



230 South LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500
Chicago, IL 60604-1411
312.263.0456 | 800.621.7440
Fax: 312.263.7462 | hlcommission.org

May 18, 2020

President Stephen Greiner
West Liberty University
208 University Drive
West Liberty, WV 26074-0295

Dear President Greiner:

The interim report you submitted to our office has now been reviewed. The staff analysis of the report is attached.

On behalf of the Higher Learning Commission staff received the report on strategic planning. No further reports are required.

The Open Pathway Assurance Review is scheduled for 2022. The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2027– 2028.

Please note: Revisions to HLC's Criteria for Accreditation will go into effect on September 1, 2020. Institutions will be evaluated against the revised Criteria for all reviews conducted after that date, including reviews related to previously assigned monitoring. Institutional reports submitted after September 1, 2020, that reference the Criteria should be written to the revised version. More information about the revised Criteria, including a crosswalk between the current and revised versions, is available on HLC's website at <https://www.hlcommission.org/criteria>.

For more information on the interim report process contact Lil Nakutis, Accreditation Processes Manager, at lnakutis@hlcommission.org. Your HLC staff liaison is Linnea Stenson (lstenon@hlcommission.org); (800) 621-7440 x 107.

Thank you.

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION



STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

DATE: May 18, 2020

STAFF LIAISON: Linnea Stenson

REVIEWED BY: Steven Kapelke

INSTITUTION: West Liberty University, West Liberty, WV

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Dr. Stephen Greiner, President

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION AND SOURCES: An interim report is required by 5/20/2020 on the process used to prepare a new strategic plan, the establishment of KPIs and metrics used to measure success in achieving goals; and plan for keeping both internal and external stakeholders informed regarding progress and adjustments to the strategic plan.

This interim report derives from the Team Report of the institution's 2018 Comprehensive Evaluation.

REPORT PRESENTATION AND QUALITY: The West Liberty University interim report on strategic planning is presented in a succinct, well organized narrative supported with a range of supplementary materials accessed through links embedded in the narrative. These items include, but are not limited to, the institution's Strategic Planning webpage, and a series of concept papers related to the four strategic themes: Academic Success, Branding, Operational Efficiency, and Student Experience. Also included in the linked documents is the *West Liberty University 2019-2024 Strategic Plan*. Evidence presented in the report indicates that the document is candid and thorough.

REPORT SUMMARY: The report is organized primarily around the stages of the strategic planning process, which began in July 2018 with the appointment of the Assistant Provost for Academic Innovation and Strategic Planning. In preparing to begin the planning process, the Assistant Provost, using a model presented in *Collaborative Strategic Planning in Higher Education*, identified five phases of the process and, working with the Provost, named 16 individuals to serve on the Planning Task Force. The institution also procured the services of an outside consultant to assist with the planning process; the consultant and the Assistant Provost for Academic Innovation and Strategic Planning served as co-facilitators for the planning process.

Phase I: Organization—Here the report notes that the PTF met for the first time in September 2018 to set the planning process in motion and to identify nine stakeholder groups: 1) *Administrators*, 2) *Alumni*, 3) *Athletics*, 4) *Faculty*, 5) *Parents/Guardians*, 6)

Local Community, 7) Local Schools, 8) Students, 9) Student Services. The PTF then assigned two committee members to each group to collect relevant data and “*identify potential themes, goals, and strategies.*”

Phase II: Data Gathering and Engagement—During this period, the two-person teams gathered data from their assigned stakeholder groups through various means and met with the planning facilitators to present progress reports and identify necessary resources. According to the report, the teams submitted their stakeholder summaries by November 23, 2018.

Phase III: Sensemaking—Using the summaries submitted by the stakeholder teams, the facilitators created “*a single presentation for the PTF, the Provost, and the President,*” which was given in a “Sensemaking Meeting” on November 29, 2018. Subsequently, the PTF identified four primary planning themes and formed thematic teams for each of the four.

Phase IV: Vision Conference—Once the thematic teams were set, each team researched their respective themes and created drafts of concept papers “*that would be used to inform and educate stakeholders about their themes...*” The teams were provided with a suggested set of seven components for the concept papers. In February 2019 each team met with the facilitators to provide progress reports and, again, identify additional resources necessary for the completion of the work. The teams submitted their final concept papers by March 1, 2019.

On March 29, 2019, the PTF convened a Vision Conference that brought together a wide range of institutional stakeholders. During this session, participants had the opportunity to review the concept papers that had been submitted earlier and take part “*in various exercises designed to create a ‘Preferred Future’ for the university...*” and generate ideas for the first draft of the strategic plan.

Phase V: Goals Conference—On May 3, 2019, The PTF developed strategic goals and action plans for each of the four strategic themes: Academic Success; Branding; Operational Efficiency; and Student Experience. Subsequently, the Assistant Provost used these materials to create “*one coherent document, a detailed implementation plan designed to blueprint to guide, motivate, and support West Liberty University’s strategic planning initiatives over the next five years.*”

The final section of the narrative is titled “Publicizing Progress and Adjustments,” and describes the means by which the institution will track progress on the new strategic plan, indicating that the first progress report will be published on the University’s strategic planning website. According to the interim report, this progress document will be provided every six months and include “*assessments of completed initiatives and updates on the progress being made on the remaining initiatives.*” The University will reevaluate the plan “periodically” and recommend modifications where appropriate.

REPORT ANALYSIS: Materials presented in the West Liberty University interim report show that the institution has made substantive progress with regard to the issue of strategic planning, which was cited as a concern in the Team Report of the institution's 2018 Comprehensive Evaluation.

The evidence indicates that the institution undertook its planning process systematically and with due consideration, beginning with the appointment of the Assistant Provost for Academic Innovation and Strategic Planning and hiring the services of an external consultant. These two individuals along with the Planning Task Force (PTF) formed the foundation of what appears to have been an effective planning infrastructure.

The report shows that the "phase-based" approach to the planning process achieved its ultimate goal, the development of a five-year plan that would commence in 2019. Each phase of the process, as described in the report's narrative, was clearly defined in terms of objectives and scheduling. This protocol enabled the institution to create an organizational structure around the nine identified stakeholder groups (noted in the Report Summary section above) and assign teams from the PTF to conduct research and draft concept papers related specifically to their respective stakeholders. Indications are that the University systematically sought input from its constituent groups, which were broadly representative of the institution.

The plan itself (*West Liberty University Strategic Plan 2019-2024*), along with other supporting documents supplied in the appendices, confirms the information provided in the report's narrative. The plan identifies the five strategic themes/areas and enumerates specific goals for each. In addition, the plan includes tables for each of the themes that identify key performance indicators, timelines and individuals responsible for reporting on each goal. (It should be noted here that the report's narrative named only four themes; this appears to have been only an oversight since all other materials, including the plan itself, identify five.)

Analysis Concluding Statement: West Liberty University has complied in all respects with the report requirements articulated in the 2018 HLC Team Report. The institution is to be commended for its progress to date. The Higher Learning Commission will not require additional reporting on this topic.

However, because the University's strategic plan is still in early stages of implementation, this matter will require continued attention on the part of the institution. (Please see the Staff Finding section below.) West Liberty University should assume that the HLC Peer Review Team conducting the institution's 2022 Open Pathway Assurance Review will examine carefully the University's continued progress toward its planning goals, as set forth in the strategic plan.

STAFF FINDING:

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s): Core Component 5.C pertaining to strategic planning

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.

Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.

Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.

Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

STAFF ACTION: Receive the report on strategic planning. No further reports are required.

The Open Pathway Assurance Review is scheduled for 2022. The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2027– 2028.