

North Idaho College Response to Show Cause Peer-Evaluation Report

As an institution, North Idaho College (NIC) aspires to immediately move off show-cause, come into compliance with all accreditation standards and eligibility requirements well before the April 1, 2025 deadline to return to good standing with NWCCU.

NIC appreciates the peer evaluation team for their time and energy in visiting campus, meeting with stakeholders, and drafting the Show Cause Visit Peer-Evaluation Report that is, on whole, representative of the efforts NIC is taking to meet accreditation standards and retain accreditation. We recognize the difficulty in assessing a complex, multi-year issue in only two days.

The Board of Trustees received a draft of this response from the president on May 24, 2023, with a request to provide input by 9:00 am on May 30, 2023. Two trustees responded with feedback that was considered and edits to this response were subsequently made. In addition, where directly related, we have cited the eligibility requirements and standards throughout this response, but we have not attempted to include all eligibility requirements and standards.

The Peer-Evaluation Report has provided us an opportunity for introspection. As a matter of integrity, the NIC writing team remains concerned with a statement made on page 15 of the Peer-Evaluation Report, in which the team cited ambiguous "potential inaccuracies" in NIC's March 30, 2023, Response Report without citing specifics. The authors of NIC's response assert that everything in the response was supported by documented evidence. To ensure integrity, opinions and recollections without documented evidence were not included (Standard 2.D.1).

After reviewing a draft of this response letter, on May 30, 2023 Chair McKenzie provided additional information that may relate to the "potential inaccuracies" noted by the peer evaluation team in NIC's March 30, 2023, Response Report. The additional information is provided as an appendix. The writing team does not have access to the original documents, but are in good faith submitting the information provided by the trustee. The writing team is providing this information from September 2021 to provide the commission with some historical context from that time period. As stated by Chair McKenzie, "NIC retaining accreditation provided by NWCCU is essential and demonstrating compliance with the entirety of the Eligibility Requirements and Standards is critical for an informed June discussion and resulting July decision. Providing as much information and transparency as possible only helps in producing a wise informed commission decision."

The focus of this letter and the Show Cause sanction from NWCCU are the board's actions and core risks that transpired on December 5, 8, 10, and 21, 2022. On December 5, 2022 the three new members of the current board were sworn into office. President Swayne was placed on administrative leave from December 8, 2022 – March 6, 2023 and was therefore unable to carry out the responsibilities of his position including board communications, relationship building, orientation, training and policy work during that time. Since his return on March 7, 2023, the president and the executive team have engaged with the board to make improvements in collaborating and creating a sustainable environment of good governance. As stated in NIC's March 30, 2023, Response Report and the Peer-Evaluation Report, the board is currently engaged in intensive training with the ACCT consultants and is developing a genuine understanding of the importance of accreditation and the accreditation eligibility requirements and standards. With these foundations established, the college will be able to re-establish and leverage the board training program and sustain effective governance (Eligibility

Requirements 2, 8, 9, & 22, Standard 2.A.4). Since the site visit, the board has demonstrated that understanding by the following actions:

- The Board of Trustees understands the importance of keeping the policies up to date. Two trustees, the president, and an ACCT consultant have formed a subcommittee charged with reviewing and revising board policy related to the Board of Trustees. They are in the process of reviewing and updating all of the current board policies and determining what new board policies are required. The first drafts of the updates to the Policy Manual were reviewed by the board at their May 24, 2023 meeting. Six updated policies were approved by the board for publication with no dissenting votes (4 for; 0 against or 3 for; 0 against). The changes in policy will enable the board to more clearly understand their roles as trustees and enhance communication with the President (Eligibility Requirements 7, 8, & 22, Standards 2.A.1, 2.A.4, & 2.B.1).

Appointment, Authority and Functions Policy [2.01.01](#)

Communication with the Board of Trustees Policy [2.01.05](#)

Board of Trustees Performance Review Policy [2.01.08](#)

New Board Member Orientation Policy [2.01.11](#)

President's Responsibility and Authority Policy [2.02.01](#)

Presidential Performance Review Policy [2.02.02](#)

- While more work needs to be done to update policies and procedures, the president and board evaluations were discussed at the regular meeting on May 24, 2023. The policies being used are evaluated and codified as policies under Presidential Performance Review Policy [2.02.02](#) and Board Performance Policy [2.01.08](#) respectively (Eligibility Requirement 9, Standard 2.F.4).
- On May 17, 2023, the Board of Trustees approved a resolution not to oppose NIC President Nick Swayne's request that the court grant him permanent reinstatement without going to trial (5 for; 0 against) (Eligibility Requirements 8, 9, & 10, Standard 2 Preamble).
- In support of Meetings Policy [2.01.03](#), trustees have agreed to and followed through with discussions that assist with deriving the agenda. All five trustees have adopted best practices in communicating with the President and are meeting with him prior to board meetings. We think this is sustainable and will result in more effective board meetings. The agenda for the May 24, 2023, board meeting was organized by the president with input from all trustees (Eligibility Requirements 9, & 10, Standards 2.A.1, & 2.E.3).
- The president's cabinet developed a schedule of recurring reports that are designed to assist the trustees with their knowledge of the ongoing operation of the college. The board reviewed the plan at their May 24, 2023 meeting. Establishing a system of recurring reports is a best governance practice for improving communications and encouraging a focus on the best interests of the institution (Eligibility Requirements 8, & 9, Standard 2.A.4).
- All five trustees reviewed and commented on the 2024 Fiscal Year Budget. Four met individually with the president and/or vice president of finance to review the budget before considering it for approval on a second reading. These face-to-face meetings allowed for productive conversations and the ability for the board members to ask and receive responses to questions about the budget proposal (Eligibility Requirements 8, & 9, Standard 2.E.2, 2.E.3, & 2.F.3).
- At their May 24, 2023 meeting, the board adopted (3 for; 2 against) the statement read by the Chair of the Board of Trustees at the April 26, 2023 meeting (p. 9), acknowledging the "No Confidence"

concerns expressed by the college constituency groups. (Eligibility Requirements 7, & 9, Standard 1.B.4, & 2.D.2, Standard 2 Preamble).

- At the May 24, 2023 board meeting, the president presented an updated schedule of college policies reviews and updates (Standards 2.B.1, 2.F.1, & 2.F.4).

In addition to the recent actions taken by the board, the college is continuing to make meaningful progress.

- The institution has traditionally engaged in a seven-year policy review process; however, we recognize some policies and procedures have not been updated for quite some time. The administration has committed to a comprehensive review of all board policies and processes, over the summer months, with the goal of ensuring all policies and procedures are current (Eligibility Requirements 9, & 11, Standards 2.A.1, & 2.A.4).
- Of the four interim senior-level positions mentioned in the Peer-Evaluation Report, the college has now hired permanent administrators through the established hiring process, which included stakeholder input, for the 1) Dean of Instruction for Workforce Education and 2) Dean of Students. The college plans to move forward with filling the remaining interim positions, 1) Provost and 2) Associate Dean of Instruction, during the 2023-24 academic year (Eligibility Requirement 11, Standard 2.A.2).

The college appreciates the efforts the peer evaluation team put into assessing the complex governance issues of NIC. The team's observations have provided the college, the board, and the community an opportunity for reflection. As stated in the Peer Evaluation report, "the college President and Board of Trustees, individually and collectively, bear the great and vitally important responsibility of figuring out how to work together in a spirit of peace and unity to govern the college effectively. The future of North Idaho College and its students hinges upon their willingness and ability to do so." With the recent documented observations of the evaluation team and with recent improvement by the board, the college respectfully requests the commission to reduce the current sanction of show cause. This would provide the employees, students, both current and prospective, and the community a strong sign of NWCCU's confidence that the college can return to good standing.