

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)  
About Accredited - On Probation Status

West Virginia Northern Community College is committed to student success and to meeting accreditation criteria. This FAQ gives information to commonly asked questions regarding the recent placement of West Virginia Northern Community College under Accredited-On Probation status by our accrediting agency, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC.)

All of the issues identified by the HLC are in the process of being addressed or have been addressed through changes in College processes and procedures. ***During the probation period, West Virginia Northern Community College remains accredited and the College is confident that the Accredited-On Probation status will be removed upon the next HLC review which culminates in June 2019.***

[Public Disclosure PDF](#)

**Q: What is Accreditation Probation?**

**A:** *According to HLC, Probation is a public status signifying that an accredited institution is no longer in compliance with one or more of HLC's Criteria for Accreditation. During the Probation period, Northern's accreditation remains in effect and the College has the opportunity to remedy the concerns that led to the Accredited-On Probation status. Once the College documents that it has corrected the deficiencies and satisfied HLC criteria, WVNCC will return to normal accreditation status with no lapse in accreditation. HLC will conduct a comprehensive visit of the institution in December 2018 and the HLC's Board of Trustees will review information from the campus visit and other documentation to make a final determination at its June 2019 meeting.*

**Q: What impact does Accredited-On Probation status have on student financial aid?**

**A:** *The Accredited-On Probation status has no effect on financial aid. Northern remains accredited during the Accredited-On Probation period so students remain eligible for all federal and state financial aid including Pell Grants, veterans' assistance, and West Virginia Higher Education Grants. Contact the Financial Aid Office if you have specific questions about financial aid.*

**Q: What does Accredited-On Probation mean for current students' degrees?**

**A:** *West Virginia Northern Community College remains accredited during the Accredited-On Probation period so graduating students earn a degree from a regionally accredited institution as they always have. The degree will continue to be recognized by other institutions, employers, and certification agencies.*

**Q: What impact does Accredited-On Probation have on transferring credits to baccalaureate institutions? Will other accredited institutions recognize a completed degree?**

**A:** *Because West Virginia Northern Community College remains accredited during the Accredited-On Probation period, other institutions of higher education will continue to accept the College's credits in transfer or for admission to a program at a higher degree level. However, the decision to accept or not accept credits from another institution always remains with the receiving institution whether they come from an accredited institution or not. Students wishing to transfer should always check with the receiving institution for specific transfer information about the program they wish to enter. Questions about transfer should be referred to the student's academic advisor.*

**Q: Who is the HLC and what is accreditation?**

**A:** *The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is one of six regional accrediting organizations recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. It accredits about 1,000 colleges and universities that have a home base in one of 19 states stretching from West Virginia to Arizona. It is a private educational association, not a government agency. The HLC mission is to assure and advance the quality of higher education. Accreditation is an important indication that a college or university is operating acceptably. Institutions accredited by the HLC are eligible to administer federal financial aid.*

**Q: Why is West Virginia Northern Community College on Accreditation Probation?**

**A:** *The HLC has 5 Criteria for Accreditation and 21 Core Components that comprise those Criteria. As a result of a regular evaluation visit, the HLC determined that West Virginia Northern Community College did not meet three of the Core Components which meant that it did not meet Criterion #3 and #4. Specifically, Northern did not meet Core Components 3.C (The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high quality programs and student services); 4.B. (The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning); and 4.C. (The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs). Northern had a faculty credential review process in place; however, the matrix used was not acceptable to HLC. While Northern also had processes in place for assessment of student learning and systems for measuring retention, persistence, and completion rates of students, the HLC determined that these processes did not provide sufficient evidence that the College was using assessment results and student success data to make improvements in educational and institutional programs. Therefore, the College must refine its processes in these areas. Northern is actively working to make the necessary improvements to be compliant. It should be noted that Northern met the other 3 Criteria for Accreditation and 18 Core Components.*

**Q: What is assessment?**

**A:** *Assessment refers to the process colleges use to measure student learning. As part of assessment, institutions are expected to use the data obtained from assessment measurements to make improvements in courses, programs, and overall institutional effectiveness.*

**Q: What prompted the HLC review that led to the Accredited-On Probation determination?**

**A:** *HLC has a normal cycle for accredited institutions that includes a mid-cycle evaluation and an evaluation at the end of the 10-year accreditation period. Northern had the normal, mid-cycle evaluation in November 2016. The Accredited-On Probation determination was the culmination of this periodic evaluation.*

**Q: Is HLC questioning the quality of education provided by West Virginia Northern Community College?**

**A:** *No. Criterion 3 of the HLC Criterion for Accreditation includes a review of teaching and learning, to include quality, resources, and support. Northern was deemed to have met 4 of the 5 core components for this Criterion and had positive comments from the visiting team on 20 of the 21 subcomponents. The sole area of concern focused on improving an internal credential matrix process. Criterion 4 deals with evaluation and improvement of programs. Concerns for this criteria centered on processes for assessment and data collection. In addition, Northern met the accreditation criteria for mission, integrity, responsible action, resources and planning.*

**Q: What actions has West Virginia Northern Community College taken to address HLC concerns and what are the next steps to ensure uninterrupted accreditation?**

**A:** *Northern has been actively working to address the HLC concerns since before it received the Team Report of the visit in February. The College has addressed the credential matrix questions and made needed modifications. The College has made administrative changes to provide the necessary assessment leadership and has conducted sessions with faculty to clarify assessment terminology and processes. Program Directors are actively working on assessment activities to measure student success in programs and non-academic areas are working on co-curricular assessment. To address concerns about goals for retention, persistence, and completion, the College has a subcommittee working on refining goals and revising the Strategic Plan. During the next year, the College will be implementing these processes and using the results to make improvements in courses, programs and services. Northern is confident that these actions will satisfy HLC requirements and will result in removal of the Accredited-On Probation sanction.*

*During 2018, the College will prepare an Assurance Report that documents compliance of all Criteria for Accreditation and the associated Core Components in preparation for the HLC visit in December 2018. Following the visit, the Team will make recommendations about the probation status. The HLC Board of Trustees will review all information at its June 2019 meeting and will make a final determination about removal of the Accredited-On Probation sanction.*

