

REPORT OF A REQUESTED FOCUSED VISIT FOR CHANGE

Assurance Section

**NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
Flagstaff, Arizona**

May 3-5, 2005

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

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ASSURANCE SECTION

Part I: CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT

A. Purpose of Visit

This focused visit is to review the request of Northern Arizona University (NAU) for approval from the Higher Learning Commission to offer unlimited online degree programs.

This request is in keeping with the mission of NAU “to provide outstanding undergraduate residential education strengthened by research, graduate and professional programs, and sophisticated methods of distance delivery.” NAU presently offers 29 undergraduate and graduate degree programs, certificates, and endorsements entirely via the internet, with the exception of those programs, such as Nursing and Education, that involve supervised clinical or professional field work. Four of these programs, two in Nursing and one in Parks and Recreation Management and one in Hotel and Restaurant Management, are accredited by disciplinary or professional associations.

The state of Arizona is anticipating an influx of 100,000 new college students by 2020, spread throughout the state. In response, and also as part of the Arizona Board of Regents system redesign, NAU is in transition from its former “Build It and They Will Come” paradigm to the concept of “Expand on Demand.” This new concept is intended to increase the ability of NAU to develop online programs that respond to the identified needs of learners, employers, communities, and other stakeholders, regardless of location.

The delivery of online programs provides not only a solution to the needs of the state, particularly for place-bound students and students and employers in rural areas of the state, but also access to students nationally and internationally to ensure that smaller niche programs have a sufficiently large student base to be economically feasible.

Currently about a third (over 6000) of the NAU student population is off-campus. The requested institutional change will continue to increase off-campus student enrollment at a projected 8% to 10% per year. Planned growth will be based on identified employer and student demand.

In accordance with North Central Higher Learning Commission policy 1.C.2.b.4, Changes in Educational Offerings, Northern Arizona University requests approval to extend the University’s accreditation to include electronically delivered programs.

B. Accreditation Status

NAU has been accredited with the North Central Higher Learning Commission since 1930, when the institution, under the name of the Arizona State Teachers College at Flagstaff, became the first teachers college in the Southwest to be accredited. In 1951, following two additional name changes, first to Arizona State College at Flagstaff in 1945 and then to its current Northern Arizona University in 1966, the institution’s

graduate programs were fully accredited by NCA. The education specialist program was added and accredited by NCA in 1962. Accreditation was extended to the doctoral level in 1970 in four program areas: the Ph.D. in biology and the Ed.D. in educational administration, in curriculum and instruction, and in educational psychology. In 1978, an additional Ph.D. program was approved in history/political science during the course of the University's decennial review.

The 1978 team approved accreditation for an additional ten years, requesting a Focused Visit in 1982 to evaluate the institution's development at the doctoral degree level. In 1982, NAU was granted authorization to initiate additional doctoral programs without prior approval from NCA. The 1987-88 Comprehensive Visit resulted in continued accreditation for ten years, with the next visit scheduled for 1997-98. The 1997-98 visit approved an additional ten years of accreditation, with requests for two interim activities: a Progress Report due the following year, in 1999, on assessment of student learning outcomes and priority setting for elements of mission and associated resource allocations; and a Focused Evaluation Visit in 2001 on the same two issues: assessment and planning. The 1999 Progress Report was accepted by NCA, with no further reports required, pending the outcome of the 2001 Focused Evaluation Visit. In response to several changes at the highest levels of NAU administration, this Focused Evaluation Visit was delayed until 2002. The team report for the 2002 Visit noted considerable improvement in both areas of assessment and planning, and required no further visits or reports until the regularly scheduled Comprehensive Visit in 2007-08.

The January 2000 NCA response to the 1999 Progress Report notes that "distributed learning is a part of the NAU mission, and that the institution is committed to lead in the use of technology for distributed learning and to offer quality instruction in every course in the distance environment." This document further notes that, following the appointment of a Dean for Distributed Learning, "the systems are in place to facilitate, coordinate, and organize distance learning programs."

In the past five years, the number of online degree programs has grown considerably at NAU; therefore, the institution has requested this Focused Visit for Institutional Change in 2005 to offer unlimited online programs without the need for prior Commission approval.

C. Organizational Context

The requested institutional change is in keeping with the mission of NAU to provide "outstanding undergraduate...education strengthened by...sophisticated means of distance delivery;" the mission of the Arizona Board of Regents "to provide access to baccalaureate and graduate education in underserved regions of the state;" and the goals of the University's 2005-2010 Strategic Plan to "Provide leadership in the development, use, and assessment of technologies in administrative systems and educational programs."

Historically, providing access to rural populations of Northern Arizona included faculty driving, taking a bus, or being ferried by private plane to reach students in remote areas of the state. Electronic modes of transmission, such as the IITV system installed in 1989 and the development of web-based courses in the 1990's, have diminished dependency on these more expensive and time consuming modes of educational delivery. In 1999, Arizona voters approved Prop 301, a sales tax dedicated to education at all levels. In 2000, the Arizona Board of Regents approved priorities for the use of these extra funds, with student access and work force development and research as the primary foci. The Board of Regents allocated \$3.9 million to the University's workforce and development

initiative and an additional \$2.2 million to the E-Learning initiative that supports research, development of infrastructure, and assessment of learning in electronic environments, with the expectation that NAU would greatly expand access to degree programs in both urban and rural areas.

In 2003, the Board of Regents eliminated geographic service area boundaries and encouraged NAU to expand offerings in urban areas to meet the demands of increasing numbers of students. NAU engaged Collegis/Edupris (now Sunguard) consulting group to make recommendations for strengthening distance learning at NAU. In 2004, in recognition of NAU's growing success in providing online programs, the Board of Regents transferred leadership of Arizona Regents' University, the state's "virtual university," to NAU.

Over the past five years, the growth of programs has resulted directly from formal and informal needs assessments conducted at departmental and programmatic levels. Concurrently, the state government released the Five Shoes Waiting to Drop on Arizona's Future report, which reached the same conclusions as NAU's needs assessments: health care, K-12 education, business management, engineering, communications, and information technology are identified as areas of high need and high demand. The NAU online programs reflect these areas of priority identified by several groups of stakeholders, ranging from students (current and potential) to employers to state legislators.

At the institutional level, the following constituencies have been directly involved in shaping NAU's educational response to the above needs assessments, and to the consequent development of online degree programs: Strategic Planning; the President's Cabinet; Extended Programs/Distance Learning Council; President's Forums; Council of Deans; Academic Chairs Council; Assistant/Associate Dean's Roundtable; and the Faculty Senate. WebCT VISTA is being implemented as the Academic Enterprise System to provide an optimum technological infrastructure to support learning in the online programs.

D. Unique Aspects of Visit

Because NAU has been involved in developing and supporting online programs for the past five years, there are many aspects of the technological and information resources infrastructure to observe and many administrators, faculty, staff, and student interviews to be conducted. As a consequence of a very full, mutually agreed upon schedule, the team was offered, and we accepted, an opportunity to have access to the resource room on Sunday afternoon and evening.

E. Interactions with Organizational Constituencies

1. President of Northern Arizona University
2. Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs
3. Vice President of Extended Programs and Dean of Distance Learning
4. Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies
5. Associate Dean of the College of Business
6. Executive Director of the School of Nursing
7. Distance Learning Coordinator of the School of Nursing
8. Associate Dean of Academic Programs and Distance Learning
9. Executive Director of the School of Health Professions
10. Dean of Professional Schools

11. Dean and University Librarian, Cline Library
12. Associate Dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Program Director of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies and BAS and Program Director of the Public Agency Service
13. Chair of the Department of Teaching and Learning in the College of Education
14. Chair of the Department of Education Specialties in the College of Education
15. Dean of Engineering and Natural Sciences
16. Vice Provost for Research and Dean of the Graduate College
17. Dean of the College of Education
18. Associate Dean of the College of Education
19. Associate Provost for Academic Administration
20. Dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
21. Dean of the College of Business
22. Dean of the College of Arts and Letters
23. Chair of the University Assessment Committee
24. Vice Provost for Academic Personnel
25. Chair of the University Curriculum Committee
26. Associate Dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Member of Extended Programs and Distance Learning Council
27. Professor of History; Immediate Past President of Faculty Senate; and former Provost
28. Senior Lecturer and member of Faculty Senate Executive Committee
29. Professor of Accounting and President of NAU Faculty Senate
30. Coordinator of Education (YUMA Campus)
31. Associate Director (YUMA Campus)
32. Associate Director of Enrollment Services/Director of Financial Aid
33. Program Coordinator for Distance Learning and Global Programs/Financial Aid
34. Program Coordinator for AZTutor (online tutoring)
35. Assistant Director of Undergraduate Admissions
36. Member of English Advising Center Staff
37. Assessment Coordinator for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs
38. Associate Director of the Gateway Student Success Center
39. Chief Information Technology Officer
40. Director of Academic Computing Services
41. University Registrar
42. Director of Education Support Programs
43. Director of E-Learning
44. Program Coordinator for Faculty Development Programs
45. Head of Reference Services at Cline Library
46. Instructional Design Librarian at Cline Library
47. Head of Special Collections at Cline Library
48. Program Director of Faculty Development
49. Electronic Reserve Librarian
50. Head of Library Technology Services
51. Faculty Member of Parks and Recreation Management
52. Associate University Librarian
53. Education Team Leader and Reference Librarian
54. Consortium of Professional Schools Team Leader
55. Director of the Center for Technology Enhanced Learning
56. Administrative Assistant in the Office of Academic Assessment
57. Director of the Office of Academic Assessment
58. Associate Dean for Distance Learning

59. Coordinator of Career and Technical Education
60. Associate Professor of Education Technology
61. Professor of Speech Communication
62. Associate Professor of Speech Communication
63. Chair of Dental Hygiene
64. Interim Director of the School of Communication
65. Professor of Dental Hygiene
66. Chair of the Department of Health Sciences
67. Clinical Assistant Professor
68. Professor of Philosophy in Humanities, Arts, and Religion and Faculty Liaison for Distance Learning
69. Four students: two undergraduate and two graduate
70. Associate Director for Distance Learning
71. Assistant Director for Distance Learning
72. Coordinator of Distance Learning
73. Director of Distance Learning
74. Business Systems Analyst
75. Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs
76. Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs
77. Director of Athletics
78. Special Assistant to the President
79. Associate Vice President for Planning, Budget, and Institutional Research
80. President of the Faculty Senate
81. Director of Public Affairs
82. University Legal Counsel
83. Vice President for University Advancement

F. Approvals Obtained

Approvals for online programs are primarily internal. For degree programs not previously offered by the University, approval of the Arizona Board of Regents is also required. All academic programs, including all online programs, have gone through the internal approval process and have been approved by the Board of Regents.

For internal approvals, there is a “Road to Curriculum Approval” graph that sets out the approval process from the level of the program and department through to the level of the University. Guidance throughout the approval process is provided by the following institutional bodies and leadership: Program/Department/School Curriculum Committees; Department Chair/Program Director/Executive Director; College Curriculum Committee; College Dean; University Curriculum Committee for undergraduate programs; University Graduate Committee for graduate programs; Provost. Most online programs are existing on-campus programs adapted for Web delivery. In such instances, there is no formal University curriculum approval process.

Even so, resource planning for online program development is guided by institutional and divisional strategic planning. Planning and approval for new online program development or the adaptation of an existing degree program for online delivery often includes commitments of funding and faculty lines.

External approval from the Arizona Board of Regents is required when the University seeks to develop a new program for electronic delivery. Approval is subject to policy that governs the development of all degree programs at any of the universities in the Arizona system.

In support of the requested institutional change, the Arizona Board of Regents has approved

- The University's mission statement that includes support for distance programs
- The expenditure of \$3.9 million/year (FY05) of sales tax funding for the distance Access and Workforce Development Initiative
- The expenditure of \$2.2 million/year (FY05) of sales tax funding for the E-Learning
- The creation of Arizona Regents University (ARU) and its recent transfer of ARU funding (\$2 million per year) to NAU for leadership and operation.

G. Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed

1. Distance Learning at Northern Arizona University
2. Faculty Handbook
3. Online Degree Programs
4. Online Learner Resources
5. E-Learning
6. Center for Technology Enhanced Learning
7. Assessment of E-Learning
8. Resources on Assessment, Learning, and Technology
9. Disability Support Services
10. LOUIE System
11. Educational Support Services
12. Office of Academic Assessment
13. Exemplary Assessment Practices
14. Assessment of Student Learning in Degree Programs
15. College of Business Assessment Plans and Reports
16. School of Hotel and Restaurant Management Assessment Plans and Reports
17. College of Education Assessment Plans and Reports
18. College of Humanities and Fine Arts Assessment Plans and Reports
19. College of Science and Engineering Assessment Plans and Reports
20. College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Communication Plans and Reports
21. Annual Reports on Degree Program Assessment of Student Learning
22. Criteria for Reviewing Degree Program Assessment of Student Learning
23. Faculty Development Program
24. Learner Centered Education Grants Opportunities
25. Teaching Resources
26. Faculty in Focus
27. 2005 Continuing Assessment Grants
28. Planning, Budgets, and Institutional Research
29. Retention and Graduation Reports (Interactive)
30. President's Page
31. Provost's Page
32. Faculty and Staff Information
33. Student Life
34. WebCT
35. BME 430; Methods and Materials
36. MUS 330: Jazz History and Styles
37. NUR 662: Family Primary Healthcare
38. E-Learning Business Plan April 2005

39. Academic Program Review: Revision of Process and Guidelines: A Proposal to the Faculty Senate (10/07/2004)
40. Academic Program Review Report – 2003 School of Hotel and Restaurant Management
41. Academic Program Review Workshop 2004-05
42. Memo from Provost, July 7 2004, re: Action plan for College of Education Academic Program Review
43. Response to Visitation Team Report for Parks and Recreation Management Program Review, May 27, 2004.
44. Northern Arizona University Department of Political Science External Program Review 2003-04
45. Report from Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education Board of Commissioners granting accreditation of the Master's Degree in Nursing, May 28, 2004
46. Northern Arizona University Mediated Copyright and Teach Act Compliance Policy Draft January 30, 2004
47. Overview of Liberal Studies at Northern Arizona University
48. Northern Arizona University Policy for Grade Appeal
49. Academic Assessment Binder
50. Request for Institutional Change Document
51. Appendices to Request for Institutional Change Document
52. Poster Presentations in Room 200 of Cline Library
53. Faculty Development Notebook in Cline Resource Room
54. President's Office Notebook in Cline Resource Room
55. Planning and Institutional Research Notebook in Cline Resource Room
56. Scholarship in E-Learning in Cline Resource Room
57. Health Professions Power Point Presentations in Cline Resource Room
58. Distance Learning Notebook in Cline Resource Room
59. Redesigning Arizona's Public University System
60. NAU Online Student Credit Hours Produced for Spring 2005 by Mountain, YUMA, and Distance Learning
61. NAU Distance Learning Fast Facts
62. Extended Programs/Distance Learning Budget Summary
63. NAU Marketing Research Practice Guidelines for Distance Learning
64. Services Offered by NAU Distance Learning Staff
65. NAU Distance Learning Student Completion Rates by Instruction Mode AY'04
66. Redesigning Arizona's Public University System

Part II. EVALUATION OF DOCUMENTATION SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION'S REQUEST FOR CHANGE

A. Evaluation of Request

A-1 Evidence that demonstrates adequate preparation and planning

To evaluate the documentation supporting adequate preparation and planning for NAU's request for change, the team considered the following three areas:

- (a) The impact of the proposed change on challenges identified by the Commission in previous visits
- (b) NAU's plans to implement and sustain the proposed change
- (c) NAU's strategies to evaluate the proposed change.

A-1 (a) The Impact of the Proposed Change on Challenges Identified by the Commission in Previous Visits

Challenges identified by the Commission on previous visits that have particular relevance for the proposed change include the following:

- i. Assessment of Student Learning
- ii. Strategic Planning
- iii. Faculty Support for the Statewide Mission
- iv. Qualifications of Faculty Teaching Graduate Level Courses in Statewide Programs

A-1 (a) i Impact of the Proposed Change on the Challenge of Assessment of Student Learning:

Assessment of student learning was identified in the 1997-98 comprehensive visit as requiring both a Progress Report (1999) and a Focused Visit (2001 – delayed until 2002). The Progress Report was accepted by the Commission, and the Focused Visit Report stipulated that no further action was required by the Commission with respect to the assessment of student learning. However, that same report (2002) noted three main challenges: the slow rate of assessment at the graduate level; the need for more fiscal support for The Office of Academic Assessment and college/department level assessment efforts; and assessment in distance learning environments.

A-1 (a) i. a: The appointment of a new Director of the Office of Academic Assessment (OAA) from internal faculty ranks, the formalized links between OAA and the University Assessment Committee (UAC), and the newly revitalized enactment of policies requiring assessment plans and annual assessment reports from all departments and programs, both graduate and undergraduate, online and on-site, support the Team's conclusion that NAU is developing a culture of assessment that includes focused attention to student learning outcomes (SLOs).

A-1 (a) i. b: The triangulation of the flow of assessment plans and reports among faculty, the OAA, and the UAC involves faculty in both the production and the review of assessment plans, following a comprehensive rubric, developed by faculty, that

standardizes expectations for assessment of SLOs. The process includes a feedback loop from the UAC for assessment plans and the OAA for annual assessment reports. This pattern of evidence supports the conclusion of the Team that faculty are integrally involved in formalized assessment processes.

A-1 (a) i. c: In collaboration with the Center for Research Development and Assessment of Learning in Electronic Environments, workshops on assessment are offered to assist faculty and departments in the development of assessment plans and reports. Additionally, a limited number of assessment grants provide incentives for faculty to develop effective approaches to assessing student learning. Together, these workshops and grants provide additional support and resources for improving the assessment of student learning.

A-1 (a) i. d: A noticeable increase of assessment reports in 2004 and the submission of six assessment reports already in 2005, four of them in graduate programs, further supports the conclusion of the Team that NAU is making significant strides in the assessment of student learning. Since assessment in online programs is subject to the same standards and expectations for assessment of student learning as on-site programs, and is supported by consultations, workshops, grants, and the E-Learning Institute, this progress demonstrates adequate planning and support for the assessment of student learning in online programs.

A-1 (a) ii. Impact of the Proposed Change on the Challenge of Strategic Planning:

Strategic planning was a challenge addressed in the comprehensive Site Visit Report of 1997 and in the follow-up Focus Visit Report of 2002. In the latter, the specific challenges related to strategic planning included the need to establish measurable goals, the need for better established, formal linkages between planning and budgeting, the need to infuse strategic planning throughout the organizational culture, and the need to extend planning to lower levels of the University structure. Since 2002, Northern Arizona University has put in place a strategic planning process that engages the campus community in the development of goals which support distance learning.

A-1 (a) ii. a: Northern Arizona University provided the visiting team evidence of strategic planning through its 2005 – 2010 strategic plan. The plan includes accomplishments of past years and the following seven future goals:

- Strengthen undergraduate educational excellence in a residential learning community
- Strengthen graduate and professional education, economic development, and research
- Increase enrollment and retention
- Provide leadership in the development, use, and assessment of technologies in administrative systems and educational programs
- Foster a culture of diversity
- Become the nation's leading university serving Native Americans
- Ensure financial stability and growth

A-1 (a) ii. b: Each of the above goals includes some measurable strategies to accomplish goals. Measurability varies. Distance learning is relevant to each goal, but is prominent in the fourth goal. The identified goals and strategies evolved from a comprehensive planning process which commenced during the 2004/2005 academic year. The Strategic Planning Council and Associate Vice President for Planning, Budgeting, and Institutional Research launched an initiative to extend strategic planning further into the organization and forge a stronger link between planning and budgeting.

The process begins with the units and progresses through the Council of Deans, Faculty Senate, Council of Chairs, and other groups dealing with strategic issues. Recommendations are made to the President's Cabinet where priorities are developed. In turn, the priorities are shared throughout the University and connected to budgets through the budgeting process.

A-1 (a) ii. c: The Vice President for Planning, Budgeting, and Institutional Research is working with the President to further define the budgeting structure and process in relation to cost centers for distance learning. As evidenced in conversation with the Vice President for Planning, Budgeting, and Institutional Research, advancements in planning and budgeting continue and the current process has resulted in new goals and strategies for Northern Arizona University. The Team reviewed FY 04, FY 05 and projected FY 06 budgets for distance learning. Both state and local funds support distance education and these revenues finance direct and indirect expenses. The President and Vice President for Planning, Budgeting, and Institutional Research report that a balanced budget will be realized in FY 05 with reserves.

A-1 (a) iii. Impact of the Proposed Change on the Challenge of Faculty Support for the Statewide Mission.

The mission of Northern Arizona University has throughout its history focused on providing access to residents in rural areas. In recent years, the boundaries of outreach have been extended until, currently, the Arizona Board of Regents has increased the mission of NAU to include both urban and rural areas throughout the state. Whereas initially the mission focused on providing excellence in residential education, the expansion of the mission to urban and rural areas throughout the state has involved the Institution in the development of a wide range of approaches to distance delivery. In 1997, the year that faculty support for the statewide mission was mentioned as a challenge, NAU was in early stages of its exploration of electronic modes of delivery, and faculty expressed concern about standards, rigor, and the value of face-to-face learning environments. Following recommendations of the 1997 report, NAU created the position of Vice President of Extended Programs and Dean of Distance Learning, who provides leadership and support for enacting the mission to provide access to excellent education throughout the state through online programs. His leadership has focused on engaging faculty to shape policies, curricula, and assessment procedures to provide this statewide access to excellent education.

A-1 (a) iii. a: A substantial number of faculty, chairs, and deans attended the meetings organized for the Team, more than 20 at each of the two scheduled meetings with that group. When asked what they perceived as the greatest strength of online programs offered by NAU, they all replied, "Access." Not only were they all aware of the mission of the University, but they also were completely committed to it. One senior faculty member lamented the learning curve required over the past several years for developing effective online programs, but even so supported the mission of providing access to students in rural areas, and acknowledged online programs as one major means of achieving that mission.

A-1 (a) iii. b: Many faculty spoke of how online programs in general require more student writing than face-to-face programs, with positive statements about this requirement benefits the literacy development of their students, balanced with a concern that more support for writing was needed. Faculty concerns about the additional support required for the extra writing that is part of most online programs further attest to their support for the mission, and their desire to achieve the mission to the highest standard.

A-1 (a) iii. c: Faculty have played a key role in the development of department-led needs assessments to determine which online programs should be proposed and developed, thereby increasing their vested interest in offering quality online programs. For example, the faculty in the Department of Health Promotions (now Health Sciences) responded to the need for baccalaureate education for allied health professionals and, ultimately, obtained external funding to support what became one of the first entirely web-based programs, the Bachelor of Applied Science in Health Promotion.

A-1 (a) iii. d: In the eight years since faculty tension about the statewide mission was referenced in the 1997 report, several developments have combined to diminish these tensions. The Team noted several faculty development opportunities, grants, and other material support coupled with growing intrinsic interest of faculty in developing online courses and researching their impact on student learning, exemplified in several faculty-authored and published research studies on the impact of online learning. The Team noted that all faculty interviewed are keenly aware of the statewide mission and are supportive of the role that online programs play in achieving that mission.

A-1 (a) iii. e: Based on the above pattern of evidence, as well as faculty interest in developing hybrid models of online and face-to-face learning, combined with their observations that by learning how to teach online courses more effectively, they now also teach their face-to-face courses more effectively, the Team concludes not only that tensions around the statewide mission have diminished but that the faculty speak the language of pride when talking about their mission of access. Several went so far as to suggest that every new faculty hire, whether for online or on-site positions, should have experience in some form of distance learning in order to meet the mission of NAU.

A-1 (a) iv. Impact of the Proposed Change on the Challenge of Qualified Faculty Teaching Graduate-Level Courses in Statewide Programs

The Site Visit Report of 1997 cited as a challenge the qualifications of faculty teaching graduate-level courses in statewide programs. The development of online programs has increased the level of departmental supervision over part-time faculty teaching online courses and, as a result, has increased attentiveness to faculty credentials.

A-1: (a) iv. i: Qualified full-time faculty teach 67% and part-time faculty teach 33% of the online courses offered in Fall 2004 and Spring 2005 semesters. A review of credentials (while not comprehensive) provided evidence that faculty possessed the credentials and degrees to be qualified, i.e., degrees in relevant academic disciplines, degrees at least one level above the program in which they are teaching, possession of terminal degrees for graduate-level courses, and/or tested experience in practice-oriented disciplines or programs.

A-1: (b) Plans to Implement and Sustain the Proposed Change

Plans to implement and sustain the proposed change include the following strategies:

- Involvement of faculty and staff in online curriculum development, program planning, and instructional staffing and evaluation
- Administrative structure to sustain the change
- Student support structures for online learners
- Financial resources to support online learners
- A timetable for implementation

Evidence of Adequate Preparation and Planning in Relation to Implementing and Sustaining the Proposed Change

A-1: (b) i: A review of handbooks revealed uniform policies and procedures for the development and approval of academic programs. The process is the same regardless of the delivery mode for the program. The University's department chairs, college deans, and administrative staff have the responsibility of overseeing the academic programs under their area of responsibility. The curriculum development process begins in the unit and programs must be approved by the department's curriculum committee, college or school curriculum committee, and finally, the University curriculum committee or University graduate committee. New programs must also be approved by the College Dean, Provost, and Arizona Board of Regents. Based on the above, it is evident that academically qualified persons participate fully in the decisions concerning program curricula and program oversight.

A-1: (b) ii: Curricular needs are identified both formally and informally by internal and external constituents. The Vice President of Extended Programs and Dean of Distance Learning has developed Marketing Research and Practice Guidelines. The guidelines include the areas of problem definition, problem approach development, research design formulation, field work or data collection, data presentation and analysis, and report preparation and presentation. Market research conducted by NAU and marketing professionals conducting research on behalf of NAU follow codes and guidelines adopted by The World Association of Research Professionals.

A-1: (b) iii: The administrative model for distance learning at NAU follows a common model whereby off-campus and electronically delivered programs are administered through one office of the University. In NAU's case, this is Extended Programs and Distance Learning. The area is led by the Vice President of Extended Programs and Dean of Distance Learning. Off-campus sites, with the exception of the Yuma campus, and online programs are administered through this office. Extended Programs and Distance Learning is effectively supported by the larger infrastructure of the University. Of special note is the strength of Information Technology Services and the faculty support embedded in E-Learning.

A-1: (b) iv: A web review of structures and services and conversations with student support staff and students enrolled in online classes give testament to NAU's commitment to extending admission, financial aid, technological support, library services, and tutoring to online students. These services are extended either virtually from the main campus or on-site at thirty offices throughout the state, providing services to off-campus and online students. A student help desk is operational 24 hours per day and advisors and student services staff are available from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. when classes are in session and during extended hours at the beginning of each session.

A-1: (b) v: As mentioned earlier in the report, the NAU budgets shared with the Team reveal that revenues surpass expenses in distance learning. In 2000, NAU allocated \$3.9 million in new sales tax revenue to student access and workforce development, much of which went to support the development of online programs. Proposition 301 sales tax funding is expected to continue to support NAU's budgets through its expiration date. In addition, the transfer of Arizona Regents University from the Arizona Board of Regents to NAU provides \$2 million annually to support distance students. The Vice President for Planning, Budgeting, and Institutional Research reported that financial ratios were calculated in accordance with the Higher Learning Commission's methodology and that ratios for NAU were in range.

A-1: (b) vi: NAU online programs have been created and are in operation. Of the total student credit hours produced at the Mountain Campus in Flagstaff, 38% are from online classes. Moreover, 7% of the student credit hours produced at the Yuma Campus is generated from online classes, and finally, in the other off-campus sites,

54% of the total credit hours produced are from online courses. The above represents the significance of online courses and programs at NAU. Clearly, implementation is underway.

A-1: (c) Strategies to Evaluate the Proposed Change

Online learning evaluation is embedded in NAU's assessment initiatives. Additionally, graduates of online programs are surveyed. The surveys attempt to assess student satisfaction in general academics, major department, faculty skills development, and experiences outside of class. Finally, faculty scholarship in the area of distance learning provides fresh and continual evaluation of online learning at NAU.

Evidence of Adequate Preparation and Planning to Evaluate the Proposed Change

A-1: (c) i: Based on the surveys from graduates in online programs and compared to graduates of face-to-face programs, little to no significant difference exists between the different populations on a variety of satisfaction questions. The detailed results were reviewed by the Team.

A-1: (c) ii: The assessment program at NAU is under new leadership and, based on reports from faculty and administrators, implementation of the plan, including assessments of online programs, is underway.

A-1: (c) iii: The team reviewed scholarly works from NAU faculty in the area of distance learning. These scholarly works, in the form of published articles and posters on display in the library, demonstrate that faculty are engaged in rigorous scholarly research to evaluate the impact of online learning programs on student learning, student retention, and student employability.

B-1: Recommendation of the Team

Evidence sufficiently demonstrated to recommend approval of change request.

C. Rationale for the Team's Recommendation

Northern Arizona University has provided evidence that the proposed change is responsive to challenges raised in previous site visits, that they have developed institutionalized approaches and infrastructure to implement and sustain the proposed change, and that they are already in the process of evaluating the impact of the proposed change on student learning. The patterns of evidence listed above provide assurance that the institution has the infrastructure, the planning, the finances, and the will to meet the demands of the proposed change to offer online programs. NAU is well positioned through its mission, its history, and the mandate provided by the Arizona Board of Regents, when it assigned management of the Arizona Regents University over to NAU, to provide online programs to rural and urban residents throughout Arizona, as well as to out-of-state learners. The Board of Regents supports the change; strategic planning has provided institutional structures to support the change; the faculty support the change; and students are signing up for online programs in record numbers, with increasing demand on the horizon. The delivery of online programs is a natural and well-planned evolution of the role of NAU in the state.

D. Other Accreditation Issues: None noted.

Part III: AFFILIATION STATUS

A. Summary of Commission Review:

No change in affiliation status.

Year for next comprehensive evaluation 2007-08

B. Nature of Organization

1. **Legal status:** No change
2. **Degrees awarded:** No change

C. Conditions of Affiliation

1. **Stipulation on affiliation status:** No change
2. **Approval of degree sites:** No change
3. **Approval of distance education degree:** No prior Commission approval required.

Rationale: NAU has been providing online programs for the past five years, and has developed an effective infrastructure of support for faculty and students, as well as a wide range of assessment methods in order to maintain the highest standards of quality. In addition, research into the efficacy of online programs for student learning is an accepted, supported, and rewarded part of the faculty role at NAU. Strategic planning, based on the mission of NAU to provide access to rural and urban students throughout the state, has laid a foundation of infrastructural support for online programs, while faculty and administration have developed sound processes to maintain the same high quality of standards and rigor for online programs that is expected of face-to-face programs.

D. Reports required:

Progress Report: None

Monitoring Report: None

Contingency Report: None

E. Other visits scheduled: None

F. Commission Sanction or Adverse Action: None Recommended

G. Summary of Commission Review: No change. Timing for next comprehensive visit: 2007-08.