



June 25, 2020

Dr. Joseph Harroz
President
University of Oklahoma
660 Parrington Oval
Norman OK 73019

Dear President Harroz:

This letter is accompanied by the Quality Initiative Proposal (QIP) Review form completed by a peer review panel. University of Oklahoma'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) or Pat Newton-Curran (pnewton@hlcommission.org). For any questions about your Quality Initiative, contact Stephanie Brzuzy at sbrzuzy@hlcommission.org.

The Higher Learning Commission

Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal Review Form

Date of Review: June 25, 2020

Name of Institution: University of Oklahoma State: Oklahoma

Institutional ID: 1642

Reviewers (names, titles, institutions): Dr. Deborah King, Vice Chancellor for Instruction, Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas and Dr. Gar Kellom, Director of Student Support Services, Retired, Winona State University.

Review Categories and Findings

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.)

The QIP Submitted by the University of Oklahoma (UO) demonstrates sufficient scope and significance. The focus on research, teaching, diversity, equity, and inclusion on the evaluation process will have a significant impact on the institution. The work is tied to the mission and clearly identifies institutional impact on research and creative activity, teaching and student success, and service. Reviewing current policies and procedures related to faculty evaluation and gathering and analyzing best practices of three like institutions in preparation for work related to changing the faculty evaluation tool and engaging multiple constituents in the process is critical to a long-term goal which is not actually part of this proposal.

The QIP from OU not only describes a thorough process for seriously improving faculty evaluations for the Norman Campus benefitting faculty and the entire university but will put in place significant incentives that will focus faculty talent

and energy on key strategic plan initiatives benefitting the community and the nation. This project is particularly timely, for example, in the time of mass national demonstrations to improve diversity and equity, for its focus on how to harness faculty talent and energy to “help reduce bias in faculty evaluations as well as serve as a road map for faculty efforts toward creating an inclusive and welcoming environment.”

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:

The QIP has clarity of purpose and describes how the plan sets into motion the foundation for a complete change which impact research, belongingness for its constituents, transformative student experiences, promoting projects which influence state and global outcomes, and envision the new faculty evaluation as a process which improves faculty work, support for other faculty, and the students’ opportunity to “make the most” of the educational experience provided. It appears that the last review of the evaluation was sixteen years ago and it is likely that the process or at least parts of it have been in use for thirty-three years. Faculty and administrators have expressed concern that the process is vague, unevenly weighted, unclear in who is responsible for policies and procedures, over reliant on student teaching evaluation, and does not sufficiently recognize professional development and student serve. The process is outdated, ambiguous, and not suited for use when tied to faculty salary increases or merit pay. It is understandable that changing such a process is time consuming and will involve much work. Requesting that the QIP is the first step in this change process is practical. The QIP outlines steps needed to accomplish a revision of the evaluation process which includes gathering and analyzing three aspirational institutions similar to UO in size and mission, once the three institutions are identified aspects of the evaluation process and tools will be examined for scale, definitions, categories, roles and responsibilities,

interdisciplinary and best practices, the willingness of an institution to share documents. This analysis of the data will result in conversations and collaborations to develop a draft of the report which will be presented to constituents. A draft of the new process will be compiled and distributed for review and feedback. The QIP is focused on gathering and analyzing the data, preparing a draft which can be used as a basis for change of the evaluation process at UO. However, it will not necessarily be the establishment of a new evaluation tool. The proposal addresses the first of several phases. Although the reviewer understands that the QIP will be phase 1 of the change processes, it would have been useful to understand how OU sees the phases progressing. Although it is mentioned that this is in Appendix A, Appendix A does not provide that information.

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:

The University has demonstrated the capacity to accomplish this initiative. Evidence supports the commitment of senior leadership, key people and group, especially Faculty Senate. The proposal includes excerpts from the Faculty Handbook, minutes from the Faculty Senate and one included the Faculty Senate Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belongingness Resolution. The VP of Research and Partnerships, VP for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Associate Provost for Inclusive Faculty Excellence, Graduate College, Center for Excellence, and Faculty Senate will have representatives in the work. There was no mention of Faculty Senate representation when discussing selecting the peer group. Perhaps that group is included but it did not appear to be in the response to question six. If it is not included, it would be useful to include representatives from that group for the peer groups. Knowing

whether the universities had an active Faculty Senate and the level of involvement in the evaluation process at an institution could impact the choice of a peer university. The nature of the proposal is research focused and will require many hours of human resources. The institution has committed to including a policy analyst and a part time graduate research assistant (.5 FTE). It is not clear if this will be sufficient. However, many individuals engaged in the work are already part of the system.

Much has happened in the country since the submission of this proposal to the HLC requiring major adjustments of universities to their operations due to the pandemic and its economic impact. Since this proposal relies on internal funds one has to wonder if the same level of commitment of resources necessary to successfully accomplish the crucial first phase of data collection, analysis and dissemination is still there with increased competition for scarce resources. There is also involvement of multiple constituents and the possibility for a lack of consensus with the analysis and conclusions in the report. It might be helpful to think more about how such situations might be resolved.

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 proposal demonstrates an appropriate timeline, beginning with activities to be started this summer (2020), such as hiring the graduate assistant and identifying peer institutions for data collection. In the fall, the ALO supervised work of the GRA and policy analyst to gather and analyze data. Next year a report will be written, presented and reviewed by all key constituents, such as the Faculty Senate, and revised based on feedback before submission to the HLC in 2022. This seems to meet intended goals and alignment with other institutional priorities.

General Observations and Recommended Modifications

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

The scope and significance of this proposal are sufficient, its purpose is clear, there is sufficient evidence of commitment and capacity for accomplishing this initiative. The timeline is consistent with the intended purposes and goals, the project is aligned with institutional goals, and the time frame for completion of the goals is reasonable and attainable. The work of investigating to determine the three aspirational peer groups, gathering and analyzing the data, and having the conversations and feedback about the work are practical.

Conclusion

- 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.)