Council Chair – Sally Krueger, Senior Secretary – Physics
- Professional Staff Advisory Council Chair – Shawn Helmbolt, Assistant Director – Admissions
- College Faculty Representatives:
  - ABS – Cody Wright, Professor - Animal Science
  - Arts and Sciences – Liz Tolman, Professor - Communication Studies
  - Education and Human Sciences – Brad Bowser, Assistant Professor - Health & Nutritional Sciences
  - Engineering – Allen Jones, Professor - Civil & Environmental Engineering
  - Nursing – Victoria Britson, Assistant Professor - Graduate Nursing
  - Pharmacy - Gudiseva Chandrasekher, Associate Professor - Pharmaceutical Sciences
  - Honors - Donna Flint, Assistant Department Head/Professor - Mathematics & Statistics
  - University College - Bonnie Shinn, Instructor - University College
- Student Affairs Representatives - Doug Wermedal, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Adam Karnopp, Orientation Director - Student Union & Activities
- Facilities and Services – Dean Kattelmann, Associate Vice President Facilities and Services
- Finance and Budget – Wes Tschetter, Vice President-Finance & Business/CFO
- Intercollegiate Athletics – Kathy Heylens, Associate Athletic Director/Senior Women’s Administrator
- Technology and Security – Ryan Knutson, Assistant Vice President-Technology
- Marketing and Communications – Andrea Kieckhefer, Creative Services Manager - University Marketing and Communications
- Research and Economic Development – Dianne Nagy, Grant Proposal Specialist - Research Assurance & Sponsored Programs

#### Ex Officio Members:

- President – Barry Dunn, Ex Officio
- Assistant VP, Human Resources – Marc Serrett, Ex Officio
- Chief University Librarian – Kristi Tornquist, Ex Officio

#### Reaccreditation Staff:

- Provost/VPAA – Dennis Hedge
- Vice Provost – Mary Kay Helling
- Director, Institutional Assessment – Jana Hanson
- Director, Institutional Research – TBA
- Director, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access – Nathan Ziegler
- Assistant to the Provost – Karla Howard

*Work Groups* – study criteria, core components; identify evidence to support assurance argument for each criterion and core component, identify strengths, gaps/areas for improvement, strategies to improve; draft assurance argument for assigned criterion, incorporate feedback; serve with the Steering Committee as resource persons during the site visit; assist in promotion of awareness and participation in the reaccreditation process by the SDSU community. Work groups include:

*Work Group 1. Criterion 1. Mission:* The institution's mission is broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations. (4 core components)

*Work Group 2. Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct:* The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible. (5 core components)

*Work Group 3. Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support:* The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offering are delivered. (4 core components)

*Work Group 4. Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement:* The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates its effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement. (3 core components)

*Work Group 5. Criterion 5. Resources, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness:* The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future. (4 core components)

*Work Group 6. Federal Compliance.* This work group will review the institution's compliance with numerous federal policies including, but not limited to: assignment of credits, program length and tuition; transfer policies; verification of student identity, Title IV program responsibilities, required information for students and the public, advertising and recruitment materials, student outcome data, standing with state and

other accrediting bodies, public notification of opportunity to comment, etc. Members of the Federal Compliance work group are:

- Micah Hansen, Financial Aid Compliance Manager, Financial Aid Office
- Karen Jastram, Director of Accounting Services/Controller/Internal Control Officer, Finance and Budget Office
- Joyce Kepford, Registrar, Records and Registration
- Carey Kilmer, Assistant Director, Continuing and Distance Education
- Mike Lockrem, Director, University Marketing and Communications
- Nick Wendell, Director, Student Engagement

*Communication Work Group* – develop communication plan and timeline, design social media campaign, design website, InsideState site, and handouts (as needed), document scheduled meetings where communication about the HLC re-accreditation is shared; ensure consistent messaging and use of graphics; coordinate the Third Party Comment process as required by HLC; prepare news releases.

*Evidence File Work Group* – with the Coordinators, prepare the electronic document repository in support of the Assurance Review by determining an appropriate file format, loading HLC required documents into the evidence file and loading and linking documents and reports into the evidence file.

*Visit Preparation Work Group* – ensure SDSU is prepared for the site visit team; ensure key facilities are ready (i.e., repairs, structural arrangements, maintenance), make necessary hotel reservations for the visiting team; plan and arrange for meals, refreshments (in hotel and meeting rooms), mementos (small gifts), packets, name tags, etc.; arrange meeting spaces on campus for the visiting team with different groups; coordinate the campus tour for the visiting team. Members of this work are:

- Karla Howard, Assistant to the Provost
- Jamison Lamp, University Event Coordinator
- Jim Weiss, Director, Campus Maintenance

## Working Calendar for Re-Accreditation Process

As of July 2017

<u>Date</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Coordinator/Group</u>
<b>YEAR 2014-15</b>		
Spring 2015	SDSU accepted to HLC Assessment Academy	Coordinator
Summer 2015	Quality Initiative (QI) Executive Team attends June HLC Round Table event	QI Executive Team
Fall 2015	Launch of Year 1 of QI project	QI Steering Comm



<b>YEAR 2015-16</b>		
Fall 2016	Launch of Year 2 of QI project	QI Steering Comm
Spring 2017	Appointment of Federal Compliance work group	Director/Coordinator (s)
	Appointment of HLC Steering Committee	Director/Coordinator (s)
	Attend HLC Annual Conference	Coordinator
<b>YEAR 2017-18</b>		
Summer 2017	Develop draft of Re-Accreditation Plan to share with Steering Committee, etc.	Coordinator (s)
Fall 2017	Launch of Year 3 of QI Project	QI Steering Comm
	Seek faculty and staff interest for work group membership (August)	Director/Coordinator (s)
	Organizational meeting with Steering Committee (September)	Director/Coordinator (s)
	Organizational meeting with Federal Compliance Work Group (September/October)	Coordinator (s)
	Work Groups established/chairs identified (October/November)	Coordinator (s)
	Work Groups convened by chairs(November/December)	Work Group chairs
	Communication plan under development Data needs identified and data gathering begins; Existing data and reports identified as needed	Coordinators Work Groups; OIRA

Spring 2018	Work groups continue to meet; gather data; Begin preparing assurance argument Begin compiling evidence files	Work Groups
	Develop survey instruments, if needed	Coordinators
	Steering Committee meets	Coordinators Steering Committee
	Attend HLC Annual Conference	SDSU Representative
<b>YEAR 2018-19</b>		
Summer 2018	Continue work on assurance argument; Evidence files	Work Groups
Fall 2018	Year 4 of QI Project	QI Steering Comm
	Continue work on assurance argument; Evidence files	Work Groups
	Identify three possible dates for on-site visit	Director/Coordinator (s)
	Steering Committee meets	Coordinators Steering Committee
Spring 2019	Continue work on assurance argument; Evidence files	Work Groups
	Implement Student Satisfaction Survey	OIRA

YEAR 2019-2020		
Summer 2019	Attend HLC Results Forum for QI project; Submit QI Report	QI Executive Team
	Finalize the Assurance Argument and Evidence Files	Work Groups Director/Coordinator (s)
	Federal Compliance report complete	Work Group/Coordinators
	Publicize forthcoming visit for third party input (for fall visit)	Director/Coordinator
Fall 2019		
• October 17	Assurance System Locks	HLC
• November 4-5	Site Visit	HLC/SDSU Community
Following the visit	Review Peer reviewers report/recommendations	President/Director Coordinators/Steering Committee
	Submit any corrections of error in fact	Director/Coordinator
	Review final report and provide institutional response	Director/Coordinator
	Communicate with campus community; external stakeholders on findings of the review	Director/Coordinator
	Celebrate!	Entire University
	Recognize those who contributed to the re-accreditation process	
	Set goals for on-going improvement	

## Engaging SDSU Stakeholders/Communication Plan

One of the goals of the HLC re-accreditation process is to solicit broad input from a variety of constituencies. Input can be provided in a variety of ways including providing/gathering evidence for the assurance argument, analyzing institutional effectiveness, reviewing the assurance argument and reviewing any conclusions and recommendations.

The following strategies have been identified to help ensure broad participation and numerous opportunities for engagement:

1. Use of information gathered via the 2023 Strategic Planning process. Numerous opportunities have been provided as part of the most current strategic planning process including a strategic planning conference, data gathering and engagement sessions, identification and discussion of themes, goals, strategies and key performance indicators, and operationalization of the plan at the college/department/unit levels. The 2023 university-level strategic plan will be implemented in July 2018.
2. Use of information gathered via the Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Planning process. The SEM plan will be in place by May/June 2018.
3. Reports/updates to SDSU Governance including Faculty Senate, Students' Association, Professional Staff Advisory Council and Civil Service Council.
4. Reports/updates to standing committees/meetings including but not limited to Academic Affairs Committee, Management Team Meetings, Dean's Council, Quality Initiative Steering Committee, Executive Team, and additional opportunities as identified.
5. Focused Group Discussions – a series of group discussion opportunities will be offered in preparation for the visit (scheduled for either spring 2019 or fall 2019)
6. Survey of Student Opinion – HLC will conduct an online survey of SDSU's student body approximately two months prior to the on-site peer review visit. The survey provides students with an opportunity to participate in the re-accreditation process and help identify questions for the peer reviewers to ask while on site. The survey includes 14 statements for which students are asked to rate their level of agreement, along with an open-ended question, "Is there anything else you would like for us to know about your experience with SDSU?", six demographic questions (academic program, year in school, age, gender, ethnicity and race).
7. Third-Party Comments – Six months prior to the on-site visit, SDSU will publish the third-party comment notice with comments due to HLC one month prior to the visit. The notice invites comments from the public about the university in preparation for the evaluation by HLC. Any comments received are shared with the institution and visiting team chair about 3 weeks before the visit. The team and the institution discuss comments received during the visit.
8. Other opportunities as identified.

## Responding to the Report

An important first step following the onsite visit by the HLC peer review team will be to recognize all those who contributed to the reaccreditation process. And, to celebrate the outcomes of the review by recognizing the strengths of the University.

We will also take stock as an institution by reviewing the HLC report, sharing results with stakeholders, evaluating the information, discussing and using results to inform change and continuous improvement.