

# Southeastern Oklahoma State University

HLC ID 1639

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OPEN PATHWAY: Mid-Cycle Review

Visit Date: 5/14/2018

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## Context and Nature of Review

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### Visit Date

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5/14/2018

#### Mid-Cycle Reviews include:

- The Year 4 Review in the Open and Standard Pathways
- The Biennial Review for Applying institutions

#### Reaffirmation Reviews include:

- The Year 10 Review in the Open and Standard Pathways
- The Review for Initial Candidacy for Applying institutions
- The Review for Initial Accreditation for Applying institutions
- The Year 4 Review for Standard Pathway institutions that are in their first accreditation cycle after attaining initial accreditation

### Scope of Review

- Mid-Cycle Review

*There are no forms assigned.*

## Institutional Context

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This HLC evaluation is a 4-Year Assurance Review---Open Pathway of Southeastern Oklahoma State University (SOSU), Durant, Oklahoma. No site visit was included in this review.

Institutional documents show that SOSU is one of the six senior regional comprehensive universities in Oklahoma, and is historically associated with serving the population in the southeastern Oklahoma and north central Texas geographical region. SOSU currently offers 38 baccalaureate and 14 master's degree programs. In Fall 2017, the University's total enrollment (headcount) was 3956, consisting of 3070 undergraduate and 886 graduate students.

HLC files show that the last evaluation of SOSU was a 10-Year Comprehensive PEAQ Evaluation, conducted in February 24-26, 2014. This evaluation resulted in continued accreditation with the next Reaffirmation of Accreditation review in 2023-24. In July 2014, SOSU was notified by HLC of the institution's approval to select a Pathway for reaffirmation of accreditation. In August 2014, SOSU declared its selection of the Open Pathway. Notably, SOSU was approved by HLC to offer up to 100% of its programs via distance education in December 2012.

Since the last HLC evaluation, SOSU has undergone immense change, including the appointment of a new President and significant state budget reductions. In May 2014, Mr. Sean Burrage, Juris Doctorate, was named President by the Regional University System of the Oklahoma Board of Regents with an effective appointment date of July 1, 2014. Among other professional distinctions, President Burrage brings to SOSU many years of public service and legislative experience at the federal and state levels, including serving as an Oklahoma State Senator. Under his leadership and vision, SOSU has demonstrated commendable success in regaining financial stability amidst significant reductions in state funding to higher education, including SOSU. Reorganization of the academic

structure, implementation of new degree programs, and rapid enrollment growth, particularly in online courses and programs are among other changes affecting the University's environment and context since the last HLC Evaluation.

While the 2014 HLC evaluation did not require any HLC monitoring or follow-up, the current review team (Team) notes that the University has been very attentive to the recommendations made in the 2014 HLC Team Report. The University's Assurance Argument itemizes and amply describes the deliberations and actions taken in response to the 2014 HLC recommendations.

During the course of this review, the University was responsive to the Team's request for additional information. In particular, the Team expresses its appreciation to Dr. Bryon Clark, Vice President for Academic Affairs of his cooperation, responsiveness and help during the review process, especially in providing documents in response to the Team's request. These documents are made available in the Addendum section of the SOSU Assurance System.

As noted in various instances in this report, the Team experienced challenges in navigating the SOSU website to find/verify information, as well as to identify the particular evidence within voluminous documents made available via the Assurance Argument. In the Team's judgement, a direct link to the evidence, or a summary statement or table with direct access to supporting evidence for information on a particular topic would benefit the review process. The Team acknowledges the challenge to the institution in providing documentation, given the wide variation that may exist among evaluation teams in their expectations for evidentiary documents.

## **Interactions with Constituencies**

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*There are no interactions.*

## **Additional Documents**

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See "Addendum" tab at the Assurance System for SOSU.

# 1 - Mission

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The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

## 1.A - Core Component 1.A

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The institution's mission is broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations.

1. The mission statement is developed through a process suited to the nature and culture of the institution and is adopted by the governing board.
2. The institution's academic programs, student support services, and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.
3. The institution's planning and budgeting priorities align with and support the mission. (This sub-component may be addressed by reference to the response to Criterion 5.C.1.)

## Rating

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Met

## Evidence

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The SOSU mission along with the accompanying scope and function (Mission Statement) has remained the same since the last HLC evaluation in 2014. This finding is evidenced by the Team's review of the Mission Statement presented in the Assurance Argument, and the University's mission as described in 2014 HLC Evaluation Team Report. The 2014 Team Report acknowledged that SOSU's mission was broadly understood by the institution's constituents. The Mission Statement was approved by the institution's governing board (Regional University System of Oklahoma) in April, 2002 (Southeastern Self-Study Report for Continued Accreditation, January 7, 2014, available the University Website).

Vision 2020 further defines and operationalizes the Mission Statement. The Vision Statement specifies SOSU's vision as well as four major initiatives, five strategic goals, and specific objectives to be accomplished by year 2020. As documented by the SOSU's Addendum (documents made available upon request of the Team) and verified by the Team's review, Vision 2020 continues the same Vision Statement as the previous one (Vision 2015), and reflects the new planning cycle established by President Barrage in 2014-2015, the first academic year of his leadership at SOSU. As further documented by the Addendum, President Barrage in collaboration with the Executive Team approved Vision 2020 in 2014-2015, subsequent to his meetings with groups representing all campus constituencies (faculty, staff, administrators and students) and with numerous external groups.

The 2014 Team report identified no concern or recommendation regarding the consistency of academic programs with the University's mission. Since the 2014 HLC Evaluation, SOSU has implemented a new General Education program. The Team's review (i.e., General Education program mission, vision, broad categories and requirements) affirms that the new program was

developed with consideration given to the mission. To illustrate, the General Education curriculum addresses specific areas of the Mission Statement, including: a) to offer “an undergraduate foundation in the liberal arts and sciences, with an emphasis on integrating critical thinking, communication skills, and appropriate technological applications into the curriculum across all disciplines”; and b) to “familiarizes students with major areas of scholarship.”

In addition, since the 2014 HLC Evaluation, SOSU has modified its Bachelor of General Studies to a Bachelor of Science in Liberal and Applied Studies (BSLAS), and has implemented several new degree programs including 100 percent online, and graduate programs (e.g., M.S. Native American Leadership (online), Master of Music Education (Online), Bachelor of Science in Organization Leadership (Reach Higher), Master of Early Intervention and Child Development, and Bachelor of Science in Health and Human Performance). The Team’s review of academic plans for Fall 2015 -16 through Fall 2017-18 verified that these program changes are consistent with the University’s mission of offering programs to “prepare students for a changing society”, “to serve the needs of the region”, and to offer “professional, academic and career-oriented undergraduate and graduate programs to meet the changing needs of the workforce”. To further substantiate consistency with mission, policies of SOSU's governing board (Regional University System of Oklahoma) require all new program requests to demonstrate the centrality to the University’s mission and approved functions. The institution should contact the HLC Liaison immediately to discern if any of the new programs would have been considered a significant departure (HLC Policy INST.F.20.040, Item 3) and submit substantive change requests if deemed appropriate. Subsequently, the institution should ensure any new programs are not considered a significant departure by HLC and have records indicating such approval is not needed in the institutional files should the next review team require such.

The Team finds that SOSU academic programs and enrollment profiles continue to be consistent with the University mission. Although the University has experienced an increase in graduate programs and graduate student enrollment since the last HLC evaluation, the institution’s emphasis on undergraduate education is evident by its academic program array as verified in the Assurance Argument and verified by the Team's review of various documents, including the 2017-2019 Undergraduate and Graduate Catalog. Similarly, the 5-year FTE comparison for undergraduate and graduate enrollment demonstrates a preponderance of undergraduate students (2,527, undergraduate FTE and 509 Graduate FTE as of September, 2017). Notably, in Fall 2017 graduate student FTE increased by 45% compared to Fall 2016, while undergraduate FTE decreased by 1.5% during that same period. SOSU has demonstrated awareness of this marked change in its Assurance Argument, and the Team encourages continuous monitoring for development of trends in undergraduate and graduate enrollments that impact the University’s mission and resource allocations.

Enrollment data continues to reflect the University’s historical ties and regional commitment to Native American/Alaskan Native population, which remains at approximately 29% of the total student body as of Fall 2017. Data available in the Assurance Argument further show evidence of SOSU’s recognition as a leader in the number of degrees granted to Native Americans/diverse populations. Additionally, the newly implemented M.S. in Native American Leadership demonstrates the University’s support of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations.

Further, as evidenced in 5C in this document, the University's planning and budgeting priorities continue to align with its mission documents

Finally, the Team finds that SOSU has demonstrated sufficient attentiveness to recommendations of the 2014 Team regarding mission. Evidence follows:

a) The 2014 Team urged the University to have discussions around whether the Mission Statement

was “well positioned to affect new influence on direction and decision-making.”

SOSU gathered opinions of fulltime and part-time faculty regarding how well the University fulfills its mission, as a part of the Annual Faculty Senate Survey conducted each fall term. As documented by survey results for Fall 2014 through Fall 2017, the majority of respondents perceive the University to fulfill its mission. Data for Fall 2017, which represent the highest favorable perception of the four years, show that 90% of the respondents perceived SOSU to be fulfilling its mission “well” or “satisfactorily”, whereas the remaining respondents answered either “poorly” or “don’t know the mission”.

Additionally, in Fall 2017 SOSU surveyed selected faculty and staff groups (Faculty Senate, Graduate Council, General Education Council, Staff Association Executive) in response to “a marked decrease” in enrollment of purely face-to-face students. The survey question ascertained if respondents felt the Mission Statement still fulfilled HLC Criterion 1, section 1 (now Core Component 1A). While the majority of participants responded affirmatively, the number of respondents across the groups sampled was too low (ranging from 2 to 12) in the Team’s judgement to offer reliable information.

SOSU appears to be aware this problem with sample size, as the Assurance Argument documents a subsequent Shared Governance Forum involving faculty and administrators, and a commitment of the University to continuing discussion along these lines. The Team urges SOSU to consider its Mission Statement in relation to the increasing number of online students, online programs, and graduate students.

b) The Team urged the institution to provide students at SOSU with a well-rounded student experience that embraces needs other than diversity, such as career development, internships, programming, and student governance.

The Division of Student Affairs' Vision Statement which was approved in 2016 included such goals as "fostering responsible citizenship" and "creatively engage students." A number of programs provide students with the opportunity to explore and engage in responsible citizenship. Understanding the shifting student population to more online students, many of these programs were made available via live streaming and other platforms.

In addition, SOSU offers over 90 student organizations including the Student Government Association which provides leadership opportunities for their students. Again, SOSU focused great attention to the use of various social media platforms to engage not only students in residence but also the growing online population.

Finally, the Team’s review affirms that SOSU has reinvested in providing a Career Management Center and has numerous external grants which continue to provide a variety of student support services. The Career Management Center assists students with their resume and other credentials while connecting students to potential employers. Career fairs and other engagement opportunities provide students the chance to connect with prospective employers. Also, a computerized database in the Center helps students with their job search and scheduling interviews. The Team experienced unusual difficulty in finding these student support services at the Website and encourages SOSU to examine and clean up as appropriate its Website structure of student support services.

**Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 1.B - Core Component 1.B

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The mission is articulated publicly.

1. The institution clearly articulates its mission through one or more public documents, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans, or institutional priorities.
2. The mission document or documents are current and explain the extent of the institution's emphasis on the various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, application of research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development, and religious or cultural purpose.
3. The mission document or documents identify the nature, scope, and intended constituents of the higher education programs and services the institution provides.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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The University clearly articulates its mission through its Mission Statement and Vision 2020, which together identifies the institution's priorities, and delineates its scope, function, major initiatives, and strategic goals and objectives. In addition, the Mission Statement defines SOSU's emphasis on undergraduate education and the regional community. As cited in the Assurance Argument, the University takes pride in being a teaching institution. This role is emphasized in SOSU's Mission Statement, which is inclusive of providing students with "personal access to excellent teaching and challenging academic programs" among other experiences to promote their learning and development. As evidenced above in 1A of this document, SOSU's implementation of its new General Education program and new master's degree programs provide evidence of its commitment to "life-long learning", as made explicit in the Mission Statement.

Based on the Team's examination of the University Website (Website), the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalog (Academic Catalog), and Academic Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM) are the principal publications that both mission documents are found. The Administrative, Professional and Support Staff Employee Handbook (Employee Handbook) publishes the Mission Statement only. Also, the Mission Statement and/or Vision Statement can be found via the "About SE", "Office of the President" and "Current Student" tabs. Although SOSU sufficiently makes its mission public, the Team recommends the University to include its Mission Statement and Vision Statement in the Student Handbook to enhance the full communication of its mission documents to major constituencies.

The Assurance Argument reports that the Mission Statement is available in printed form in the Academic Catalog and APPM, and the University is now establishing standards to require the Mission Statement to be included in a broader range of publications. The Team commends this process, and recommends that SOSU consider including standards for publication of its Vision Statement along with the Mission Statement.

The Team finds that the mission documents are current. Although the Mission Statement was approved by the SOSU governing board in 2002, SOSU has recently examined its mission. Similarly, Vision 2020 was reviewed during the 2014-2015 academic year via a process inclusive of its internal and external constituencies. See 1A above in this document for evidence substantiating these findings.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 1.C - Core Component 1.C

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The institution understands the relationship between its mission and the diversity of society.

1. The institution addresses its role in a multicultural society.
2. The institution's processes and activities reflect attention to human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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SOSU continues to reflect a commitment to a multicultural society and diversity as appropriate to its mission. Beyond a commitment to its students, the University is also attempting to build a more diverse faculty. The 2014 Team urged the institution to follow best practices by the state regional university system and peer institutions to build a more diverse faculty. As evidenced by comparative data in the Assurance Argument for the race/ethnic distribution of faculty, SOSU has made some progress. In Fall 2014, SOSU had a total of 20 faculty from underrepresented populations, representing 15.4% of the total faculty population, compared to 23 faculty in Fall 2017, representing 20.4% of its total faculty. For new hires in Fall 2017, 5 of 15 were ethnic minorities and 7 of 15 were female. Considering these data in the context of significant budget reductions occurring at the University during this period, the Team finds that SOSU has demonstrated a commitment to faculty diversity. No information was available to the Team on SOSU's recruitment/retention practices. The Team urges the University to continue its efforts to enhance faculty diversity, and to document successful methodologies to assess best practices for the institution.

Additionally, in keeping with the 2014 Team's recommendation to focus on diverse populations native to the area, the institution moved away for an initiative to grow its international population. However, as cited in the Assurance Argument, SOSU continues to provide opportunities for cultural and global awareness through forums, speakers, concerts, and events hosted by various University units (e.g. Student Life, Residence Life, student organizations, and academic departments). To illustrate, in examining the University Website, Student Life offers Native American activities, Black History Month events, and the Carnival of Cultures; students, faculty and staff worked with Durant Main Street and Durant Boys and Girls Club in commemoration of the 2018 Martin Luther King Day; and a Shakespeare Symposium is scheduled during summer 2018. As cited in the Assurance Argument, SOSU regularly offers a study abroad, and an exchange program with China in biological sciences, and various short-term experiences for global awareness through its Honors Program, Language, English and Humanities departments. The Team finds that such opportunities for students to gain a broad awareness of a multicultural, global society is appropriate to SOSU's mission.

Additionally, since the 2014 HLC Evaluation, SOSU has demonstrated attentiveness to diversity through its institutional processes. As noted in the Assurance Argument, SOSU created the Office for Compliance and Safety (OCS) in 2016, which reflects a combination and expansion of the Office of Equity, Compliance, and Diversity, and the Disabilities Office. The OCS created a Civil Rights &

Title IX Policy for Faculty, Students and Staff (last updated March 2018). This policy outlines reporting procedures, remedies for victims, disability rights, and transgender inclusion. Additionally, the associated websites offer useful resources, including definitions and policies for affirmative action, and an Online Training webpage with video links for Title IX and other related training.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 1.D - Core Component 1.D

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The institution's mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.

1. Actions and decisions reflect an understanding that in its educational role the institution serves the public, not solely the institution, and thus entails a public obligation.
2. The institution's educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.
3. The institution engages with its identified external constituencies and communities of interest and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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SOSU has continued to demonstrate a focus on its regional role as made explicit in its Mission Statement. In Fall 2017, SOSU began offering multiple Masters of Education programs online (Masters of Education in Special Education, Curriculum & Instruction, Educational Leadership (Academic Track), and School Counseling). Implementation of these programs is consistent with SOSU's regional role of providing "advanced graduate studies and research in areas of particular strength and need for the region and the state of Oklahoma." Further, these programs help SOSU to "continue its historical preparation of quality educators for Oklahoma", and also assist with state funding shortfalls.

Since 2014, SOSU has demonstrated its commitment to the public good, beyond the civic and cultural experiences the University traditionally provides. As documented in the Assurance Argument, SOSU partnered with a group of citizens who decided that additional safe waking space was needed in the community. In Spring 2016, SOSU opened Schuler Loop, a designated 1.75 mile walking trail through the main campus. In Spring 2017, SOSU extended its commitment and secured a grant for outdoor exercise equipment. Most recently, the institution opened an additional 1.3 mile trail.

Further, SOSU has continued its attempts to address issues of educational access and under-preparedness in the communities it serves, and has demonstrated success in securing federal grants to support high-risk populations. For example, the TRIO grant programs housed at SOSU work to provide access and educational support for under-served in its service areas. As cited in the Assurance Argument these grants work closely with the public school systems, state workforce offices, and other state agencies to place students into secondary education. Other external grants secured by SOSU have specific outreach functions. For example, the Child Care Resource and Referral Program is a free service which helps parents find quality child care in SOSU's eleven-county service area. SOSU is one of the locations for the Oklahoma Small Business Development Center, which advises business owners in planning, financial analysis and many other areas.

**Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 1.S - Criterion 1 - Summary

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The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

### Evidence

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Based on the Team's evaluation of the Assurance Argument and accompanying documents, along with the Addendum documents, SOSU meets the standards for all Core Components of Criterion 1.

Since the last HLC evaluation, the University has examined its mission documents, and evidence demonstrates the mission is broadly endorsed by SOSU constituents. The University clearly articulates its purposes, scope, functions and goals through its approved Mission and Vision 2020 statements, which are published in various handbooks/manuals targeting its internal constituents, and made public via the University website. SOSU implemented new master's degree programs in education in Fall 2017, as well as other programs that align directly its mission, vision, and purposes as a regional University.

SOSU has continued to demonstrate an understanding of its role in a multicultural society as evidenced by its recent efforts and progress toward enhancing diversity of its faculty, while continuing to serve diverse populations native to its region. SOSU continues to offer services through its Native American Institute as well as a broad range of cultural and global opportunities for students through various formats and departments. Its newly established Office on Compliance and Safety, and policy pertaining to civil rights and Title IX further demonstrate SOSU's commitment to diversity. Similarly, since 2014, SOSU has established new partnerships with local community groups, and has continued its success in securing grant funding for its outreach purposes, including services for business and other entities. These efforts demonstrate an expansion of its commitment to the public good beyond its traditional civic and cultural work in communities it serves.

## 2 - Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### 2.A - Core Component 2.A

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The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it establishes and follows policies and processes for fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff.

#### Rating

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Met

#### Evidence

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SOSU continues to operate under the auspices of the Regional University System for Oklahoma (RUSO) and the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE). As documented in its Policy Manual, the RUSO governing board is vested by Oklahoma law with ultimate responsibility for supervision, management, and control of the University. RUSO has established policies and procedures inclusive of its legal authority for SOSU along with five other universities in the southeastern region of the state. The OSRHE is the legal entity in Oklahoma with responsibility for coordinating all public education at the college level, and has established policies and procedures for coordination of SOSU and other colleges/universities in the State System of Higher Education. The Team's review of the RUSO and OSRHE respective policy manuals confirms their integral responsibility and authority for oversight of personnel, academic, financial, and other matters essential for SOSU's operations and purposes, as well as their authority for monitoring and ensuring compliance with these policies.

As cited in the Assurance Argument, the RUSO and OSRHE update their respective policies and procedures as needed for compliance with state and federal statutes and regulation. The Team's review of policy manuals confirms instances of updates by the RUSO and the OSRHE since the 2014 HLC Evaluation. For example, the RUSO Policy Manual demonstrates updates as recent as 2018, including areas pertaining to administration, financial management, academic affairs, and student affairs. The OSRHE policies pertaining to Administration Operations, inclusive of its State Regents Ethics Policies, were updated in 2017.

As affirmed by the Team's review of respective policy manuals, OSRHE Ethics Policies, and RUSO Oath of Office and other requirements establish expectations for ethical practices and behaviors of its board members, administrative staff, and operations. Also, policies are inclusive of personnel, financial, academic, and other operational matters for governing of SOSU (e.g., disclosures and compensation of board members; internal and external audits, audit standards and reporting, complaints/grievances and appeals, equal access/nondiscrimination, reasonable accommodation, and academic responsibility). These policies are further detailed in 2C below in this document. Finally, as

documented in the Assurance Argument, the OSHRE continues to maintain a mandatory Academic Integrity Policy, and the RUSO continues to demonstrate its commitment to integrity by administering and staffing Ethicspoint for anonymous reporting of policy violations in various categories, including human resources, financial affairs, and student affairs.

Further, SOSU continues to maintain authority to implement its own policies in accordance with regulations of the governing boards. SOSU clearly specifies its expectations pertaining to integrity, and fair and ethical practices through approved policies and procedures published in various handbooks and manuals for its constituents. As reviewed by the Team, principal publications include: 2017-2018 Academic Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM); Administrative, Professional and Support Staff Employee Handbook, page/section dated (Employee Handbook); 2016-2017 Student Handbook; and the 2017-2019 Academic Catalog. These documents are available at the University website. Institutional units such as the Office of Business Affairs, and Office of Financial Aid have adopted and published at the website statements of ethics, which substantiate the University's endorsement of fair and ethical practices. Notably, the Team observed the Organizational Chart contained in the Employee Handbook is inconsistent with the one provided in the Assurance Argument as the latest Organizational Chart, which reflected the recent elimination of academic deans. The Team urges immediate correction of this discrepancy.

Since the HLC Evaluation in 2014, SOSU has continued to demonstrate its commitment to ethical practices, and academic quality and integrity as evidenced by the Assurance Argument:

- In 2015, SOSU added gender identity and sexual orientation as protected statuses in its non-discrimination statement.
- Beginning Fall 2015, SOSU required all students to complete mandatory Sexual Violence/Sexual Harassment training.
- In 2016, SOSU gained recognition as an approved institution by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA) for offering distance education courses and programs, which complements SOSU's increasing emphasis on online/distance education since 2014. Additionally, as further verified by the Team, SOSU is an Oklahoma Affiliate Institution of Quality Matters, which provides for certification of SOSU faculty desiring to teach online courses.
- In 2018, SOSU enacted Civil Rights & Title IX Policy for Faculty, Students and Staff, which was approved by the SOSU and the RUSO General Counsel Office in 2017. According to the policy statement, SOSU developed this policy to simplify and consolidate all equity-based processes and procedures under one umbrella policy. To facilitate clear communications, the new policy document identifies the particular policies or specific portions thereof in existing Handbooks/Manuals that are replaced by the new policy.

As evidenced by the Team's review of notification letters from accrediting bodies, as well as SOSU's listings of affiliations in the Academic Catalog, SOSU has continued to maintain specialized accreditation of applicable degree programs, and has demonstrated integrity in presenting its affiliations to the public.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.B - Core Component 2.B

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The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public with regard to its programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control, and accreditation relationships.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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As documented in the Assurance Argument and verified by the Team, the University website is a principal portal of information for students and the public. The website homepage has a “Future Students” tab and “Current Students” tab, which discloses information pertinent to students. To illustrate:

- The “Future Students” tab leads to information on undergraduate and graduate programs, including curricula and degree requirements; admissions requirements; financial aid information; scholarships and public safety. “Cost of attending” information is available, including estimated costs for the current academic year, itemized by tuition, mandatory fees, and online and IETV fees per credit; estimated textbook cost per 12 credits, room, board, and approximate total tuition for in-state and out-of-state. Additionally, specialized accreditations for degree programs are appropriately identified from this tab at “SE [Southeastern] Schools/Departments” webpages, as applicable.
- The “Current Students” tab leads information on campus resources, student services, campus life, and student organizations.
- Other tabs are available from the website homepage, such as “Graduate Studies”, “New & Events”, and “About SE” provide easy access to the University Mission Statement, governance, master calendars, current events, and information on facilities and other areas.

The 2017-2019 Academic Catalog publishes detailed information for students and the public inclusive of the following: a) degree program offerings, curricula and degree requirements; b) accreditation relationships and institutional affiliations; c) faculty information such as departmental affiliation, academic title and rank, degrees earned/credentials; and d) financial aid and cost information, including tuition and fees for residents and non-residents and non-residents, special fees, and food services costs.

The Academic Catalog, 2016-17 Student Handbook, 2017-2018 APPM, and the Employee Handbook (page/section dated) are repositories of information for students and the public. These documents, available at the website, detail policies and procedures for University controls.

The “SE Online” webpage is a gateway to resources for online/distance education students, including online degree programs, general education, technical support, library, ADA Compliance, how to apply, and student resources. The “academic support” link leads to the Smart-Thinking portal for tutorial services. The SE online webpage leads to financial aid, and tuition and cost information for online students. The Team found the SE Online webpage to be particularly resourceful for online

students, but not readily accessible in the Team's experience as new users. Given the increasing numbers of online students, the Team encourages the University to enhance the accessibility of this webpage such as from the "Future Students" tab or "Academic" webpage.

While SOSU makes information available to the public on its faculty and staff, the Team was unable to verify the publication of complete information, particularly with respect to staff qualifications. A complete listing of faculty by name and qualifications was found available in the Academic Catalog only. A comparable listing for staff was not found by the Team, and the listing of qualifications across departments was inconsistently provided, based by the Team's review of the University Directory and departmental webpages. To illustrate, in attempting to review qualifications using the University Directory, only the credentials for the Director of the Academic Advising and Outreach Center was found. No information pertaining to staff qualifications was available in the Directory for other student services/academic support departments reviewed by the Team (i.e., Counseling Center, Career Management Center, CIDT (Center for Instructional Development and Technology), Education Opportunity Center, and Learning Center). Additionally, given that the Academic Catalog appears to be published in two-year cycles, faculty information may not remain current. Given this unclarity in disclosure of information on faculty and staff qualifications, the Team expects SOSU to specifically identify the qualifications of all of its current faculty and staff to the public. At the next HLC Comprehensive Evaluation in 2023-24, the Team expects SOSU to present evidence of its compliance with this expectation, beginning in the 2018-19 academic year.

Additionally, the Assurance Argument documents a new "Campus Expression Policy" (discussed in 2D below in this document) was implemented in 2017. While the Team applauds this policy, the Team is unable to verify its official approval. The Team acknowledges email communications pertaining to its approval among SOSU administrators (Vice President for Academic Affairs, Director of Compliance and Safety and Title IX Coordinator, and Special Assistant to the President/Director of University Communications) and the RUSO General Counsel), yet documentation of final approval was not available in Assurance Argument and Addendum documents. The Team expects SOSU to provide evidence of the official approval of the Campus Expression Policy at the 2023-24 Comprehensive Evaluation.

Finally, the Team finds that recently implemented policies cited in the Assurance Argument (i.e., Campus Expression Policy, implemented January 2017; and the Civil Rights & Title IX Policy for Faculty, Students and Staff, last updated in March 2018) may not be readily accessible by SOSU internal constituencies and the public. Neither policy is yet available in major publications for faculty, staff and students (Academic Catalog, Student Handbook, APPM, and Employee Handbook). However, in the Team's experience with the University website, the accessibility of both policies poses a challenge for new users. For example, the Team was able to find the Campus Expression Policy under "Student Union Forms" at the "Student Life" website only with guidance via the SOSU Addendum. With unusual effort, the Team verified that the Civil Rights & Title IX Policy is available from the "Faculty & Staff" tab at the "Office of Compliance and Safety" webpage, which appears to limit its access particularly to students. The Team experienced challenges in finding other information, including career development as noted in 1A above in this document, and career placement services, library resources and technology resources for academic programs. These observations further support the Team's recommendation in 1A regarding a clean up of the website structure to enhance ease of access to information, particularly new users.

**Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.C - Core Component 2.C

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The governing board of the institution is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and to assure its integrity.

1. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.
2. The governing board reviews and considers the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.
3. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties when such influence would not be in the best interest of the institution.
4. The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the administration and expects the faculty to oversee academic matters.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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Based on the Team's review of the Assurance Argument, and the OSHRE and RUSO Policy Manuals, the Team finds that the SOSU governing boards are sufficiently autonomous to assure integrity and decision-making in the best interest of the University. Evidence follows:

- Each Board has established policies and procedures for preserving the independence of Board members in decision-making and conducting his/her responsibilities on behalf of the University. The OSHRE Ethics Policies continue to incorporate the Oklahoma Ethics Commission Rules for conduct, compliance, and disciplinary actions. The policy governs the relationship of the Regents and institutional representatives, and set rules for Regents pertaining to the conduct of their responsibilities. These rules are inclusive of outside employment, compensation, gifts, the use of state titles, and political activities. Board members are required to promptly disclose any activity that may interfere with his/her ethical behavior and decision-making as a Board member. Similarly, the RUSO Oath of Office prohibits Regents from knowingly receiving money or anything of value that may interfere with the ethical performance of the responsibilities of a Regent. As noted in the Assurance Argument, Board policies reflect financial separation and protects against conflict of interest in SOSU's business transactions.
- Each Board has processes in place to systematically gather input for decision-making. The OSHRE Policy Manuel affirms its organization by various Councils along with guidelines for regular meetings and reporting expectations for each. Councils are representative of university administrators, faculty, staff and student: (i.e., Council of Presidents, Student Advisory Council, Faculty Advisory Council, Council on Instruction, Council on Student Affairs, Council of Business Officers, and Information Technology Council). The OSRHE policies require the agendas of regular Board meetings to include "academic affairs", "fiscal affairs", and "reports"; university presidents are invited to assist the System Chancellor in reporting respective university business at Regent meetings. Students and citizens have an opportunity to submit

agenda items in accordance with OSRHE Board procedures. The RUSO policies require the agendas of its regular Board meetings to include several items that gather input from the universities such as Presidents' Recommendations, Presidents Council Report, and Committee Reports.

Additionally, the Team's review of a sampling of agendas for regular Board meetings held in 2016 through 2018 indicates that OSHRE and RUSO attend to priorities and other topics that enhance SOSU. Both Boards considered academic matters, including new degree programs, and online delivery, which were priorities of SOSU during this period. Other topics specific to SOSU were evident on the RUSO Board agendas such as personnel matters, infrastructure improvement, renovation projects including residence halls, and grants/contracts. The Audit and Finance Committee report was a standard agenda item.

Finally, as cited in the Assurance Argument and verified by the Team of SOSU policy (i.e., APPM, and Employee Handbook) the governing board delegates to the SOSU president the authority and responsibility for day-to-day administration, management and supervision of the institution, and holds faculty accountable for the curriculum matters and instructional delivery. SOSU's newly revised Organizational Chart illustrates the lines of internal authority and responsibility at the institution.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.D - Core Component 2.D

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

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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SOSU and its governing board demonstrates a commitment to freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth in research, teaching and learning. As is evident in the policy on “Academic Freedom and Responsibility” of RUSO and SOSU, both organizations protect the freedom of faculty members in the conducting and reporting/publishing research, and in teaching and discussing academic topics.

Similarly, the Student Handbook publishes the “Intellectual Inquiry and Academic Freedom” policy, which makes explicit the University’s commitment to "promoting intellectual inquiry and debate." This policy specifically defines freedom of expression within the context of gender-based or sexual misconduct and protects the freedom of discussion of controversial, sensitive and sexual-related topics for pedagogical purposes within and outside of the classroom.

Additionally, the Student Handbook publishes the “Computer Policies and Procedures” which declares the University’s endorsement of freedom of communications associated with the use of its computer facilities to support research, teaching, and related activities. The policy protects the right to share information produced by computing facilities among SOSU’s internal and external collaborators in a responsible manner.

The Assurance Argument reports the implementation a “Campus Expression Policy” in January 2017, which strengthens the University's commitment to freedom of expression. As reviewed by the Team, this protects freedom of expression in meetings, demonstrations/rallies, performances and other expressive activities in campus facilities and grounds. The policy statement declares that SOSU’s “grounds and facilities are intended for academic enrichment and the purpose of this policy is to “protect the integrity of the academic environment and while protecting the use of campus space as a vibrant marketplace of ideas.” The Team's expectations regarding approval and broad publication of this policy have been delineated in 2B of this document.

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.E - Core Component 2.E

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

1. The institution provides effective oversight and support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff, and students.
2. Students are offered guidance in the ethical use of information resources.
3. The institution has and enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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Since the 2014 HLC Evaluation, SOSU has enhanced its oversight structure for ensuring integrity in research and scholarly activities of its faculty, students and staff. In 2016, SOSU established an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), under the auspices of the Faculty Senate. As described in the APPM, the purpose of the IACUC is to oversee and evaluate policies regulating the use of laboratory animals, and ensure compliance of those policies with the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. In the Team's judgment, the IACUC functions, the review/inspection requirements for animal research and facilities, and other protocols/procedures delineated the policy statement are consistent with good practice for committees of the kind. Additionally, the Faculty Senate Institutional Review Board (IRB) continues to provide oversight and review responsibility for ensuring the integrity of research involving human subjects at SOSU.

To enable academic integrity the 2016-17 Student Handbook, " Student Obligations and Regulations" section, identifies SOSU's expectations and standards of behavior for students in academic and civil settings. This policy defines acts of misconduct that are prohibited in the academic setting (e.g., cheating; plagiarism, and facilitating cheating or plagiarism of any kind even if attempts were unsuccessful). The Handbook details other forms of misconduct, such as furnishing false information, technology abuse, and unauthorized use, entry or occupancy of University facilities or premises. The consequence of violations and grievance procedures are described.

Similarly, the Team's review of the RUSO policy manual affirms a clear delineation of policies and procedures by SOSU's governing board for ensuring academic integrity. RUSO policies serve as the framework for SOSU's regulations governing the acquisition and responsible use of information.

Further SOSU continues to provide guidance for students in the ethical use of information. To illustrate:

- The IRB policies support the student research as a part of course, provided faculty teaching the course comply with established ethical and legal standards
- SOSU makes available the Smarthinking Online Writing Laboratory to support distance education students in writing across the curriculum. According to Assurance Argument

documents, Smarthinking E-certified tutors specifically provide assistance in composition and creative writing. Additionally, SOSU provides support for instructors through the University Learning Management System, which allows for papers to be assessed automatically using SafeAssign, a plagiarism-detection software.

- Further, the Team's review of a limited number (three) of sample syllabi (all Fall 2017) available in the Assurance Argument indicates that students are provided standards for academic honesty and ethical use of information via course syllabi. Similarly, the review of course templates for General Education composition courses (English Composition I&II) affirms some guidance on the ethical use of information. While it is unclear to the Team if the University consistently utilizes a syllabus template, each syllabus reviewed included the topic of "Academic Integrity", and provided information either by a link to the Student Handbook, or in one instance by a summary of pertinent information.

Finally, the Team applauds a standard pattern for communicating these standards via syllabi as suggested by the above findings. Yet, even given the limited number of syllabi for this review, the Team urges the University to attend to processes for assurance that information is up-to-date and clearly presented to students. Sample syllabi provided links to outdated versions of the Student Handbook (2009-10, 2015-16), and the composition courses linked to the "SE Student Life" webpage, hosting the latest as well as two earlier versions of the Handbook. For clarity to students, the Team believes the syllabi should refer/link directly to the current Handbook, and make reference to the precise title as exists in the Handbook for this information (i.e., "Student Obligations and Regulations").

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.S - Criterion 2 - Summary

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The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### Evidence

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The Team finds that SOSU has met Criterion 2. The Team found substantial evidence that the institution operates with integrity and maintains well-established policies and procedures for ethical practices and behaviors for members and staff of its governing and coordinating boards, and faculty, staff and students. Since 2014, attention has been given to integrity and ethical issues, as evidenced by updates to policy manuals of SOSU and its boards. Similarly, substantive documentation verified established policies, systematic procedures, and board structures for assuring independence in decision-making, input from pertinent constituencies and the public, and deliberations on SOSU's the priorities. Since 2014, SOSU's commitment to responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge has been strengthened with the implementation of a new policy and procedures for animal care in research, along with continuing its policies and procedures for protection of human subjects, as well as its policies and guidance to student on academic integrity and ethical conduct.

Finally, the preponderance of evidence substantiates that SOSU accurately and completely presents itself to the public through various publications available at the University website. However, given the available documentation, the Team was unable to verify either a complete disclosure of staff qualifications, or assurance that faculty qualifications are kept current annually. The Team expects SOSU to specifically identify the qualifications of all of its current faculty and staff to the public. At the next HLC Comprehensive Evaluation in 2023-24, the Team expects SOSU to present evidence of compliance with this expectation, beginning in the 2018-19 academic year. Similarly, the Team was unable to verify the official approval of a "Campus Expression Policy" implemented in 2017. The Team expects SOSU to provide documentation of the official approval of the Campus Expression Policy at the 2023-24 Comprehensive Evaluation.

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

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The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

### **3.A - Core Component 3.A**

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The institution's degree programs are appropriate to higher education.

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded.
2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate, and certificate programs.
3. The institution's program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).

### **Rating**

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Met

### **Evidence**

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As evidenced by the Team's review of the Academic Catalog at the University website, programs and courses at SOSU are current and have goals and objectives with student learning outcomes. Programs are identified by level and type, and specification of level of delivery is outlined as follows: 1000-2000 level courses are for freshmen and sophomores, 3000-4000 level are for juniors and seniors, and 5000 level and above for are graduate students only. Specific criteria for transfer is established, and guidelines are also established for seniors interested in enrolling in graduate courses in their final semester. The Graduate Council provides oversight for graduate programs, and admission standards for entry to graduate study and performance targets for each program are set. As evidenced in the Assurance Argument, student expectations established by the Goals and Objectives statements for General Education, the Liberal and Applied Studies Goals and Objectives statements, and the goals and objectives statements identified for each school and by the graduate programs. The Team finds that courses and programs are at the appropriate level for the degrees awarded.

In the Assurance Argument and associated documents, the SOSU provides evidence of the differentiation of learning goals for undergraduate and graduate programs. Outcomes by program are outlined, performance goals are set, and criteria are listed for each program. Sample syllabi from Biology, Education, Physical Science and Geography demonstrate the inclusion of course objectives for specific courses. The Team affirms that learning goals are articulated and connected, in an appropriate manner, with degree level. The Curriculum Committee is responsible for reviewing syllabi to ensure that program goals are met and the Graduate Council reviews programs as well as faculty credentials to ensure that delivery at the appropriate level is provided by faculty in graduate programs.

From its review of the Assurance Argument and accompanying documentation, the Team recognizes that the institution's degrees are appropriate across all delivery modes. Faculty who teach online are required to complete a Quality Matters Rubric prior to or during their first semester and the University has documented that 146 faculty have completed QM training.

As evidenced by the Assurance Argument and associated documents, distance education has seen a significant increase in enrollment over the last three years. Increased enrollment is particularly evident with online graduate education, which has grown from 255 online students in Fall 2014 to 456 graduate students by Fall 2016. Engaging in an agreement with Academic Partnerships (AP) in December 2015, SOSU was able to increase the MBA from 67 students in Fall 2015 to 174 students in Fall of 2016 and 410 students by Fall 2017. Given the success in enrollment, SOSU has expanded its partnership with AP to include nine additional graduate programs in Fall 2017 and select undergraduate programs beginning in Fall 2018. The University also experienced a drop in face-to-face enrollments in undergraduate courses and programs (77% of all enrollment Fall 2013; 63% of all enrollment in Fall 2017). In response to the growth and shifts in enrollment, the Assurance Argument and Addendum documents show:

- The University has made or planned the following adjustments to increase instructional support in the Center for Instructional Development and Technology (CIDT): added a fulltime Assistant Director, and a half-time position of Instructional Design in 2017; transferred one fulltime Instructional Technologist from Department of Information Technology in 2016; reallocated approximately \$15,000 in regular student work in 2017-2018; and plans to reallocate 1.5 FTE from IETV to CIDT in FY19.
- The University has made adjustments/hires to support graduate delivery, specifically a temporary instructor was transitioned to regular fulltime, and a non-tenure track instructor was hired to support the MBA. Two additional tenure track hires will begin Fall 2018 according to the Assurance Argument.
- SOSU engaged Instructional Connections to assist in hiring teaching assistants (coaches) to assist professors in courses with enrollments over 35 in the M.Ed. program and over 50 in the MBA. In Fall 2017, MBA had five coaches for six courses, and 11 coaches for 10 courses in Spring 2018. The M.Ed is scheduled to have one coach for one course, beginning in Spring 2018.
- According to the partnership agreement, AP provides services to support online programs, including academic support services to work with faculty teaching online courses, enrollment specialists representatives to provide student support and retention services, and program development, review and implementation support. The University maintains sole authority for appointment of faculty, student admissions, online delivery, student evaluations, and awarding credit/credentialing, financial aid and scholarships.

Based on the above evidence, the Team finds that SOSU has been responsive and attentive to enrollment increases and shifts amidst tremendous budget challenges. However, the impact of these changes on quality of instructional delivery has yet to be evaluated. Consequently, at the 2023-24 Comprehensive Evaluation, the Team expects SOSU to demonstrate assessment of the impact of enrollment growth, Academic Partnership “academic-related” support services, and Instructional Connections services on the quality of instructional delivery in applicable courses and programs. SOSU is expected to demonstrate closure of the assessment loop at that time.

**Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.B - Core Component 3.B

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The institution demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs.

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution.
2. The institution articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.
3. Every degree program offered by the institution engages students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; in mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.
4. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity of the world in which students live and work.
5. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their programs and the institution's mission.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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SOSU has revised its General Education program since the 2014 HLC Evaluation. The current mission of General Education is to provide a “. . .broad foundation of intellectual skills, knowledge, and perspectives essential to all students . . .”, Its vision statement indicates that general education is, “To ensure that students perceive general education as a unified and related curriculum.” The mission and vision seek to capture the University's interest in integrative knowledge and academic excellence. The General Education program consists of 44 total semester hours, distributed according to broad categories: 9 hours of Communication, 12 hours of Social and Behavioral Sciences, 11 hours of Sciences and Mathematics, 9 hours of Humanities, and credits (3 hours) in Computer Proficiency. The overall requirements of the program align with educational offerings and degrees.

Through review of the General Education and Academic Catalog websites, the Team affirms that SOSU provides information on the mission, vision, and core requirements of the General Education Program. The general education framework meets the overall understanding of program delivery for an institution of SOSU's type and kind. In 2016-2017 the General Education Council, upon the advice of the 2014 HLC Evaluation Team, reduced the number of program goals from 10 to 6 and the number of outcomes from 43 to 20. The General Education Requirements are available on the website as well as the new goals, which are planned to be implemented in Fall of 2018.

As documented at the General Education website, the new goals and learning outcomes for the program are configured as follows: Communication – 1 Goal, 4 Learning Outcomes; Computer

Literacy – Graduation Requirement, 0 Learning Outcomes; Critical Thinking – 0 Goals, 0 Learning Outcomes – Integrated; Fine Arts and Humanities – 1 Goal, 4 Learning Outcomes; Mathematics – 1 Goal, 2 Learning Outcomes; Science – 1 Goal, 3 Learning Outcomes; Social and Political Institutions – 1 Goal, 4 Learning Outcomes; Wellness – 1 Goal, 3 Learning Outcomes. In review of course offerings associated with each of the General Education requirement areas (e.g., Humanities), the Team notes a discrepancy between the General Education mission statement pertaining to its intent to ensure experiences that connect students to diversity and the complexity of, “. . . .humankind’s cultural heritage. . .”, and the configuration of requirements. For example, in the Humanities category, students are required to take “zero or one” of the listed courses that immerse students into experiences related to the diversity/cultural heritage (American Sign Language, Choctaw Language and Culture, Chickasaw Culture and Language, French, German, or Spanish). With the option of taking “zero” courses, these experiences are not assured by the Humanities, the provision of them elsewhere in the General Education course requirements is unclear. In addition, in reviewing learning outcomes (i.e., three and four) for the Humanities revised goals and objectives, and aligning those with expected outcomes for course offerings, it is not clear that courses currently available are sufficient to meet these outcomes. While the Team acknowledges SOSU’s plans for embedding goals and outcomes in multiple courses, at this point the options appear insufficient to meet the overall mission. The Team recommends that the University review the requirements, the outcomes, and the course options to ensure a sufficiently sustainable framework.

As documented in the Assurance Argument and confirmed by the Team’s review of the disciplinary goals and objectives stated in Program Level Assessment Plans, all degree programs engage students in appropriate levels of mastery of modes of inquiry, analyses/communications of information, and development of skills for a changing environment. Also, program assessment reports demonstrate this engagement, as well as the sample course syllabi reviewed by the Team. Additionally, each year academic programs complete Program Outcomes Assessment Reports and demonstrate their effectiveness in delivery. For example, Communications faculty reflected in their report on the successfulness of newspaper competitions and how the faculty will measure student material in the future through the use of rubrics. Program reviews and accreditation outcomes for accredited programs are available on the Academic Affairs website.

Native American programs are identified as central to the strength of the University’s commitment to diversity. Information on the University website regarding the Choctaw Language and Culture minor, the Native Studies minor, and the Master’s program in Native American Leadership evidences the intent of the University and faculty to ensure the vitality of Native programming. In addition, sponsored conferences and travel are central to instilling a richness to the understanding of Native American life and culture. The Assurance Argument identifies service learning as a means of providing exposure to diverse communities, and the Team’s review sample syllabi affirm the incorporation of diversity topics into course delivery.

Finally, the Team finds that SOSU’s faculty and students contribute scholarly and creative work as appropriate for the University’s mission, where teaching is a central purpose. The Team found scholarship and creative work are identified in academic goals and objectives and linked to program outcomes. Through grant support, science departments engage students in various forms of research. In addition, students in other disciplines, including English, receive mentorship in research and are supported in their work and encouraged to present at conferences. Every year multiple students present at Oklahoma Research Day. The University also partners with local institutions on research. One example is the collaboration of the Behavioral Sciences department and the Choctaw Nation Reintegration Program on investigating ways to reduce recidivism rates. At the individual faculty, department, and university level the connection of scholarship and discovery of knowledge is linked to SOSU’s mission.

**Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.C - Core Component 3.C

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The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

1. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance; establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning.
2. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial programs.
3. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.
4. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.
5. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.
6. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising, and co-curricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained, and supported in their professional development.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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The Assurance Argument identifies the challenges associated with reductions in state funding that occurred in Spring 2016 and FY 2016-2017. The number of fulltime faculty dropped from 139 in Fall 2014 to 111 in Fall 2016. As of Fall 2017, the number of fulltime faculty had rebounded to 133, according to evidence in the Common Data Set for 2017-2018. The student-to-faculty ratio for Fall 2017 was 18 to 1, demonstrating a return to almost the level of Fall 2014 when the ratio was 17 to 1. This ratio reflects, in part, a decline in undergraduate enrollment, a change to cross-discipline delivery by faculty, and a reduction in low enrollment sections.

The Team's review of Addendum documents pertaining to faculty adequacy for instructional delivery demonstrates that SOSU was deliberate in protecting faculty lines during the budget reduction process. The Team reviewed a listing by title of the 31 positions eliminated since 2014, and found no faculty title listed. Additionally, documents show that SOSU has 14 active searches underway for budgeted fulltime faculty positions, including three new positions, and 11 faculty replacements. The positions are inclusive of a number of undergraduate programs. However, in the review of faculty loads for new degree programs implemented since 2014, the Team observed three faculty members teaching six or more classes in Fall 2017 and four faculty members teaching six or more classes (including two faculty members teaching eight classes) in Spring 2018. The Team was unable to examine the pervasiveness of this observation across all degree programs due to the absence of

documents available for the number of faculty by degree program. Additionally, undergraduate programs appear to have become more cross-disciplinary with faculty serving more than one program, and the impact of this approach on instructional delivery is unclear. The Team expects SOSU to evaluate by the 2023-24 HLC Evaluation the adequacy of the number of qualified faculty for each degree program, including consideration for enrollment growth, teaching workloads, and cross-disciplinary teaching assignments. Also, the University is encouraged to carefully consider the need for additional faculty in high need areas to ensure a continuation of high quality programming.

Department faculty have control of decisions regarding programs and program delivery, and are directly involved in assessment and the creation of action plans. As noted in the Assurance Argument, department chairs are responsible for ensuring that program goals and outcomes are met, and under a new organizational structure adopted in 2016 which eliminated the Dean of Instruction, department chairs now report directly to the Vice President of Academic Affairs who oversees the curriculum and overall expectations of performance. The Addendum documents affirm no additional compensation has been provided to department chairs. Based on the Assurance Argument and Addendum documents, it is unclear how this organizational structure impacts the workload of the department chairs or overall delivery. SOSU acknowledges conversations are ongoing regarding this organization change, and the Team recommends the evaluation of the sustainability and effectiveness of this structure on instructional management/oversight.

The Team's review of the SOSU's hiring process, along with available faculty CVs and equivalent experience evaluations verifies that the faculty meet appropriate standards for their instructional assignments. SOSU's hiring process is outlined in the APPM, and all candidates are screened based on job-related qualifications. All faculty are expected to meet the qualification standards as set forth in the position description at hire and through review of qualifications. Department chairs review qualifications and for those faculty who have work experience, certification or licensure that qualifies them to teach; the department chair completes the Faculty Evaluation Form for Equivalent Experience. The most common areas where alternative experience, certification, or licensure is used are Aviation, Occupational Health and Safety, Choctaw and Chickasaw Language and Culture, and Freshman Composition.

SOSU continues to maintain regular evaluation of its faculty. The University has a three-tiered process for evaluating faculty. All faculty are involved in an annual performance evaluation as documented in the APPM. Professional activities are identified annually by each faculty person and the plan is approved by the department chair. Evaluations submitted by faculty at a later point in the year are reviewed by the chair. Tenure and promotion processes, which reflect AAUP's best practices, are outlined in the APPM. In AY 2014-2015 a post-tenure review process was put in place. Tenured faculty have an opportunity to receive feedback on their performance from their peers once every three years.

Budgetary issues have impacted SOSU's ability to provide robust support for research and professional development. Yet, the Assurance Argument documents the University's continuing support of faculty development, research and creative work. In 2016-2017, funds available for travel and research were reduced by 50.7%. Organized Research funds were dispersed to cover all but one request over the academic year. This success was accomplished by SOSU's denying requests for funding secondary projects. The Assurance Argument reports that resources such as Organized Research continue to be a viable means for support of research and professional development, as well as the identification of alternative resources through an endowed gift to the John Massey School of Business. Further details regarding future plans for maintaining and potentially growing support for faculty research and creative endeavors were not discussed in the Assurance Argument.

SOSU maintains policies to help ensure the accessibility of its faculty. According to APPM, a full-time faculty member is required to schedule ten office hours per week, with specifications regarding how much time per week day a faculty person must be available. Online faculty are allowed to negotiate with the department chair the portion of access that may be online versus face to face. From the Assurance Argument, departmental expectations for all adjunct faculty at SOSU is unclear to the Team. Searching the University website, it is apparent that at least one department, Biological Sciences, had established an Adjunct Faculty Handbook for 2014-2015 that specified policies for adjunct delivery, access, and evaluation.

The Team's evaluation of the adequacy of qualified staff for student support services is presented in 5A.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.D - Core Component 3.D

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The institution provides support for student learning and effective teaching.

1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its programs and the needs of its students.
4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites, museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).
5. The institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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The SOSU Assurance Argument identifies the student services available to students. The University provides a Counseling Center staffed by two licensed counselors, a Department of Public Safety that ensures a safe place to live and learn, health services for students with access to a registered nurse, TRIO programs, Educational Talent Search, and Upward Bound. Additional services include the Educational Opportunity Center which provides financial aid and educational support to adults interest in a post-secondary degree, the Student Support Services Program which addresses support for students who are disadvantaged seeking to complete a program of study, the Wellness Center which provides a variety of services, and the Learning Center that engages in assessment and development of basic skills. Many of these services directly address the needs of low income, first generation college students and students who are disadvantaged in various ways and are seeking to complete their college degree. These are appropriate to the population SOSU is serving, and on closer examination, it is particularly well noted that the Student Support Services Program has a graduation rate of 45% which exceeds the university graduation rate of 28.2%.

SOSU's Learning Center provides support for preparatory instruction in basic English, reading and mathematics. Students are assessed and the Annual Assessment Report for 2016-2017 indicates that of 2432 admitted undergraduates, 849 were required to participate in a secondary assessment to determine the level of remediation. CARES was established in 2011 as an alternative option to remedial courses, and summer workshops have been offered to encourage success in credited courses.

Advising is accomplished through the Academic Advising and Outreach Center, serving the needs of freshmen, transfer students and students with additional academic needs. Professional and faculty advisors work with students, with faculty advisors typically assigned as the primary advisor once a

student has completed 24 hours or declared a major. A guide has been created to help faculty handle advising questions. The Director of Advising evaluates the advising process and creates an annual program outcomes assessment report. The Native American Institute, located in the Academic Advising and Outreach Center, provides significant support for Native American students including advising. These advising approaches provide a blended model that meets the needs of all students.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.E - Core Component 3.E

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The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment.

1. Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.
2. The institution demonstrates any claims it makes about contributions to its students' educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, and economic development.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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The Division of Student Affairs adopted a vision statement that promotes diversity, responsible citizenship, and community engagement and complements the overall university mission. As such, students are afforded a well-rounded array of co-curricular activities which enhances their educational experience. Students have the opportunity to participate in a variety of performing arts activities, athletic activities both intercollegiate as well as intramural, and engage in many leadership organizations.

SOSU students have the chance to explore new student organizations and activities provided that a faculty or staff member agrees to serve in an advising capacity. This opportunity expands the potential engagement activities and speaks to the institution's commitment to providing a positive educational experience for its students.

Most notable co-curricular activities cited by SOSU in the Assurance Argument are the Honors Program, the President's Leadership Class, and the FIRST program. The Honors Program focuses on an enhanced curriculum along with research, travel and civic engagement opportunities. The President's Leadership Class focuses on campus involvement and the development of leadership skills. The FIRST program is housed in residential life and closely aligns with the successful FIG (Freshman Interest Group) concept. Freshmen participate in a variety of academic as well as social activities as a group.

SOSU documents that 45% of incoming students from 2016 participated in the vast number of student engagement opportunities. The success of engaging students in such activities is consistent with the overall University vision as well as the specific vision of the Division of Student Affairs. In addition, data from the Ruffalo Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory has remained consistent in verifying the level of satisfaction SOSU students have with the availability of their co-curricular activity options.

Several academic programs and/or faculty effectively engage students outside the classroom, which demonstrates the importance of such activities to the academic mission of SOSU. Several examples of collaborative research projects between faculty and students were highlighted in the Assurance Argument. A long-standing activity noted by SOSU was the publication Green Eggs and

Hamlet. This publication is in its 26th year and reflects a strong partnership between faculty and students through submission of journal articles.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

### 3.S - Criterion 3 - Summary

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The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

#### Evidence

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The Team finds that SOSU has met the requirements for each core component in Criterion 3. SOSU's Assurance Argument provides evidence that programs are of good quality, and degree outcomes are consistent across all types of delivery. The Assurance Argument and supporting documentation demonstrate that General Education goals and outcomes have been reviewed and reestablished to meet the 2014 HLC recommendations, and assessments have been put in place to ensure connection between program goals and student success. SOSU's focus on Native American diversity recognizes the institutions regional location, and the necessity of the student population. SOSU's faculty are appropriately credentialed. Faculty support scholarship through course delivery and multiple forms of research and grant funding. Advising and support services for all students are in place, and co-curricular programming is well-suited to the student population. Commentary on the adequacy of qualified staff for student support is addressed in 5A.

In the Team's evaluation of course requirements along with the expected outcomes for the new General Education (GE) framework, it is unclear if existing course requirements are sufficient to meet the expected GE outcomes. The Team recommends that in addition to implementing the new GE goals and outcomes as planned in Fall 2018 as planned, the University engage in a review of GE requirements, outcomes, and course options to ensure a sufficiently sustainable framework.

Additionally, the University has made recent changes and faculty reductions in response to budget reduction. Given recency of these development, the impact of the changes on degree programs and the adequacy of faculty is unclear. Consequently, by 2023-24 HLC Comprehensive Evaluation, the Team expects SOSU to:

- a) Demonstrate assessment of the impact of enrollment growth, the Academic Partnership "academic-related" support services, and the Instructional Connections services on the quality of instructional delivery in applicable courses and programs. SOSU is expected to demonstrate closure of the assessment loop at that time.
- b) Demonstrate the adequacy of the number of qualified faculty for each degree program, including consideration for enrollment growth, teaching workloads, and cross-disciplinary teaching assignments. Also, the University is encouraged to carefully consider the need for additional faculty in high need areas to ensure a continuation of high quality programming.

## 4 - Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

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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.

### 4.A - Core Component 4.A

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The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.
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.
3. The institution has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
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 assures 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.
5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution assures that the degree or certificate programs 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, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and Americorps).

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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SOSU continues to maintain an established process for review of all its academic programs. Programs having specialty accreditation use the external accreditation process as their program review. This process includes adhering to the review schedule established by the external reviewer (e.g. AACSB, CACREP, CAEP). Programs without a national accrediting body follow the review process delineated in the University's Academic Program Review Guide. These programs are reviewed on a five-year cycle by the Organized Research and Program Review Committee. The University's review guidelines require each program to create a self-study report, as evidenced by the Team's review of self-study reports for the BA in Communication, BA in Criminal Justice, BS in Biology, Fisheries & Wildlife Science, and BS in Science Education. The Assurance Argument documented the review

schedule for all programs, provided a summary of results of the review, and linked to examples of complete program reviews at the University website.

The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including credit it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties. Credit that is transcribed by SOSU is approved in one of three ways: 1) transfer credit is evaluated by the Registrar for current equivalencies based on the OSRHE transfer equivalency project; 2) transfer credit is defined in articulation agreements the University has in place with 17 Community Colleges; and 3) credit through evaluation of coursework approved by academic chairs and department faculty. All approved transcribed courses are also calculated for credit-hours and grade point average.

Also, evidence demonstrates that SOSU maintains appropriate policies and procedures for granting credit through the following: 1) successful completion of institutionally-prepared advanced standing examinations, based on course objectives and competencies; 2) standardized national tests such as CLEP; 3) American Council of Education (ACE) evaluated instruction for military training/learning; and 4) workplace courses. Any credits earned through these opportunities are GPA neutral, and are only recorded after the student has successfully completed 12 or more semester hours of formal course credit at SOSU.

The policies that guide the institution regarding assurance of quality of the credit it accepts in transfer are detailed under the Articulation Policy available in the Academic Catalog. As documented by the Assurance Argument and verified by the Team's review of the associated Registrar's Office webpage, SOSU's procedures are consistent with the Articulation Policy as well as polices guided by the Transfer Credit Practices Guide from AACRAO.

The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for its courses, as documented by procedures identified in the APPM, which include instructions for submitting syllabi prior to the start of the term, the tasks of the faculty, and the role of the Curriculum Committee for approving curriculum and course changes. The Assurance Argument provides documentation of procedures for implementing these tasks. These procedures appear to be consistent with the 2015 President Advisory Committee on Academics report, which stated that each academic department was required to review their courses offerings with "an eye towards ensuring that each course has the appropriate prerequisites, not just in terms of in-area content but in terms of needed skills or competencies from the General Education program."

The Assurance Argument notes that academic departments are responsible for the rigor of the program, especially regarding degree elements, course prerequisites, and major requirements. Assurance of rigor takes place through the Program Outcome and Assessment Report process or, in the case of those with specialized accreditation, through their accreditation reports. Additionally, expectations for student learning are tied to GE requirements, as reviewed through the General Education Council for the undergraduate students. The Graduate Council provides direction and review for rigor and expectations of student learning of graduate level coursework. The Curriculum Committee reviews and approves new courses, according to procedures detailed in the APPM. Also, the APPM details the procedures for syllabi approval. Any changes to course description or outcomes are the purview of the Curriculum Committee. As verified in Addendum documents, department chairs are currently responsible for oversight of syllabi submitted each semester, given the elimination of the Dean of Instruction position in 2016. This oversight is intended to verify textbook changes or assignment changes only.

Through a careful reading the Program Reviews provided for each program, the Team identified appropriated resources needed to run the program. Some program reviews spoke to the resources to

which the students have access (e.g. Music). The kinds of resources the University provides to all students, such as library resources or technology resources, as well as Career and Placement Services are described in the Assurance Argument and Addendum documents supplied. However, the verification of student access to these materials was challenging to verify by the Team, and eventually accomplished through examination of the SOSU library website, and the Center for Instruction Development and Technology (CIDT) website.

The Assurance Argument stated that SOSU does not offer courses for dual credit, nor does it offer courses in area high schools. High school students can enroll in SOSU courses as f2f or online and earn college credit. Data were provided that demonstrated that when students take concurrent enrollment credit, those first-time freshmen coming in with previous credit have a greater first-to-third year retention rate than those who do not take college credit courses while in high school.

To the extent that a program can seek national accreditation through an external specialized body, SOSU demonstrates a commitment to seek it. The Assurance Argument provides documentation of the specialty accreditor for those programs.

Further, the Assurance Argument documents provide details on how the University evaluates the success of its graduates as well as data on the results of its tracking efforts. The Team finds that SOSU utilizes appropriate means for maintaining long-term relationships with graduates. These procedures include: a) exit interviews with faculty the semester prior to graduation; b) internal survey sent to graduates to determine employment, occupation, and salary information as well as willingness to engage current students regarding their careers; c) Alumni Relations Department structured activities and organized alumni events; and 4) Career Management Center in collaboration with Alumni Relations applications of social media to track student success.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 4.B - Core Component 4.B

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The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.
2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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Through the examination of numerous documents (i.e., Institutional Assessment Plan for Academic Programming, Program Review/Self Study Report for various programs, and the new GE Goals and Outcomes), the Team affirms that program outcomes could be assessed for all programs. As verified and discussed in 3A in the document, it appears that the new GE course options may not assure that outcomes are met in the area "diversity/cultural heritage". The Institutional Assessment Plan for Academic Programming provides the details for how students are assessed: a) upon entry for acceptance and course placement, b) at mid-level through GE assessment, c) through Program Outcome Assessment (Program Review/Self-Study Reports), and d) through Student Satisfaction Surveys and Inventories.

In addition, SOSU has processes in place to assess learning outcomes for its curricular and co-curricular programs, as evidenced by the Team's review of documents available in the Assurance Argument (e.g., the Program Review/Self Study Report, and the General Education Goals and Outcomes Assessment Plan - Fall 2018). Based on assessment data for academic programs and the "old" GE outcomes, the Team finds the outcomes assessment data have been used for curricular improvements since 2014 HLC Evaluation. To illustrate:

- The English (B.A.) program was revised in 2016, in response to results of program assessments collected over the previous three years.
- An International Business course (MNGT 4443) was added to the business core requirement for accounting, finance, marketing/management majors, in response to low scores observed on the International Business section of the Major Field Test.
- The Special Education faculty decided to monitor areas in which student teachers are not mastering in their "teacher candidate lesson plans", and address these areas in courses and in student teaching, in response to findings over previous years showing that students struggled with certain lesson planning skills.

Notably, assessment of the new GE outcomes is planned to begin in Fall 2018. To further illustrate the institutional assessment process:

- SOSU maintains an Institutional Assessment Committee and a General Education Council that analyze the Program Review reports and offer feedback. Additionally, the Resident Student Satisfaction Survey and the Library and Student Satisfaction Survey provide evidence that the institution assesses outcomes for co-curricular programs and use results for improvement. The rubric used by the Institutional Assessment Committee provides structured feedback to the academic departments. Data collected from these assessments since 2012 were provided, as was an analysis of those data on course embedded assessments, DFW rates, and student performance on the ACT CAAP instruments which the University uses to assess student performance toward meeting GE outcomes.

The Team concludes that the processes the University maintains to assess student learning, at entry, mid-level (GE), and at program level are consistent with best practices. Involvement of faculty comes through service on the committees responsible for assessment (i.e., Institutional Assessment Committee, General Education Council) and through participation in Program Reviews. Other good practices are evidenced in SOSU's evaluation of co-curricular programs. To illustrate:

- Results of Student Satisfaction Survey were used, for example, to improve food services.
- Working with Residents Life, Student Health services in partnership with Resident Life developed programming to address issues such as sexual relationships and domestic violence in based on assessment data.
- Student Support Services set goals for retention and persistence and used various projects to reach those goals (e.g., Project TEACH).
- The Learning Center's CARES Program was designed as an alternative to remediation programs and has collected data to determine their impact on student retention and persistence.
- The library used the results of the student satisfaction survey to improve its offerings and services.

By examining the University website, the Team observed that the *24th Annual Assessment Report*, prepared by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Institutional Assessment Committee, provides a comprehensive summary of multiple assessment processes at SOSU. This Report captures the culture of assessment across campus by summarizing assessment processes and identifying action steps to address concerns and future actions, thus closing the loop on assessment.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 4.C - Core Component 4.C

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The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
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.)

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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The Team finds that SOSU demonstrates evidence of good practice for establishing goals and addressing student retention and completion issues. As documented in the Assurance Argument, the University focused attention on its retention issues, and established a Retention/Graduation Task Force in 2013, consisting of faculty and staff. This Task Force appropriately examined the unique needs of the student body, which predominantly represents SOSU's 10-county service area covering over 12,000 square miles. Additionally, the Task Force consulted with an expert (Betsy Barefoot) to assure that established goals were attainable given the demographic and other characteristics utilized. Based on these considerations, SOSU established a first-to-third semester retention rate of 66% (10-year average), which reflects the average retention rate of Oklahoma's 11 regional institutions; SOSU's previous 10-year retention rate was 57.5%. Additionally, this Task Force established a goal of 35% for the graduation rate vs the previous ten-year average of 30.8%. The Team affirms that the established goals are reasonably established for SOSU.

Based on the Assurance Argument and Oklahoma State Regents documents, SOSU's retention rates have shown some positive changes since 2013. Beginning with the incoming class in Fall 2013, the first-to-third semester rates exceeded 60% for three out of four classes. In 2014-15, the first-to-third semester rate exceeded 66% for the first time in eight years. Similarly, prior to 2013, the first-to-second retention rate exceeded 80% in only one out of the previous eight years, while rates exceeded 80% in three out of the past five years. In 2017, the first-to-second retention rate (81.7%) was the highest in at least 13 years. These individual good years contribute importantly to SOSU progress in attaining its projected 10-year average of 66%. Since 2013, SOSU's six-year graduation rates have remained below its expectations: 28.5%, 29.3% and 24.6% respectively for the 2013-14, 2014-15 and

2015-16 academic years. As reviewed by the Team, SOSU's six-year graduation rates were well within the range of Oklahoma's 11 regional institutions. The average regional rates were 31.5%, 29.2%, 30.5% respectively for 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16. In recognition of these results for retention and graduation rates, the SOSU Faculty Senate, Director of GE, and Director of the Academic Advising and Outreach Center determined that a permanent faculty committee would be formed to continually address retention, persistence and completion. This action was affirmed by the President's Advisory Committee on Academics in 2015. The Assurance Argument notes that the faculty committee will officially begin its work in Fall 2018.

SOSU annually collects and tracks data regarding retention and graduation rates and publishes these findings on the Academic Affairs homepage of the University website. The Team reviewed a report of data for the previous 12 years, including retention rates, graduation rates, and degrees conferred. Data were presented for 23 demographic and other characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, course delivery method, Honors Program, major, student preparedness/deficiency, residence, and employment status). As documented in the Assurance Argument, the Office of the Registrar is responsible for collecting and tracking these data.

Similarly, the Assurance Argument provides documentation of the process that has been in place since 2013 for the analyses of retention/graduation data and utilization of results for improvement. The Retention/Graduation Task Force has performed this responsibility since 2013, and as noted above, a faculty committee will formally began this work in Fall 2018. Based on its analyses, the Task Force identified 27 recommendations for improvement of retention and graduation rates. The Team affirms that SOSU has been attentive to recommendations that are considered to be most influential in making improvements and has implemented changes based on data analyses. To illustrate:

- In 2015, SOSU standardized a \$500 per semester tuition scholarship incentive for any student with a 22 or higher score on the ACT, in response to data demonstrating that retention was significantly higher for students who entered SOSU with an ACT score of 22 or higher.
- In Fall 2016, the Office of Academic Affairs made it mandatory for monthly grade and attendance reports (i.e., EAR/Progress Reports) to be sent to all students enrolled in freshman- and sophomore-level courses and their advisors, in response to findings showing improved retention when such reports were submitted in 2014 and 2015 by some faculty members.
- In Fall 2016, SOSU began offering all remedial English through an embedded format, in response to findings indicating lower retention of students in developmental courses. For similar reasons, the University piloted its first embedded College Algebra course in Fall 2017.
- In Summer 2017, SOSU followed the Task Force recommendation and hired an advisor responsible for case-management of first-year students who cannot enroll due to financial holds, in response to data demonstrating that students with financial challenges also struggled with persistence.

Based on the Assurance Argument, the Task Force acknowledges that it uses the same definitions for retention, persistence, and completion as IPEDS, but examines/interprets institutional data within the context of its student population for internal purposes. The Task Force makes a case to justify its tracking based on the particular demographics of the SOSU student population. The Team applauds this approach. As evidenced by institutional processes for tracking, analyzing, reporting, and utilizing data for improvement, described above, SOSU continues to maintain good practices for addressing retention and completion, and demonstrates a commitment to on-going retention/completion practices through the establishment of a permanent faculty committee.

**Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## **4.S - Criterion 4 - Summary**

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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.

### **Evidence**

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Evidence shows that SOSU has fulfilled the requirements for meeting Criterion 4. SOSU has demonstrated responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services routine manner. The University evaluates the effectiveness of its programs, services and learning environments for students through multiple processes, inclusive of multiple measures that contribute to educational quality. Established assessment processes include: Program Reviews, Program Outcome Assessment Reports, National Accreditation Reports, co-curricular program assessment, and the work of the Retention and Graduation Task Force and the Presidential Advisory Committee on Academics, as well as analysis of Student Satisfaction Surveys. These processes individually demonstrate a contribution to learning, and collectively demonstrate an effective system of institutional evaluation of student learning. Evidence shows the utilization of assessment results for improvements. The 24th Annual Assessment Report, prepared by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, captures the culture of assessment across campus by summarizing assessment processes and identifying action steps to address concerns and future actions, thus closing the loop on assessment.

## 5 - Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

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The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

### 5.A - Core Component 5.A

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The institution's resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

1. The institution has the fiscal and human resources and physical and technological infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
2. The institution's resource allocation process ensures that its educational purposes are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations to other areas or disbursement of revenue to a superordinate entity.
3. The goals incorporated into mission statements or elaborations of mission statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources, and opportunities.
4. The institution's staff in all areas are appropriately qualified and trained.
5. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring expense.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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SOSU has dealt with significant reductions in state funding over the last five years (2012-13-2017-18) along with the slumped enrollment in 2015-2017. Since 2013, state appropriations have decreased from approximately 42% to 32% of SOSU's total budget. The institution appears to have effectively addressed the budget shortage by following the recommendations made by the 2014 HLC Team and taking a multifaceted approach. SOSU implemented retirement incentive program and other one-time measures to reduce personnel cost, and increased student tuition and mandatory fees but at the rate lower than other state universities' average. The "Fall 2017 Enrollment Summary" shows that the recent addition of a new MBA program resulted in an increase of the overall student enrollment from 3,725 in Fall 2016 to 3,956 in Fall 2017. External grants and financial support from the Southeastern Foundation are funding scholarships and department chair allocations, and supplementing the general fund. In 2016-2017, grants and contracts brought in over \$6 million to fund programming and facilities updates while the Southeast Foundation provided \$1.37 million for scholarships, department chair allocations, and operating support. Financial indicators show positive outcomes of this multifaceted approach to securing the revenue while reducing the cost. SOSU's reserve, which was once down to \$715,809 in 2015-2016, recovered up to \$5,767,632, securing the ideal level of a one-month reserve. The composite financial indicator (CFI) also recovered from the low point of 0.7 in 2014-2015 to 3.1 in 2017-2018. The 2017 external financial audit reinforces the positive turn of the

financial situation as it indicates an increase in the net position (by \$4.7 million) and in total assets (by \$2.4 million) and a \$4.4 million decrease in total liabilities. The Team applauds the University for this performance.

The Assurance Argument documents a 10.4% decline in the total fulltime employees from 2014-2015 to 2017-2018 (from 405 to 363). During the same period, part-time employees increased by 13.5% (from 122 to 141 part-time). The Team finds that the University was deliberate in its cost-cutting measures, and reasonably attained its goal minimizing the “potential negative impact on students” in the cost-cutting process.

In the Addendum documents listing by title the staff positions that were eliminated (approximately 31), most positions fell in the category of Coordinators, Directors, Deans, and Associate Vice Presidents (11 positions); followed by Office Assistant/Secretaries (6 positions). Two librarians, and one police officer were also eliminated. Other areas consisted of business office staff, postal clerks, physical plant staff, and marketing/graphic designer. Based on the totality of evidence available in the Assurance Argument and Addendum, it is the Team’s judgement that SOSU continues to maintain appropriate numbers of staff for academic support and other functions. Evidence follows:

- Notwithstanding the elimination of two librarians, the hours of Library operation have not been reduced for either Fall/Spring or Summer terms. The Addendum documents does not specify how hours were maintained. The current Library staff consists of 9.70 FTE (3 fulltime librarians, 1 adjunct librarian, 1 fulltime Director, and 5.5 FTE staff). To enhance Library services, SOSU has allocated an additional \$14,000 to purchase a new Integrated Library System, and the Library along with the Southeastern Foundation have a \$50,000 donation to enhance technology, acquire e-books, and for other purposes.
- Three (3) new staff positions have been added (Financial Aid Counselor, Housing Facilities Supervisor, and Aviation Technician); a total of 13 active searches for budgeted staff positions are currently underway, including the three new positions, and the remaining 10 searches are replacement positions.
- Several units that provide assistance to students have increased in staff (e.g., Center for Instructional Development and Technology, Counseling Center, and Director of Student Conduct, Rights, and Responsibilities).
- Staff levels have been maintained in other areas (e.g., Financial aid, Student Health Services, Disability Services).
- All Grant Funded Programs have been renewed since 2014, with no staff changes (STEPS—Talent Search, Upward Bound, Texoma Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math/Science, Student Support Services, Student Support Services—Project Teach, Educational Opportunity Center).
- Other units have been reconfigured staff positions in various ways to maintain services, and achieve efficiencies (e.g., Career Management Center, Academic Advising and Outreach Center and Native American Institute).

Given the recency of SOSU’s budget reductions and staff changes, the impact of the resulting changes on the University’s capacity to maintain quality academic support programs and services students has yet to be evaluated. Elimination of administrative and support positions can cause an increase in workload of the remaining staff. The 2017 Faculty Survey document the increased workload of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and department chairs, as perceived by faculty and staff. Shifting

responsibilities from one position to another often require additional professional development. In the Team's review of staff training/professional development opportunities, evidence was available in the Assurance Argument for Title IX and workforce discrimination training. Professional development/training for academic coaches was documented. No other training opportunities was found. Tracking the participation rate and assessing the impact of the training is critical to ensure the effectiveness of these training opportunities. Given these observations, the Team expects the institution to demonstrate by the 2023-24 HLC Comprehensive Evaluation its institutional units and services have been evaluated and adjustments have been made as appropriate to maintain quality academic support programs and services for students. Also, the Team expects SOSU to demonstrate training/professional development opportunities made available to staff by the University.

The Team reviewed the qualifications of SOSU current staff, made available in the Addendum request. Available information included budget/position title and degree(s) earned. CVs/resumes were not available for this review. Based on available information it appears that the University continues to have qualified staff in to handle multiple aspects of student and University services. Most staff held bachelor's degrees at minimum, except for staff in areas such as physical plant and grounds, who were licensed in some cases.

The 2014 HLC Evaluation noted that faculty salaries at SOSU lagged behind the regional peers. Based on the OSRHE's report on salaries for the faculty and selected administrative positions, SOSU's regular faculty salaries in 2016-2017 have become generally comparable to its peers. The 2017 Faculty Survey indicated that faculty members were more positive about the University's efforts to retain quality faculty than the previous years, which may reflect, in part, recent salary enhancements.

A formal annual evaluation process for staff is conducted by the supervisor and helps identify professional development needs. Given the personnel reduction and resultant organizational structural changes that took place since 2015-2016, this process of assessing and supporting staff capacity to effectively perform assigned responsibilities and manage the workload is ever more critical.

SOSU's 2017-2018 Campus Master Plan lays out the facilities planning process, completed projects, and planned projects for FY2019. The campus facility renovation projects appear appropriate to the mission of providing a safe and appropriate learning environment to students. This current planning document states its intention is to align with Vision 2020; however, the Team notes that Vision 2015 remains in the plan. According to the Budget Request submitted to the Long-Range Capital Planning Commission of the State of Oklahoma, the majority of the planned projects for FY2017-FY2021 requires funding outside of state appropriation. It is essential to demonstrate more clearly how the plan aligns with Vision 2020, particularly as the institution needs to provide an appropriate budget for these projects.

The University has assessed its information technology needs, specifically in order to serve the new MBA program's partnership with Academic Partners (AP). Following the assessment by a third-party consulting firm and AP, the University has completed projects to update and improve several IT features (i.e., network for high speed connections, on-campus wi-fi access, tools for digital record keeping and online training, and instructional technology for online teaching/assessment and student support services by the Center for Instructional Development and Technology). This assessment was funded by a Title III grant, the Master Lease, and National Science Foundation. Faculty and students appear to have adequate access to computers, printers, projectors, software, and discipline-appropriate lab equipment.

Evidence presented in the Assurance Argument shows the presence of a solid process of monitoring expenses at the institutional level through a monthly report, and at the departmental levels by running

a report on an e-budget portal. Financial records are also audited externally.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 5.B - Core Component 5.B

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The institution's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.

1. The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; it provides oversight of the institution's financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
2. The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students—in the institution's governance.
3. Administration, faculty, staff, and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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As substantiated in 2A in this document, the RUSO and OSRHE boards have established policies and procedures, which provide oversight of SOSU's functions and operations. The role of each board is clearly delineated by state law. As a coordinating board, OSHRE is responsible for setting education standards, coordinating program offerings, and recommending state funding levels for institutions. RUSO makes recommendations to the OSHRE coordinating board. Additionally, as the governing Board, RUSO has supervision, management and control responsibilities, including financial auditing and reporting; and review, analysis and action on institutional reports in all areas of its purposes and operations (new programs, accreditation, enrollment, budget, personnel, others).

The existing governance and administrative structures of RUSO and OSHRE effectively supports shared governance and institutional awareness and knowledge. Presidents of institutions under RUSO submit all matters to the RUSO Board for its action. To aid in addressing these actions, the RUSO Board has standing committees in such areas as academics, finance, building, personnel, and policy/procedures, and system advancement. The RUSO Regents also have opportunities to directly learn about each institution by holding a regular Board meeting on campus once per year and making appearances at various campus events. Similarly, the OSHRE is organized according to various advisory councils representing faculty, staff and students, which report to the Board. Additionally, by Board policy, agendas include topics such as "academic affairs", and "financial affairs" and reports that facilitate shared decision-making and continual acquisition of knowledge about the University.

The governing board engages in additional practices for meeting its fiduciary responsibilities. The RUSO policies require the financial records of SOSU as well as the Board's administrative office to be audited annually by an independent firm or individual in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the U.S. The audit firm/auditor must hold a permit to practice accounting in the State of Oklahoma. Additionally, RUSO policies require internal audits to provide the Board with

independent, objective assessments for improving its operations, control and governance processes. The Board is required to employ a sufficient number of internal auditors to meet its fiduciary responsibilities. As cited in the Assurance Argument, RUSO hires internal auditors to provide consulting services to SOSU's Office of Finance, and ensures University financial activities are conducted consistent with the professional standard. Finally, as evidenced above in 2A above in this document, RUSO and OSRHE maintain codes of ethics to enable Board members to conduct their responsibilities in the best interest of the University.

At the institutional level, the APPM delineates the roles and responsibilities of the University president and faculty in shared governance. The SOSU's website on University committees provides further evidence that the faculty have membership in University-wide committees, including the Administrative Council and the President's Advisory Committee on Budget. According to the 2017 Faculty Survey, 75% of the respondents support the view that mutual respect and trust between faculty and the administration are cultivated through shared governance. Student and staff participation in shared governance was evident in the description of committee structure and membership in the Academic Policies and Procedures; website information on the 2017-2018 committee membership verified their participation.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 5.C - Core Component 5.C

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The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning.

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities.
2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting.
3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity. Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue, such as enrollment, the economy, and state support.
5. Institutional planning anticipates emerging factors, such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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The Assurance Argument shows that SOSU allocated 82% of its 2016-17 budget to its mission appropriate purposes, such as instruction, academic support, student services, and scholarships. The 2017-2018 budget report submitted to OSRHE appears to show the similar pattern of resource allocation although verification is challenging due to the format of data presentation. The Campus Master Plan, Deferred Maintenance Plan, and IT Plan provide sufficient evidence that the remainder of the resources are allocated primarily to improve students' learning environment on campus and to enhance the environment for online education. As mentioned in 5A as well as 3C, the reduced personnel due to the budget cut in 2015-2016 had resulted in a smaller faculty and administrative body. It is critical to monitor the sufficiency of human resources that support on-site and online instruction and student success.

Institutional planning has been accomplished with an eye on the geographical location, demographics in the service area, and technological changes. For example, the recently developed online MBA program that involved a revenue sharing contract with Academic Partnership was developed in response to the declining enrollment and state support, and in consideration of the relatively limited internal capacity for marketing, geographical limitations, the available faculty, and online delivery capacity. This innovative move led to an enrollment increase and relative financial stability.

A review of the Program Assessment Reports failed to find any instance where findings from student learning assessment was linked to resource allocation. Also, the 2017 Faculty Survey indicated that the faculty did not see student learning outcomes assessment as helpful to program improvement. If assessment results serve as additional information to determine resource allocation for program improvement, assessment activities could become more meaningful to the faculty and students.

SOSU's strategic planning since 2014 has been iterative. An addendum document "Strategic Planning Since 2014" asserts that the arrival of the current President and the urgent need to address a significant budget reduction led the campus to engage with the short-term planning with focus on implementing mission-appropriate budget reduction and improving the institution's financial viability. In the meantime, the President extended the cycle of the existing strategic vision ("Vision 2015") to "Vision 2020" while establishing four President's Advisory Committees staffed with faculty and professional staff (but notably without the presence of vice presidents) to explore viable solutions to address short-term and long-term budgetary and enrollment challenges. Each committee had access to extensive institutional data and developed recommendations that were submitted directly to the President and later shared with senior administrators and the campus community. Planning also took place in other areas; examples include Academic Affairs Vision 2020, Student Affairs Vision 2020, IT planning based on assessment by an external entity, and implementation of a new ERP (Elucian Colleague). This iterative planning process appears to have served SOSU well under the circumstances, judging from improved financial health, increased enrollment, and upgraded facilities.

Further, SOSU acknowledges the benefits of resuming its traditional, more formalized strategic planning process that facilitates clear alignment of institutional actions with strategic goals. "Strategic Planning Since 2014" documents that the Executive Team consisting of administrators conducted SWOT analysis in Spring 2018, and is working to establish a new strategic planning process. The institution has already adopted the process for evaluation and approval by the fulltime faculty and staff, and centralizing a framework to ensure the alignment with strategic directions. The Team has not observed any reference to the SOSU faculty senate, staff association, or student government, although the APPM, and Student Governance website indicate respective engagement of these constituencies in planning/decision-making processes. At the time of the 2023-24 HLC Comprehensive Evaluation, the Team expects the University to demonstrate completion of the strategic planning process, appropriate implementation of the plan, and evidence of its shared governance procedures in the planning, implementation, and decision-making processes. The Team expects the University to link its institutional planning to assessment outcomes, and demonstrate evidence of a systematic, integrative planning process.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 5.D - Core Component 5.D

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The institution works systematically to improve its performance.

1. The institution develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations.
2. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts.

### Rating

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Met

### Evidence

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SOSU has developed numerous means to document, monitor, and improve its performance. As documented in the Assurance Argument and evidenced previously in this report, SOSU has demonstrated ongoing monitoring for improvement in its operations, including academic quality, finance, enrollment, infrastructure projects, and faculty relations with administration. As examples:

- Specialized accreditations, regular academic program reviews, program outcome assessments, and institutional assessment plans/reports illustrate documents that provide a robust means to ensure and improve the program quality and institutional effectiveness.
- The institution monitors academic programs with low enrollment using a set of key performance indicators (KPIs). Programs flagged for low enrollment are reviewed for possible discontinuation.
- Student learning assessment results have culminated into continuous improvement in departments and programs, and students' demographic information and satisfaction survey results are reviewed to determine the student group to focus programmatic efforts by the Student Affairs.
- The Faculty Senate administers an annual faculty survey and shares the results with the campus stakeholders so as to assess and improve the effectiveness of shared governance.
- Regular processes of internal and external auditing coupled with a multifaceted approach to securing revenue while reducing costs have resulted in improved financial stability, as evidenced by increased CFI scores, increased total assets, decreased liabilities and other financial indicators.
- An external assessor was hired to evaluate IT operation's capabilities particularly in the context of expanding online programs and increased need for data analytics. The Assurance Argument documents this assessment was used as a guide to determine priority IT projects.

The Advisory Committees created under the current President offered an effective model to develop new initiatives and strategic directions. These committees consisted of faculty and professional staff and had a charge to develop recommendations based on a critical review and analysis of institutional

practices. Following up on the recommendations developed by these committees would be beneficial as the institution formalizes its strategic planning process.

Given the abundance of information collected through assessment of academic programs and SOSU's operational areas, instituting a dedicated office for institutional research, assessment and planning may be highly beneficial to the University. Having such a function to centrally manage, organize, and communicate institutional data would support strategic decision-making and analyses of institutional performance, and eliminate gaps in these processes.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 5.S - Criterion 5 - Summary

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The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

### Evidence

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SOSU has demonstrated continuing compliance with Criterion 5. The University has effectively addressed its financial challenge in 2014-2015 by reducing personnel cost, moderately raising tuition, and developing online-based academic programs to increase enrollment. These efforts, made in consultation with the faculty and professional staff, resulted in the successful recovery of financial health and enrollment growth. SOSU appears to maintain sufficient numbers of qualified staff to assure quality delivery of academic programs and student support services, and to perform other university functions. Allocations of University resources clearly demonstrate an alignment with the University's Mission and Vision 2020 strategic goals. SOSU implements processes to document, monitor, and improve its performance, and evidence demonstrates the use of monitoring/assessment results for improvement of institutional effectiveness.

Given the recency of SOSU's budget reductions, staff reductions, organizational changes, the impact of resulting circumstances on the University's capacity to maintain quality academic support programs and services students has yet to be evaluated. Consequently, the Team expects the institution to demonstrate by the 2023-24 HLC Comprehensive Evaluation that its institutional units and services have been evaluated and adjustments have been made as appropriate to maintain quality academic support programs and services for students. Also, the Team expects SOSU to demonstrate training/professional development opportunities made available to staff by the University.

Similarly, the SOSU had recently implemented the planning process for a new institutional strategic plan. The Team did not observe any reference to SOSU faculty senate, staff association, or student government in the planning process as currently outlined. Consequently, the Team expects the institution to demonstrate at the 2023-24 HLC Comprehensive Evaluation the completion of the strategic planning process, as well as appropriate implementation of the plan, and evidence of its shared governance procedures in the planning, implementation, and decision-making processes. The Team expects the University to link its institutional planning to assessment outcomes, and demonstrate evidence of a systematic, integrative planning process.

## Review Dashboard

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Number	Title	Rating
1	Mission	
1.A	Core Component 1.A	Met
1.B	Core Component 1.B	Met
1.C	Core Component 1.C	Met
1.D	Core Component 1.D	Met
1.S	Criterion 1 - Summary	
2	Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct	
2.A	Core Component 2.A	Met
2.B	Core Component 2.B	Met
2.C	Core Component 2.C	Met
2.D	Core Component 2.D	Met
2.E	Core Component 2.E	Met
2.S	Criterion 2 - Summary	
3	Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support	
3.A	Core Component 3.A	Met
3.B	Core Component 3.B	Met
3.C	Core Component 3.C	Met
3.D	Core Component 3.D	Met
3.E	Core Component 3.E	Met
3.S	Criterion 3 - Summary	
4	Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement	
4.A	Core Component 4.A	Met
4.B	Core Component 4.B	Met
4.C	Core Component 4.C	Met
4.S	Criterion 4 - Summary	
5	Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness	
5.A	Core Component 5.A	Met
5.B	Core Component 5.B	Met
5.C	Core Component 5.C	Met
5.D	Core Component 5.D	Met
5.S	Criterion 5 - Summary	

## Review Summary

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### Conclusion

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The Team concludes that SOSU continues to maintain compliance with all core components within each accreditation criteria (Criterion 1 – 5). Based on the review of the available documentation, the Team judged all core components to be “met”. The University demonstrates a wide endorsement of its mission, a consistency in allocation its resources with mission and strategic goals, especially with respect to goals pertaining to quality of academic programs, student learning, and student support services. SOSU continues to maintain specialized accreditations for all applicable programs, maintain qualified faculty and staff, as well a robust process for review and monitoring of all academic programs, along with evidence of closure of the assessment loop. Very importantly, SOSU has restored its financial stability, even during a period of significant budget and personnel reductions. SOSU continues to operate with integrity, and continues its commitment to ethical behaviors, academic freedom, and responsible use of information among faculty, staff, and students. In consideration of the preponderance of evidence supporting compliance with each core component, the Team concluded that SOSU continues to fulfill accreditation criteria.

Primarily, due to the recency of budget reductions and resulting adjustments, the Team was unable to verify the impact of certain changes on institutional functions and processes. Consequently, the Team has specified the following expectations of SOSU to be demonstrated at its next HLC Comprehensive Evaluation in 2023-24:

- Verify the official approval of a “Campus Expression Policy” implemented in 2017.
- Make public the qualifications of all of its current faculty and staff, and present evidence of compliance with this expectation, beginning in the 2018-19 academic year.
- Demonstrate assessment of the impact of enrollment growth, the Academic Partnership “academic-related” support services, and the Instructional Connections services on the quality of instructional delivery in applicable courses and programs. Also, SOSU is expected to demonstrate closure of the assessment loop at that time.
- Demonstrate the adequacy of the number of faculty for each degree program, including consideration for enrollment growth, teaching workloads, and cross-disciplinary teaching assignments. Also, the University is encouraged to carefully consider the need for additional faculty in high need areas to ensure a continuation of high quality programming.
- Demonstrate that its institutional units and services have been evaluated and adjustments have been made as appropriate to maintain quality academic support programs and services for students.
- Demonstrate training/professional development opportunities made available to staff by the University.
- Demonstrate completion of the strategic planning process, as well as appropriate implementation of the plan, and evidence of SOSU’s shared governance procedures in the planning, implementation, and decision-making processes. The Team expects the University to link its institutional planning to assessment outcomes, and demonstrate evidence of a systematic, integrative planning process.

## **Overall Recommendations**

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### **Criteria For Accreditation**

Met

### **Sanctions Recommendation**

No Sanction

### **Pathways Recommendation**

Eligible to choose

*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*