

## Criterion 2 – Integrity

### Criterion 2.A.

The institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff.

#### 2.A.1.

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##### **The institution develops and the governing board adopts the mission.**

North Central’s mission statement ([NC-003 p. 3](#)) was adopted in 2020 ([NC-011 p. 183](#)) and is a guiding principle for planning and policy making. Operating in sync with its mission, the College provides the benefit of high-quality higher education to all its constituencies.

#### 2.A.2.

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##### **The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, human resources and auxiliary functions.**

The mission statement and its underlying policies and processes ensure fair and ethical behavior to all constituencies. For example, Board Policy #114 ([NC-066 p. 7](#)) prescribes “Ethical Standards for Faculty, Staff, Administration, and the Board of Trustees.” The integrity of academic operations is detailed in Core Component 2.E.

The North Central Employee Handbook ([NC-053](#)) contains multiple policies and processes that provide mandates and guidelines that ensure fairness, integrity, and ethical behavior on the part of employees and board members ([NC-120](#)).

The College has two collective bargaining agreements: North Central Association of Faculty and Professional Staff ([NC-013](#)); and Custodian, Maintenance, Office Personnel Association ([NC-078](#)). These agreements complement the Employee Handbook in terms of integrity and ethical behavior.

The College adheres to the State of Michigan Transparency Reporting guidelines. The homepage of the College website includes links to budgets, audits, debt obligations, handbooks, collective bargaining agreements, 5-year capital outlay plan, security reports, and consumer information ([NC-116](#)).

Financial integrity is a strength of the College. The policies and practices that comprise financial management, operations, reporting, controls, and evaluation include the work of the Board and its Finance and Facilities and Personnel subcommittees ([NC-118 p. 6](#)). In 2024, the College's finances were evaluated by Moody's, an external rating agency, as part of a bond issue and received an Aa2 rating, one of the highest and very favorable ([NC-121](#)). This high rating is the result of the College's detailed budgeting and monitoring process, which is discussed in detail in 5.B.3. Each audit since the College's last HLC evaluation has resulted in a clean opinion ([NC-038](#)).

## Criterion 2.B.

The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public.

### 2.B.1.

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**The institution ensures the accuracy of any representations it makes regarding academic offerings, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, governance structure and accreditation relationships.**

North Central ensures the accuracy of any representations about academic offerings, requirements, faculty and staff, costs, governance, and accreditation. The College's website serves as the central hub for all pertinent information for students and the community. The integrated [College e-catalog](#), updated daily, lists all academic programs ([NC-122](#)) and includes real-time career, salary, and financial aid information. The program pages include a link to the Federal Net Price calculator ([NC-123](#)) so students can get information on tuition costs and financial aid packages, as well as real-time career and salary information.

The website's home page displays disclosure and compliance elements, such as a link to verify the College's Higher Learning Commission accreditation status ([NC-124](#)) and State Budget and Performance Transparency Reporting ([NC-116](#)). The Fast Facts page ([NC-125](#)) includes information about North Central and links to the Economic Impact Report ([NC-126](#)) and Strategic Plan ([NC-003](#)).

### 2.B.2.

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**The institution ensures evidence is available to support any claims it makes regarding its contributions to the educational experience through research, community engagement, experiential learning, religious or spiritual purpose and economic development.**

North Central supports any claims about educational contributions through research, community engagement, experiential learning, and economic development. For example, the College's Institutional Research department tracks and reports student retention, graduation, and transfer-out rates ([NC-127](#)), and detailed data on costs, aid, enrollment, diversity, and more through IPEDS reporting ([NC-128](#)).

The College initiated Fast Track programs in 2022 to meet workforce training demands of the region. A year after launching a non-credit Fast-Track Healthcare Program in 2022, the College celebrated adding 44 healthcare professionals to the workforce ([NC-129](#)). Since 2022, the College has greatly expanded these Fast Track programs ([NC-037](#)).

Through a nearly \$500,000 investment ([NC-093](#)) over seven years, the College has prioritized student sense of belonging through the research-based Real Talk pedagogy. This is further discussed in Core Component 1.C.3.

Launched in 2022, the College's Child Care Initiative ([NC-023](#)) addresses Emmet County's childcare shortage by creating sustainable, equitable access to childcare, supported by a qualified workforce earning livable wages. The initiative is supported by a nearly \$2M federal grant over four years ([NC-197](#)) to expand child care access for student parents and is supported by local community foundations and government bodies.

North Central's AA in Environmental and Sustainability Studies (ENVS) program ([NC-031](#)) equips students with multidisciplinary knowledge to address environmental challenges. The community impact of the work of ENVS program students was recently highlighted in a student's discovery of a rare, invasive plant in the College's Natural Area ([NC-059 p. 73](#)).

## Criterion 2.C.

The governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution's integrity.

### 2.C.1.

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**The governing board is trained and knowledgeable so that it makes informed decisions with respect to the institution's financial and academic policies and practices; the board meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.**

North Central operates independently as a non-profit public institution under the Michigan Community College Act of 1966 ([NC-040](#)) to serve its district of Emmet County. The voters of Emmet County elect the seven members of the Board ([NC-130](#)) in staggered six-year terms to conduct the affairs of the College, meet the educational needs of its citizens, and enrich the life of the community in accordance with its bylaws ([NC-118](#)).

Trustees are trained and knowledgeable to make informed decisions regarding the College's financial and academic policies and practices. New Trustees meet with the Board Chair and the College's President to be trained on the College's mission, vision, and values and to review the strategic plan ([NC-002](#)). New Trustees are briefed on current projects, initiatives, and challenges the College may be facing. New Trustees are also presented with information relevant to the general operations of the Board, such as Board Bylaws ([NC-118](#)), the Board Policy Manual ([NC-066](#)), and the Campus Master Plan ([NC-009](#)).

In accordance with Michigan's Open Meetings Act 267 of 1976 ([NC-131](#)), the Board meets monthly in open sessions, and meeting notices, agendas, and minutes are posted to the College's website ([NC-132](#)). Trustees participate in bi-annual retreats, which include activities, such as the retreat evaluation activity (NC-138) held during its June 2023 retreat with ACCT facilitator Luke Robbins (NC-011 p. 134).

Although Michigan's 31 two-year colleges are autonomous, a strong collaborative network operates through the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA). MCCA provides professional development and legislative advocacy opportunities for North Central Trustees.

## 2.C.2

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### **The governing board’s deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.**

The Board operates in a manner that reflects its priorities to preserve and enhance the College through its regular meetings and committee structure. The Board’s monthly meeting agendas ([NC-011](#)) focus on the institution’s priorities and provide opportunities for public comment and input, both scheduled and unscheduled. The Board committees include the Finance and Facilities, Personnel, Bylaws and Policy, and Curriculum committees ([NC-118 p. 5](#)).

The Finance & Facilities Committee ensures compliance through monthly meetings and reviews of reports relevant to the College’s finances. The committee fully reviews annual operating and capital budgets and, selects an external auditor to perform annual audits, who renders an opinion to the Board regarding financial conformance with all financial recording and reporting requirements ([NC-038](#)).

In addition to regular monthly meetings, the Board meets periodically for longer planning sessions at Board retreats. Board retreat agendas are posted as open meetings and typically held in downtown Petoskey. The retreats allow for more in-depth planning and discussion on strategic topics than at a regular Board meeting. Topics include strategic planning, facility needs, assessment and accreditation, the five-year budget forecast, strategic plans, and an in-depth review of campus initiatives ([NC-011 p. 19, p. 82, p. 134](#)).

## 2.C.3

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### **The governing board reviews the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution’s internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.**

The Board is focused on North Central’s achievement of its mission through the success of its students and its impact on the community, incorporating the input of external stakeholders. Noted as the #1 commitment in the strategic plan is the College’s commitment to people: students, employees, and the community – including external stakeholders ([NC-003 p. 7](#)).

North Central’s President frequently invites campus community members to speak at Board meetings. Examples of such presentations include the College’s Library ([NC-011 p. 30](#)) and Business Office ([NC-011 p. 16](#)) staff.

Most recently, the Board directed the College to focus on the Career and Technical Education Enhancement (CATEE) project ([NC-133](#)), which will improve health, technology, and trade offerings to students and help fill community needs in the areas of nursing, allied health, automation, mechatronics, robotics, and other skilled trades that drive our community's vitality and growth.

In addition to their formal role as Board members, Trustees are active leaders within the Petoskey community and have varied opportunities to interact with citizens. Trustees attend College events such as the annual faculty/staff holiday party, numerous lectures and meetings held on the campus, the Employee Years of Service banquet, Phi Theta Kappa induction ceremony, the Athletics Banquet, and Commencement ceremonies. These events provide opportunities for the Trustees to hear the views of internal and external constituents and to factor the information gleaned into future decision-making.

## 2.C.4

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### **The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties.**

The Board preserves its independence from undue influence by its conflict-of-interest policy in its Bylaws ([NC-118 p. 7](#)).

North Central's Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization ([NC-135](#)) chartered separately from the College and has its own Articles of Incorporation ([NC-134](#)) and Policies ([NC-136](#)). The Foundation seeks to initiate philanthropy in partnership with the College and community to provide financial support to the College ([NC-071](#)), such as assistance in meeting the goals of its strategic plan.

The College's Board appoints Foundation Board members ([NC-137](#)). Foundation Board members may serve three three-year terms for a total of nine years of service. The College's President also serves as the President of the Foundation Board and is a voting member. As many as one to three College Board Trustees also serve as Foundation Board members and on the Foundation's Executive Committee. The Foundation's Executive Committee is made up of the College's President, who serves as the committee's President, and a Chair, Past Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer.

Foundation Board members are given a job description that includes the commitments of Foundation Board membership ([NC-080](#)). Foundation Board members must follow the Foundation conflict of interest policy ([NC-136 p. 3](#)), which is identical to the College Board of Trustees conflict of interest policy ([NC-118 p. 7](#)).

The Executive Director of the Foundation reports to the College's President, serves as the Vice President for Advancement on the President's Cabinet team, and, with the President, serves as the interface between the College and Foundation boards in identifying fundraising priorities. The Foundation's Administrative Assistant keeps minutes of Foundation meetings ([NC-187](#)).

Although the College Foundation Board and Board of Trustees are careful to maintain separation, both have adopted a common policy regarding lobbying ([NC-066 p. 7](#)). The separation is evidenced through Foundation audits ([NC-057](#)) and its 990 reports ([NC-055](#)).

## 2.C.5

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**The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the institution's administration and expects the institution's faculty to oversee academic matters.**

The College's Board has delegated the authority and responsibility for overseeing the College's day-to-day operations and the execution of its strategic goals to the President. The President consults with the five vice presidents of the College, who are the VP of Finance and Facilities, VP of Academic Affairs, VP of Student Affairs, VP of Marketing and Strategy, and VP for Advancement in weekly Cabinet meetings on matters concerning federal and state compliance, short and long-term planning, budget, personnel, and other operational issues.

College administration oversees the institution's day-to-day management. The College's organizational chart ([NC-062](#)) illustrates the relationship between the Board, President, and those reporting directly to the President.

The College's faculty are responsible for chairing the Curriculum Review and Development and Academic Policies (CRD/AP) Committee. Other faculty, instructional deans, associate deans, the VP for Academic Affairs, the VP for Student Affairs, and the Registrar complete the Committee's membership. The mission of the CRD/AP Committee is to review and approve new, revised, or inactivated courses and revised programs. This group also reviews and recommends new and inactivated programs ([NC-100 p. 4](#)). All course approvals (new, revised, or inactivated) are implemented without further approval by the President or Board. Likewise, all approved program revisions do not require further approval by the President or Board. CRD/AP also reviews and recommends academic policies through the President and to the Board, such as the College's Program Review and Assessment policies (Board policies 213, 214, 215, and 216) ([NC-011 p. 155](#)).

## Criterion 2.D

The institution is committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.

### 2.D.

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**The institution is committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.**

To meet North Central's mission "to provide exceptional, accessible, relevant higher education to the benefit of all" ([NC-003 p. 3](#)), academic freedom and freedom of expression are paramount as evidenced in Board policy #406 regarding Freedom of Assembly ([NC-066 p. 45](#)). Aligning under this Board policy are statements on academic freedom and freedom of assembly in the [Student Handbook](#). Also in alignment, the collective bargaining agreement with North Central's Association of Faculty and Professional Staff includes a section on academic freedom ([NC-013 p. 8](#)). North Central's commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning is clear and drawn directly from its governing board.

In pursuit of truth in teaching and learning, North Central ensures a focus on its five institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) for all students. The five ILOs are Intellectual Skills, Communication Skills, Ethics, Applied Skills, and Cultural Skills ([NC-061](#)). Mapping the College's general education curriculum ([NC-145](#)) – which aligns with the statewide Michigan Transfer Agreement (MTA) curriculum ([NC-087](#)) – with these five ILOs enables this pursuit and ensures students learn about the world in which they exist, while cultivating critical thinking and engaging in a sustained and independent search for truth. The general education learning outcomes ([NC-072](#)) are identical to the ILOs. Criteria three and four provide further discussion on the teaching and learning of the ILOs.

North Central encourages open dialogue for students, community members, faculty, and staff through a myriad of opportunities to exercise academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning; often through other learning activities outside of the structure of academic programs. These opportunities take the form of a series of forums or events, and singular, unique events such as Lifelong Learning Club presentations ([NC-08,4](#)), Luncheon Lecture series ([NC-096](#)), International Committee Speakers series ([NC-036](#)), and Library presentations, displays, and events ([NC-056](#)).

## Criterion 2.E.

The institution's policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, staff and students.

### 2.E.1.

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#### **Institutions supporting basic and applied research maintain professional standards and provide oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability.**

North Central supports research aligned with its strategic plan ([NC-002](#)) and adheres to policies that ensure regulatory compliance, ethical behavior ([NC-092](#)), and fiscal responsibility. The College acknowledges its role in fostering and sharing knowledge through policies on academic freedom found in the Faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement ([NC-013](#)), [Student Handbook](#), and Intellectual Property Policy ([NC-066 p. 10](#)). The Ethical Standards for Faculty, Staff, Administration, and Board Policy ([NC-066 p. 7](#)) sets high standards of integrity for employees and trustees, while the Student Handbook addresses student conduct and academic dishonesty. The Board Bylaws ([NC-118](#)) and Intellectual Property Policy ensure financial accountability, reflecting the College's commitment to ethical and responsible practices.

The Office of Institutional Research (IR) supports research conducted by faculty involving students or employees, requiring them to submit proposals for review ([NC-094](#)). Using standards from Michigan State University and the University of Michigan, IR ensures ethical and professional standards are met through its research review process ([NC-095](#)). If a study qualifies as Human Subjects Research under the Common Rule ([NC-151](#)), IR assists faculty in collaborating with external IRBs ([NC-152](#)) until North Central establishes its own IRB, a process currently in development ([NC-153 p. 4](#)). When working with external organizations, North Central follows their research standards and procedures, such as with the CCSSE ([NC-154](#)) and PACE Climate Survey ([NC-155](#)).

## 2.E.2.

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### **The institution provides effective support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff and students.**

North Central's Office of Institutional Research provides effective support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff and students in many ways, such as literature review, survey design, methodology, and data literacy ([NC-156](#)).

The Library actively supports research integrity and scholarly practices among faculty, staff, and students. It provides diverse content and services to ensure the college community has the resources needed to ethically use, share, and create information. This includes a content collection development policy ([NC-157](#)). Research and reference support are available through in-person or virtual sessions, and 24/7 chat ([NC-158](#)), monitored by the Librarian and a team of academic librarians. Faculty frequently consult the Library for help with course materials, including Open Educational Resources (OER), copyright, licensing, fair use ([NC-159](#)), source compilation ([NC-160](#)), and adapting materials ([NC-161](#)).

The Library also provides information literacy (IL) and research instruction for College classes and creates research guides. It follows the Association for College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy, tailoring sessions based on instructor requests and class assignments. Examples of past sessions include "Fake News and Misinformation" for political science, "Ethics of Generative Artificial Intelligence" for sociology, "Introduction to Scholarly Conversation" for English, and "Identifying Scientific Research" for biology ([NC-162](#)).

North Central's Tutoring and Testing Center, which houses the Writing Lab, is another effective support service for students. As discussed more fully in the response to Criterion 3.D.2, North Central's Writing Lab offers face-to-face and online support for student research writing ([NC-163](#)).

### 2.E.3.

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#### **The institution provides students guidance in the ethics of research and use of information resources.**

The College provides students with clear policy and procedures regarding student code of conduct and academic dishonesty in the [Student Handbook](#). In addition, North Central provides standardized guidelines on plagiarism and the use of artificial intelligence. These guidelines are included in all syllabi and managed through Simple Syllabus in the Distance Learning division of the College. In addition, faculty may also add additional research guidelines to their syllabi ([NC-164](#)). Some faculty will also give students online guides to help them avoid plagiarism via proper citation. Examples include the Purdue Online Writing Lab. Faculty also meet with students having trouble with citations and may refer them to the campus Writing Lab in the Tutoring & Testing Center ([NC-165](#)).

### 2.E.4.

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#### **The institution enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.**

North Central's policy regarding academic dishonesty is presented in the [Student Handbook](#). The Academic Dishonesty Process provides a clear definition of academic dishonesty. In addition, the handbook delineates the due process steps that must be adhered to when bringing charges of academic dishonesty. Evidence of a redacted Judicial Committee decision and Final Decision Letter ([NC-166](#)) to a student illustrate the enforcement of these procedures.

Given the policies and procedures that focus on the discovery of knowledge and its responsible acquisition and application, North Central has a robust system to ensure the institution and its members act with integrity, and that its research conduct is ethical and responsible.

### **Summary**

North Central demonstrates its commitment to integrity through robust policies and processes governing ethical behavior, academic freedom, and clear communication with its stakeholders. The institution's mission serves as a guiding principle for decision-making and operations, ensuring transparency, fairness, and ethical standards.

The College upholds financial integrity through detailed budgeting, audits, and compliance with state transparency reporting. Ethical behavior is mandated across all operations, with guidelines established in employee handbooks, collective bargaining agreements, and board policies. Academic freedom and freedom of expression are protected through policies that encourage open dialogue and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.

North Central ensures accurate representations of its programs, costs, governance, and accreditation through its comprehensive website and catalog, which are regularly updated. The institution supports claims about its contributions through research, community engagement, and workforce development initiatives, such as Fast Track programs and Child Care Initiative.

The governing board operates autonomously and prioritizes the College's mission while maintaining independence from external influences. Faculty oversee academic matters, and administrative staff manage day-to-day operations.

Research integrity is supported through Institutional Research and the Library, which provide resources and guidance on ethical practices. Academic honesty is enforced through clear policies, ensuring that all members act responsibly and ethically.