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## HLC Reaffirmation of Accreditation 2016 UNL Assurance Argument Executive Summary

### Criterion 1 - Mission

As Nebraska's only public, research-intensive, land-grant research university, UNL's mission – to teach, do research and serve Nebraskans – is reflected in its academic programs, student support services, and enrollment profile. The mission is publicly shared through the UNL website; public presentations; the annual *UNL Fact Book*; wide-ranging communications with varied constituencies; publications and news stories from University Communications; education programs offered through the county extension offices; and individual mission statements, values statements, and/or statements of purpose contained in the bylaws, websites and documents of the university's nine colleges and related support offices.

UNL publicly acknowledges its role in a multicultural society and helps prepares students to succeed in a diverse world. UNL has made significant progress in attracting underrepresented minority students and in closing the achievement gap in graduation rates between white and ethnic minority students. Its diversity-related general education program focuses on global awareness and human diversity and is one of the few among its peer group to highlight issues related to sexual orientation, socioeconomic class and intersectional diversity.

UNL demonstrates its commitment to the overall public good by addressing the state's specific workforce and research and development needs; contributing expertise to Nebraska's schools; serving the public through extension programs; and providing educational and cultural enrichment programs to all citizens in the arts, humanities, sciences, agriculture, business and other areas.

### Criterion 2 - Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

UNL's mission is guided by state and federal laws, as well as the NU Board of Regents' policies and bylaws. Sources of extensive and easily accessible information about programs, academic requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students and accreditation relationships include, among others: UNL's website; news and information from University Communications; an online data index; the *UNL Fact Book*; online undergraduate and graduate bulletins and a myriad of information provided by all UNL units.

The Board of Regents provides leadership and is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interests of the institution and to ensure its integrity. Its meeting structure provides opportunities for collaboration with internal and external constituents. The Board works within an established policy framework and gives UNL independence in meeting its teaching, research and service missions.

UNL's Office of Research and Economic Development provides oversight of research and scholarly practices. An autonomous Institutional Review Board and Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee ensure ethical compliance in human subjects and animals, respectively. The University has a clearly established conflict of interest policy as well as established procedures for responding to allegations of academic and research misconduct. Academic freedom is a core belief at UNL, and freedom of expression is guaranteed to all students, faculty and staff.

### Criterion 3 - Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support

UNL provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered. It offers 137 undergraduate majors, 70 master's majors, 48 doctoral majors, 7 professional degrees, 32 certificates and 8 supplemental endorsements in over 165 fields. Courses and program requirements reflect appropriate levels of student performance and are reviewed every 7 years to ensure they are relevant, high quality and consistent with the mission.

Programs at all levels – undergraduate, graduate and professional – are differentiated by goals and outcomes. The Achievement-Centered Education (ACE) program operationalizes the University's commitment to a liberal education in the context of a research-intensive university and creates a framework for assessment. The program ensures that students develop expertise in collecting,

analyzing and communicating information; mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and building skills adaptable to changing environments.

UNL prioritizes education about human and cultural diversity. Faculty, students, staff and senior leaders collaborate to build research partnerships and recruit talent from outside the U.S. to enrich and diversify the campus and offer domestic students access to education and service learning opportunities abroad.

UNL's current student-faculty ratio is 16:1. Full-time faculty have terminal degrees in their fields or appropriate experience relating to their disciplines. Faculty members are evaluated regularly by students, peers and/or appointed supervisors.

UNL has made strategic investments in technology, infrastructure and personnel to maximize student retention and time to degree. A variety of programs systemically support student success, especially in the areas of advising, admissions and transfer credit, high impact practices (like learning communities and undergraduate research), academic support and career services. In addition, UNL has the appropriate teaching laboratories, technological infrastructure and libraries to support student learning. Co-curricular activities and programs foster inquiry and discovery, enhance academic and personal development, and promote citizenship, economic development and quality of life in Nebraska.

#### **Criterion 4 - Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement**

UNL has invested in developing authentic assessment and data collection processes for improved retention, persistence, time to degree and student learning.

Although assessment of student learning remains uneven in some places, we have an established process that provides colleges and units a systematic means for gathering evidence they can use to inform curricular change. Regular external and internal review, of curricular and co-curricular programs, typically conducted every seven years, ensures the quality of UNL's graduate and undergraduate educational programs. Other UNL units also conduct regular program reviews designed to facilitate continuous improvement.

New structures for collecting and disseminating data (e.g., scorecards, HuskerScan) enable academic units to make more evidence-informed decisions. UNL's Quality Initiative project is a strong example of how assessment results can be used to improve programs and integrate learning outcomes with student career preparation.

UNL also has invested significant resources in initiatives designed to improve retention, persistence and completion rates, in these four priority areas: 1) intentional first-year experience programs; 2) proactive advising and early warning systems; 3) use of analytics to track persistence and degree completion; and 4) elimination of institutional barriers to students' success and timely degree completion.

#### **Criterion 5 - Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness**

UNL makes the most of its fiscal, human, physical and information technology resources to ensure consistent progress toward its overall goals. The necessary infrastructure is in place, including resource and budget monitoring processes, and UNL has recently invested over \$32 million in the renovation of classrooms, laboratories, student support service centers and learning resource centers.

New undergraduate and graduate enrollment growth goals for the next four years have been identified for each college, and new and enhanced academic and student support services needed to support such growth are anticipated. New and enhanced facilities have also been identified, and several large capital projects are underway. Progress has been made toward developing data-sharing tools to provide direct access to various learning analytics.

Measures to boost technology infrastructure have been the subject of significant focus since UNL's last review. Technology infrastructure was prioritized for investment and innovation, and campus-wide IT services were transformed to meet UNL's priorities – undergraduate education and research.