

Name: Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities	Meeting Date: 06/23/2016	Response Submit Date: 06/07/2016	Status: Final Review	Type: Compliance Report
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U.S. Department of Education

Staff Report

to the

Senior Department Official

on

Recognition Compliance Issues

Recommendation Page

1. **Agency:** Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
2. **Action Item:** Compliance Report
3. **Current Scope of Recognition:** The accreditation and preaccreditation ("Candidacy status") of postsecondary degree-granting educational institutions in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington, and the accreditation of programs offered via distance education within these institutions.
4. **Requested Scope of Recognition:** Same as above.
5. **Date of Advisory Committee Meeting:** June 23, 2016
6. **Staff Recommendation:** Continue the agency's recognition for one and one-half years
7. **Issues or Problems:** None

Executive Summary

Part I: General Information About The Agency

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) is a regional institutional accreditor that accredits (or preaccredits) over 150 degree granting institutions in seven states, and including those programs offered via distance education within these institutions.

Most of the institutions accredited by NWCCU use the Secretary's recognition of the agency to establish eligibility to participate in the Title IV, HEA student financial assistance programs. Therefore, the agency must meet the separate and independent requirements.

Recognition History

NWCCU received initial recognition in 1952 and has received periodic renewal of recognition since that time.

The last full review of the agency was conducted in December 2013, at which time the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI or the Committee) found the agency out of compliance with 10 sections of the Secretary's Criteria for Recognition, and Department staff found the agency out of compliance with 12 sections. Both NACIQI and Department staff recommended the continued recognition of the agency and that it come into compliance within 12 months and submit a compliance report on the deficient sections. The senior Department official, Acting Assistant Secretary Brenda Dann-Messier, concurred with the recommendation of NACIQI, and found the agency out of compliance with 10 sections, granted continued recognition of the agency, and required that it come into compliance within 12 months and submit a compliance report. NWCCU disagreed with the findings in five sections and appealed the decision regarding those sections to the Secretary. On December 11, 2014, Secretary Arne Duncan reversed the decision concerning three sections, and affirmed the decision concerning two sections, 602.24(a) and 602.24(b). The Secretary also granted continued recognition pending the submission of a compliance report on Sections 602.24(a) and 602.24(b) within 12 months. This compliance report is in response to the decision on appeal by the Secretary regarding Sections 602.24(a) and 602.24(b) of the Secretary's Criteria for Recognition.

In December 2015, Department staff and NACIQI reviewed and accepted the compliance report in response to the finding by the senior Department official regarding the five sections of the Secretary's Criteria for Recognition that were not appealed by NWCCU - Sections 602.15(a)(5), 602.16(a)(1)(ix), 602.20(b), 602.23(c), and 602.26(d).

Since the agency's last review in December 2015, the Department has received one complaint that is under review.

Part II: Summary Of Findings

602.24(a) Branch Campus

If the agency is an institutional accrediting agency and its accreditation or preaccreditation enables those institutions to obtain eligibility to participate in Title IV, HEA programs, the agency must demonstrate that it has established and uses all of the following procedures:

(a) Branch campus.

(1) The agency must require the institution to notify the agency if it plans to establish a branch campus and to submit a business plan for the branch campus that describes--

- (i) The educational program to be offered at the branch campus;
- (ii) The projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow at the branch campus; and
- (iii) The operation, management, and physical resources at the branch campus.

(2) The agency may extend accreditation to the branch campus only after it evaluates the business plan and takes whatever other actions it deems necessary to determine that the branch campus has sufficient educational, financial, operational, management, and physical resources to meet the agency's standards.

(3) The agency must undertake a site visit to the branch campus as soon as practicable, but no later than six months after the establishment of that campus.

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602.24(b) Change in Ownership

(b) Change of ownership.

The agency must undertake a site visit to an institution that has undergone a change of ownership that resulted in a change of control as soon as practicable, but no later than six months after the change of ownership.

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Analyst Remarks to Response:

In response to the draft staff analysis the agency notes that in the Decision of the Secretary dated December 11, 2014, it was determined that NWCCU was not in compliance with section 602.24(b). Subsequent to the Secretary's determination the agency has revised its substantive change policy (see attached, page 7-7). The policy specifically requires that a site visit be conducted within a six-month period after approval of a change in owner. The agency also informs Department staff that to date, it has not had an opportunity to apply 602.24 (b) but will do so if and when a change of ownership occurs.

Part III: Third Party Comments

The Department did not receive any written third-party comments regarding this agency.