



Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal

The enclosed Quality Initiative proposal represents the work that the institution will undertake to fulfill the Improvement Process of the Open Pathway.

Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor

Date

President Steve Turner

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Northeastern State University

Name of Institution

Tahlequah, Oklahoma

City and State

+

The institution completes the Quality Initiative proposal by responding to the questions in each category of the template. The institution may choose to submit a brief implementation plan or supplemental charts or graphs as appendices to the template. Proposals should be no more than 4,500 words. The Quality Initiative Proposal is due no later than August 31 of Year 7 (and will be accepted beginning September 1 of Year 5). Submit the proposal as a PDF file to pathways@hlcommission.org with a file name that follows this format: QI Report No Name University MN. The file name must include the institution's name (or an identifiable portion thereof) and state.

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. **Provide a title and brief description of the Quality Initiative. Explain whether the initiative will begin and be completed during the Quality Initiative period or if it is part of work already in progress or will achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative.**

Title: Sustaining Student Success

Northeastern State University (NSU) serves a variety of student populations that national research suggests may be at risk for dropping or stopping out of college. These populations include first generation students, transfer students, adult learners, American Indian students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds or who experience poverty on a daily basis.

NSU'S Quality Initiative is rooted firmly in four documents and initiatives:

1. The Strategic Plan 2015-2023,
2. The Degrees of Excellence Institutional Assessment Plan,
3. Destination 2023: A 10-year road map of distinction through degree completion, and
4. Current work with HLC's Persistence and Completion Academy.

Guided by these on-going efforts, NSU strives to better understand student educational mindsets and goals, to identify potential impediments to those goals, and to implement proactive practices to help students reach their educational goals.

The proposed project further refines work already in progress to address high remediation rates, identify barriers to retention and completion, and enhance curriculum with recently adopted initiatives for campus-wide immersive/experiential learning experiences, meta-majors as general education foci, and NSU's Degrees of Excellence learning outcomes. During the Quality Initiative, NSU will implement the additional step of utilizing existing touch points or developing new touch points for students as a means to explore personal goals and educational pathways. The Quality Initiative will utilize mixed qualitative and quantitative methodologies to examine multiple variables which impact student success (See Methodology, Section 5).

The Quality Initiative focuses on helping students identify, articulate, review, revise, and attain their educational goals. Through this process, NSU will be better equipped to design academic and co-curricular programs to support student success. In addition, NSU can provide a higher degree of institutional support and academic quality tailored to each student's personal needs.

In essence, NSU's Quality Initiative is not merely an effort to improve select data points related to enrollment, retention, attrition, and completion but is also a sustainable endeavor that focuses on students' development through their individual educational and experiential goals.

Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

2. **Explain why the proposed initiative is relevant and significant for the institution.**

The proposed project serves as a coalescence point for several institutional initiatives. For more than five years, NSU has focused on increasing the number of students who are retained, persist from year to year, and complete their education experience with a degree. Data reveal a significant majority of NSU's students are "non-traditional" and "at-risk"; hence, their route to degrees is often circuitous and fraught with challenge.

Student success may mean very different things for each identified student population. In fact, goals often differ for each individual student and include the following:

- Many NSU students re-enroll after an attendance lapse with the goal of completing a bachelor's degree while employed, supporting a family, and attempting to pay bills.
- Many transfer from area community colleges to complete a bachelor's degree.
- Some students seek to complete general education courses with the intention of transferring to a sister institution to pursue a degree program NSU does not offer.
- A cohort of students participate in 3+1 articulation agreements allowing early admittance to professional programs in optometry or medical fields and reverse transfer to finish a baccalaureate degree.
- Some students enroll to enhance job skills necessary for career advancement while others seek certain classes to enhance careers in community service.

By focusing on the importance of students' goals, their pathway toward these goals, and how they perceive success, NSU's Quality Initiative is an opportunity to fulfill NSU's [Focused Mission Statement](#) which highlights empowering students to reach their full intellectual and human potential.

By aligning academic quality with students' individual definitions of success, the Quality Initiative fulfills NSU's [Vision Statement](#) to "shape the future of its region as the educational partner of choice, setting a standard of excellence by serving the intellectual, cultural, social and economic needs of the University's diverse communities."

The Quality Initiative also aligns with [Destination 2023: A Ten-year Road Map of Distinction through Degree Completion](#) (D23) which sets forth goals to "help individuals achieve their educational aspirations. To accomplish this, retention and completion continue to be critical university priorities." Part of D23's roadmap is to establish platforms for student success. This Quality Initiative supports the natural evolution of D23 by clearly identifying what defines "success" from students' perspectives

Finally, the proposed Quality Initiative aligns with NSU's planning process. Having recently established the [Strategic Plan 2015-2023](#), NSU recently updated its Mission Statement, Vision Statement, Core Values, and Strategic Goals. NSU's Strategic Plan Goal #1 focuses on efforts to "Advance a culture of academic excellence and student success" [emphasis added]. As described under Section 5 of this proposal (referencing methodology), "The University seeks to develop the whole person, enhance engagement and support services in order to achieve and sustain student persistence, completion and career readiness." Similarly, each Quality Initiative goal and objective speaks to efforts to develop the whole person, enhance engagement, and offer support services needed for student and hence, institutional success. NSU's Quality Initiative clearly supports the Strategic Plan Goal #1.

NSU's Quality Initiative serves as the convergence point for academic and co-curricular activities supporting the Strategic Plan, degree completion efforts articulated in D23, and the institution's stated mission, vision, and values. "Sustaining Student Success" will become the foundation for assessing challenges and successes in achieving NSU's mission of service in northeastern Oklahoma and beyond.

3. Explain the intended impact of the initiative on the institution and its academic quality.

This Quality Initiative expands institutional success criteria to include each student's definition of success. For example, some students pursue a bachelor's degree, some seek to minimize college costs by taking general education classes at a regional (and affordable) academic institution, and some merely

desire to attain professional and academic skills required to gain or advance their employment. As such, this Quality Initiative will re-evaluate what goals, objectives, and factors determine success for each individual student.

Consequently, this project has the potential to inform and impact NSU's approaches to academic programming including program offerings, curriculum design and assessment, delivery modes, and campus locations. It should also provide strategic planning information and data to evaluate resource utilization and allocation for student support systems such as admission and advising processes, corequisite remediation, tutoring services, early alert services, and even counseling and career services. By better understanding individual student goals, NSU fulfills its mission to provide "a service-oriented, supportive learning environment where students prepare to achieve professional and personal success in a multicultural and global society." [[NSU Mission Statement](#)]

Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose

4. Describe the purposes and goals for the initiative.

The proposed Quality Initiative, "Sustaining Student Success," facilitates students' identification, articulation, evolution, and attainment of career and educational goals. To do this effectively, the project will initially consider several cohorts including transfer students and first-time freshmen. As the project evolves, key variables and characteristics will no doubt arise from the data analysis, and these variables will serve as junctures for further exploration and project modification in an iterative manner.

Project Goals and Objectives:

1. Focus on students' definitions of "success" related to their professional and educational goals
 - a. Implement goal-setting / success elements at key points in the curriculum
 - b. Update general education offerings to a meta-major structure
2. Improve individual student success
 - a. Validate effectiveness of methods and tools used to identify at-risk students
 - b. Improve developmental / remedial services and course offerings
3. Improve institutional success by better aligning academic, student support, and student engagement systems.
 - a. Increase immersive/experiential learning opportunities
 - b. Enhance market responsiveness of academic programs
 - c. Increase number of programs created or modified to address Oklahoma's five workforce ecosystems: Aerospace and defense; Energy; Agriculture and biosciences; Information and financial services; Transportation and distribution

Initial Study Cohorts:

While NSU has varied student cohort populations, to narrow the Quality Initiative focus and ensure manageable group size, the initial cohort groups will be limited to:

- First-Time, Full-Time students, and
- New transfer students

Data analysis may suggest additional cohorts based on student characteristics which could provide further differentiation of student support and success factors.

5. Describe how the institution will evaluate progress, make adjustments, and determine what has been accomplished.

Methodology: For each of the broad goals and specific objectives detailed above, the institution has identified measures to assist in evaluating progress and provide guidance for adjustments throughout the iterative implementation process. NSU can, by and large, accomplish these goals and objectives by working within the structures of its existing committees and student support structures. The overall methodology and outcome assessments are consistent with the Degrees of Excellence Institutional Assessment Plan and will follow a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) model.

NSU will utilize predictive data and analytics and will also analyze data provided by the early alert system and subsequent intervention referrals, assessment evidence related to both student success definitions, and supplemental instruction course outcomes. NSU's Office of Institutional Effectiveness will oversee all data collection and analyses with regular review by the Quality Initiative Steering Committee, Deans, and key faculty and staff. Since NSU will utilize a CQI methodology, the overall processes will assess efficacy at all data points, monitoring and modifying where needed.

Data analysis and outcomes will include quantitative and qualitative measures to assess the curriculum, co-curricular activities, and interventions throughout the Quality Initiative as described in the assessment plan below.

Goal 1. Focus on students' definitions of "success"

Students will participate in goal setting exercises and discussions of how they define success. To measure this goal, the following actions and direct/indirect measures are planned:

- a. Implement goal-setting / success elements at key points in the curriculum
 - i. Increase curricular units addressing goal setting / success definitions
 - ii. Increase co-curricular programming addressing goal-setting
 - iii. Identify regular touchpoints for students to evaluate their goals
- b. Update general education offerings to a meta-major structure

Goal 1(a) will be the responsibility of faculty members with assistance from faculty in NSU's CACREP-accredited counseling program and professional staff who hold counseling licenses. Projected implementation points for this goal include the UNIV 1002 University Strategies course for new freshmen, major courses for career-specific discussions related to goal-setting, orientation programs for new and transfer students, and advisement sessions for all students.

Goal 1(b) will be the responsibility of the faculty working through the General Education Committee through the University Curriculum Committee with final approval by the state-level governing regent's boards.

Once fully implemented, course evaluations, satisfaction / perception surveys, and engagement tracking through electronic portfolio implementation will provide data as to the effectiveness of curricular modifications, co-curricular activities, and touchpoint interactions. Student retention and attrition data,

remedial / developmental success rates, and degree completion data will also be critical for informing the QI Steering Committee and the campus community at large.

Goal 2. Improve individual student success

Goal 2 focuses on student success through the lens of NSU's student support systems. To measure this goal, the following actions and direct/indirect measure are planned:

- a. Validate effectiveness of methods and tools used to identify at-risk students
 - i. Predictive analytics (Civitas Illume)
 - ii. Early Alert data analysis (Beacon)
 - iii. Admission / placement data analysis
 - iv. Persistence, attrition, completion data analysis
- b. Improve developmental / remedial services and course offerings
 - i. Supplemental instruction data & persistence rates
 - ii. Tutoring service data & persistence rates

Goal 2 Responsibility

As with Goal 1, personnel and actions needed to achieve Goal 2(a) utilize several existing processes and structures, and the Quality Initiative will focus the data collection efforts of offices and committees to hone in on actionable items. For example, NSU has collected admission, placement, persistence, and completion data for many years but only recently has collected data from its early alert systems. In 2016, NSU purchased new early alert software capable of drilling down in the data and cross-tabulating results with information about students' admission, placement, and persistence characteristics. Key variables may include demographic variables, ACT scores, high school GPA, transfer GPA, financial variables, tutoring participation, and non-cognitive variables. NSU's Office of Institutional Effectiveness will be primarily responsible for Goal 2(a).

Goal 2(b) falls under the responsibility of the Developmental Education Committee that includes faculty and staff who teach and advise students whose preparation for college-level work is in question. In 2015-16, this committee piloted a corequisite course project for both mathematics and composition which allowed students to enroll in credit-bearing, on-level courses with supplemental instruction by the same faculty member. The results from this pilot were significant in several variable areas; thus, Goal 2(b) will build on those successes to further enhance services and course offerings for developmental students.

Goal 3. Improve institutional success by better aligning academic, student support, and student engagement systems.

Goal 3 expands the impact of the quality initiative beyond individuals to a more holistic level. While success of individual students is foremost and NSU's goal is to institutionalize activities which the data reveal are effective, research highlights the importance of strengthening NSU's academic and co-curricular programs through increased connections with constituent communities.

To measure this goal, the following actions and direct/indirect measures are planned:

- a. Increase immersive/experiential learning opportunities
 - i. Review curriculum to identify additional opportunities for immersive/experiential learning experiences

- ii. Increase the number of students participating in immersive/experiential learning opportunities
 - iii. Develop an infrastructure to document, track, and assess student learning in experiential and immersive environments (electronic portfolio)
 - iv. Assess student perceptions of immersive/experiential learning opportunities
 - v. Encourage sharing and promotion of immersive/experiential learning activities through faculty, staff, and student participation in conference and professional development events
- b. Enhance market responsiveness of academic programs
- i. Implement NSU's Degrees of Excellence outcomes across all programs
 - ii. Increase number of programs created or modified to address Oklahoma's five workforce ecosystems - Aerospace and defense; Energy; Agriculture and biosciences; Information and financial services; Transportation and distribution
 - iii. Revise or develop curricula to address local constituent needs.

Goal 3 focuses on helping students see the real-world application of the knowledge and skills learned in their programs and through co-curricular activities. During implementation of D23, programs conducted a base-line, curricular survey to determine the immersive and experiential opportunities available at that time.

Goal 3 Responsibility

Goal 3(a) builds on the D23 survey to find ways to increase immersive and experimental learning opportunities. No doubt, expanding these opportunities will not only require professional development for faculty to better integrate clinical, field, and service learning in the curriculum but will also outreach to area employers, service agencies, and community organizations. Responsibility for Goal 3(a) will involve faculty and NSU's Center for Teaching and Learning which oversees professional development offerings on campus. In addition, NSU's Career Services office, student leadership, engagement organizations, and recruitment and orientation offices will further support increasing immersive/experiential learning opportunities. Another critical partner, the NSU Alumni Association, supports the Green and White Network project which helps connect alumni mentors with students.

Outreach to external constituents will also be an important factor for Goal 3(b) as NSU seeks to strengthen its market responsiveness. While many NSU programs, particularly those with specialty accreditations have advisory panels and community connections, NSU has room for growth in this area. Practitioner feedback and best practice research will be the compass for improved program and course design. Faculty, department chairs, and deans will have primary responsibility for this goal and objective.

Goal 3(c) aligns with national initiatives to articulate degree outcomes, state-wide efforts to improve Oklahoma's economic future, and the needs of local schools, businesses, and industries. NSU's Degrees of Excellence build upon the Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualifications Profile and the American Association of Colleges and Universities' LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes. Goal 3(c) also aligns with the Oklahoma Department of Commerce's five workforce ecosystems identified as critical to the state's economy. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, the governing board with oversight over curriculum matters requires that all new programs requests respond to an ecosystem workforce question. Finally, the needs of local employers will be an important consideration in meeting Goal 3(c).

Assessment and Oversight. The offices of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs will provide oversight with key personnel to coordinate the work of faculty and staff and keep the QI projects moving forward. A team of committee chairs, key staff, and administrators will form a Quality Initiative Steering Committee which will meet regularly, share data, evaluate progress, and identify challenges and points of success (See Section 7). In addition to the items mentioned earlier, methods and data points targeted to evaluate the success of the project include:

- Annual surveys to assess student goals and satisfaction
- Standardized assessments with value-added components (e.g. Beacon SSI)
- Retention year to year, matriculation to degree, career placement data
- Degrees of Excellence Outcomes measures
- Specialty accreditations and re-accreditations

Data and results from these assessment processes will be used to adjust academic and student support programming.

Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

6. Describe the level of support for the initiative by internal or external stakeholders.

The President, Provost, Executive Cabinet, staff, and faculty are dedicated to accomplishing the Quality Initiative goals. As indicated earlier, the Quality Initiative will be integrated across the university through existing committee and student support structures, fostering high levels of support and buy-in. Below is a list of existing committees and offices that will have a role in the success of this initiative.

- Existing NSU committees and offices:
 - Academic Council / Dean's Council
 - Alumni Association
 - Career Services
 - Center for Teaching and Learning (Faculty Professional Development)
 - College / University Curriculum Committees
 - Developmental Education Committee
 - General Education Committee
 - Office of Institutional Effectiveness
 - Strategic Planning Committee
 - Student Affairs Leadership Team (SALT)
 - Student Learning and Assessment Committee (Degrees of Excellence)
 - Student Orientation Activities
 - University Advising Committee

Prior to implementation, the project will be vetted throughout the university with input and feedback sought from various constituencies. During the fall 2016 opening meetings, the President, Provost, and VP for Student Affairs will share the initiative and plans with the campus community and collect input. A website will provide the campus with immediate information, and the QI Steering Committee will work with NSU's Communication and Marketing unit to further distribute information as needed to the public.

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

Representatives from the above committees and offices will form a QI Steering Committee whose main function will be to oversee the implementation of the initiatives and related projects, to receive data and data analysis from the constituent groups, and to monitor and adjust the plans as informed by those data.

- Dr. Mark Arant, Provost, committee chair
- Dr. Jerrid Freeman, VP Student Affairs
- Dr. Mike Wilds, Professor, HLC Accreditation Liaison Officer
- Dr. Tom Jackson, AVP Academic Affairs (Research & Sponsored Programs)
- Dr. Pamela Fly, AVP Academic Affairs (Teaching & Learning)
- Dr. Cari Keller, Executive Director of Planning and Assessment
- Dr. Julie Sawyer, Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness
- Mr. Karl Kruczek, Chair Developmental Education Committee
- Dr. Dan Savage, Chair General Education Committee
- Mr. Chad McLane, Director, Center for Teaching and Learning
- Dr. Richard Reif, Chief Information Officer
- Mr. Daniel Johnson, Alumni Association Director
- Dr. Renee Cambiano, Chair, Faculty Council
- Mr. Jeff Walker, Director, University Advising Center
- Mr. Ben Hardcastle, VP University Relations
- Student Affairs Staff as identified by J. Freeman
- Deans, faculty representatives identified by M. Arant
- Branch Campus Dean(s)

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

Human. Identified individuals will dedicate time and effort to the Quality Initiative project. Since this project utilizes existing committees and their work assignments, the project is not expected to generate the need for additional personnel. Each of the QI Steering Committee members oversees faculty and staff who will contribute to the effort. Since this project is tightly connected with NSU's Strategic Plan and D23 Retention and Completion roadmap, several offices have individuals already assigned to facilitate aspects of the QI project. Depending upon which phase of the project is underway, individuals may devote 10% to 25% (4 to 10 hours a week) of their time to any particular aspect.

Financial. NSU has already invested in this project because of the university's commitment to improving persistence and completion and immersive/experiential learning. NSU's memberships in the HLC Assessment Academy and the HLC Persistence and Completion Academy have informed the project design. As indicated below, some costs are already budget line items while others will be new expenditures.

QUALITY INITIATIVE: SUSTAINING STUDENT SUCCESS Budget – Year 1			
Nature of Investment	New Expenditure	Reallocation of Existing Structures	Explanation
Predictive analytic software	\$90,000 \$40,000		Annual cost/ Initialization costs
Assessment software (university deployment)	\$94,000		E-portfolio
Corequisite, Developmental Ed. (full implementation)		\$15,000	Additional adjunct expense
Student Support Systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutoring (face-to-face & online) • Early Alert system • Financial Aid processes • Advising processes 		\$0	Already exists
Center for Teaching and Learning (Experiential Learning Coordinator designated summer 2016)		\$0	Already exists
Career Services		\$0	Already exists
Other areas to be identified Year 2			To be determined
Totals	\$224,000	\$15,000	

Other Resources. With the expansion of NSU’s experiential/immersive learning curricular components, the importance of community and external partnerships is heightened. Several programs such as teacher education, social work, and allied health programs make extensive use of community-based partners. The goal is to improve upon these partnerships. Potential areas to expand our immersive learning/experiential learning opportunities include a new agreement with the Tulsa Research Partners and expanded business connections to foster students’ opportunities to apply their learning in a real-world environment.

The Quality Initiative also aligns with initiatives sponsored by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. NSU will leverage external resources and support systems connected to the following:

- Complete College America (CCA). Oklahoma’s initiatives to increase the number of degree completions through Complete College America (CCA) are supported through a state-wide degree completion with NSU as one of the lead partners.
- High school concurrent partnerships. NSU enrolls approximately 200-250 high school students per year and is in discussions with more K-12 partners to expand these opportunities.
- 2+2 Transfer Articulations. NSU has partnerships with several community college partners and meets regularly with these partners to ensure smooth curricular and transfer process alignment.
- Math Pathways / Meta majors. NSU is part of the OSRHE project to minimize math remediation and to streamline general education degree components to facilitate students’ matriculation.

In each of these partnerships, NSU has designated participants who are either on the QI Steering Committee or report to a committee member; thus, the institution will fully integrate all efforts toward the QI goals and objectives.

Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative

(The institution may include a brief implementation or action plan.)

9. Describe the primary activities of the initiative and timeline for implementing them.

NSU’s Quality Initiative is sustainable in that it builds upon work already in progress. However, the project is a considerable refinement in the paradigm that defines “student success.” NSU will ask students to define “success” in relationship to their life and career goals. The answer may be the traditional answer, “I want a bachelor degree.” Or, it may be that students seek to refine computer or business skills, accomplish certain credit hours to satisfy a current or future employer, refresh educational skills to obtain a terminal degree, or complete the core classes at a reduced price with the intent of enrolling in a professional degree offered at another university. Below are highlights of the QI Timeline:

Yr. 5	2016 – 17	Planning / Refinement of Proposal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify data that might be used for QI analysis • Refine QI Proposal • Initiate general education / meta major proposals for state approval • Plan “goal setting” curriculum for Fall 17 implementation • Submit QI Proposal late Fall 2016
Yr. 6	2017 – 18	Implement specific action items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate the first phase of student interventions • Evaluate curriculum to expand immersive learning opportunities • Identify platforms to improve transfer student support
Yr. 7	2018-19	Compare data outcomes to baseline data outcomes attained in 2017-18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify success in implementation of action items • Reflect upon data outcomes and accomplishments • Refine action items if merited
Yr. 8	2019-20	Compile and submit the Quality Initiative Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform a thorough evaluation of overall success of QI initiatives • Reevaluate student definitions of individual “student success” • Compile Comprehensive Evaluation Materials; Submit Final QI Report
Yr. 9	2020-21	Complete First Draft of Self Study Report; Create the Evidence File
Yr. 10	2021-22	Finalize Evidence File & Self-Study; Site Visit - Spring 2022

The Quality Initiative is sustainable in future years in that through these efforts, NSU will fulfill student aspirations, connect with student needs, and create life-long bonds among students, community members, and business leaders. It has the potential to foster an affinity for the university for years to come. The “Sustaining Student Success” initiative will help NSU accomplish its mission of “empower[ing]

students, faculty, staff and the community to reach their full intellectual and human potential by creating and expanding a culture of learning, discovery, and diversity.”

Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal

Include the name(s) of the primary contact(s) for the Quality Initiative.

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