

NORTHERN New Mexico College HLC ACCREDITATION 2025 MASTER PLAN



Hector Balderas, JD, CFE, President
NORTHERN New Mexico College

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



NORTHERN COMMUNITY,

Over the coming year we will work together to prepare for the reaffirmation of Northern's accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). To this end, I want to first acknowledge and thank each of you for your unique contribution to making Northern a place where students realize their dreams. While our accreditation is hugely important to validating the quality of our work here, the accreditation process is also an opportunity to reflect and showcase the high quality of our work and all that we do to support our students' success.

Through this process, we have an exciting opportunity to come together and discuss our strengths, assess how we operate, and identify areas where we can continue to grow into the future. We also have the opportunity to dive deeply into our work and evaluate all aspects of our college, from our strategic direction, to our academic programs, and how these and our operations align to advance our mission.

As you may be aware, this work will culminate in what HLC refers to as our comprehensive site visit, which will take place in November 2025. Because of the magnitude of this work, we have already begun putting in place the tools and teams we will need to successfully prepare for this visit. Over the coming year, we will work collectively to meet the challenge of this process. As we do this work together, I encourage you to reflect on Northern's mission, vision, and values, as this process at its core is about demonstrating how we express those principles every day through our work.

Northern has a strong history of demonstrating to the HLC how unique we are, the quality of our work, and the impact that we have on our students and the broader community. I am excited to collaborate with you all to build on this legacy, and to continue to demonstrate to HLC that Northern shares a deep commitment to our institutional principles that distinguishes us as an institution of excellence.

Thank you again for your shared commitment and for all that you do. I know that together we will show that not only does Northern satisfy the standards for accreditation, but that we go above and beyond those in our support of our students and our community.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'H. Balderas', written in a cursive style.

Hector Balderas, JD, CFE
President

2025 Reaffirmation of HLC Accreditation for Northern

NORTHERN New Mexico College moved to the Open Pathways model for accreditation after our 2016 Reaffirmation of Accreditation. *The Open Pathways model requires 3 reviews:*

YEAR 4: MID-CYCLE ASSURANCE REVIEW

In 2020, HLC-appointed peer reviewers evaluated the institution based on HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and other requirements. The review occurred virtually, without a campus visit. Read it on our website here: <https://nnmc.edu/about/institutional-accreditation/hlc-accreditation.html>

YEARS 5–9: QUALITY INITIATIVES

In 2024, NNMC reported our Quality Initiative after participating in the HLC Student Success Academy. The College worked to design and implement a project aimed at improving student retention and completion rates. Institutions are required to submit a project proposal between Years 5 and 7 and then report on the outcomes between Years 7 and 9. Peer reviewers evaluate both the project proposals and the outcomes reports.

YEAR 10: COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION FOR REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION

In November 2025 we will have our Year 10 evaluation process where HLC determines whether the institution's accreditation should be reaffirmed. Institutions are evaluated based on HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and other requirements. Peer reviewers review materials, visit campus, and consider feedback from students and community members. The team also reviews the institution's compliance with certain federal requirements.



Higher Learning Commission: The Assurance Review

ASSURANCE REVIEW

1. The institution demonstrates that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation by preparing an Assurance Filing, comprised of an Assurance Argument and an Evidence File, using HLC's Assurance System.
2. A team of HLC peer reviewers evaluates the institution's Assurance Filing. The outcome of this review is a recommendation as to whether the institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation. If the Assurance Review is part of a comprehensive evaluation, this review will also include an on-site visit by the peer review team.
3. A decision-making body reviews the institution's documentation and the recommendation from the peer review team and takes an official action.

ASSURANCE ARGUMENT

In the Assurance Argument, the institution demonstrates how it meets each Criterion and Core Component. For each Criterion, the institution offers:

- An articulation of how each Core Component within the Criterion is met.
- A summary statement regarding any additional ways in which the institution fulfills the Criterion that are not otherwise covered in the statements on the Core Components.
- Links to materials in the institution's Evidence File for each claim or argument made.

EVIDENCE FILE

The Assurance Argument will link to materials the institution uploads to its Evidence File to further support its narrative for each Criterion and Core Component. Every item uploaded to the Evidence File must be specifically linked to at least one Core Component in the Assurance Argument.

PEER REVIEW

A team of peer reviewers evaluates the institution's Assurance Filing and writes its report in the Assurance System. If the review is being conducted as part of a comprehensive evaluation (on-site review), the peer review team will write its report after completing its site visit and will take into account all the additional materials involved in the evaluation.

The peer review team's report includes its findings as to whether the institution meets HLC's Criteria for Accreditation, as well as possible recommendations for further action or monitoring. In judging whether the institution is in compliance with the Criteria, the team evaluates each Core Component individually. The team determines whether the Core Component is met, met with concerns or not met using the guidelines provided in HLC's policy on the Evaluative Framework for the HLC Criteria.

For more information, go to [HLCommision.org](https://www.hlcommission.org)

Criteria & Core Components

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

Mission is foundational to an institution's curriculum, instructional activities and the success of its students. Mission further informs an institution's research and innovation pursuits, its community engagement activities and services, its role within the higher education ecosystem, its student body, and its decisions regarding operations and resource allocations. An institution's distinctive mission is the cornerstone around which the institution's effectiveness, integrity and commitment to continuous improvement are evaluated.

When demonstrating that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation, an institution has the opportunity to reflect on the significance of its distinctive mission as well as across the wider higher education landscape. Against these backdrops, the institution is able to speak to its current state, aspirations and plans for the future.

Specifically, the distinctiveness of an institution's mission may inform the strategies it adopts and the evidence it provides to demonstrate that it meets each Criterion and Core Component. In preparing for a review, an institution may provide evidence relevant to additional topics related to a Core Component beyond those specified in any HLC resource document. During the review process, peer reviewers will determine whether an institution meets the Criteria and Core Components on the basis of such evidence.

CRITERION 1. MISSION

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations. As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 1.

- ☐ **1.A. MISSION ALIGNMENT** The institution's educational programs, enrollment profile and scope of operations align with its publicly articulated mission.
- ☐ **1.B. MISSION AND PUBLIC GOOD** The institution's operation of the academic enterprise demonstrates its commitment to serving the public good.
- ☐ **1.C. MISSION AND DIVERSITY OF SOCIETY** The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

CRITERION 2. INTEGRITY: ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT

In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible. As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 2.

- ☐ **2.A. INTEGRITY** Actions taken by the institution's governing board, administration, faculty and staff demonstrate adherence to established policies and procedures.
(Criterion 2 continues on the next page)

Criteria & Core Components *CONT'D*

(Criterion 2 continued from previous page)

☐ **2.B. TRANSPARENCY** The institution presents itself accurately and completely to students and the public with respect to its educational programs and any claims it makes related to the educational experience.

☐ **2.C. BOARD GOVERNANCE** In discharging its fiduciary duties, the institution's governing board is free from undue external influence and empowered to act in the best interests of the institution, including the students it serves.

☐ **2.D. ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION** The institution supports academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of knowledge as integral to high-quality teaching, learning and research.

☐ **2.E. KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY AND APPLICATION** The institution adheres to policies and procedures that ensure responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge.

CRITERION 3. TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 3.

☐ **3.A. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS** The institution maintains learning goals and outcomes that reflect a level of rigor commensurate with college-level work, including by program level and the content of each of its educational programs.

☐ **3.B. EXERCISE OF INTELLECTUAL INQUIRY** The institution's educational programs engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in practicing modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

☐ **3.C. SUFFICIENCY OF FACULTY AND STAFF** The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

☐ **3.D. SUPPORT FOR STUDENT LEARNING AND RESOURCES FOR TEACHING** The institution provides student support services that address the needs of its student populations, as well as the teaching resources and infrastructure necessary for student success.

☐ **3.E. ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING** The institution improves the quality of educational programs based on its assessment of student learning.

☐ **3.F. PROGRAM REVIEW** The institution improves its curriculum based on periodic program review.

☐ **3.G. STUDENT SUCCESS OUTCOMES** The institution's student success outcomes demonstrate continuous improvement, taking into account the student populations it serves and benchmarks that reference peer institutions.

Criteria & Core Components *CONT'D*

CRITERION 4. SUSTAINABILITY: INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS, RESOURCES AND PLANNING

The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 4.

- ☐ **4.A. EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES** The institution's administrative structures are effective and facilitate collaborative processes such as shared governance; data-informed decision making; and engagement with internal and external constituencies as appropriate.
- ☐ **4.B. RESOURCE BASE AND SUSTAINABILITY** The institution's financial and personnel resources effectively support its current operations. The institution's financial management balances short-term needs with long-term commitments and ensures its ongoing sustainability.
- ☐ **4.C. PLANNING FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT** The institution engages in systematic strategic planning for quality improvement. It relies on data, integrating its insights from enrollment forecasts, financial capacity, student learning assessment, institutional operations and the external environment.

For more information on Criterion 1-4, go to [HLCommission.org](https://www.hlccommission.org)

President's Accreditation Advisory Committee

NNMC HLC REPRESENTATIVES

Hector Balderas, JD, CFE / Chief Executive Officer
Carmella Sanchez, MS / ALO & Assurance System Coordinator
René Vellanoweth, PhD / Chief Academic Officer
Theresa Storey / Chief Financial Officer
Christian Gomez / Location Coordinator

FACULTY LEADERS

Lori Baca, D.B.A. / Chair, Business Administration
Lori Franklin, MA / Chair, Language & Letters
Ashis Nandy, PhD / Chair, Engineering & Technology
Sushmita Nandy, PhD / Chair, Biology, Chemistry, Env. Science
David Torres, PhD / Associate Professor, Math & Physical Science
and Assessment Coordinator
Ellen Trabka, MSN / Chair, Nursing & Health Sciences

EXECUTIVE TEAM LEADERS

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René Vellanoweth, PhD / Chief Academic Officer
Scott Stokes / Chief Information Officer
Theresa Storey / Chief Financial Officer

STAFF LEADERS

Sondra Adams, MA / Director, Financial Aid
Kristy Alton, MA / Director, Title V
Tobe Bott Lyons, PhD / Director, Upward Bound
Maria Cedillo / Senior Project Manager, Database Admin
Emma Hashman, MA / Director, Admissions
Sandy Krolick, MA / Creative Director, Comms/Mktg
Carmella Sanchez, MS / Director, Institutional Research
Milam Shah, MA / Communications Coordinator

HLC Accreditation Timeline

A successful HLC Accreditation visit takes considerable preparation by the Accreditation teams and the entire Eagle family. The HLC accreditors will want to meet with everyone — students, faculty, staff and community members. We are all a part of the process!

DATE	ACTIVITY	TEAM
Nov 2024 to Jan 2025	Assemble and train President's Accreditation team. Identify ALO.	All NNMC employees and students. Comms team.
Jan 2025	Create Core Component subcommittees to begin drafting narratives and gathering evidence. Begin monthly communication of HLC Accreditation progress & status.	Accreditation Team
Feb / March 2025	Continue drafts of Criterion 1-4.	Accreditation Team
April 2025	First drafts of Criterion 1-4, load evidence, and develop Accreditation 2025 website.	Accreditation Team
May 2025	Federal Compliance Review draft.	Accreditation Team
June 2025	Final draft of Assurance Argument & evidence files.	Accreditation Team
June / July 2025	Edit for accuracy, clarity, voice. Fix gaps.	Writing/editing team
Aug 2025	Create newsletters and distribute the HLC Accreditation Master plan (with mission, vision, values and Strategic Pillars, Assurance Argument Criteria, and Core Components).	Accreditation Team
Sept 2025	HLC Student Opinion Survey (Sept. 8-17). Share final Argument to the BOR as "informational" item, and campus community.	HLC Accreditation Team
Oct 2025	Final Assurance Argument, Evidence Files, and Federal Compliance Report due to HLC (lock date Oct. 20, 2025).	Accreditation Team
Nov. 3-7, 2025	Clean up campus, buildings and offices, chalk art, posters, etc. Create welcoming workspace for HLC.	NNMC Community and Planning Team
Nov 2025	Prepare site visit itinerary. NNMC materials to HLC upon request.	HLC Peer Review Team Planning Team
Nov 17-18, 2025	On-Site HLC Comprehensive Evaluation Visit	HLC Peer Review Team

#NorthernProud #StudentSuccess



MISSION, VISION, VALUES & STRATEGIC PILLARS

MISSION

Northern New Mexico College is an inclusive, student-centered teaching and learning community, dedicated to excellence, empowering students, and transforming lives.

VISION

As a Hispanic- and Indigenous-serving institution, sustained by place, culture, and innovation — Northern is a beacon of higher education for all students, igniting minds to create vibrant futures.

CORE VALUES

Student-Centered: We honor every student as a unique individual and prioritize student needs in all decision making.

Mutual Respect: We respect the differences of all peoples; diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are our strengths.

Integrity: We value honesty, trust, and transparency.

Excellence: We commit to continuous improvement and strive to excel in all that we do.

Servant Leadership: We prioritize the growth, well-being, and empowerment of students, faculty, and staff, and are good stewards of resources entrusted to our care.

STRATEGIC PILLARS

Transformational Student Experience: We journey together with our students through a positive, proactive, personalized experience and become partners in their dreams.

Academic Excellence: We teach with spirit and heart to provide a culturally responsive, 21st-century learning environment that sparks critical thinking and maximizes intellectual achievement.

Organizational Excellence: We act with shared purpose and responsibility – focused on innovation and continuous improvement – committed to student success and empathetic, engaged leadership and expertise.

Strategic Partnerships: We build partnerships that enhance student and institutional success and community well-being.