To: Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

Re: Comment on the Draft 2020 Standards and Eligibility Requirements

Dear Drs. Huftalin and Powell and members of the NWCCU Bylaws, Standards, and Policies Committee:

Thank you for your work updating the Accreditation Standards and for considering input from stakeholder groups. The Information Literacy Advisory Group of Oregon (ILAGO) appreciates your desire to keep the standards lean, but we are concerned about the absence of instruction in the Library and Information Resources section of the revised standards. To that end, we recommend the addition of a section 2.G.2 that makes the library instructional role explicit.

Students will not achieve the economic and social mobility the NWCCU advocates for if they do not learn to participate in and adjust to complex, dynamic, increasingly sophisticated information environments. Library instruction is not just telling someone to put a couple of keywords into a search box. Libraries coordinate across-campus instruction to build information competence and mitigate achievement gaps so that our students are prepared for the workforce and the ongoing inquiry needed to remain competitive and relevant in the knowledge economy. Our industry partners suffer when graduates enter the workforce unprepared to work and make decisions within media saturated landscapes, so libraries keep pace with change and are responsive to changing needs.

Information Literacy instruction is essential to mitigating achievement gaps among students who come from a range of educational and socio-economic backgrounds. Students take many different paths to arrive at college and the playing field is not equal. Providing resources without also teaching the transferable knowledge practices and dispositions students need to make use of those resources perpetuates achievement gaps and inequality. Our institutions and the communities we serve show poor return on resource investment if there is not a strong instruction program to promote inquiry and the critical, ethical use of information.

To that end, the Information Literacy Advisory Group of Oregon (ILAGO) Board endorses the addition of the following as 2.G.2 in the Library and Information Resources section of the revised Accreditation Standards:

“2.G.2 Consistent with its mission, programs, services, and characteristics, the institution employs sufficient appropriately qualified library and information resources personnel to provide information literacy instruction in support of institutional student learning outcomes.”

We strongly recommend the addition of standard 2.G.2 to recognize the vital teaching and learning role that college libraries provide, and the leadership role that libraries can take in preparing graduates who are economically and socially nimble. To refer to libraries mainly for acquiring and housing collections ignores the critical need for instruction in how to find and use information in and outside of library
resources, and to employ that information with increasing sophistication to the level necessary to achieve academic and personal goals, and to meet industry expectations. More than ever students require improvement of their information literacy along a developmental continuum. Employing appropriately qualified personnel to work collaboratively with content faculty is crucial in order to innovate discipline-specific research and deliver explicit instruction in emerging information models across the curriculum.

ILAGO was entrusted with establishing the current Information Literacy Outcomes and Criteria for Transferable General Education Courses for the Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer degree. ILAGO member institutions maintain norm standards and articulate expectations horizontally between institutions offering the same courses, and vertically along the K-16 continuum. Statewide and institutionally, strong partnerships and infrastructure are already in place to support the current Accreditation Standards which clearly designate college libraries as teaching and learning spaces, and call upon teaching faculty to partner with library personnel. We urge you to include language in 2.G.2 that explicitly recognizes the instructional role of libraries and encourages institutions to continue building and assessing these critical learning relationships.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

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