

Criterion 4 – 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.

Criterion 4.A

The institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings.

Argument 4.A.1

The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews and acts upon the findings.

Program Review Process

As noted by HLC during the College's 2019 Mid-Cycle Assurance Argument, the Academic Planning and Program Review (APPR) template offered consistency in the review process of programs, but its use and effectiveness were limited by several factors. The first is the lack of an established timeline to routinize program review across the entire curriculum to ensure that all credentials are evaluated appropriately. The second and most significant limitation of the APPR process is the template's structural weakness: no component of program-level assessment informing the review. This lack of a systematic approach to program assessment as a defined element of the APPR necessarily limited program review effectiveness to guide decision-making and curricular adjustments.

Recognizing the weaknesses of the APPR, and the concomitant need to define systematic program assessment processes to guide decisions and curricular changes resulting from program review, the institution joined the 2021 cohort of the HLC Assessment Academy. The purpose of doing so was to develop program assessment protocols to support systematic structures and processes for program review ([NC-226 p. 405](#)). Criterion 3 includes an in-depth discussion of these refined assessment processes.

In 3.A.1 and 3.A.3 of this Assurance Argument, the College's program review process and connections to other programmatic and curricular processes are discussed in detail. As mentioned earlier in 3.A.3, North Central ensures program quality through its comprehensive program review process for all programs (Certificates of Development, Certificates, Associates (including pathways)). The College defines program review as the systematic, cyclical process that involves collecting program information to analyze and evaluate a program's effectiveness, vitality, relevancy, and resource needs. Program Review occurs every six years ([NC-234](#)). The six-year timeframe consists of assessing program learning outcomes (PLOs) in years 1-4; coordinating with stakeholders, reviewing data, and completing the Review of Academic Programs (RAP) form ([NC-203](#)) in year 5; and receiving and discussing administrative feedback

provided on the Administrative Response to Academic Planning & Program Review (APPR) form ([NC-229](#)) and planning change initiatives in year 6. New programs are scheduled to undergo a mid-cycle, abbreviated program review after three years ([NC-234](#)). To complete a program review, program stakeholders (e.g., Faculty and Academic Deans) use the RAP form, which includes an evaluation of program structure, learning outcomes, resources, and student success outcomes. After faculty and/or academic deans finalize the RAP, the Vice President of Academic Affairs reviews the completed RAP and provides feedback using the APPR form ([NC-205](#)).

Use of Program Review Outcomes and Data

The program review process provides stakeholders the opportunity to confirm quality, improve quality ([NC-205 p. 1](#)), or sunset a program ([NC-205 p. 3](#), [NC-205 p. 4](#)). When the recommended outcome is to sunset a program, the Curriculum Review and Development and Academic Policies (CRD/AP) committee reviews this and provides a final recommendation to the President of the College ([NC-279](#)). To limit redundancy, programs with third-party accreditation use their external accreditor's review in place of the internal RAP process ([NC-185 p. 3](#)).

4.A.2

The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.

North Central Michigan College Award of Credit

North Central fully evaluates credits transferred to the College, offering a variety of methods for students to receive credit for prior learning and credits earned at other higher education institutions.

More than 90% of credits awarded annually to North Central students are taught by North Central Faculty. Credit awarded for courses taken at North Central are approved and periodically revised through CRD/AP (will be NC-227). Faculty and Deans review the Master Course Syllabi every six years as part of program review ([NC-203](#); checklist for reviewing MCS).

North Central adheres to the guidelines established by the State of Michigan as detailed in the Activities Classification Structure (ACS) manual ([NC-230](#)). ACS provides guidelines for all areas at the College, including instructional design. The major points related to instructional design are:

- Classification of instructional areas and topics ([NC-231](#))
- Classification of various disciplines ([NC-230 p. 10](#))
- Contact hour and credit hour standards ([NC-230 p. 36](#))

Award of Credit from Other Institutions and Credit for Prior Learning

The remainder of credits (10%) awarded annually to North Central students are a result of credits transferred to North Central from other higher education institutions or through some form of credit for prior learning.

North Central provides clear guidelines for transferring credits to the College ([NC-238](#)). These guidelines include specific rules regarding the transfer of credits from other higher education institutions. In addition to College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) and Dantes Subject Standardized Tests (DSST) testing for credit, the College also considers test results from Advanced Placement (AP) testing and American Council on Education (ACE) evaluations of Education Experiences in the Armed Forces recommendations.

The Board of Trustees Policy 212 – Credit for Prior Learning ([NC-066 p. 26](#)) provides the direction, opportunities, and limitations for awarding credit for prior learning. Students are awarded credit for CLEP and DSST testing, and Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) ([NC-232 pp. 2-3](#)). Through CPL, North Central recognizes that current licensure or certification represents learning for which credit may be granted. Finally, working with the State of Michigan Department of Education, North Central is an active participant in the Michigan Statewide Postsecondary Credit Agreement initiative; the College is part of 14 CTE discipline-specific agreements ([NC-270](#)).

4.A.3

The institution has policies that ensure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.

The College's Registrar follows professional guidelines for evaluating and accepting transfer credits set forth by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and its Michigan affiliate, the Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACRAO) ([NC-243](#)). The Registrar is active in the MACRAO organization, serving on the Conference Planning Committee, and takes advantage of various available professional development opportunities.

North Central's policies regarding the incoming transfer of credits are published in the online 2024-2025 catalog ([NC-238](#)).

The College has several consortia and contractual agreements whereby entire blocks of credit—not as individual credits—are transferred in for credit towards certain applied degree programs. Examples include two Law Enforcement programs in which a police academy experience is credited and Welding ([NC-269](#)).

4.A.4

The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It ensures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.

North Central maintains and exercises authority over its curriculum including rigor, student learning, and faculty qualifications. The College's highly qualified faculty develop appropriate course content, learning outcomes, and rigorous learning experiences.

Rigor of Courses

Primary control of course design, expectations, prerequisites and rigor is the purview of the Curriculum Review and Development and Academic Policies (CRD/AP) Committee. The College's faculty are responsible for chairing the 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.

All course approvals (new, revised, or inactivated) by the CRD/AP Committee 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 (evidence). New programs (associate degrees, certificates, and certificates of development) require President or Board approval as outlined in Board of Trustees Policy 213: Academic Degrees, Programs & Courses ([NC-066 p. 26](#)).

The academic policies reviewed and recommended by the CRD/AP Committee are forwarded to the President and Board for approval; for example, BOT Policy 215: Program Review ([NC-066 p. 27](#)) and BOT Policy 216: Outcomes Assessment (Assessment of Student Learning) ([NC-066 p. 28](#)).

Expectations for Student Learning

The College's Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) set expectations for student learning at the College. The development process of the ILOs is detailed in 3A. The ILO statements are displayed in the College Catalog ([NC-061](#)) and shared at campus presentations ([NC-286 p. 42-56](#)). Course learning outcomes (CLOs) are aligned to Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and PLOs are aligned to ILOs. Faculty and staff use curricular and co-curricular maps ([NC-258](#)) to align learning outcomes which is discussed further in 4.B. These maps illustrate expectations of student learning and provide a road map for assessment. These tools, as well as others (co-curricular assessment plan evidence file; ([NC-213](#), [NC-272](#))) help to measure, maintain, and inform decisions about student learning expectations.

Access to Learning Resources

The College maintains authority over Learning Resources to ensure the quality of educational programs, learning environments, and support services. Examples include:

Nursing Programs

The Nursing Department offers students several support resources: Hurst NCLEX test prep, tutoring, resilience coaching, and the iPad 1:1 initiative. Tutoring is led by working nurses from the community, while resilience coaching, provided by two coaches, helps students build confidence, develop coping skills, and strengthen resilience for both the program and their future careers ([NC-333](#)). Through donor support, the College also offers nursing students a Hurst review, with a coach providing in-person instruction over four days for RN and PN students in their final semester. Additionally, the IT and Nursing departments created a program providing iPads to RN students upon acceptance, addressing technology access inequities and supporting electronic testing to prepare students for the NCLEX.

Library

The Library actively collects and provides access to physical and electronic resources that support and enhance the college curriculum, including licensed materials, open access content, and Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) resources ([NC-157](#); [NC-334](#); [NC-335](#)). In collaboration with the College's IT department, the Library also supports student access to technology through a lending program that offers semester-long checkouts of laptops, WiFi hotspots, and graphing calculators ([NC-336](#); [NC-337](#)).

Student Success Coordination (Starfish)

In 2021, the College implemented Starfish software, a communication tool that enables faculty and student services to identify and support struggling students. Faculty can flag, refer, or give kudos to students, and they complete three student-progress surveys each semester (Weeks 1, 5, and 15) ([NC-338](#)). The Student Success Coordinator trains Faculty on the use and application of Starfish. The coordinator also monitors and supports students with two or more tracking items, and academic coaches provide additional support to these students through email or text. This process is further detailed in section 3.D.

Tutoring and Testing Center

The College ensures quality learning environments through its tutoring and testing services. The Tutoring & Testing Center Manager ensures all proctors pass certification exams from each testing entity to adhere to testing standards and procedures ([NC-339](#)). In addition, the manager hires experienced Part-Time Tutors for the Math and Writing Labs, and Student Peer Tutors must meet specific criteria, including passing the relevant course with a B+ or higher, maintaining a 3.0 GPA, interviewing, and obtaining a recommendation from the course professor. To enhance quality, the College is aligning tutor training with College Reading & Learning Association (CRLA) standards, aiming for CRLA certification ([NC-340](#)). Additionally, every tutoring session is documented, and the College provides 24/7 online tutoring through

Net Tutor ([NC-341](#)). Tutoring is also part of Cocurricular Assessment, with student feedback from the Math Lab guiding improvements ([NC-258 p. 7](#)). For testing, all proctors must pass certification exams from each testing entity to ensure adherence to testing standards and procedures ([NC-339](#)).

Faculty Qualifications

All Faculty, including the College's Adjunct Faculty, at all teaching locations have a Faculty Qualifications Review (FQR) Assessment completed by the hiring Divisional Dean ([NC-273](#)). Part One of the FQR form includes a comprehensive Credentialing Requirement Checklist ensuring all proper documentation necessary to meet the HLC's and the College's guidelines has been obtained and located in the Faculty personnel file. Part two of the FQR form describes what makes the Faculty member qualified, either by proper academic degrees, academic credits, and/or tested experience. Under this section, separate courses counted towards the 18 qualifying graduate hours are specifically listed along with an area to provide comments for further explanation where necessary. A similar section exists for tested experience, if applicable. This form then moves on to Part Three which summarizes the courses that the Faculty member is deemed qualified to teach.

The summary of these forms is included in a document maintained by each Divisional Dean and uploaded to SharePoint for the Academic Affairs team found under "Faculty Credential Review" (NC-299). Subsequently, academic credentials held by Faculty are listed by the name and contact information on the College's website directory ([NC-300](#)).

The on-boarding process of all new Faculty has been amended to require completion of the FQR before the individual can be processed and sent to payroll ([NC-273](#)). This ensures as the administrative staff change, the process is maintained.

North Central has offered Dual Enrollment to local area schools within its service district area for the past 36 years. Dual Enrollment has continued to grow to include North Central Now! (NCN) concurrently enrolled courses. Concurrent courses are held at the local high schools and taught by qualified Faculty on site at the local schools during the daytime while high school classes are in session. All dual-enrolled Faculty, including NCN faculty, are treated the same as full-time and part-time Faculty; therefore, the same process outlined above is applied. All Faculty have an FQR ([NC-273](#)) completed and filed and are included in the "Faculty Credential Review" document (NC-299).

All Faculty, regardless of teaching location or modality, follow the most current Master Course Syllabus (MCS) for each course taught (*evidence*). These MCS documents are initially approved by the CRD/AP Committee ([NC-212](#)) and periodically reviewed during Program Review ([NC-203](#)).

4.A.5

The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.

North Central maintains specialized accreditation for two programs.

The College's Emergency Medical Services – Paramedic Program recently received continuing accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) ([NC-185](#)). The Michigan Bureau of EMS, Trauma & Preparedness states "A Paramedic education program must have a Letter of Review from the Committee of Accreditation of the EMS Professions (CoAEMSP) or full accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) ([NC-235](#)).

The College's Nursing Associate of Applied Science Program (RN) recently received initial accreditation through the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) ([NC-184](#)). Michigan Code Code R.338.10303d ([NC-233](#)) requires any nursing education program approved by the board to be accredited by a board-recognized nursing accreditation organization.

Periodic evaluations conducted as part of these specialized accreditations are used in lieu of the College's program review process ([NC-234](#)). Advisory Committees for these programs also periodically review program objectives and outcomes ([NC-103](#), [NC-107](#), [NC-108](#), [NC-109](#), [NC-110](#), [NC-111](#), [NC-112](#)).

North Central is also pursuing two additional specialized accreditations/endorsements. The College recently received grant funding to pay for our Early Childhood Education programs accreditation by the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) ([NC-280](#)). In addition, following the construction completion of the Health Education and Science Center (HESC) addition in 2026, the College will finalize the application for full International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL) Healthcare Simulation Standards endorsement for our nursing simulation labs ([NC-281](#)).

4.A.6.

The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution ensures that the credentials it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission.

For associate degrees, certificates, and certificates of development, North Central defines student success as the summation of completion and transfer rates ([NC-176 p. 2](#)). The College's Persistence, Enrollment, Retention, and Completion (PERC) dashboard includes two-, three-, and four-year success rates ([NC-176](#)). These rates are based on cohorts' time-of-entry to the institution. This is the same definition and methodology used by Michigan's Center for

Education Performance Indicators (CEPI) ([NC-240 p. 3](#)). As illustrated in the PERC and CEPI dashboards, North Central's four-year success outcomes increased four percentage points (46% to 51%) from 2016-2017 to 2020-2021, while the average for the state of Michigan increased one percentage point (39% to 40%) ([NC-268](#)). To further evaluate student success, the College disaggregates success by degree attainment and transfer to four-year university ([NC-268](#)).

When students apply for graduation, they are asked to complete a brief survey, summarizing their experience at North Central and their immediate plans for the future. Overwhelmingly, students feel they have met their personal goals (~95%), which is especially remarkable when one considers the percentage who reported working full- or part- time while attending (~89%). The anticipated transfer rate (~62%) is also higher than that of the students in general. At the time of applying for graduation, around 40% of students already have employment in their field of study([NC-236](#)).

For occupational programs, such as nursing and EMS/paramedic, the College closely monitors licensure exam pass rates of graduates to ensure program objectives and outcomes result in high pass rates ([NC-044](#); [NC-287](#)). These pass rates are also available on the College's website.

North Central ensures credentials prepare students for advanced study or employment through transfer articulation agreements ([NC-316](#)), including ten MiTransfer Pathway degrees (statewide articulation agreements) ([NC-228](#)). These agreements simplify the transfer of credit and create a more efficient process for students to complete baccalaureate degrees.

As mentioned in 2.B.2, the College's Fast Track programs ([NC-037](#)) have provided opportunities for over 350 students in the last two years to meet workforce training demands in the region. Of these 350+ students, over 75% have completed since June 2022.

Criterion 4.B

The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.

4.B.1.

The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and cocurricular offerings.

North Central's HLC Assessment Academy Team ([NC-244](#)), along with the Office of Institutional Research & Assessment (IR), guide the College's assessment processes. In 2011, the College adopted the Lumina Foundation-supported Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) as its outcome assessment platform ([NC-228](#)), establishing goals for participation and student learning ([NC-206 p. 1](#)). This new infrastructure introduced faculty to standard assessment processes, requiring course assessments to be submitted via the Assessment Record Sheet ([NC-206 p. 2](#)). Participation increased across students, sections, and disciplines ([NC-206 p. 5](#)). The College demonstrated achievements in the five broad DQP areas in the 2019 mid-cycle report ([NC-206 p. 6](#)). Additionally, by integrating the DQP framework, it developed a learning outcome assessment data system through the College's SIS and LMS.

These infrastructure developments positioned North Central to effectively use assessment data to enhance teaching and learning both now and in the future. However, the 2019 HLC Open Pathway Mid-Cycle Review noted that the College did not fully meet its expectations ([NC-245 p. 46](#)). Following this feedback, new leadership in Academic Affairs and Institutional Research & Assessment, and recent participation in the HLC Assessment Academy, North Central identified improvement opportunities and began focused efforts to strengthen its student learning assessments ([NC-001](#)).

North Central is committed to continuously enhancing its student learning assessment processes, basing improvement decisions on evidence and collaboration with stakeholders. In 2021, the Team identified key areas needing improvement:

- limited shared understanding of DQPs, program outcomes, and institutional learning outcomes ([NC-246](#); [NC-247](#); [NC-248 p. 57](#); [NC-248 pp. 55-56](#))
- an incomplete assessment process ([NC-206](#); [NC-245 p. 46](#));
- a compliance-focused rather than engagement-driven assessment culture ([NC-248 p. 57](#); [NC-286 pp. 276-279](#));
- a lack of defined learning goals and processes for co-curricular assessment ([NC-245 p. 46](#)).

With input from Faculty ([NC-286 pp. 42-56](#), [NC-249](#), [NC-250](#), [NC-246](#)) and guidance from HLC Assessment Academy Mentors ([NC-225](#)), the Team began addressing these issues while maintaining ongoing student learning assessments ([NC-286 pp. 248-251](#); [NC-252](#)).

Process for Learning Outcome Alignment

In the 2022-2023 academic year, the Team created new curriculum mapping processes and guided faculty, academic deans, and co-curricular leaders through the mapping ([NC-253](#); [NC-286 p. 129](#); [NC-286 p. 117](#)). The Team introduced a curriculum map template ([NC-255](#)) to help stakeholders align course and activity learning outcomes with program and institutional outcomes. For new general education courses, CLOs are also mapped to General Education PLOs and recorded in CRD/AP course approval forms ([NC-254](#)).

Learning is structured so that course learning outcomes (CLOs) or co-curricular learning outcomes (CoLOs) align with program outcomes (PLOs) ([NC-145](#); [NC-255](#); [NC-256](#); [NC-257](#); [NC-258](#)). Program learning outcomes align to the College's institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) ([NC-237](#)).

Process for Writing and Revising Learning Outcomes

As discussed in 3.A, in 2022-2023, the Team launched a multi-year project ([NC-001](#)) to revise and develop course ([NC-259](#)), co-curricular ([NC-064](#), [NC-260](#)), program ([NC-286 p. 246](#)), and institutional learning outcomes ([NC-249](#); [NC-041](#)) using Blooms Taxonomy and outcome writing guides ([NC-266](#); [NC-261](#)). The Team also trained faculty and staff on these resources during Assessment Day workshops ([NC-260 pp. 1-16](#); [NC-286 p. 246](#); [NC-262](#)). With this large project nearly complete, the Team is planning sustainable outcome review and revision processes "post-academy" ([NC-225](#); [NC-248](#)).

Process for Curriculum Mapping

The Team is implementing improved assessment processes through a scaled approach, as outlined in the Team's Goals and Timeline ([NC-001](#)). For curricular assessment, the Team began with the General Education Program and several high-demand occupational programs. In 2024-2025, the Team is working with faculty to map all remaining transfer and occupational programs ([NC-001](#)). For co-curricular programs, Team leaders are working with high-impact areas like Library, Tutoring Services, Student Senate, Phi Theta Kappa, Career Services, and student employees, with plans to expand to programs like Athletics ([NC-064](#)). This approach balances workload for faculty, co-curricular leaders, and the Team, and allows feedback to refine assessment processes.

The curriculum map template ([NC-255](#)) will be an essential tool for faculty and co-curricular leaders, helping them identify opportunities to reinforce and enhance student learning throughout a program's curriculum. The Team will make any necessary refinements as a result of the Team's pilot work.

Process for Measuring Learning

For over a decade, faculty have assessed student learning for institutional purposes ([NC-279 pp. 63-64](#), [NC-206](#)), primarily using direct assessments and submitting learning outcome data to IR via the Academic Record Sheet ([NC-206 p. 6](#)). As part of the HLC Assessment Academy, the Team improved learning measurement processes through pilots, starting with assessment planning. From Fall 2021 to Fall 2023, full-time faculty submitted CLO assessment plans via Survey Monkey ([NC-264](#), [NC-265](#)), specifying which CLO(s) to assess, methodologies, and proficiency targets. Academic deans and the Associate Dean of Institutional Research & Assessment informed adjunct faculty of these plans so instructors could assess and submit results for the selected CLO. The IR Office provided “Learning Outcome Reports” with aggregated learning outcome data at section, course, and institutional levels, allowing faculty to compare proficiencies ([NC-252](#) ; [NC-286 pp. 248-251](#); [NC-286 pp. 141-142](#)). An interpretation guide accompanied the reports ([NC-263](#)). This approach enabled faculty to intentionally plan CLO assessments and allowed the Team to refine data collection methods while designing PLO assessment planning.

From there, the Team developed, and is currently piloting, PLO assessment plans that integrate CLO assessment, replacing the CLO assessment plan process previously discussed ([NC-286 p. 16](#)). Introduced in Winter 2024, Faculty completed annual PLO assessment plans ([NC-213](#)) to be implemented in the 2024-2025 academic year ([NC-286 pp. 17-23](#)). These plans require faculty to select at least one PLO to assess annually (aiming to assess all PLOs before Program Review) ([NC-286 p. 92](#)) and to identify aligned courses, assessment methods, CLO and PLO proficiency targets, timelines, and involved stakeholders ([NC-272](#)). Faculty assess CLOs aligned with the chosen PLO and submit proficiency data via Brightspace. Based on faculty feedback, PLO assessment plans are now submitted through a shared, accessible form on the College’s SharePoint, facilitating easier collaboration than Survey Monkey.

Historically, the College used a three-tiered proficiency scale (beginning, developing, advanced) to measure learning proficiency. Evidence showed that faculty had varied interpretations of this scale at the CLO level ([NC-286 p. 78](#); [NC-282](#)), so, as discussed in Core Component 3.A., faculty and the Team revised the scale to Below/Meets/Exceeds proficiency for greater clarity and consistency, establishing an expected minimum proficiency level ([NC-286 pp. 50-51](#); [NC-286 p. 33](#); [NC-283](#)). At the program level, the College adopted a binary scale (meets/does not meet), applied through proficiency targets in assessment planning and curriculum maps ([NC-286 pp. 50-51](#); [NC-286 p. 34](#)). Using historical assessment data ([NC-284](#)), faculty determined the percentage of learners they expect to meet the PLO being assessed in 2024-2025. For example, 2015-2023 assessment data showed that 72% of learners in Business Management AAS courses met or exceeded CLO proficiency across the curriculum. In the 2024-2025 Business Management AAS assessment plan, stakeholders will consider PLO 4 (“construct and present effective oral and written forms of professional management communication”) met if 75% or more of Business Management AAS students assessed meet or exceed the CLOs mapped to PLO

4 ([NC-213](#)). Given this is the first iteration of this PLO assessment process, the Team will gather feedback and make necessary improvements.

The College is leveraging its Learning Management System, Brightspace, for CLO and PLO assessment. Each course in Brightspace includes the newly revised CLOs and proficiency scale. When faculty complete their assessments, instead of manually inputting data into the antiquated Assessment Record Sheet (NC-206 p. 2), they can now easily select “Below/Meets/Exceeds Proficiency” for the assessed CLO for each student in their Brightspace course ([NC-239](#)). Aggregated CLO data will be used to determine whether students are meeting the PLO target. This technology will be used for faculty teaching online and in-person courses. The Team provided training and resources for faculty in Winter 2024 ([NC-286 pp. 13-26](#); [NC-251](#)).

Faculty will complete the PLO assessment plans each year in the Winter term using data from previous years’ assessment to inform decisions. Given this is a new process, the Team is testing these processes with full-time faculty courses only and will integrate part-time faculty courses once the evidence has been collected and revisions made as necessary.

For co-curricular assessment, co-curricular groups are also completing 2024-2025 assessment plans ([NC-258](#)). Like curricular assessment, the Team will use feedback from stakeholders involved in testing of the redesigned assessment structures to improve process.

Processes for Data Reporting and Use

Historically, North Central provided periodic reports on DQP proficiency achievement at the institutional level ([NC-206](#)). In 2022, the Team introduced “Learning Outcome Reports” to better link teaching, learning, and assessment for faculty ([NC-263](#)). Now, the Team is developing processes to report CLO data in the College’s learning management system, Brightspace. Since all courses, regardless of modality, have Brightspace course shells every semester, Faculty can submit student-level CLO assessment data ([NC-239](#)) and review a summary of their CLO proficiency results directly within Brightspace. Utilizing the reported CLO data and PLO mapping, IR will develop and provide PLO proficiency reports to indicate whether PLO targets are met. Faculty can use Brightspace reporting tools to analyze areas where CLO proficiency fell short of expectations and apply a data interpretation tool to identify improvement areas ([NC-301](#)). These processes are currently being designed and tested through the HLC Assessment Academy project.

Lastly, Brightspace is currently improving their learning outcome reporting features. The College’s Associate Dean of Distance Learning and Instructional Design (and also a member of the Team) participates on Brightspace’s Advisory Board for this project ([NC-271](#)). Our intention is to inform Brightspace decisions and be as knowledgeable as possible so that we can leverage new Brightspace learning outcome features at the College. This work is currently in the research and development phase.

Processes for Assessment Training

Effective student learning assessment relies on robust stakeholder training. North Central's participation in the HLC Assessment Academy has provided key "train-the-trainer" opportunities. Team members, including curricular and co-curricular representatives, attended the HLC Assessment Academy Orientation, Midpoint Roundtable ([NC-288](#)), and Annual Conferences, gaining insights into benchmarking, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) research ([NC-305](#)), and HLC assessment resources. Working closely with their HLC Mentor and Scholar, the Team provided SPARQ updates and engaged in productive third-year consultations, receiving positive feedback on both process effectiveness and team productivity ([NC-225](#)).

The HLC Assessment Academy Team aims to shift the assessment culture from compliance to engagement. To support this, the College introduced regular assessment days, held 2-3 times each fall and winter semester, where faculty and co-curricular staff gather to learn, design, practice, and provide feedback ([NC-286](#); [NC-258](#); [NC-260](#); [NC-262](#)). Each session focuses on gathering input for proposed changes, training on previously agreed changes, and practicing new processes.

4.B.2.

The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning

Course Assessment

Faculty use formative and summative assessments to measure student learning in the classroom no matter the modality.

Faculty use the results of student learning to inform curricular and/or pedagogical improvements. In the Nursing 231 course, "Acute Care Concepts," students present weekly on topics recently covered by faculty. Each student assumes a role in a 10-minute skit presented to classmates and provides evidence-based patient education materials. This assignment, modeled after "grand rounds" in hospitals, fosters teamwork and uses an interdisciplinary, best-practice approach ([NC-342](#)). Students have responded positively, noting its value in reinforcing material understanding and teaching skills—both essential for nursing. The frequent nature of this assignment enables faculty to regularly assess comprehension ([NC-342](#)) and adjust instruction as needed.

A key learning outcome for PHY 231: *Physics for Scientists & Engineers II* is for students to "apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills to the analysis of physical behaviors." To achieve this, careful problem formulation, solution, and interpretation are essential. Following subpar solution submissions in Winter 2023, the faculty member collaborated with Instructional Design to create a problem-solving rubric for PHY 231 ([NC-343 p. 1](#)). This initiative led to a marked improvement in solution quality from Winter 2023 (weak) to Winter 2024 (strong) ([NC-](#)

[343 p. 2](#)). A former student now at Michigan Tech noted, “I feel more prepared than my peers here at MTU and have a better understanding of problem-solving.” This example demonstrates the faculty member’s use of student outcomes and feedback to refine instructional methods.

In the English course *Modern Mythology*, the faculty member noticed students struggling to apply (post)modern concepts to characters, events, and settings in mythological texts, particularly in the Loki discussion board and analytic writing assignments. To address this, the instructor introduced an AI-based assignment to help students grasp these theories. Students generated 200-word summaries of key modernism and postmodernism features with AI, then identified these concepts in the readings. This approach significantly improved students' analytical papers, with mean scores on the Loki analysis paper rising from the mid-B range (85-87) to an A- (90) after implementing the theory map activity.

In English 111, faculty teach students research, critical thinking, rhetoric, organization and writing skills which are aligned to three CLOs:

- Demonstrate skill with linguistic structures, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling such as it does not distract readers often.
- Paraphrase the main ideas of a diverse range of text from both academic and nonacademic sources.
- Apply strategies for giving and receiving feedback on writing.

To measure student learning, a faculty member used an essay writing assignment with multiple drafts, peer review, class presentation, class discussion, faculty/student conferences, and then the final draft. Based on results of previous semesters, the faculty member wanted to improve students’ research skills. To do so, they had the College librarian provide a hands-on research demonstration in the classroom on how to use databases. The faculty member also revised assignment expectations and provided more resources (e.g., examples of successful papers and YouTube videos on I-Search essays) while also modifying the assignment schedule to allow for an extra week to work on research writing. As a result of these changes, the faculty member observed improved scores on the final writing assignment.

In the Introductory Spanish course, students learn to describe their personal interests and hobbies. Typically, the faculty member asks students to demonstrate learning through a writing activity and oral practice via Zoom. Through these activities, the faculty member could observe if the students applied the learned vocabulary and grammar correctly as well as how clear they communicated verbally. Based on results of these assessments, the faculty member modified the oral practice document by changing, simplifying or adding new questions, as well as adding textbook page numbers to help students go back to course material instead of Google. By assessing the overall results of the whole class and by giving feedback individually to students, the faculty member has confirmed the changes are helpful for students.

A new faculty member at the College is using student outcome data to enhance learning in Math 128, focusing on an assignment about buying a home that aligns with the course outcome, “Analyze situations using estimation and calculation.” Students submitted their work electronically, and analysis showed that around 81% of students in MATH 128A and MATH 128C met or exceeded proficiency in quantitative reasoning and analytical estimation (CLO-3 and CLO-5) ([NC-344](#)). While most students performed well, a few submitted inadequate or no work. To address this, the faculty member plans to introduce weighted assessments earlier in the semester, including rough drafts and individual progress meetings. Additional data will be gathered next semester to complete the improvement cycle.

Another faculty member who teaches Art History and Computer Information Systems shared reflections on data use to improve student learning across these varied disciplines ([NC-345](#)).

In an Environmental Science course (ESC 121: *Physical Geology*), a faculty member teaches a lesson on mining and mineral resources, aligned to the CLO: *Interpret Earth processes and natural hazards/resources with the use of experimental/observational data, remote sensing data, charts, and maps*. The faculty member uses exam questions to measure student learning, and over time observed that students struggled with questions about processes that form ore deposits (i.e. how are metal deposits formed?). The faculty member had previously skipped a lab for this topic (mineral/rock resources) because it falls on the same class meeting and calendar day as a peer-review activity for one of the projects in the class. Since students worked on the peer-review in class, the faculty member did not have time for a lab or learning activity that focused on mineral/rock resources. The faculty member devised a new learning opportunity where students could do a take-home lab with practice questions about mining/rock resources to see whether extra practice would lead to improved results on related exam questions. The exam with these questions is later in the Fall 2024 semester and the faculty member will monitor whether this instructional adjustment helped improve student learning on this topic.

Institutional Assessment

North Central is committed to enhancing the use of assessment data to improve student learning. As one example, discussed in 3.A and 4.B.1, faculty used eight years of program and general education assessment data ([NC-284](#)) to set PLO proficiency targets in the 2024-2025 assessment plans ([NC-213](#)). In addition, IR has provided faculty with CLO assessment outcome reports, showing proficiency achievements at section, course, and institutional levels ([NC-252](#)), along with a faculty-designed interpretation guide ([NC-263](#)). Guided by an HLC mentor and scholar ([NC-225](#)) and participation in a Brightspace advisory board ([NC-271](#)), the HLC Assessment Academy Team is creating processes for faculty and staff to leverage learning outcome data for program and institutional improvement. These efforts include assessment

days focused on data review and advanced Brightspace features, like a learning outcome dashboard.

Program Review

The HLC Assessment Academy Team is developing processes to integrate assessment data into the program review ([NC-203 p. 6](#)). A revised Program Review process launched in Fall 2023, establishing a six-year cycle for each program, with dedicated time for assessment planning, assessment, and data utilization across all program learning outcomes ([NC-234](#)). To reduce stakeholder burdens, programs are reviewed in groups determined by program health (e.g., enrollment and completion), curriculum, and key stakeholders.

In the program review process, program stakeholders complete the Review of Academic Programs form (RAP) ([NC-203](#)). The RAP is an improved version of the Academic Program Planning and Review template (APPR) and improvements to this process are expected over the next year. For example, results from the 2024-2025 PLO assessment year will be incorporated into program review starting 2025-2026 after completion of the PLO assessment pilot. Additional revisions to the program review process will be made based on Groups 1 and 2 feedback. The program review process is further explained in section 3.A. and 4.A. as well.

4.B.3.

The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty, instructional and other relevant staff members.

As discussed previously, North Central's HLC Assessment Academy Team (Team) uses benchmarking research to inform processes and methodologies. For example, when first starting the Assessment Academy, Team members researched the assessment processes of colleges that had already completed an HLC Assessment Academy ([NC-289](#)). Other team members benchmarked assessment resources like guidebooks for faculty ([NC-248 p. 60](#)) and assessment planning ([NC-285](#)). The Team also benchmarked program review processes at peer institutions to inform APPR template criteria and the College's program review schedule ([NC-302](#)).

The HLC Assessment Academy Team actively seeks best practices from reputable assessment organizations, such as NILOA. They use resources like the American Association of Higher Education's Principles on Assessment ([NC-303](#); [NC-304 p. 3](#)), supported by NILOA ([NC-305](#)), and rely on HLC resources, including Susan Hatfield's videos on curriculum mapping ([NC-253](#)), and Mentor and Scholar feedback ([NC-225](#)). Team members also attend the Annual HLC conference, bringing back valuable insights and storing presentation notes and materials in their shared MS Teams folder for ongoing reference ([NC-306](#)).

The College prioritizes stakeholder input in designing assessment processes, aiming to shift from a compliance-focused to an engagement-centered culture. Regular assessment days are central to this strategy, gathering insights and feedback from curricular and co-curricular stakeholders through discussions, polls, and surveys ([NC-286](#); [NC-258](#); [NC-260](#); [NC-262](#)). These sessions have fostered curiosity, enthusiasm, and stakeholder buy-in. This commitment is reflected in the Team's progress toward ambitious goals and in the steady engagement of faculty and staff on the HLC Assessment Academy Team ([NC-001](#); [NC-244](#)).

Criterion 4.C

The institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

4.C.1

The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence and completion that are ambitious, attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations and educational offerings.

The College began systematically collecting retention, persistence, and completion data during participation in Achieving the Dream (AtD) ([NC-307](#)). Although no longer part of AtD, North Central advanced the collection and use of these metrics, regularly reviewing outcomes to set ambitious yet attainable goals. Recently, the College underscored this commitment by developing a five-year Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) plan ([NC-169](#)) in collaboration with internal stakeholders ([NC-100 p. 7](#)) to align goals with its mission, student demographics, and educational offerings. The SEM's primary objective is to foster a student-centric approach, promoting inclusive access, persistence, and success for all students ([NC-169 p. 1](#)). To support this initiative, the College hired a data analyst ([NC-115 p. 22](#)) to develop PERC PowerBI dashboards, accessible on SharePoint ([NC-176](#)), furthering its strategic goal of enhancing student success ([NC-002](#)).

The PERC data dashboard plays a central role in advancing the College's strategic goal of improving student success by enhancing persistence, enrollment, retention, and completion ([NC-002](#)). This tool allows stakeholders to set and track outcomes for the SEM Plan, disaggregating PERC data by student cohorts (e.g., new-to-North Central, FITIAC, Dual) and demographics ([NC-308](#); [NC-075](#)). The dashboard also provides four to five years of historical data, enabling trend analysis across admissions, course success, transfer, and graduation outcomes. This enhanced tracking capability allows the College to monitor student population outcomes more effectively and better target strategies to support student success.

The College has refined its timeline for achieving its goals. Between 2015 and 2021, it did not meet its three-year persistence and retention targets ([NC-309](#)). Now, with a five-year timeline and collaboratively designed action items through the SEM planning process, the College is confident in meeting the goals established in the SEM plan.

Using the data dashboards, the College has set the following five-year goals for degree-seeking students ([NC-169](#)):

- Persistence (Fall-to-Winter): increase by 4% to a 79% persistence rate.
- Retention (Fall-to-Fall): increase by 4% to 55% retention rate.

- Three-Year Completion Rate (degree completion): increase by 4% to 35% three-year completion rate.

4.C.2

The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs.

The College regularly collects and analyzes success outcomes for its overall student population, specific programs, and various cohorts, such as new-to-North Central, degree-seeking, Early College, and dual-enrollment students. These cohorts are further analyzed by demographics, including gender, race/ethnicity, age, Pell status, and first-generation status. Analysis is conducted on weekly, semesterly, yearly, and five-year cycles as described below.

The PERC data dashboards are updated continuously as new outcome data becomes available ([NC-176 p. 2](#)). However, SEM goal monitoring is conducted annually by the Student Success Committee and the Cabinet. Additionally, IR is developing other dashboards, including a Program Review dashboard, to further support strategic insights ([NC-092](#); [NC-310](#)).

In addition, student outcome data is analyzed through the Program Review process. Historically, the College used the Academic Program Review Planning (APPR) template when conducting a program review ([NC-311](#)). The APPR included analysis of enrollment (disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, and age), course pass rates, course success rates, graduates, transfers, and completion rates.

As mentioned earlier in 3.A and 4.A, the College is enhancing its Program Review process through a pilot process, an essential step in effective change management ([NC-312](#)). With new policies in place ([NC-234](#), [NC-313](#), [NC-203](#), [NC-314](#), [NC-229](#)), including an updated schedule, timeline, and resources, the College is testing and revising its practices. This trial spans two cohorts: Group 1 completed program review on September 1, 2024, and Group 2 will complete it by September 1, 2025. Based on Group 1 feedback, the process, now called Review of Academic Programs (RAP), emphasizes reflection, prompting faculty and academic deans to consider how program outcomes inform improvements in student learning, a change implemented for Group 2 ([NC-204](#); [NC-203](#)). Additionally, the new six-year program review schedule aligns with the course, program, and institutional learning outcome assessment cycle, supporting a comprehensive, systematic assessment of student learning ([NC-234](#)).

Various groups across the College actively analyze student outcome data. For example, the Registrar's Office distributes persistence and retention reports at the start of each semester, sharing these by email with all faculty and staff ([NC-315](#)). Additionally, IPEDS and CEPI STARR (Michigan) student outcomes are posted on the College website and intranet ([NC-317](#); [NC-176](#)).

IR also reviews the annual IPEDS Data Feedback Report and CEPI STARR dashboards with the Cabinet (handout from presentation ([NC-114](#)) as well as other faculty and staff ([NC-209](#)). The Academic Affairs Leadership Team ([NC-318](#)) and the Cabinet ([NC-319](#)) monitor application and enrollment through weekly reports ([NC-320](#); [NC-321](#)).

4.C.3

The institution uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted college success rates nationally, statewide, and at North Central ([NC-322 p. 1](#); [NC-322 p. 10](#); [NC-268](#)). However, since then, North Central has seen steady increases in persistence, retention, and completion over the past three years ([NC-268](#)). Several initiatives were implemented during this period to enhance student success outcomes.

Application Tracking: Timely conversion of applicants to registered students is essential for building enrollment, so the College tracks this process in several ways as students progress through the pipeline. As mentioned previously, Cabinet and Academic Affairs Leadership Team monitor applications by student type, acceptance status, location, division, and program each week ([NC-320](#)). When trends show a particular student group or program falling behind compared to the previous year, targeted interventions are planned. For example, now, IR provides additional reports to Academic Deans which include applicant enrollment rates and applicant contact information ([NC-346](#)). Deans and faculty use this information to send letters to students ([NC-323](#)). Other improvements have been made to the application process including integrating Salesforce's JRM admissions software and adding a first-generation student question to the application for dual students.

Enrollment Tracking: During enrollment periods, the College carefully compiles and tracks student registrations. One element of this is a running comparison of the current semester with the same semester (Fall or Winter) one year previously. The College developed a useful report for comparison ([NC-321](#)) with which one can quickly compare the current semester's progress with last year's. Graphs are prepared to compare headcount, credit/contact hour, and revenue year-to-year. These weekly reports are shared with the Cabinet and Academic Affairs Leadership Team ([NC-318](#); [NC-319](#)). The College also tracks semester enrollment and adjusts courses scheduling prior to the start of the term. At the course cancelation meeting which occurs prior to the term start date, Academic Affairs and Student Services staff meet to determine which courses need to be canceled. From 2019 to 2023, the number of courses the College canceled during these meetings has decreased by 35% ([NC-347](#)). After count date reporting, the Registrar's office compiles several enrollment reports (e.g., [NC-348](#); [NC-012](#)). These reports spur discussion and lead to improved processes, for example, in course scheduling and declared-major policy.

Returning Student Analysis and Intervention: In addition to weekly enrollment reports, the College does "checks" on current students returning in the following semester by comparing current and subsequent student enrollments, considering graduations. IR provides these persistence and retention reports to the Student Success Coordinator who then reaches out to students. This is typically done several times both for fall-to-winter and winter-to-fall retention ([NC-324](#)).

Workshops: IR hosts workshops for employees across campus to learn about student outcomes data. Workshop topics include Dashboard Data Literacy, Course Completion and Withdraw Rates, Challenging Assumptions with CCSSE Student Services Data ([NC-209](#)).

Persistence and Retention Efforts: The College uses the enrollment data described above to inform strategies and tactics to improve persistence and retention. In 2021, following the COVID-19 pandemic and a decline in enrollment, the College hired its first student success coordinator ([NC-115 p. 16](#)), and in 2023 and 2024, partnered with the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN) ([NC-325](#)) to place three student completion coaches on North Central's campus. As described in 3.D, these positions provide critical support for student learning and success. For example, the Student Success Coordinator utilizes the Starfish Early Alert software which the College adopted in 2021 to monitor student success tracking items and provide additional support to students.

In addition, the College established the Student Success Committee, a cross-functional group of faculty, staff, and administrators focused on stabilizing enrollment by recruiting new students and retaining current students. As outlined in the Committee Charge, this group is guided by a commitment to student success aligned with North Central's mission ([NC-100 p. 7](#)). Several recent outcomes of this committee are:

- Strategic Enrollment Management Plan (2023-2024) ([NC-169](#))
- Employee Professional Development Survey / Center for Teaching & Learning Proposal 2022-2023 ([NC-139](#))
- Course Withdraw Survey (2021-2022) ([NC-286 pp. 68-70](#))

Within the SEM Plan ([NC-169](#)), action items aimed at increasing persistence, retention, and completion are listed along with indicators of success and the applicable time frame. For example, to increase retention by 4%, the College will implement the following (p. 15):

Action Step	Indicators of Success	Time Frame
Develop and implement a minimum of two Express Registration Walk-in days for current North Central	Weekly enrollment reports, attendance	Implement over the five years and evaluate annually.

students in the fall and winter semesters during the first two weeks of open enrollment.	reporting of express registration days.	
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Another recent example of using enrollment data to improve persistence and retention is the College’s registration button and banner campaign which started in 2023 ([NC-349](#)). During course registration periods, employees wear magnetic registration buttons which remind students to register for classes. Since this intervention, enrollment, persistence, and retention have steadily increased ([NC-321](#); [NC-326](#)).

4.C.4.

The institution’s processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

Collection

Retention, persistence, and completion data are collected and maintained with validity and reliability, grounded in the Jenzabar (J1) database, which stores all student information. Data are collected using parameters defined by Michigan’s Center for Education Performance Indicators (CEPI) ([NC-327](#); [NC-328](#)) and the National Center for Education Statistics (IPEDS) ([NC-329](#)). Data are collected throughout the year for various CEPI and IPEDS surveys ([NC-330](#)).

Analysis

The College uses CEPI ([NC-327](#); [NC-328](#)) and IPEDS ([NC-331](#)) as its primary tool and guide for data analysis methodology. Within both the CEPI and IPEDS reports, validation systems are in place to identify anomalies and errors.

The College also uses CEPI and IPEDS definitions and methodology to guide internal research. For example, when the College analyzes “student success” it uses the CEPI definition and methodology to analyze the rates at which degree-seeking cohorts complete a credential at the College or transfer to a four-year university or college. Internal analysis is validated by comparing with CEPI outcomes ([NC-332](#)). Internal data analysis is also shared and tracked through the PERC dashboard ([NC-268](#)).

In addition, the College uses additional external data reports, such as the College Scorecard and Michigan’s Pathfinder, to inform its analysis of student enrollment, retention, and completion

[\(NC-209; NC-114; NC-317\)](#). CEPI, IPEDS, the College Scorecard, and Michigan's Pathfinder each provide useful tools for comparing and benchmarking student outcomes by institution.

IR is currently evaluating additional benchmarking tools including joining the National Community College Benchmark Project, participating in the Richmond Fed Survey of Community College Outcomes, and utilizing the Aspen Prize Community College Benchmarking Tool.