February 22, 2022

Dr. Janet Cunningham
President
Northwestern Oklahoma State University
709 Oklahoma Boulevard
Alva, Oklahoma 73717

Dear President Cunningham,

Attached is the Quality Initiative Report (QIR) Review evaluation information. Northwestern Oklahoma State University's QIR showed genuine effort and has been accepted by the Commission. The attached reviewer evaluation contains a rationale for this outcome.

Peer reviewers evaluate all the QIRs based on the genuine effort of the institution, the seriousness of the undertaking, the significance of scope and impact of the work, the genuineness of the commitment to the initiative, and adequate resource provision.

If you have questions about the QIR reviewer information, please contact either Kathy Bijak (kbijak@hlcommission.org) or Pat Newton-Curran (pnewton@hlcommission.org).

Higher Learning Commission

Open Pathway Quality Initiative Report

Panel Review and Recommendation Form

The Quality Initiative panel review process confirms or questions the institution's effort in undertaking the Quality Initiative Proposal approved by HLC. As indicated in the explication of the review, the Quality Initiative process encourages institutions to take risks, innovate, take on a tough challenge, or pursue a yet unproven strategy or hypothesis. Thus, failure of an initiative to achieve its goals is acceptable. An institution may learn much from such failure. What is not acceptable is failure of the institution to pursue the initiative with genuine effort. Genuineness of effort, not success of the initiative, constitutes the focus of the Quality Initiative review and serves as its sole point of evaluation.

Submit the final report as a Word document to HLC at hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Pathways/Quality Initiatives" from the list of submission options to ensure the report is sent to the correct HLC staff member. The file name for the report should follow this format: QI Report Review <Name of Institution>.

Name of Institution: Northwestern Oklahoma State University

State: Oklahoma

Institutional ID: 1627

Reviewers (names, titles, institutions): Casmir Agbaraji, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Navajo Technical University; Douglas Davenport, Provost and Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, Missouri Western State University (retired)

Date: February 22, 2022

I. Quality Initiative Review

☒ The institution demonstrated its seriousness of the undertaking.

☒ The institution demonstrated that the initiative had scope and impact.

☒ The institution demonstrated a commitment to and engagement in the initiative.

☒ The institution demonstrated adequate resource provision.

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II. Recommendation

☒ The panel confirms genuine effort on the part of the institution.

☐ The panel cannot confirm genuine effort on the part of the institution.

III. Rationale (required)

Northwestern Oklahoma State University implemented Ellucian Enterprise Resource Planning (ERPS) to increase efficiency of day-to-day operations, increase student satisfaction with their university experience, and (ultimately) improve students' persistence and retention rates. This initiative aligns with the mission on the university "Northwestern Oklahoma State University provides quality educational and cultural opportunities to learners with diverse needs by cultivating ethical leadership and service, critical thinking and fiscal responsibility."

The institution has accomplished its primary goals through this initiative. Furthermore, Northwestern Oklahoma State University students and employees have learned valuable lessons during the quality initiative project. The most important lessons learned include the following: enhancing tools and technology will improve student perceptions of the institutional process; provide a positive impact on student experiences; remove barriers to functions and empower students to improve their educational experiences; allow students to have greater ownership of their educational paths and positively impact student retention and persistence; and allow faculty to assist students in a more efficient and effective manner with academic and nonacademic matters such as advising. Another of impact of implementing the ERPS is that students can electronically enter their timesheets and submit them to payroll for approval. In addition, students and employees can assess their payroll information online.

Following the implementation of ERPS, the fall-to-fall retention rate for first-time freshmen increased from 58% for students who entered 2018 and retuned in 2019 to 62% for students who entered in 2019 and returned in 2020. Additionally, the persistence rate increased from 57.7% in 2018 to 61.7% in 2019. While it is not possible to establish a causal link between the new ERPS and these measures, the findings are encouraging. As the institution notes in its report, longitudinal data need to be collected on graduation, retention, and persistence rates to make determinations regarding the relationship between implementation and institutional outcomes.

More direct evidence of positive outcomes related to the implementation of the new system are available. Most importantly, student satisfaction (measured via NSSE and Noel-Levitz SSI) improved from pre-implementation measures. The gains in student satisfaction are modest on several items, but are more robust on others. Additionally, faculty satisfaction with the advising functions in the university ERP system (measured via institutional surveys) showed significant increases following implementation of the Ellucian system.

The university allocated physical and technological resources to furnish a dedicated training room for the quality project initiative. Equipment included a Smart Board, 13 computer workstations, desks, and chairs to support students and staff needs. This room allows personnel involved in training, implementation, and

eventual production to leave their respective office spaces and transition to a quite work environment. A second room was identified in the library to serve as an overflow training room.

During FY 2018, Northwestern Oklahoma State University collaborated with two sister institutions - Southwestern Oklahoma State University and Southeastern Oklahoma State University to evaluate options to implement the ERPS process for all three institutions. By working together and selecting one vendor, the three institutions received significant cost savings of $2,724,000 over unilateral implementation. As part of efforts to avoid borrowing funds to implement this nearly $1.8 million endeavor, the university started saving funds for this project during FY 2016. To assist with the implantation process, Northwestern Oklahoma State University, along with the two sister institutions, engaged the services of Brown, Hendrix and Associates. In spring 2018, the university added one new FTE in the Information Technology (IT) department to work directly with the implementation of ERPS process. Additionally, the university assigned a project manager outside of the IT department to be the liaison between the Brown, Hendrix and Associates consultant, Ellucian, and university.

The implementation faced various challenges in the conversion from the Jenzabar system to the Ellucian system. The team was able to overcome the challenges through help from Ellucian staff, input from consultant from Brown, Hendrix and Associates, and support from the Northwestern Oklahoma State University Administration.

Of note, this quality initiative also resulted in the creation of an Enrollment Champions committee, whose on-going efforts will help strengthen the positive effects of the new system and advance the achievement of the goal of increasing student success. Northwestern Oklahoma State University is to be commended for its work on this project, which required significant efforts on the part of individuals across the institution.

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