

HLC's Open Pathways to Accreditation

For its next accreditation, Northwestern Oklahoma State University will be taking part in the Higher Learning Commission's Open Pathway Ten Year Cycle. Below is a chart that presents this cycle. Note the activities that are due each year as well as the reviewers who will be reviewing them.

Cycle Year	Institutional Activities		Peer Review	HLC Decision-Making ¹
<i>Year 1</i> 2014-2015	Institution may contribute documents to Evidence File			
<i>Year 2</i> 2015-2016				
<i>Year 3</i> 2016-2017				
<i>Year 4</i> 2017-2018	Submit Assurance Filing (Assurance Argument and Evidence File)		Conduct Assurance Review (no visit) ²	Acceptance of Assurance Review ³
<i>Year 5</i> 2018-2019	Institution may contribute documents to Evidence File	Period to submit Quality Initiative Proposal	Review Quality Initiative Proposal	
<i>Year 6</i> 2019-2020				
<i>Year 7</i> 2020-2021		Period to submit Quality Initiative Report	Review Quality Initiative Report	
<i>Year 8</i> 2021-2022				
<i>Year 9</i> 2022-2023				
<i>Year 10</i> 2023-2024	Submit Comprehensive Evaluation Materials ⁴		Conduct Comprehensive Evaluation (with visit)	Action on Comprehensive Evaluation and Reaffirmation of Accreditation ⁵

Notes

- ¹ HLC will continue to review data submitted by affiliated institutions through the Institutional Update, will apply change Processes as appropriate, to planned institutional developments, and will monitor institutions through reports, visits, and other means as it deems appropriate.
- ² Team may require a visit to explore uncertainties in evidence that cannot be resolved at a distance.
- ³ Certain team recommendations may require IAC action.
- ⁴ Materials for a comprehensive evaluation include an Assurance Filing (Assurance Argument and Evidence File) and Federal Compliance Filing. Some institutions will also file materials for a multi-campus review.
- ⁵ Year 10 includes HLC action regarding reaffirmation of accreditation. Action on the Year 10 review will also determine the institution's future pathway eligibility.

Currently (academic year 2015–2016). During year 2 and year 3, the University will contribute documents to the evidence file. NWOSU’s Director of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness will gather this data from a variety of sources.

During Year 4 (2017–2018), NWOSU will submit its Assurance Filing (Assurance Argument and Evidence File). The Assurance Argument is a narrative that demonstrates the ways in which the institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation. The Evidence File contains the actual evidence that the institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation.

The Assurance File Peer-reviewers will view these documents. If approved, HLC will accept the assurance review. (This step requires no campus visit.) Through the Open Pathways process, then, NWOSU builds its self-study report each year instead of writing one large report towards the end of the ten-year cycle. This is the first major step in this process.

During years 5–9 (2018–2023), NWOSU will continue contributing to the Evidence File.

During years 5–7 (2018–2021), NWOSU will submit its Quality Initiative Proposal (a plan for improvement in one specific area); Peer-reviewers will review the proposal and suggest revisions.

During years 8–9 (2021–2023), NWOSU will re-submit the Quality Initiative Proposal for final peer review.

At year 10 (2023–2024), NWOSU will submit its Comprehensive Evaluation Materials. Peer reviewers will visit campus to explore evidence, and a decision will be made by HLC concerning the university’s comprehensive evaluation and reaffirmation for accreditation.

Below is a link to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) website that explains the Open Pathways Accreditation process in much greater detail:

<https://www.hlcommission.org/Pathways/open-pathway.html>