

## Academy Application 2013-14 and 2014-15

**NORTHEASTERN STATE UNIVERSITY    TAHLEQUAH, OK    AUGUST 12, 2013**

Name of Institution

City, State

Application Date

### Preferred Point of Entry to the Academy

Please choose 3 possible dates, with at least one date in 2014 and one date in 2015

- March 12-14, 2014 (required Information and Planning Workshop event December 12-13, 2013)
- June 18-20, 2014 (required Information and Planning Workshop event March 17-18, 2014)
- October 2014 (required Information and Planning Workshop event July 2014; dates TBD)
- February 2015 (required Information and Planning Workshop event November 2014; dates TBD)
- June 2015 (required Information and Planning Workshop event March 2015; dates TBD)
- November 2015 (required Information and Planning Workshop event August 2015; dates TBD)

### Purpose for Academy Participation

Institutions in the PEAQ, AQIP, Standard, and Open Pathways may join the Academy at any time for their own benefit as long as they are eligible. For institutions on the Open Pathway, the Academy may serve as the Quality Initiative if engaged at the appropriate time in the accreditation cycle. For institutions in AQIP, the Academy may serve as one or more action projects.

#### Check the applicable purpose below.

- Open Pathway Quality Initiative (Institutions must begin participation no later than June of Year 5 and complete no later than June of Year 9. Institutions may join in Year 4 at the completion of their Year 4 review and decision process, if applicable.)
- AQIP Action Project(s)
- Other institutional purposes (Institutions on the PEAQ, AQIP, Open, and Standard Pathways may join the Academy at any time for their own benefit.)

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

### NORTHEASTERN STATE UNIVERSITY, TAHLEQUAH, OK

#### Recent Efforts

- 1. Provide a brief overview of your recent efforts to improve student persistence and completion. Include the groups and individuals that have been involved in these efforts.**

Northeastern State University (NSU), like many other academic institutions, recognizes the fact that state and federal funding opportunities continue to shrink while the cost of living and student expenses continue to rise. Since similar trends are expected to continue in future years, NSU must look at innovative ways of maximizing return on investment of university funds, refocus on recruiting, and improve persistence, retention, and completion efforts. To achieve these efforts, NSU is submitting its application to become a member of the newly created HLC Persistence and Completion Academy where similarly-situated institutions will join together to share ideas and create networking opportunities calculated to improve persistence and completion rates.

Fortunately, NSU has already initiated efforts to improve persistence and completion rates. In the fall 2013 opening meeting, President Turner, the Cabinet, and select faculty members launched a new initiative, Destination 2023 (D-23), with the overarching goal of gradually improving NSU's graduation rates over a ten year period of time. This is a dynamic, university-wide initiative where each member of the staff, administration, and faculty plays an integral role in improving student retention, persistence, and completion rates. To be successful, NSU recognizes that all faculty, staff, and administrators must join together in a unified effort to improve quality education, offer more flexible scheduling opportunities, acquire more scholarship funding opportunities, improve campus facilities, and secure additional state and federal financial aid for NSU students. The intent is to create a campus culture where everyone is dedicated to recruiting, advising, mentoring, and guiding NSU students along the path of graduation success. Although D-23 is in its infancy, the ten-year goal to achieve a 34.5 percent increase in the number of NSU degrees conferred by the year 2023 is ambitious, yet achievable.

The premise for this strategic realignment is that persistence and completion rates are directly affected by the degree of commitment displayed by each and every member of the NSU family. It is also premised on the fact that students are seeking a quality education for a reasonable price that will ultimately result in future job opportunities. To achieve the goal of a 34.5 percent increase in conferred degrees, NSU must examine new ways to improve teaching, scholarship, research, and service learning. NSU must also improve what is considered to be a quality education, examine new course offerings, provide more flexible course schedules, offer expert advising and faculty mentoring, increase scholarships and financial aid, secure new grant opportunities, and most of all, provide a quality "home away from home" for NSU's student population.

Examining each of these areas is nothing new to NSU. In the past, NSU has examined and implemented new initiatives in each of these areas. However, the individual initiatives were not unified under a cohesive, coordinated effort of services. This is where the HLC Persistence and Completion Academy comes into play. Through membership in the Academy, NSU will be able to unify individual college and departmental units under one cohesive umbrella designed to achieve the 34.5 percent increase in conferred degrees by 2013. NSU will also be able to examine time-tested best practices in implementation, coordination, and evaluation of persistence and completion programs, thereby acquiring knowledge and experience necessary to create a university-wide, holistic campaign that focuses on persistence and completion of degree programs. With this understanding, NSU will develop a university-wide culture acknowledging that every student interaction matters and the cumulative effect creates a

profound and positive impact on student persistence and completion. It is a culture that recognizes shared responsibility for persistence and completion rates with appointed champions that lead the way to graduation success.

The ultimate goal of D-23 will be to increase the number of conferred degrees from 1,789 to 2,477 in the year 2023. This will be achieved by increasing the number of first-time, full-time students from 864 to 1,200 and increasing the number of transfer students by 8.3%. It will also be achieved by progressively improving persistence and completion rates for dedicated students over the next ten years. Understandably, these are challenging goals, yet they are realistic with the aid of a unified platform offered by membership in the Persistence and Completion Academy.

The opportunity to become a member of the Academy could not have come at a better time. During our last HLC site visit, students and faculty recommended a renewed focus on advising, mentoring, tutoring, and improving academic offerings as ways to improve graduation rates. As such, D-23 is not a top down initiative, but an initiative that sprung from our most recent HLC site visit. Students recommended the creation of a one stop advising center, creation of new staff positions specifically responsible for excellence in advising at all three campus locations, designation of faculty mentors to assist with personal issues and career goals for each NSU student, and initiatives to secure the acquisition of more financial aid and scholarship opportunities. Staff and faculty readily embraced these initiatives recognizing that implementation would ultimately result in greater overall student satisfaction, enhanced learning, and improved graduation rates. As such, D-23 is a natural solution, a campus-wide initiative that is supported and embraced by all members of the NSU family.

**2. List the data sets you have related to persistence, retention, and completion and how you have used the data to determine ways to improve persistence and completion. Please be specific and relate your data to student types/groups.**

NSU is fully automated and uses IPEDS, Banner, DARS, Map Works, and an advising model that provides data tracking and early warning alerts in an effort to improve student persistence and completion rates. With the implementation of Sunguard Higher Education Banner software, NSU annually administers uniform graduate surveys in order to determine future student needs. Additionally, NSU retains the five-year program reviews, annual assessments for the Regents, and individual program capstone classes, assessments, and portfolio requirements.

The Office of Assessment and Institutional Research facilitates the generation, compilation, interpretation, and distribution of institutional data to enhance policy and decision making. Its mission ensures national standards are met. NSU's national assessment standards include the:

- National Communications Association (NCA)
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)
- Regent's Assessment Report (opening enrollment report)
- Freshman survey (UCLA Freshman Survey)
- Freshman inventory
- Senior survey
- Remediation survey
- Mid-Level Assessment (College Base exam)
- Assessment in the major data
- Alumni survey

- College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ)
- Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)
- College Assessment Activities (WritePlacer – Masters in Education exam)
- Faculty project

NSU also began participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 2009. This survey provides a stable timeline of insights revealing how students learn and develop at NSU. It provides insight into study habits, classroom requirements, community-based service learning projects, and other factors that are invaluable in gauging student success. To promote transparency, the NSSE Survey and other similar reports are available to the NSU family and the general public on the university's website.

### **Purposes and Outcomes**

#### **3. Explain the issues you want to address while in the Academy and why these issues are significant and relevant at this time.**

Destination 2023 is an ambitious program that seeks “to significantly increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.” This mission may sound familiar in that it is also the mission statement of the Alliance of States for Complete College America, a national movement driven by the Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Ford Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, Kellogg Foundation, and USA Funds. As a member of the Alliance of States, NSU is dedicated to improving the quality of education, advising, and mentoring in an effort to increase the number of degrees conferred each year by 3%, culminating in a goal of 2,477 degrees conferred in the year 2023.

This mission to increase the number of conferred degrees is supported by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education in that the Regents have recognized “Complete College America as the most comprehensive and ambitious higher education initiative ever undertaken by the state of Oklahoma.” In addition, NSU has submitted D-23 to the Governor of Oklahoma as an initiative that might be considered by other colleges and universities in Oklahoma. Unless D-23 and similar initiatives are adopted, Oklahoma will not be able to fill the void in the workplace as baby boomers continue to retire.

NSU recognizes that the greatest issue facing any persistence and completion initiative is the nature and degree of commitment displayed by each and every member of the NSU family. Success of the D-23 initiative is dependent upon every person at NSU. With this understanding, every student interaction matters, and the cumulative effect creates a profound and positive impact on student persistence and completion. It is the development of this shared responsibility and the “I care, therefore I will” attitude that is critical for success and sustainability of the D-23 initiative goals of improving persistence and completion rates. For more detail related to additional issues that NSU plans to address while in the Academy, see the outcome sections outlined in Section 6 of this proposal.

#### **4. Describe the student groups that will be the focus of your efforts while in the Academy and why you've chosen these specific groups.**

The primary focus of the D-23 initiative will be to increase the number of first-time, full time students who attain a conferred degree. In that Oklahoma is the home to 39 Native American tribes, a secondary focus will be to increase the number of conferred degrees for minority populations. By targeting these groups, NSU will help the state of Oklahoma fill the void in the workplace that will be created by aging baby boomers.

Another focus of D-23 will be to increase the number of conferred degrees for transfer students from two year colleges since these students often cease their studies once they obtain an associates or applied degree. The intent is to entice these students to complete a bachelor's degree and then a graduate degree at NSU.

D-23 will also focus on adult learners who have experienced a gap in their education due to family or employment conflicts. By offering more flexible class offerings and new degree options, NSU will target a new pool of college students, those students who desire a degree, but have not yet achieved one.

**5. Explain the specific outcomes you wish to achieve in terms of the issues and student groups you've identified.**

The ultimate goal is to improve recruiting, advising, persistence, and completion rates. More specifically, NSU desires to increase the annual total number of graduates by 34.5 percent from the benchmark of 1,787 graduates set in 2011 to 2,477 by May 2023. To achieve this goal, NSU will be reviewing and implementing programs calculated to:

- Increase the total base student headcount for fall 2023 to 11,000 students.
- Achieve a 3 percent annual increase (30) in first-time, full time cohort from 864 in 2012 to 1,200 in 2023.
- Achieve a 13 percent annual increase (80) in new transfer students from 964 in 2012 to 1,850 in 2023.
- Achieve a 5 percent annual increase (59) in new graduate students from 1064 in 2012 to 1650 in 2023.
- Achieve a 9.3 percent increase in retention for first-time, full time cohort groups from first to second year, from 62.7 for the fall 2011 to 72 percent by 2019.
- Increase by 9.7 percent in six year graduate rates (IPEDS standard) for the first-time, full time cohort groups from 30.3 percent in 2012 to 40 percent by 2017.

In order to achieve these goals, NSU must review the academic prioritization plan for course and departmental offerings, establish college and academic department enrollment goals, improve precision marketing and recruitment for academic signature programs, and expand international student recruitment strategies. This is where the Persistence and Completion Academy plays an integral part. Through collaboration and a "think tank" environment, NSU will be able to explore new ideas and create innovative solutions and tracking mechanisms to guarantee success of the achievable D-23 goals.

One such "think-tank" idea is the Red Balloon Initiative (now the NSU Degrees of Excellence Committee) adopted from the Lumina Degrees of Excellence program. It is designed to review, modify, and adopt degrees of excellence and outcomes for each college and department. Although this is a pilot project at NSU, the initial findings of the project look promising. Again, this initiative was developed through collaboration and guidance provided during previous HLC seminars and conferences. Hence, membership in the Academy is expected to bring forth even more creative and innovative ideas calculated to improve overall graduation rates.

**6. Describe potential challenges and issues in implementing the initiative.**

Destination 2023 goals were not created in a vacuum. The ultimate goal of academic degrees to be conferred by 2023 has been established based upon demographic growth expectations coupled with aggressive realignment of recruiting, advising, mentoring, and tutoring models. To date, all components of the NSU family appear committed to making it happen by adopting an "I care, therefore I will" attitude. The greatest challenge will be in the actual nuts and bolts

implementation at the college and departmental levels. Although growth percentages can be set in terms of projected demographic growth rates, it will be up to the colleges and departments to determine the best possible roadmap of success necessary to achieve individual specific goals. This will entail a due diligence analysis on the micro level of college and program offerings, recruitment strategies, current and future retention efforts, mentoring strategies, and creating partnerships with K-12 schools and community colleges.

In addition, the challenge will be to create a holistic culture dedicated to persistence and completion efforts at NSU. This holistic approach must focus on academic preparation, achievement, financial assistance, cultural inclusion, diversity, engagement, and leadership development. It must focus on college readiness and remediation. It must foster new partnerships with high schools, community colleges, and other agencies to help ensure the admission of academically prepared, capable, and motivated students. It must create bridge programs designed to ensure college readiness. Again, this is where the HLC Persistence and Completion Academy comes into play. Through membership in the Academy, NSU will be able to review, analyze and establish best practices already thought of or implemented by comparable institutions, thereby maximizing financial and personnel resources to guarantee the best return on investment.

## Scope and Significance

### 7. Explain how work on persistence and completion aligns with current academic or strategic priorities.

NSU and the Oklahoma State Regents are fully committed to providing a quality education that ultimately culminates in conferred undergraduate and graduate degree for our students. The NSU Mission Statement is to “empower individuals to become socially responsible global citizens by creating and sustaining a culture of learning and discovery.” Through quality teaching, research and scholarly activities, service to local and professional communities, and high expectations, our dedicated faculty and staff strive to provide a friendly learning environment where students are prepared to achieve socially responsible careers and personal goals for success in a challenging global society. This is best accomplished through dedication to quality, both in the quality of education and the quality and degree of personal assistance devoted to each individual student at NSU. To assure quality education and personal assistance is embraced university-wide, NSU is reexamining its strategic and master plans in terms of recruiting, advising, retention, and overall educational excellence.

As evidenced by NSU’s extremely positive HLC site visit in 2012, the entire NSU family is dedicated to achieving this mission statement. Even the janitorial staff and grounds personnel are dedicated to making NSU the “best possible home away from home” for our student body and community supporters. After the HLC site visit, NSU initiated a renewed focus and vigor in achieving the NSU Mission Statement from every component of the university. This is resulting in an overall evaluation of each individual component of the university in an attempt to improve an already successful university culture. With the adoption of the “I care, therefore I will” philosophy, NSU is seeking to develop a university-wide culture dedicated to implementing NSU’s Value Statements of Integrity, Collaboration, Creativity, Leadership, and Excellence on a daily basis at all levels of the university. In addition, NSU is in the process of:

- Collecting, analyzing and utilizing student learning assessment data to evaluate program offerings and student achievement.
- Generating awareness and improving financial and scholarship offerings for students.
- Reviewing and refining policies, procedures and practices for the Admissions and Recruitment Office, Student Financial Services Office, and the NSU Foundation to ensure

collaboration in an attempt to creatively leverage financial resources available to students.

- Improving grant writing activities to compete for private, tribal, and institutional scholarship opportunities.
- Identifying and maintaining increased scholarship and federal aid assistance for students.
- Implementing innovative fundraising campaigns.
- Maximizing cost containment and cost avoidance.
- Implementing early intervention teams of staff and faculty to assist students who may be encountering academic and financial challenges.

In this process, NSU has solicited input from all colleges, departments, and employees resulting in a family commitment to excellence. As such, the dedication to persistence and completion is not top down, but from the inside (the heart) out. All members of the NSU family recognize the importance of persistence and completion and are committed to making the NSU “home away from home” a lifelong learning experience that will transcend graduation.

**8. Explain your goals for participating in the Academy and the intended impact on the institution as a whole.**

NSU believes that improvement is often achieved through diversity of ideas. The Persistence and Completion Academy affords an opportunity to exchange ideas with similarly situated institutions in a “think tank” environment that is conducive to positive improvement. Through such interaction, NSU hopes to garner new ideas and oversight, thereby minimizing loss of human and financial resources on ideas less likely to succeed. Similarly, NSU hopes to provide creative and innovative ideas for other institutions. NSU believes that the external offering of ideas and oversight will prove to stimulate internal thinking among all NSU constituents.

In addition, NSU has a duty to guarantee that every student entering the university achieves the dream of achieving a diploma. This dream can only be achieved if every member of the NSU family goes the extra inch, foot, or mile to assure that each NSU student receives the attention and resources necessary to graduate. In many cases, this is merely adopting the “I care, therefore I will make a difference” attitude. Through institutionalizing this attitude into a university-wide culture, NSU will be able to increase the number of degrees conferred in the year 2023 by 34.5 percent.

As stated, the Oklahoma legislature has progressively cut state funding of all Oklahoma academic institutions in the past ten years and will continue to do so in the future. To offset such cuts, NSU and other academic institutions must look at improved recruiting, retention, and graduation rates. In response, NSU seeks to create a university-wide culture that is dedicated to improving retention and completion efforts by improving quality education, offering more flexible courses, acquiring more scholarship funding opportunities, providing enhanced faculty mentoring, creating dedicated advisors for each college, securing more financial aid for students, and offering tailor-made opportunities for each NSU student.

The President, Provost, Cabinet, faculty council, and staff council have already pledged a commitment to improving student performance, success, and completion rates. Despite federal and state cuts, commitment of human resources, technology, and financial funding for both D-23 and membership in the Academy have already been secured. It is fully recognized that membership in the Academy will promote inter-institutional learning and invaluable sharing of ideas.

## Commitment and Capacity

### 9. Describe the level of internal support from faculty, staff, and administrators for Academy participation and your planned work on persistence and completion.

Initial response to the HLC Persistence and Completion Academy has been overwhelming. Within minutes of announcing NSU's possible membership in the Academy, an outpouring of faculty, staff and administrators immediately contacted the HLC Administrative Liaison voicing a desire to be involved in planning and implementation committees. This outpouring of dedicated individuals resulted in a reassessment of the nature and scope of the differing committees that might be involved in the implementation of the Academy goals. It crystallized the need for the committees to be well balanced, equally representing each component of the NSU family. Due to such strong interest, NSU will most likely conduct a "community interest forum" to allow all interested individuals to share innovative ideas on what they believe to be the best structure of Persistence and Completion committees. Within this framework, dedicated planning and implementation teams will be created to insure success of the initiative with the understanding that future "town hall" meetings will be conducted to ensure that the planning and implementation teams are on track with overall university constituent needs and interests.

### 10. Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.

The President and Executive Cabinet will lead the way in creating an NSU culture that promotes persistence and completion. However, at the ground level, two champions, the Assistant Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs and for Student Affairs, will coordinate efforts for accomplishing the Destination 2023 goals. This coordination will involve utilizing university committees, task forces, and colleges and departments to advance adopted initiatives and institutionalize persistence and completion into daily operations. The "I care, therefore I will" initiative will create a culture that fosters a caring and supportive environment to maximize teaching, learning, advising, mentoring, and caring. Leading the way, NSU's Academic Affairs will coordinate efforts by all colleges as well as several support units such as the John Vaughan Libraries, the Center for Teaching and Learning, Assessment and Institutional Research, the Center for Tribal Studies, the Office of International Programs, the Student Academic Success Center and the Registrar's office. Measures of success will include:

- Commitment to providing the highest quality undergraduate and graduate education in the state, region, and nation thereby achieving international prominence in the educational and academic community.
- Recruiting and retaining outstanding faculty.
- Evaluating the quality of programs and departments.
- Increasing student interactions with faculty and the community.
- Increasing interest and caring for students.
- Providing professional development services.
- Creating academic and continuing education programs that entice adult learners into returning for enhanced college educational opportunities.

In addition, the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research will provide evidence that speaks to program quality and student learning. Through this effort, generation, compilation and distribution of institutional data will be analyzed and disseminated of information to enhance decision making. To complement this effort, the Registrar's office will provide the entire campus community with enrollment, retention, and graduation data including headcounts, credit hour



production, degree completion, and any other data points needed to fully support and evaluate NSU's progress in persistence and completing goals. The Registrar also will provide data to determine academic program and course offerings, baseline enrollment and projection processes, and completion of all appropriate state and federal reporting requirements to ensure that NSU remains compliant with state and federal regulations.

**11. List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.**

NSU is in the process of reevaluating its strategic plan and master plan. The intent is to align human, financial, technological and other resources in order to achieve the D-23 ten year goals for persistence and completion, ultimately resulting in enhanced graduation numbers. Through realignment, maximization of resources is possible thereby assuring:

- Professional development, resources, and rewards necessary to assist faculty in implementing and strengthening immersive learning.
- Funds to support service learning projects, internships, externships, and practicums calculated to secure future employment opportunities for NSU students.
- A campus-wide academic advising model that includes college specific advisers for each college and supports retention of students.
- Academic prioritization initiatives.
- A comprehensive recruitment plan.
- Learning outcomes in alignment with Lumina Foundation's Degrees of Excellence.
- A University Master Facilities Plan that supports the Strategic Enrollment Plan.
- A Strategic Enrollment Plan that focuses on maximizing academic resources, both human and financial, in order to achieve the goals stated in D-23.
- A residential living space master plan that contributes to student recruitment and retention.

NSU's core team for the Persistence and Completion Academy will consist of the President, the Provost, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Vice President for Student Affairs, the Director for the Student Success Center, the Graduate School Dean, a dean from one undergraduate college, one representative from each satellite campus, the HLC Administrative Liaison, one faculty representative from each college, one key advisor from each college, a representative of Faculty Council, a representative of Staff Council, and two representatives from the student body. Recognizing that true success is dependent upon university-wide commitment, meetings will be open to all NSU employees, students and community leaders. Similarly, meeting minutes will be published to the entire NSU family and community leaders on the NSU HLC webpage in an attempt to promote commitment and transparency.

To accomplish these goals, NSU has completed preliminary analysis of the strategic plan, the master plan, and the budget in an effort to insure adequate financial, technological, and other resources are properly earmarked to guarantee success of the D-23 initiative. Colleges, departments, and support services are aligned to provide support in terms of data tracking, assessment, and dissemination of information such that all members of the NSU community may contribute to the D-23 initiative. In essence, NSU is fully committed to achievement of D-23 and membership in the Persistence and Completion Academy. These as well as other support allocations are more thoroughly discussed in Sections 1, 2 and 8 of this proposal.

## Institutional Contact Information

### Primary Institutional Contact Person for Academy Participation:

Dr. Michael R. Wilds  
Name

Professor & HLC Administrative Liaison  
Position title

Northeastern State University  
Institution name

3100 E. New Orleans, BALA  
Office address

Broken Arrow, Oklahoma 74014  
City, State, Zip

918-520-4397 (cell)                      918-449-6532                      wilds@nsuok.edu  
Office phone(s) and extension(s)      Office fax                      Email address

### Name and address to which the Commission should send invoices for Academy participation:

Dr. Michael R. Wilds  
Name

Professor & HLC Administrative Liaison  
Position title

Northeastern State University  
Institution name

3100 E. New Orleans, BALA  
Office address

Broken Arrow, Oklahoma 74014  
City, State, Zip

wilds@nsuok.edu  
Email address

### *HLC Academy for Student Persistence and Completion*


Before you email your *Academy Application* to [academy@hlcommission.org](mailto:academy@hlcommission.org), make certain it has been reviewed and approved by your institution's CEO. See Affirmation page.

Application Packet for the Academy on Student Persistence and Completion

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## Academy Application Affirmation

I affirm that the application emailed to [academy@hlcommission.org](mailto:academy@hlcommission.org) presents our institution accurately, and that we agree, if admitted, to commit to meaningful and productive participation in the Academy for Student Persistence and Completion.



\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Institutional CEO

8/9/13  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Steve Turner, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Northeastern State University

Institution name

\_\_\_\_\_  
600 N. Grand Avenue, Building A

Institution Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 74464

Institution City, State, Zip

Include the affirmation in the electronic delivery of the application or fax it to the Commission, attention Academy: (312) 263-7462.