NCU
Northcentral University

2012
SELF STUDY
REPORT

REAFFIRMATION
OF ACCREDITATION
SITE VISIT

OCTOBER 8-10, 2012

Submitted to the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

www.ncu.edu
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DEDICATION

This self-study is dedicated to our late colleague, Ms. Linda Boitos, whom we lost to pancreatic cancer in February 2012. Linda served as our Director of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning and was an integral member of the University community. Linda led her team to help move the University forward in a number of key initiatives including assessment, program review, reporting, and data analysis. Additionally, she developed and maintained the resource room for our Comprehensive Visit in 2008 and designed the resource room for our Visit in 2012. Linda had a passion for the University and the success of our students that she exhibited each day. We will miss her keen sense of humor and her passion for excellence.
PREFACE

Since Northcentral University’s Comprehensive Visit in 2008, the institution has progressed to a purposefully structured institution, led by an engaged Board of Trustees that supports collaboration between academics and administration for the benefit of our students, faculty, and other constituents. During this period, the University has adopted best practices for governance, strategic planning, budgeting, faculty, academic program review, course design, and communication. We have been authorized to disburse federal financial aid, have reaffirmed our Business School’s accreditation by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), have hosted the first-ever accreditation site visit to a distance education institution by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE), and are actively pursuing accreditation by the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC).

With an awareness of the changing world around us, Northcentral is committed to accomplishing our Mission on a global scale with a proven teaching model enabled by technology, all while keeping meaningful learning outcomes for each student at the center of our institutional focus. Key to accomplishing our Mission and Vision is articulating a strategy that is aligned with the allocation of resources, school missions, expected program learning outcomes, and the daily activities of our team members. To that end, we have made strides in regularly communicating with students, faculty, and team members and actively engaging them in discourse around our Mission, Vision, Values, Goals, and Strategies. Equally important are the processes we have put in place to assess the effectiveness of our teaching and our success in meeting the expectations of our constituents.

NCU’s commitment to nurturing breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry is represented by our first strategic goal: Quality. Since the last Comprehensive Visit, the credentialing of the faculty has shifted to 100% doctoral degrees, and Foundations Courses and Dissertation Committees are now led by full-time, salaried faculty. The University has adopted the principles of Applied Experiential Learning within our One-to-One teaching model and continues to provide supportive learning resources, including a comprehensive online Library, writing center, dissertation center, and web-based tutoring service. The University has structured courses to maximize both scheduling flexibility and successful program completion.

Northcentral University is pleased with our progress, appreciates the learning inherent in the self-study process, and welcomes the opportunity to share our present accomplishments and future aspirations with the Higher Learning Commission. We would like to express our sincere thanks to the many members of our community who participated in the self-study process.

George A. Burnett, President and CEO
INTRODUCTION

The Northcentral University (“NCU”, “Northcentral”, “University”) community is pleased to present our Comprehensive Visit self-study report to the Higher Learning Commission (“HLC,” “Commission”). This document provides detailed information and evidence that demonstrates how NCU continues to meet and exceed the Commission’s requirements for reaffirmation of accreditation.

Northcentral University offers online academic programs in the following three schools: Behavioral and Health Sciences (bachelor’s, master’s, and PhD degrees), Business and Technology Management (bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees), and Education (bachelor’s degree completion, master’s, and doctoral degrees). While we offer a range of degree levels, we focus primarily on graduate education. We currently serve a little over 8,000 active students, with the majority pursuing graduate degrees.

Organization of the Self-Study

This self-study is organized by criterion. Embedded links will take you directly to supporting evidence housed in the electronic resource room. Items that are sensitive in nature, or contain confidential information, are housed in the physical resource room and will be available for inspection upon the visit team’s arrival at Northcentral University.

Transparency through University-Wide Engagement

This Self Study represents the contributions of a wide range of institutional constituencies, including the Board of Trustees, academic and administrative leadership, faculty, students, and team members from throughout the University. Constituents could be as involved as they deemed appropriate throughout the self-study process. Six groups played particularly key roles in developing the self-study: the Steering Committee and five Criterion Work Groups. The membership of the Steering Committee consisted of academic and administrative leaders. The Steering Committee provided continuous feedback and direction to each Criterion Work Group. The self-study chairs worked cooperatively with academic and administrative leadership to identify members for each Criterion Work Group. Chairs of the Criterion Work Groups recommended additional members as appropriate. These groups organized by HLC Criterion, included faculty members from each school, administrative department heads, and team members from numerous departments within the University. The Steering Committee and Work Groups conducted regular meetings, as indicated by agendas and minutes (Meeting Agendas and Minutes).

To provide multiple avenues for constituents to learn about and participate in the development of the self-study, we provided regular communication and accreditation updates through a dedicated public webpage and internal electronic resource room; student, faculty, and team member newsletters; emails, all-University meetings and webinars; and departmental meetings. Additionally, faculty, students, team members, and Board of Trustee members were provided the opportunity to submit comments and suggestions via multiple channels including email, phone calls, letters, and live chat sessions during University-hosted webinars. The webinars were an integral tool for collecting feedback from all constituents, as evidenced by aggregate
participation data, and the number of submitted participant comments and recommendations. As of July 24, 2012, we have recorded 5,928 instances of participation in or viewing of a webinar session (Webinar statistics).

The success of this self-study is directly related to the diversity of participants and the quality of their feedback in response to requests for input throughout the process.

History

Northcentral University was established in 1996 in Prescott, Arizona, and moved to Prescott Valley, Arizona in 2007. The University established a presence in Tempe, Arizona in 2006, moving that facility to Scottsdale, Arizona in 2010. Northcentral University became fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of North Central Association of Colleges and Schools in 2003 and has been continuously accredited since that time.

On June 22, 2012, NCU formally notified the HLC of the retirement of Dr. Clinton Gardner, President since November 2007, and Provost since November 2010. As of July 16, 2012, Mr. George Burnett, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) since late 2011, also assumed leadership and responsibility for the Office of the President. Mr. Burnett’s title is President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). On July 16, Dr. Scott Burrus assumed leadership and responsibility for the Office of the Provost and assumed the title of Provost and Chief Academic Officer (CAO). Dr. Gardner has assumed the role of Special Assistant to the President and CEO until October 31, 2012. This role will allow him to seamlessly transition responsibilities to current leadership and continue to help the institution in its accreditation efforts (NCU Organizational Chart).

Recent interactions with Accrediting and Regulatory Bodies

Since the last HLC Comprehensive Visit in 2008, Northcentral University experienced a change in ownership and control. In December 2008, after receiving approval from the HLC and the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education (see approval letters in the physical resource room), 75.5% of the University was acquired by two investment firms (Rockbridge Growth Equity and Falcon Investment Advisors). The transaction was confirmed through a HLC Focused Visit in September 2010 (2010 Assurance Report; see page 9).

In March 2012, based on a unanimous vote by the Board of Trustees, the University redeemed the founder’s remaining ownership interest (see January 31, 2012 Minutes in the physical resource room). The HLC, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Arizona State Board for Private Postsecondary Education each provided a formal determination that this transaction did not constitute a change of ownership and control (see approval letters in the physical resource room).

In addition to the aforementioned transactions, the following list represents significant accreditation and regulatory milestones since the last Comprehensive Visit:

1. Between January 2009 and February 2010, NCU’s Board of Trustees amended its Bylaws to increase its membership from 7 to 13.
2. In August 2009, NCU received approval from the U.S. Department of Education to participate in the Title IV program.

3. In August 2009, NCU received approval from the Higher Learning Commission to offer Master’s and PhD degree programs in Marriage and Family Therapy.

4. In January 2011, NCU’s Marriage and Family Therapy program became an approved degree program for the State of California.

5. In January 2012, NCU received approval from the Higher Learning Commission to offer a new degree program at the Education Specialist (EdS) level.

6. In February 2012, NCU received teacher certification accreditation for its bachelor’s degree completion program in education from the Arizona Department of Education.

7. In April 2012, NCU’s Marriage and Family Therapy Master’s program became the first online program to receive a site visit for accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE). Final accreditation determination will be made in February 2012.

Responses to Previous Challenges

The following table presents a summary of HLC visits since and including our Comprehensive Visit in 2008. Details surrounding each action noted appear in appropriate criterion; to date all issues have been resolved.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type of Visit</th>
<th>Assurance Action</th>
<th>Assurance Response</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Remediate finance/accounting system reporting shortfalls</td>
<td>Existing accounting system replaced with upgraded system providing comprehensive financial reporting</td>
<td>Resolved September 2009 – system implemented (HLC approval).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure appropriate faculty preparation for dissertation supervision</td>
<td>Conducted comprehensive audit of faculty qualifications and teaching responsibilities (Focused Visit Report 2009 – see Chapter 4)</td>
<td>Resolved February 2009 – no Commission follow-up required (2009 Assurance Report – see pages 13-15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Letter committing to implementation of upgraded finance/accounting system by September 30, 2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Commission Mandated Focused Visit on institutional governance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Commission Mandated Progress Report: Strategic planning, operating budgets, and team member plans:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Evidence of how academic programs drive planning and budget</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Evaluation of learning drives planning and budget</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How strategic goal is being met to improve retention by 5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Evidence regarding goal of becoming employer of choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2012</td>
<td>Letter from the Commission</td>
<td>Financial Composite Score is &quot;Below the Zone&quot;. Commission requests:</td>
<td>Provided evidence of financial health and explanation of accounting aspects that skew appearance of financial health when the Composite Score is calculated.</td>
<td>Resolved June 2012 - Acknowledgement by the Commission that the University demonstrates financial health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Financial Recovery Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Financial Information</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Responses to Previous Challenges
Assessment at Northcentral University

While academic assessment is discussed thoroughly in Criterion 3, below is a summary of key institutional initiatives, organized by strategic goal, and how data have helped drive decisions at Northcentral University since the 2008 Comprehensive Visit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Goal Supported:</th>
<th>Opportunity for Continuous Improvement</th>
<th>Champion(s)</th>
<th>Data Sources to Inform Recommendations</th>
<th>Participating Constituents</th>
<th>Result (Evidence)</th>
<th>Ongoing Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>Refresh Mission, Vision, and Values</td>
<td>Academic and administrative leadership</td>
<td>Assessment of Annual Strategic Plan (Agenda) Feedback received from webinars (webinar presentations) surveys, and polls</td>
<td>Entire University community</td>
<td>Refreshed Mission, Vision, Values, Goals, and Strategies</td>
<td>Annual Strategic Plan Refresh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase engagement and accountability in budgeting process and resource allocation</td>
<td>Chief Financial Officer</td>
<td>Best practices in financial management and strategic asset allocation Feedback from 2008 Comprehensive Visit</td>
<td>Controller, academic and administrative leadership</td>
<td>Functional area annual budget forecasts, including funding for strategic action plans (Action Plan Budget Worksheet; Budget Example; Instructions)</td>
<td>Monthly budget reconciliation by academic and administrative leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Improve faculty performance by managing faculty workload</td>
<td>Academic leadership</td>
<td>Faculty feedback Student focus groups Results of faculty performance reviews related to substantive feedback</td>
<td>Academic Affairs Committee</td>
<td>Modification to Faculty Workload policy (Faculty Handbook)</td>
<td>Automated monitoring of workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improve faculty performance through training</td>
<td>Academic leadership</td>
<td>Faculty feedback on training needs (Faculty survey results) Student and faculty focus groups (Presentations) Results of faculty performance reviews related to substantive feedback Best practices for teaching and responsive student interaction</td>
<td>Center for Faculty Excellence</td>
<td>Modified Faculty Development course</td>
<td>Automated monitoring of faculty response times Regularly scheduled faculty performance appraisals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhance academic quality through improved library offerings and search capabilities</td>
<td>Director of the Northcentral University Library</td>
<td>Library user feedback (Library user survey results) Library usability studies Library Annual Report</td>
<td>Faculty, students and Library team members</td>
<td>Redesigned library to improve search capabilities and expanded offerings</td>
<td>Annual survey of Library users</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Assessment Initiatives and Data-Driven Decisions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Goal Supported: Quality (cont’d)</th>
<th>Champion(s)</th>
<th>Data Sources to Inform Recommendations</th>
<th>Participating Constituents</th>
<th>Result (Evidence)</th>
<th>Ongoing Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhance student concern, grade appeals, and grievance processes</td>
<td>Academic and administrative leadership</td>
<td>System data on timeliness and analysis of process Internet effectiveness Priorities Survey Online Learners (see page 5) Graduate Satisfaction Survey (see Results Report, page 14)</td>
<td>Academic Affairs Committee Academic Advising Board of Trustees</td>
<td>Migrated Ombud’s Office to Office of Compliance Management; recruited functional expert (Director Position Description)</td>
<td>Automated tracking system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve student experience through enhanced writing support</td>
<td>Writing center</td>
<td>Faculty feedback on student writing competency Input from Academic Advising on need for student support Research on options for augmenting student writing skills</td>
<td>Faculty and academic leadership Academic Advising</td>
<td>Adoption of Smarthinking (Presentation)</td>
<td>Student and faculty surveys post-Smarthinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce student attrition rates, with emphasis on Foundations courses</td>
<td>Academic leadership</td>
<td>Focus Groups with students and faculty (Presentations) 8-Week vs. 12-Week Study New and Old Syllabi and Staggering Findings</td>
<td>Students Faculty Academic advisors</td>
<td>Hiring of salaried faculty in foundations courses (Position Description) Revised course syllabi (sample) Creation of student success academic advising team</td>
<td>Monitor and compare attrition rates before and after implementing recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve graduation rates and time to completion for doctoral students</td>
<td>Graduate School</td>
<td>Best practices for research training Doctoral students’ average time to completion Doctoral student graduation rates Student survey results (Priorities Survey Online Learners) 8-Week vs. 12-Week Study</td>
<td>Academic Affairs Committee, academic leadership</td>
<td>Restructured doctoral program with research and statistic courses integrated throughout Hiring of salaried faculty to serve as dissertation chairs (Position Description)</td>
<td>Monitor doctoral student time to completion and graduation rates as part of ongoing Academic Quality Dashboard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Assessment Initiatives and Data-Driven Decisions (cont’d)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Goal Supported: Student Success (cont’d)</th>
<th>Champion(s)</th>
<th>Data Sources to Inform Recommendations</th>
<th>Participating Constituents</th>
<th>Result (Evidence)</th>
<th>Ongoing Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve dissertation quality</td>
<td>Graduate School</td>
<td>Feedback from 2008 Comprehensive Visit (see pages 11-14) &lt;br&gt; Feedback from Research faculty &lt;br&gt; Feedback from faculty serving on dissertation committees</td>
<td>Academic leadership</td>
<td>Dissertation Quality Assessment &lt;br&gt; Modified Basis of Admissions for doctoral applicants to require a conferred Master’s degree</td>
<td>Ongoing monitoring of dissertation quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve student success in &lt;br&gt;undergraduate &lt;br&gt;programs</td>
<td>Office of the Provost</td>
<td>Bachelor’s student graduation rates &lt;br&gt; Undergraduate Transfer Credit Study</td>
<td>Academic Affairs Committee &lt;br&gt; Academic leadership</td>
<td>Revised Basis of Admission for bachelor’s programs</td>
<td>Monitor bachelor’s student time to completion as part of ongoing Academic Quality Dashboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve student outcomes through Time Management training</td>
<td>Office of the Provost</td>
<td>Grade appeal data &lt;br&gt; Instructional Design team</td>
<td>Academic leadership &lt;br&gt; Instructional Design team</td>
<td>Attack Your Day! Before it Attacks You program (documents) &lt;br&gt; Time Management student survey</td>
<td>Annual Time Management student survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Goal Supported: Growth</td>
<td>Academic and administrative leadership</td>
<td>Best practices for program development in higher education &lt;br&gt; Dean input on process requirements</td>
<td>Faculty &lt;br&gt; Marketing team</td>
<td>Formalized program development process including project management</td>
<td>Annual review of 5-Year Program Development plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve communication to &lt;br&gt;constituents</td>
<td>Academic and administrative leadership</td>
<td>Priorities Survey Online Learners (see pages 4-7) &lt;br&gt; Campus Employee Satisfaction Survey (see Executive Summary, Page 4) &lt;br&gt; Best practices for organizational strategic alignment &lt;br&gt; 2008 HLC Comprehensive Visit Assurance Section, page 8</td>
<td>Faculty &lt;br&gt; Students &lt;br&gt; Team members</td>
<td>Newsletters &lt;br&gt; Regularly scheduled University-wide meetings &lt;br&gt; All-constituent webinars &lt;br&gt; Formation of faculty/team member representative group (MOD Squad) &lt;br&gt; Creation of Training team</td>
<td>Ongoing feedback from faculty/team member representative group (MOD Squad) &lt;br&gt; Ongoing training on Mission, Vision, Values, Goals and Strategies (Training materials)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Assessment Initiatives and Data-Driven Decisions (cont’d)

These highlights along with other critical evidence are presented, by criterion, in the following pages.

While Northcentral believes it is readily apparent that it has met and continues to meet the Minimum Requirements for Accreditation as outlined by the HLC, a complete analysis can be found in the physical resource room.
CRITERION ONE: MISSION AND INTEGRITY

The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, faculty, staff, and students.

Overview

While the core principles have remained unchanged, as part of our annual strategic plan review, we refined our mission, vision, and values to ensure that they continue to clearly define our purpose and reflect who we are as an institution of higher learning.

As noted in the response to the 2010 Focused Visit Progress Report, pursuant to strategic planning best practices and implemented in the August 2011 annual strategy review meeting, academic and administrative leadership took the opportunity to reassess the plan and both expand and refine its focus (Agenda). The strategic objective and goals were recalibrated to clarify and better articulate how the University defines our long-term strategies (Mission, Vision, Values, Goals, and Strategies). While the overall fidelity of the plan remains, this recalibration ensures emphasis continues to be placed firmly on the University’s academic priorities.

An interest in refreshing the University’s mission surfaced during the 2011 strategic review session. In the fall of 2011, Northcentral’s community engaged in a webinar requesting feedback on the mission documents (Criterion 1 Webinar PowerPoint). The University has found regularly scheduled webinars to be an effective tool to both generate feedback from and provide information to various University constituencies. The feedback received from our constituents as a result of the Criterion 1 webinar provided further evidence that the community believed that a refreshed mission was needed. For example, Northcentral had a combined mission and vision statement which the community felt should be separated. Following this initial webinar, a survey was sent to the community asking them to select key terms they believed applied to our mission documents. Once the survey results were tabulated, a representative committee comprised of academic and administrative representatives was formed (“Mission Possible”) to draft a refined and refreshed set of mission documents. Improvements to these mission documents were proposed by the committee and were then further refined by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) during winter 2011-2012. In the spring of 2012, multiple webinars were conducted requesting community feedback, resulting in further refinement of the mission, and related documents. Similar to the refreshed strategic plan, the overall fidelity of the mission documents remain (Mission, Vision, Values Planning Process), yet provide a more accurate articulation of our Mission, Vision, and Values. As of July 16, 2012 there have been over 5,900 instances of constituents, representing faculty, students, team members, and members of the Board of Trustees, attending or viewing the webinars. These refined mission documents were approved by the Board of Trustees on March 13, 2012 (see Trustee Minutes in the physical resource room). The refreshed mission and related documents appear below and were presented to the community by the President and HLC Steering Committee co-chairs via webinar on April 12, 2012. We will continue to evaluate the currency of our Mission, Vision, and Values statements at the annual Strategic Plan Refresh.

The primary changes to the mission documents include the following:
• wording to denote that historically we have and will continue to focus on graduate education;
• highlighting our desire to provide global access to a U.S. regionally accredited education;
• reaffirming our commitment to engaging highly credentialed faculty; and
• reaffirming our commitment to our One-to-One teaching model commonly referred to as the Oxford Model (Distance Education at Northcentral).

At the request of the community, we have articulated a separate Vision statement aligned with our Mission.

The update to our values includes highlighting the critical importance of Integrity and articulating those key values most important to the community and aligned with the achievement of our Mission (see illustration that follows).

**Core Component 1a**

_The organization’s mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization’s commitments._

Northcentral University clearly articulates our Mission, Vision, and Values on our public website under the heading “About Northcentral” (Website Screenshot), our student and administrative portals, and social media websites such as YouTube via Northcentral-produced videos.

We also present our mission documents in the course catalog and in all our faculty, student, and team member training (Faculty Handbook, Welcome video that is part of the new student orientation, and New Hire Orientation).

Our Mission, Vision, and Values are presented below.

**Mission**

Northcentral University educates professionals throughout the world and provides an accessible opportunity to earn a U.S. regionally accredited degree. Northcentral mentors students one-to-one with highly credentialed faculty via advanced delivery modalities. Northcentral commits to helping students achieve academically and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions.

**Vision**

Northcentral University is a premier online graduate University and a global leader in providing unprecedented access to U.S. regionally accredited higher education.

**Values**

I.D.E.A.’s Founded on INTEGRITY: We hold all members of our community to the highest ethical standard of professional and academic conduct and the rules and regulations of U.S. higher education (Video).
**Innovation:** We envision new and innovative education delivery systems, and support proven concepts of teaching and learning. We encourage our community to seek solutions to educational challenges that will improve the quality of our programs and services (Video).

**Diversity:** We value diversity of thought and action as a strength that allows our community to transcend organizational and geographical boundaries. We expect members of our community to treat people with respect and dignity (Video).

**Excellence:** Our community is committed to excellence in academics and service. We value leadership and strive for continuous improvement in everything we do. We define and measure outcomes and take action to ensure that our community’s passion for excellence is never compromised (Video).

**Accountability:** We are deeply committed to holding each member of the University responsible for their scholarly and professional work. We expect financial responsibility in the actions of our students and University team (Video).

As part of the refresh, we challenged ourselves to fully articulate how the Values support our Mission as illustrated below.

*Figure 1- Northcentral University Values Mapped to our Mission*
The University Mission statement clearly cascades to our strategic goals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MISSION</th>
<th>GOAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northcentral University educates professionals throughout the world and provides an accessible opportunity to earn an <strong>U.S. regionally accredited</strong> degree.</td>
<td><strong>Quality</strong>: Continuously elevate our academic quality and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northcentral mentors students One-to-One with <strong>highly credentialed faculty</strong> via advanced delivery modalities.</td>
<td><strong>Student Success</strong>: Achieve the highest standards of student success through our values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northcentral commits to helping <strong>students achieve academically and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Growth</strong>: Achieve efficient growth by meeting demand from professionals throughout the world who will benefit from a Northcentral degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northcentral University <strong>educates professionals throughout the world</strong> . . .</td>
<td><strong>Community</strong>: Build and maintain excellent relationships with our students, team members, partners, governance bodies, and other stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northcentral commits to helping students achieve academically and become valuable <strong>contributors to their communities and within their professions.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Community</strong>: Build and maintain excellent relationships with our students, team members, partners, governance bodies, and other stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3 - Northcentral University Mission Cascades to our Strategic Goals**

Finally, the University Mission provides a guide for the activities of the Schools in support of the strategic plan, as expressed by the individual school missions, which are approved by their respective faculty:

- **School of Behavioral and Health Sciences** - The mission of Northcentral’s School of Behavioral and Health Sciences (SBHS) is to deliver educational opportunities allowing students throughout the world to acquire the knowledge, skills, practical application and values integral to the behavioral and health sciences.

- **School of Business and Technology Management** - The School of Business and Technology Management is committed to preparing its students to make ethical and professional contributions in their chosen fields of study. While under the guidance of highly credentialed faculty, students will acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies required of a global community.
School of Education - The mission for the School of Education at Northcentral University is to prepare professional educators at all levels to become effective leaders, reflective practitioners, and successful communicators within the diverse field of education. The School of Education's mission is centered on improving teaching, learning, research, and leadership contributions throughout all levels of human development and education.

Core Component 1b

In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its students, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.

The statements below highlight how diversity is addressed (identified in italics).

Mission

Northcentral University educates professionals throughout the world and provides an accessible opportunity to earn a U.S. regionally accredited degree. Northcentral mentors students One-to-One with highly credentialed faculty via advanced delivery modalities. Northcentral commits to helping students achieve academically and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions.

Vision

Northcentral University is a premier online graduate University and a global leader in providing unprecedented access to U.S. regionally accredited higher education.

Value: Diversity

We value diversity of thought and action as a strength that allows our community to transcend organizational and geographical boundaries. We expect members of our community to treat people with respect and dignity.

Northcentral is diverse by nature and inclusive by design. As an online University that does not require a physical residency, we provide educational opportunities to people around the world. Regardless of geographic location, as long as a potential student has access to the Internet and meets the basis for admission requirements (Policy), they can be a part of the Northcentral learning community. Additionally, because of the nature of our university, we can utilize the expertise of our highly credentialed faculty regardless of where they live.

In alignment with our Vision to provide unprecedented access to a U.S. regionally accredited education to students throughout the world, Northcentral has and continues to attract a population of students outside the United States. We attract a diverse community as evidenced by the student residence map below. Thus, by providing an education to students outside of the U.S., Northcentral is making a positive contribution to communities throughout the world.
### Figure 2 - Student and Faculty Residence Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Europe</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North America</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>7097</td>
<td>609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central America &amp; the Caribbean</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bermuda</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turks &amp; Caicos</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin Islands</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Saharan Africa</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>India</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australia &amp; Oceania</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Samoa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guam</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle East, North Africa, &amp; Greater Arabia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
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<td>Qatar</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Core Component 1c

Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.

Understanding and support of the Mission begins with the Board of Trustees who thoroughly reviewed and approved the refreshed Mission on March 13, 2012 (see Trustee Minutes in the physical resource room).

Through ongoing communication, our Mission is ingrained in our daily activities. For example, Excellent News, Higher Degrees, and VERITAS are University newsletters that serve our faculty, students, and team members (University Newsletters). Through articles submitted by community members, these newsletters support our Mission and Vision by providing up to date information on how the University continues to provide quality educational opportunities to students throughout the world. For example, each issue of Higher Degrees features first-person experiences from our graduates and current students on how they have become notable contributors to their communities and within their professions. These newsletters are transparent vehicles through which Northcentral enthusiastically presents itself to our constituents.

Likewise, the Mission is supported by the administration and team members. Our community members receive training on how the Vision, Mission, and Values are an integral part of our culture, practices, and daily tasks through orientation sessions, training requirements (FMD 5000, Mission Vision Values Training for Leaders, New Hire Orientation) and in the Welcome video that is part of the new student orientation.

Finally, and importantly, the University’s Mission is mapped to and expressed by the goals and strategies in its strategic plan. Our strategic goals and strategies are manifested in day-to-day action plans that are the focus of faculty and team member activity (June 2012 Action Plan Inventory). As evidenced in the 2010 Progress Report and discussed further in Criterion 2, action plans are directly linked to strategies and goals and ultimately the Mission.

Mission Permeates Academic Programs and Curriculum

Our Mission of educating professionals throughout the world is expressed in the design of our academic programs and curriculum. The following program goals, taken from our bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral programs and found in our Catalog, demonstrate Mission alignment in our academic programs:

Bachelor’s

- Prepare students to act ethically while promoting fairness, candor and respect for diversity throughout the global community (BBA)
- Accurately integrate multiple perspectives related to diversity(BEd)
- Promote the values of ethical action, use of empirical evidence in making decisions, tolerance of ambiguity, recognition and respect for diversity, and understanding of the role of psychology in fostering positive social, civic and global outcomes (BAPsy)
Master’s

- Prepare students to recognize the ethical roles of business within a global society (MBA)
- Accurately integrate multiple perspectives related to diversity (MEd)
- Train students to understand and apply ethical principles in research, integrate academic integrity into a personal code of honor, employ a tolerance of ambiguity, analyze and critique psychological explanations of behavior with respect for diversity, and create a personal plan for engagement with contemporary civic, social, and global issues (MA PSY)

Doctoral

- Prepare students to complete a significant and substantial research dissertation that contributes solutions to issues, problems, and challenges using increasingly complex and innovative practices within the global society (DBA and PhD Business and Technology Management)
- Enhance students' communication skills and competencies (oral, written, computer literacy, interpersonal) to support their professional practice and development within a global environment (EdD and PhD Education)
- Encourage personal growth, intellectual accomplishment, global awareness, and respect and appreciation for diversity (PhD MFT)
- Train students to implement ethical principles in research, integrate academic integrity into a personal code of honor, formulate and evaluate research and programs that reflect understanding and respect for diversity, and develop a personal plan for engagement with contemporary civic, social, and global issues as related to the field of psychology in general and to the student's specialization (PhD PSY)

Core Component 1d

The organization’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.

Through leadership and collaborative processes, Northcentral’s academic and administrative structures promote an independent Board of Trustees with responsibility for oversight of the entire University and assures a shared governance model between faculty and administration.
Board of Trustees

Northcentral University is governed by a Board of Trustees responsible for the establishment of broad institutional policies for the operation of the University, with oversight responsibility for academics and academic policies; ensuring financial resources are adequate to support the University's goals; selecting, supporting, and evaluating the President of the University; promoting shared governance; and providing continuity to the University. The Board of Trustees' Bylaws set forth the authorities, responsibilities, and functions of the Board of Trustees in the governance of the University (Bylaws). The Board operates with a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary/Treasurer, and the following committees: Audit and Finance; Academic Affairs; Governance; and CEO Performance and Compensation (Board members and committee appointments).

Based on feedback gained during the 2008 Comprehensive Visit, the Board has established clear processes for nominating trustees and has modified the bylaws to increase the number of trustees to 13, with 8 being independent, and 5 representing shareholders. All trustees acknowledge that they have fiduciary duties to make all decisions in the best interests of the institution. The Board is highly engaged and works as a cohesive team to ensure that the University is financially responsible, operates with integrity, upholds the Mission, executes against the strategic plan, and offers quality academic programs. Evidence of the Board of Trustees’ performance, as demonstrated in minutes and supporting materials, is available in the physical resource room.

Board of Trustee committees (e.g., Academic Affairs; and Audit and Finance) meet regularly and are apprised of relevant University initiatives. Additionally, committees meet with designated University leaders in advance of regularly scheduled Board of Trustee meetings to discuss agenda items that require Board review and/or approval. Evidence of the Board of Trustees’ committees’ effectiveness, as demonstrated in minutes and supporting materials, is available in the physical resource room. Please see page 7 of the bylaws for more detail on Board of Trustee committees’ roles and responsibilities. A good example of effective Board governance is their unanimous approval related to the recent redemption of an outstanding ownership interest in the University (details of this transaction are available in the physical resource room). This decision came after a thorough Audit and Finance Committee review, and application of our Board’s conflict of interest policy. Another example is the Board’s approval of budgetary support for the University’s move to full-time faculty devoted to supporting students during the dissertation phase of their program (minutes available in the physical resource room).

Executive Leadership Team

The purpose of the Executive Leadership Team is to evaluate the performance of the University’s academic and administrative teams and their forward-looking plans in light of the University’s Mission and strategic plan. The Executive Leadership Team is headed by the President (CEO) who is hired by, is evaluated by, and reports directly to the Board of Trustees. Under the direction of the President, the Executive Leadership Team is responsible for maintaining integrity throughout the institution, achieving Board-approved goals and maintaining budgets, evaluating strategies and action plans for continuous improvement, and
fulfilling all other commitments to the Board as part of the University’s shared governance model. The membership includes: Provost (CAO), Chief Financial and Operating Officer (CFO/COO), Vice President of Enrollment and Student Services, Vice President of Marketing, and Director of Human Resources (Organization Chart; ELT and SLT Membership). The Executive Leadership Team meets weekly (ELT Agendas).

**Senior Leadership Team**

The purpose of the Senior Leadership Team is to promote communication and shared governance. The SLT ensures all policies and initiatives are evaluated for administrative impacts and receive necessary support for implementation. The SLT is co-chaired by the Provost (CAO) and the Chief Financial and Operating Officer (CFO/COO). Membership includes: President (CEO); Dean of the School of Behavioral and Health Sciences; Dean of the School of Business and Technology Management; Dean of the School of Education; Dean of the Graduate School; Vice President of Enrollment and Student Services; Vice President of Marketing; Vice President of Information Technology; Senior Director of Student Financial Services; Director of Human Resources; Director of Compliance; and the Controller (ELT and SLT Membership). SLT is scheduled to meet twice per month (SLT Minutes).

**Academic Leadership Team (Informal Information Sharing)**

The Academic Leadership Team is comprised of the Provost and the Deans. Scheduled weekly, this team meets to discuss the status of current academic initiatives, barriers to progress, and ways the Provost may support success. In addition to these meetings, each week the Provost meets one-on-one with each Dean and each academic Director to ensure academic leaders receive supportive direction.

**Academic Affairs Committee (Formal Academic Decision-Making)**

The purpose of the Academic Affairs Committee is to provide guidance, counsel, and direction on all academic matters at Northcentral University. The Provost or the Provost's designee facilitates discussions and seeks input. Members include: Deans, Program Chairs, Director of Faculty Excellence, Director of Instructional Design, Director of Library Services, Registrar, Director of the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research, Vice President of Enrollment and Student Services, Senior Director of Student Financial Services, Director of Policy and Strategy Management, and one faculty representative from each school.

The Committee is required to meet at least six times per year (AAC minutes). The following subcommittees are convened at least quarterly or more often if necessary: Academic Integrity Committee, Curriculum and Assessment Committees, Ethics and Professional Standards Committee.

**School and Faculty Councils**

The purpose of School and Faculty Councils is to ensure open communication and provide a channel for input between and among faculty and academic leadership. The Schools of Behavioral and Health Sciences, Business and Technology Management, and Education each
elect three members for their School Council. School Councils work with Deans to advise on academic-related matters and strategic planning proposals and submit recommendations to Deans for consideration by the Academic Affairs Committee or other bodies, as appropriate. They also communicate with and solicit input from fellow faculty members on a regular basis (at least quarterly); attend student advisory or other school-specific boards; and examine the role of faculty in governance and propose warranted changes. School Council Members serve for one year and receive an honorarium of $500. Elections were held in May 2012, and the current School Council members began their terms on June 1, 2012.

Each School Council elects a chair and those chairs constitute the Faculty Council. The Faculty Council represents the faculty providing recommendations to the Provost’s Office, the Academic Affairs Committee, and other University entities.

**Student Advisory Boards**

The purpose of Student Advisory Boards is to provide input and solicit feedback regarding the University’s decisions and activities. These groups create bridges of understanding between faculty, students, and administration. Student Advisory Boards exist in all schools (MFT; SBHS; SoBTM; SoE) to provide input on planning and decision-making.

**Summary**

As evidenced above, Northcentral University’s governance and administrative structures allow for overall governance with integrity and academic decisions driven by faculty and academic leaders, through a collaboratively informed process that effectively supports the administration. These governance structures have been expanded and refined over time and provide for the successful collaboration between entities throughout the University. They help ensure appropriate accountability and involvement in the decision-making process and promote understanding of decisions and how they are being implemented.

**Core Component 1e**

*The organization upholds and protects its integrity.*

Northcentral University upholds and protects its integrity in a number of ways including policies, training, and overall culture. Upholding integrity is the responsibility of all NCU team members. Compliance is managed across functional lines to foster the highest levels of identification, communication, resolution, and implementation supporting the shared governance model. The Office of Compliance Management (OCM) is responsible for oversight of compliance performance in all functional areas as captured through normal business processes.

The OCM serves as the clearinghouse for compliance related issues. It works with all functional areas on institutional policy, compliance processes, internal audits, regulatory program management, complaints management, and it produces an aggregated monthly compliance scorecard (available in the physical resource room) for leaders with recommendations for compliance program improvements.
Enrollment Services and Academic Advisor Team Training and Quality Assurance

The first point of contact for a prospective student is the Enrollment Services Team. To ensure compliance and service quality, and this team is thoroughly trained and monitored. Orientation and ongoing “hands-on” training designed to ensure overall compliance is required of all members of the Enrollment Services Team. The orientation provides enrollment team members foundational understanding of the admissions and enrollment processes, the expectations for each phone call, which are monitored by the Quality Assurance (QA) team, effective communication practices, and the University’s Mission, Vision, and Values (Enrollment Training Materials). Software used for call monitoring allows NCU’s leaders and the QA team to listen to calls remotely, and join calls as a third party, as needed, if necessary to ensure the prospective student receives the highest level of customer service. Additionally, our leaders and experienced team members perform a simple Quality Assurance Question and Answer session with each prospective student just prior to completing the application for admission.

Academic advisors are responsible for assisting students with all of their scheduling and support-related needs. All members of the Academic Advising Team participate in initial and continuing training on addressing student needs, university program offerings, NCU policy and procedures, the University’s Mission, Vision, and Values, and the call quality expectations of the Quality Assurance (QA) team (Academic Advising Training). Call quality reviews are an integral part of the Academic Advising team’s success and allow leaders the ability to provide informed feedback.

Human Resources, enrollment leaders, and student services leaders have collaborated to outline a series of steps in the corrective action process, which includes progressive discipline warranted when multiple errors occur, to ensure team members act with integrity and comply with NCU standards. As described above, NCU’s quality assurance (QA) team monitors calls at all times to provide team members and leaders insight into call quality, and to ensure compliance. Call quality scoring sheets are used by the QA team and by enrollment and student services leadership to score the sample of calls that are selected for review, and the data from call sheets is aggregated and presented on a monthly basis to enrollment, compliance, and administrative leaders. If, on any call, a compliance error is found, an email escalating the details of the error is immediately sent by the QA team member who identified the error, to the Associate Director to whom the enrollment advisor or academic advisor reports. The Associate Director who receives the compliance alert email is responsible for reviewing the details of the alert and taking corrective action and coaching the Enrollment Advisor whose call was recorded.

Maintaining Integrity of Internal Controls through Internal and External Audits

The University upholds the integrity of its financial reporting and controls and its overall operations through its internal audit function, annual independent external audits and regulatory oversight. Results of these are reported directly to the Audit and Finance Committee and ultimately to the Board of Trustees.
Internal Audit
The University has voluntarily implemented an internal audit function to ensure adherence to internal controls and external policies and regulations. The internal audit function is overseen by the Office of Compliance Management. Policies and procedures are reviewed each year to determine those at the highest risk of having adverse effects on the University. Testing is performed to ensure adherence to such policies and procedures. In 2010 and 2011 there were no significant findings in the internal audits performed (audit reports are available in the physical resource room).

External Financial Statement Audit
An independent audit firm conducts an audit of the University’s financial statements in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the U.S. and standards applicable to financial audits contained in Government Auditing Standards, issued by the Comptroller of the U.S. Based on the result of these audits, the University received unqualified (“clean” audits) from our independent auditors for each year since the last Comprehensive Visit.

External Audits of Federal Student Financial Aid (Title IV)
In compliance with its administration of financial aid, external audits are performed each year by an independent audit firm (external audits are available in the physical resource room). The audit team performs rigorous testing of compliance with federal regulations, adherence to policies and procedures, and compliance with internal controls. The University has received unqualified opinions (“clean” audits) in each year an audit has been conducted. These comprehensive audits ensure the institution is following federal and internal guidelines and maintaining proper internal controls over Title IV administration (audits available in the physical resource room). Once audits are reviewed and approved by the Board of Trustees, they are submitted to the U.S. Department of Education.

Monitoring Emerging Accounting Standards
The Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) periodically issues revisions to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), which often apply to Northcentral University. Recently, the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) has been formed to create accounting standards that will be consistent across international borders. As the United States moves to conform to international standards, it is expected that an increased amount of change to GAAP will occur, which may affect the University’s accounting practices.

The University’s Controller monitors all proposed and implemented changes to accounting standards and principles and assesses their impact on the institution. There is currently one proposed change to accounting standards that FASB is considering that will have an effect on the accounting presentation of the University’s financial statements.

Changes proposed to the accounting for leases will have an effect on the University. All operating leases will be treated as capital leases. Although the University will change its accounting for operating leases under this standard, it is not expected to have a material effect on its financial position. The property leases for Prescott Valley and Scottsdale will simply be
recorded as liabilities on the University’s balance sheet and will be amortized over the life of the leases. There will be no effect on operating results (Proposed Lease Accounting Changes).

Administrative Policies

**Code of Business Ethics and Conduct**

Code of Conduct policies establish guidelines of behavior to protect our integrity, which begins with the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees provides a hotline to allow anonymous reporting of violations (Team Member Handbook, Section 6.17). Every Senior Leader and Board Member signs the Code of Business Ethics and Conduct policy on an annual basis. Anyone that reports an issue is assured of confidentiality and reports may be submitted anonymously. Reporting of a violation or suspected violation may be submitted via email to the compliance officer or through the Ethics Hotline. A Board member is designated as the compliance officer (see Trustee Minutes 2/22/09 in the physical resource room) and no team member, including the Human Resources department, has access to these emails and calls. This policy addresses:

- Conflicts of interest, and appearances of conflict of interest
- Reporting violations of the Code of Conduct
- Improper use of University funds and assets
- Questionable accounting activity
- Financial impropriety

**Code of Conduct**

We publicly state our Code of Conduct Policy. This Code is applicable to all members of the Northcentral University community including students, faculty, team members, applicants, and alumni. Members of the Northcentral University community are expected to conduct themselves professionally at all times. Those found to have committed a violation or to have attempted to violate this Code of Conduct will be subject to disciplinary sanctions, up to and including dismissal from the University.

Additionally, the Board of Trustees takes its responsibility to University constituents seriously and ensures that the University is in compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal laws (AZ Board of Private Post-Secondary Education License; Prescott Valley Business License; Scottsdale Business License).

**Academics**

Northcentral University holds strongly to its value of integrity as it relates to academics.

**Institutional Review Board**

In accordance with federal regulations and University policy, all research conducted by any member of the NCU community must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that the safety, welfare, rights, and dignity of research participants are protected. To ensure that Dissertation Chairs and committee Members have a solid foundation in the IRB process, Northcentral requires these faculty and doctoral students to successfully
complete the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course in the protection of Human Research Subjects.

In 2009, NCU hired a chairperson, who reports to the Dean of the Graduate School, with significant IRB-related experience to review each IRB application and determine whether each review would be exempt, expedited, or require a full review. Upon initial receipt, each application is logged and tracked throughout the process until the research is completed. The historical log is maintained by the Dissertation Process Coordinator. Should a full review be required, the Ethics and Professional Standards subcommittee serves in this capacity. The constitution of the committee includes a Chair appointed by the Provost (usually the Dean of the Graduate School), the IRB Coordinator, all deans, program chairs, and a separate member of the Graduate School. In 2009, the IRB application and the application process was also reviewed and modified to ensure completeness of information and efficiency of process.

**Academic Integrity Violations**

The Student portal presents links to the Academic Integrity Tutorial (Tutorial), the Northcentral Academic Integrity Policy (Policy), and the Academic Integrity Questionnaire (Questionnaire) to ensure understanding of the institution’s expectations for academic integrity. Since the last Comprehensive Visit, to address the issue of plagiarism, all faculty are required (per policy) to submit at least one student paper per course to a text-matching service. Suspected violations of plagiarism are reported to the dean's office resulting in a decision concerning an appropriate sanction (in the case of second or later violation or a serious first violation the Academic Integrity Violation Committee makes the final decision). Sanctions include: Asking the student to resubmit the paper, the student receives a failing grade for the paper, a failing grade for the course is recorded, and/or the student is academically dismissed from the University.

**Concerns, Grievances, and Appeals**

Northcentral has a formal process for documenting all concerns, grade appeals, and grievances. Per Policy, a student may appeal a final course grade issued by a faculty member. The appeal must be submitted through the appeals web form to the faculty member that issued the grade. Appeals must be submitted no more than 10 calendar days after the student received notification of the final course grade. All appeals are reviewed by the applicable school dean. Any grade appeal that is being adjudicated by the dean requires a final decision within 5 days. The appeal decision made under the authority of the dean is final. All grade appeals are maintained electronically (see Grade Appeals Report in physical resource room).

Per Policy, in the event that a student has a grievance with the University regarding University procedures, decisions, or judgments, the student has a right to seek a satisfactory resolution through the formal avenues of a grievance. Formal grievances are investigated by the Office of Compliance Management and forwarded to the appropriate “deciding body” for adjudication. Decisions, which are entered within 20 business days, are considered final. Students may contact their Academic Advisor to obtain the web link and instructions for filing a grievance. All grievances are maintained electronically (see Grievance Report in physical resource room).
For other types of concerns, students and Northcentral University team members are encouraged to make every reasonable effort to resolve disputes through informal means and at the lowest reasonable level in the institution. Since the last Comprehensive Visit in 2008, faculty, students, and team members have noted that there are issues or concerns that arise that need to be tracked, but do not fall within the grade appeal/grievance structure. In response, the Office of Compliance Management has automated our system to track, investigate, and follow up on issues, in effect acting as a “clearinghouse” for all concerns throughout the institution.

Other external means of resolution are described in our Catalog.

**Verification of Student Identity**

As a distance education institution, Northcentral University takes student identification and privacy seriously and verifies student identity through a variety of ways. Students are provided a student ID number and unique password upon enrolling. Students use this information to access their accounts, and team members use the student ID number to confirm a student’s identity. Students who call the University are asked to confirm two of the following pieces of information: date of birth, previous academics (may include last completed course, last instructor, previous school attended), email address on file, student identification number, mailing address on file including zip code, phone number on file, or last four digits of the social security number. Finally, students are required to use their unique login and password in order to access the electronic course room. If a student forgets his or her password, the password may be sent to the email address on file.

In addition, our One-to-One educational model enhances our ability to verify student identity. Student assignments are designed to assist faculty in getting to know the writing and communication style of each student.

**Regulatory Compliance**

Recent federal court rulings and legal review (Review Letter) has confirmed that the U.S. Department of Education’s policy that states online institutions must be licensed in all 50 states does not apply to Northcentral University. However, the University continues to work with legal counsel to monitor all requirements from the U.S. Department of Education.

NCU demonstrates compliance with regulatory requirements in all 50 states as noted below:
- Northcentral is approved to operate in 26 states and is seeking licensure, if required, in 11 more.
- Northcentral has continued to request information to ascertain the requirements for exemption or licensing in the remaining 13 states.

Additionally, Northcentral University continues to address Federal and State regulatory compliance issues, and Accreditation requirements as noted in the Introduction.
Public Disclosures

On the public website, we have a section titled Privacy Policy and Consumer Information. Within this section, we provide consumer information related to FERPA, ADA, Standards of Rehabilitation Act, Higher Education Opportunity Act, and state authorizations. Information required by accrediting and other regulatory authorities is also appropriately displayed on our public website, including our disclosures concerning Privacy and Consumer Information and Gainful Employment (School of Behavioral and Health Sciences, School of Business and Technology Management, and School of Education).

Marketing

The website and all publicly available materials go through a joint approval process involving academics, administration, and Marketing to ensure all information is accurate. Content requires a responsible party sign-off and then approval must be given by Marketing prior to release. If any communication is deemed to have any compliance or legal risk, written or electronic approval is required from appropriate parties. If the material is to be distributed within the organization and involves any change to process, procedures or policy, the training team must sign off on the communication in addition to Marketing and the business owner. The multiple reviews of marketing materials (Sample Approval Process) ensure our marketing materials accurately reflect what students should expect from Northcentral and what Northcentral expects from its students. Controls in our content management system ensure that our approval process is consistently followed.

Summary

Northcentral University operates with integrity to fulfill its Mission and Vision by living out our values. While our mission and related documents have evolved, the fundamental principles have remained the same. Further, the refresh of the Mission documents provided an additional opportunity for the entire community to be involved in a process of improvement. The refreshed Mission, Vision, and Values consistently guide each individual community member and the overall University through its strategic plan and all institutional policies and processes.

Strengths

1. Community-wide involvement in the refresh of Mission documents resulted in an articulated focus on graduate education, our desire to be global and remain regionally accredited, our commitment to highly credentialed faculty, the use of advanced delivery modalities, and helping our students succeed beyond the classroom. The modification to the Values maintained our foundation of integrity with a focus on innovation, diversity, excellence, and accountability. Finally, the refresh gave us the opportunity to show how our values support our mission.
2. The Mission, Vision, and Values and their corresponding alignment give the University a laser focus in terms of making decisions.
3. Clearly articulated Mission documents are publically available and part of on-boarding for faculty and team member training and student orientation.
4. Northcentral is diverse by nature and inclusive by design. This is evident through our clearly stated Mission documents: to be global and value diversity throughout the University including programs, curriculum, and policies.
5. Understanding of and support of the Mission throughout the University is evidenced in Board of Trustee actions, the strategic plan, and team member training and newsletters.
6. Our use of webinar has increased communication with our constituents.
7. The Board’s bylaws and administrative policies support governance and administrative structures that promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable us to fulfill our Mission.
8. Faculty and team member training, appropriate administrative and academic policies, processes in marketing, and the Office of Compliance Management are in place to ensure we uphold and protect our integrity.

Self-Recommendations for Progress Towards Continuous Improvement

1. With each annual strategic assessment, we should continue with collaborative, University-wide reviews of the Mission documents and strategic goals. We learned from our webinars that the community appreciates regular communication regarding high-level plans.
2. Human Resources should evaluate changing performance evaluations to link daily team member responsibilities to the strategic goals, which are aligned to the Mission documents.
3. While we do enjoy a diverse community, we will continue to expand our efforts to recruit and retain diverse faculty and team members.
4. Based on the positive impact of Student Advisory Boards, we will investigate the feasibility of adding industry advisory boards to the program development and evaluation processes.
CRITERION TWO: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The organization’s allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Overview

Northcentral’s strategic planning and budgeting processes are mapped directly to our Mission and responsive to our academic needs. These processes are informed by outward looking environmental scans and inward looking assessments of academic quality and institutional effectiveness. For example, our new program development process incorporates the best ideas and advice of our faculty and academic leadership combined with outward facing demand and outcome analyses.

![Figure 4 - Strategic Planning and Assessment Cycle](image)

To assess the effectiveness and coordinate execution of the University’s strategic plan, quarterly strategy review meetings are conducted with the Senior Leadership Team and typically include monitoring progress on strategic action plans, and identifying obstacles and projects that require additional resources. The outcomes of these reviews are a recurring feature of the institution’s quarterly report to the Northcentral University Board of Trustees (Strategy Updates to Board of Trustees).
**Table 4 - Quarterly Strategy Reviews and Board Updates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Strategy Review/Update</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/04/2010</td>
<td>Strategy Review with Senior Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/07/2010</td>
<td>Strategy Update to Board of Trustees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/21/2011</td>
<td>Strategy Review with Senior Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/28/2011</td>
<td>Strategy Update to Board of Trustees</td>
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<tr>
<td>06/02/2011</td>
<td>Strategy Review with Senior Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>06/10/2011</td>
<td>Strategy Update to Board of Trustees</td>
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<tr>
<td>09/06/2011</td>
<td>Strategy Review with Senior Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>09/13/2011</td>
<td>Strategy Update to Board of Trustees</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/01/2011</td>
<td>Strategy Review with Senior Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/06/2011</td>
<td>Strategy Update to Board of Trustees</td>
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<td>02/28/2012</td>
<td>Strategy Review with Senior Team</td>
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<td>06/13/2012</td>
<td>Strategy Update to Board of Trustees</td>
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<td>05/31/2012</td>
<td>Strategy Review with Senior Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>06/08/2012</td>
<td>Strategy Update to Board of Trustees</td>
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Further, in accordance with strategic planning best practices, the University conducts an Annual Strategic Plan Refresh (2011 Annual Strategic Plan Refresh Agenda; meeting follow up materials). Environmental scanning and external data and trends identified by academic research, finance, compliance, and marketing teams are discussed and inform our strategic plan and subsequent resource allocation, including adding or modifying strategies and action plans.

**Core Component 2a**

*The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.*

Northcentral University prepares for the future by identifying societal and economic trends, determining their impact on the educational and professional needs of our students, and ensuring that resources are directed toward educational programs as required to meet those changing needs. These trends are vetted through the strategic planning process described above, is governed by the Board of Trustees, and is informed by assessment throughout the University.

The University’s outward-looking teams have been instrumental in identifying the following highly relevant educational trends:

1) Increased demand for graduate education by non-traditional students

2) Rapid development of online platforms, social media and technology-based communications devices and their application to education, training, and business activities

3) Increased concern about the cost of a college education and the value it delivers
4) Demand for applied knowledge for problem-solving in the real world

**Trend 1: Increased demand for graduate education by non-traditional students**

Non-traditional students, based on our research (8 Week White Paper), prefer accelerated courses and, in the best judgment of our academic leadership, are more likely to succeed with increased course structure. The University initiated a change in course length from 12 weeks to 8 weeks in the Master’s programs in Business, Education, and Psychology. Similar changes were made in courses at the doctoral level in Business and Education. We also introduced fixed assignment due dates versus suggested dates for our 12-week courses.

The conversion of courses from 12 to 8 weeks required a thorough review of the curriculum to ensure appropriate learning outcomes and that time spent on learning experiences were equivalent to the 12-week courses. Credit hours remained constant. Under the guidance of faculty and with the help of instructional designers, approximately 1,300 syllabi were revised to the 8-week format. Since July 2011, incoming students have been enrolled in 8-week courses (e.g., MA in Psychology, MEd, and MBA).

Initial findings show that students are performing at a higher academic achievement level (8 Week White Paper). Faculty and students were surveyed at the 4-week point in their first 8-week course and expressed a preference for 8-week courses to 12-week courses (Course Length Survey).

**International Students**

NCU recognizes there is unmet demand from non-traditional international students who want to earn a U.S. accredited graduate degree without relocating from their home country. We are analyzing the most effective methods for attracting qualified students and determining any additional infrastructure that may be required to serve them.

**Trend 2: Rapid development of online platforms, social media and technology-based communications devices and their application to education, training, and conducting business activities**

NCU uses social media to encourage participation and feedback and to deliver relevant and timely information to our students, alumni, faculty, and team members. Social media also serve as a vehicle for educating prospective students throughout the world on the benefits of a Northcentral education. We utilize advertising, multi-media, and discussion boards to create and maintain communities aimed at providing information and enabling interaction among all interested parties. Northcentral also engages in social media through outlets such as YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. The comments, questions, feedback, and responses are monitored by Marketing, Compliance, and Academics.

The University’s Information Technology plan exemplifies the organization’s awareness of the relationship between academic quality, student learning, and the dynamic technological and academic resources available in a rapidly changing environment. Developing technology in
alignment with the University’s Mission and Values is foundational to student learning at Northcentral. To that end, we are pursuing the following technology initiatives:

**Learning Management System (LMS)**

Northcentral University is enhancing its proprietary web-based Learning Management System (LMS) to enhance student learning, improve the student experience, and provide enriched opportunities for substantive interactions between students and faculty. The LMS provides support and evidence for required, regular, and substantive interaction between the student and faculty member in academics, and is continually being enhanced to document and support other interactive methods and activities. An updated LMS to include a redesigned student course room and virtual academic center is due for launch in 2013 (screenshots).

**Student Tutorial Services**

Smarthinking is a valuable technological resource for students providing them access to a live, on-demand tutoring service. Smarthinking empowers students to get the help they need when they need it, working directly in real-time with a tutor, and communicating using virtual whiteboard technology. By completing a simple form that provides the tutor with information on their assignment and requested area of assistance, students can receive the help that they need, including a review by a technical writing or creative writing expert.

**Enhanced Interaction with Prospective Students through Online Web Chat**

In 2011 NCU implemented online web chat, accessible through the public website, with prospective students through the integration of Syntellect, a web- a web-based Customer Interaction Management (CIM) system Chat transcripts are monitored and recorded for quality and training purposes and provide the type of online interaction that is increasingly expected today. Team members are able to communicate information about programmatic offerings and provide valuable feedback and support through this interactive technology platform.

**Service Desk Improvements**

Implementation of new event tracking and procurement systems have allowed extension of Service Desk hours to a 24/7 schedule, effectively supporting all students regardless of time zone or the hours they choose to utilize University system resources. Our non-traditional student population expressed the need for off-peak hours of support and assistance. We therefore continue to enhance the quality of service and support provided to students, faculty, and other constituencies.

**New Student Orientation**

NCU launched a web-based new student orientation program that is accessible throughout a student’s academic career. Providing an interactive tour of the student portal, library, and writing center, and methods for engaging with faculty and fellow students, this resource delivers valuable information and provides helpful tools in real time.
Live, web-based, interaction in the Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) Program

Northcentral has integrated live web-based conferencing within the MA and PhD practicum and internship courses as well as the doctoral supervision course for Marriage and Family Therapy students. Interactive web-based technology allows for advanced delivery of education and enhanced observation of learning outcomes through live supervision, instruction, and feedback from qualified clinical supervisors. This type of course instruction allows NCU to deliver personal and valuable education to students throughout the world.

Enhanced Communication through Technology

The need to improve communication in an era of rapidly changing technology has driven the need to enhance methods of communication at Northcentral. Since the last visit, NCU has increasingly utilized live webinar and video conferencing to deliver academic and administrative announcements, updates, and information to faculty, students, and other constituents. The ability to deliver communication through mixed modalities has improved faculty and student engagement in University activities, and has enhanced the level of interaction between academic leadership and the entire University community.

Infrastructure Improvements

A number of technology infrastructure improvements have been made to maximize system availability for students, faculty and team members. These include server storage reorganization and hardware upgrades (clustering of database servers in addition to web farms with load balancers for higher availability and minimized downtime), firewall improvements, a new Virtual Private Network (VPN) solution, operating system upgrades, and a comprehensive system security review.

Disaster Recovery Plan

The University’s Disaster Recovery Plan has been updated to ensure the fastest possible recovery of service to students, faculty, and team members in the event of a power outage at our primary data center. Redundant network paths to all locations have been established to maintain business continuity in the event of a power loss (see Disaster Recovery Plan available in the physical resource room).

Trend 3: Increased concern about the cost of a college education and the value it delivers

To provide increased transparency around our tuition structure, the University moved in 2011 to an inclusive tuition pricing model. Multiple fees, including dissertation fees, associated with degree programs were consolidated into inclusive, per-course tuition pricing. This pricing model has allowed prospective students to more easily understand the cost of an education at Northcentral. Inclusive tuition pricing has been well received by prospective and existing students (Tuition website).
Annual Tuition Review

Northcentral reviews tuition rates annually. Market indicators for degree programs and analysis of competitive tuition rates are reviewed carefully and reasonable changes are calculated to allow the University to continue delivering quality to its students while maintaining affordability (Pricing Student Announcement).

Financial Aid

In an effort to provide our students with affordable financing opportunities for their education, the University applied for and was approved to participate in the U.S. Department of Education Title IV program in August 2009. The University has invested in a team of well-trained Tuition Planners whose responsibility is to counsel students on the amount of financial aid available to meet their needs (Tuition Planner Position Description). During the financial aid application process, a Tuition Planner from the Financial Aid Office advises the student of Title IV federal financial aid eligibility. As part of the process, the Tuition Planners provide loan counseling to ensure students are fully aware of their student loan obligations in order to help them in making prudent financial decisions. Northcentral’s 90/10 calculation has been and remains well below requirements prescribed by the Department of Education, at approximately 46% at the end of 2011.

Value through Programmatic Accreditations

Northcentral ensures quality in its programs by seeking appropriate and relevant accreditation for programs and specializations. Each school works to align specialization goals with national professional and accrediting agencies like the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE), and the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). By ensuring coursework in degree programs and specializations meet the rigorous standards of these professional accrediting organizations, students receive an enhanced credential from the University that is more likely to translate into increased professional opportunities and earnings. Accreditation progress across the University is detailed below.

- School of Behavioral and Health Sciences/Marriage and Family Therapy - Currently, the Master’s in Marriage and Family Therapy (MA MFT) program is under review for accreditation with the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) and is the first distance-based program to be officially considered for accreditation by this body.
  - In preparation for the COAMFTE accreditation application, a full self-study of the MA MFT program was completed and submitted with the application in April, 2011 (COAMFTE MFT MA Self Study Report 2011). This application resulted in a request for written clarifications of the program, which was completed and submitted on November 2, 2011 (Response to Request for Clarifications).
  - Based on the response to the request for clarification, the program received approval for a site visit in April 2012. The University is now awaiting the COAMFTE evaluation outcome, which, if favorable, will result in a recommendation for accreditation in winter of 2012.
The online supervisory course within the MFT program is the only online supervisory course that is approved and endorsed by the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT).

- **School of Business and Technology Management** - Northcentral University sought and successfully achieved Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) accreditation in May 2007 and continues to be fully accredited by the ACBSP. In addition, the School announced in June of 2011 that the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) has acknowledged that its Human Resource Management specialization within the MBA program fully aligns with SHRM’s HR Curriculum Guidebooks and Templates.

- **School of Education** - Northcentral University is pursuing accreditation through the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) for eleven Master’s in Education specializations (programs under review by TEAC). The University has been granted initial Candidate Status (TEAC Letter) while an Inquiry Brief Proposal is prepared for TEAC review. The Inquiry Brief Proposal was submitted to TEAC in 2012 (TEAC Final Brief). If TEAC review of the Brief is favorable, the University will prepare for a site visit from an auditing team.

**Trend 4: Demand for applied knowledge for problem-solving in the real world**

One of the primary academic initiatives that have occurred since the last Comprehensive Visit relates to curricular enhancements focused on applied experiential learning (AEL). All courses are scheduled to be revised to incorporate AEL.

**Applied Experiential Learning (Course Development Guidelines)**

Northcentral University recognizes the importance of providing our students with an educational experience they can directly apply to their field. We have made a strategic commitment as one of our advanced delivery modalities to enhance all courses through implementing an applied experiential learning approach. Our curriculum uses this model to help determine the design and organization of activities within a course based on the content and learning outcomes. Further articulation of this use of the model is presented in the Course Organization section of these guidelines. We believe our focused effort on revising curriculum using the AEL method demonstrates our commitment to creating opportunities for our students to gain applied knowledge in their respective fields.

**Graduate Specializations and Programs**

Since the last Comprehensive Visit, the School of Behavioral and Health Sciences (SBHS) has launched a Mental Health Policy and Practice specialization in the Psychology PhD program. This specialization was developed to offer evidence-based learning in the area of mental health policy and practice.

People who are already licensed in their respective disciplines need to broaden their knowledge in behavioral health treatment. In concert with this initiative, SBHS has applied to the Higher Learning Commission to add a Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) degree (application submitted with self-study and available in the physical resource room). This program is designed to
accommodate the needs of students whose interest in a doctoral degree is oriented toward practice rather than research.

In the School of Education, the Athletic Coaching and Adult Learning and Workforce Education specializations were developed at the Master’s level. A principal leadership specialization and superintendent leadership specialization are under development at the master’s degree level and a reading specialization is being developed at the master’s and doctoral degree levels. Each new specialization aligns with national standards bringing the focus on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to meet the current industry demand for applied knowledge.

An application was submitted to the Higher Learning Commission for approval of an Education Specialist (EdS) program. This program was designed to provide students an option between the master’s degree and doctoral degree. The EdS program focuses on the application of knowledge, especially in the capstone project. This program also provides teachers with additional education, tools, and qualifications they can apply in their classrooms and to their future careers. Currently, this program has been approved by both the Arizona Board for Private Postsecondary Education and the Higher Learning Commission (HLC Approval Letter).

Requests from potential students led us to pursue approval from the Project Management Institute (PMI) to become a Registered Education Provider (REP) for the Master’s in Business Administration with a specialization in Project Management program for all PMI programs. The application was submitted to PMI in May 2012 and the program is awaiting evaluation by PMI (PMI Application). Becoming a REP will enable the University to offer Professional Development Units (PDUs) for its courses. PDUs are required by PMI in order to maintain an individual PMI certification, which must be renewed every three years.

Bachelor of Education (BEd)
The Bachelor of Education (BEd) program of study is an undergraduate state approved articulation pathway program. The program is designed for Rio Salado College (RSC) students interested in a pathway to teacher certification and completing the degree work for the teaching profession. BEd transfer students come to Northcentral University with academic coursework in elementary education, secondary education, and special education. This foundation coursework completed at RSC prepares students for the Arizona State Teacher Certification examination. The ten education courses taken at Northcentral University allow the student to receive the teaching certification after they have successfully passed the Arizona State Teacher Examination. A bachelor’s degree is required for the student to be awarded a teaching certificate in Arizona and colleges such as Rio Salado College do not award the bachelor’s degree (Rio Salado Partnership materials).

Core Component 2b
The organization’s resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
The assurance of adequate resources to support educational programs and maintain and strengthen their quality is a priority for the University. As an online institution, the University has the ability to direct the majority of its investments to its educational programs. These investments provide direct support through instruction, and other academic services such as academic advising, instructional design, faculty training, research services, tutoring and a highly regarded online library. The investments also provide indirect support through areas such as enrollment, information technology, finance, student financial services and human resources. Financial data on how the University has allocated its revenue from 2008 to 2012 between Instruction and Educational Services, Marketing and Admissions, General and Administrative and Depreciation and Amortization is presented below.

![Expenditures as a Percentage of Revenue](image)

**Figure 5 - Expenditures as a Percentage of Revenue**

As detailed later in Core Component 2d, the University’s strategic plan is directly aligned to its Mission. We have four strategic Goals underlying our Mission: Quality, Student Success, Growth and Community. The University believes our Growth goals will be achieved through an uncompromising commitment by our Community to Quality and Student Success. By linking our budgets and plans to these goals, the University assures the allocation of resources supports its commitment to the Mission. Since the last Comprehensive Visit, this commitment is reflected in the numerous advancements to the quality of our educational programs.

The University has experienced consistent and sustainable growth in revenue and the number of courses taken by its students since the last Comprehensive Visit (data available in the physical resource room). The resulting financial strength of the University ensures adequate resources are available for our educational programs and maintaining and enhancing their quality in the future.
In addition to demonstrating consistent and sustainable growth in revenues, operating expenses have been appropriately managed to ensure strong earnings and cash flow growth. The University closely monitors its Earnings before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortization (“EBITDA”) with an eye toward both earnings and quality. This metric is generally accepted across all industries, and is a good indicator of the cash generated through earnings. The strong growth in EBITDA along with the relative growth in revenue and cash reserves is prime evidence of the University’s disciplined approach to expense control (data available in the physical resource room).

The University’s ability to generate strong earnings has ensured sufficient cash flow for investment in educational programs. Since the last Comprehensive Visit, growth and other strategic investments in the University have been funded organically. No dividends have been paid to shareholders. Cash generated by the institution has been used to service the University’s debt and continue its investment in educational programs through capital expenditures, which primarily consist of technology, curriculum development, and facilities for its academic and administrative team members (data available in the physical resource room).

Budgeting and planning processes ensure continuous assessment of the adequacy of the University’s resource base to support educational programs. Budgeting begins with discussions between academic and administrative leaders and the finance team to review proposed strategic action plans, including new programs or enhancements to existing programs. The leaders and the finance team collaborate to determine the necessary resources required to achieve the plan’s goals.

The budgeting process has been enhanced by having each leader complete a worksheet to capture resources required for each strategic plan action item (Strategic Action Plan Worksheet). Guidelines are followed for evaluating the overall benefit of each action plan, including assessment of strategic fit, cost, tangible and intangible impact(s), and difficulty to implement (Guidelines and Instructions document). Once these evaluations are complete, they are used to help facilitate functional budget justification discussions held by the President, Provost and Chief Financial Officer. For example, once the Board of Trustees approved pursuit of professional degrees in Psychology and Education (PsyD and EdS programs), two action plans were entered into the action plan inventory: 1. to complete the applications to the HLC; and 2. to launch the programs once HLC approval is received. The anticipated launches of these two programs were budgeted in 2012 as follows:
### Table 5 - Strategic Action Plan Budgeting Example

Proposed budgets and strategic action plan worksheets are analyzed with the President, Provost and the Chief Financial Officer, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the investment and educational value of each action plan. Opportunities for creating efficiencies and optimizing resource allocation and usage are discussed, and a budget for each department is established. The collaborative budgeting process across the leadership team creates a strong overall commitment to the execution of the strategic plan (2012 Action Plan Budget).

To maintain alignment with our value of Accountability, continuous assessment of strategic action plans and their associated budget is operationalized through a forecasting process that ensures resource allocation is re-examined each month and that strategic action plans, identified as priorities, are properly funded. Additionally, academic and administrative leaders participate in quarterly strategy reviews (Strategy Review Agendas; Strategy Review Updates to Board of Trustees) where progress on each strategic action plan is reported and constraints or additional resource requirements are identified. Once a strategic action plan is accomplished, it is integrated into normal operations, including ongoing budgets and assessment. It is then removed from the Strategic Action Plan Inventory.

In the Focused Visit – Progress Report submitted to the HLC at the end of 2011, the University provided strong responses to the following three questions regarding the effectiveness of our strategic plan process as they relate to supporting our educational programs.

1. How do academic programs drive planning and budgeting?
2. How does evaluation of learning drive planning and budgeting?
3. How is the goal of retention being met?

The University received a positive response to this report, and has continued to ensure the strategic planning process is effective in advancing our Mission. In examining our progress to date in 2012, we continue to execute against our strategic plan and budgeting processes and continue to complete key action items on-time and on-budget.

For example, in pursuit of our highest strategic priority, academic quality, we continue to make investments in salaried faculty. We reported that the University had grown to 25 salaried faculty members at the end of 2011 from nine at the end of 2009, and that we anticipated growing another 30% or more in 2012. As of July 18, 2012 the University has hired an additional 47

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan #</th>
<th>Action Plan</th>
<th>Operating Expense*</th>
<th>Capital Expense</th>
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<tr>
<td>3B1-e</td>
<td>Launch EdS program</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B1-f</td>
<td>Launch PsyD Program</td>
<td>$66,000</td>
<td>None</td>
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</table>

*Partial Year Incremental Expense Rounded to the Nearest Thousand
faculty, bringing total salaried faculty to 72. This increase in faculty is primarily related to initiatives described in Criterion 3 regarding the hiring of full-time, salaried faculty to teach foundations and dissertation courses.

We also shared that each school realigned faculty to ensure proper focus on improvement of existing curriculum and new program development. To support the University goals for quality and student success, enhancements continue to be made to the academic programs’ curricula with a particular focus on ensuring students graduate on time, achieving the appropriate outcomes. It was noted that in pursuit of these goals, approximately $330,000 was spent on curriculum development in 2011 and the University planned to invest at or above that level in 2012. As of June 30, 2012, the University has invested approximately $240,000 in curriculum development and anticipates investing at or above this level in the second half of 2012.

Also, as explained in the Progress Report, the University has continued to invest in the technology necessary to ensure it meets its strategic goals. Since 2009, approximately $4.3 million has been invested in technology development and infrastructure capital expenditures. In 2012, approximately $800,000 has been invested in technology associated with an enhanced student portal; a new student orientation; an updated course room; a virtual academic center; a learning outcome assessment module; enhancements to the enrollment and academic advising modules; and other enhancements to our student information systems. Many of these are still in development and are anticipated to be fully deployed during 2013.

The Progress Report updated the Commission on the academic program review (APR) process, discussed in detail in Criterion 3. In this report, we explained that one of the lessons learned from the Marriage and Family Therapy Program (MFT) APR was that more faculty hires were required to align better with student enrollment. Based on our estimates at the time of the report we assumed we would need to add three MFT faculty members in 2012. As of July 18, 2012 we have added four faculty members and are appropriately aligned with our growing student enrollment.

The progress report also detailed Northcentral’s approach to its goal of improving retention through enhancing the enrollment process, enabling and supporting on time program completion, enhancing academic engagement and curricular quality with particular focus on the first three courses, and improving the overall student experience.

Northcentral has continued its expansion of retention and completion-related activities, exemplified by three key initiatives. NCU has completed its interactive, web-based, new student orientation. This orientation, described in Criterion 2a above, provides an interactive tour of the student portal, library, and writing center, and instructs new students on methods for engaging with faculty and fellow students. This orientation is presented to all new students, and remains available as a resource throughout each student’s program. In 2011 an “Early Warning System” was developed to systematically identify key touch points and events that could place students at-risk of progressing successfully in their program, and provide alerts to academic advisors to reach out to those students and assist them.
Finally, the Early Warning System mentioned above has now been supplemented with an advanced reporting system that gives academic advisors insight into their students’ academic progress at all times. This “Student Portfolio Report” gives comprehensive visibility into student success and academic risk, and prioritizes students, helping academic advisors prioritize their contacts to students. Using this report, academic advisors are tracking not only risks, but also student successes, so that students can be congratulated for their accomplishments as they progress through their programs.

The average monthly attrition rate year-to-date is 3.6% for 2012 as compared to 4.1% for 2011. Further, if you look at net attrition, which represents the students who leave the University each month less the students who re-enter the University in that month (within 180 days of their withdrawal), the monthly net attrition rate year-to-date is 3.1% as compared to 3.7% for 2011.

Core Component 2c

The organization’s ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provides reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.

Since the HLC’s last Comprehensive Visit in 2008, Northcentral’s overriding strategic goal of continuous academic quality improvement has led to the launch of a major Academic Program Review (APR) initiative. This effort has been led by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning (now the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research), in collaboration with the Office of the Provost and Deans. The first steps toward adopting an effective, standard methodology were to look outward for the most up-to-date thinking on best practices and models for outcomes-based assessment, implement a pilot of this process, and then improve the institution’s APR. This research and review yielded the fundamental design principles that serve as the foundation of Northcentral’s APR approach: strong linkage from the University’s Mission all the way through course activities and learning outcomes (Curriculum Maps). Moreover, at the time of this report, and as a function of our learning through the APR process, the University is migrating its current manual mapping process to an automated, system-enabled, course-based assessment tool that will provide the institution with the ability to more efficiently collect and better report on learning outcomes mastery (see Specifications for Automated Learning Outcomes Assessment).

Academic Program Review

Discussed in detail in Criterion Three, the institution’s investment of $130,000 has resulted in continuous APR process improvements:

- Completed curriculum mapping to enable evaluation of academic programs
- A clarified APR process resulting in the development of an APR template that improves the assessment of outcomes in each school and requires articulation of action items including curriculum changes, personnel, and resource allocation
- Systematic and planned schedule for APR completion (Assessment Plan).
APR Process Timeline
The current Academic Program Review cycle is University-wide and is based on capturing baseline measures new Assessment process.

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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Gather Data</td>
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<td>Schools Submit Draft to OAIR</td>
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<td>Schools and OAIR Revise</td>
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<td>Action Items Agreed Upon and Implementation Begins</td>
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<td><strong>Next Cycle – Staggered Evaluations</strong></td>
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<td>Determine Review Priorities</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Launch Next Cycle (see above)</td>
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<td><strong>Ongoing Cycles</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 - APR Process Timeline

Current APR Cycles: SoE Review Cycle; SoBTM Review Cycle; SBHS Review Cycle; MFT Review Cycle

Center for Faculty Excellence
The Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE) plays a key role in supporting the University’s strategic goal to continuously elevate our academic quality and outcomes. The CFE supports academic departments by facilitating the hiring, preparation, evaluation, and training of faculty and supports individual faculty members with guidance and information for improving their teaching skills. Faculty are surveyed for their ideas on training and evaluation (Survey Results). These results are used to inform and modify current CFE practices and have also spurred the creation of a newsletter, Excellent News, which highlights University resources, best practices, teaching tips, and more (Excellent News; Academic Reorganization 2011).

Faculty Performance Appraisal
By directing the Performance Appraisal Process, maintaining monthly and weekly records and detailed reports on faculty activities, including professional development activities, continually improving Faculty Mentor Development (FMD) courses, and solving problems for faculty and schools, the Center for Faculty Excellence ensures excellence in teaching.

Non-Salaried Faculty - The Performance Appraisal process begins once a new non-salaried faculty member has successfully completed initial training and has taught for at
least 30 days if teaching an eight-week course and 90 days if teaching only 12-week courses. Non-salaried faculty are reviewed by an Associate Director of Accountability using the Faculty Appraisal process (Faculty Self-Assessment Form). Non-salaried faculty who fail to earn a satisfactory rating are restricted from taking on new students and given a Guided Action Plan (Review Form and GAP template), which may include a “Do Not Assign” (DNA) designation, that specifies what needs to improve and specifies a date by which the outcomes must be met. This provides an opportunity for coaching and an opportunity for non-salaried faculty members to improve their teaching skills. Non-salaried faculty members who do not improve during a GAP are released from their contract. This standardized review process ensures that all non-salaried faculty members are being given adequate support and that the appropriate actions are taken when necessary.

![2011 Northcentral University Yearly Reviews](image)

**Figure 6 - 2011 Faculty Review Outcomes**

**Salaried Faculty** - Salaried faculty are reviewed annually. During this evaluation, faculty complete a self-evaluation that is submitted to their direct supervisor (dean or program chair) (Self Evaluation Form). The supervisor then completes a formal review (Annual Review Form) and comments on the self-evaluation. The annual review process offers an opportunity to discuss successes and create new goals for the next year. By examining results and setting goals, faculty members are able to improve execution of their responsibilities and positively influence their effectiveness. Completed self-evaluations and full annual reviews are kept in files in the HR department. While the formal process is an annual review, faculty receive regular feedback from their dean or department chair through regular, often weekly, discussions.

**Financial Assessments**

Finance and accounting are an integral part of the execution of the strategic plan. Continual review and improvement of systems, processes, and procedures in these areas are instrumental in ensuring that the University has the knowledge and capability of implementing action plans designated as those most important in achieving strategic goals. The University conducts internal and external audits, including audits of federal financial aid programs, in order to ensure the
strength of its internal controls and compliance with regulations. See Criterion 1, Core Component 1e for details.

Financial Statement Analysis
The finance team prepares and analyzes a multitude of financial data on a monthly basis and presents these analyses to the Board of Trustees, President, and academic and administrative leaders. Comparisons to prior year data, approved budgets and current forecasts is performed and variances are scrutinized to ensure the institution is meeting its financial goals and to ascertain whether there are indicators of negative trends that may need to be addressed. Financial health is examined through ratio analysis and aids in the University’s ability to revise current year plans, as necessary, to align with changing needs in meeting strategic goals.

External Reporting
The University Controller monitors all proposed and implemented changes to accounting standards and principles and assesses their impact on the University. There is currently one proposed change to accounting standards that the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) is considering that will affect the accounting presentation of the financial statements for the University. All operating leases will be treated as capital leases. Although the University will change its accounting for operating leases under this standard, it is not expected to have a material effect on its financial position. The property leases for Prescott Valley and Scottsdale will be recorded as liabilities on the University’s balance sheet and will be amortized over the life of the leases. There will be no effect on operating results.

Core Component 2d
All levels of planning align with the organization’s mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

University planning and budgeting is informed by its strategic planning process in which the Mission is first translated to goals:
MISSION

Northcentral University educates professionals throughout the world and provides an accessible opportunity to earn an *U.S. regionally accredited* degree.

Northcentral mentors students One-to-One with *highly credentialed faculty* via advanced delivery modalities.

Northcentral commits to helping *students achieve academically and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions.*

Northcentral University *educates professionals throughout the world* . . .

GOAL

*Quality*: Continuously elevate our academic quality and outcomes

*Student Success*: Achieve the highest standard of student success through our values

*Growth*: Achieve efficient growth by meeting demand from professionals throughout the world who will benefit from a Northcentral degree

*Community*: Build and maintain excellent relationships with our students, team members, partners, governance bodies, and other stakeholders

**Table 7 - Northcentral University Mission Cascades to our Strategic Goals**

These four Goals are then linked to fifteen underlying strategies. As discussed in Core Component 2b, leadership of the University continually weighs all proposed initiatives against these strategies to ensure priorities are properly set and resources are allocated accordingly. By linking all initiatives to our strategies in this manner, the University is able to ensure full alignment with our Mission, thereby increasing our capacity to fulfill our Mission. Through the annual budgeting process, initiatives are approved by executive leadership, and ultimately approved by the Board of Trustees. All proposed initiatives and their linkage to our strategies and goals are reviewed carefully prior to approval. Once initiatives are approved, they become strategic action plans. To ensure continual assessment, these strategic action plans are reviewed quarterly by the Senior Leadership Team. It is through this process that the University ensures a constant focus on achieving its Mission. The following table represents an example of the linkage of strategic actions plans to our strategies and goals as of the second quarter of 2012.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOALS</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
<th>STRATEGIC ACTION PLANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Quality:** Continuously Elevate our Academic Quality and Outcomes | Continuously measure and improve outcomes of our programs | • Conduct retrospective APR (2008 - 2010) at the program level in each School. Initiate regular schedule of APR going forward  
• Implement Learning Outcomes Assessment at the course level (signature assignments and Capstone projects) |
| | Ensure accountability for results | |
| | Earn new and maintain current accreditations | • Apply for accreditation of the MFT Master’s program by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE)  
• Obtain School Superintendent and School Principal accreditation for State of Arizona  
• Go forward with Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) accreditation process, ultimately leading to Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) accreditation |
| **Student Success:** Achieve the Highest Standards of Student Success through our Values | Continuously improve our students' experiences | • Improve the Student Portal  
• Improve student entry experience by developing and implementing an online orientation presentation  
• Conduct 2011 Priorities Survey of Online Learners (PSOL), analyze and assess results  
• Regularly summarize and communicate student withdrawal reasons  
• Ensure all student concerns regarding service issues are captured, reported, and effectively addressed |
| | Provide unprecedented access via advanced delivery modalities | • Increased use of technologies to improve delivery, for example virtual academic center  
• Curriculum revision related to Applied Experiential Learning |

Table 8 - Strategies and Action Plans Link to our Goals
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOALS</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
<th>STRATEGIC ACTION PLANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Student Success: Achieve the Highest Standards of Student Success through our Values (cont’d) | Mentor students One-to-One with highly credentialed faculty who are accountable for quality student interaction and outcomes | • Revise first two to three foundations courses in all Schools and programs according to best practices for student engagement and retention, reduction of content fatigue, and establishing skills for ongoing academic success  
• Establish an effective dissertation chair process in the Graduate School, including hiring of full-time faculty  
• Migrate to salaried faculty for Foundations Courses by vetting course load standards, and hiring and managing against them  
• Develop expectations, training, and support for improved student feedback |
| Growth: Achieve Efficient Growth by Meeting Demand from Professionals throughout the World Who Will Benefit from a Northcentral Degree | Build our brand | • Clearly define and articulate the Key Brand differentiators within all 3 schools and the University as a whole  
• Benchmark studies. |
| Develop quality academic programs with high demand and strong outcomes | • Design and implement development process for relevant and innovative programs  
• Launch new SoE program and specializations  
• Launch EdS program.  
• Launch PsyD Program  
• Establish a 3-year academic program development roadmap  
• Conduct MFT Licensure Study  
• Establish and implement 30 to 90-day roll out plan for the Rio Salado Bachelor’s Degree Completion Program. |
| Establish New Market Channels and Build Existing Market Channels | • Expand organic web site traffic  
• Develop and execute co-marketing plan for Rio Salado Bachelor’s completion program. |

*Table 8 - Strategies and Action Plans Link to our Goals (cont’d)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOALS</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
<th>STRATEGIC ACTION PLANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build Scalable Technology Platform</td>
<td>• Complete planned enhancements to Student Information System&lt;br&gt;• Design and implement Business Continuity/Disaster Recovery Solution.&lt;br&gt;• Conduct a comprehensive IT security assessment&lt;br&gt;• Implement Compliance Office Module Enhancement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth: Achieve Efficient Growth by Meeting Demand from Professionals throughout the World Who Will Benefit from a Northcentral Degree (cont’d)</td>
<td>Achieve Industry Leading Financial Performance</td>
<td>• Create business intelligence dashboard for University-wide KPI's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community: Build and Maintain Excellent Relationships with our Students, Team Members, Partners, Governance Bodies, and other Stakeholders</td>
<td>Build and Maintain a Highly Engaged University Team that is Passionate about its Mission&lt;br&gt;Cultivate Excellent Relationships with Students&lt;br&gt;Meet and Exceed Partners’ and Stakeholders’ Expectations&lt;br&gt;Continuously Improve Reputation with all Constituencies</td>
<td>• Develop formal team member on-boarding experience.&lt;br&gt;• Develop Performance Management standards and process, and career pathing for each department&lt;br&gt;• Redefine and improve the Ambassador Program&lt;br&gt;• Accomplish strategic plan action items and achieve budgetary goals.&lt;br&gt;• Enhance communication with all constituents via newsletters (Higher Degrees, Excellent News, VERITAS) and webinars.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 - Strategies and Action Plans Link to our Goals (cont’d)

The following diagram further illustrates how academic and financial assessment, budgeting, and strategy management processes are fully integrated, with consistent evaluation and oversight by the Board of Trustees, President (CEO), Executive Leadership Team, and Senior Leadership Team:
Figure 7 - Integrated Assessment, Budgeting, and Strategy Management Processes
Summary

Northcentral engages in strategic planning and budgeting processes that are mapped directly to our Mission and are responsive to the needs and investments defined by academics. The capacity to invest is driven by the sustained and consistent financial growth achieved since the last Comprehensive Visit. Our strategic planning process is forward-looking and takes into account environmental scans and assessments of academic quality and institutional effectiveness.

Strengths

1. We have an integrated planning and budgeting model that aligns our Mission all the way through strategic action planning and assessment.
2. We have annual and quarterly strategy reviews, annual budgeting, and monthly forecasting designed to support action plans, resolve obstacles and provide additional resources as needed.
3. We have a collaborative budgeting process informed by functional leaders.

Self-Recommendations for Progress Towards Continuous Improvement

1. Develop more systematic financial and economic environmental scanning and analyses.
2. Drive strategic alignment to the individual team member level through translation of strategic goals into individual performance goals and reviews.
3. Build on established team communications by ensuring feedback from team members is gathered and regularly shared with Senior Leadership.
CRITERION THREE: STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING

The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

Overview

Student learning and effective teaching are a core focus in all that we do at Northcentral University. As seen in our institutional strategic goals, our first goal is to “Elevate our academic quality and outcomes.” Our second strategic goal is to “Achieve the highest standards of student success through our values.” These goals drive our academic and administrative efforts on a continual basis and directly support the Northcentral University Mission and Vision.

In keeping with these goals and the University Mission and Vision, this criterion report is focused on demonstrating our approach to student learning and effective teaching. Specifically, we clarify what students are expected to learn, achieve, and provide evidence of how we assess that learning. We hire, train, and support a well-qualified faculty and regularly evaluate their effectiveness. We have a rich learning environment and our courses and processes work efficiently to help students learn and achieve what is needed within their programs of study. Just as important, we provide the needed support services to foster success in student achievement of expected outcomes.

Core Component 3a

The organization’s goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.

At Northcentral University, as we have matured as an institution, we have established and refined the tools, processes, personnel, and training needed to facilitate effective assessment. This is an ongoing task at any institution, and is an integral part of our continuous improvement model. Since the last Comprehensive Visit, we have been working to establish a culture of assessment. We have developed curriculum maps to clarify outcomes and ensure alignment between the University mission statement down through each School, degree program, course, and activity. We have instituted an Academic Program Review (APR) process by researching, pilot testing, refining, and then implementing the APR methodology across all Northcentral degree programs. We have worked extensively to assess degree programs in order to pursue key programmatic accreditations. Consistent with the need for ongoing improvement, we are actively working on our next steps of refining and creating automated rubrics, establishing benchmarks, and improving the sophistication of our APR process in order to clarify what is working and better inform change. Our work with rubrics, and assessment work in general, will be facilitated by the assessment tool project that is currently underway and nearing completion. Each of these efforts is explained in further detail below.

Culture of Assessment

Over the past five years, we have experienced a significant shift in our culture at Northcentral relating to our awareness of and broad participation in assessment. Up until mid-2007, we had
only one full-time team member whose primary focus was assessment (the Director of Institutional Research). At that time, a new Director was hired who quickly formed a team and organized a new department called the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning (OIERP). This was a particularly salient change because the new Director of OIERP was purposeful about creating a vision of shared responsibility for assessment and program review throughout the institution. The OIERP team began meeting with leaders of schools and programs, as well as senior academic leadership (the President and Provost) and the Academic Affairs Committee. They also started working with key administrators and with the IT team in order to request technical assistance in data collection and data management as needed for assessment purposes. Throughout 2008 and into 2009, they laid the groundwork for development of an institutional approach for program review and assessment.

By late 2009, the OIERP team had completed a review of best practices in academic program assessment and presented an initial plan for pilot testing an aggregated process that stemmed from the review. A pilot test began with the Master’s level Marriage and Family Therapy program. This Academic Program Review (APR) pilot resulted in many meetings with Deans, the Academic Affairs Committee, and administrative leadership during 2010 and into 2011. Over time, the process was refined and launched as an institution-wide APR process in late 2011. Since that time, the Northcentral community has been socialized to the importance and process of assessment through webinars, newsletters, and participation in the APR process. At present, as a function of working to complete the APRs, faculty in all programs have now participated in curriculum mapping and worked to clarify and refine each program’s focus from general goal statements to measurable outcomes. Faculty throughout the institution understand the importance of connection and alignment between course activities, course learning outcomes, program learning outcomes, school missions, and the NCU Mission. As a community, our understanding of assessment as a continuous process and not a point-in-time event has matured over time.

Additionally, to support the cultural shift and pervasiveness of assessment throughout the institution, the following has occurred since the last Comprehensive Visit:

- The Data Operations team was formed to facilitate data integrity, access, aggregation, and reporting. To facilitate interaction with Data Operations, a template was designed to clarify the needs, uses, and parameters of new reporting projects (see the Assessment Request Template).
- Each school has been involved in various artifact assessment projects (SoE; SBHS; SoBTM).
- The OIERP was converted to the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research (OAIR).
- Program faculty are revising and creating new rubrics (e.g. sample rubric for MFT program) to facilitate more sophisticated assessment of learning outcomes.
- As our focus on assessment has grown over time, we have realized we can benefit from a systematic way of deploying rubrics for data collection and assessment (described in more detail later in this criterion report). We are currently developing a web-based automated Assessment Tool.

As a result of these efforts across the past five years, assessment is part of common discussion throughout academics and the institution as a whole. Assessment is part of what we all do on an
ongoing basis to demonstrate what is working, learn from what is not, and collaborate for continuous improvement.

Curriculum Mapping

We have established and clearly stated our expected learning outcomes in the Catalog and course syllabi. Course activities, course outcomes, and program outcomes have been designed and reviewed to ensure alignment. Program learning outcomes (PLOs) for each degree program at the University are clearly stated in the NCU Catalog. These outcomes describe what students will know and be able to do upon completing their program of study, and are aligned to professional expectations for graduates in their field. To accomplish these PLOs, the curriculum for each program has been designed and developed to be consistent with best practices of each discipline and level of study.

Figure 8 - Relationship between Assessment Levels

The “right” angle illustrates the relationship between levels and can be further defined as:

- Level 1: School mission mapped to University mission
- Level 2: School goals mapped to school mission
- Level 3: Program/specialization goals mapped to school goals
- Level 4: CLO’s mapped to program/specialization goals
- Level 5: Course Activities mapped to CLO’s

Beyond the program level, learning outcomes are established for each course and course activities are designed to help students learn what is needed and achieve the stated course learning outcomes (CLOs). These CLOs, and the learning activities and assignments required to achieve each one, are clearly stated in the course syllabi (see below for sample course information page).
Example: Course Information

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<tr>
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<table>
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<td>This doctoral level course introduces learners to theories of comparative education, cross-national comparative analysis, global educational transfer and borrowing, and the relation between culture and education. Through this course, learners will begin to develop the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to be effective educators of global and comparative education. Students will understand the commonalities, differences, and connections between global and comparative education, and the meaning and significance of globalization in the field of education. Learners will comprehend, through reading and class assignments, the global dimensions of several crucial contemporary issues, including the hopes of global cooperation, and the complexity of educational accountability, authority, and professionalism. This course will underline the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to understanding these complex issues.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

| Number of Activities: 8 |

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Analyze the theories of comparative education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Assess the value of comparative education in multicultural contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Apply comparative analyses of international education systems in a professional setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Apply various instruments/tools used in global education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Evaluate the benefits of global educational transfer and borrowing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Synthesize the various elements of culture and education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Evaluate present education practices using the global and comparative education theories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Concepts:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Comparative education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Global education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cross-national comparative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Global educational transfer and borrowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Culture and education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Tools and instruments used in global education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Applied comparative analyses of international education systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rigor and performance level expectations for CLOs are established using Bloom’s Taxonomy, which in turn informs the design of related course activities used for learning outcomes assessment measurements. Specifically, Taxonomy is used to guide the development
of learning outcomes at each degree level to ensure that courses offered at each level are distinctly different as follows:

- **Doctoral level courses** (7000 level course numbers and above)—the majority of CLOs are designed using Bloom’s two highest levels (synthesis and evaluation)
- **Master’s level courses** (5000-6000 level course numbers)—the majority of CLOs are designed using Bloom’s levels 3, 4, and 5, (application, analysis, and synthesis) with some level 6 outcomes (evaluation)
- **Bachelor’s level courses** (1000-4000 level course numbers)—the majority of CLOs are designed using a mix of levels 1 and 2 (knowledge and comprehension) and higher-level CLOs (some level 3-6 outcomes) to scaffold foundational knowledge.

### Resources and Content Delivery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bloom’s Taxonomy</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Synthesis</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 9 - Course Outcomes Align with Bloom's Taxonomy**

Northcentral University is committed to using Bloom’s Taxonomy with regards to student learning outcomes. Our undergraduate courses contain learning outcomes aligned across all levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, while our graduate courses contain more learning outcomes aligned with higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy.

The development of program and course level learning outcomes allows for learning outcomes to be assessed and analyzed for program review purposes. In order to clarify the connection from activities to Mission, an extensive curriculum mapping initiative was piloted in 2009-10 and implemented across the University in 2011-12 as part of the Academic Program Review (APR) process. This detailed course, program, and school-level outcomes alignment with each other, as well as with Northcentral’s Mission.

Below is an example for the course PSY5101: *Foundations for Graduate Study in Psychology* (MA program). Every course has been mapped from the individual activity to the University Mission. The example below maps course level outcomes to program learning outcomes; all other levels are detailed in the Curriculum Mapping Reports.
## Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

### Course Names and Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course # and CLO #</th>
<th>Course Names and Learning Outcomes (CLOs)</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Critical Thinking</th>
<th>Personal and Professional Application</th>
<th>Ethics and Diversity</th>
<th>Information Literacy and Communication</th>
<th>Critical and Appraise Information Sources</th>
<th>Practice Scholarly Communication Skills in Print and Electronic Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSY5101</td>
<td>Foundations for Graduate Study in Psychology</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLO1</td>
<td>Examine career and academic goals</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLO2</td>
<td>Evaluate a personal time management plan</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLO3</td>
<td>Consider appropriate resources for research and writing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLO4</td>
<td>Prepare and revise assignments that integrate and utilize the Northcentral University Grading Rubric</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLO5</td>
<td>Prepare, evaluate, and revise writing according to Northcentral University’s Academic Integrity Policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLO6</td>
<td>Appraise personal learning skills</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLO7</td>
<td>Construct a mind map utilizing brainstorming skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLO8</td>
<td>Utilize critical thinking skills to analyze controversial issues in psychology</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLO9</td>
<td>Prepare and evaluate writing according to APA form and style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLO10</td>
<td>Critique peer reviewed research</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 10 - Example of Course Outcomes Mapped to Program Learning Outcomes**
Academic Program Review

The Academic Program Preview (APR) process has been established since the last Comprehensive Visit to effectively assess our programs and courses as described in the 2010 HLC Focused Visit Progress Report. The APR process involves a thorough review of each program and results in detailing Program Action Items, which are then implemented to improve program efficacy. The APR process will follow a 3-5 year cycle during which Program Action Items are implemented and then programs are comprehensively reassessed with attention to completion.

The Academic Program Review (APR) process is the primary mechanism for assessing NCU student learning outcomes for each program and includes a Self-Assessment Report and a list of Action Items. Upon completion of these reports, program and institutional team members’ work collaboratively to complete the action items identified through the process. The specific components of the Self-Assessment Report include:

- Description of the degree program
- Summary profile of all students in the program (demographic characteristics)
- Review of degree program goals
- Review of current strategic initiatives in the degree program
- Status of any relevant programmatic accreditation or licensing
- Comparison between the program and any peer or aspirational peer programs at other institutions
- Assessment of course level and program level student learning outcomes (CLOs and PLOs)
- Review of program level direct performance indicators (e.g., program enrollment, retention, and completion rates)
- Aggregated reports of student assignment scores and grades
- Review of indirect indicators relating to the program (e.g., student satisfaction survey, post-course survey, and graduate satisfaction survey results)
- Review of faculty teaching in the program (e.g., faculty credentials and qualifications, continuing professional development, workload levels)

The Action Item list for an individual program includes:

- Proposed corrective steps
- Expected timeline and academic resources needed
- Expected resources outside of the academic program
- Anticipated costs
- Expected deliverables

Currently, all programs are in the implementation stage and we are identifying common initiatives across multiple programs that can be added to the Strategic Plan. Some examples of how implementing action items have resulted in positive programmatic change are listed below.
**MA Program in Marriage and Family Therapy (MA MFT)**

One of the Action Items resulting from the APR in the MA MFT program was to “Increase awareness of state licensure requirements and facilitate successful attainment of MFT licensure by program graduates.” To this end, two major initiatives have been completed. First, an updated MFT Program website that includes a full section on “Seeking Licensure” in MFT was developed and launched. Licensure profiles for 10 states in the U.S. have been developed and profiles are being developed for each of the remaining 40 states, Washington, D.C., and any foreign locations where MFT licensure is possible. Secondly, we have established a service called “Ask a Licensure Question.” The service includes a specific email address to submit licensure questions and is available to our students, prospective students, and alumni. A member of the MFT faculty, Dr. Chuck West, receives and responds to these emails. He is the current Past President of the Association of MFT Regulatory Boards and is highly qualified to respond to questions about the state level MFT licensure processes throughout the U.S. Taken together, these changes in our support services represent purposeful improvements to the program identified through our APR process.

**MA Program in Psychology (MA Psy)**

One Action Item from the APR completed for the MA PSY program was development of a capstone course. A capstone course serves as a milestone for students, allowing them to reflect on their program of study and how program goals were met. It also serves as an assessment point, because previously the “last course” for MA students varied. This course has been developed (Sample MA Capstone Course PSY6105-8) and it culminates in a paper on a subject of interest to the student that also allows for the assessment of program goals.

**Master in Business Administration Program (MBA)**

In the APR for the MBA program, the curriculum mapping process helped faculty to identify that, while respect for diversity is a goal of the program, not all courses included supporting course learning outcomes or activities. As an Action Item, faculty have re-examined all courses and identified appropriate learning outcomes that specifically address diversity; they are now in the process of revising the curriculum.

**Bachelor in Education (BEd)**

One Action Item from the APR for the BEd program was to obtain program approval from the State of Arizona Department of Education for the BEd pathway to teacher certification. State program approval allows students to obtain teacher certification in the areas of elementary, secondary, or special education and complete a degree program preparing teacher candidates with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be competent, effective, and reflective individuals in varied educational settings. This Action Item has now been completed. The steps to completion included: complete revisions suggested by Arizona Department of Education; create courses to align with 3 specializations; and complete a curriculum mapping process to include InTASCcore teaching standards and content standards (CEC, NETS) (InTASCore Outcomes Mapping Report).
Programmatic Accreditations

Pursuing specific programmatic accreditations has facilitated success in clarifying and assessing student learning outcomes. Much like this self-study for reaffirmation of HLC Accreditation, pursuing and maintaining programmatic accreditations requires ongoing and extensive review of program structures, outcomes, and assessment methods. In addition to clarifying and evaluating alignment between course and program level outcomes and school and institutional mission statements, programmatic accreditations require alignment with standards of the professions the programs are designed to meet ensuring that student learning is applicable in their chosen fields.

- The Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) program faculty applied for accreditation of the MA level MFT program with the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) in May 2011. Additional program refinements were completed and reported to the COAMFTE in November of 2011. The COAMFTE sent a site-visit team to review the MA MFT program in May 2012, and we expect to receive an accreditation decision winter 2012. This accreditation process required clarification of student learning outcomes and benchmark results showing that the learning outcomes are being met. All documents and results of the assessment processes needed for this application for accreditation are available in the COAMFTE documents.

- The School of Education is seeking accreditation from the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). TEAC accredits professional education programs in which there is evidence that the graduates are competent, caring, and qualified. As of July 1, 2011, the School of Education achieved TEAC candidacy status, and is currently working to achieve accreditation of the Master’s degree program. The Inquiry Brief Proposal was submitted in May 2012 and a site visit is tentatively scheduled for December 2012.

- The School of Business and Technology Management received accreditation in 2007 from the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), for the Bachelor of Business Administration, Master of Business Administration, Doctor of Business Administration and Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration in the School of Business and Technology Management. Since the initial accreditation, the School of Business and Technology Management has presented a Quality Assurance Report to ACBSP, which was accepted and approved in 2009 and 2011. The next Quality Assurance Report will be submitted in 2013.

These programmatic accreditation efforts extend our institutional assessment process to the specific field of study for each related degree.

Next Steps: Rubrics, Benchmarks, and the Assessment Tool

In addition to our current manual processes of establishing and assessing student learning outcomes, we are developing automated tools and procedures for clarifying and assessing student outcomes in each program. Our “Assessment Tool” project is the result of an interdisciplinary team of academics and information technology developers who have worked collaboratively to
create Internet-based tools that will be used to assess student learning outcomes across programs. The creation of the Assessment Tool will involve the development of activity, course, and program level rubrics, which will be used to evaluate achievement of expected outcomes. This tool is being designed for institutional use and illustrates continuous improvement in assessment through innovation and automation that will facilitate effective assessment of student learning outcomes in a scalable way across the University (Specifications for Automated Learning Outcomes Assessment).

Designed to integrate with the learning management system and utilizing rubrics, the Assessment Tool will allow us to collect data on all levels demonstrated in the curriculum mapping project presented earlier in this Criterion.

As the rubrics are refined for each program and deployed through the Assessment Tool, we will be able to collect, aggregate and report detailed learning outcome results at the activity, course, and program levels. We will set benchmarks for degree programs as needed to renew and improve our programs into the future.

Since the last Comprehensive Visit we have made demonstrable strides in assessment. We have established and published learning outcomes in each academic program that are clear and appropriate for the level of learning and have established a culture of assessment. Our curriculum mapping, APR process, and efforts to pursue and maintain programmatic accreditations comprise a track record of success, innovation, and continuous improvement relating to this core component. We continue to move forward through development of an automated Assessment Tool, more refined rubrics, and benchmarks that will set the stage for further improvement. By these means, we have and will continue to ensure that each program is successful in achieving the stated learning outcomes.

**Core Component 3b**

*The organization values and supports effective teaching.*

At Northcentral University, we recognize the importance of effective teaching in providing a quality education. All faculty are appropriately credentialed for the level they teach (see Faculty Credential and Professional Development Report in the physical resource room), with appropriate experience. The institution has adopted a higher standard than required and is moving to 100% doctoral faculty. All courses started after June 26, 2012 are taught by doctoral faculty. As of September 17, all faculty will hold doctoral degrees. We provide training, budgetary support, and opportunities for ongoing professional development. Training focuses on both online andragogical and disciplinary and discipline specific professional development. We conduct periodic reviews and audits to evaluate faculty performance and support continuous improvement. We have established organizational and governance structures and we engage faculty members through multiple means of communication and collaboration. We have established the Center for Faculty Excellence in order to provide support services and training for faculty members. Finally, we have enhanced our teaching model to include the roles of full-time Foundations faculty and dissertation chairs in order to provide focused support for new
students and for doctoral students during the dissertation process. Each of these topics is described in further detail below.

**Faculty Qualifications**

Northcentral University follows the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) “Guidance on Determining Qualified Faculty” in recruiting, hiring, and developing members (Faculty and their Qualifications Policy). As a distance-based university, we are not limited by geographic restrictions and we are able to hire a diverse faculty of active practitioners from throughout the U.S. and around the world. This affords a rich learning environment for our students and benefits the development, revision, and teaching of our courses.

Most Northcentral faculty members have completed their program of study at a regionally accredited institution of higher education in the discipline in which they will teach or develop curricula. Deans may seek exceptions from the Provost to the requirement of a regionally accredited institution for highly credentialed international faculty. Dissertation chairs may chair doctoral dissertation committees across disciplinary areas after being deemed qualified by the Dean of the Graduate School. Deans must ensure that faculty members also meet criteria established by accrediting bodies for programs particular to their schools.

At Northcentral, we use a long established educational model focusing on a One-to-One student to faculty relationship for each course. This model is commonly referred to as the Oxford Model (Distance Education at Northcentral). Northcentral faculty members teach through the individualized, substantive feedback they give to students on their work (Teaching through Feedback). They also develop relationships with students in which they engage, motivate, and welcome students into a community of scholars and professionals.

Effective teaching is part of the Northcentral University culture. Faculty members at Northcentral, to varying degrees, teach; provide leadership for courses and programs; assist in the development and design of new programs; and provide support for students (Academic Organizational Chart; faculty position descriptions). Northcentral is committed to having highly-credentialed faculty, which includes salaried and non-salaried. Related to this, based on a U.S. News and World Report study, we were recognized as one of the top ten business and education programs for “faculty credentials and training” in the United States (psychology and marriage and family therapy programs were not rated). Curriculum vitae for each member of the faculty are available in the physical resource room.

Course development occurs through collaboration between faculty who serve as Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), School Curriculum Directors who are responsible for oversight of curriculum in each degree program, and qualified team members who work within our Instructional Design Team (see the Course Development Guidelines for more information). Schools select SME candidates from among experienced faculty who have a track record of quality work and appropriate subject matter expertise. Beyond course development, SMEs and full-time faculty work with the Instructional Designers to keep the courses current following a regular revision schedule. To ensure that course developers are current in their specializations and knowledge of
curriculum design, School Curriculum Directors are encouraged to attend at least one professional development workshop, seminar, or professional organization conference or convention annually (Faculty Professional Development Policy).

To ensure that faculty members are current in their fields and skills, Northcentral requires teaching faculty to engage in at least one outside professional development activity and take one FMD (Faculty Mentor Development) course every year (Faculty Handbook). Faculty compliance with this requirement is verified during yearly performance reviews (see Faculty Credentials and Professional Development Report in the physical resource room). Those faculty members, who are out of compliance, may not be assigned new students and teaching responsibilities until they have met these requirements.

To ensure that Dissertation Chairs are qualified to chair Committees, the Graduate School hires faculty members who have:

- A terminal degree determined by the discipline (dissertation chair faculty may chair doctoral dissertation committees across disciplinary areas after being deemed qualified by the Dean of the Graduate School)
- Successfully completed a dissertation from a regionally accredited institution
- A demonstrated record of research and/or doctoral level teaching appropriate to the program and degree specialization
- A record of publications in peer reviewed or scholarly journals or books, edited or otherwise

To ensure that Dissertation Committee Members are qualified to serve on Committees, the Graduate School oversees a training program and assigns faculty to committees based on their terminal degree and specialization.

Professional Development

In order to support effective teaching, Northcentral maintains multiple services and resources to facilitate ongoing professional development. This includes internal training and budgetary support for external professional development, research, and publication or presentation of scholarly work. Since 2009, the University has committed a minimum budget of $200,000 per annum in professional development resources.

Faculty Orientation Training

All new faculty complete FMD5000, which orients them to NCU, our policy and procedures, and Compass, our online course platform. New faculty hired by the Graduate School to chair dissertations complete additional training. Faculty who serve as (non-chair) doctoral committee members also receive specialized training. Full-time (salaried faculty) teaching Foundations Courses receive specialized training in teaching these courses.
Dissertation Chair Training

The training regimen for faculty who are assigned to guide students through the dissertation process has been refined multiple times over the past five years based on feedback from faculty taking the course as well as faculty who were reviewing Dissertation Milestone documents. Most recently revised by the Graduate School, the Dissertation Chair Management Training is required for all new faculty members who will direct student work in the dissertation sequence. This course addresses a wide range of topics that are required to successfully perform the duties associated with being an effective dissertation chair.

Learning outcomes in this course require that new faculty must be knowledgeable about the Dissertation Tracking System (DTS), policies that relate to the dissertation process, and the role of the Graduate School and Research Specialists. They must be skilled in identifying and evaluating the core components associated with the different sections of a dissertation, familiar with the various research approaches and methods most commonly used by students, and must be capable of responding to the most frequent stumbling blocks students encounter while progressing through the dissertation process.

Activities conducted by faculty enrolled in this training course ensure that new dissertation chairs become familiar with the dissertation process, the Dissertation Tracking System (DTS), the Graduate School, and the resources available through the Dissertation Center. They also review common research approaches and methods used by students and must be able to identify the defining characteristics of each and the resources available. They must demonstrate awareness of common mistakes associated with developing research questions, choosing an approach, and selecting data collection techniques. The course also includes learning about strategies and resources to better respond to student needs.

This course and its revisions is an example of our strategic goal of “elevating our academic programs” and “improving the student experience” through the quality guidance students receive while they conduct their dissertation research. Upon completion of this course, new faculty begin their duties with a clear understanding of their role as chair and the level of scholarly work expected from each student.

Additional Internal and External Training

In addition to initial orientation (FMD5000) and the dissertation faculty training provided by the Graduate School, other training courses are available to help faculty learn and hone skills with online teaching, giving effective feedback regarding writing and APA style, and research skills. These courses are available to faculty members at no cost and are part of the annual professional development process.

Beyond internal training opportunities provided by the University, faculty are expected and supported by the institution to maintain professional competencies by participating in professional and academic activities in their disciplinary field, such as attending conferences, seminars, and workshops, and by obtaining advanced degrees and credentials. One activity annually is obligatory for all faculty members and evidence of this activity is required and posted
to each individual’s profile (see Faculty Credentials and Professional Development Report located in the physical resource room for more information). The profile area also tracks diversity-related trainings and individuals’ service to their profession or local community. Faculty members who do not meet these requirements may not be assigned new students until these requirements are met.

To support faculty, Northcentral specifically budgets for professional development. Salaried faculty are budgeted to attend at least one conference per year and school budgets often include line items related to credentialing or other professional dues and fees. Non-salaried faculty members may apply for professional development assistance for conference, seminar, or workshop attendance. For this purpose, an annual budget is approved and individual applications are considered on a case by case basis by the Office of the Provost. Non-salaried faculty members who publish or present scholarly work using their Northcentral affiliation may apply for an honorarium (Policy). Finally, since 2009, salaried and non-salaried faculty members alike can apply for grants to support research costs of up to $5,000 for new research projects (Policy).

Funding of internal training and external professional development opportunities supports Northcentral’s faculty in providing effective teaching.

Faculty Loading, Audits, and Evaluations

To ensure that we have sufficient qualified faculty members, we have and continue to analyze faculty load (see the Load report in physical resource room) and audit credentials (see the Faculty Credential and Professional Development Report in the physical resource room). We also conduct regular performance evaluations of faculty members to ensure effective teaching, compliance with University policies and procedures, and ongoing professional development.

Faculty Loads

The Faculty Mentor Load report shows the number of students actively enrolled with each faculty member. Each faculty member varies in the number of students he or she is able to teach in order to balance their work at Northcentral with other professional responsibilities. Some non-salaried faculty members teach as few as 5-10 students at a time; others typically teach up to 30 students across multiple courses. Salaried, full-time faculty may instruct up to 70 students at any one time. An automated process ensures that when a faculty member reaches their maximum load they are no longer assigned students until the number drops below the set maximum limit. Irrespective of the automated process, the Faculty Mentor Load report is reviewed regularly to ensure that faculty members are not assigned students in excess of institutional or individually set caps. This report also informs the need to hire additional faculty when existing loads approach the caps set for the faculty members assigned to a given course. Exceptions to the cap are based on performance and must be approved by both the Director of CFE and the Dean of the School where the faculty member teaches.

In addition to teaching content courses in each program, qualified faculty members can serve on dissertation committees. Beginning in March 2012, committee chair support of the students through their dissertation process has been transitioned to full-time faculty members. However,
engaged and qualified committee members are imperative to the success of Northcentral’s doctoral training process. Our faculty provide a strong pool of resources for matching doctoral student research topics to Subject Matter Experts (committee members) with similar areas of expertise.

**Faculty Audits**

The Faculty Audit is a report of qualifying credentials held by each faculty member that is assigned to teach each of the courses across the University. In order to qualify to teach a course, a faculty member must have a graduate degree in the area of study, graduate coursework taken or taught regarding the course topic, or research or extensive professional experience in the course area. To ensure that faculty members are appropriately assigned to the courses they teach, schools periodically conduct audits with the assistance of the Center for Faculty Excellence. The most recent audit was completed in 2012.

**Faculty Evaluations**

Each salaried faculty member is reviewed annually. During this evaluation, the faculty member completes a self-evaluation that is submitted to their direct supervisor (dean or program chair) (Self Evaluation Form). The supervisor then completes a formal review (Annual Review Form) and comments on the self-evaluation. The annual review process offers an opportunity to discuss successes and create new goals for the next year. By examining results and setting goals, faculty are able to improve their performance and the effectiveness of their teaching. Completed self-evaluations and full annual reviews are kept in files in the HR department. While the formal process is an annual review, faculty receive regular feedback from their dean or department chair through regular, often weekly, discussions.

Performance of non-salaried faculty is appraised after initial training and completion of either 60 days (for 8 week courses) or 90 days (for 12 week courses) of teaching to ensure high quality instruction (Faculty Review Form). Performance is then reviewed annually. An appraisal may also be initiated at any time by the Dean of the applicable school or the Provost as needed or appropriate. The primary purpose of the review is to promote excellence in faculty work with students by encouraging thoughtful reflection on their work and development of goals to improve their work. The appraisal process is comprised of the following areas:

1. Self-assessment (Form)
2. Timeliness and responsiveness to questions and assignments
3. Substantive feedback on content and writing
4. Knowledge of the subject material
5. Accurate grading
6. Compliance with policy (no bulk uploading, use of TurnItIn, sending welcome letters)
7. Professional development (both for online teaching and discipline specific)
8. Dissertation committee / chair work (when applicable)

Reviews that identify concerns with performance may result in a Guided Action Plan (GAP). The GAP is utilized to clarify the issue(s) that need to be addressed, note how the improvement
will be evaluated, and provide a timeline for a subsequent review; the typical time period for a follow up review is 45 days. During this time the faculty member is placed in a status of DNA (do not assign) to preclude additional students from being assigned to his or her roster. This affords the faculty member the time to ensure they have improved on the area(s) cited in their GAP. At the end of the GAP period, faculty performance is re-evaluated and appropriate action taken.

Results of performance reviews provide an opportunity for Northcentral University to ensure faculty are meeting guidelines for effective teaching. A summary of performance reviews completed in 2011 is presented in the Faculty Review Summary Report.

**Faculty Organization, Collaboration, and Communication**

Faculty members at Northcentral University report to the dean or program chair (Academic Organizational Chart) and are assigned to teach within a specific school or program. To foster effective teaching, Northcentral encourages both formal and informal communication and collaboration with its faculty. An annual gathering for salaried faculty is facilitated during the week of our graduation ceremony each June. Group discussions are scheduled to discuss University policies and issues that impact teaching. Faculty members are encouraged to share ideas to improve teaching and learning outcomes. Communication forums, such as blogs, discussion forums, and newsletters are tools provided on the portal. In addition, each school facilitates meetings on a regular basis so that all faculty are aware of the opportunities to communicate their successes, concerns, or ideas for improvement (see School meeting minutes in the physical resource room).

**Center for Faculty Excellence**

Reorganization efforts during 2011 focusing on enhancing faculty support resulted in the creation of the Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE). The mission of the CFE is: *To inspire and support Northcentral faculty in providing meaningful and powerful learning experiences that help students meet the goals of their program and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions.*

Faculty evaluations, training and hiring, Faculty Mentor Development (FMD) courses, a regularly published newsletter (Excellent News), and support are all vital roles assigned to the Center for Faculty Excellence in order to provide higher standards of communication and accountability. We plan to conduct an evaluation of how the CFE is serving faculty in 2013.

**Next Steps: Foundations Faculty and Dissertation Chairs**

We are currently implementing two initiatives to elevate academic quality and improve the student experience: 1. Provide full-time Foundations faculty to new students and 2. Provide full-time dissertation chairs to doctoral students. To address both of these needs, we have increased the number of full-time salaried faculty members to work with these two specific groups of students. In addition to strong academic credentials, foundations faculty must demonstrate the skill-sets required for quality teaching through feedback. Foundations faculty are assigned the first one to three courses depending on the program. Dissertation chairs, hired specifically for their research skills and experience, chair the committees for doctoral students. In both cases, the
new Foundations Faculty members and dissertation chairs participated in focused training to prepare them for the specific work they are doing. As these are new initiatives, we will begin assessing their impact in spring 2013. However, through anecdotal feedback from faculty and students alike, we are confident that the new full-time faculty are already making a difference and improving the learning experience at the University.

Northcentral University is committed to our Mission of providing people throughout the world with quality educational opportunities. Through the support system of professional development, information availability, performance reviews, and a dedicated, highly qualified faculty, Northcentral is a university that values and supports effective teaching.

Core Component 3c

*The organization creates effective learning environments.*

We use a unique One-to-One student to faculty relationship as the context of learning and have developed an interactive, distance-based platform to facilitate these learning relationships. We follow a specific course design process to ensure that up to date resources, methodologies, and activities are used and consistently applied between faculty and students. We have identified needs and implemented changes in our learning processes in order to support students and faculty more fully at key times during the degree programs and we are continuously striving for improvement in our learning environment.

One-to-One Model

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of our learning environment at Northcentral is our focus on the One-to-One interactions we facilitate between students and faculty (Distance Education at Northcentral). As a modern application of the Oxford Model of instruction, we use technology to bring together motivated students and qualified faculty members to facilitate the transfer of knowledge. Some of the key concepts of the Oxford Model include:

- Our students are assigned to a single faculty member for each course. Our faculty teach through feedback, enabling students to meet course, specialization, and program outcomes.
- Our one-on-one teaching approach is based on the principle that faculty teach students, not material, and that students differ in their skill sets, prior knowledge, and dispositions. It is supported by scholarship discussed in the influential *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school* (Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school: Expanded edition*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.)
- Our faculty evaluates student work to assess progress and diagnose strengths and weaknesses. They provide feedback that assists students in meeting current and future learning outcomes.

Our One-to-One model focuses on the faculty to student relationship. We train faculty on teaching through feedback to ensure consistency in engagement for each course.
Northcentral’s Online Learning Environment

Northcentral University, from its origin, has developed and maintained its own learning management solution. We call our online learning environment “Compass” based on the notion that it is an integration of four major web portals (similar to four points on a compass): the public website, the student portal, the faculty portal, and the administrative portal. These portals are designed to facilitate interaction between the various constituents of the University. Compass has been developed and is continuously improved to allow for greater functionality, efficiency, and security.

Our interactive learning environment allows the faculty, students, and team members of Northcentral to collaborate to fulfill the Mission of the University. It facilitates educational opportunities for students throughout the world to earn regionally accredited degrees from wherever an Internet connection is available. It provides the structure and functionality needed to organize an online classroom, provides educational materials for students and faculty to access and study, facilitates submission, tracking, and evaluation of assignments, and includes tools for communication to discuss questions and provide support to students and faculty.

Course Design

As described earlier in this Criterion, Northcentral courses are designed by a team of academics including a Director of Curriculum Development, curriculum faculty, subject matter experts, and an instructional designer. To ensure course consistency, and to provide our students with applicable learning within their specialization, and the opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful in their field, courses are built according Northcentral University’s Course Development Guidelines. Once the course is developed by faculty, a series of approvals occurs starting with a curriculum faculty, followed by a Director of Curriculum Development, and finally the Dean of the school (or designee as appropriate, for example Program Chair). Following course approval, a master course is uploaded to the course management system. To provide consistent course delivery, faculty approved to teach the course follow the approved course.

To further ensure course quality, and following our commitment to continuous improvement, at the end of each course, students are given the opportunity to complete a post course survey. These surveys are provided to the Dean. The course content portion of the survey is provided to the course development team to assist in course revisions. The faculty portion of the survey is provided to the Center for Faculty Excellence to be included in the review process. In addition to feedback from post-course surveys, faculty teaching a course can, at any time, provide feedback and suggestions for improvement to the Director of Curriculum Development in their respective school.

Foundations Courses

APR results indicated that attrition in early courses could be improved across the University. Some attrition is expected and withdrawal data suggest that many students drop out during the first course (or fail the first course) due to a number of factors: they are too busy to complete the activities, they find the online delivery mode is not a good fit with their learning style, and/or
they find the work required at the doctoral level (particularly scholarly writing) to exceed their skill set. However, conversations with faculty teaching the first course suggested that there was room for improvement in the attrition rates.

In order to improve engagement and provide scaffolding for students to develop the skills needed for a graduate degree in a distance-based environment, Northcentral University offers Foundations courses. Based on APR data and input from faculty and students, we revised our Foundations courses to create a consistent introduction to Northcentral and our online environment with a focus on those skills faculty and students indicated were important for success: time/activity management (Attack Your Day announcement and reports), academic integrity, online library research, and APA style. The courses were revised using mixed learning modalities, and each activity was scrutinized to determine if there was a way to reduce cognitive overload to provide a sense of early accomplishment and, when appropriate, activities that encouraged application of the degree to a student’s profession were included. A faculty guide (Foundations Course Faculty Guide) was developed that assisted in increasing interaction between faculty and student(s).

Quantitative data (New Foundations Course results) suggested that the revisions resulted in improvements. For example, 70 students in the old PhD Psychology Foundations course were compared to 70 students in the updated course. Success rates (with success defined as a passing grade) significantly differed between the two groups: 36% of the students succeeded in the old course, whereas 67% succeeded in the updated course.

To better understand how these course updates impacted our students and our faculty, we conducted separate focus group interviews.

Overall, three themes emerged from these focus group interviews:

- Faculty and students requested additional resources to improve writing for students, including APA instruction
- Students requested improved feedback (timeliness of response, increased interaction)
- Students requested more consistent engagement within the first course

To address the items that arose:

- Ten faculty members were hired across all programs; these faculty were trained on engaging and supporting new graduate students and providing feedback that help them acclimate to graduate-level online education.
- Center for Excellence redesigned FMD5000 to enhance substantial feedback and student engagement components.
- A major revision to the doctoral level writing course (the second course in most programs) is underway, to include MyCompsLab (an individualized writing tutorial program)

We will continue to assess how these changes improve student retention, learning, and preparation for graduate level education.
Integrated Research Training

Since our last Comprehensive Visit, through conversations with dissertation committee members, doctoral students, and reviewers in the Graduate School we identified the need for modification to the doctoral programs such that research training is introduced early and is woven throughout the program. Prior to July 2010 the majority of the research courses occurred at the end of the doctoral programs. Some students were able to excel with discipline-specific content courses and yet struggled with research related courses at the end of their degree programs. A second concern was identified relating to the average number of reviews of each dissertation milestone document by the dissertation committees and Graduate School reviewers. Additionally, concerns were raised by the HLC site visit team in 2008 relative to dissertation quality.

To address these concerns we have revised and/or developed curriculum and modified the order of courses to provide this needed training in research. We also believe that integrating the dissertation experience throughout the curriculum has the potential to increase completion rates and are tracking this data to determine the outcome of this change.

A Comparison of Past and Current PhD Program (Psychology)

Yellow highlighting designates foundation, research, or statistics courses that are either new or significantly revised. Blue highlighting designates the block of research courses that used to come after content courses but before dissertation courses.
**Updated Program (July 2010 – present)** | **Old Program (prior to July 2010)**
--- | ---
PSY7101 Foundations for Doctoral Study in Psychology | PSY5000 Theories of Personality or equivalent
PSY7102 Scholarly Writing and Professional Communication in Psychology | PSY7039 Research Methods
Specialization Course #1 | PSY5004 Professional Ethics, Law, and Psychology
PSY7103 Research Methods (formerly PSY7039) | PSY7240 Graduate Statistics
Specialization Course #2 | PSY7205 Advanced Topics in Developmental Psychology
PSY7104 Statistics I | PSY7206 Adult Psychopathology
Specialization Course #3 | Specialization Course #1
PSY7105 Tests and Measurements | Specialization Course #2
Specialization Course #4 | Specialization Course #3
PSY7106 Quantitative Research Design | Specialization Course #4
Specialization Course #5 | Specialization Course #5
PSY7107 Statistics II (formerly PSY7240) | Specialization Course #6
Specialization Course #6 | RSH9101P Research Topic, Problem, Purpose and Questions
PSY7108 Qualitative Research Design | RSH9102P Research Methods and Design
PSY7109 Planning Dissertation Research in Psychology | RSH9103P (students selected 1 of 3 courses – quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods)
CMP9500P Comprehensive Exam | RSH9104P Concept Paper
DIS9501P Dissertation Research | CMP9500P Comprehensive Exam
DIS9502P Dissertation Research | DIS9321P Dissertation Research I
DIS9503P Dissertation Research | DIS9322P Dissertation Research II
DIS9504P Dissertation Research | DIS9323P Dissertation Research III
Additional DIS courses can be taken if needed | Additional DIS courses can be taken if needed

*Note: in this example most of the fundamental courses required prior to 2010 were removed from the program due to a change in the basis of admission requiring a MA in Psychology or related field.

**Table 11 - A Comparison of Past and Present PhD Program (Psychology)**

**Next Steps: Applied Experiential Learning (AEL) and the Enhanced Course Room Project**

Beyond the aspects of our effective learning environment that are solidly in place, in our efforts to pursue continuous improvement, we are working on several initiatives to improve our learning environment. The first initiative that is underway is focused on revising our curriculum to update the content, activities, and course interactions to be even more focused on Applied Experiential Learning. This is the result of many hours of work by faculty supported interdisciplinary efforts throughout the University to improve our teaching and learning processes. The AEL project is focused on improving the interaction, quality, and diversity of learning activities, and
applicability of the course content. This AEL project is described in more detail in the Course Development Guidelines and, as a function of this project; all courses throughout the University are being reviewed and revised to follow this updated approach to our learning model.

Related to this AEL project, we are working on a second major initiative, the Course Room Project, to improve the user-friendliness of courses, to facilitate the Applied Experiential Learning project, to increase use of multi-media content, and address diverse learning styles. The Course Room Project design is a collaborative effort with representatives from each school involved in the “look and feel” decision-making process. The new Course Room design is currently in development and is planned for testing and review by a sampling of students and faculty from each school in late 2012. Following user testing, suggestions will be incorporated into the new design.

While most of the functionalities in the current system support many aspects of the University, we are reviewing the system for planned improvements. The planned improvements will allow better utilization of multimedia content, threaded discussions, and quizzes. As a result, the Information Technology team, in collaboration with Academics, has given deep focus to this initiative. While the new Course Room is in development, ongoing needs of students and faculty are also effectively managed in the current system.
Core Component 3d

The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

Northcentral University is committed to the provision of state of the art resources and support services for the entire community to maximize success in our distance-learning environment. Our support services include the Northcentral Library, Academic Advising services, the Center for Academic Excellence (including the Center for Faculty Excellence, the Instructional Design Team, and the Writing Center), time management training, the Help Desk (IT Support), and the Graduate School. We are also working on new support services, including a Virtual Academic Center to facilitate more extensive community interaction at Northcentral, and a Faculty
Commons, for faculty support and interaction. A brief description of the key resources and links to these online resources are detailed below.

**Northcentral Library**

In accordance with its Mission statement, the Northcentral University Library is dedicated to the continual improvement of its resources and services (Annual Report 2011). Library team members maintain active memberships in professional development organizations and regularly attend conferences in order to infuse the library with the latest technology and best practices available. In addition to these large-scale professional development measures, library team members also actively review and update the library’s collection of professional journals and websites. This is particularly critical to service the University’s doctoral candidates who depend on peer-reviewed research to inform their dissertations. The Library has also instituted an annual strategic plan that formulates goals for each of the following functional areas: Reference, Instruction, Collection Development, Interlibrary Loan, Website, and Collaboration, Partnerships, and Professional Development. These common goals ultimately focus team member efforts on initiatives that support the University’s overall Mission, Vision, Values, Goals, and Strategies.

Library expenditures (not including salaries) experienced roughly a 28% increase in the last three years, averaging 9.2% per year. While library expenditures vary by degree level, purchases are driven by student need. With the majority of the student body being at the doctoral level, expenditures are appropriated heavily in favor of doctoral student and faculty support. Faculty influence library purchases through the launching of new programs and specializations. When this happens, the library collection is reviewed for potential gaps. Examples of changes made in the Library based on professional development participation, input from faculty and students, and direction from the Strategic Plan are as follows:

- Increased permanent e-book and journal collection
- Created instructional video archive
- Improved search techniques
- Expanded hours of Librarian availability
- Offer live instruction sessions using online conference and VoIP technology
- Enhance the Library website to enable mobile access
- Improved communication to constituents through the creation of the “Director’s Message” (sample) function and implementing the “Library News Blog”

Northcentral’s Library also offers an online Ask a Librarian Service and My E-Reference to facilitate information requests from students and faculty.

**Academic Advising**

Academic Advisors (AAs) are part of the Student Services Team at Northcentral University. Academic Advisors serve as the primary point of contact for students to address questions about navigating through their degree plans and the catalog, helping students get accustomed to their portal, and educating them about the resources available to them. AAs answer phone calls,
emails, and internal University messages from students and provide personalized guidance. If students have questions related to Accounting or Financial Aid, the AA will direct the student to the appropriate department and follow up to ensure that the student receives the answers and information being sought.

**Center for Academic Excellence**

The Center for Academic Excellence houses the Center for Faculty Excellence, Instructional Design, and the Writing Center. The Center for Academic Excellence is a University-Wide resource available to all team members, students, and faculty, and provides quality academic support to enhance teaching and learning.

**Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE)**

The CFE hires, supports, evaluates, and trains Northcentral faculty. Additionally, the CFE teaches the Faculty Mentor Development (FMD) courses, and regularly publishes a newsletter (Excellent News), in order to provide high standards of communication and accountability.

**Instructional Design**

The Instructional Design (ID) team (department description) works with faculty across schools to refine and load courses to the online course room, enhance curriculum according to the applied experiential model, and to ensure each course includes activities that encourage engaged learning and up-to-date technology. Key responsibilities include enhancing curriculum according to applied experiential model and overseeing the implementation of the Student Orientation.

**Writing Center**

Northcentral University is committed to ensuring that its students and faculty adhere to the highest quality of academic writing. The Writing Center serves as a repository for best practice writing information, American Psychological Association (APA) style rules, and writing expectations. The publication of the APA Manual, 6th edition, prompted a critical examination of all Writing Center materials to ensure compliance with the newest APA standards.

In early 2011, the Writing Center expanded its capabilities by hiring a full time team member to manage the content of the Writing Center. The addition of a dedicated team member has provided students an outlet for any writing or style questions they may have. In addition to the many resources housed within the Writing Center, multiple services are available including:

- **TurnItIn**—The Writing Center acts as the point of contact and support for TurnItIn, a text-matching service that is used to reduce plagiarism in students’ written work. Faculty members are required to submit at least one paper per student per course to TurnItIn.

- **Smarthinking**—This is an on-demand tutoring and writing assistance program that is provided to students through the Writing Center. Following a needs analysis conducted in December 2008, it was determined that Smarthinking would best meet the needs of students. Through this agreement, students are provided ten hours of free tutoring (most commonly for statistics and writing questions), and are able to purchase additional time if necessary.
Time Management Training

Investigations into most “failed” grades found the failed grades were not due to a lack of understanding of content, but rather, the inability to complete all course activities. Balancing work, graduate school, and personal responsibilities can be challenging. Thus, a decision was made to partner with a time management consultant to offer free information that teaches students a system to plan, prioritize, and arrange their day so they can effectively manage their study time and avoid becoming overwhelmed as they work to complete their degree programs (the time management program is called, “Attack Your Day! Before It Attacks You”). This training is introduced in Foundations Courses and is available to students during their entire program.

Students were asked what their greatest time management challenge is that may have an impact on their ability to complete their course work and ultimately their degree. The survey results from 221 students appear below.

![Figure 10 - Student Time Management Challenges](image)

To assess the effectiveness of this program, a group of students were surveyed within 30-90 days of completing the “Attack Your Day! Before It Attacks You” program. All respondents agree that the skills learned in the program made an impact on their ability to complete their course work and would recommend it to other students.
Help Desk and IT Support

At Northcentral University, technology plays a vital role in enhancing effective learning. This is reinforced by providing exceptional technical support for our students, faculty, and team members. The University help desk was expanded to offer 24 hour/7 days a week/365 days a year support to accommodate students on different time zones and assist with technical problems whenever needed.

Our IT team strives to constantly improve the performance of our network and systems by utilizing various technologies to prevent unauthorized access and ensure confidentiality, integrity, and availability of the data and information.

The Graduate School

As a primarily doctoral granting institution, a focus in terms of assessment has been on clarifying and improving outcomes related to the doctoral dissertation. Since the last Comprehensive Visit we have clarified expected doctoral outcomes as evidenced by the creation of the Dissertation Review Form, and established additional resources to facilitate success through a revised Dissertation Handbook and Dissertation Center. We established a process by which dissertation milestone products are reviewed outside the committee (ensuring quality control). However, perhaps our most significant change has been the decision to hire full time faculty to serve as Dissertation Chairs. These efforts have been achieved through the work of the Office of Academic Research (OAR), established September 1, 2009 and, in 2011, renamed the Graduate
School. Resources by the way of expanded faculty have been added to the Graduate School to both facilitate expected doctoral outcomes in the dissertation process and assess outcomes to ensure achievement of the required outcomes prior to graduation. Demonstrating substantive commitment to enhancing and supporting academic quality at the dissertation stage, Northcentral University has increased the overall staffing from 3.5 in the Office of Academic Research (now the Graduate School) in 2009 to 52.5 staff in the Graduate School in 2012. This includes a full-time Dean; 3 Directors overseeing doctoral academic quality; 7 Research Specialists supporting dissertation progress and curricular quality in the research methods and statistics sequence; 34 full-time dissertation chairs; 2 administrative staff; 3 academic quality reviewers; and a part-time staff member dedicated to Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight.

The Graduate School exists primarily to support and oversee the achievement of established doctoral outcomes culminating in successful completion of the dissertation process. The Graduate School has incorporated a wide variety of functions such as: hiring, training and supervising full-time dissertation faculty with an emphasis on dissertation supervision; developing and providing research training and dissertation development courses; and serving as subject matter experts (SME) for all research design and statistics courses.

The full-time faculty of the Graduate School must have demonstrated dissertation chair and committee experience, extensive research backgrounds, and scholarly publication records. Dissertation chairs must demonstrate their research and scholarly writing skills and ability to guide doctoral students through the dissertation process. The Graduate School team includes a Dean, Director of Research Curriculum and Training, Director of Dissertation Quality Assessment, a Director of Dissertation Management, Research Specialists and Academic Reviewers.

In addition to full-time dissertation chair and committee member guidance, Academic Reviewers provide doctoral students with a blind review of students’ initial concept paper, proposal, and final dissertation. Reviews include detailed, substantive feedback on the topic feasibility, design, and writing. Completed academic reviews are returned to the dissertation chairs and academic reviews are assessed on a weekly basis for consistency and accuracy. Dissertation chairs are encouraged to submit a Request for Clarification (RFC) if an Academic Reviewer suggestion or feedback comment requires additional clarification. Typical response time is less than 48 hours. The use of Request for Clarification forms has improved communication and serves as a “feedback loop” for Academic Reviewers.

If, after two reviews, the milestone document is not approved, a Research Specialist schedules a consultation conference call with the dissertation chair and student to formulate a plan for the student to address the remaining issues. The conference consultations have been highly successful and well received.

The Graduate School is also responsible for maintaining the Dissertation Center, a repository for research and statistics information, statistics tutorials, Northcentral University dissertation handbooks and templates for applied and research degrees, and a variety of scholarly sources related to dissertation quality and student development. Some of the primary resources include
literature review quality standards and published articles related to the distinction between applied and research degrees. In addition, an informal process for research related inquiries (“Ask a Researcher”) is offered by the Graduate School to provide a method for students and faculty to ask research related questions. Finally, the Graduate School has the professional faculty and resources to train and supervise dissertation chairs and research course faculty, develop research and dissertation-related curriculum, provide substantive, critical feedback to students as they develop their dissertation research and oversee the continued improvement of Northcentral student dissertations.

The Graduate School oversees the Dissertation Tracking System (DTS) that documents all milestone reviews and dissertation committee activities. The DTS provides a centralized repository for all dissertation milestone documents.

**Applied Doctorates vs. PhD Degrees**
Higher education has long made a distinction between those who are expert in creating knowledge (PhDs) and those who are expert in using knowledge (e.g., MDs and JDs). In response to demands from students and employers, institutions of higher education have developed applied doctorates, for example the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), and the Doctor of Education (EdD). Northcentral University offers both the PhD degree and applied doctorates (DBA and EdD; a request for a PsyD is submitted with this self-study). The PhD is intended for students who: are going into a research career, such as working in a corporation’s research department; are going to teach in a university or college setting; and simply desire, for their own edification, to learn advanced research techniques. The applied doctorate dissertation is a doctoral project of applied significance, and may be an applied investigation, a replication study, or a case study. The requirement of every doctoral manuscript (PhD or applied doctorate) is that it includes a comprehensive, up-to-date, and critically evaluative review of the professional and scientific literature pertaining to its topic. At Northcentral, applied doctorates degrees require at least 54 credit hours, and PhD degrees require at least 60 credit hours.

**Enhancements to Support Distinguishing Doctoral Degree Tracks**
To support delineation between applied and PhD degrees, the Graduate School has improved and updated the templates provided to students as they complete their milestone documents in the dissertation development process. Students in a PhD track are required to focus on the expected standards of PhD level research as detailed in the milestone document templates. This section must include the identification and articulation of the theoretical foundations of the proposed study based on a review of the relevant literature. The literature review requirements are equivalent for both degree tracks; however, the applied degree has an emphasis on the study context and historical background, whereas the PhD track requires a theoretical foundation. Essentially, the key research design differences between an applied and PhD degree is scope and significance. For applied degrees, the results should be significant to leaders and practitioners in the field, whereas, PhD studies must have theoretical implications and contribute to the literature. Further delineation for each dissertation chapter and section are described in the “Differentiating PhD and Applied Doctorates” located in the NCU Dissertation Center.
**Improvements to Dissertation Outcomes**

Since the last Comprehensive Visit, in an effort to improve the experience and success of doctoral students, the Graduate School has implemented the following improvements:

- Doctoral expectations have been clarified in the Dissertation Handbook and Dissertation Review Form
- Expanded research training has been developed and woven throughout the curricula in doctoral programs
- Dissertation Milestone document templates have been created
- Dissertation review process, including allowable number of reviews, is outlined in the Dissertation Handbook, Catalog, and course syllabi
- Dissertation Center has expanded resources to facilitate successful completion
- Dissertation Review Form is available to all students and faculty to access and know what is expected of the Dissertation Proposal and Dissertation Manuscript
- The Graduate School provides detailed reviews of all submitted documents; feedback is given to show what (if anything) is needed for a document to be approved
- The Request for Clarification Form was developed to facilitate communication between the dissertation committee and the Academic Reviewer
- All students must work with their committees, programs, and the Graduate School to achieve the required outcomes needed in the dissertation process
- All dissertations are assessed at multiple points in time to ensure that expected outcomes are achieved
- Improved training for faculty members working with dissertation students
- The University has approved the budget for a substantial increase in full-time faculty within the Graduate School who will work to support the dissertation training process, help design and improve research training courses specific to each discipline, and serve as chairs for the dissertation committees
- Restructured the dissertation committee so that it consists of one full-time chair affiliated with the Graduate School, one subject matter expert from the School where the student is obtaining their degree, and one part time Reviewer, also affiliated with the Graduate School

The improvements in the doctoral research process are an example of changes we made to improve student learning. As evident in the table below, and based on 11 criteria rated on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from Poor (1) to Excellent (5), at Northcentral University, student learning improved across all key dissertation dimensions when compared to the 2008 Comprehensive Visit (Comparative Analysis Report). All dissertations are available for review through the Northcentral Library.
Next Steps: Virtual Academic Center and Faculty Commons

In addition to the support services noted above, the Information Technology team is also working closely with Academics to develop and roll out a new Virtual Academic Center (VAC) for the University. This will be an online community based environment outside of the course room for faculty and students to collaborate and interact with each other. As one function of the Virtual Academic Center, a Faculty Commons is being developed to allow faculty members to interact, collaborate on research and teaching initiatives, and develop a sense of community and camaraderie among the NCU faculty. Although students, faculty, and team members of the University are dispersed throughout the U.S. and around the globe, this new tool (the VAC) will facilitate extensive interaction, communication, and support to enhance our academic environment. It will take what is working in our academic programs and expand our successes.

Summary

Northcentral is dedicated to fulfilling its educational Mission by assessing student learning and supporting effective teaching. We have processes in place that allow us to clarify what students are expected to learn and achieve and also assess that learning. When appropriate, we make changes to improve student learning. Since our last Comprehensive Visit, we have made significant changes to our APR process, dissertation outcomes, and Foundations Courses. We hire, train and support a well-qualified faculty and regularly evaluate their effectiveness. Since our last Comprehensive Visit we have created the Center for Faculty Excellence which better supports these efforts. We have a rich learning environment and our courses and processes work efficiently to help students learn and achieve what is needed within their programs of study.
Finally, we provide the needed support services to foster success in student achievement of expected outcomes.

**Strengths**

1. We have clearly stated program goals and learning outcomes for all courses. We also have a strong Academic Program Review process and leadership in each school that directs additional assessment initiatives (like artifact assessment).
2. We have clear guidelines and a well-honed process for developing excellent courses that lend themselves to effective evaluation.
3. We are in the process of automating our assessment tools to further enhance our assessment efforts.
4. We have made significant changes to improve student learning related to Foundations Courses and dissertation outcomes, including the hiring of full-time faculty to teach the first courses and to chair dissertations.
5. We have a highly credentialed faculty and a Center for Faculty Excellence that supports, trains, and evaluates them.
6. We have a highly regarded library and many other support services, including time management training that foster student success.

**Self-Recommendations for Progress Towards Continuous Improvement**

1. Develop a Faculty of the Year Award (to recognize and reward effective teaching)
2. Develop demonstration videos for University processes and tools (e.g. DTS, Comps)
3. Develop video introductions, profiles, and links to full Curriculum Vitae for all faculty and make them available on the public website. This can be used to demonstrate our highly credentialed faculty and also build community.
CRITERION FOUR: ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The organization promotes a life of learning for its administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

Overview

Northcentral University promotes lifelong learning for all constituents, including students, faculty, administration, team members, and alumni. The essence of our commitment to lifelong learning is encompassed in our Mission documents, which express a commitment to helping students achieve academically and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions, and highlights values of excellence and accountability.

Lifelong learning requires a willingness to commit time to explore, to discover, and to understand. We enable our constituents to pursue a life of learning personally and professionally through the flexibility offered by distance education.

Core Component 4a

The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, and staff, that it values a life of learning.

Northcentral University was founded on the belief that opportunities for lifelong learning should transcend one’s geographic location. The essence of the commitment to lifelong learning is encompassed in our Mission.

Our administrative structures support lifelong learning through policies and dedicated resources as described in detail below:

Academic Freedom

A clear statement of support for freedom of inquiry is found within the policy on Academic Freedom which states in part that intellectual pluralism and academic freedom are central principles of American higher education. The Board of Trustees of Northcentral University endorses the concept of academic freedom and supports the American Council on Education “Statement on Academic Rights and Responsibilities.”

The policy further supports openness and freedom of inquiry by stating: “Colleges and universities should welcome intellectual pluralism and the free exchange of ideas. Such a commitment will inevitably encourage debate over complex and difficult issues about which individuals will disagree. Such discussions should be held in an environment characterized by openness, tolerance, and civility.” This culture of openness is evidenced by meetings and discussions throughout the University, see, for example, the self-plagiarism debate held via a University virtual Town Hall Meeting (Self-Plagiarism Presentation).
Northcentral Library

The Library facilitates the research activities of students, faculty, alumni, and team members (Library Annual Report 2011). The Library provides learning opportunities designed to encourage the development and expansion of information skills. The Library continually evaluates resources, and student, faculty, alumni, and team member needs to ensure the best possible search and reference tools are made available. The University has made a strong commitment to providing students with information literacy skills to enable them to make full and appropriate use of a wide-variety of information resources while as a student and after graduation (Information Literacy Tutorial). One significant example of improvement since the last Comprehensive Visit is the extension of access to the Library to alumni, allowing and encouraging them to become lifelong learners.

Writing Center

The primary goal of the Writing Center is to provide students, faculty, and alumni with the tools and resources required for successful scholarly writing. The Writing Center provides numerous resources including a writing handbook, information on academic integrity, guidance on forms of writing, APA Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and Guides, and Grammar and ESOL information for International Students.

Professional Development

Faculty, administrators, and team members are encouraged to value lifelong learning and to continue to refine their skills by participating in training seminars, classes, symposia, attending conferences, presenting at conferences, and sharing their research with others through publications in professional journals. Such professional development activities are financially supported by the University through a budgeted line item. In 2011, the University invested $221,393 in support of development and has budgeted $390,588 in 2012.

Faculty

In response to the 2008 Comprehensive Visit Team’s recommendations and best practices in higher education, faculty members are expected to engage in professional development. At Northcentral University, examples of professional development include professional certifications; papers presented at conferences; published articles, manuscripts and books; and attendance at professional conferences, workshops, and meetings. One scholarly activity annually is obligatory for all faculty members and evidence of this activity is required to be posted to their faculty profile page. The Faculty Handbook specifies this requirement. The Faculty Credential and Professional Development Report is located in the physical resource room.

Team Members

Northcentral University administrators have budgeted resources allocated for professional development. The Employee Handbook includes information outlining these opportunities. Northcentral University offers educational assistance, whereby eligible team members and their eligible family members may take courses free of charge (valued at $480,389 in 2011).
Additionally, team members receive FERPA, diversity, sexual harassment prevention training, and other professional education opportunities. The University annually allocates resources for internal and external team member development, above the amount allowed for NCU coursework taken by team members and their families (e.g., conferences, workshops, seminars).

**Public Recognition for Lifelong Learning**

*Academic Professional Honorarium*

Established in June 2008, Academic Professional Honorariums includes the commitment to supporting scholarly contributions from any member of the Northcentral learning community (including alumni) who makes scholarly contributions while representing Northcentral University.

*Dissertation of the Year Award*

The Dissertation of the Year Award, established in June 2008, recognizes high scholarly achievement among doctoral students by honoring the author(s) of the most outstanding dissertations. The author(s) of the Dissertation of the Year award is invited to a special ceremony during graduation week honoring their achievement, and provided with remuneration in the form of up to $1,000 to cover the costs of travel and lodging expenses (Dissertation of the Year winners).

*Newsletter Recognition*

Creating a climate for the benefit and appreciation of learning in the lives of team members, faculty, and students is enhanced by public recognition in the University newsletters, VERITAS that features team member graduates of NCU and Higher Degrees (students).

**Professional Organizations and Societies**

Northcentral University offers its students membership in the following honor societies that recognize scholarship and provide the opportunity for lifelong learning through networking and access to professionally relevant information (described fully in Criterion Five):

- Alpha Phi Sigma
- Delta Mu Delta
- Golden Key International Honor Society
- Kappa Delta Pi

*MFT Student Participation in AAMFT*

The primary professional organization for MFT students is the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT). At NCU, we encourage students and alumni to join and participate in the national organization (AAMFT). Northcentral University has set up, in collaboration with AAMFT, a special website that will allow Northcentral students to apply for a Student Membership and waive the $25 application fee.
Honorary Doctoral Degree of Humane Letters

In 2008, the Board of Trustees authorized the awarding of honorary degrees to recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to their community. Recipients of these awards are recognized for the accomplishments during our annual graduation ceremony (AZ BPPE Approval of Honorary Degree). Since its inception, the University has awarded seven honorary doctorate degrees (Recipient Bios).

Tuition Support and Scholarships

Northcentral University understands that earning a regionally accredited university degree is a significant financial investment. To encourage a life of continuous learning, we offer tuition support (Veterans’ Tuition Assistance, Federal Financial Aid, team member tuition assistance) and scholarships to qualified students and alumni.

Courses for Non Degree Students

Northcentral University encourages lifelong learning by allowing students who are not seeking a degree to take individual courses to increase their knowledge, gain continuing education units, and for personal and professional enrichment.

Core Component 4b

The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.

The Northcentral University Vision states its commitment to being a premier higher education distance learning institution. This objective is achieved through excellence in providing educational opportunities to adult students that fosters integrity, innovation, diversity, and accountability.

Integral to our Mission, Northcentral University prepares students for lifelong learning. Northcentral University is committed to providing students with a depth and breadth of knowledge to prepare them for success in their chosen endeavors. The University has multiple programs and services in place to help prepare students for a life of continual and meaningful learning. Critical to developing students’ knowledge, attitudes, and skills for inquiry and analysis is a comprehensive curriculum.

Acquisition of a Breadth of Knowledge

Bachelor’s Degree Programs

The University offers full bachelor degree programs in business and psychology, and a completion program in education. Each program requires students to complete a 120 credit course of study focusing on general education requirements, school specific content courses, specialization course requirements (if applicable), and elective courses.
All bachelor programs require that students complete 39 credits of general education courses in the areas of humanities, natural sciences, political sciences, math, and social sciences. These courses are offered by the University for students enrolled in business and psychology programs. Students transferring to NCU in the degree completion program in education are required to complete all of their general education requirements prior to their matriculation date (recent changes to the Basis of Admissions policy for business and psychology students is described later in this section).

Undergraduate students complete courses that include activities based on the attainment of student knowledge, comprehension, and content application. Courses are designed to challenge critical and analytical thinking skills and may encourage students to establish connections with working professionals and scholars in their communities. Course learning objectives and outcomes appearing on syllabi incorporate Bloom’s Taxonomy of intellectual inquiry, higher-order thinking requirements, and measurable outcomes.

Students completing NCU’s General Education curriculum demonstrate competency related to student outcomes assessment. The General Education program prepares students to continue on to complete their undergraduate studies. The primary goal of Northcentral University’s undergraduate degree programs is to provide the student with the opportunity to acquire and apply the knowledge and skills necessary to participate and function effectively in a global society.

**Undergraduate Graduation Assessment Data**

In assessing undergraduate student graduation data, Northcentral University has identified a retention challenge. Students enrolling at NCU with limited transfer credits and few general education courses have lower graduation rates (Undergraduate Transfer Credit Study). As a result, and in support of our Vision of being a premier graduate institution, the University has determined that the best method for successfully addressing this challenge is by modifying the Basis of Admission for undergraduate students to require a minimum of 60 credits or a conferred Associate’s Degree and the completion of all General Education courses. NCU believes that students with these admissions characteristics can achieve a consistent level of academic success leading to degree completion. These changes in Basis of Admission and academic focus are in alignment with our commitment to continuous improvement and our Vision of being a primarily graduate institution. This approach continues to support adult undergraduate students in taking the next step in their academic journey as potential applicants to our graduate programs.

The new University undergraduate admissions requirements were informed by faculty, reviewed and approved by school deans, approved by the Academic Affairs Committee, approved by the Provost, approved by the Senior Leadership Team, and evaluated and reviewed by the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees, and approved by the Board of Trustees. The new Basis of Admissions was implemented as of June 22, 2012.
Capstone Courses
The last course for every student in a Master’s program is a capstone course. This course culminates in a Signature Assignment designed to assess the program goals for that student’s program. This exercise demonstrates both breadth of knowledge and intellectual inquiry. Signature assignments in each program are listed below:

- Business: The student completes a signature exercise in order to demonstrate the ability to synthesize theoretical and conceptual knowledge, professional application, ethical implications, and fundamental areas of research methods and critiques in their chosen field of specialization.
- Education: Students develop an action research project based on the scientific method and concepts presented in the ED6001 course.
- Marriage and Family Therapy: Students develop a detailed presentation describing their personal theory of therapy and present it to the MFT faculty.
- Psychology: The Capstone course culminates in a review of the evidence-based practices related to a specific issue of interest to the student in Psychology.

Comprehensive Exams
Doctoral students develop a breadth of knowledge prior to beginning the dissertation research process and this knowledge is assessed and confirmed when students successfully complete their comprehensive exam. Students who successfully pass the comprehensive exam obtain doctoral candidacy status (ABD). Prior to 2008, students enrolled in their comprehensive exam course before the research course sequence. Feedback from doctoral students and faculty working with doctoral students indicated that the exam should occur after the research course sequence. Additionally, prior to 2008 students were randomly assigned four exam questions from a pool of questions. Assessment of these questions resulted in identification of variability of the quality and difficulty of questions and their reliability in assessing certain core competencies. Thus, the schools collaborated under the direction of the Provost to create four standard exam questions so that the following learning outcomes are assessed:

1. Compose a theoretically sound and conceptually rich essay that demonstrates knowledge of the fundamental subject areas of the student’s academic discipline and specialization.
2. Critique existing research and design a methodologically sound approach to research in the student’s academic specialization(s).
3. Apply relevant theory and research from the student’s specialization coursework to real life situations to solve specific problems and discuss implications.
4. Integrate knowledge of ethical practices with principles of professional practice as they apply to specific scenarios within the student’s academic discipline and specialization.
Feedback from faculty teaching the comprehensive exam course has been positive and we will continue the analysis of the comprehensive exam through on-going evaluation.

**Discovery of Knowledge**

All programs at Northcentral include components that demonstrate that the discovery of knowledge is integral to educational success. Northcentral University faculty are committed to a variety of research methodologies, plans for intellectual inquiry, and other aspects related to the acquisition of knowledge. All graduate students are required to produce evidence of their intellectual inquiry through signature assignments in a capstone course or dissertation research.

*Intellectual Inquiry through the Northcentral Library*

The Library collections serve as a gateway to global research and scholarship as well as to a rich diversity of opinions and human experiences. The Northcentral University Library Mission includes the commitment to “support school programs and student research through the collaborative acquisition and dissemination of knowledge.” Students and team members are well-served by the Northcentral University Library as it strives to provide the best services, scope of collections, and state-of-the-art information technologies (Annual Report 2011). Over the past several years, the Library has improved desktop access to research and reference tools and access to scholarly literature. Various web-based interfaces provide easy access to numerous periodicals, indices, and databases.

*Dissertation Research*

The dissertation is the capstone project for all doctoral students and students work directly with the Graduate School to obtain support to develop a product that demonstrates the breadth of knowledge obtained in the content courses as well as demonstrates a student’s ability to engage in intellectual inquiry by becoming an independent scholar. As discussed in detail in Criterion 3, the Graduate School was created to oversee comprehensive changes to improve doctoral outcomes.

To supplement interaction with dissertation committees, an additional resource for research-related inquiries (“Ask a Researcher”) is offered by the Graduate School. Since its inception in 2009, responses to over 700 unique questions have been provided, the nature of which have informed the Frequently Asked Questions and answers posted for reference in the Dissertation Center. Both faculty and students have provided positive feedback regarding the “Ask a Researcher” initiative.

The Graduate School has the resources and budget to hire, train, and supervise dissertation chairs; develop research, statistics, and dissertation-related curriculum; provide substantive, critical feedback to students as they develop their dissertation research; and oversee the continued improvement of Northcentral’s student dissertations.

**Learning Outcomes-Based Assessment**

Institutional effectiveness and assessment practices compare actual results to expected outcomes through a continuous process of program review and improvement. The assessment of learning
outcomes is a component of program review performed by each school and program (APR documents). This process allows the University to appraise intellectual inquiry, assess the acquisition related to the breadth and depth of knowledge through academic achievement in areas of basic skills, and determine levels of cognitive knowledge using methods appropriate to the program and course objectives. Assessing learning outcomes provides evidence that the program is continuously meeting its stated objectives.

As discussed in Criterion 3, the academic program review and outcomes assessment processes enable Northcentral University constituents to evaluate the effectiveness of the curricula and general student satisfaction (e.g., the Priorities Survey for Online Learners-Results), providing formal feedback to academic departments. The results of academic program reviews include identifying strengths and challenges, providing a basis for improvement, and assuring high standards in support for fulfilling student needs and expectations.

**Core Component 4c**

*The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.*

The University’s academic programs and curricula prepare students to make important contributions to their communities and within their professions. Members of the Northcentral University team understand the importance of education and training to improve the lives of individuals and strengthen communities. Success in a global, diverse, and technological society requires that students acquire knowledge necessary for lifelong independent learning as well as crucial workplace skills.

**Assessing Curricula through Academic Program Review**

Since our last Comprehensive Visit in 2008 and discussed in detail in prior Criteria, the Academic Program Review (APR) process has been enhanced and improved. The APR process involves a thorough review of each program and frequently results in Action Items related to improvement of the curriculum. The APR process follows a 3-5 year cycle during which Action Items are implemented and then programs are comprehensively reassessed to determine the impact of completed Action Items (APR documents). The following are Action Items that we have undertaken that directly relate to preparing students to live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase use of interactive material between student and faculty, including audio and video interface.</td>
<td>Improves student’s ability to operate in an increasingly technological society by improving digital competency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train students to access, evaluate, and prepare scholarly materials in print and electronic forms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revise courses to delineate how content applies in multicultural contexts and include at least one related course learning outcome when appropriate.</td>
<td>Increases awareness of cultural differences and diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design course activities to require application of discipline-specific principles to evaluating individual, social, organizational, and global problems.</td>
<td>Promotes global perspective and the ability to design appropriate strategies for dealing with global problems.</td>
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</table>

**Table 13 - Preparing Students for a Global, Diverse, and Technological Society**

Prior to completing a program APR, all curriculum in the program under review are mapped. Common templates for outcomes-based assessment mapping have been developed at five levels to provide a foundation for program improvement by validating the alignment of the goals and Mission of the University throughout the program structure and driving institutional goals through the curriculum down to the course activity level. Curriculum Maps provide a visualization of this alignment at all levels. The Academic Action Plan plays a critical role in the assessment process by capturing and providing a feedback mechanism for the identification, execution, and assessment of curricular changes.

**A Global Perspective through Diversity in the Curriculum**

There has been increased focus on ensuring that we actualize our Vision and Mission of being a global leader in educating people around the world. While we offer specializations related to diversity and our global vision, (for example, Gender Diversity Studies in the School of Behavioral and Health Science; International Education and Global Training in the School of Education, and International Business in the School of Business and Technology Management), we know that to live up to our Value of diversity and Vision of being global, diversity must be woven throughout the learning process. To address this issue further, in July 2010 all Schools modified missions and goals to include diversity (Revised Missions, Visions, Program Goals).

As part of these modifications, curriculum continues to be reviewed to ensure diversity, when applicable, is part of all courses; and revisions to curriculum are on-going. Examples of activities that link to learning outcomes related to respect for diversity can be found in the resource room (Diversity in the curriculum). Further, the curriculum maps detail where every activity related to diversity appears in programs (Curriculum Maps).
Curriculum Review Cycle

Each School ensures that the curriculum is current and relevant by maintaining a curriculum review cycle (SoE Review Cycle; SoBTM Review Cycle; SBHS Review Cycle, MFT Review Cycle). Faculty and student feedback are utilized to provide valuable insight concerning ways each course can be improved. The discipline-specific, external accreditation of many Northcentral University programs and the standards of the program accrediting agencies are also used as a framework for assessing the currency and relevancy of the University’s curricula. Similarly, although not part of assessment activities, faculty members’ activities in professional organizations provide opportunities for them to be current on the changes and trends in their discipline. This kind of professional engagement allows faculty to inform, suggest, and assist in the implementation of future curricula changes in their discipline.

Technology

Students attending Northcentral are, or become through their program of study, well-versed in technology as it relates to computer usage. Students access all resources online and use various software programs to complete activities, including but not limited to: word processing programs, presentation software, and interactive video technology. Students also learn how to use the NCU Library through extensive synchronous and asynchronous workshops and tutorials (Student Orientation in the Library).

Core Component 4d

*The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.*

Northcentral University has policies, procedures, and practices that support ethical and professional conduct for all of its constituents to include faculty, students, team members, and Board of Trustees.

As a university, we implicitly uphold the value of acquiring, discovering, and applying knowledge responsibly. The Northcentral University Vision to become “…a premier online graduate University and a global leader in providing unprecedented access to U.S. regionally accredited higher education” is founded on integrity. Further, we explicitly state that a core value is accountability, while publicly stating that Northcentral is a quality higher education learning institution that seeks to achieve this end through the pursuit of excellence. Northcentral University’s faculty and team members model responsible and ethical behavior for all students. Clear policies and procedures articulate concern for responsible scholarship and academic integrity.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB)

In accordance with federal regulations and University policy, all research conducted by any member of the NCU community must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to ensure that the safety, welfare, rights, and dignity of research participants are protected. Northcentral requires all faculty members working with doctoral students as well as doctoral students to successfully complete the Collaborative Institutional
Training Initiative (CITI) course in the protection of Human Research Subjects.

In 2009, NCU hired an IRB Coordinator (CV available in the physical resource room), who reports to the Dean of the Graduate School, with significant IRB-related experience to review each IRB application and determine whether each review would be Exempt, Expedited, or Full. Upon initial receipt, each application is logged (IRB Application Log available in physical resource room) and tracked throughout the process until the research is complete. The historical log is maintained by the Dissertation Process Coordinator. Should a full review be required, the Ethics and Professional Standards subcommittee serves in this capacity. In 2009, the IRB application process was also reviewed and modified to ensure completeness of information and efficiency of process.

**Developing Responsible Use of Knowledge**

In order to establish and maintain a climate of high academic standards, faculty and team members must model responsible use of knowledge through their actions. At Northcentral University, these actions are governed by policies, and knowing and applying normative codes and behaviors associated with specific disciplines and professions. The University Faculty Handbook and Catalog contains explanations, policies, and sanctions regarding expected professional and ethical conduct (Code of Conduct).

**Ethical Conduct**

Northcentral University Catalog details the following policies related to ethics and student conduct expectations (see Section 7) including:

- **Code of Conduct**: Members of the Northcentral University community are expected to conduct themselves professionally, and refrain from acts of misconduct including but not limited to the five categories: 1) Dishonesty, cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation or furnishing false information, forgery, or misuse of academic or administrative materials; 2) Harassment, stalking, humiliation, name-calling, the use of insulting or offensive language, cyber-bullying, threatening communications, abuse and intimidation; 3) Conduct, in speech, written communication or behavior, that is disrespectful or unprofessional or racist, sexist, ageist, or that is otherwise prejudicial against a particular community or social group; 4) Disruption or obstruction of the normal operations of the University; including unauthorized use of any of the University’s facilities, informational or material properties, and resources; 5) Conduct that is disorderly, lewd, lascivious, indecent or otherwise inappropriate, or that constitutes a breach of the peace; including violation of the University’s policy that prohibits bringing alcohol, recreational drugs, or firearms onto University property or any location during a University-sponsored event.

- **Academic Integrity**: Northcentral University is committed to supporting students and Faculty Mentors in understanding and applying standards of Academic Integrity and is committed to taking appropriate steps to ensure these standards are met (see below).
• Acceptable Use of Information Technology: All use of the Northcentral University Web sites must be in support of education and research consistent with the purposes of Northcentral University. An account is assigned to an individual and must not be used by others. The individual is responsible for proper use of the account, including password protection. The individual must take all reasonable precautions, including password maintenance and file and directory protection measures, to prevent use of their account by others.

• Fair Use of Copyrighted Works: The Northcentral University Library is committed to compliance with intellectual property law and the preservation of the rights of copyright owners and users of copyrighted materials. The Library strives to inform all its constituencies of the rights and responsibilities under the fair use provisions of the Copyright Act (17 U.S.C. Section 107).

• Institutional Review Board (IRB): The University is guided by the ethical principles regarding all research involving human subjects as set forth in the report of The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research entitled Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research (see below).

The Catalog also includes statements on the right to free inquiry, and outlines expectations for academic honor and integrity, respect for the rights and property of others, and concern for the safety and well-being of the University community.

Intellectual Property Rights
The Northcentral University handbooks and Catalog detail the policies regarding plagiarism, student cheating, software use, copyright infringement; technology downloads and file-sharing, photocopying, and computer-related infringements. All copyright policies are based on library best practices established by National Commission on New Technological Uses of Copyrighted Works (CONTU), an official committee that adds clarity to Fair Use law and how it relates to photocopy sharing (especially with regard to interlibrary loan services).

Student Academic Integrity
Northcentral University holds strongly to its value of academic integrity. The student portal presents to students links to the Academic Integrity Tutorial (Tutorial), the Northcentral Academic Integrity Policy (Policy), and the Academic Integrity Questionnaire (Questionnaire) to ensure understanding of the institution’s expectations for academic integrity. The library also provides training resources on integrity for students to assist their academic work, as does the Writing Center.

Each School requires faculty to address plagiarism and academic dishonesty by requiring faculty to submit at least one student assignment per course into a text matching database (TurnItIn) to be validated for originality against Internet sources and term paper databases. Should faculty suspect a violation of academic integrity they follow policy to ensure that these issues are
elevated to the dean’s office. The University has an Academic Integrity Committee that meets to discuss integrity issues and render decisions pursuant to the University’s Policy and Procedures Manual on a case-by-case basis.

*Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*

Northcentral University adheres to the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and publishes policies to ensure FERPA provisions are adhered to throughout the University. Team members are required to successfully complete standardized FERPA training. Policies related to FERPA include: Student Consumer Information Requirements; Student Educational Records; Privacy Statement; Student Records; and Full Disclosure.

**Summary**

At Northcentral University, we demonstrate through the actions of the Board of Trustees, administrators, students, faculty and team members that we value a life of learning and that we have integrated the acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills in our educational programs. We assess the usefulness of our curricula to students who live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society and we provide support to ensure that faculty, students, and team members acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.

**Strengths**

1. We possess clear and public policies, handbooks for team members and students, a comprehensive catalog, and other resources, such as the Library, Dissertation Center, and Writing Center, to support lifelong learning and the responsible application of knowledge.
2. We have high expectations as documented in policy for students, faculty, and team members regarding ethical conduct, research standards, and academic integrity.
3. The Northcentral University Graduate School provides comprehensive support for our doctoral students and enhances their ability to function as an independent scholar.

**Self-Recommendations for Progress Towards Continuous Improvements**

1. We will persist in strengthening the resources provided to our students and faculty in support of ongoing improvement in academic and research quality by continually assessing our outcomes.
2. We should continue to explore ways to improve and enhance our internal data collection and reporting to allow continuous monitoring of new processes.
3. We should continue to devote administrative, budgetary, and technological support for ongoing institutional improvements to ensure acquisition of knowledge and intellectual inquiry (e.g., Virtual Academic Center).
4. We will investigate the interest in and financial impact of offering tuition remission for faculty to promote continued academic inquiry.
5. We will further our commitment to lifelong learning by developing educational enrichment events and activities sponsored by the University.
CRITERION FIVE: ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE

As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

Overview

As an institution, Northcentral values its constituents as integral to our Mission. Northcentral’s constituents include prospective students, applicants, students, alumni, Northcentral partners, local communities we do business in, accrediting and regulatory bodies, and Northcentral faculty, Board of Trustees, and team members. Each of these groups share a vested interest in the success of Northcentral and each is served by the organization. Within this Criterion chapter, descriptions are given of the ways that Northcentral learns from its constituents, engages them, responds to them, and serves them in ways that are valued by both the constituent and the University.

Core Component 5a

The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.

Northcentral University’s efforts to engage and serve its constituencies start with seeking feedback, ideas, concerns, and suggestions. This is accomplished through various methods: frequent communication with accrediting and regulatory bodies, numerous surveys conducted by the Office of Assessment and Institutional Research (OAIR), student advisory boards, direct web-based feedback, faculty councils, community outreach, and virtual and physical suggestion boxes.

University Surveys

A powerful planning tool is the use of well-designed survey instruments whose results give insight into the experience of its constituents. Members of the University’s functional teams, our faculty, and our past and present students help us understand what is working well, what needs improvement, and where innovation is called for in the future.

Priorities Survey for Online Students (PSOL)

The Noel Levitz Priorities Survey for Online Students (PSOL) is administered regularly to an appropriate sample of students. The most recent survey (2011) included 73 questions and received a response rate of 44%. The survey was previously administered in 2003, 2006 and 2010 enabling both trend and national comparative analysis.

Survey Results:

Results from the 2010 and 2011 surveys were very similar showing that more than 81% of those surveyed report that their expectations are being met or exceeded by the University.
The 2011 survey results also paint a portrait of a Northcentral University student community that is very consistent with our Mission of serving professional adults. The Northcentral community tends to be older (with 30% falling between the ages of 34-44 and 36% falling between 45 and 54), female (55% women), employed full time (86%), homeowners (79%), and married with children (45%).

**Strengths:**
- The rigor and breadth of the University’s course offerings
- The quality of its online library
- The caliber of academic advisors and enrollment specialists
- The flexibility of course start dates
- The convenience of the registration process
- Levels of satisfaction were consistent across all degree programs
- Billing and payment procedures are convenient
- Academic requirements and policies in the Catalog are easily understood
- Academic advisor is accessible by telephone and email

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities for Improvement</th>
<th>Responsive Initiatives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student assignments could be more clearly defined in the syllabus</td>
<td>Develop new course room as a platform for a richer learning experience. This learning platform is a learning management system designed to allow for greater interaction between faculty and students (see description in C3c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty/Institution responsiveness (timely feedback and responsiveness to student needs)</td>
<td>Reviewed and revised faculty feedback guidelines (for all courses) and reviewed and revised workload policy for all faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of tuition; reputation of institution</td>
<td>Inclusive Tuition structure implemented eliminating most fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication channels for student complaints</td>
<td>Process for students to register and track resolutions for concerns (appeals, grievances, disability services, SAP appeal) directly from the student portal to decrease institutional response time to student needs across all departments (Process Flow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment in tuition is worthwhile</td>
<td>Inclusive Tuition structure implemented eliminating most fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and evaluation procedures could be clearer</td>
<td>Hiring of Instructional Designers who ensure clarity of individual activities in each course</td>
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Table 14 - Priorities Survey for Online Students: Responsive Initiatives
Time Management Survey

Investigations into most “failed” grades found the failed grades were not due to a lack of understanding of content, but rather, the inability to complete all course activities. Balancing work, graduate school, and personal responsibilities can be challenging. Thus, a decision was made to partner with a time management consultant to offer free training that teaches students a system to plan, prioritize, and arrange their day so they can effectively manage their study time and avoid becoming overwhelmed as they work to complete their degree program. This training is introduced in Foundations Courses and is available to students during their entire program of study.

To assess the effectiveness of this program, a group of students was surveyed within 30-90 days of completing the “Attack Your Day! Before It Attacks You” program.

Survey Results:
All respondents agreed that the skills learned in the program made an impact on their ability to complete their course work and would recommend it to other students.

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<th>Opportunities for Improvement</th>
<th>Responsive Initiatives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes could more often relate to applying the course to life experience</td>
<td>Moved to Applied Experiential Learning model providing students with an educational experience they can apply directly to their field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty performance related to supportiveness and encouragement</td>
<td>Launched Center for Faculty Excellence Bi-Weekly Newsletter Excellent News to promote faculty engagement, facilitate a faculty community, highlight accomplishments, and provide resources, information, and answers to faculty questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institution of faculty governance through faculty councils</td>
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Table 15 - Time Management Survey - Responsive Initiatives

Post Course Survey
Northcentral University’s Post Course survey is integrated with each course syllabus and each student is asked to evaluate various aspects of his or her education experience upon completion of a course. The Post Course survey captures the students’ satisfaction with course learning outcomes, course content and materials, course length and pace, faculty performance, academic advising services, and overall satisfaction.

Survey Results and Strengths:
Survey from course starts 1/1/2011 through 8/29/2011 resulted in responses from 33% of the population. Each of the constructs below resulted in the following average positive
responses (agree and strongly agree): Learning Outcomes 88%; Course Content 88%; Faculty Performance 87%.

- Learning Outcomes related to accomplishing learning goals, acquiring or enhancing knowledge or skills on the topic and enhancing intellectual, analytical, and critical thinking abilities.
- Course content and materials related to course outline syllabus, appropriate academic rigor and course materials supporting the course objectives.
- Faculty performance related to accessibility and responsiveness, knowledge of the course materials and useful feedback.

**Library Annual Survey**

Since the last Comprehensive Visit, the Library has conducted an annual survey that measures community satisfaction with Library resources and services. Starting in 2010 the survey includes questions for University alumni in addition to active students.

**Survey Results:**
The 2011 Library survey was administered to a sample of 4,364 students and alumni:

**Strengths:**
- Library Web site is current, helpful and well presented
- Reference help available (email, phone, Ask a Librarian, chat) meets the needs of students
- Databases available support research in subject areas

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<tr>
<th>Opportunities for Improvement</th>
<th>Responsive Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual quality of documents could be improved</td>
<td>Implemented ILL Trusted Borrowers list; Redesign Library website for improved design, organization, and functionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Databases used to find necessary resources difficult to navigate</td>
<td>EBSCO Discovery Service (unified search engine) was purchased and implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library site navigation</td>
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**Table 16 - Library Annual Survey - Responsive Initiatives**

**Graduate Satisfaction Survey and Financial Aid Addendum**

During 2009, over 500 of Northcentral University’s graduates were asked to participate in the completion of the Graduate Satisfaction Survey. Northcentral’s One-to-One teaching model and nontraditional student demographics contributed to the decision to design an instrument rather than use a nationally comparative instrument focused on traditional (ages 18-23) students attending college for the first time.
An additional Graduate Satisfaction Survey with a financial aid focus was also administered. This survey captured graduates’ employment status, annual income, financial assistance received during their course work at Northcentral, outstanding balances on that assistance, and graduates’ perceptions of their ability to pay their outstanding debt.

The Northcentral Graduate Satisfaction Survey is based on models that link student satisfaction with specific functional and performance areas. The 534 students who graduated from Northcentral University in 2009 were from all three schools and from sixteen different programs.

Survey Results:
Aggregating positive response choices (agree and strongly agree) resulted in the overall satisfaction rating was 87%. Survey results indicated strengths in the following key areas:

Strengths:
- *Academic Advising/Staff*–Student support by Academic Advisors was found to be very responsive by those surveyed, and team member interactions were characterized as professional.
- *Course and Program Content* – Graduates of the University responding to the survey gave positive feedback on the relevance of course and program content.
- *Course and Program Delivery*– Delivery of academic content was given high marks for both accessibility and flexibility.
- *Faculty Performance*– Faculty in non-dissertation courses as well as Dissertation Chairs and Committee Members were considered by most respondents to be very responsive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities for Improvement</th>
<th>Responsive Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal encouragement from Academic Advisors was cited as an area that could be improved.</td>
<td>Implemented automated task generation system for Academic Advisors to prioritize student needs and provide automated notification when students need assistance (behind in course-work, failed a course, had not entered the course lately)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency in facilitation of dissertation work by Chairs and Committee Members was cited as an area for improvement.</td>
<td>Moved to an innovative dissertation management model providing full-time salaried faculty chairs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 17 - Graduation Satisfaction Survey - Responsive Initiatives*

*Information Technology Assessment Survey*
In October 2010, Northcentral’s Information Technology department conducted an online survey. Nearly 2,000 students, faculty, and team members responded to the survey.
The survey contained questions covering topics such as networking, technical support, and website usability. Responses measured user level of satisfaction related to technology and customer service; this information was used to identify and enhance technical support tools.

**Survey Results:**
Feedback representative of most respondents suggested updating the Northcentral system portals, email, search capabilities, interactive labs, and earlier access to course syllabi.

As a result of this survey, helpdesk hours have been expanded 24/7 to accommodate varied student schedules. The tracking system was upgraded to ServiceDesk Plus to improve productivity and tracking of technical support activities. Remote team members have been supplied with laptops configured for easy yet secure access to University resources.

**Campus Employee Satisfaction Survey**
Northcentral’s OIERP team administered third party team member satisfaction surveys in 2003, 2005, and 2007 using the Campus Quality Survey (CQS) developed by Noel Levitz. In 2010, Noel Levitz revised the instrument in cooperation with the Higher Learning Commission and in alignment with AQIP principles, naming it the Campus Employee Satisfaction Survey (CESS). This survey is one means of engaging Northcentral University team member constituency and capturing valuable process improvement information.

The survey was administered in 2010 to over 200 Northcentral University employees to capture their satisfaction with culture and policies, institutional goals, involvement in planning and decision-making, and work environment.

**Survey Results:**
Overall team member satisfaction averaged 3.78 out of a possible 5. A majority (65%) were satisfied or very satisfied with their employment. Survey results indicated strengths and opportunities in the following areas (see last page of the Results):

**Strengths**
- The University’s culture is widely perceived as characterized by taking pride in work that is personally fulfilling and valuable to the institution.
- Relationships between employees and leadership are perceived as positive and supportive, with job responsibilities clearly communicated.
- Deans, Directors, and Chairs are generally perceived to have just the right level of involvement in planning and decision-making.
Communication between administrators, team members, and departments needs improvement.
The basis for institutional planning and decision-making is not evident to team members and was perceived as top-down in nature.
Faculty and team members rated themselves low on involvement in planning and decision-making.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Responsive Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish team member representative teams (MOD Squad), Launched newsletters (VERITAS), and increased University-wide meetings with Senior Leaders</td>
<td>Regular meetings with team members and Leadership regarding Strategic Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and Electronic suggestions boxes utilized, MOD Squad established to improve involvement in planning and decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 18 - Campus Employee Satisfaction Survey - Responsive Initiatives**

**MFT Alumni Survey**
In 2011, an alumni survey related to general satisfaction was prepared and distributed to graduates of the Master’s of Arts in Psychology degree who were in the Marriage and Family Therapy specialization who began their program between 2004 and 2009.

Students are very satisfied with their education and training in MFT, satisfied with Academic Advising, the curriculum, program outcomes, and the faculty. The lowest rating was with the faculty performance, but still 84% of the alumni were satisfied with faculty performance. An initiative to improve teaching and learning experiences in the program was clarified. Feedback indicated a need for improved information and preparation for licensure resulting in enhanced reviews of licensing requirements (MFT site).

**Smarthinking Satisfaction Survey**
Northcentral’s Writing Center conducted a survey in February, 2011 to determine student satisfaction with the service and the use and satisfaction with Smarthinking, an online tutoring service. This survey was emailed to the 1,441 students who used the service.

Overall, students responded favorably to this online tutoring service with 48% of respondents indicating that they used the service more than three times in the preceding 12 months. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very satisfied, 62% scored their satisfaction level at 4 or 5 and 67% responded that they believed the service contributed to their success as a student at Northcentral. In response to the level of satisfaction determined through this survey, the Smarthinking Tutorial Service was retained for student use.

**Core Component 5b**
*The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.*
Northcentral’s commitment to engage its constituencies can be found directly in our strategic plan. In particular our Community goal is supported by the strategy: “Build and maintain a highly engaged University team that is passionate about its Mission.” Our capacity to engage is enabled by our financial strength (see Core Component 2b) and our commitment is expressed through cross-functional collaborative efforts, communication and technology capabilities, our public website, social media networks, and various partnerships.

We recently surveyed our faculty and have found that they take great pride in providing multiple methods of student engagement. We found that our faculty engage student learning via email, text, phone, video conferencing, in-person meetings, blogs, and chat. The following example of faculty-student engagement is representative of our faculty’s commitment to engagement with their students as well as external organizations and University team members:

“Interactions occur via different communication media from Skype, to the phone, to the COMPASS message system, the NCU email system, and on occasion, my personal email (for publications with students and Kappa Delta Pi). In addition, I estimate that I make or receive approximately 10 calls per week to or from students, e-mail 20-30 students above and beyond the coursework, and reach out to 5-10 advisors or university administrators regarding student concerns per week.” (Dr. Melanie Shaw, NCU faculty for 6 years)

Communication Capabilities and Commitments

The institution has the capacity to enable effective connections with its identified constituencies and communities through varied communication technologies.

Compass System

Northcentral University uses the proprietary Compass system as both an Intranet and Extranet website as its means of engaging its constituency groups. The Compass system connects enrolled students, administration, and faculty.

The system provides email messaging, institutional announcements, and student and faculty forums. This system’s intranet websites provide one-stop service portals to team members, faculty, and students. Each portal has information relevant to the appropriate constituent, permitting the user to find all that is needed to successfully complete his or her tasks.

- Student Portal-The student portal is a secure online system that is accessible by active students and appropriate team members. It is secured through an authentication process that requires login and password. This portal permits the student access to his or her course room, personal profile demographics, course information such as course history (e.g. course list, grades), degree plan details, and links to academic advisor, chair, Library, handbooks, and blogs. There is also a tab for daily University announcements. This feature permits the organization to communicate important planned and timely messages to students.
- Faculty Mentor Portal- The faculty portal, a one stop online servicing tool, facilitates user friendly access to all resources required to teach Northcentral University courses. The
portal permits Northcentral University faculty to access their profile demographic information, roster, grading, dissertation access, and access to University resources (e.g. library, reporting), discussion forums and the my.ncu.edu email system.

- Administrative Portal- Northcentral University team members use the administrative portal to conduct some of their day-to-day activities. Gaining access to student, faculty, applicant, and colleague information is sometimes a requirement and this portal permits easy access to this information. University operations and other services are accessible through this portal. Additionally, a secure section of the Administrative portal has been established to allow the Board of Trustees access to relevant information electronically.

**Customer Interaction Management**
It is imperative that Northcentral University’s team members have effective means for contacting and being contacted by students and prospective students. In March 2011, Northcentral University adopted the Syntellect Customer Interaction Management (CIM) tool (Syntellect Summary) to provide leaders the ability to review calls to insure integrity and consistency in communication.

**Video Conferencing/Virtual Meetings**
Northcentral University utilizes various web-based meeting utilities to allow for instant or scheduled virtual interaction.

**Public Web Site**
Northcentral’s public website (available at: www.ncu.edu) provides a comprehensive view of the University including information on academic programs, benefits of attending the institution, and regulatory information as required by law. It also provides testimonials from alumni and active students, financing, admission requirements, accreditation information, history and mission of the University, honor society information, and online applications.

- Press Releases – Northcentral posts each press release distributed to the wire on their public site. Subject matter may be new accreditations gained or specializations launched, addition of faculty or team members, operational changes and/or expansions, and student successes.
- Blog – Northcentral launched the Northcentral University Blog on September 30, 2011. The Blog covers items of interest to various constituencies by highlighting student, faculty and alumni achievements, program offerings, academic support services, tips for navigating the student portal and public website, and higher education trends. As of February 1, 2012, the Northcentral Blog had 855 followers, 11 posts, 102 comments, and 2,127 all-time views.
- Graduation – The public site has several graduation pages that give those who plan to attend commencement information that will assist in their travel plans and schedules. Photos and videos taken of prior graduation festivities and commencements are also found on these pages.
Social Networks (plan)
Northcentral University has developed various methods to encourage co-curricular activities, including a Facebook page that permits students to engage in discussions and voice opinions. Northcentral also uses its Facebook page to announce upcoming events, post multi-media, and provide testimonials from students and faculty. Facebook is accessible to the community and is one of the organization’s co-curricular activities that encourage prospective student and student engagement. Northcentral uses Twitter to connect with our various constituencies including prospective students, students, alumni, team members, and various partners. The Northcentral University YouTube site is a repository of multiple videos designed to communicate our Mission, Vision, and Values to our various constituencies (http://www.youtube.com/user/NorthcentralUniv).

Disaster Recovery
Northcentral University as an organization prepares for institutional disruptions to ensure that our students can receive support should a disaster occur affecting our services. Through effective collaboration, deans, faculty, and team members make the appropriate accommodations to support those affected. Decisions to make accommodations are made by academic and administrative leadership. Examples of the accommodations provided include extended assignment due dates and not penalizing students or faculty for non-participation in academic-related activities. Designated individuals send email notifications to team members to notify them of the situation, the status of the University, and the need to accommodate students (emails to students).

Northcentral University Outreach Programs
In recent years, Northcentral University has provided support to a number of local organizations including Yavapai Big Brothers Big Sisters, Prescott Valley Library Foundation, Yavapai Regional Medical Center, and Prescott Area Habitat for Humanity among others. For example, Northcentral University donated funds to develop the virtual reality room in the Prescott Valley Library which provides advanced technologies for community members, thus improving their technical skills and employability (letter to town).

This wide-ranging outreach to the community is funded directly through a budgeted line item, “Community Relations” and through an agreement with the Town of Prescott Valley, AZ whereby Northcentral donates $2.00 per course start (approximately $80,000 for 2012) to the Town to go toward a variety of community specific needs. Other organizations we have supported since 2008 are listed below:

- Special Olympics
- Prescott Frontier Days Rodeo
- Prescott Valley Library Foundation
- Central Yavapai Fire District
- Prescott YMCA Whiskey Row Marathon
- Big Brothers Big Sisters Bowl-a-Thon
- Prescott Valley Chamber - Valley of Lights
Effective Collaboration with Educational Institutions

Practicum and Internship Placement

One example of effective collaboration is seen in our Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) practicum and internship processes. The MFT team has developed innovative ways to interact with students and facilitate the necessary clinical training. Specifically, the MFT program provides a unique opportunity for students to engage and participate in clinical training partnering with facilities in their local community. A platform offering secure, web-based video conferencing tools allows students the opportunity to interact, participate, and gain experience along with evaluation and support from our clinical supervisors who are part of the MFT faculty. Using this web-conferencing platform allows MFT students to work in their local communities and participate in supervised clinical sessions while engaging with other students and MFT faculty.

Rio Salado College

Northcentral is partnering with Rio Salado College, a Higher Learning Commission-accredited institution on two degree programs:

Bachelor’s Completion Program - Northcentral University has entered a partnership agreement with Rio Salado to accept 39 units of general education courses and 51 units of teacher preparation courses in transfer (90 units total). Northcentral University permits the student to earn the last ten upper division courses (30 credits) for the Bachelor’s degree in Education. Arizona state program approval was granted in February 2012.

Master’s in Education Program - The second Rio Salado partnership and articulation agreement is a Post-Baccalaureate program for students who have a bachelor’s degree and desire a teaching certificate. Rio Salado offers the teacher preparation courses and Northcentral University will accept 18 credits from specific courses as transfer credits into the program. The student completes three credits in the fundamental area, nine credits in the specialization area, three credits in educational research, and three credits in the capstone for a total of 18 units from Northcentral, and 18 credits from Rio Salado for a 36-unit Master’s degree.
Society of Human Resource Management
During 2011, the School of Business and Technology Management applied and was approved by the Society of Human Resource Management to offer Master’s in Business Administration Human Resource specialization courses.

Core Component 5c
The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.

Responsiveness to Prospective and New Students
The University is committed to providing prospective students with clear, comprehensive, and accurate information and disclosures about degree programs and costs. Our training programs for Enrollment Advisors focus on these attributes (training).

To aid new students in navigating the student portal and to acclimatize them to the University environment and online education, we have created a student orientation tour. Features of the tour include managing time in a course (course duration, start/ending dates), how to gather resources, and expectations of faculty and students.

To serve the needs of our diverse student population, Northcentral offers course starts every Monday of the year, without exception. All students design their own schedule of courses with their Enrollment Specialist and Academic Advisor. Breaks of varying length (up to 28 days) are allowed between courses, further adding to the wide range of options the students have in building schedules that fit their educational needs.

Responsiveness to Students
Given our strategic commitment to “continuously improve our students’ experiences”, Northcentral provides a wide range of resources and initiatives to support its student body. Described below are a few salient examples.

- An important measure of responsiveness to students is the timeliness of faculty feedback, including grades. Since the last Comprehensive Visit, the University instituted automated monitoring of faculty responsiveness, which has resulted in significantly improved performance on this metric as seen below.
On August 4, 2009, Northcentral University received notification that it was approved by the United States Department of Education (U.S. D.O.E.) to participate in the Title IV Financial Aid Program. This positive decision by the U.S. D.O.E. allows the University to provide federally-backed financial aid resources to all students who meet the federal requirements. As a result, students can complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) which provides consideration for a variety of financial aid including grants and student loans.

In January 2011, inclusive course pricing was implemented, which includes all costs associated with the delivery of a degree program with the exception of books. This allows students to clearly understand the cost of their education and simplifies financial statements. Tuition also comes with a choice of payment plans, whether students are seeking a Doctoral, Master's, or Bachelor's degree. Experienced financial services team members are available to help identify financing options.

In order to respond more efficiently to working adults and our global student population, since the last Comprehensive Visit, we have expanded our Technical Help Desk hours to 24 hour coverage, 7 days a week and Library hours to Sunday – Friday, 6am to 6pm (MST).

Responsiveness to Faculty

The Center for Academic Excellence addresses the needs of our faculty, houses the Center for Faculty Excellence, Instructional Design, Library, and the Writing Center. The Center provides a number of important faculty services, including an orientation for new salaried and non-salaried faculty, information on how to schedule tutoring in the Writing Center and information...
on helpful writing tips, and information on self-evaluation, course welcome letters, and other course tools.

**Responsiveness to Team Members**

Providing a highly desirable work environment generates multiple positive outcomes for the University and its constituents. It allows the University to compete successfully with other institutions for recruitment. Once on board, team members supported by a communication-rich, mission-focused organization are more likely to be highly engaged and therefore more productive and more helpful to students and other constituents. Selected initiatives include:

- **Rewards and recognition program** – The University acknowledges team members across many functional areas who provide high levels of service to students and/or fellow team members.
- **Motivating, Optimistic, and Determined (MOD) Squad** – The University established a team member “council” for two-way communication between team members and leadership. For example, the MOD Squad now sponsors quarterly all-team huddles with leadership to share University-wide updates.
- **Cost-sharing Medical Benefits** - In its 2012 team member benefits package the University initiated a family benefits cost-sharing plan making the costs of medical, dental and vision coverage significantly more affordable for team member spouses and children.
- **Tuition Benefits** - Northcentral provides free tuition to all Northcentral University team members who have been continuously employed in a full-time or part-time capacity for a minimum of 30 calendar days. The benefit applies to spouses, children, step-children, parents, and in-laws.

**Core Component 5d**

*Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.*

Northcentral University recognizes the diverse and unique make up of its internal and external constituents and strives to provide them with the services they want and need. The measure of the how these efforts are valued is reflected in many ways, including surveys and testimonials, and offers from alumni to commit to being Ambassadors for the University.

**Graduation Satisfaction Survey**

To assess graduate satisfaction, we implemented a proprietary instrument to determine perceptions of the University’s academic and administrative services. The entire 2009 graduate population (534) were invited to participate. Using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from ‘Strongly Disagree’ (1) to ‘Strongly Agree’ (5), graduates’ perceptions gauged whether faculty were responsive, consistent, encouraging, professional, and provided substantive feedback.
Graduate Testimonials

A number of Northcentral graduates gather yearly to participate in commencement in Prescott Valley, Arizona, and several participate in a testimonial videotaping session. These videos are posted throughout the public web site, and the University’s YouTube site.

Comments from the Northcentral graduates range from subjects about our method of teaching to the flexibility of an asynchronous environment to the relationship they had with their advisor. All graduates noted here approved the publishing of their comment and name.
Northcentral was quite receptive to my hectic schedule with being a mother, soldier, and student! Love, love, love Northcentral! – Angela Gordon, MBA in Organizational Leadership, Graduated 2011

My Northcentral experience was a wonderfully professional, rigorous journey. I learned so much from the dedicated team members who supported my course work with their expertise and enthusiasm. – Carol Neague, EdD in Teacher Leadership, Graduated 2011

A Northcentral degree provided me the opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream…to teach at the college level. I am now living a dream. I enjoyed the challenges that Northcentral provided. I was fortunate to find an excellent mentor early in my academic journey. He guided and directed me throughout my journey. Northcentral offers a variety of learning experiences. Keep up the good work! – Brent Booth, PhD in Management, Graduated 2010

Northcentral Ambassadors

Many graduates from Northcentral volunteer and make a commitment to be Ambassadors for the University so that they can share their experiences with people who are trying to determine the best place to earn their degree. The University created a web page, which allows graduates and seasoned students to upload their biography and photo along with their personal contact information to the public site, where prospective students may search for ambassadors by degree. Ambassadors regularly answer student and prospective student’s questions and provide guidance based on their experience at Northcentral University.

Summary

Focused firmly on its Mission to help students achieve academically and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions, Northcentral University provides a model of stewardship through its engagement and service efforts. The needs of its constituents are continuously examined through survey and assessment. Institutional strategies to “continuously improve our students’ experiences” and “build and maintain excellent relationships” with constituents direct our resources and energies.

Strengths

1. A continuous and comprehensive process of seeking feedback, ideas, concerns, and suggestions from its constituents.
2. Regular communication of University news and events via multiple modalities to those served by the University.
3. Active involvement in, and support of our communities.
4. Institutional partnerships that create opportunities for students to earn an advanced degree, such as the articulation agreement with Rio Salado.
5. The Center for Academic Excellence which addresses faculty needs.
6. Approval by the United States Department of Education to allow the University to participate in the Title IV Financial Aid Program.
Self-Recommendations for Progress Towards Continuous Improvement

1. Continue to measure current and new initiatives derived from our strategic goals and strategies.
2. Strive to keep pace with rapidly changing capabilities in technology and social media.
3. Expand Ambassador and Alumni Relations programs to strengthen their involvement in the University community.
CONCLUSION

Northcentral University has taken the self-study process as an opportunity not only to evaluate ourselves against the requirements for reaccreditation, but also as a means of improving the University. By engaging our entire University community, we were able to identify our strengths and, importantly, areas for continuing self-improvement, and opportunities for the future.

As evidenced in this self-study and supporting documentation made available in our electronic and physical resource rooms, our governance, strategic planning, resource allocation, faculty, academic and assessment processes are the means through which we achieve our Mission and Vision, and live our Values. The University endeavors to solicit a full range of input on major initiatives across a wide range of constituencies. Northcentral believes that the University continues to meet or exceed the core criteria requirements.

This self-study illustrates continuing progress since the last Comprehensive Visit. The University is advancing a number of initiatives and maturing as an institution of higher learning focused on graduate education. We believe the University has the appropriate structures and processes in place to continue to grow, govern itself responsibly, maintain financial strength, execute strategies, accomplish goals, achieve its Mission, and ultimately realize its Vision. On this basis, Northcentral University respectfully requests reaccreditation for 10 years in accordance with the new Pathways Accreditation Cycle by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.