

Assurance Argument Core Component Capsules

Criterion 1: Mission

The institution's mission is articulated publicly and operationalized throughout the institution.

- SWOSU updated its Mission Statement in 2019 to state: *"Southwestern Oklahoma State University supports students and community through its integration of effective teaching, scholarly and creative endeavors, and civic engagement."* This Mission Statement is a core component of the SWOSU Strategic Plan.
- A Strategic Planning Task Force was responsible for the design and implementation of the 2018-2023 Strategic Plan. The Task Force consisted of a Strategic Planning Executive Committee led by the Associate Provost. Subcommittees spanned the four defined goals of the Strategic Plan.
- The university's areas of study, nationally accredited programs, general education curriculum, service and experiential learning activities, and student activities and organizations are consistent with this stated mission. The undergraduate and graduate catalogs provide a comprehensive list of majors and programs: 10 Associate's degrees, 41 Bachelor's degrees, 8 Master's degrees, 1 Doctoral program, and 50 minors.
- SWOSU makes its Mission, Vision, and Values Statements available online and in print. The university's website publishes these statements on a Strategic Plan webpage linked on the main website.

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

- SWOSU first serves its community through vital and relevant educational offerings and programs, as described in the 2018-2023 Strategic Plan. SWOSU is a public regional university that provides access to quality higher education to all students, educates these students to meet their educational and professional goals, prepares these students to be responsible citizens, and develops a well-educated workforce to serve the needs of the public.
- SWOSU's admissions policy, variety of programs, and multiple methods of course and program delivery ensure that every student has broad access to the university wherever the student is located and whenever they need the access.
- SWOSU also pursues its public service mission through outreach and engagement programs.
- The university does not remit funds to investors, RUSO, or OSRHE. The university is accountable to students and the public, and therefore strives to offer affordable tuition and fees in programs that lead to career program entry.

The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

- SWOSU prepares students for success as informed citizens of the world and supports activities that move toward this goal.

- Within the GE Objectives are goals for broad curricular content and the master of the professional skills and aptitudes embodied in the 5C's and R. These are the foundation of SWOSU's belief that "Empowered citizens must challenge preconceptions, assess the validity of evidence, ask thoughtful questions, and propose defensible answers."
- To operationalize the university's mission and GE Objectives, the university offers the following methods to prepare students for informed citizenship and workplace success:
 - Service learning:
 - Experiential learning.
 - Leadership opportunities.
 - Research.
 - Co-curricular structure.
- Within its Vision Statement, SWOSU is dedicated to "cultural inclusion and diversity."
- SWOSU's Enrollment by Diversity table and chart highlight the growing diversity of the student population and the impetus for expanded multicultural services. The Hispanic student population has grown from 5% in 2010 to more than 10% in 2019. Over the same period, the percentage of Caucasian students has decreased from 77% to 64%.
- As stated in the Strategic Plan's Values Statement, "[o]ur faculty, staff, and administration are committed to fostering a safe, healthy, and diverse intellectual, cultural, and social environment for student success." University policies, training sessions, and campus events strive to support this statement.
- The monthly Brown Bag Lecture Series and other professional development programs provide information and opportunities for discussion about fostering a climate of respect from a range of diverse perspectives.

Criterion 2: Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

The institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff.

- Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) developed its current Mission Statement as part of its 2018-2023 Strategic Plan. The Statement was adopted by SWOSU's governing board in 2019. The Mission Statement is: *Southwestern Oklahoma State University supports students and community through its integration of effective teaching, scholarly and creative endeavors, and civic engagement.* The Planning Flowchart shows that the Statement and Strategic Goals constitute the foundation of the university's assessment, budgeting, and decision-making processes.
- The 2018-2023 Strategic Plan's Values Statement includes the charge that "We guide our actions by fairness, honesty, and integrity as we meet our obligations through prudent use of the resources entrusted to us." SWOSU applies this commitment to integrity into its financial, academic, human resources, and auxiliary functions.
- An Executive Compliance Committee meets monthly to review and improve specific methods of ensuring overall integrity and institutional compliance with internal and external policies. Minutes show that topics discussed range from Title IV audits to the university alcohol policy.

The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public.

- SWOSU's website is open and accessible to all. The following information is published on the site: Academic offerings, Requirements, Accreditation relationships, Governance structure, and Costs to students.
- All handbooks and promotional material, such as the Viewbook for prospective students, are reviewed and updated at least annually to ensure accuracy and completeness.
- External audits and financial analysis provide objective evidence to verify claims of SWOSU about its financial stability.

The governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution's integrity.

- The governing board of SWOSU is the Regional University System of Oklahoma (RUSO). Its members are qualified state leaders appointed by the governor. These appointed members serve nine-year staggered terms.
- The board meets the legal and fiduciary responsibilities outlined in its management responsibility statement through monthly meetings. A central RUSO office supports the regents as they fulfill additional responsibilities and obligations.
- The RUSO Dashboard provides an "objective lens" to identify key outputs of the regional university system.
- Though the RUSO Board of Regents governs SWOSU, the board delegates day-to-day oversight of the university to its President. SWOSU's President is the chief executive of the institution and is responsible for its administration. Accordingly, the President is responsible for employment decisions, including the discipline and termination of faculty, administrators, and staff. The President is required to promptly report to the board decisions concerning employment, promotion, changes of rank, salary adjustments, and other matters pertaining to the operation of the university.

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

- In accordance with Oklahoma statute, the SWOSU Campus Expression Policy was updated in August, 2019. Each year, the university submits the required Expressive Speech Annual Report to Oklahoma's governor and legislature. In 2019, SWOSU reported no barriers or disruptions of free speech in 2019.
- Faculty members are assured of academic freedom in their research, as well as in the classroom. SWOSU incorporates into its Faculty Handbook the Regional University System of Oklahoma (RUSO) Policy Manual's academic freedom guidelines. Academic freedom is considered by SWOSU to be an additional assurance to rights of expression regarding teaching and research.

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

- The Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) has the primary responsibility for compliance of faculty, staff, and students with ethical and legal guidelines concerning funding, conduct, and reporting of research activities. The primary document for these policies is the SWOSU Grant Writing Guide. The processes described in the guide establish an oversight framework that facilitates compliance.

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

The rigor of the institution's academic offerings is appropriate to higher education.

- The programs of SWOSU described in the undergraduate and graduate catalog are reviewed for currency and appropriateness to the credential awarded.
- The review of academic courses and programs comprises outcome assessment policies and procedures that ensure course and program currency and appropriate level of instruction.
- Results from the 2018 survey of graduates of SWOSU's four colleges indicated that 92% of the respondents were employed full time and 4% were employed half time.
- SWOSU clearly articulates Institutional Student Learning Outcomes (ISLOs) at each degree level - associate, baccalaureate, and graduate/professional.
- Learning goals are articulated on the university's student learning document, department webpages, degree plans, and syllabi.
- Documentation of learning goals is centralized through the SWOSU Assessment Center. Reporting templates are provided annually for general education assessment, academic degree programs and options assessment, and co-curricular assessment.
- Regardless of delivery mode or location, all programs fulfill the same requirements for program review and assessment of student learning outcomes.

The institution offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

- The purpose of the GE program is to "prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of life beyond the university experience."
- SWOSU's general education requirements are founded in the belief that "graduates should leave SWOSU with a broad knowledge of the social and natural world, a keen sense of self, an awareness of their membership in a global society, and an understanding of what it means to be thoughtful and responsible citizens."
- SWOSU's Human/Cultural/Social Diversity Policy expresses the university's commitment to providing students with growth opportunities and the skills necessary to succeed in a multicultural world.
- The Dean of Students has created a multi-tiered Diversity and Inclusion Professional Development Program that encourages faculty and staff to make SWOSU a welcoming place for all.
- The Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) publishes an annual report of extramural and intramural activity. The funding rate of extramural activity for fiscal years 2013-2017 averaged 83%. During this period, 172 faculty and staff members collaborated to earn 346 total awards that exceeded \$22 million. Over the same period, supplemental assistance for intramural activities involved 41 students and 112 faculty members.

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

- SWOSU strives to ensure that the overall composition of its faculty and staff reflects the diversity of Oklahoma and the region and recognizes that it has opportunities for improvement in this area. The university continues to seek applicants who will help the

university's employee composition reflect the student body. SWOSU is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action institution that follows all applicable laws.

- In the past 10 years, the ratio of full-time student equivalent enrollment to full-time instructional faculty has ranged from 20 to 1 to 24 to 1. In Fall 2019, the ratio was 22 to 1.
- To ensure that all instructors are appropriately qualified, SWOSU maintains faculty credentialing policies and procedures, per HLC's 2016 criteria. Faculty may be deemed qualified based on academic credentials, tested experience, or a combination of both.
- The assurance that instructors are current in their disciplines begins with the regular evaluation of all faculty. This provides a continuous improvement process that guides departments in ensuring that faculty are adept at teaching their discipline and effective student advisors.
- A notable professional development project implemented by the university was the Three Pillars Course Transformation Project (2016-2018). The purpose of the Three Pillars Method was to advance students' deep learning, intellectual development, and professional skills in general education and academic program courses.
- The employment of staff is managed by SWOSU Human Resources using the Bulldog Works Employee Applicant Tracking online application. New Employee Orientation is offered quarterly by HR.

The institution provides support for student learning and resources for effective teaching.

- Prospective students and their families are introduced to SWOSU's support services in promotional materials and upon application to the university. The support SWOSU provides to all students is well-suited to their needs throughout their university careers.
- The Co-Curricular Annual Assessment Report details the effectiveness of several support offices.
- When asked "How much does your institution emphasize providing support to help students succeed academically?," the mean of freshmen/senior responses was 3.1/3.0. When asked "How much does your institution emphasize using learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)?," the mean responses were 3.1/3.1. Both sets of scores meet or exceed the Oklahoma statistical comparison.
- The NSO office works with the Assessment Center to provide advisors with Developmental Course Placement Guidelines, aligned with OSRHE policy.
- SWOSU has structures in place to provide students with appropriate academic advising. Advising is done primarily by faculty members who teach courses within the advisee's major. In some departments with large numbers of majors, the university employs full-time advisors/program coordinators.
- In fall 2019, SWOSU implemented a new enterprise resource and planning (ERP) system. A key component of the new ERP system is an improved enrollment management application. The application -- Colleague Self-Service -- enables faculty to offer students better designed course schedules and simplifies verification that students are progressing toward graduation.
- SWOSU addresses its mission of integrating effective teaching, scholarly, and creative endeavors by providing the necessary infrastructure and resources, including technological infrastructure, assessment resources, libraries, laboratories, performance spaces, clinical sites, museum collections, and meeting spaces.

Criterion 4: Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews and acts upon the findings.

- SWOSU adheres to internal and external policies and procedures for regular program review, all of which are tied to learning outcomes and drive continuous improvement. The procedures are outlined in the Processes for Assessment and Improvement of Student Learning table.
- SWOSU follows the requirements of OSRHE's Articulation Policy for the transfer of students among institutions in the state system.
- RUSO and OSRHE grant SWOSU the authority to designate course prerequisites, course rigor, student learning expectations, learning resources access, and faculty qualifications.
- Each college maintains a curriculum committee, which reviews and makes recommendations to the Provost for additions, deletions, or modifications of courses or programs.
- SWOSU's credentialing policy applies to all faculty positions including voluntary, part-time, dual credit, adjunct, full-time temporary, non-tenure track, tenure track, and tenured faculty.
- Fourteen programs at SWOSU have specialized national accreditations.
- 87% of SWOSU graduates reported that they consider their investment in the university to be worthwhile.

The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.

- Defining and assessing student learning outcomes are embedded in practices on many levels, as outlined in the Processes for Assessment and Improvement of Student Learning table. These processes not only guide curriculum decisions but also help inform institutional planning and budgeting.
- The university sets Institutional Student Learning Outcomes, general education learning objectives, program-level student learning outcomes, course learning outcomes, and co-curricular student learning outcomes appropriate to its student population.
 - Qualitative methods of assessing **overall student learning and ISLOs** include several review processes that preceded the establishment of ISLOs. The primary method of assessing overall student learning is through the University Executive Summary Assessment Plan.
 - **Program and course learning outcomes** are assessed through:
 - The Assessment Center's Outcomes Assessment and Academic Degree Program and Options learning goals assessments. The Assessment Center compiles these program reports in the ASAR and associated learning outcome reports.
 - Accreditation reports for the 14 programs with specialized accreditation.
 - OSRHE's Five-Year Program Reviews for programs without specialized accreditation.
 - Student evaluations of courses.
 - **General education student learning objectives** are evaluated by the teaching faculty, departments, the university General Education Committee, the

Assessment Center, and the Assessment Committee's GE subcommittee. GE courses are evaluated on a rotating schedule set by the Assessment Center.

- Student Affairs has the primary responsibility for the assessment of **co-curricular programs and related student outcomes**. In accordance with HLC directives from the 2010 site visit, Student Affairs produces an annual student engagement assessment model in which all student services departments identify appropriate student learning outcomes.
- SWOSU uses the assessments described above to drive improvements in student learning.
 - **Overall/Institutional student learning outcomes:** The Assessment Center is constructing methods to link program outcomes and general education objectives with ISLOs.
 - **General education learning objectives:** The ASAR's Section II (General Education Assessment) indicates planned or implemented instructional changes resulting from general education assessment results.
 - **Program and course student learning outcomes:** Each program completes a Program Outcomes (Part I) and Degree Programs and Options (Part II) component of an annual review submitted to the Assessment Center. These provide evidence of assessment used to improve student learning and describes program level outcomes and continuous improvement plans.
 - **Co-curricular student learning outcomes:** Co-curricular activities are assessed according to the Student Affairs Assessment Cycle. As part of this assessment, each department completes an Individual Program Report which describes learning goals, assessment measures, and student learning improvements.
- The processes and methodologies by which student learning is assessed and modified reflect good practice, and include substantial participation by faculty, student affairs staff, and other key personnel.
- The Assessment Center ensures that all processes are performed regularly, improvements and recommendations are acted upon, and reports are published for transparency.

The institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

- SWOSU has defined goals and strategies for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious and attainable.
- SWOSU's Strategic Plan has several components tied to retention, persistence, and completion.
- The Retention Council ensures that the goals are appropriate to the university's Mission Statement, its student populations, and educational offerings.
- IPEDS data shows how SWOSU performs on these measures compared to other peer universities in Oklahoma. The most recent report shows that SWOSU exceeds the other RUSO universities in retention and is comparable in completion.
- SWOSU uses sound methodology when collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs. The methodology used ensures that the measures are uniformly defined so that results can be compared with assessments from other institutions.
- Two offices help ensure that good practices are used in collecting and analyzing information: the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) and the Assessment Center.

Criterion 5: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

Through its administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution's leadership demonstrates that it is effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission.

- Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) practices shared governance and engagement at all levels in accordance with its Mission Statement and planning processes.
- RUSO's Policy Manual delineates its oversight and engagement with SWOSU.
- The diverse viewpoints of SWOSU's employees and students have many avenues for expression, and many ways to influence the university's governance.
 - The Executive Council and Administrative Council meet monthly.
 - A 14-member Strategic Planning Review Team (SPRT) meets quarterly to review more than 50 points of information to take stock of the university's commitment to and accomplishment of its mission and Strategic Plan.
 - The Faculty Senate makes recommendations to administrators on any matter relating to the university.
 - The SWOSU Staff Council (SSC) represents all staff and support personnel.
 - By directive of the President, most university committees have at least one student representative, including the Administrative Council. Each month the President and Vice Presidents hold a luncheon with the Student Government Association (SGA) to confer about matters of importance to students. The SGA is the elected governing body for SWOSU students.
- SWOSU utilizes data from a variety of sources, including budgets, IPEDS reports, student enrollment, and continuous improvement reports, to make informed decisions in pursuit of institutional goals and to serve constituents.
- Data from assessment reports and reviews is systematically communicated to decision makers.
- SWOSU relies on a shared governance approach to establish academic requirements, policies, and processes.

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

- SWOSU has the staff and infrastructure needed to support high-quality operations in all areas and locations.
- Budget planning and policies ensure the financial resources necessary to support and sustain high-quality operations.
- The university's total CFI score remained between 2.4 and 3.9 over the past six years. This is within the "safe zone" defined by HLC to be from 1.1 to 10.0. SWOSU's score is the second-highest among the six RUSO universities.
- Per OSRHE policy, SWOSU updates a capital master plan annually.
- An independent report on SWOSU's long-term viability in 2020 determined that SWOSU has a resource base that allows it to "devote funds toward strategic priorities while continuing to build reserves in the coming fiscal years."
- The 2019 IPEDS Human Resources report shows that the university has 205 full-time instructional staff and 87 part-time instructional staff.

- The Mission Statement and Strategic Plan goals are realistic because they were created with a deep understanding of SWOSU's structure, resources, constraints, opportunities, and challenges.
- The Vice President for Administration and Finance (VPAF) and the Business Services office lead the university in a standardized process to develop each annual balanced budget.
- SWOSU allocates funds to ensure that its teacher programs are of the best quality and that the university is fulfilling its mission. Established review and decision making mechanisms ensure that the purposes for which the funds are allocated are monitored. The budget expenditure chart from the 2019 audit shows that costs directly related to educating students constitute the majority of expenditures.
- The Foundation has been able to increase its scholarship distribution to SWOSU students by nearly 60% since 2016, while simultaneously increasing the Foundation's net assets by 23%. The Pharmacy Foundation stewards a separate pool of resources.

The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement.

- Through its consistent implementation of planning and improvement policies and practices, SWOSU allocates its resources in alignment with institutional priorities, its Strategic Plan, and its mission.
- The FY 2019-2020 budget summary shows that instruction and academic support accounted for 53.2% of the budget, student services for 9.3%, operations and facilities for 8.9%, scholarships for 14.6%, and institutional support for 7.2%.
- SWOSU has extensive methods for assessing student learning (as detailed Core Component 4B) and gathering recommendations for continuous improvement. These methods are linked to the evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting through several analysis strategies.
- Planning processes involve SWOSU's stakeholders, including internal and external constituents. These processes include the development and review of strategic plans, program oversight, and recommendations for change.
- SWOSU's budget planning process and other institutional planning processes are realistic and forward-looking to ensure that the university fulfills its mission.
- SWOSU uses many methods to prepare for issues that may result from external factors, such as reductions in state funding.
- The university utilizes systematic methods to improve its operations and student outcomes.