

June 26, 2023

Dr. Richard D. Muma  
Provost  
Wichita State University  
1845 N. Fairmount  
Wichita, Kansas 67260-0001

Dear Provost Muma,

This letter is accompanied by the Quality Initiative Proposal (QIP) Review form completed by a peer review panel. Wichita State University's QIP is approved.

Within the QIP Review form, you will find comments from the panel for your consideration as you proceed with your Quality Initiative. The panel reviewed the QIP for four areas:

- Sufficiency of initiative's scope and significance
- Clarity of initiative's purpose
- Evidence of commitment to and capacity for accomplishing the initiative
- Appropriateness of the timeline for the initiative

If you have questions about the panel's review, please contact either Kathy Bijak ([kbijak@hlcommission.org](mailto:kbijak@hlcommission.org)) or Pat Newton-Curran ([pnewton@hlcommission.org](mailto:pnewton@hlcommission.org)). For any questions about your Quality Initiative, contact Dr. Linnea Stenson at [lstenon@hlcommission.org](mailto:lstenon@hlcommission.org).

***The Higher Learning Commission***

# Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal Review Form

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Date of Review: June 21, 2023

Name of Institution: Wichita State University      State: Kansas

Institutional ID: 1304

Reviewers (names, titles, institutions): Tami Eggleston, Provost, McKendree University; Patrick Schmidt, Professor of Political Science, Macalester College

## Review Categories and Findings

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### 1. Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

- Potential for significant impact on the institution and its academic quality.
- Alignment with the institution's mission and vision.
- Connection with the institution's planning processes.
- Evidence of significance and relevance at this time.

#### Finding:

- The Quality Initiative Proposal demonstrates acceptable scope and significance.
- The Quality Initiative Proposal does not demonstrate acceptable scope and significance.

**Rationale and Comments:** (Provide 2–3 statements justifying the finding and recommending minor modifications, if applicable. Provide any comments, such as highlighting strong points, raising minor concerns or cautions, or identifying questions.)

Wichita State University identified Student Success and Persistence as their QI Project. This project was informed by the National Institute for Student Success commissioned by the Kansas Board of Regents. The goal of WSU is to increase retention and graduation rates for all students with an emphasis on both underserved and non-underserved students by narrowing the gap.

\*It should be noted that the two reviewers were a bit confused by the narrative in the first paragraph that suggested a 3.8% gap on six-year graduation rates between underserved and non-underserved students, and the university's goal of reducing that by half, to 1.9%. Identifying Figure 4: Time-to-Degree (in the appendix) as the appropriate source of data, the reviewers found different equity gaps in six-year graduation rates (e.g., 10.1% in 2022), and likewise high persistence gaps in Figure 1 (e.g., 13.8% in 2021, the last year reported here). While the reviewers appreciated the specific figures and the tables, there seemed to be some incongruence in both the absolute values and the gaps discussed in the proposal.

This QI project was linked the university's Strategic Enrollment Management Plan which identifies "increase persistence rates of degree-seeking students."

This project appears to fit in with the goals and planning across the campus as well as with the Kansas Board of Regents' strategic plan for Kansas and the priority to "provide an accessible, affordable, and impactful higher education for all Kansans." The project also fits within the WSU mission "to be an essential educational, cultural, and economic driver for Kansas and the greater public good."

## 2. Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose

- Clear purposes and goals reflective of the scope and significance of the initiative.
- Defined milestones and intended goals.
- Clear processes for evaluating progress.

### Finding:

- The Quality Initiative Proposal demonstrates clarity of purpose.
- The Quality Initiative Proposal does not demonstrate clarity of purpose.

### Rationale and Comments:

WSU's leadership team has charged each area with four recommendations: systematize the use of academic data, standardize academic advising, develop intentional pathways to help students select majors, and strengthen financial aid collaboration.

WSU starts with the importance of student success and graduation. But WSU also understands the financial impact that by retaining 100 students, that will generate approximately \$800K. In addition, these students will earn more money over their lifetimes and finally this will improve the reputation of Wichita State University.

The two main goals for this QAI include narrowing the equity gap from the current 3.8% to 1.9% (again, please see above note, as the reviewers didn't see that the current gap was 3.8% based on tables later), and increase persistence rates from 75% to 80%.

And the SSP Initiative included 6 very specific strategies to help reach these goals.

The evaluation of retention and graduation targets by groups will allow for evaluation of the initiatives over time. It was noted that COVID may influence on some of this data.

## 3. Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

- Commitment of senior leadership.
- Commitment and involvement of key people and groups.
- Sufficiency of the human, financial, technological, and other resources.
- Defined plan for integrating the initiative into the ongoing work of the institution and sustaining its results.

- Clear understanding of and capacity to address potential obstacles.

#### **Finding:**

- The Quality Initiative Proposal demonstrates evidence of commitment and capacity.
- The Quality Initiative Proposal does not demonstrate evidence of commitment and capacity.

#### **Rationale and Comments:**

The QI suggests that this initiative has brought a new level of excitement to campus and we hope this is true, but we also understand how hard it can be to get an entire campus moving toward a common goal. The reviewers offer their best wishes to keep the momentum and enthusiasm, particularly in embedding the goal of student persistence at the level of student-facing staff and faculty.

There has been a clear, public commitment from the leadership (president and provost), as well as the visible involvement (e.g. town hall participation) of administrators and faculty from across the university. The reviewers reacted positively to accountability and leadership provided by a dedicated committee, the wonderfully-named Student Success and Persistence Coalition.

There was a large list of initiatives and associated budgets linked to the initiatives including: Summer Bridge Programs, Student Engagement and Belonging programs, Advising and Academic Support, Digital Toolbox Resources (laptops/tablets), a new VP for Student Success, Financial Aid restructuring, and Teacher Apprentice Program Student Retention. It appears that there has been an investment in people and programs to help move the QI forward.

#### **4. Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative**

- Consistency with intended purposes and goals.
- Alignment with the implementation of other institutional priorities.
- Reasonable implementation plan for the time period.

#### **Finding:**

- The Quality Initiative Proposal demonstrates an appropriate timeline.
- The Quality Initiative Proposal does not demonstrate an appropriate timeline.

#### **Rationale and Comments:**

A detailed implementation timeline was provided. Preparatory work began in Summer 2022 and extending to the Spring of 2026.

WSU has started the preparatory work and has data and a variety of initiatives and resources in place.

## General Observations and Recommended Modifications

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Panel members may provide considerations and suggested modifications that the institution should note related to its proposed Quality Initiative.

We will note two observations before a general observation.

- Just ensure that the data from the tables match the data in the narrative. To the extent that the polished “NISS Implementation Timeline” published a six-year graduation rate gap of 3.8% (based on underlying rates of 49.9% and 53.7%), it must be that this number was found somewhere at the university at an early point. However, the reviewers could not find anything in the appendices that correspond. What drew our attention to the statistics initially was, in fact, that a gap of 3.8% seemed quite small compared to what other institutions experience. Then, a goal of reducing it by half, to 1.9% over four years, is similarly slight—something that may be subsumed very quickly by cohort-to-cohort variance. Based on the equity gaps in six year graduation rates (for students with zero earned transfer hours, the top half of “Figure 4”), in the last five non-pandemic years, the University has seen a range of 6.8% (10.1% in 2022, to 16.9% in 2016). As the University revisits these data, it may be necessary to reconsider the goal itself so that it is appropriately ambitious.
- This is very nitpicky, but we just wanted to point out that Table 1 should be called a Figure. And Figures 1-4 were actually Tables.

Aside from these points in the weeds, at a higher level the reviewers observed a high level of sophistication to the planning process for this Quality Initiative. The strategies woven together into this initiative include many sound, well-tested approaches (e.g., summer bridge programs, coordinated advising and academic support). The University has sought to ground their work in good data and have committed significant resources (including over \$2.4 million) to these efforts. We commend them on the overall strong top-to-bottom marshalling of resources for this worthwhile project.

## Conclusion

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- Approve the proposed Quality Initiative with or without recommended minor modifications. No further review required.
- Request resubmission of the proposed Quality Initiative.

## Rationale and Expectations if Requesting Resubmission

### Timeline and Process for Resubmission

*(HLC staff will add this section if the recommendation is for resubmission.)*