



October 12, 2021

Dr. Thomas Newsom  
President  
Southeastern Oklahoma State University  
425 W. University Boulevard  
Durant OK 74701-0609

Dear President Newsom:

This letter is accompanied by the Quality Initiative Proposal (QIP) Review form completed by a peer review panel. Southeastern Oklahoma State University's QIP is approved.

Within the QIP Review form, you will find comments from the panel for your consideration as you proceed with your Quality Initiative. The panel reviewed the QIP for four areas:

- Sufficiency of initiative's scope and significance
- Clarity of initiative's purpose
- Evidence of commitment to and capacity for accomplishing the initiative
- Appropriateness of the timeline for the initiative

If you have questions about the panel's review, please contact either Kathy Bijak ([kbijak@hlcommission.org](mailto:kbijak@hlcommission.org)) or Pat Newton-Curran ([pnewton@hlcommission.org](mailto:pnewton@hlcommission.org)). For any questions about your Quality Initiative, contact Dr. Andrew Lootens-White at [alootenswhite@hlcommission.org](mailto:alootenswhite@hlcommission.org).

***The Higher Learning Commission***

# Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal Review Form

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Date of Review: Oct 11, 2021

Name of Institution: Southeastern Oklahoma State University      State: OK

Institutional ID:

Reviewers (names, titles, institutions): Jervaise McDaniel, Professor School of Business and Director of Graduate Studies, Oakland City University; Patrick Schmidt, Professor of Political Science and Co-Director of Legal Studies, Macalester College

## Review Categories and Findings

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### 1. Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

- Potential for significant impact on the institution and its academic quality.
- Alignment with the institution's mission and vision.
- Connection with the institution's planning processes.
- Evidence of significance and relevance at this time.

#### Finding:

- The Quality Initiative Proposal demonstrates acceptable scope and significance.
- The Quality Initiative Proposal does not demonstrate acceptable scope and significance.

**Rationale and Comments:** (Provide 2–3 statements justifying the finding and recommending minor modifications, if applicable. Provide any comments, such as highlighting strong points, raising minor concerns or cautions, or identifying questions.)

In macro-perspective, the institution envisions a series of efforts to strengthen its “student ready” philosophy and improve retention, persistence, and completion. Two more specific initiatives aim at significant dimensions of student success: the quality of online learning and the quality of advising. The latter is especially well articulated against the institution's on-going efforts and pressures mounting due to evolving enrollment patterns.

### 2. Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose

- Clear purposes and goals reflective of the scope and significance of the initiative.
- Defined milestones and intended goals.
- Clear processes for evaluating progress.

#### Finding:

- The Quality Initiative Proposal demonstrates clarity of purpose.
- The Quality Initiative Proposal does not demonstrate clarity of purpose.

#### **Rationale and Comments:**

Regarding the plan for student advising, the purpose of this project is clear: to unify two models of advising that have persisted side-by-side, and in doing so, to provide students with clearer systems for support in areas of academic advising, learning support, career exploration, and financial aid. The institution has articulated a refined strategy for mixed-method evaluation (quantitative and qualitative) and implementation (esp. of technology costs).

Regarding the initiative for online education, the institution has reacted appropriately to rapid changes spurred by Covid-19 and articulates a clear pilot plan for improving faculty competencies in online education. Its use of the Quality Matters rubric gives the institution a clear and high-quality set of benchmarks with which to set the milestones and goals of this work.

The proposal has described activities for the next two years as an “initial phase” of the QI, and in each area alludes to later work. The reviewers agree that this work should be seen as a pilot of later work that will be necessary. A cohort of “10+” faculty to receive online teaching certification is an investment that will need to be sustained in order for the quality improvement to be realized across the university. The reviewers would encourage the institution to anticipate, even at this point, the ultimate scope of the investment that will be required to build on this QI.

### **3. Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative**

- Commitment of senior leadership.
- Commitment and involvement of key people and groups.
- Sufficiency of the human, financial, technological, and other resources.
- Defined plan for integrating the initiative into the ongoing work of the institution and sustaining its results.
- Clear understanding of and capacity to address potential obstacles.

#### **Finding:**

- The Quality Initiative Proposal demonstrates evidence of commitment and capacity.
- The Quality Initiative Proposal does not demonstrate evidence of commitment and capacity.

#### **Rationale and Comments:**

This QI flows out of strategic initiatives introduced by a university president who began in Spring 2020, and the proposal is especially strong in itemizing the human capital available at Southeast Oklahoma State University for this implementation. Considering the nature of the activities proposed and the institution’s preparatory and on-going work in the targeted areas, the reviewers agree that the institution possesses sufficient resources, commitment, and involvement to accomplish the proposal. The financial and technological demands of this project appear to be

either modest or are in place for the work of the next two years. The reviewers suggest that the range of staff and faculty involvement can be an obstacle as well as a strength. Although there appears to be coordination for this initiative through the office of the president and the ad hoc committee formed by the Vice President of Assessment and Accreditation, it is less clear that there is a structure—with defined lines of both authority and accountability—in place to move the project from the study phases and into the work of implementing a project that touches down in both the academic and student affairs segments of the institution.

#### 4. Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative

- Consistency with intended purposes and goals.
- Alignment with the implementation of other institutional priorities.
- Reasonable implementation plan for the time period.

#### Finding:

- The Quality Initiative Proposal demonstrates an appropriate timeline.
- The Quality Initiative Proposal does not demonstrate an appropriate timeline.

#### Rationale and Comments:

The institution articulates clearly the alignment of the proposed work with the on-going transformation of the institution to the mode of “student ready”; it also connects this work to the strategic planning process undertaken by the new president. This work aligns very well with the goals set for the institution’s student body, especially in light of the evolving demographics of the student population and changing needs as the modes of delivery respond to technological and societal changes. The proposal explicitly notes that this work will not be completed during the window allotted for the QI, but the steps proposed are sound, necessary, and reasonable in for this period.

## General Observations and Recommended Modifications

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Panel members may provide considerations and suggested modifications that the institution should note related to its proposed Quality Initiative.

This proposal is sound. The two portions each stand on their own as important and timely initiatives that are likely to improve student learning and success. The proposal also supports a conclusion that it is part of a continuous process of improvement; this work has not been created only as an exercise but grows out of continuing responsiveness to student needs.

As noted above, the reviewers recommend attention to ensuring that the oversight of this project have sufficient time, capacity, authority, and accountability for seeing the work through all phases—from evaluation to implementation. The coordination of advising, in particular, needs leadership who will be able to overcome barriers to collaboration on the path to the “concierge” model. What’s more, there may be three different types of leadership required: for the online education project, for the advising project,

and for the wider vision articulated in the introduction that sees these as only two components of a wider effort to improve student success.

Last, and as also noted, the reviewers recommend that the team go further to sketch a long-term plan for student retention, persistence, and completion. In the absence of such a visioning exercise, it was difficult to assess whether the improvements, especially related to training for online educators, represents an ambitious target or merely low-hanging fruit.

Despite these recommendations, the reviewers conclude that this proposal sets out a project of sufficient scope and significance, that the institution has envisioned a clear and feasible course of action, and that the institution possesses the necessary capacities for this work.

## Conclusion

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- Approve the proposed Quality Initiative with or without recommended minor modifications. No further review required.
- Request resubmission of the proposed Quality Initiative.

## Rationale and Expectations if Requesting Resubmission

## Timeline and Process for Resubmission

*(HLC staff will add this section if the recommendation is for resubmission.)*