

**A CSC Primer  
for the 2017  
HLC Campus  
Visit**

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At the behest of Executive Council

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# Introduction

This collection of documents has been assembled to help CSC prepare for the upcoming campus visit by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). HLC is CSC’s main accreditation body, and a four-person Peer Review Team representing HLC will be on campus April 24 and 25 to reaffirm our accreditation. The Peer Review Team will have individual meetings with selected faculty and staff members and host open forums with students, faculty, and staff. This collection of documents begins with two lists of questions: one, to help prepare for the April visit, and the second, questions that the Peer Review Team may ask while on campus.

Because of the great variety in higher education institutions, HLC considers the core documents of an institution in its evaluation, and this primer contains a few important items. Accreditation begins with a college’s mission statement, so that is included in large font. Strategic planning is also a key feature of the review process, so brief summaries of the three main campus planning documents – Master Academic Plan, Master Campus Plan, and Comprehensive Campaign – collectively known as Chadron State 2020 are included.<sup>1</sup>

The final pages of this primer contains the main aspects of what HLC will be reviewing. The re-affirmation process is complicated and involves many documents, but for the campus visit, the most important document is called the “Assurance Argument,” created by CSC, to respond to the HLC document called “Criteria for Accreditation,” which lists the five main areas under which the college will be evaluated during the campus visit. The Criteria for Accreditation contains dozens of sub-criteria, and the Assurance Argument is 35,000 words. In the interest of brevity, sub-criteria appear in outline form before the summaries of each of the five sections taken from the longer Assurance Argument.<sup>2</sup>

HLC is an independent corporation that was founded in 1895 as one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States. HLC accredits degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions in the North Central region, which includes the following 19 states:

- Arizona
- Arkansas
- Colorado
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Missouri
- Nebraska
- New Mexico
- North Dakota
- Ohio
- Oklahoma
- South Dakota
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin
- Wyoming

Chadron State College was first accredited by HLC in 1915, with the most recent re-affirmation of accreditation occurring in 2006-2007. The 2017 visit is one of the final steps in CSC’s 2016-2017 re-affirmation of accreditation process.

<sup>1</sup> A more complete description is available at <http://www.csc.edu/president/2020/index.csc>.

<sup>2</sup> If any of you want to dig deeper in the full Criteria for Accreditation, it is available at <http://policy.hlcommission.org/Policies/criteria-for-accreditation.html>.

# Questions to Prepare for Our Campus Visit

This list of preparation questions is adapted from University of Northern Colorado's preparation materials from its 2015 HLC campus visit. The process for HLC visits is similar for every campus, however, the actual visit is conducted according to the interests and concerns of the Peer Review Team based on their understanding of the Assurance Argument. Our best way to prepare is to be familiar with the overall accreditation process and the alignment of the mission statement to our day to day activities since we all contribute to the success of Chadron State.

## General Questions:

- A. What do you know about accreditation?
- B. What do you know about the Higher Learning Commission?
- C. What are CSC's greatest strengths?
- D. What are the biggest challenges facing CSC? How about challenges specific to your department/office?
- E. What makes CSC unique in your state and among higher education universities in general?

## Staff Questions:

1. How does your department/office support the academic mission of the university?
2. What is it like to be a staff member at CSC?
3. What opportunities do you have for professional development? Are staff members treated equitably in their access to these opportunities?
4. How are staff evaluated at CSC? What is your impression of the evaluation process?
5. How are staff involved in campus decision-making processes? Do you think that staff have sufficient input into decisions that affect them?
6. How would you describe the relationship between staff and administration? What works and what could be improved?
7. What are some important benefits about working at CSC? What do you like best about your job? What would you change if you could?
8. How do units across campus work collaboratively? What works well and what could be improved?
9. Do you feel that the work you do is valued by administration? Faculty? Other staff members? Students?
10. How does your department/office contribute to student learning and development? How does your department assess or evaluate effectiveness?

# Questions to Prepare for Our Campus Visit

## Student Questions:

- I. Why did you choose CSC? Have your expectations been met?
- II. Do you know where to go to get academic advice? Personal counseling? Make a complaint?
- III. Can you get the courses you need when you need them?
- IV. Do students have the opportunity to provide the administration with input about CSC?
- V. Is the library an important part of the education offered at CSC? How would you rate support for technology?
- VI. What would you change if you could?
- VII. What kind of education does the above-average student get? A transfer student? A non-traditional student? An under-prepared student?
- VIII. What do you like best about CSC? What do you like least?

## Faculty Questions:

- a. How do faculty members participate in decision-making?
- b. How is a new course developed?
- c. What improvements have resulted from student learning assessment?
- d. How do faculty feel about teaching basic general education courses?
- e. What evidence demonstrates that students at CSC are mastering the Essential Studies Learning Outcomes?
- f. Is teaching and learning valued at CSC? Creative Activities/Scholarship? Service?
- g. What is the role of faculty in assuring academic quality?
- h. In what ways does CSC make sure that assessment outcomes are used to guide decision making and resource allocation?

## **Mission Statement**

Chadron State College will enrich the quality of life in the region by providing educational opportunities, research, service, and programs that contribute significantly to the vitality and diversity of the region.

# CSC STRATEGIC PLANNING

The basis for Chadron State 2020 extends from the Nebraska State Legislature's charge to Chadron State College as delineated in State of Nebraska Statute 85-951: "[The College's] first instructional priority shall be the provision of baccalaureate general academic, baccalaureate occupational, and baccalaureate professional degree programs in education. The...second instructional priority shall be master's programs in education and other areas authorized by the State Legislature. The...third priority shall be the continuation and development of applied research and public service activities."

Chadron State 2020 is comprised of three complementary and interconnected plans:

- The Master Academic Plan, the centerpiece of Chadron State 2020
- The Campus Facilities Master Plan (2012)
- The Comprehensive Campaign

The MAP was developed in advance of Chadron State 2020 to act as the centerpiece for alignment of campus-wide efforts. The MAP furnished an avenue to self-reflect through a community of learners and learn through the implementation process to enhance the quality of the CSC learning environment, the alignment of resources within academic affairs, and the nature of the alignment of non-academic resources with academic pursuits. The College community embraced six priorities to address the most pressing concerns toward the pursuit of student and organizational learning success. The six priorities include the Essential Studies Program, co-curricular experiences, teaching and learning resources, student recruitment and retention, the graduate studies program, and faculty and staff recruitment and retention.

A Campus Facilities Plan was first developed in 1991 to meet the infrastructure needs for the coming decade. The current Campus Facilities Master Plan (2012) strives to create spaces which facilitate experience-based, hands-on learning and promote the cultivation of learning communities. Among its most important goals are to reinforce a distinct campus identity, to support a community of learners, to enrich student quality of life, to promote sustainable practices, and to reflect the campus connection to its rural environment. Some of the recommendations of note include the addition of a Rangeland Center, the construction of suite-style or townhouse-type housing to replace the aging West Court apartment-style units, and renovation of various buildings. The Campus Facilities Master Plan is renewed every 10 years.

In 2007, the Chadron State Foundation launched its first ever multi-million-dollar comprehensive fundraising campaign. The five-year campaign raised funds for scholarships, equipment, student and faculty support, and two building projects: The construction of the aforementioned Rangeland Lab and Coffee Agriculture Pavilion, and the renovation and expansion of the aging Armstrong Physical Education Building, including construction of the new Chicoine Center. The Next Horizon comprehensive campaign, which began in 2016, encompasses construction and renovation of the Math Science Building and football stadium and outdoor track, academic and program support, and scholarships to enhance the CSC educational experience.

# Criterion One. Mission

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

1.A. The institution's mission is broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations.

1.B. The mission is articulated publicly.

1.C. The institution understands the relationship between its mission and the diversity of society.

1.D. The institution's mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.

## Summary

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Chadron State College meets the expectations articulated in Criterion One. As part of the Nebraska State College System (NSCS), we carry out our statutory mission and the policies of our governing board in a thoughtful, intentional manner. To clarify our role within the region, we developed institution specific mission and vision statements through a collaborative process. These statements, along with the NSCS mission statement, vision statement, and core values, guide all institutional strategic planning, programming, budgeting, and operations. All documents related to CSC's mission and/or the Board of Trustees' elaboration of this mission can be accessed through the NSCS website, the CSC website, and other forms of campus and public outreach. We understand the needs of our students and other constituents, and strive to educate and serve them in a manner consistent with our appointed mission.

CSC provides a strong, undergraduate curriculum in the arts and sciences and in many professional and occupational areas. Students are also offered an education that recognizes the value of service learning, internships, and other connections with the wider community. We create global awareness in our students through our curriculum, recruitment of diverse populations, and extra-curricular activities. Our graduate programs also further our mission by emphasizing career advancement and professional development in the field of education. While focusing on learning outcomes and best instructional practices, we also provide the social, emotional, and financial support that lead to student success.

The college is also a good public servant. CSC offers cultural events, consulting, workshops, continuing education, collaboration in community projects, and other services to the residents of western Nebraska. Our mission to enhance the quality of life in our region guides us in all that we do.

The college community is re-evaluating our institutional mission and vision statements and considering whether they fully articulate CSC's mission and the parameters of its operations set out in our complex mission documents. Final adoption of any mission/vision statement revisions will occur after the HLC reaffirmation visit. Meanwhile, our review of mission documents has reaffirmed that we are on-task with providing exactly the kind of education and regional service expected of us.



# Criterion Two. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

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.

2.B. The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public with regard to its programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control, and accreditation relationships.

2.C. The governing board of the institution is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and to assure its integrity.

2.D. The institution is committed to freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.

2.E. The institution's policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, students and staff.

## Summary

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CSC has provided evidence that our institution functions with integrity in all of its operations. As a member of the Nebraska State College System (NSCS), we are guided by Board policies regarding ethical concerns such as equality of access, conflict of interest, auditing procedures, and student/employee rights and conduct. Employee and Student Handbooks articulate institutional procedures for student/employee ethical conduct and protections based on Board policies. Also, separate negotiated agreements between the NSCS Board and CSC faculty, professional staff, and support staff establish guidelines for equitable compensation and working conditions.

The CSC website serves as a primary source of information for the campus and the public, and procedures are in place for website updates and maintenance. Our digitized Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs, department handbooks, marketing materials, and other documents in digital or print form provide multiple resources for learning about academic programs, degree requirements, and tuition/fees. We are continually striving to improve our communications so students may complete their degrees in a timely manner with a minimum of expense. The Department of College Relations uses established procedures to review all marketing materials for accuracy and collaborates with units requesting such materials. Every effort is made to avoid any form of misrepresentation.

The NSCS Board of Trustees operates autonomously to make decisions in the best interest of CSC. Our evidence confirms that the Board works collaboratively with CSC on various issues, respecting our planning process and working to fulfill our educational mission. Both the Board and the college involve internal and external constituents in decision-making.

CSC and its Board are committed to freedom of expression, as stated in Board Policy 4650, based upon the Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure endorsed by the AAC and AAUP. The college supports faculty members in conducting and/or presenting the discipline-based research they have chosen to pursue. Instructors are free to choose topics for classroom discussion and to explore controversial issues in an unbiased, respectful manner. Our commitment to freedom of expression is also demonstrated through guest speakers, political forums, and the award-winning student newspaper, *The Eagle*.

Finally, CSC has developed policies and procedures for ethical use of resources and provides institutional support to both faculty and students. The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) has assembled materials on copyright law and fair use policies, which are published on the TLC website. Students also receive guidance in the ethical use of information resources through a coursework at both the undergraduate and graduate level. The Student Handbook, Undergraduate/Graduate Catalogs, and the Academic Honesty web page all provide students with expectations of academic honesty and consequences for violations. Ethical use of human and animal research subjects is guided by institutional policies enforced by an Institutional Research Board (IRB).

# Criterion Three. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support

The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

3.A. The institution's degree programs are appropriate to higher education.

3.B. The institution demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs.

3.C. The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

3.D. The institution provides support for student learning and effective teaching.

3.E. The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment.

## Summary

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Chadron State College offers undergraduate and graduate programs appropriate to its mission and in compliance with NSCS board policies. Programs are kept current in part through regular internal and external reviews. We differentiate learning outcomes for upper and lower division courses, often using Bloom's taxonomy. Regardless of modality, all courses have the same learning outcomes and performance requirements.

As a result of our Quality Initiative and earlier efforts, the CSC faculty developed and implemented an innovative general education curriculum, the Essential Studies Program (ESP). The ESP, along with all other academic programs, requires students to collect, analyze, and communicate information, master modes of inquiry or creative work, and develop skills adaptable to changing environments. Outcomes related to multiculturalism and diversity appear in courses across the curriculum, and references to all forms of diversity in both General Catalogs reaffirm the institution's commitment to such ideals. The recent development of institutional undergraduate learning goals and assessment have been designed to determine whether transfer students who have not taken our core curriculum have achieved the same or similar learning outcomes.

CSC is committed to hiring and retaining ranked faculty in sufficient numbers to ensure excellence both in teaching and extra-instructional duties. Ranked faculty and administrators work together to attract, interview, and hire prospective full-time and adjunct instructors with appropriate credentials that meet HLC standards. The faculty is evaluated annually. Full-time faculty members have access to sabbaticals, leaves of absence, and funding for professional development. In congruence with our mission as a teaching and learning institution, such opportunities often relate to student learning. Professional and support staff members also have access to professional development resources.

We provide appropriate academic and non-academic student support services to all students enrolled either in courses taught face-to-face or through a distance-learning modality. Some services are tailored to meet the needs of special populations, including at-risk students, international students, veterans, transfers, distance learners, and disabled students. The Transitional Studies Program assists students who are not prepared for college work in math, writing, and reading. While general academic support services include the Learning Center and academic advising, other resources are available to promote student learning, such as IT services, laboratories and studios, performance space, clinical practice sites, and museum collections.

Through abundant co-curricular activities and high-impact academic practices, we fulfill our claim to an enriched educational environment. These practices promote student learning related to specific aspects of our mission: career and professional development, service to the community, diversity and globalization, cultural enrichment/creativity, and applied research.

# Criterion Four. 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 their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

4.A. The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.

4.B. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

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.

## Summary

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As a teaching and learning institution, Chadron State College is deeply committed to improving the quality of its educational programs. In accordance with NSCS Board policy and Nebraska statutes, we participate in program reviews by the Nebraska State Coordinating Commission for Higher Education every seven years. All academic programs also conduct internal, biennial reviews based on student learning data and other program assessments. We have demonstrated an ongoing commitment to assessment of student learning outcomes. Considerable faculty involvement across campus is a highlight of our assessment process. Instructors have identified student-learning outcomes for all academic programs and courses, and all but two academic programs have assessment plans. The faculty uses procedures in those plans to collect and analyze data, which are then analyzed to identify possible strengths and weaknesses. Resulting proposals for program improvements are reported to the deans in annual assessment reports and become part of the biennial program review. Such changes must be reviewed and approved by the Faculty Senate Academic Review Committee. This process assures a connection between student learning assessment, program review, and program changes.

Co-curricular learning has always been a part of our approach to enriched education, but assessment has often been indirect and anecdotal. In AY 2015-16, a President's Executive Council Task Team created an institutional definition for co-curricular activities and is developing more intentional assessment strategies to improve our co-curricular programming.

CSC evaluates all transcript credits (including transfer credit) and exercises authority over course requirements and faculty qualifications. Our Teacher Education, Business, Music, and Social Work programs meet the standards of specialized accrediting agencies. Moreover, we assess program quality by evaluating the success of our graduates through an Annual Placement Survey.

The institution tracks retention and graduation rates and offers support services to assist students in persisting with their education. We have particularly redoubled our efforts at improving retention rates since they fall a little below our goal. The President's Executive Council Retention Task Team, has concentrated on retention strategies and activities across Academic Affairs and Student Support Services.

# Criterion Five. 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.

5.A. The institution's resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

5.B. The institution's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.

5.C. The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning.

5.D. The institution works systematically to improve its performance.

## Summary

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Chadron State College possesses sufficient resources and infrastructure to sustain its operations and maintains contingency funds for emergencies. Budget analyses and audits confirm the institution's continuing financial health and viability. We employ qualified faculty, professional staff, and support staff and provide them with opportunities for professional development. Our regularly upgraded physical and technological infrastructures support our educational goals. Institutional budget processes ensure that resource allocations and re-allocations align with CSC's mission and strategic planning priorities.

The Nebraska State College System's (NSCS) Board of Trustees oversees CSC's operations and provides support through the System Office in Lincoln. The NSCS Policy Manual supplies a framework within which CSC policies and procedures are created. College administrators and the CSC Student Trustee interact with the Board through scheduled meetings and supply the Trustees with financial reports and regular updates on all of our operations. Board policies on shared governance designate roles for the college administration, faculty, and student body while the President's Cabinet, Executive Council, Faculty Senate, and Student Association provide structures for participation and collaboration among college constituents.

CSC engages the campus in systematic and integrated planning related to our mission. Our current strategic plan, *Chadron State 2020*, consists of three components--the Master Academic Plan (MAP), the Campus Facilities Master Plan, and the Comprehensive Campaign Plan. Assessment of student learning informs all institutional planning and budgeting. Nonacademic units link planning goals and budget requests with at least one of the six MAP priorities. The development and implementation of the MAP affirms faculty and student involvement in the strategic planning processes.

Finally, CSC documents performance throughout its operations and uses direct and indirect assessment feedback in decision-making. While each unit collects and archives such evidence, a Campus-wide Assessment Committee is charged with coordinating these processes. Our administrators strive to keep pace with developments in higher education while the faculty makes sure our programs are current and relevant. We have demonstrated our ability to learn from analyses of institutional experience through two examples of Continuous Improvement Initiatives--the Policy Website and the Library Learning Commons.