

Executive Summary

This self-study for Northeastern State University's decennial review by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (NCA) was designed to ascertain whether the University satisfies five basic criteria for accreditation. The evidence accumulated in the three-year process of completing this self-study affirms that the University satisfies these criteria.

The significant effort involved in the self-study process has had two additional purposes. First, it provided the opportunity for the University to focus more closely on its purposes, accomplishments, and challenges while engaging strategic planning for the new millennium. Second, it has been the framework for evaluating the University's progress toward becoming Oklahoma's premier regional university.

NCA accreditation criteria and evidence that the University meets them:

Criterion 1 The University has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education:

Northeastern State University, a state-supported, regional university, has made and continues to make impressive progress in articulating, communicating, and implementing its mission and purposes. Its strategic plan includes statements of the mission and vision of the University and identifies the goals, objectives, and strategies for accomplishing the mission. The mission statement is published in the catalog and on the institution webpage.

Criterion 2 The institution has effectively organized human, financial, and physical resources necessary to accomplish its purposes:

Decision making at Northeastern State University involves the administration, advisory groups, and the faculty council in a shared-governance structure, ensuring the most efficient use of human, physical, and financial resources to accomplish the University's purposes.

Criterion 3 The institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes:

The highest priority of Northeastern State University is to advance learning through the integration of teaching, research, and service to others. The following accomplishments demonstrate the measure of success attained:

- * The University is proceeding with an aggressive plan to enhance instruction and scholarly activity for undergraduate students that has introduced an Honors Program and a Freshman Convocation. The University is engaged in a number of activities that are changing the campus culture in recognizing assessment results as critical for improving student learning.
- * New and realigned baccalaureate degree programs are creating a market position that makes the University a provider of several distinctive programs which attract students from beyond Northeastern's immediate service area.

- * The University is committed to outreach as an extension of teaching and research/creative activity for audiences outside the University, and to improving the well-being of the region, state, and the world beyond.

Criterion 4 The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness:

Northeastern State University has fostered a more participatory and inclusive planning process and developed a more diversified resource base to prepare for the challenges that lie ahead.

Criterion 5 The institution demonstrates integrity in its practices and relationships:

The University promotes integrity and ethical behavior on the part of its students, faculty, and staff through leadership, continual review and updating of policies, and the clear expectation that practice will follow policy.

The major accomplishments of the last decade:

- * Substantial investments have been made to renovate classrooms, construct new facilities, modify existing buildings, and enhance the campus infrastructure (particularly in computing and telecommunication technology). These improvements provide an environment that supports excellence in the instruction and research pursuits of students and faculty, and in administrative processes that support the University's educational mission.
- * Positive trends in diversity are illustrated by continued progress in minority student recruitment and retention, modest growth in the numbers of new women and minority faculty, and attention to salary equity issues for women on the faculty.
- * Faculty continue to be heavily involved in teaching at the undergraduate level, particularly in lower-division courses. Excellence in teaching at all levels is rewarded. The *NSU Faculty Association* sponsors an awards program to recognize outstanding teaching, research, and service. Three Circle of Excellence Awards are presented annually.
- * The post-tenure review process, now part of each tenured faculty member's three-year performance evaluation, addresses at a minimum whether excellence has been achieved in teaching, research (scholarship) or creative achievement, professional service, and university service. Faculty are expected to be involved in scholarly activities which contribute to the multifaceted mission of a community of scholars whose primary responsibility is teaching.
- * Funding for faculty development has been substantially increased over the last three years. All faculty members are encouraged to request and utilize funds for approved professional development activities.

- * Grants and Contracts expenditures have increased from \$1.09 million in FY91 to \$2.38 million in FY00, a 117.2% increase.
- * Commitment to the concept of being Oklahoma's premier regional university is exemplified by the recent regional outreach expansion. The establishment of a new campus, Northeastern State University Broken Arrow, has solidified outreach to Broken Arrow, a dynamic suburb southeast of Tulsa.
- * The expansion of the Muskogee campus and development of the Broken Arrow campus demonstrate NSU's commitment to outreach. Information technology and electronic communication advances have been instrumental in outreach growth.
- * Assessment has been integrated into the planning process, as most recently illustrated by the NSU Strategic Plan's goals, objectives, and measurements.
- * Creation of the position of Dean of Enrollment Management in FY00 has placed renewed emphasis on student recruitment, financial services, retention, academic advisement, and assessment. This commitment has created and will maintain a seamless process for students from recruitment through graduation.
- * An innovative scheduling pattern has been established that has included a May intersession, a special session in December, and a session in August between the summer and fall terms.
- * Partnership agreements with two-year institutions within Oklahoma and with the adjoining states of Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas, and 2 *plus* 2 agreements with Tulsa Community College and Connors State College are providing new opportunity for transfer recruitment.
- * Development of a unified Strategic Plan has increased the involvement of faculty, staff, and students in University planning and decision making.
- * Interdisciplinary degree programs have expanded in several areas, and their importance in stabilizing enrollment in some disciplines has grown.

Issues and challenges facing Northeastern State University:

- * The University has the challenge of implementing the finalized strategic plan.
- * The University continues to be challenged to bring the Professor and Associate Professor salaries to levels found at regional institutions of comparable size.

- * With the growing distance learning activities, the University continues to be challenged in evaluating their impact on faculty time and load.
- * Student research activities are an important education experience. Expanded recognition and support of these activities is desired.
- * Growing demands are challenging the Office of Grants and Contracts.
- * The multi-learning site structure poses challenges to the maximal effective utilization of faculty resources.
- * As the University continues to meet the increasing demands of providing instruction on three campuses and at multi-learning sites, administrative officials will continue to be challenged in assuring the quality of instruction and meeting the expanding demands on faculty time and loads.
- * Growing demands are challenging the current University Assessment Program.
- * NSU would benefit by increased coordination of institutional research and data. Consideration should be given to the development of an office for coordinating institutional research and data.
- * The NSU Tahlequah campus is challenged by the deferred maintenance on some of its older physical facilities.
- * Communication between the University administration and other University groups would be enhanced by concerted efforts to disseminate appropriate information in a timely manner.

Northeastern State University is poised to continue to accomplish its mission and purposes. By doing so, the University will strengthen its educational effectiveness. Northeastern has the resources to maintain its strengths, correct weaknesses, and address the continuing challenges that face the institution.