



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Higher Learning Commission Reaffirmation of Accreditation 2015

#### CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF HLC ACCREDITATION

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Accreditation by regional accreditors like the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), formerly known as the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, is the primary means of assuring and improving the quality of higher education institutions in the U.S. This system of self-examination and peer review by educational institutions is required for student access to federal grants and loans. Missouri State University has 30 other accreditations specific to academic programs.

The University has been continuously accredited for 100 years – since 1915 – by HLC and its predecessors. Missouri State University is part of the open pathway for the reaffirmation of accreditation that requires a quality initiative project, an assurance argument and a site

visit during year 10 of the 10-year cycle. The 2015–2016 academic year is year 10 of the latest 10-year cycle. The assurance argument will be revised and submitted again in year four.

The University has completed the quality initiative project and the assurance argument, which was previously known as a self-study. The assurance argument clearly articulates how the University meets all criteria and core components adopted by HLC. Evidence has been submitted to support the argument.

University officials are preparing for the HLC Site Team visit October 5–6, 2015.



## University committed to continuous improvement

### Improvements since 2005

Missouri State University has made many improvements over the past 10 years. In its 2005 HLC self-study report — and then detailed in its long-range plans for 2006–11 and 2011–16 — the University identified a number of actions it would take to achieve continuous improvement. Some of the most significant include:

- Instituting an external review process for academic programs to ensure their strength and responsiveness to the discipline and students
- Adding external evaluators to the promotion/tenure process
- Working more closely with Missouri community colleges on transfer guides and articulation agreements
- Improving diversity on campus, which has been especially successful with the student body
- Further clarifying and maturing the public affairs mission
- Fully implementing the Provost model to help raise the academic profile
- Expanding University-wide involvement with — and transparency in — the budget process, while still maintaining the University's favorable financial position and strong reserve fund
- Continuing the culture of assessment of student learning with posted learning outcomes and a more comprehensive plan.

As you will see in the summaries of the five criteria, there is much of which to be proud and opportunities for continuous improvement.

### Expectations

The Steering Committee believes that the University meets or exceeds all criteria and core components for the reaffirmation of accreditation by the HLC.

Over the past 20 years, Missouri State has gained a reputation for developing and implementing comprehensive long-range plans and for integrating those plans with the HLC accreditation process. Missouri State officials have made multiple invited presentations at HLC workshops and conventions to discuss the University's success with this integration.

Missouri State believes strongly in continuous improvement and values the HLC accreditation process as one important tool in that effort. The most recent example is how the 2015 HLC accreditation has informed the University's visioning process during 2015–16. That vision will serve as the foundation for the 2016–21 long-range plan, which will be developed during the 2015–16 academic year.



## Criterion One

# Mission

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

### EXCERPTS FROM SUMMARY

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For 20 years, Missouri State has benefited from a strong and consistent mission statement. The public affairs mission is distinctive, meaningful and memorable. The concept of educating students for their role as "global citizens" sets a high standard and is attractive to today's students. It was compelling enough to be approved by the Missouri General Assembly and the Governor and has been included in state statute since 1995.

Since it was established, the public affairs mission has been continuously incorporated into all aspects of campus life, from on-campus living units to academic programs.

With its three pillars of ethical leadership, cultural competence and community engagement, the public affairs mission provides the foundation for diversity and inclusion. Likewise, it provides the philosophy for the University's commitment to partnerships – and it also provides the foundation for the open and transparent style of management at all levels of the University, including the budget.



### Strengths

- The purpose of developing educated persons and the public affairs mission are strong, clear and have staying power.
- The University's budget process is a model of campus-wide participation and transparency.
- The mission has provided a strong foundation for the University's progress in diversity and inclusion.
- Missouri State remains an honest broker and strong partner with many institutions, organizations and other entities.

### Strategic opportunities

- Although the public affairs mission is deeply incorporated into General Education, the University will continue to find fresh ways in which to incorporate the mission into the curriculum and campus life.
- While progress has been made in its diversity goals, the University continues to strive for excellence. A recently completed climate study that involved the campus and external community will lead to new specific goals in the next strategic plan.

## Criterion Two

# Ethical and Responsible Conduct

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### EXCERPTS FROM SUMMARY

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With its public affairs mission, Declaration of University Community Principles, online policy library and Office of Internal Audit and Compliance, Missouri State possesses the ingredients to meet the criterion on ethical and responsible conduct. Expectations for behavior are clearly outlined for all members of the campus community. The University has demonstrated its commitment to these ideals, most notably in its response to the Missouri State Bookstore theft in August 2012 that received national attention and for which the University continues to receive accolades.

The University has a strong commitment to shared governance and includes all constituents, including students, in developing the long-range plan and other important documents and in reaching strategic decisions. Missouri State also serves its constituents by its continuing commitment to partnerships.



#### Strengths

- The institution operates with integrity as evidenced by its commitment to an up-to-date online policy library and annual external audits. In addition, Missouri State has an active Office of Internal Audit and Compliance and a full-time information security officer in support of this commitment.
- The public affairs mission provides a strong philosophical foundation for ethical and responsible behavior, including the celebration of freedom of thought and speech, and diversity and inclusion.
- Codes of conduct are clear for all members of the campus community, from the Board of Governors to faculty and staff, to administrators and to students.

#### Strategic opportunities

- Given the importance of cost to its students, Missouri State strives to find the clearest ways in which to list the price and value of the education it offers.
- The University remains diligent in its goal of responsible conduct in research as it continues to support scholarly activity across all disciplines.
- In this rapidly changing technological environment, Missouri State continues to build on current policies and practices to address new challenges.

### Criterion Three

# Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support

The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

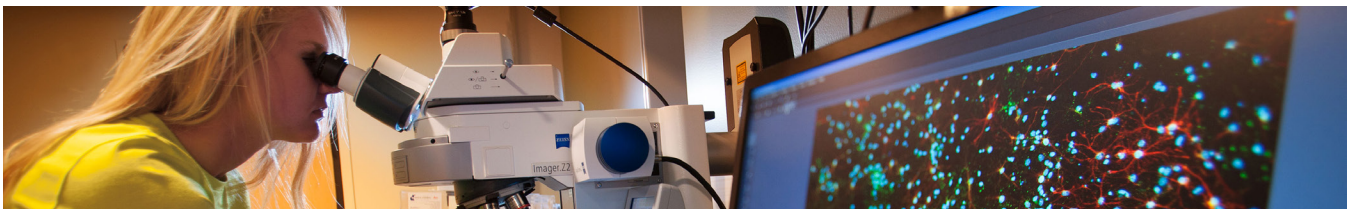
## EXCERPTS FROM SUMMARY

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Missouri State University's reputation is largely based on its academic programs, its faculty and its ability to prepare students to succeed. These are reasons the University has focused on adding relevant programs, eliminating outdated programs; attracting and retaining outstanding faculty, both full-time and part-time; and providing a wide range of services and support to help students succeed.

Over the years, the University has focused its academic program growth at the graduate level with particular focus on health-related programs. Quality is assured through Missouri State's philosophy of accrediting as many programs as possible and regularly reviewing all programs. In addition, the University has taken many steps to ensure the quality of the programs is consistent across all platforms and delivery methods.

Missouri State recruits faculty from across the country and internationally. Policies regarding faculty promotion, compensation and recognition are clearly identified in the Faculty Handbook and other documents.



### Strengths

- Faculty are highly qualified as evidenced by more than 90 percent of the full-time ranked faculty holding the terminal degree in their fields.
- Missouri State has a nationally recognized Academic Advisement Center and Master Advisor Program, which ensures quality advising for all students.
- The general education program recently underwent a thorough review resulting in changes. The program has clearly identified goals and is more closely aligned with the University's mission in public affairs.

### Strategic opportunities

- The University is working to clearly differentiate between graduate and undergraduate learning outcomes for programs and specific dual listed courses as expansion of the number of doctoral programs and interest in accelerated master's programs occurs.
- The Faculty Senate Chair has charged the Academic Relations Committee with producing a report on how the University can better support the teaching efforts of per course faculty in order to improve student success and retention.
- The University continues to work on a variety of alternate pathways to degree completion – online, blended, off-campus, ITV and more. There are many challenges and opportunities as we continue to make progress on this University goal.

## Criterion Four

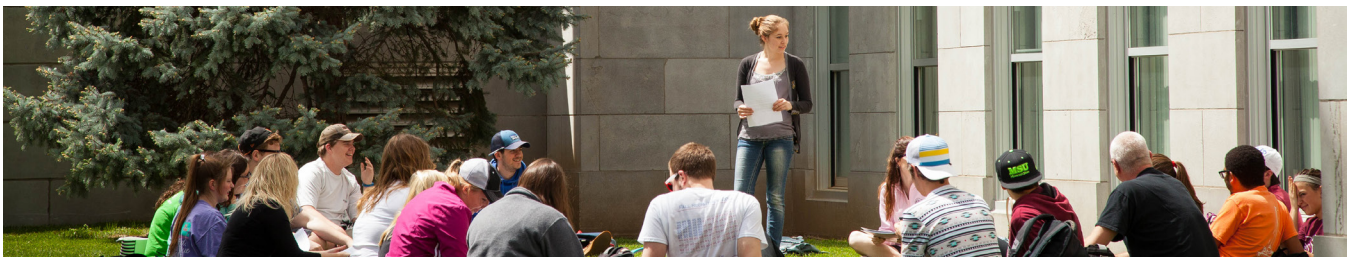
# Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

### EXCERPTS FROM SUMMARY

Missouri State University has a strong tradition of planning, implementing best practices and assessing outcomes. That philosophy is evident in the four long-range plans since 1995 and the increasing emphasis on assessment and the 31 individual accreditations. Missouri State continues to make progress in the areas of assessing student learning and documenting student success after graduation.

In all areas of planning, assessment and accreditations, the University effectively uses data collected. Departmental members with support from the Office of Institutional Research and Office of Assessment analyze collected data and make changes in curricular and co-curricular programs with the goal of increasing student success.



### Strengths

- All program level student learning outcomes are available to students, faculty, staff and external constituents. As part of the University's comprehensive assessment plan college deans are responsible for overseeing program assessment as it aligns with program review. Co-curricular learning outcomes have been established and reviewed by unit heads and the VP of student affairs.
- The Office of Assessment was reinvented to focus on institutional assessment such as National Survey of Student Engagement and the Quality Initiative Project (QIP) that assesses the public affairs mission.
- Missouri State developed an enhanced program review system with external evaluations, a clearer calendar and a website to store all reports.

### Strategic opportunities

- Missouri State continues to refine its customized approach to assessment as the University community shares and learns from one another.
- A new state-wide performance measure requires more comprehensive data on all graduates than the University was collecting. In March of 2015, the President's Task Force on Graduate Tracking and Outcomes was appointed and charged with creating protocols for collection and reporting of data.
- As the University strives to increase retention rates, there is a focus on increasing the number of students who participate in high impact experiences such as service-learning, study away, undergraduate research, practicums and internships.



## Criterion Five

# Resources, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness

The institution's resources, structures and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

### EXCERPTS FROM SUMMARY

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For more than 20 years, Missouri State has developed a reputation for strong planning, setting specific annual goals and measuring progress on all initiatives. That developed reputation is reflected in the long-range plans, annual goals and regular reporting to the Board of Governors, the campus community and the public at-large.

Over the years, Missouri State also has implemented a more inclusive and transparent budgeting process, which has succeeded in making a good system even better. Faculty, especially, have become more engaged at all levels, resulting in strong recommendations and a greater understanding of the University's finances.

The University has made excellent use of the Web and other electronic communication to advance its initiatives.



### Strengths

- Since 2005 the budget process has become increasingly transparent and participatory, aided by the creation of "cost centers," multi-leveled budget committees and public records.
- The 5- to 7-year cycle of strategic planning is now part of the institutional fabric. It is maintained through annual updates to institutional goals and monitored with key performance indicators and performance measures. The KPI website is located at <https://mis.missouristate.edu/KeyPerformanceIndicators/>.
- The changes in the governing board since 2005 – from statewide membership to the current committee structure – have been positive changes for the University as it allows the Board of Governors to engage more effectively in the visioning and strategic planning process.
- Conscientious attention, aided by improved technology, has improved communication and greater transparency throughout campus.

### Strategic opportunities

- With limited state funding for facilities, the University continues to find unique ways to fund improvements in buildings, laboratories, classrooms and other facilities. Recently, renovation funds from the state have been made available to complete some significant renovations in the next few years.
- With decreasing percentage of overall support coming from the state, the University is challenged with increasing numbers of students and larger class sizes.



## The Higher Learning Commission Process

### Purpose

The primary purpose of the Assurance Argument is to apply for continued accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) by presenting patterns of evidence that demonstrate that Missouri State University meets all five of the HLC accreditation criteria.

### Process

Preparation for the 2015 Assurance Argument and site visit began soon after notification of 10-year continuing accreditation from the Commission in 2006. The 15-member Steering Committee was formed in spring of 2012 and began meeting in October 2012. Seven of the committee members served for the 2005 accreditation, thus providing continuity and leadership.

The Steering Committee formed five subcommittees that included faculty and staff outside the Steering Committee to write a first draft of the Assurance Argument and to collect evidence for each criterion. From these initial documents the Steering Committee worked through three more drafts before final submission.

The Steering Committee's work, as well as copies of the Assurance Argument reports are posted at [www.missouristate.edu/hlc/preparation.htm/](http://www.missouristate.edu/hlc/preparation.htm/). The Committee also evaluated progress on and opportunities for each criterion [www.ncahlc.org/Criteria-Eligibility-and-Candidacy/criteria-and-core-components.html/](http://www.ncahlc.org/Criteria-Eligibility-and-Candidacy/criteria-and-core-components.html/).

### Communication

Since 2012, the Steering Committee has taken regular and multiple steps to keep the campus community informed about the HLC accreditation process.

A Town Hall meeting in spring of 2014 covered the process and the most recent draft. Throughout 2014-15, drafts were shared with Administrative Council, Academic Leadership Council, Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, Student Government Association and others.

Missouri State President Clifton "Clif" Smart III has mentioned the process and drafts in Clif's Notes at least once every six months since the process began. There is always a feedback link.

Finally, over the past three years, the chair of the Steering Committee has presented regular updates to the University's Board of Governors – at the Programs and Planning Committee, to the full Board meeting and at the Board Retreats.