

Assessment Cycle 2025-2026

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources

Division or Department: Institutional Effectiveness

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Date: 26 May 2026

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Date: May 26, 2026

Northwestern Mission. Northwestern State University is a responsive, student-oriented institution committed to acquiring, creating, and disseminating knowledge through innovative teaching, research, and service. With its certificate, undergraduate, and graduate programs, Northwestern State University prepares its increasingly diverse student population to contribute to an inclusive global community with a steadfast dedication to improving our region, State, and nation.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Human Resources is a responsive administrative service and support unit that provides university leaders with information to use in strategic planning, evidence-based decision-making, and human resource programs and services. The Office assesses, collects, analyzes, reports, and disseminates data on behalf of the University and supports all University units in assessment-based enhancement efforts. Reporting of information is in accordance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and federal and state regulations. The Office develops and delivers innovative human resource programs and services designed to support the mission of the University, including its core services and competencies such as staffing, employee relations, organizational and employee development, risk management, compensation and benefits, human resource information management, and regulatory compliance.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness assists university leaders with strategic planning, assessment, and evidence-based decision-making. The Office assesses, collects, analyzes, reports, and disseminates data on behalf of the University and supports all university units in assessment-based enhancement efforts. It also assists in reporting information from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and federal and state regulations.

Methodology: The assessment process includes:

- (1) Data from assessment tools (direct & indirect and quantitative & qualitative) are collected and returned to the executive director.
- (2) The executive director will analyze the data to determine whether the applicable outcomes are met:
- (3) Results from the assessment will be discussed with the appropriate staff;

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- (4) Individual meetings will be held with staff as required (present justification);
- (5) In consultation with the staff and senior leadership, the executive director will determine proposed changes to measurable outcomes, assessment tools for the next assessment period, and, where needed, service changes.

Institutional Effectiveness

Service Outcomes:

SO 1. Ensures the institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing enhancement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.

Measure 1.1.

Finding. Target Met

Analysis. In AC 2024–2025, the target was met. Following a comprehensive review of the results, enhancements were implemented in AC 2025–2026 to strengthen integrated, institution-wide planning and evaluation processes. The Director of Institutional Effectiveness leveraged the SACSCOC Review Committee tracking tool to refine the University's long-range planning calendar and strengthen alignment between strategic planning, assessment, and institutional decision-making. Collaboration with the University of Louisiana System strategic planning contractor further ensured alignment between institutional priorities and system-level expectations. As a result, the target was met in AC 2025–2026, demonstrating a systematic, research-based approach to institutional effectiveness and mission accomplishment.

Following a comprehensive analysis of the 2024-2025 results, the following changes were made to foster continuous institutional enhancement in AC 2025-2026. The DIE leveraged the SACSCOC Review Committee tracking tool and knowledge gained to support the University's long-range planning calendar to inform strategic planning and assessment-related decision-making. The DIE collaborated with the University of Louisiana System (ULS) Strategic Plan by providing a copy of Northwestern's Strategic Plan and discussing the process with the contracted agency on the mechanics of how Northwestern conducts long-range planning and assessment.

As a result, in 2025-2026, the target was Met. The University's Strategic Plan is 96% aligned with the University of Louisiana System's four strategic priorities. The small number of non-aligned items primarily reflects campus branding, athletics, or

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administrative modernization efforts that, while important, do not directly map to the System-level indicators. This high degree of alignment demonstrates NSU's commitment to achieving the System's vision of 'One System, One Mission' through measurable, data-driven objectives and outcomes.

Decision, action, or recommendation. In AC 2025–2026, the target was met. The University will continue refining its institutional understanding of the strategic planning and assessment process to support informed decision-making and continuous improvement. Responsibility for ongoing process refinement will transition to incoming leadership to encourage fresh analysis and foster substantive enhancements to the institutional effectiveness model.

These actions will strengthen the University's ability to maintain sustained compliance with SACSCOC requirements and to support near-real-time monitoring of mission accomplishment through integrated planning, assessment, and reporting processes.

Following a comprehensive analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the following strategic actions will be undertaken to foster continuous institutional enhancement in AC 2026 - 2027. The DIE intends to broaden institutional knowledge of the current planning process so that more informed changes can be made to adapt the plan to the ever-changing higher education environment. Overall responsibility will transition to a new Director who can better foster substantive changes in the process.

These changes will enhance and prepare the University to sustain a viable effort to comply with all SACSCOC reporting requirements and maintain an almost real-time picture of the University's mission accomplishment.

Source Map:

Resources Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges
University of Louisiana System Board of Supervisors
Louisiana Board of Regents Higher Education Bylaws

Measure 1.2.

The University has established a systematic review of the institutional mission, goals, and outcomes. Per the strategic plan development process, the university requested that the mission, vision statement, and core values be revalidated and/or approved by our Board of Trustees once every five years. The target is to conduct at least one comprehensive annual analysis of the mission, objectives, and metrics.

Finding. Target Met.

Analysis. In AC 2024-2025, the target was met.

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Based on the 2024-2025 results analysis, the following changes were made to foster continuous institutional enhancement in AC 2025-2026. The University submitted its mission statement, vision, and core values for revalidation by the ULS in preparation for its SACSCOC Differentiated Review in 2026.

This extension facilitates nesting the University Strategic Plan with the Board of Regents' Strategic goals for Northwestern while improving alignment with their recently published master plan. It also aligns with the ULS, the University's governing board's Strategic Plan. In addition to revalidating the University Mission, the University can better reset its priorities in alignment with its new president. Developing a new, revised strategy will continue to drive organizational enhancement. As a result, the target was met in 2025-2026.

Based on the 2025-2026 results analysis, the University will refine the comprehensive timeline/plan for integrating the new strategic plan spanning 2028-2033 into the institutional effectiveness model, thereby establishing it as an unfiltered view of how well the University is accomplishing its mission in AC 2025-2026.

Decision, action, or recommendation. The target was met in AC 2025-2026. Based on the results analysis, the University will refine institutional understanding of planning and assessment processes to support informed decision-making and continuous improvement. These actions strengthen the integrated institutional effectiveness model and support ongoing compliance with SACSCOC expectations for systematic planning, evaluation, and enhancement.

These changes seek to ensure that the University's mission remains aligned with the Board of Regents and the University of Louisiana System's strategic framework, while demonstrating to SACSCOC the continuous nature of the University's strategic planning efforts.

Source Map:

Resources Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges
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Measure 1.3.

University senior leaders brief the University President on the findings of the strategic plan assessment cycle to better inform strategic decision-making. This ensures the University accomplishes its mission and maximizes resources for targeted enhancement in institutional quality. The target is to conduct and document the annual assessment briefing, capturing and actioning areas of concern.

Finding. Target Met.

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In AC 2025-2026, the target was met.

Analysis. Based on the 2024-2025 results analysis, the following changes were made to foster continuous institutional enhancement in AC 2025-2026. The Key Findings Brief took place in late September 2025 to facilitate the completion of the University Strategic Plan and its Assessment Cycle. It set the conditions for the new President and the University's SACSCOC Compliance certification preparation in 2025-2026.

The target was successfully achieved in 2024-2025. Based on the 2024-2025 results analysis, the DIE revised the AC 2025-2026 Assessment Cycle to capture the guidance from the new president, the ULS Strategic Plan, and the Board of Regents Strategic Plan for Northwestern.

As a result, the target was met in AC 2025-2026.

Decision, action, or recommendation. The target was met in AC 2025-2026. Based on the 2025-2026 results analysis, the following strategic actions will be undertaken to foster continuous institutional enhancement in AC 2026-2027: the DIE will revise the AC 2026-2027 Assessment Cycle to better align with the ULS Strategic Plan and outcomes for the SACSCOC Differentiated Review.

Source Map:

Resources Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges University of Louisiana System Board of Supervisors
Louisiana Board of Regents Higher Education Bylaws

SO 2. Assist with the identification of key indicators of performance related to the strategic plan, academic programs, and academic support units.

Measure 2.1.

Each of the 164 academic programs and administrative units has identified expected outcomes, assessed the extent to which it achieves them, and provided evidence of enhancement based on the analysis of results. The target is 100% compliance.

Finding. Target Met.

Analysis. The target was successfully achieved in 2024-2025. Based on the 2024-2025 results analysis, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness in AC 2025-2026 revised the 'by the numbers' assessment tool for unit and program coordinators to ensure they wrote the requirement in the correct format using SACSCOC language, thereby driving continuous enhancement and accessibility.

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As a result, the target was met in AC 2025-2026; 170 academic programs and administrative units have identified expected outcomes, assessed the extent to which they achieve these outcomes, and provided evidence of enhancement based on analysis of the results. The associated report was then made accessible in accordance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1. The target is 100% compliance.

Decision, action, or recommendation. The target was met in 2025-2026. Based on the 2025-2026 results analysis, in 2026-2027, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness seeks to ensure that the academic program count is synchronized with the Director of Institutional Research and that by-unit accounting is conducted to ensure that the maximum number of units participate in the assessment process.

By doing so, the University will maintain a realistic and accurate picture of itself and its mission accomplishment.

Source Map:

Resources Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges University of Louisiana System Board of Supervisors
Louisiana Board of Regents Higher Education Bylaws

Measure 2.2.

The University will produce a holistic University assessment report using the Strategic Plan AC 2024-2025 assessment findings and the 165 separate academic programs and administrative unit assessments. The assessment report will highlight key findings in strategic decision-making and resource allocation. The report and briefing will be completed in August of each Academic Year. The target is to leverage a completed Strategic Plan Assessment and 100% of individual program and unit assessments to develop and present an annual assessment report by August 30 of the academic year.

Finding. Target Met.

Analysis. The target was successfully achieved in AC 2024-2025. Following a comprehensive analysis of the AC 2024-2025 results, in 2025-2026, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness refocused the brief on areas needing improvement rather than on areas of success. By concentrating time and resources on the areas that require attention, the University is better able to drive continuous improvement.

As a result, the target was met in AC 2025-2026.

Decision, action or recommendation. The target in AC 2025-2026 was met. Based on the AC 2025-2026 results analysis, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness will work with the President and Chief of Staff to ensure the focus

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remains on looking forward in time and driving organizational enhancement in line with Presidential priorities, BOR and ULS Strategic Plans.

By focusing time and resources on the future, the University can drive continuous enhancement.

Source Map:

Resources Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges
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SO 3. Facilitate all aspects related to accreditation, including standards compliance, applications, reviews, and self-evaluation processes and documents.

Measure 3.1.

All SACSCOC Standards are assigned to the appropriate university office for incorporation into and integration with daily operations.

Finding. Target Met.

Analysis. In 2024-2025, the target was achieved. Based on the analysis of the 2024-2025 results, in 2025-2026, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness developed a comprehensive approach for producing the Differentiated SACSCOC report. Each standard was organized in a folder containing a draft and the associated reference material. The plan is designed to maximize the output from the Fifth-Year Report, focusing on the new standards included in the Differentiated Review Process. Consequently, in 2025-2026, the drafting of compliance reports supported by reliable evidence is almost 100%.

As a result, the target was met in AC 2025-2026.

Decision, action, or recommendation. The target was met in AC 2025-2026. Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the following strategic actions will be undertaken to foster continuous institutional enhancement in AC 2026-2027. The DIE will conduct a comprehensive review of the process used to compile the Differentiated Review report to determine improvements to ensure the completed work remains current and better positions the University for its next SACSCOC Evaluation.

These changes ensure the University can meet the timelines and requirements of all SACSCOC or other accreditation reports and remain fully compliant.

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Source Map:

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Measure 3.2.

All university strategic planning and assessment documents will be stored to ensure that the information remains secure and accessible from any location via the Internet.

Finding. Target Met

Analysis. The target was met in AC 2024-2025. Based on the analysis of the 2024-2025 results, the following changes were made to foster continuous institutional improvement in AC 2025-2026. The DIE established a process to ensure documents are revised as new versions are produced. The DIE collaborated with the contractor and the university's marketing and branding to ensure that the new IE website provides a comprehensive, user-friendly platform for strategic planning and assessment-related materials.

As a result, the target was met in AC 2025-2026.

Decision, action, or recommendation. The target was met in AC 2025-2026. Based on the analysis of the 2025-2026 results, the following strategic actions will be undertaken to foster continuous institutional enhancement in AC 2026-2027. The DIE will ensure that a process to sustain web content accessibility in accordance with WCAG 2.1 is established.

These changes will enhance and document the library's future relevance to planning, assessment, and SACSCOC compliance.

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Comprehensive Summary of Key evidence of enhancement based on the analysis of results. The following reflects all changes implemented to drive continuous improvement in AC 2025-2026. These changes are based on insights gained from analyzing the AC 2024-2025 results and lessons learned.

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- 1.1. The DIE leveraged the SACSCOC Review Committee tracking tool and knowledge gained to support the University's long-range planning calendar to inform strategic planning and assessment-related decision-making. The DIE collaborated with the University of Louisiana System Strategic (ULS) Plan by providing a copy of Northwestern's Strategic Plan and discussing the process with the contracted agency on the mechanics of how Northwestern conducts long-range planning and assessment.
- 1.2. The University submitted its mission statement, vision, and core values to the ULS for revalidation in preparation for its SACSCOC Differentiated Review in 2026. This extension facilitates aligning the University Strategic Plan with the Board of Regents' strategic goals for Northwestern while improving coherence with their recently published master plan. It also aligns with the ULS, the University's governing board's Strategic Plan. In addition to revalidating the University Mission, the University has reset its priorities to align with its new president. Developing a revised strategy continues to drive organizational enhancement.
- 1.3. The Key Findings Brief occurred in late September to support the completion of the University Strategic Plan. By doing so, it established the conditions necessary for the University to move forward with its SACSCOC Compliance certification preparation in 2025-2026.
- 2.1. The Director of Institutional Effectiveness revised the 'by the numbers' assessment tool for unit and program coordinators to ensure they write the requirement in the correct format using SACSCOC language, thereby driving continuous enhancement.
- 2.2. The Director of Institutional Effectiveness refocused the brief on areas needing improvement rather than on successes. By concentrating time and resources on areas that required attention, we were better positioned to drive continuous improvement.
- 3.1. The Director of Institutional Effectiveness developed a comprehensive approach for producing the Differentiated SACSCOC report. Each standard was organized in a folder containing a draft and the associated reference material. The plan is designed to maximize the output from the Fifth-Year Report, focusing on the new standards included in the Differentiated Review Process.
- 3.2. The DIE established a process to ensure documents are revised as new versions are produced. The DIE collaborated with the contractor and the university's marketing and branding to ensure that the new IE website provides a comprehensive, user-friendly platform for strategic planning and assessment-related materials.

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Summary of Evidence-Based Improvements.

- Strategic plan integration with ULS and BOR frameworks completed.
- Revised assessment tools have increased alignment with accreditation standards.
- Shifted focus toward areas requiring enhancement, not only success.
- Improved online access to planning and assessment documentation.

Plan of action moving forward.

The University systematically and comprehensively leverages the Institutional Effectiveness Model to move closer to its vision. The University's senior leadership remains the force behind establishing a culture of continuous assessment. The assessment's purpose, reasoning, and value are slowly becoming clear to university administrators, faculty, and staff. The tangible value of this process directly impacts organizational enhancement and is increasingly understood across campus. The University continues to correct the assessment process. The University has completed nine iterations, so its leadership has a far better understanding of what should/needs to be assessed. The task is to fine-tune what needs to be assessed, determine how best to evaluate it, and leverage the results to drive continuous enhancement.