

# Lake Superior State University - MI

HLC ID 1337

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STANDARD PATHWAY: Mid-Cycle Review

Review Date: 3/22/2021

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## Context and Nature of Review

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### Review Date

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3/22/2021

#### Mid-Cycle Reviews include:

- The Year 4 Review in the Open and Standard Pathways
- The Biennial Review for Applying institutions

#### Reaffirmation Reviews include:

- The Year 10 Review in the Open and Standard Pathways
- The Review for Initial Candidacy for Applying institutions
- The Review for Initial Accreditation for Applying institutions
- The Year 4 Review for Standard Pathway institutions that are in their first accreditation cycle after attaining initial accreditation

### Scope of Review

- Mid-Cycle Review
- Federal Compliance (if applicable)
- On-site Visit
  
- COVID-19 Response Form

## Institutional Context

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Lake Superior State University is a public institution located in Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, with five additional locations in the state. With an enrollment of 1,900 students, it is the state's smallest public institution. Because it is located in the far Upper Peninsula of Michigan, LSSU is geographically isolated and in an area of declining population. This has resulted in enrollment challenges for the institution over the last several years.

The university has had significant turnover in leadership in recent years, welcoming a new president, provost, admissions dean, and also, in the near future, losing a long-time chief financial officer. Despite this leadership shift, the institution has launched an aggressive new strategic plan, undertaken renovations of facilities, and started several new academic programs to attract students from a broader area while still meeting the workforce needs of the state and region.

Balancing additional debt with declining enrollment and unstable state support has led Lake State's HLC composite financial indexes to decline consistently over the last four years. The Year Ten comprehensive site visit team report called for attention by the current site team to finances, budgeting, and enrollment. Those concerns four years ago by the comprehensive team were warranted as the Year Four team found ample evidence of a continuing deterioration of the institution's financial status.

The site visit team completed a Year Four Comprehensive Evaluation of Lake Superior State University on March 22-24, 2021. LSSU is in the standard pathway with an embedded interim report on enrollment, budget, and

finances, both of which necessitated a site visit in year four.

## **Interactions with Constituencies**

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The following individuals participated in site visit meetings (listed by title):

Seven members of the Board of Trustees

President

Provost and Vice President for Academics

Vice President for Finance and Operations

Vice President for Advancement

Vice Provost for Accreditation and Assessment

Dean of the College of Health and Behavior

Dean of the College of Science and Environment

Dean of the College of Education and Liberal Arts

Dean of the College of Innovations and Solutions

Interim Dean of the College of Criminal Justice and Emergency Responders

Academic Services Librarian

Director of Academic Services

Learning Management System Administrator

Dean of Admissions and Marketing

Dean of Student Affairs

Director of Financial Aid

Chief Diversity Officer

Deputy Title IX Coordinator

Director of Club Sports

Assistant Director of Housing

Interim Director of the Norris Center

Director of Human Resources

Director of Athletics

Assistant Director of Athletics for Compliance

Head Men's Basketball Coach

Director of Community and Alumni Relations

Director of the Business Office

Director of the Center for Freshwater Research and Education

President of the Faculty Association

Vice President of the Faculty Association

Treasurer of the Faculty Association

Past President of the Faculty Association

Information Officer for the Faculty Association

Four Members-at-Large, Michigan Association for Higher Education (MAHE)

Department Chair, School of Business

Department Chair, Culinary Arts

Department Chair, School of Engineering and Technology

Professor of Biology

Professor of Business

Professor of Computer Science

Professor of Criminal Justice

Professor of Medical Laboratory Science

Faculty member, Education

Faculty member, Psychology

Faculty member, Engineering

Faculty member, Kinesiology

Faculty member, Nursing

Faculty member, Emergency Medicine and Paramedics

Faculty member, Robotics

Members of the Assurance Argument Team for the 2021 visit

Members of the Assessment Committee

Members of the General Education Committee

One student

## **Additional Documents**

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The site visit team requested and received the following additional pieces of evidence from Lake Superior State University:

- 1) Board of Trustees Financial Dashboard for March 12, 2021
- 2) 202021 HLC Institutional Update, which contained requested information regarding the most recent composite financial index report data submitted to HLC.
- 3) General education assessment reports for diversity, humanities, natural sciences, communication, social science, and mathematics.
- 4) Minutes of the Assessment Committee.
- 5) Examples of course-level assessment in accounting, biology, business, computer science, engineering, kinesiology, nursing, and psychology.
- 6) Examples of co-curricular assessments
- 7) Information on national exams pass rates for mathematics, teacher education, engineering, business, criminal justice, education, health and behavior, innovation, and science.
- 8) Enrollment profile, including information on ethnicity.
- 9) Budgets for new academic programs in freshwater, cannabis, and robotics.
- 10) Information on the ESP contract.
- 11) Overall institutional budget projections through 2023, including bond repayment schedules.
- 12) Information on financial impact of projected enrollment increases.
- 13) Information on the factors contributing to the anticipated enrollment increase.

# 1 - Mission

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The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

## 1.A - Core Component 1.A

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

1. The mission was developed through a process suited to the context of the institution.
2. The mission and related statements are current and reference the institution's emphasis on the various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, application of research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development and religious or cultural purpose.
3. The mission and related statements identify the nature, scope and intended constituents of the higher education offerings and services the institution provides.
4. The institution's academic offerings, student support services and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.
5. The institution clearly articulates its mission through public information, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans or institutional priorities.

## Rating

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Met

## Rationale

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The Mission of Lake Superior State University to "equip our graduates with the knowledge, practical skills and inner strength to craft a life of meaningful employment, personal fulfillment, and generosity of self within an inclusive atmosphere, all while enhancing the quality of life of the Great Lakes region and the world."

As a part of its strategic planning process in 2019-2020, the University community reviewed and updated its mission statement through a series of listening sessions and surveys of campus, local, and tribal communities. Specifically, the updates added the words, "... within an inclusive atmosphere," and changed the phrase "Upper Great Lakes region" to "the Great Lakes region and the world."

The University's Board of Trustees reviewed the input from that process and approved the updated Mission Statement in April 2020.

In addition to the Mission Statement, the College's Vision Statement was updated. Previously it stated, "We capitalize on our unique location and mission as a regional state university to be a model for educational innovation and a preferred partner for U.S. and Canadian community and tribal colleges." This was modified to state, "We believe in an innovation-driven, transformative education for all. We identify potential, enable success, drive social mobility, and develop students into

professionally prepared graduates who excel locally, nationally and globally.”

These changes to the Mission and Vision statements reflect an institution that is aware of its location on the border between the United States and Canada (hence, “the Great Lakes Region” rather than the U.S. perspective of the “the Upper Great Lakes”); its need to be inclusive of tribal and international talent in its efforts toward institutional sustainability; and its responsibilities to first generation college and/or low-income students who comprise more than half of its undergraduate population.

The University’s Strategic Plan contains five pillars and three overarching themes. The five pillars are: 1) creating a culture of student learning and development; 2) diversity, inclusion and belonging; 3) fiscal resilience and operational excellence; 4) community partnerships; and 5) engagement and sustainability. Each of these five pillars has within the strategic plan specific goals and strategies outlined in detail.

Lake Superior State University sought input from more than 300 internal and external constituents in the development of its strategic plan in Fall 2019. The Strategic Plan – with the tag line "Superior Education, Superior, Superior You" – is organized in 5 goals and 218 strategic objectives. The 2020 Assessment of progress toward the strategic objectives, specifically identifies more than 50 faculty and staff who are actively engaged in fulfillment of the goals and objectives. Certain committees and departments are assigned to each of the goals. This includes consultation and engagement with the Student Government. The institution is working to align employee goal setting and evaluation to the objectives of the Strategic Plan. These efforts show evidence of broad dissemination of the University’s strategy and its engagement with internal and external constituents in the plan’s implementation.

While the strategic planning process of 2019-2020 enabled the University to review and update its mission and vision statements, it also added three themes, as mentioned earlier. These three themes of the LSSU 2020-2025 Strategic Plan are: global interdependence, social mobility, and innovation. These three areas of focus are also reflected in the mission and vision statements. The University’s intention in making these changes was to strengthen its connection to tribal nations and to Canada and to broaden its international reach are reflected in the addition of, “the world” in its mission statement and “globally” in its vision statement.

The incorporation of “inclusive” and “social mobility” in the mission and vision statements reflect the aspirational goals of the strategic plan as well as the University’s on-going commitment to meeting the needs of low-income and first-generation students. Lake State was ranked third in the state by the 2020 WalletHub rankings which emphasize the social mobility of graduates. It was also awarded *First-gen Forward* designation by the Suder Foundation and NASPA in 2020. This designation is based on the commitment of an institution to first-generation success. Although the designation for LSSU did not carry into the 2021 First Gen Forward cohort, the University’s strategic plan reflects a continued commitment in Objective 1.3.1, “Increase support and services for students who are first-generation, Pell Grant eligible, veterans, or enter needing developmental coursework.” The University’s vision statement was updated to be consistent with this intention.

Further, the strategic plan identifies among its goals, the intention to add new academic programs and delivery methods that meet student and market needs. These additions, as evidenced by the addition of programs such as cannabis production and business and the robotics initiative, as well as by the activities of the Center for Freshwater Research and Education, reflect a commitment to innovation as articulated in the revised vision statement.

LSSU mission, vision, values, and planning statements recognize its role as a provider of postsecondary education for a rural population on the northern border of the state and the nation. The University currently offers 50 baccalaureate degrees, 25 associate degrees, 63 minors, and 8 certificate programs in an extensive range of disciplines “to help students craft a life of meaningful employment and personal fulfillment”.

In doing so, the University attempts to respond to the individual interests of potential and current students and the talent needs of the state. The Assurance Argument (1.A.3) indicates that, “Most programs feature strong undergraduate research, clinicals, practical application components, specialized facilities, and regional opportunities to strengthen the knowledge and practical skills that will be meaningful to students’ future careers.” Numerous examples of such student opportunities are available and were enthusiastically described during the campus site visit. For example, staff in the Academic Success Center encourages students to develop an Individualized Plan for Academic Success (IPASS). The IPASS program tailors support services to the needs of each student with special outreach to first-generation students. A second example includes the University’s Recreation Center, which offers many ways to enjoy the natural area of the region as a way of bringing to life LSSU’s commitment to “enhancing the quality of life in the Great Lakes Region.” Although high impact strategies for teaching and learning are identified in the University’s strategic plan, more could be done to make them explicit in the public facing documents, e.g., the University website and its Catalog, neither of which emphasize such learning experiences overtly from a prospective or current student point of view.

The institution’s mission and enrollment profile provide a framework for the delivery of the University’s academic offerings and student support services. LSSU’s five colleges and 75 degree programs offer students a range of choices to explore and pursue various careers. Many courses and programs include an experiential component such as service-learning, lab work, internships, or clinical training. Support services include but are not limited to career services, a counseling center, computer labs, the library, public safety, and accessibility services.

Consistent with its global perspectives, the University offers study abroad opportunities in partnership with the College Consortium for International Studies, CIEE, International Studies Abroad, and the Japan Center for Michigan Universities. The Native American Center (NAC) strives to share the history, language, and culture of the Native people of the Great Lakes region and to support Native American students at LSSU.

The University’s recent efforts to promote "Early Middle College" and dual enrollment is an indication that LSSU recognizes the need to increase college attainment in the region in order to promote the social mobility of the region’s youth. Through its course offerings at Bay College, North Central Michigan College, in St. Helen and Hessel/Les Cheneaux, LSSU recognizes the wide geographical dispersion of its students. The Upper Peninsula of Michigan, home to LSSU and its primary market, spans 16,452 square miles with a population base of just under 16 residents/square mile.

The assurance argument provided a screenshot of the LSSU Fall 2020 enrollment profile webpage and the enrollment summary indicates a total headcount of 1,901 students. Enrollment by ethnicity was somewhat more difficult to obtain and analyze. For example, written and verbal reports of the Native American student representation varied from .4% to 8%. Greater clarity in its enrollment data and a greater degree of disaggregated data may be useful to the University as it moves forward in its recruitment and student support initiatives.



The LSSU mission, vision, core values, learning outcomes, strategic plan and operational procedures are visible and easily accessible through the University's website and broadly articulated in official institutional documents and publications.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 1.B - Core Component 1.B

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

1. The institution's actions and decisions demonstrate that its educational role is to serve the public, not solely the institution or any superordinate entity.
2. The institution's educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.
3. The institution engages with its external constituencies and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Lake Superior State University serves its community, region, and the state in a variety of ways. For example, the LSSU Arts Center, Arts Center Gallery is open to public to provide education and enrichment opportunities through theater productions, concert, and art exhibits, LSSU student recitals, and an Educational Series that is targeted to expose children to the diverse theater performances. The LSSU Shouldine Library is open to public and offers borrowing privileges to the entire region. The library hosts and opens to the public its Scholars Series, Sustainability Series, and Campus Colloquium series for faculty and staff to present their research. The TEDx bi-annual event and Visiting Writers Services library sponsored events are community favorites.

The assurance argument and supporting documentation provide ample evidence of the University's engagement with and support of the public. Examples include the research and teaching done by the Center for Freshwater Research and Education; the COVID-19 testing; the activities of the Arts Center; and the Library services. There is no indication from the public or student comments that services have been or are misdirected.

Although LSSU has needed to make difficult financial decisions in recent years, the allocations to academic instruction seem to have prioritized over other areas. An aging infrastructure and higher than anticipated costs for the renovation of the Center for Freshwater Research and Education (CFRE) are creating significant budget pressures (discussed more fully in Criterion 5). However, in both cases the intent is to provide facilities and services that meet the needs of students and the Great Lakes region. This is consistent with the University's mission, vision, and values.

There is significant evidence to support the assurance argument statement that, "LSSU cultivates extensive and varied relationships with external constituencies to serve the students, faculty, and community. The University reaches beyond its own unique, rural location to foster relationships that support its mission to the best of its capacity, to provide innovation-driven and transformative education for all, and to enhance the quality of life of the Great Lakes region and the world."

For example, input and advice from external constituents are sought routinely through the various advisory boards for academic programs. In addition, external constituents were invited to and included in the search for a new President (2018) and the development of the University's strategic plan (2019). Undergraduate research projects, internships, and clinical assignments connect students to life beyond the classroom. The undergraduate research contributions have not only been of instructional benefit to the students but improved the quality of life in the region (e.g., when a senior project focused on removing invasive stalk-producing algae from the St. Mary's River).

The LSSU mission has been resolute in its emphasis to create a sense of community since its inception in 1946 as an institution that served returning World War II veterans and Eastern Upper Peninsula citizens. It seeks to provide individuals with access to career-readiness education and practical skills training to amplify quality of life, attain meaningful employment, acquire social mobility in the Great Lakes region to serve the public good.

LSSU demonstrated its commitment to the public good to achieve a community-wide collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic by its deliberate intention to establish partnerships with (1) Bay Mills Indian Community Health Center, (2) War Memorial Hospital, (3) Chippewa County Health Department, (4) Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, and (5) Michigan National Guard. In August 2020 LSSU partnered with the Michigan National Guard to utilize its facility to serve as a community site location to administer COVID-19 tests and provide educational resources to the wide-ranging community. In January LSSU partnered with the county health department to administer the COVID-19 vaccine to the local community and this action demonstrates the institution's tenacious commitment to collaborate and engage with numerous entities for the public good of the Great Lakes region and campus constituents. LSSU submitted its COVID-19 Planning and Process Changes Institutional Response form to HLC and is accessible in the Assurance Argument.

LSSU has demonstrated evidence of a multifaceted approach as an institution that serves the public good to educate, engage, and equip external constituents through purposeful community, state and regional collaborative partnerships in the arts, sciences, and healthcare sectors. This approach affirms its mission "to help drive social mobility and enhance the quality of life of the Great Lakes region", plus supports its students. LSSU exhibits this multilayered commitment to serve the public good as well as provide educational and research opportunities for faculty, staff, students and through cooperative partnerships and community outreach initiatives with various entities. A few of these include the (1) Center for Freshwater Research and Education, (2) Freshwater Stewardship Corps, (3) Superior Analytics Lab, and (4) LSSU Simulation Center which partners with the War Memorial Hospital to provide immersive simulation training for nurses, paramedics, and other health care professionals from across the region.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 1.C - Core Component 1.C

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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.

1. The institution encourages curricular or cocurricular activities that prepare students for informed citizenship and workplace success.
2. The institution's processes and activities demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations.
3. The institution fosters a climate of respect among all students, faculty, staff and administrators from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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LSSU has unique opportunities to prepare students for informed citizenship, workplace success and civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world due to its proximity to two tribal nations and Canada. Annually the LSSU Native American Center hosts cultural performances and exhibits, and annually the institution celebrates Native American Month through lectures, food tastings, and traditional ceremonies. At sporting events and commencement exercises multiculturalism is embraced and illustrated by opening with the U.S. and Canadian national anthems at both events and featuring Scottish bagpipers and Native American drummers at graduation services.

The institution engages the constituencies it serves and the campus in other notable multicultural events to promote diversity and inclusivity. Notable examples include: (1) hosting the play *Commencing* that examines issues of gay and straight women, (2) LSSU yearly campus read and book selection for 2018-2019 was *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, (3) The Arts Center hosting the Tibetan Monk Residency, and (4) King-Chavez parks Initiative Future Faculty Fellowship that assist those who are academically and or economically disadvantage to pursue graduate studies.

The institution hosts a plethora of cocurricular activities to prepare and inform LSSU students of opportunities for civic engagement and workplace success in a diverse multicultural world. LSSU cocurricular initiatives include career-focused opportunities that include internships, co-ops, and clinicals to prepare students for meaningful employment like field trips for geology students across the country and into Canada, internships for students in kinesiology and business majors, student research positions in the Center for Freshwater Research and Education.

LSSU offers students opportunities to participate in 56 student-led clubs and organizations that emphasize informed citizenship and community involvement. LSSU offers support and resources through multiple venues for the LGBTQ campus community. Campus Life sponsors cultural awareness events and activities to emphasize diversity and inclusion and engage students to embrace the traditions of diverse cultures that include Chinese, Black, Native American and Mexican.

LSSU has demonstrated its pledge to foster an environment that promotes and advances diversity by providing ample evidence to illustrate the relationship between its mission for the constituencies it serves and the opportunities it provides to increase cultural literacy through sustainable institutional initiatives led by diverse campus stakeholders. A few examples of specific evidence cited in the Assurance Argument of the institution's commitment to foster a climate of acceptance and respect among all students, faculty, staff and administrators include (1) LSSU Strategic Plan: Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Pillar that comprises five overarching goals with detailed strategies, (2) LSSU Diversity Core Value that pledges "students experience a campus community environment that is inclusive and welcoming", (3) LSSU Diversity Statement, that pledges to "promote diversity inclusion, and belonging that respects and celebrates the uniqueness of its students, staff, and faculty", (4) LSSU Diversity Expansion Plan implemented in 2018 that invested in efforts to increase diversity training and workshops, (5) LSSU mandate that students must take one diversity course to meet general education requirement and utility of the general education program Diversity Learning Outcomes that focuses students to "view the world from cultural perspectives other than their own".

There are support services for persons of color, persons with disabilities, first-generation students, veterans, and low socioeconomic populations and other groups. The LSSU Accessibility Statement is posted on the LSSU website and appears in various institutional publications. The Office of Accessibility Services provides services for students who need special accommodations, and also provides training to the Admissions staff to ensure they are cognizant about services and resources.

The University's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan does not address equity as a component of its diversity initiatives. An analysis of whether the University treats its students, faculty, and staff equitably could advance its efforts to promote a sense of inclusion by all. An awareness of issues related to equity seems especially important at a time when LSSU is financially constrained. Given its commitment to diversity and inclusion, it will want to ensure that the burden of cost-reduction does not fall unfairly upon any subset(s) of the University community.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 1.S - Criterion 1 - Summary

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The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

### Rationale

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Lake Superior State University has developed a sustainable and viable mission statement that is widely known and supported by faculty, staff, and administrators. The Lake Superior State University "2020- 2025 *Superior Education, Superior Experience, Superior You*" strategic plan provides a clear pathway for the University's future. The strategic plan distinct five pillars that are articulated as Aspirational Values clearly aligned goals and strategies to help ensure that the mission impacts divisional operations and sustains institutional priorities. Objectives of the plan have been assigned to various members of the Senior Management Team. However, the key performance indicators and assessment measures are not articulated.

Lake Superior State University faculty, staff and administrators are acutely aware of the University's importance to its broad constituency "to create a life of meaningful employment, personal fulfillment" for the Great Lakes Region and the world". This theme was mentioned repeatedly and seen as both a point of pride and as an obligation to meet the needs of the Great Lakes Region, the two United States Tribal Nations, Canada, Canada Tribal Nations, and world.

## 2 - Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### 2.A - Core Component 2.A

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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.

1. The institution develops and the governing board adopts the mission.
2. The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, human resources and auxiliary functions.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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In 2019, Lake Superior State University (LSSU) modified the institution's mission and, subsequently, the institution's Board of Trustees approves those changes. LSSU's strategic plan, mission, and vision was most recently revised in 2019, with input provided via collaborative listening sessions with the greater community. The current strategic plan establishes five broad priorities, which are broken down into 22 overall goals and then 136 aligned strategies. In total, these efforts established a more global perspective for the institution, also reflected within the four distinctive core values of excellence in teaching and learning; opportunity, diversity, ethics and values; and stewardship. The revised documents were proposed to the Board of Trustees for approval, which occurred in April 2020. Interviews with the Board of Trustees and LSSU faculty, staff, and administration confirmed this process occurred as presented in the assurance argument.

LSSU operates with integrity in its financial operation. The ultimate responsibility for financial oversight falls to the Board of Trustees, however, the vice president for finance and operations oversees financial operations. The Business Operations Office represents the institution's financial records publicly on its web pages. Audits are completed annually on the institution's financial reports, with results reflecting unqualified opinions. LSSU's current bond rating is a BBB+. Meeting minutes and interviews with board members reflect that the Board of Trustees reviews and approves financial reports each year.

LSSU operates with integrity in its academic functions. All academic policies are introduced and outlined in the *LSSU Academic Catalog 2020-2021* and publicly posted and available to all constituents via the University's website and the Provost's webpage. Faculty, staff, and students are engaged in the review and creation of academic policies to ensure the rights and responsibilities related to this area. Committee representation includes students to ensure their input and interests are included in institutional decision-making processes. A number of policies provide students with

rights to appeal sanctions or charges made against them. Interviews with LSSU faculty confirmed their involvement and leadership in academic functions.

LSSU operates with integrity in its human resources functions. The university has established hiring policies and procedures and clearly defined them within the *Faculty Agreement*. Policies related to equal opportunity and discrimination also exist and are posted on the institution's HR website, and interviews with HR staff indicated that vacancies are posted nationally across various platforms. Trainings are provided for all involved in the hiring process to ensure practices comply with all laws and reflect best practices. Search committee members complete an equal employment opportunity form that assesses candidate qualifications and assures compliance with hiring policies.

LSSU operates with integrity in its auxiliary functions, which includes housing, food services, residential life, health care center, and counseling center for the Student Affairs unit, as well as the Athletics unit. The Board of Trustees approves the auxiliary budget each year, and LSSU establishes and administers policies and procedures for each auxiliary, which are then posted online and within handbooks or other materials across campus. The *LSSU Student Handbook* is the primary document in which policies and procedures related to these areas are published. The Campus Life Office, Food Services, Health Care Center & Counseling Center also have established policies and procedures related to their services for the University.

Interviews with the Board of Trustees, the LSSU senior leadership team, and LSSU faculty and staff confirmed that these operations are formally approved by the board, but that the individuals and offices described above have direct oversight for the various operations, which includes the development of policies and procedures to support operations as needed.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*



## 2.B - Core Component 2.B

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

1. The institution ensures the accuracy of any representations it makes regarding academic offerings, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, governance structure and accreditation relationships.
2. The institution ensures evidence is available to support any claims it makes regarding its contributions to the educational experience through research, community engagement, experiential learning, religious or spiritual purpose and economic development.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Lake Superior State University presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public with regard to its academic offerings, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, governance structure, and accreditation relationships. LSSU predominantly utilizes the University's website to provide access to an array of electronic media, including the *Academic Catalog*, *Academic Affairs Directory*, *Staff Directory*, *Organizational Chart*, and Board of Trustees website. Current information regarding academic offerings, cost of attendance, financial aid opportunities, and current accreditation relationships is available via the University website.

The website is under the direction of the Office of Marketing and Communications, which relies on trained faculty and staff who review and update the website and manage webpage content. LSSU contracts with Monsido to regularly monitor the accessibility and functionality of the website. Interviews with various LSSU constituents (faculty, staff, students, administration) confirmed their use of the website to locate information and their own efforts, if applicable, to ensure accuracy and accessibility of information. Some frustration with the centralized process for requesting web updates was shared during interviews, but individuals confirmed their ability to make changes themselves for portion of the website assigned to them.

LSSU ensures evidence is available to support its claims regarding its contributions to the educational experience. Most LSSU programs require a senior research/project that connects students with external stakeholders to propose and complete a project that results in an end-product for the organization and provides value to both parties. Presentations of these projects occur each year to showcase student results, as materials provided by LSSU reflect, and a number of them are showcased on the LSSU website.

Other academic programs include real-life experiences through internships, research studies, and other field work that place students with local organizations and school districts to experience and contribute to their work. These experiences are documented on LSSU's various program webpages, which depict students from those programs practicing and applying their knowledge in real-world settings. LSSU students can also engage and contribute to the larger community through outreach

activities coordinated with agencies such as the United Way and Special Olympics.

Interviews with faculty, staff, and a current student indicated that these opportunities are a significant part of the attraction of LSSU for students, and that the greater community appreciates the collaborative initiatives. The student appreciated the opportunities to apply knowledge and skills in authentic settings and make connections with individuals in desired career fields.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.C - Core Component 2.C

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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.

1. The governing board is trained and knowledgeable so that it makes informed decisions with respect to the institution's financial and academic policies and practices; the board meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
2. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.
3. The governing board reviews the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.
4. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties.
5. The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the institution's administration and expects the institution's faculty to oversee academic matters.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Lake Superior State University's governing board is trained and knowledgeable and meets its fiduciary responsibilities. The Board of Trustees includes eight Michigan residents appointed by the Governor. While Covid-19 has somewhat changed how training is delivered, these individuals confirmed via interview that they regularly participate in ongoing training that begins with an initial orientation and includes annual retreats held by the Board, annual briefings provided by the Michigan Association of State Universities (MASU), and working sessions held prior to each scheduled Board meeting. They discussed their appreciation for opportunities to meet with individuals who serve on other Michigan boards to discuss topics of shared interest and network.

Interviews confirmed that a minimum of six Board meetings are scheduled each year and are open meetings for all interested parties to attend and provide input. The Board website identifies the meeting dates established for each year, and while the agenda packets and materials for each meeting are not made available, minutes of all past Board meetings are posted for public access. Fiduciary oversight of the Board includes annual approval of the University's tuition and other student costs, capital outlay projects, general fund and auxiliary budgets, and emergency approval of funds as needed, such as for the recent Covid-19 crisis.

The deliberations of LSSU's governing board reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution. The Board of Trustees prioritizes the leadership role of the President and has consistently taken action to ensure that a timely but comprehensive search is completed when a vacancy occurs. Interviews with the Board confirmed that the Trustees hold the President accountable for, and work with the President to provide, a strategic direction and vision for the University. This work has resulted in recent outcomes of an *LSSU Strategic Plan*, *General Fund Budget*, new academic programs and facilities that are responsive to the needs of students, improved institutional

assessment, and modified tuition rates for students. Trustees discussed their commitment to LSSU and their efforts to support LSSU through their collective actions.

The university's governing board reviews the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations. Interviews with trustees confirmed that prior to each scheduled Board of Trustee's meeting, they meet with LSSU senior management team members to review reports and engage in in-depth discussions. During each Board meeting, summary reports from critical areas of finance, academic affairs, human resources, admissions & marketing, and student affairs are shared to inform Board actions and decisions. Recent examples of the Board's consideration of internal or external constituencies include using student input to develop a tuition plateau, engaging with various constituents during the development of the LSSU strategic plan, and engaging with various constituents during the development of the most recent president search profile.

Trustees discussed a variety of activities that provide them with input and feedback that informs their decisions. Informal dinners allow for interaction with various LSSU constituents, such as faculty, staff and students, as well as community representatives, including tribal chairs. They engage with alumni through events jointly organized by the Board of Trustees and the LSSU Foundation. Due to the close community in which LSSU resides, they also discussed informal interactions with community members. LSSU provided examples of summary reports and meeting minutes that reflected these activities.

LSSU's governing board is autonomous to make decisions in the best interests of the institution and ensure the institution's integrity. The Board of Trustee's by-laws require each trustee to sign a conflict of interest declaration form each year. The by-laws also prohibit board members from having personal financial interests or transactions with LSSU and requires members to report any outside interests, consulting services, or other relationships that might interfere with their duties and responsibilities, or raise a question of conflict of interest. If such conflict occurs, the member shall abstain from voting on the related matter.

In addition, the Board recently established a policy that limits interactions with the Faculty Association to open forum settings only, to preserve independence and limit individual interactions. Discussions with trustees affirmed their commitment to remain neutral and avoid getting in between the administrative team and the faculty on discussions and decisions beyond their oversight.

LSSU's governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the administration and the oversight of academic matters to the faculty. Discussions with trustees confirmed they perceive the board-appointed university president as chief executive officer, who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the University's educational, financial, and administration functions. The president is the primary spokesperson for the University and is charged with operating the institution according to the policies established by the board, in collaboration with his senior management team.

The president delegates authority to members of the senior management team related to key operational areas for which they oversee. Interviews with the president and senior management team members confirmed that the president delegates responsibilities to them and holds them accountable, which includes making progress toward specific goals identified in the strategic plan. His senior leadership team members discussed how they delegate and assign various roles and responsibilities to their respective team members, which engages a majority of the campus in meeting strategic plan goals/outcomes. Annual reports and updates on progress are submitted to the president by the senior leadership team members.

The *Faculty Agreement* reflects that the board delegates leadership in academic matters to LSSU faculty, which includes curriculum and program development, peer review of their colleagues and programs, and recommendations regarding issues of evaluation, promotion, and tenure. Interviews with faculty, including those who serve in leadership roles in the Faculty Association, affirmed that faculty oversee and are engaged in academic matters. The curriculum committee, whose primary membership is faculty, is the body through which curriculum and program approval move forward.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.D - Core Component 2.D

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

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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LSSU is committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning. Students have multiple avenues to pursue truth in learning. These include participation in student organizations, campus events and guest speakers that spotlight topics of diversity, and workshops that promote problem solving, cooperative practices, and team building. Academically, students are encouraged to participate in research opportunities and real-life projects.

Interviews confirmed that students have funding support through the Undergraduate Research Fund for student research proposals and an array of opportunities for relevant and meaningful learning via experiential learning activities such as “work for hire”, simulations, and internships. An LSSU student shared that research opportunities for students are far greater than at other institutions, as they get to develop their own research questions and lead their projects. These experiences are perceived positively by graduate schools.

The LSSU *Faculty Agreement* ensures that faculty can also pursue truth in teaching and learning. The Agreement includes the AAUP’s *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, which ensures faculty the right to exercise freedom of expression in research, publication, and instruction. Interviews with faculty confirmed that LSSU provides financial support for faculty professional development each year to promote scholarship and research, which also supports faculty promotion and tenure processes, with funds commonly used for conference attendance, materials or equipment to support instruction, and scholarship activities. Sabbatical leave is also available to faculty to conduct research related to professional activities and advancement of knowledge. Faculty can receive funding from the Office of Sponsored Programs to support grant-funded projects, and LSSU provides an extensive collection of resources that promote excellence in teaching, innovation, and professional development.

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.E - Core Component 2.E

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

1. Institutions supporting basic and applied research maintain professional standards and provide oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability.
2. The institution provides effective support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff and students.
3. The institution provides students guidance in the ethics of research and use of information resources.
4. The institution enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Interviews with faculty and staff affirm that Lake Superior State University maintains professional standards and provides oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability for basic and applied research. The Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) and Business Office oversee adherence to these requirements. All agreements with external funding are reviewed and approved using an internal process that includes appropriate chains of approval. The Institutional Research Board (IRB) and Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) may participate in such reviews if applicable. The OSP provides continued oversight for active research projects and ensures that faculty and staff are in compliance with state and federal guidelines. Students may also receive funding for undergraduate research through the Undergraduate Research Fund or through Student Government. The Undergraduate Research Committee reviews and administers student research funding.

LSSU faculty did share that as an undergraduate institution focused on quality teaching and learning, teaching effectiveness is set as a priority for faculty over research and service, with Rank Promotion and Tenure percentages reflecting this. As such, faculty identify a broader array of "scholarly activities" that are supported by these funds that include case studies, research projects jointly completed by students, and action research that supports the local community.

LSSU provides effective support services to ensure integrity of research and scholarly practice. Most academic programs at LSSU include undergraduate research projects and papers which develop students' abilities to demonstrate integrity in their research. Training modules related to research and scholarly practice are provided to all students through the Collaborative Institutional Training initiative online training and certification system; certificates of completion are required for IRB and IACUC research proposals. The LSSU Library recently updated database subscriptions to include full-text scientific journals and provides information literacy instruction to support research initiatives for both faculty and students.

Lake State also provides students guidance in the ethics of research and use of information resources. Freshmen Composition courses introduce students to these concepts, and introductory courses in a number of majors include training through the completion of specific course assignments. Some programs may provide handbooks or other materials that support students' development. Students can receive additional guidance from academic services, which includes tutors and training on various related topics. LSSU states that approximately 30 sessions have been provided annually to approximately 1,300 students since 2018.

LSSU enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity through its *Academic Integrity Policy*. The policy defines specific types of unethical behavior and outlines the procedure in cases of unethical behavior. Course syllabi reference this policy, as well as the Academic Catalog and various University webpages. Possible sanctions range from verbal warning to expulsion. Since 2014, LSSU reports that 60 academic integrity incident reports have been processed. An LSSU student indicated in an interview that the policies are clearly posted in syllabi and LSSU documents, and that faculty establish clear expectations for students.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*



## **2.S - Criterion 2 - Summary**

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The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### **Rationale**

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As reflected in the assurance argument materials and affirmed in interviews with LSSU constituents, LSSU has established policies and procedures that monitor and maintain the integrity of the institution and the ethical and responsible conduct of its constituents. The Board of Trustees maintains autonomy and considers both internal and external stakeholders in making decisions. The board delegates responsibility to the president and his senior leadership team to manage the day-to-day management of the institution and follows Board policy in conducting and performing its duties. Institutional policies maintain the practices of freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning, as well as the responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by faculty, students, and staff.

## 3 - Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support

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The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

### 3.A - Core Component 3.A

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

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of student performance appropriate to the credential awarded.
2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for its undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate and certificate programs.
3. The institution's program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Lake Superior State University (LSSU) maintains program-specific accreditations for their business (ACBSP), education (CAEP) and nursing (CCNE) schools. Individual programs in chemistry (ACS), computer engineering (ABET), electrical engineering (ABET), mechanical engineering (ABET), electrical engineering technology (ABET), manufacturing engineering technology (ABET), emergency medical technician (CoAEMPS), firefighting (Proboard) and medical laboratory science (NAACLS) are also accredited.

LSSU academic programs utilize advisory boards to ensure that programs remain current and relevant to employers and industry, as well as, to determine need for additional programs. Faculty and academic deans elaborated on the role of advisor boards during the site visit. The members of the advisory board for the new cannabis chemistry program have been reviewing the curriculum of the program to ensure that students are acquiring the skills necessary for employment in the industry. The industrial advisory board for the School of Engineering provides feedback on the rigor of students' senior projects and the communication and presentation skills of students. The nursing advisory board includes area employers of LSSU nursing graduates and evaluates LSSU nursing graduates at six and twelve months post-employment. These evaluations are reported to nursing faculty for consideration when pursuing curricular revision.

LSSU offers baccalaureate degrees, associate degrees and certificates. The curriculum committee and deans review course expectations utilizing a standardized definition of course-level designation based upon Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* and Bloom's *Taxonomy*. New course proposals require the proposer to list student learning outcomes and instruct the proposer that outcomes should reflect

course level. Program and institutional learning outcome assessment data is reported annually and programs are reviewed on a five-year cycle. Course and program outcomes and rigor are addressed at multiple points in the academic program review. LSSU faculty, administrators and students described significant applied and experiential learning opportunities at multiple program levels. These include practicums, internships, laboratory courses and student research including a culminating senior project involving significant student-directed learning.

LSSU articulates and differentiates learning goals for its degree programs. Several of LSSU's certificate and associate degree programs allow for continuation to a baccalaureate degree; in such cases, program learning outcomes are differentiated based upon degree level. Baccalaureate level outcomes include and expand upon outcome articulated for the associate degree or certificate.

LSSU offers concurrent instruction at high schools and dual enrollment coursework on campus and online. The dean of the College of Education and Liberal Arts notes that online courses allow for a single section of a class that may be taken at students studying at a number of LSSU campuses which provides both consistency and increased likelihood of the course demonstrating appropriate student enrollment. LSSU's faculty qualifications policy applies to faculty regardless of modality and location. The faculty hiring process states that adjunct faculty candidates will be reviewed by the program dean, chairperson and faculty to ensure that they meet minimum qualifications. LSSU utilizes a standardized syllabus template to ensure consistency of learning outcomes across delivery mode and locations. Further, faculty across all locations report course-level learning outcome assessment data via the "Nuventive Improve System."

LSSU faculty and administrators spoke to efforts to ensure quality in online instruction including upgraded technology, laboratory simulation software, professional development for faculty transitioning to online instruction through the Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning (CETAL), full-time faculty providing support for adjunct faculty, and carefully mapping pedagogical elements to learning outcomes to ensure they are met.

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) conducted a Multi-Location Visit in October of 2019 at two of LSSU's five regional centers (Iron Mountain Regional Center and Les Cheneaux Regional Center) resulting in a finding that the LSSU's operations at its additional locations appeared adequate with no further review or monitoring recommended.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.B - Core Component 3.B

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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.

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings and degree levels of the institution. The institution articulates the purposes, content and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements.
2. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.
3. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity and provides students with growth opportunities and lifelong skills to live and work in a multicultural world.
4. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their offerings and the institution's mission.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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LSSU's mission statement is "We equip our graduates with the knowledge, practical skills and inner strength to craft a life of meaningful employment, personal fulfillment, and generosity of self within an inclusive atmosphere, all while enhancing the quality of life of the Great Lakes region and the world." LSSU's general education learning outcomes are consistent with this mission and tailored to address the needs of the student population (largely first generation) that LSSU serves. LSSU differentiates its general education requirements based on degree type, with bachelor's degrees requiring 34-36 hours of general education coursework, associate's degrees requiring 24 credit hours and associate of applied science degrees requiring 15 hours.

Lake State articulates the purpose, content and intended learning outcomes of its general education requirements. The mission of LSSU's General Education program, "In a diverse and changing world, college graduates must be prepared for a lifetime of learning in a variety of fields. In order to meet this challenge, general education requirements foster the development of general skills and knowledge that are further developed throughout the curriculum," is consistent with the University's mission. The General Education Mission Statement, General Education Learning Outcomes and General Education Requirements by Degree type are published in LSSU's academic catalog. General education syllabi include general education learning outcomes, in addition to course and institutional-level outcomes.

LSSU's general education program is a distribution model adapted from the American Association of Colleges and Universities' (AACU) Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) framework.

LSSU has mapped its general education learning outcomes to the four broad Essential Learning Outcomes of LEAP (Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World, Intellectual and Practical Skills, Personal and Social Responsibility and Integrative and Applied Learning).

The university's general education program imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts and develops skills and attitudes that LSSU values. LSSU's General Education Committee establishes these required learning outcomes which are mapped to general education categories and individual courses. LSSU demonstrates a commitment to reviewing the general education curriculum for currency by incorporating this review as Strategy 1.1.1 of their strategic plan: Analyze, assess, and refresh traditional general education and liberal arts courses to accentuate their intrinsic value and add appeal and relevancy to current students.

The institution's educational offerings recognize human and cultural diversity. LSSU affirms a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion by including diversity and inclusion as one of its core values and as a pillar in its strategic plan. LSSU's diversity committee revised the University's diversity statement in AY 20-21 and the University president signed the statement on February 2, 2021. LSSU's general education learning outcomes includes a diversity outcome, "LSSU graduates will be able to view the world from cultural perspectives other than their own." More than 8% of LSSU's student body identify as Native American, and LSSU provides a variety of contexts to educate students, faculty and staff on Native American culture including through the Native American Center, a native showcase during "Laker Week," celebration of Native American Heritage Month and through the 2020-2021 "Big Read" featuring *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich.

LSSU provides students with growth opportunities and lifelong skills to live and work in a multicultural world. LSSU offers study abroad trips in a variety of countries including China, Belize, Ireland and New Zealand. Also, LSSU students can study abroad in over 50 countries through the College Consortium for International Studies.

Faculty and students at Lake State contribute to scholarship, creative work and discovery of knowledge appropriate to the institution's mission. As an undergraduate institution focused primarily on teaching, LSSU demonstrates appropriate levels of student involvement in scholarship and creative works. The Undergraduate Research Committee (URC) provides grants of up to \$500 for senior capstone projects. LSSU's senior symposium serves as a forum to showcase student research, and most programs require a senior research/project presentation. Students contribute to *Snowdrifts*, the LSSU literary magazine and display their creative works in the Arts Center and at the Shouldice Library.

Faculty scholarship is flexibly defined through Section 8.7.4.4.c of the Faculty Agreement, and is based on Boyer's (1997) model of scholarship. This flexible model is appropriate given the mission of the institution and the level of its program offerings. LSSU supports faculty through an annual professional development allowance that may be carried over from year-to-year. Faculty reported that LSSU support faculty scholarship through provision of development funds, laboratory space, equipment support and assistance with grant application and management through the Office of Sponsored Programs. The provost's office publicizes faculty publications and presentations on its webpage. Faculty also attend and present at monthly colloquia which are open to the public.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

### 3.C - Core Component 3.C

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

1. The institution strives to ensure that the overall composition of its faculty and staff reflects human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.
2. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance, assessment of student learning, and establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff.
3. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual and consortial offerings.
4. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.
5. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.
6. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.
7. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising and cocurricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their professional development.

#### Rating

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Met

#### Rationale

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Lake Superior State University strives to ensure that the overall composition of its faculty and staff reflects human diversity appropriate to its mission and constituencies. LSSU engages in a standardized hiring process that includes mandatory training on hiring procedures including non-discriminatory interviewing. The candidate selection process is reported on an Equal Employment Opportunity form. LSSU reports 66% of its students identify as first generation students and that many staff and faculty were, themselves, first-generation college students, including the University President. LSSU faculty and administrators noted that they view the ability to relate with the LSSU student population as an important variable when hiring new faculty.

LSSU's Office of Human Resources reports that position vacancies are posted in multiple locations including local, tribal and national websites. Open positions are displayed for a minimum number of days to encourage as many qualified applicants as possible to apply. As of academic year 2020-2021, the ethnic make up of LSSU's faculty and staff is 84% White/Caucasian, 1% African American, <1% Canadian Native, 7% Native American, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% Latinx, and 4% Non-Resident Alien.

The institution demonstrates sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both classroom and non-classroom faculty roles. LSSU employs 92 full-time faculty, 7 part-time faculty

and 50 adjunct faculty (adjuncts teach 12% of LSSU courses). LSSU reports an average student to faculty ratio of 16:1. Sixty-eight of the faculty have been with LSSU for at least five years. Students, alumni, and faculty mention small class sizes as a strength of the institution.

LSSU faculty provide curricular oversight via participation in the Curriculum Committee and the General Education Committee. Faculty co-chair these committees along with the provost. Procedures for assessment of student learning were revised in 2019 and involve faculty developing and assessing course learning outcomes (CLOs). CLO assessment data is entered into the "NuventiveImprove system," and assessment results are used by faculty for continuous improvement of courses. CLOs are mapped to program learning outcomes (PLOs) which are developed and reviewed by faculty within individual schools. PLOs, subsequently map to institution learning outcomes (ILOs) which are assessed in capstone courses. Two faculty members represent the faculty on the University Assessment Committee which reviews outcomes data. Faculty qualifications are established through the faculty association and faculty agreement. Such qualifications must meet the minimums established the faculty qualifications policy.

The faculty at Lake State are appropriately qualified. Per the faculty agreement, LSSU establishes qualification to teach a course based upon review of academic transcript, documented professional experience, and other factors consistent with HLC policies and guidelines. Seventy-one percent of LSSU's full-time faculty hold a terminal degree. Concurrent enrollment faculty are evaluated by program faculty and academic administrators to ensure their qualifications. All current concurrent instructors possess a minimum of a Master's degree. Faculty qualifications are maintained in the provost's office and can be updated through the use of a *Teaching Qualification Form*.

In accordance with procedures detailed in Section 8 of the *Faculty Agreement*, LSSU instructors are evaluated regularly. Probationary faculty are evaluated annually with a mid-probationary review conducted in year three of appointment. Tenured faculty complete an annual self-evaluation. Adjunct faculty receive instructional evaluation by a faculty member or dean at least once per academic term in which they teach. Student evaluation of instruction is completed at the end of each term.

LSSU has processes and resources that assure instructors are current in their disciplines. Per the Faculty Agreement, LSSU provides annual monetary support to both full-time and part-time faculty for the purposes of professional development. Over half of the funds allocated in 2018-2019 were used to defray travel expenses for professional development.

In addition, the Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning (CETAL) provides opportunities to faculty to develop as instructors through learning communities, communities of practice and an annual professional development day. CETAL also supports faculty in the scholarship of teaching and learning. LSSU provides a day-long new faculty orientation that includes information on strategies for improving teaching practices. Probationary faculty may also request tenured faculty to serve as mentor(s).

LSSU reports a 16:1 student to faculty ratio, making LSSU instructors appropriately accessible to students. Faculty are required to schedule at least five office hours/week (prorated for part-time faculty) per the faculty agreement. Office hours are published in syllabi and outside offices. As part of the annual faculty self-evaluation and reflection, faculty report on formal academic advising and student development activities such as informal academic advising, career advising, graduate school application advising, scholarship application assistance and student organization advising. Faculty engage in experiential learning (for which they receive course load equivalency) with students including internships, practicums, apprenticeships, and student research.

The University ensures that staff members providing support services are appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their professional development. Tutors are selected from qualified students and receive training covering policies, procedures, customer service and skills applicable to tutoring. Supplemental Instruction tutors are trained by faculty members teaching the course(s). LSSU employs and provides extensive training to students as resident advisors, resident success coaches and commuter success coaches.

Campus life, financial aid and business operations staff are provided opportunities for on-the-job training, in-house training and external professional development. Human Resources staff report that minimum position qualifications are developed by appropriate office staff and reviewed by managerial human resources personnel. The Office of Human Resources utilizes College and University Professional Association (CUPA) data to establish equitable and competitive classification and salary. New staff are onboarded and oriented by human resources representatives and receive relevant on-the-job training. All students, staff and faculty complete annual Title IX training.

Faculty serve as academic advisors. The Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning (CETAL) began providing multiple professional development opportunities on advising beginning in 2018. Deans and peer faculty train probationary faculty in academic advising procedures and skills, and the Provost's website includes an advising handbook which was updated in Fall of 2020. Faculty receive feedback on their advising processes via a common advising survey found in appendix C of the *Faculty Agreement*, and superior academic advising is recognized via the Excellence in Advising Award, for which the nomination form is located on the provost's webpage.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*



## 3.D - Core Component 3.D

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

1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its offerings and the needs of its students.
4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites and museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Because one third of LSSU students receive Pell Grant funding, the institution provides student support services that meet the specific needs of its students. Lake State, through the FAFSA process, identifies 59% of its students as low income. LSSU provides support for low income students including emergency monetary resources, food pantry, and clothing resources. Emergency funds were utilized to meet student needs caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. LSSU also provides assistance in Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) preparation and education around financial literacy.

LSSU provides services to academically disadvantaged or struggling students through its Academic Success Center (ASC) and the Individualized Plan for Academic Student Success (IPASS) program. Services offered include in-person and online tutoring, supplemental instruction, Writing Center, Math Center and academic skills development. Accessibility Services provides students with disabilities necessary accommodations and testing services provides accommodated and makeup testing services. The Shouldice Library staff provide additional academic support. Recent layoffs in the area of academic support services have resulted in the need for reorganization and cross-training of staff and reduction of hours for some services. Administrators in these areas note that lower staffing levels create challenges but provision of services has continued.

Students' social and physical needs are addressed through programming from the University Recreation (UREC) Program, the Regional Outdoor Center (ROC), Campus Life and residential Life. Programming includes sports, daytrips, outdoor equipment rental, social and cultural events, performing arts events, transportation services and first-year experience services. Campus Life promotes and tracks attendance at events through the Involvio app, purchased in 2018. Financial aid and career services staff note that they present information on financial literacy and career preparation in first year University Seminar courses. Career services reports hosting career readiness events and career fairs.

Information technology needs are assessed; LSSU doubled its bandwidth capacity prior to spring 2020 which facilitated the transition to remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many student support services transitioned to remote or online modalities including mental health and telehealth services and online tutoring. Other COVID-19 pandemic-related IT investments included the development of a coronavirus dashboard to provide current information, purchasing of Zoom licenses and hardware such as webcams.

LSSU proactively provides learning support and preparatory instruction that meets the academic needs of its unique student population. For example, Lake State provides developmental and support courses including developmental reading, developmental mathematics, co-requisite skill-building courses in composition and mathematics, and first year experience (required of all freshmen as of AY19-20) courses.

LSSU has processes in place that direct entering students into courses and programs for which they are adequately prepared. Students' initial mathematics placement is based upon college entrance test scores or ALEKS score and is illustrated in the Mathematics Placement Guide and Course Placement Chart. Mathematics placement ranges from MATH 088 Beginning Algebra (developmental course) to MATH 151 Calculus I. Students placed into MATH 088 or MATH 102 Intermediate Algebra are recommended to take MATH 107 Building Mathematics Confidence. A grade of "C" or better is required for students to progress to the next course in their mathematics sequence. English placement is self-directed with the exception of those students scoring the equivalent of 17 or lower on the ACT who were directed into READ091 (developmental course). All students are eligible to enroll in ENGL 110 First-Year Composition and may opt to enroll in ENGL 105 First-Year Composition Workshop, a co-requisite skill-building course. Students meet with discipline-specific advisors during orientation who help the student choose and register for appropriate classes. Academic advisors assist students in choosing courses and the student information system (Anchor Access) provides automated validation for pre-/co-requisite course completion. In 2015, a freshman survey indicated that many students were unable to adequately exercise their academic plans due to lack of midterm grade reporting. LSSU administrators and faculty worked together to improve consistency of midterm grade reporting and report achieving 95% midterm grade reporting as of Fall 2020.

Faculty within the students' majors serve as academic advisors. Per the *Faculty Agreement*, faculty are to dedicate 5-20% of their time to advising (which may include additional advising and counseling beyond academic advising). First-year probationary faculty are not assigned as academic advisors; probationary faculty advisors receive training on academic advising from deans and faculty colleagues. LSSU provides faculty with a *Faculty Advising Handbook* (revised in 2020) containing resources and instruction on the student-centered advising process. LSSU began surveying students regarding academic advising experiences in 2015 and has revised the instrument used, most recently in spring 2020. Results of the survey are used for continuous improvement. Faculty report on their advising activities in their annual self-assessment. Beyond the formal academic advising conducted by faculty, informal advising is provided by student support offices including Career Services, Laker Success and the Counseling Center.

LSSU's Information Technology (IT) office maintain and support University hardware and software necessary to support academic and support programs. IT provides classroom technology including instructor stations, software, webcams and document cameras. LSSU leases computers in computer labs ensuring that each machine is less than five-years-old. IT develops a 10-year budget plan to ensure network infrastructure is sufficient to needs. LSSU provides WiFi (802.11g) and doubled its bandwidth capacity in January of 2020. LSSU utilizes Moodle as its Learning Management System

for online, hybrid and face-to-face courses.

LSSU provides to students and instructors the facilities necessary to support teaching and learning in programs with significant experiential learning requirements. LSSU's campus laboratory facilities include the Robotics and Automation Laboratory, nursing laboratories, the Superior Simulation Center for clinical simulation, Cannabis Chemistry laboratories, Geographic Information System (GIS) laboratory, science laboratories, Superior Analytics Laboratory, computer science laboratories, and Center for Freshwater Research and Education (CFRE). LSSU addresses facilities needs within its strategic plan; initiatives have included lighting and environmental control upgrades, card access and improved HVAC efficiency. LSSU maintains off-campus clinical site agreements in health care settings including War Memorial Hospital, Helen Joy Newberry Hospital, Mackinac Straits Health System, Schoolcraft Memorial Hospital, Sault Tribe Recreation Center and War Memorial Rehab Center. Students in education complete student teaching clinical experiences in local K-12 schools. Internship opportunities (local, regional and remote) have also been established for students in business, criminal justice, fire science and parks and recreation.

The Shouldice Library collection includes over 130,000 print volumes and 220,000 e-books, access to 100+ research databases, a map collection and a collection of regional historical materials. This collection provides LSSU students and instructors the scholarly and creative collections necessary to support teaching and learning. The Shouldice Library Card provides joint library access privileges with local libraries. The Arts Center's performance spaces include 674 seat theater, Black Box theater, music studio and dance studio. The Arts Center Gallery houses a permanent collection of Native American and Western Art, as well as, rotating exhibitions. Both the Arts Center Gallery and the Library Art Gallery exhibit artworks from regional and student artists. Crawford Hall houses the Ernest Kemp Mineral Resources Museum and the Gil Gleason Natural History Museum.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## **3.S - Criterion 3 - Summary**

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The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

### **Rationale**

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As noted in the assurance argument and evidentiary materials, and affirmed through interviews with LSSU faculty, staff, administrators and students, Lake State provides assurances that its students receive a quality education regardless of delivery method or location. LSSU is an exclusively undergraduate institution offering baccalaureate degrees, associate degrees and certificates. LSSU faculty and academic administrators ensure that courses and programs demonstrate appropriate rigor. LSSU supports its academic programs with sufficient resources to conduct the business of teaching and scholarly activity including adequate faculty, appropriate physical facilities, and necessary equipment. As such, LSSU's students are able to engage in a variety of educational activities including experiential learning and development of scholarly and creative works.

## 4 - Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

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The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

### 4.A - Core Component 4.A

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The institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews and acts upon the findings.
2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.
3. The institution has policies that ensure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It ensures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.
5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution ensures that the credentials it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Since the institutions 2016 review and 2018 focused visit, Lake Superior State University has established a regular process of program review in pursuit of continuous improvement of its academic programs, cocurricular programs, and administrative units. Reviews of all academic programs occur on a five year cycle and informs planning and budget decisions. In fact, strategy 3.1.2 of LSSU's strategic plan calls for regular evaluation of academic programs "for overall effectiveness, financial viability, and enrollment growth potential."

Information gleaned from the site visit indicates the institution found the first round of program review "cumbersome," but that the faculty and staff continued to work to streamline and improve the process. This includes putting annual updates into the program review system between the five year interval full reviews and using specialized accreditation in some programs to reinforce LSSU

program review.

LSSU continues to monitor and improve the program review process through its Assessment Committee. Following the 2018 program review cycle, the institution's deans, department chairs, and faculty provided feedback to improve the process. Adjustments made include: revisions to the program review template, a reporting section for program level data and action plans, and a more consistent update process during the years prior to the five-year review.

During the site visit, faculty and staff conveyed how the institution uses the program review process to inform the institution's budget. Embedded within the annual update and the five-year program review forms is a section that addresses budget. Deans, department chairs, and directors have the ability to note how additional faculty or staff positions, equipment, or other budgetary enhancements would assist the program in achieving its goals. These "requests" flow up to the institutional budget process where they are evaluated and, if merited, included in the overall LSSU budget.

The institution holds an "Annual Assessment Update" meeting to provide faculty the opportunity for ongoing professional development among those involved in program review and assessment, both faculty and staff.

Section 13.2 of the *Faculty Agreement* gives faculty the prerogative to propose changes to academic programs based on feedback received from the program review process. Examples of changes made based on program review include:

- Program review of the psychology program helped guide a full restructuring of that program to meet American Psychology Association standards for program outcomes and assessment of student learning.
- Faculty in the Biology Department used program review to address concerns about low acceptance rates to graduate schools for veterinary science majors. The result was the development of a new animal health concentration in the department that focuses more clearly on animal-related experiences.
- The Lukenda School of Business used program review to identify areas of low scores using the major field test given to all seniors. Analysis of the data received from the major field test showed a need to enhance instruction in quantitative business analysis and information systems curricula.

Lake Superior State has also pursued program review for cocurricular and administration units. These include the library, student life, athletics, enrollment management, human resources, and the registrar's office. Program and service improvements implemented as a result of program review of these areas include:

- Development of an online submission and scheduling system for the Writing Center to expand the number of students served successfully.
- Adoption of a new customer relations management platform in Career Services. After one year of use, a total of 403 students and 260 employers had created accounts on the new platform, which assists students in building resumes, searching for jobs, and building professional portfolios.
- Program review revealed to library staff a lack of confidence among students related to academic research. The library now offers drop-in sessions in their instruction lab to allow students easier access to training on library research.

Staff in the registrar's office evaluate previously-earned credit for equivalencies to Lake Superior State University courses and assigns credit based on the relevance and alignment of course content and learning outcomes. Department chairs assist LSSU's registrar's office with questions regarding applicability of another institution's courses to courses taught at Lake Superior State.

Lake Superior State University utilizes the "transfer equivalency tool" housed within the Banner student information system to track all course equivalencies for institutions across the country. Once previously-earned credit is confirmed to align with a course at LSSU, registrar staff enter that fact into the Banner System. Using an online access program known as Anchor Access, prospective students can determine how credits earned at another institution will transfer to Lake Superior State.

The institution has a *Prior Learning Policy*, published in the catalog and online, which outlines the conditions under which LSSU will award credit for skills and knowledge gained outside the university classroom. This policy contains three options for awarding credit outside the classroom. These are: successful completion of a standardized exam (i.e. CLEP or Advanced Placement), prior learning through recommendations of the American Council on Education, and successful completion of LSSU departmental exams. The last example (departmental exams) awards credit to students who prepare a prior learning portfolio that must demonstrate mastery of learning outcomes for a specific course. The portfolios are reviewed and approved by departmental faculty and the appropriate academic dean. Credit awarded under this process is categorized as transfer credit.

As stated earlier, Lake Superior State University has a *Prior Learning Policy* that guides decisions about prior learning, including transfer credit. Credits presented for transfer are evaluated by the Registrar's Office and staff in admissions. Faculty and department chairs also carefully evaluate the content and learning outcomes of proposed transfer credit to ensure alignment and equivalencies with an existing LSSU course.

The *Prior Learning Policy* is posted online on the Office of Admissions "Transfer Student Information" website. Also contained on this website is information related to the Michigan Transfer Agreement, the Michigan Associate of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers transfer agreement, and institution-specific articulation agreements.

Lake Superior State University has policies in place that require students to have earned a C- or higher in a previously-completed course to make that course eligible for transfer credit at LSSU. This ensures that the students performance in a course, approved in content and learning outcomes, merits awarding LSSU credit.

During the site visit, faculty conveyed a strong sense of ownership for all matters related to the curriculum, including authority over pre-requisites, course rigor, student learning outcomes, and pedagogy. For example, faculty in the School of Math and Computer Sciences conveyed the ability to adapt existing degree programs to better meet workforce needs. This included adjusting the curriculum, learning outcomes, and even closing the web development portion of the curriculum due to low enrollment.

Lake Superior State University maintains specialized accreditation in nine academic program areas. These are: business, chemistry, engineering, engineering technology, education, emergency medical technology, firefighting, medical laboratory science, and nursing. LSSU maintains an accreditation website that provides links to each specialized accreditor.

Maintaining specialized accreditation complements Lake Superior State's existing program review

and assessment activities, but does not replace them. Continuous improvement processes within the university are used to strengthen academic programs and assist them in meeting accreditation standards and maintaining specialized accreditation.

Graduate preparedness is evaluated through a variety of means, including scores on graduate placement exams such as the MCAT and GRE, major field tests, national exams, and licensure exams. Since 2017, over 80% of LSSU graduates have scored equal to or higher than national averages on the GRE and MCAT exams. Students in the Lukenda School of Business have had a 90% pass rate or above in seven out of nine categories and an 80% or above pass rate on the remaining two categories since 2010. LSSU graduates taking the national engineering exam have a 90% first-time pass rate compared to a 78% national average. Finally, nursing graduates have a first-time pass rate on the NCLEX of 80% and a 99.6% pass rate for all students, including those taking it more than once.

Lake Superior State University evaluates the success of its graduates through a survey conducted six months following degree completion. Graduates receive an e-invitation from their academic dean to complete the survey, which is standardized across all academic schools. Faculty and administrators use data received from this survey to track placement rates as well as collect narrative data that informs program improvement. For the spring 2020 survey cohort, LSSU had an 84.1% response rate and found that, of those who responded, 89.5% were employed, continuing their education, or both.

LSSU faculty conduct exit interviews in many programs, including business, engineering, mathematics, nursing, and education. Information contained in these exit interviews help inform programmatic changes to enhance student success both in the program and upon completion in the job market. For example, exit interviews in teacher education indicated graduates did not feel confident in differentiating lessons for learners. To address this, faculty reviewed materials on that topic and added learning outcomes on differentiation in several courses.

Several academic program maintain external advisory boards comprised of industry professionals. These include the Lukenda School of Business, which engages its advisory board in strengthening its curriculum and ensuring relevance and rigor in key skills for graduates. For example, the industry advisory board identified a weakness among graduates in advanced Excel skills. Based on that feedback, the School of Business embedded learning activities in several business courses to strengthen students' understanding and aptitude in using Excel.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*



## 4.B - Core Component 4.B

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

1. The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and cocurricular offerings.
2. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
3. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty, instructional and other relevant staff members.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Following a 2018 focused visit, the institution has addressed issues related to its assessment of student learning. In those three years, LSSU has restructured its assessment processes to ensure course and program-level outcomes are measurable, consistent, and improvements are data driven. The institution has a comprehensive assessment plan to guide overall assessment activities and has acquired a relational database (Nuventive) to collect, house, aggregate, and report assessment activities, findings, and action plans in a central location. Faculty and academic administrators can access Nuventive to create reports that drive continuous improvement of programs across campus.

Since 2018, all course, program, and institution-wide learning outcomes have undergone a review and changes have been made to strengthen both the process and outcomes. One change, for example, is a requirement that each semester all faculty submit course syllabi to their dean for review of learning outcomes to ensure they are focused and measurable. The feedback from this review is received by the faculty in the first few weeks of each semester so, if necessary, adjustments can be made. The implementation of these changes are overseen by the deans.

Faculty receive a variety of resources to assist them with creating relevant, measurable learning outcomes for their courses. These resources include: a syllabus template, syllabus guidelines, detailed instructions for writing outcomes that are specific, student-focused, and measurable, and peer assistance for those faculty who need additional support. Faculty are responsible for keeping their learning outcomes updated in Nuventive and inputting results each semester for analysis and continuous improvement.

At the course level, faculty at Lake Superior State University use data collected through assessment activities, and entered into Nuventive, to inform continuous improvement in both academic and co-curricular programs. Examples of improvements made to courses through the assessment process include:

- The chemistry department identified through a particular exam that an unacceptable amount of

- students (36%) in Chem 108 were unable to calculate the number of moles in a mass. As a result, faculty in the department imbedded additional homework on that topic, provided students more time to make those calculations during the exam, and began encouraging students to attend tutoring (known as "supplemental instruction") for that particular class.
- Students in ENGEE 125 were unable to utilize the logic analyzer software for digital circuit analysis. As a result, a student assistant was hired for the lab to demonstrate and assist with that and other pieces of equipment and software. Early results from this adjustment show improved student learning in the laboratory.
  - A review of data collected in CHLD 225 shows students ability answer question #4 was less than expected. As a result, a new emphasis will be placed on writing earlier in assignments given as part of the field experience.
  - Students in Math 251 taking an exam showed difficulty correctly answering questions related to equations of surfaces. As a result, the instructor chose to spend more time in class emphasizing that topic, particularly as it relates to how they are embedded in problems.

At the program level, faculty have used data from assessment activities to strengthen program outcomes, including:

- Faculty in the College of Science and Environment looked at D/F grades, withdrawals, and drops in General Chemistry I and General Chemistry II courses. The rates of completion were around 60%, meaning 40% of student who enrolled did not complete the course successfully (D/F grade, withdrawal, or drop). As a result, faculty developed one-credit-hour "recitation courses" for each of the above courses to assist students with acquiring material. Second, faculty who had higher completion rates for these courses were assigned the larger sections of the courses. Finally a faculty sub-committee developed plans to change the format for the above courses from one-hour sessions four days a week plus a one-hour lab to one-hour sessions meeting three days a week with a one-hour lab on the fourth day, but the inclusion of a one-credit-hour "associated course" on the fifth day to assist students with the material.
- Faculty in the Math Department found, following review of assessment data, that only 72% of students achieved satisfactory performance on symbolic learning outcomes. As a result, the department strengthened the assessment question, eliminated grading disparities across course sections, and increased the teaching emphasis placed on symbolic understanding in relevant courses.
- Nursing faculty reviewed data from the NCLEX exam and also asked students how prepared they felt for each of the areas of the exam. Based on that data and feedback, the Nursing Department has implemented additional instruction focusing on the connection between pathophysiology and pharmacology. A new elective course in pathopharmacology has also been added to the curriculum to strengthen scores in that area of the NCLEX exam.
- Faculty in both the computer science and computer networking programs identified a weakness in a common learning outcome related to communication. The learning outcome specifically says, "Students will be able to communicate effectively with clients." Assessment data, including client surveys, presentation evaluations, and peer evaluations, showed a weakness in this area. As a result, both programs added a technical writing course for majors that puts an emphasis on communication skills.

Since the 2016 comprehensive review and 2018 focused visit, Lake Superior State appears to have developed a more substantive culture of assessment. The assurance argument states that all faculty are involved in designing, implementing, and assessing learning outcomes and assessment strategies that are mapped to program and institutional learning outcomes. Faculty report and discuss their

course-level assessments with their colleagues to determine appropriate courses of action for continuous improvement. The creation of this culture of assessment has strengthened faculty ownership of courses and governance over the curriculum and encouraged peer-to-peer input and responsibility when discussing the quality of courses and instruction.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 4.C - Core Component 4.C

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

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence and completion that are ambitious, attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Faculty and staff across the Lake Superior State University campus share a strong sense that retention and persistence is a common responsibility of all members of the university community. This was evident in evidence collected during the site visit that included:

- Living/learning communities are run by a wide variety of offices and departments at LSSU and responsibility for their success is shared across organizational boundaries. For example, staff in the library run the Laker Spirit House with assistance from offices in the student affairs division. The Laker Spirit House is designed to assist first-generation college students with issues that impact retention and persistence.
- Likewise, the Engineering program operates a living/learning community home stocked with equipment obtained from private donors with the assistance of the development office. Staff in student affairs assist all living/learning communities with assessment of the impact of these houses each year.
- Staff in Financial Aid assist students who take out direct student loans by educating them on their responsibility to repay those loans and under what circumstances that repayment will occur. This helps to lower the institutions default rate and keep more students on track to progress toward graduation.

The institution's goals for retention, persistence, and completion are contained in the goals, strategies, and initiatives of the 2020-2025 strategic plan. The institution has set for itself a target of 75% student retention. During the site visit, when asked how they planned to meet that goal, faculty and staff noted several initiatives, including:

- Faculty in the College of Business identify and engage students who have not yet enrolled for the upcoming semester. Oftentimes, according to those same faculty and staff, this is because of low grades, dissatisfaction with the program, and a balance due on their student accounts. Faculty assist students in identifying and engaging resources that can assist with each of those areas of concern and, ultimately, leads to continued enrollment and progress toward completion of a credential.
- Nursing faculty are assigned advisees based on their seniority within the department. Those faculty who have been at LSSU longer receive more student advisees and are assigned those students who need special attention. Shorter-tenured faculty are assigned a smaller number of advisees and those who are generally on track to progress. Nursing faculty are held accountable for the continued persistence of their assigned advisees and must provide a rationale to the department when one of their students does not persist.
- Coaches and staff in Intercollegiate Athletics have "team nights" where relationships are built between student athletes themselves and with coaching staff. These team nights, which are geared around fun, teambuilding activities, help fight homesickness. Alumni members of teams mentor athletes through this program as well. The goal for Intercollegiate Athletics through this "team night" initiative is 100% retention of student athletes.

Lake Superior State University utilizes IPEDS definitions to measure retention, persistence, and completion and tracks data for first to second year retention by first-time degree seeking students. For example, LSSU's cohort retention rates for Fall 2015 was 72% and increase to 73% for the fall 2019. These rates of retention are consistent with peer institution data provided by the institution through the assurance argument.

The institution has also set a goal for degree completion rates to be at or above national averages for peer institutions using IPEDS definitions. Tracking completion rates for cohort data in 2016, the institution had a 40% graduation rate in 150% of normal time (four to six years for a bachelor's degree), whereas peer groups identified through IPEDS had a 31% graduation rate during that same period. In 2019, the numbers were similar with LSSU having a 54% graduation rate and peer groups having a 42% rate.

At both the institution and program levels, data related to retention and persistence is analyzed continually and used to make changes that positively impact those two important factors. According to the assurance argument, these include analyzing the data by factors such as first generation college student, low income students (based of the FAFSA estimated family contribution metric), and diversity designations such as Native American. Not only is this data analyzed by faculty, staff, and administration, but the Board of Trustees receives an annual report on retention, persistence and completion that informs strategic and budgetary decisions at the institution level.

Academic deans annually review data collected from assessment and program review processes to identify "gateway courses" that are impacting student retention and persistence. Data collected has assisted academic leadership in engaging faculty who teach in these "gateway courses" to improve their course completion rates. One example of this, obtained during the site visit, is in the math department's first level math course. Faculty and academic leadership identified this course as being a stumbling block to retention and persistence. As such, the department used funds available from a vacant position to hire a developmental math specialist to restructure and strengthen the institution's developmental math courses and sequence. This change helped increase student completion of the course and, ultimately, retention and persistence toward graduation.

Staff in the Division of Student Affairs actively monitors and makes contact with students who have

financial or non-financial holds on their LSSU student accounts. Often times small "holds" on student accounts are barriers to enrolling for future semesters of applying for graduation. Staff in Student Affairs assist students in remedying these holds, which then frees the student up to continue academic progress toward graduation.

The Lukenda School of Business used data collected on retention and persistence to increase students' sense of belonging within their academic program. Initiatives to better connect students to the faculty and program included bringing guest speakers to campus, creating a BUSN 101 freshman seminar where students meet faculty and learn about degree programs, and connecting students with academic and student support resources early in their academic career to better make use of these services to improve retention and persistence.

The Culinary Arts Program identified a correlation between attendance and retention and completion of the program. As such, faculty now routinely inform students of their attendance rate and use attendance as an early alert indicator. Students with poor attendance are identified early, contacted, and assisted with whatever personal or institutional issues are preventing them from routinely attending class.

Lake Superior State University uses IPEDS to collect and track data related to retention, persistence, and completion of an academic credential. Based on information collected from the assurance argument and the site visit, LSSU's data collection and use processes reflect current best practices.

LSSU has chosen measures, such as first to second year retention and 150% normal time graduation rates, that reflect best practices nationally and utilizes IPEDS definitions so as to accurately compare themselves to other institutions. To that end, LSSU has chosen a relevant peer institutions to compare themselves to and does so routinely and effectively.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## **4.S - Criterion 4 - Summary**

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The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

### **Rationale**

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In the 2016 decennial review by a comprehensive site visit team, Lake Superior State University's program review and assessment processes were identified as requiring ongoing monitoring.

In that time, the institution has developed a robust program review process that requires all academic programs and many co-curricular programs to be reviewed every five years. Based on their experience in the first round of program review, the institution has already made improvements to the program review process and strengthened its relation to budget and strategic planning.

As for assessment of student learning, Lake Superior State University appears to have strengthened its processes in such a way that clearly demonstrates how faculty and academic leadership have a strong sense of shared responsibility for student learning outcomes. It would appear from the assurance argument and site visit that all academic departments are actively engaged in assessment and that LSSU uses the data collected through assessment to make regular and substantive improvement to its academic and co-curricular programs.

Based on the 2021 assurance argument and Year 4 review, the institution has made significant progress in both of these areas and now appears to have met the criteria and all four core components.

## 5 - Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

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The institution's resources, structures, processes and planning are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

### 5.A - Core Component 5.A

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

1. Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.
2. The institution's administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.
3. The institution's administration ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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In comparing the 2016 HLC peer review and the 2020 assurance argument, evidence of increased transparency and shared governance comes to the fore. The assurance argument attributes this improvement to the installation of Lake Superior State's 10<sup>th</sup> president, Dr. Rodney Hanley in June 2018. Comments made by administrators, faculty, and the Student Government Association president during the site visit emphasized the important benefits that have come from having a stable leadership team in the last two years.

Regularly scheduled and posted meetings of the University's Board of Trustees (appointed by the Governor of Michigan), its senior management team (SMT), its academic governance committees (e.g., Curriculum, General Education and Assessment), administrative departments, and Student Government allow for an awareness of the decision-making process and the opportunity for input. The *Faculty Agreement* outlines and protects faculty control in curriculum oversight, development, and assessment. The access of the Student Government Association (SGA) president to key decision-makers at the University (through bi-weekly meetings with the president and provost) is particularly noteworthy and reflects the Institution's commitment to student learning and engagement.

Collaborative and responsive decision-making was demonstrated when the University convened the COVID-19 Response Team in March 2020, representing a broad base of the University's stakeholders. This group met three times each week and more frequently if needed to monitor and



respond to the progression of the virus at the local, regional, and state level. The response team also informed the campus community of changes to operations driven by the pandemic by using a Coronavirus dashboard.

The University maintains an assessment tool that documents and records progress toward curricular (e.g., institutional learning outcomes) and administrative goals (e.g., the strategic plan). The University Assessment Committee reviews data in this tool and uses it to initiate improvements.

The University's strategic plan for 2020-2025 was developed with shared governance, led by a Planning Committee with broad representation from stakeholder groups. The Planning Committee conducted 35 listening sessions from students, faculty, staff, students, advisory boards, and Tribal Leaders. The final strategic plan was broadly shared and appears on the University website. The five goals and more than 150 strategic objectives have been loaded into the assessment tool. Each goal is assigned to a member of the senior management team for tracking and advancement.

The University has several processes in place for collecting and reviewing data. These include assessment results at the course and program level, enrollment reports, and surveys of various constituents.

Examples of data-driven decisions include the discontinuation of the Athletic Training Program. When the National Athletic Trainers Association Strategic Alliance instituted a mandatory master's level requirement for such programs, LSSU used data from enrollment in its bachelor's program to determine that enrollment potential to support such a graduate program was insufficient. Enrollment data also led to the suspension of academic programs in communication, computer networking, history, medical laboratory science, and sociology. In contrast, labor market data and the growth of FIRST Robotics programs in area high schools led to the creation of the robotics engineering BS degree and the robotics concentration, each of which positions LSSU ahead of other public universities in Michigan. An awareness of market trends supported LSSU's decision to launch the cannabis chemistry and cannabis production programs, following the 2019 legalization of cannabis in Michigan and Ontario.

The creation of new programs such as those in cannabis and robotics are aligned with the University's need to grow its overall enrollment. The same is true for decisions to expand sports and club activities, based on input gathered from students.

However, significant data and connection points seem to be absent from the budget planning process. These observations are discussed in greater detail in Criterion 5.B.3.

The development of the strategic plan and the work of the Covid-19 Response Team are strong examples of broad involvement in the decision-making of the University. Academic requirements and policies appear to rest largely with the Faculty although administrators and students are included in several decisions. Student feedback and student performance on licensure examinations have resulted in modifications to academic programs.

Meeting agendas and minutes show evidence of a dynamic shared governance system in which faculty, staff, and students are working toward continuous improvement of the University. Corresponding examples related to the University's budget and financial situation are absent from the assurance argument and may benefit from further development.

**Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 5.B - Core Component 5.B

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

1. The institution has qualified and trained operational staff and infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
2. The goals incorporated into the mission and any related statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources and opportunities.
3. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring its finances.
4. The institution's fiscal allocations ensure that its educational purposes are achieved.

### Rating

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Met With Concerns

### Rationale

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As of the date of the site visit, Lake Superior State University reports 149 full and part-time instructional staff (92 FT and 57 PT); 143 administrative professionals; and 76 education support professionals. Information provided by the University website, in its relevant documents, and during the site visit, support the assurance argument regarding policies and practices for Equal Employment Opportunity hiring, for on-boarding, and for Title IX Training. Faculty members are engaged in numerous professional development opportunities and many are active in research.

Faculty qualifications as described on the University's website are consistent with HLC provisions although Lake State does allow for exceptions at the Bachelor's degree level. Faculty activity and comments made during the site visit indicate that faculty members are aware of the University's fiscal challenges and thus far have been cooperative. For example, several have worked to create new academic programs without adding additional faculty lines.

The University reduced the number of staff in 2020, particularly in academic support and facilities services. Comments during the HLC site team visit indicated that additional layoffs may occur in the coming months. These reductions and their impact are not discussed in assurance argument. During the site visit, academic deans reported that oversight and advising functions were consolidated so that shared staff can cover more than one remote location. On campus, academic services functions were consolidated with a reduction of staff. For example, reductions of full-time library staff have resulted in student staff covering the library after 5:00 p.m. The Academic Services Center and the Career Center have been consolidated under one full-time staff member, although the expansion of such services is a goal in the institution's strategic plan.

The University's contract with the MEA-NEA Education Support Professionals (ESP) Association expired in September 2020. Bargaining of the new contract began on October 7, 2020 and has continued. In the interim, both sides have agreed to extend the provisions of the expired contract. The Faculty Association contract runs until August 31, 2022 with a provision to begin bargaining

180 days prior to contract expiration.

As of the date of the site visit, LSSU operates a 115-acre campus in St. Sault Marie, Michigan. Physical infrastructure considerations are significant. Although the University itself was established in 1946, it sits on the former site of Fort Brady which operated from 1894 to 1944. Fourteen of the 28 campus buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Thus, Lake State faces the challenge of maintaining a reasonably large physical plant with aging facilities. The University engaged Johnson Controls, Inc. in 2018 to address infrastructure upgrades, safety and security upgrades, and energy reduction initiatives. The \$23.6M project was financed through a bond and the work was largely completed by the end of 2020. The University intends to use the savings from energy reduction initiatives to offset the debt service payment on the bonds.

Despite the efforts to improve the efficiency of its facilities, a misalignment between enrollment and physical plant size persists. Average building usage ranges from 27% (if calculated on a 65 hour week) and 33% (if calculated on a 45 hour week). More than 80% of the lecture sections on campus enrolled fewer than 30 students and the approximately 200 laboratory classes had fewer than 20 students per class. The 5 regional off-site locations account for approximately 1% of total enrollment. 95% of enrollments are at the home campus in Sault St. Marie. The University prides itself on its low student-to-faculty ratio of 17:1 and its student-to-administrative ratio of 22:1.

In addition to the infrastructure projects undertaken through Johnson Controls, the University's *Campus Master Plan* identifies that the "deferred maintenance backlog for general fund facilities is currently estimated at about \$7M." Its *Campus Master Plan* indicates, "The University plans and budgets to address repairs and replacements and prioritizes the deferred maintenance of its aging buildings and infrastructure to the fullest extent possible but will never expect to be able to fully catch up with the backlog of deferred maintenance without assistance."

Even in the face of such deferred maintenance challenges, the University completed more than 15 recent projects/improvements on campus in recent years. These include the Nursing Simulation Center, the Cisler Gallery Grill, the Library Learning Commons, the Golf Simulator Upgrade, the new keyless entry system across campus, and the consolidation for fire and safety systems.

In addition to its main campus, LSSU owns a 2 acre parcel on the St. Mary's River, adjacent to the Cloverland hydroelectric facility. This site is the location of LSSU's \$13.2M Center for Freshwater Research and Education. That project was funded in part through a capital outlay allocation from the State of Michigan and in part from private donations. Funding of the final \$1M remains to be determined although the financial report indicates that it is being incorporated into the FY20 and FY21 budgets. The University owns a few donated parcels of land which can be used for research or held for resale. The University also maintains five remote locations (Escanaba, Hessel, Iron Mountain, Petoskey, and St. Helen). Of these, the closest is in Hessel (approximately 38 miles); the furthest is Iron Mountain (approximately 226 miles).

The University's technology infrastructure is maintained through regular updates to its systems such as Banner, Argos, Moodle, and Nuventive Improve. Its website has been updated to ensure ADA compliance. The campus utilized Zoom for remote instruction during the pandemic. The *Involvio* app enables students to access LSSU resources and updates. Broadband access in the region is lower than in the more urban areas of the state, a factor that may pose additional challenges for students in more remote areas of the Upper Peninsula. The University has shown its ability to incorporate technology into its academic programs as evidenced by the new robotics engineering BS program (2018), the nursing simulation center, and the cannabis chemistry labs.

The University's 2020-2025 strategic plan and related activities reflect the University's commitment to student success. As described in the strategic plan, Lake State's value proposition is to "facilitate upward social mobility at a comparatively low cost." LSSU's choice of programs appear to be thoughtful, innovative, and well-suited to its location.

New programs, such as the cannabis programs and the robotics engineering program, are grounded in economic growth areas for the State of Michigan and the region surrounding Lake State. The University's most recent capital investment, the Center for Freshwater Research and Education (CFRE), will open in 2021. The center's vision is to "inspire our community and sustain our Great Lakes." Its location overlooking the St. Marys River, great lakes, and Canadian border position it for strong national and international partnerships in freshwater research and education. The CFRE also houses the Environmental Analysis Laboratory (EAL), allowing for an expansion of analysis services to local, state, and federal monitoring programs. In conjunction with the new CFRE development, LSSU's fish hatchery has raised \$50,000 for renovation of its facilities for the study of fish culture.

The University's *Campus Master Plan (2020-2025)* indicates an intention to expand programs in parks and recreation, kinesiology, and criminal justice programs through the creation of a 150,000 sq. ft. Center for Outdoor Learning and Experiences (COLE). In Michigan, outdoor recreation is a \$10 billion industry with a need for skilled practitioners and leaders.

However, even though the University's goals (and its organization and observable activities) are consistent with its mission and aligned to the needs of the region, the question of whether such goals are realistic in light of LSSU's resources and opportunities is a cause for concern.

The University's HLC total composite financial indicator (CFI) score has dropped from 2.85 in 2017 to -.08 in 2020. In addition to the overall CFI, the institution's score in each of HLC's four primary ratios also weakening from 2017 to 2020.

In responding to the HLC site visit team's request for the 2020 ratios, the institution's chief financial officer provided the following explanation: "Three factors directly led to the drop in the CFI: 1) a significant reduction in the state appropriation (11.5% one-time reduction in FY 2020), 2) a reduction of revenue due to COVID-19, and 3) investment into the University's infrastructure" Although COVID-19 and the corresponding delay in state funding might have accounted for a one-year drop in FY 2020, it would not have explained the persistent decline over the last four years.

Framed somewhat differently, the HLC site visit team noted two primary drivers of the financial challenges facing Lake Superior State University: significant debt and low enrollment. These challenges are not unique to LSSU but they do require a strategic financial plan, the absence of which will inhibit the University from achieving its goals and regaining its financial footing.

As the 2020 *Financial Report* states, "LSSU has increased its debt service by over 100% in the last few years." Encumbrances include:

- A 2020 line of credit for \$3 million to meet cash flow needs related capital expenditures;
- Bond initiatives in both 2012 (\$21.9 million) and 2019 (\$23.3million);
- Lab equipment costs of \$1 million for the cannabis chemistry program, and estimated cost overruns of \$1 million for the Center for Freshwater Research and Education building.
- Smaller loans, such as for the equipment in the fitness center, are also mentioned in the financial report.

Principal and interest on the bonds in 2021 is listed as \$2.6 million in the *Financial Report*. The Board of Trustees has refinanced the 2012 bonds in order to reduce the annual payments by about \$120,000. Information from the assurance argument indicates that, "LSSU has no plans to acquire additional debt over the next five years."

Debt service and other transfers are the first step in the budget process although the information seem to be confined to staff in the business office and perhaps the senior leadership team. Information on debt service can be gleaned from the *Financial Report* but does not seem to be available in one clear, consolidated way. The *Financial Report* indicates that plans for debt repayment have been created by building resources in the plant fund.

In addition to the care of its historic and aging campus, the University faces additional pension liability as do most universities in Michigan. Michigan Public Act 300 of 1980 requires the University to contribute amounts necessary to finance the coverage of pension benefits of active and retired members of the Michigan Public School Employees Retirement System (MPSERS). Lake Superior State University's contributions to the plan in 2020 were approximately \$1.4 million. As of June 30, 2020, the University reported that its share of MPSERS net pension liability was just over \$20 million.

"Revenues of the University consist of four main categories: tuition, state appropriations, auxiliary activities, and other revenue. Tuition and fees, net of scholarship allowances, make up the largest contribution to the total revenue of the University." This statement underscores the critical role enrollment plays in the financial stability of the institution. Enrollment growth, through the recruitment of new students and increased retention of current students, are major themes in the University's strategic plan. The University is currently operating far below its enrollment capacity, both as measured in physical facilities and in personnel. However, enrollment growth is likely to be a significant challenge for Lake State.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (IPEDS), between Fall 2005 and Fall 2019, total undergraduate enrollment at Lake Superior State University dropped by 31.96% (From 2,916 to 1,984). Enrollment of undergraduate degree-seeking students fell by 34.88% (from 2,669 to 1,738). Enrollment briefly and modestly increased between 2008 and 2011 but returned to a downward trend from 2011 to the present. The University's *Financial Report* describes the change from 2019 to 2020 as follows, "Tuition and fees, net of scholarship allowances, decreased by approximately \$622,000 or 4.5% after a tuition rate increase of 3.03% and a slight decrease in total fall semester headcount." The University reported a 13% increase in first time in any college (FTIAC) students, but that increase did not result in overall enrollment growth.

These enrollment declines are not unique to Lake Superior State University. They mirror the enrollment declines at other regional public universities in Michigan and the Midwest. In Michigan, most of the regional public universities showed enrollment declines from 2010 to 2019 while the State's two flagship institutions – Michigan State and the University of Michigan – showed significant increases.

Regional universities in Michigan face the additional challenge of overall population declines in the state. According to the U.S. Census, Michigan was the only state in the nation to see a population decline between 2000 and 2010. Between the 2010 Census and 2015, the state saw only a 1% increase, placing it 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation for population growth. According to the State of Michigan's Department of Management and Budget, Michigan's Upper Peninsula, home to LSSU, declined by 4.8% between 2000 and 2017. Some population growth is projected between 2022 and 2045 but not

enough to return the region to its 2000 population level. Furthermore, the median age of residents in the Upper Peninsula (43.8) is above the national median age (38.4), LSSU has identified a number of new recruitment strategies (e.g., a new CRM, a more focused communication strategy) but its institutional history, its remote location, and the demographics of its state are countervailing factors.

LSSU's strategic plan includes the goal of raising student enrollment to 2,400 students by 2025. During the site visit, members of the senior management team indicated that an enrollment of 2,400 – 2,600 students would be necessary to achieve financial stability.

The University's Institutional Research webpage lists Fall 2020 enrollment as 1,901. Of these, 585 were new students (both freshmen and transfer). Reaching the enrollment target of 2,400 by 2025 would require, on average growth of 100 students per year, or approximately 5%. This goal is not impossible, but it is ambitious, especially in light of the University's enrollment record and the State's demographic and enrollment trends.

The HLC site visit team was concerned that a more detailed, disaggregated, and focused enrollment plan with targets was not provided. Targets for enrollment growth were provided but they lacked underlying data and specific strategies that would demonstrate the likelihood that they can be achieved. Disaggregated projections by program, remote location, and demographic groups were also not provided, but should be readily available from any institution serious about achieving 5%+ annual growth over the next five years.

The relationship between enrollment growth and revenue is acknowledged by campus leadership but does not seem to be uniformly understood. While the one-rate tuition program should enable greater predictability of tuition revenue, the projections supplied by the chief financial officer, dean of admissions, and the institution's strategic plan differ dramatically. Agreement on strategic enrollment targets and carefully tying enrollment and financial projections together would be a useful next step for the senior management team.

Much of the University's hope for enrollment growth rests on the success of new academic and research programs. The HLC site visit team inquired about the strategic plans on which those expectations were built. Upon request and in follow-up materials, the site visit team received a budget analysis of the cannabis chemistry, robotics engineering, and Center for Freshwater Research and Education (CFRE). Each document provided a retrospective of revenue and operational expenses. No prospective information such as recruitment and enrollment targets, expense projections, capital costs, etc., were included. Also, the Center for Freshwater Research and Education has its own strategic plan. The plan's first goal is to, "contribute to LSSU's financial stability." However, when the HLC site visit team asked for the supporting documentation, the response was comprised of four sentences that indicated the CFRE had received over \$3.5 million in external and block grants since 2018. This is not a plan of sufficient depth and detail with which the institution can hope to achieve any sort of programmatic or financial success.

Given the enrollment challenges described above, and given its overarching commitment to student success, the University is also focusing on improving its retention, particularly of first year students. Goal 1.3 of the University's strategic plan states the institution's desire to "increase first-year student retention to 75%, and increase the percentage of entering students who complete an associate or bachelor's degree by 10%."

Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (IPEDS) paints a variable picture of LSSU's fall to fall retention rates, ranging from 60% to 77% for full-time students. The LSSU Common Data

Set (2019-2020) shows the Fall 2018 to Fall 2019 retention rate of 68%. The institution's history indicates that it is possible for LSSU to improve and stabilize its retention rate. This, in turn, could positively impact its completion rate. Many of the goals of the strategic plan incorporate high impact practices that are likely to support such improvements.

The assurance argument and supporting documents describe the transition from deficit budgets of FY 2019 and FY 2020 to a balanced budget in FY 2021. The board members indicate that they regularly receive detailed budget information. However, members of the Faculty Association indicated they did not have access to that information. Upon further request the March 2021 dashboard provided to the Board of Trustees was given to the HLC site visit team. While it does provide revenue and expenditure data for various university accounts, it does not tie this data to other management lines such as enrollment, personnel, or facilities nor does it include projections. The dashboard does indicate the University may end FY21 with a surplus, especially given HEERF II funding. The assurance argument makes no mention of budget forecasting. Faculty, administrators, and staff on the campus seem to be aware that the University's financial picture is challenging. Through the shared governance system, they have been asked to make cuts and find efficiencies. However, the decrease in the deficit and the reconciliation of revenue and expenditures appears to be the result of administrative action rather than a budget process consistent with other aspects of shared governance.

The assurance argument indicates that the vice president for finance and operations monitors the University's enrollment, retention, and revenue streams. This individual "works closely with the provost to review that data in combination with data from actuals budget reports and *Annual Financial Reports*." However, it is unclear how shared governance factors into the budget development process or whether LSSU stakeholders understand the fiscal challenges facing the University beyond the general fund.

Budget projections through 2023 were required for this HLC interim monitoring visit but were not included with the assurance argument. Follow-up information provided at the site visit team's request yielded budget projections. In addition, that material included the following narrative, "Moreover, there have been no changes to debt repayment plans due to COVID funds. LSSU has no plans to acquire additional debt over the next five years. We are planning to refinance the 2012 bonds in order to reduce annual payments by about \$120k [sic] per year. The bond issuance will take place this August. The bond repayments (actually, all debt service payments) are built into the annual budget by setting aside those funds first. The CFO maintains a separate transfer reconciliation document that captures all debt service and internal transfers of funds. The document is shared with the budgeting and accounting staff for entry into Budgetpak (budget planning) and BANNER. The accounting staff transfer funds periodically (according to directions) and work at year-end to accommodate any smaller transfers need to close the fiscal year. Funds not set aside for debt service are available for budgeting."

It is unclear that unit managers have the needed understanding or tools for engaging with the budget strategically. For example, as a follow-up to the site visit, the site visit team asked about the specific budgets for the new programs like cannabis, robotics, and the Center for Freshwater Research and Education. Faculty and administrators had assured the team that each program had such a budget plan. However, the follow-up information provided showed a review of the tuition revenue and some of the operating expenses for FY 2019 and FY2020. The materials provided lacked a) any future estimates for FY22 or beyond; b) any enrollment targets; and c) any instructional (faculty salary) costs. There seems to be an assumption that, unless the program specifically requires a new faculty



line in addition to the current faculty numbers, it carries no instructional cost.

Recent budget cuts fell largely outside of the instructional area which accounts for 26% of expenditures. The majority of expenditures are devoted to student and public service but it is noteworthy that 11% is in transfers, largely for debt service and another 12% for maintenance of the physical plant. The University's debt load, including its pension liability, could pose significant challenges to future budgets. Meeting its debt obligations must be a priority in the budget process but the institution would benefit from a plan that identifies the impact of debt service on the University's educational and public service endeavors.

Although COVID-19 undoubtedly caused disruption to the University's operations, it appears that the use of CARES Act, HEERF I mitigated the impact on students and enabled the University to provide required support for students during the pandemic. HEERF II funds will enable the University to recoup some of its losses and should have a positive impact on the FY 2021 budget.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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The HLC site visit team identified four issues in Core Component 5B that merited a "met with concern" rating. These were:

**1) A Declining Composite Financial Index Score.** The University's HLC total composite financial indicator (CFI) score has dropped from 2.85 in 2017 to -.08 in 2020. In addition to the overall CFI, the institution's score in each of HLC's four primary ratios also weakening from 2017 to 2020. Although COVID-19 and a corresponding delay in state funding might have accounted for a one-year drop in FY 2020, it would not have explained the persistent decline over the last four years. The site visit team believes the four-year decline in CFI scores corresponds to LSSU having increased its debt service by over 100% in the last few years. Not only could the institution not provide information about how they planned to increase the strength of their financial position as evidenced by the HLC CFI, they seemed rather cavalier about the multi-year decline. In fact, members of the Board of Trustees gave the site visit team a clear, "We've got it under control" message that was not supported by detailed plans, budgets, or strategies crafted by the senior leadership team in collaboration with campus governance and approved by the governing board.

A consistent four-year decline in the University's HLC composite financial index leads the site visit team to conclude the institution has met with concern sub-component 5.B.3: The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring its finances.

**2) Lack of Any Detailed Plans for Increasing Enrollment.** Lake Superior State University's current headcount enrollment is approximately 1,900 students. The University's strategic plan includes the goal of raising student enrollment to 2,400 students by 2025. During the site visit, members of the senior management team indicated that an enrollment of 2,400 – 2,600 students would be necessary to achieve financial stability. While broad targets for enrollment growth were provided, they lacked underlying data and specific strategies that would demonstrate the likelihood that they can be achieved. Disaggregated projections by program, remote location, and demographic groups were also not provided, but should be readily available from any institution serious about achieving 5%+ annual enrollment growth over the next five years.

This lack of detail for increasing enrollment leads the site visit team to conclude the institution has met with concern sub-component 5.B.2: The goals incorporated into the mission and any related

statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources and opportunities.

**3) Lack of Any Detailed Plans for Successful New Academic Programs.** While new academic programs, such as cannabis and robotics engineering, are grounded in economic growth areas for the State of Michigan and the region surrounding Lake State, the documentation provided to the site visit team by LSSU lack specificity and depth. Upon request and in follow-up materials, the site visit team received a budget analysis of the cannabis chemistry, robotics engineering, and Center for Freshwater Research and Education (CFRE). Each document provided a look back at revenue and operating expenses in prior fiscal years, but no forward-looking information such as recruitment and enrollment targets, expense projections, staffing needs, capital costs, etc., were included. Also, the Center for Freshwater Research and Education has its own strategic plan. The plan's first goal is to, "contribute to LSSU's financial stability." However, when the HLC site visit team asked for the supporting documentation, the response was comprised of four sentences that indicated the CFRE had received over \$3.5 million in external and block grants since 2018. This is not a plan of sufficient depth and detail with which the institution can hope to achieve any sort of programmatic or financial success.

This lack of detail for successful new academic programs leads the site visit team to conclude the institution has met with concern sub-component 5.B.2: The goals incorporated into the mission and any related statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources and opportunities.

**4) A Budget Process that Lacks Collaboration and Transparency.** The assurance argument makes no mention of budget forecasting. It can therefore only be assumed by the site visit team that the campus budgets only one year to the next with no forward-looking perspective. Faculty, administrators, and staff on the campus seem to be aware of the University's financial challenges and have responded positively when asked to make cuts and find efficiencies. However, the decrease in the deficit and the reconciliation of revenue and expenditures appears to be the result of administrative action rather than a budget process consistent with other aspects of shared governance. When asked about their role in the budget process, members of the Faculty Association recounted a far more active role with greater transparency in years past. They indicated in Fiscal Year 2021, there was little, if any, information forthcoming from the administration to governance groups that would indicate an interest in the Board of Trustees or senior leadership team in a collaborative, transparent budget process.

The manner in which the Fiscal Year 2021 budget was created with little collaboration and transparency leads the site visit team to conclude the institution has met with concern sub-component 5.B.3: The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring its finances.

**Because sub-components 5.B.2 and 5.B.3 have been met with concern as evidenced above, Core Component 5B and, subsequently Criterion 5, are found by the site visit team to be "met with concern."**

## 5.C - Core Component 5.C

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The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement.

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities, including, as applicable, its comprehensive research enterprise, associated institutes and affiliated centers.
2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning and budgeting.
3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity, including fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue and enrollment.
5. Institutional planning anticipates evolving external factors, such as technology advancements, demographic shifts, globalization, the economy and state support.
6. The institution implements its plans to systematically improve its operations and student outcomes.

### Rating

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Met With Concerns

### Rationale

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The budget process begins with the identification of all debt and transfer fund obligations by the chief financial officer. It appears, through evidence obtained during the site visit, that this important information is not widely known or understood by faculty and staff and appears to be limited in distribution to Business Office staff. The general fund budget is built from the remaining amount, given enrollment and appropriation projections, and these are the budget figures shared with the larger campus community. Page five of the *2020 Financial Report* shows the following allocation of the \$48M operating expenses:

• Instruction	26%
• Research	1%
• Public Service	3%
• Academic Support	6%
• Student Services	5%
• Student Aid	4%
• Institutional Support	11%
• Operation and Maintenance of Plant	10%
• Auxiliary Activities	19%
• Depreciation	10%
• Other	5%

As shown above, instruction accounts for 26% of operating expense. The lines most related to the University's primary focus on teaching and learning (instruction, research, public service, academic support, student services and student aid) total 45% of operating expenditures. Students receiving

Pell Grants has hovered around 40% in recent years which seems to contrast with the University's strong commitment to serving low-income and first-generation students.

Financial support for students was increased by 5% in the 2020-21 budget. Although the total allocation is a small percentage of the total budget, funding for undergraduate research also increased, reflecting a continued commitment to student success.

Of greater research significance and revenue potential is the Center for Freshwater Research and Education (CFRE). The Center will enable LSSU to begin significant research activity related to the Great Lakes, attracting both student engagement and civic support. The University's *Campus Master Plan* indicates that approximately, "40% of all Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) fisheries biologists and 75% of fish production staff are LSSU graduates... Additionally, LSSU provides the majority of all Atlantic Salmon in the Great Lakes (a multi-million dollar industry for Michigan)." Since 2018, CFRE has received more than \$3M in external grants and block funding from the State. The CFRE is one of several University initiatives demonstrating activities and allocations carefully aligned with the University's mission and vision. The Center's new facilities were undertaken with support from the State's Capital Outlay funds and private donations.

The arrival of President Hanley and Provost Gillette in 2018 ushered in a new senior management team (SMT). The dean of student affairs, director of human resources, director of government relations, and dean of admissions have all been appointed since 2019. The vice president for finance, who has 10 years of experience, has announced his retirement, making it likely that an additional new person will be added to the SMT.

The importance of building and stabilizing the leadership team was emphasized by President Hanley, by members of the faculty and staff, and by the Student Government President. In the last two years, the University has significantly improved its shared governance structure, engaged external constituents, strengthened its assessment methods, launched at least four new academic programs, updated its Campus Master Plan, and developed a robust strategic plan. These would be significant achievements under normal circumstances, but the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic makes them all the more remarkable.

However, the HLC site visit team was unable to identify a coherent financial plan aligned to the achievement of the University's strategic goals. Unlike the goals of the strategic plan, which are widely understood and delegated for accountability, financial materials seem less transparent. Trustees reported receipt of a detailed financial dashboard prior to each meeting. However, deans, directors, and faculty reported having less access to financial information than in prior years and less involvement in the budgeting process than previously experienced.

Much of the financial information available is retrospective. Some can be gleaned by the published financial reports and campus master plan documents. Upon request for the planning documents supporting LSSU's new academic programs, the HLC Team received a retrospective analysis of 2019 and 2020 enrollment and partial expenditures.

The University's 2019 and 2020 *Financial Report* indicates that, "The new strategic plan here at Lake Superior State University is intended to be much more than a routine map for the institution, but rather a proactive framework to link the academic mission with the fiscal realities of the university and get it back on solid financial ground" (p. 11).

The recognition of this need is an important first step. Work will need to be done to align the

University's strategic goals with the limited financial information provided to the HLC Team. For example, the strategic plan calls for enrollment growth of more than 25% (from the current 1,900 students to 2,400 by 2025). In contrast, the high-level budget materials provided by the institution's chief financial officer project an enrollment decline of 1% for FY22, followed by modest enrollment growth of 1-2% in each of the following three years. A further example of divergence between strategic goals and financial information can be seen in the institution's strategic plan that call for an expansion of career and academic services and the contrasting reductions in budget and personnel for those areas. Undoubtedly, aspirational strategic goals and prudent budget projections differ at many institutions. But the significant gaps between program and budget planning could undermine the achievement its strategic goals and the morale of its employees.

If Lake Superior State University is currently in the process of developing alternative scenarios or reconciling these projections through its shared governance structure, that information was not shared with the HLC site visit team.

As indicated in the review of Core Component 1, LSSU has engaged numerous internal and external constituents in the selection of its president (2018) and the development of its strategic plan (2019).

LSSU programs benefit from the input of advisory boards such as those in departments such as business, chemistry, and nursing. In addition, the assurance argument and supporting materials indicate active collaboration with numerous local and regional groups. These include its partners at its regional centers and tribal nations. Through work with Cloverland Electric, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and other state, tribal, and federal agencies from the U.S. and Canada resulted in the establishment of the Center for Freshwater Research and Education. Collaboration with the Bay Mills Indian Community Health Center, War Memorial Hospital, Chippewa County Health Department, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, and the Michigan National Guard led to COVID-19 testing on the LSSU campus, a community service. LSSU participates in the Michigan Association of State Universities (MASU).

Many conversations during the site visit reflected an enthusiasm for the current direction of the University and its efforts. In discussing the financial challenges facing LSSU, one faculty member commented that the drive to balance the budget resulted in hard decisions but also prompted them to share resources in ways that had not previously been done. Another commented that that the senior management team was "moving us to a sustainable place [and] it's all hands on deck. Several faculty members who had been at LSSU for a number of years commented that financial woes have long been a part of the narrative on campus but that the "status quo has changed." She talked about the recognition that budgets were being overspent and that the University might be overstaffed. Others commented that the recent layoffs were "really hard" and that healing was needed – "it will take some time before people feel stable." Some faculty traced the new approach to as long ago as six years with general agreement that the current leadership team seems to have a strategy for addressing the financial challenges.

However, budget planning seems less specific and less transparent than the planning for programs and policies. Faculty and staff are aware that financial challenges exist. Trustees and employees expressed confidence in the senior management team's ability to put the institution on more solid ground. However, among the senior management team's next priorities must be a solid analysis of its current financial situation (most notably debt load) and the development of financial projections that support its strategic goals.

The site visit team also heard faculty who expressed the view that the budget process has become

significantly less transparent. Department chairs were not involved in the budget process this year as they would have been in the past. The allocation of course fee monies was a concern. Although the Board reports receiving detailed budget reports and dashboards on the financial health of the College, these are not provided to the faculty nor were they provided to the HLC site visit team.

As the University worked to balance its budget, reductions were made to most departments. Budget reductions from 2018FY and 2020FY show that the smallest cuts were made in instructional lines. However, cuts to other areas ranged from 10 to 50%, including some areas (e.g., career services, testing, and academic success) that are key parts of the University's strategic plan.

The assurance argument indicates that, "Projected costs for FY2021 through FY2023 remain at or below LSSU's projected revenue." However, no greater detail for the FY2022 and FY2023 was provided in the argument. Overall revenue figures of \$37,473,261 (FY22) and \$38,062,389 (FY23) in the assurance argument were revised downward by approximately \$300,000 for each year in the supplemental material provided by the chief financial officer at the HLC site visit team's request.

Undoubtedly, the pandemic added uncertainty to a fragile budget situation. According to information provided by the CFO, the State of Michigan's decision to replace the allocation to public universities with federal pandemic funds pushed the University's composite financial index (CFI) into the negative range because it spanned the FY20 and FY21 fiscal year for the University. Had the state issued the replacement funding in FY20, the CFI would have been .3. This figure still represents a significant drop from the .93 of FY19. The shift in state appropriations and the reduction in revenue from auxiliary services apparently triggered some reduction of personnel as well.

However, federal HEERF funding has given administrators cause for hope as loss of revenue can be reimbursed through HEERFII with estimated infusions of \$2,000,000 - \$5,000,000.

As indicated in the assurance argument and in site visit conversations, the 13% increase to new student numbers in Fall 2020 and the small surplus of \$16,236, are positive signs for LSSU. However, they are fragile, especially when the increase debt service is considerable.

The University's *Annual Financial Report* states that, "Beyond COVID-19, LSSU has increased its debt service by over 100% in the last few years. The institution recently exited from a plan to develop new housing on campus in an effort to contain debt service and review other options. Plans for repayment of all debt has been created and have been implemented in the FY20 and FY21 budgets. Debt service could increase by an additional \$1M due to the Brownfield loan, but repayment plans began in FY20 and are continuing in FY21 so that the entire payment will be available in the Plant Fund once the payment schedule begins" (p.17).

The plans for repayment of debt were not shared with the HLC site visit team although there was an indication that the University intends to, "refinance the 2012 bonds in order to reduce annual payments by about \$120k per year.

It is clear that LSSU hopes that enrollment growth will ease its financial tensions. The capacity for enrollment growth in faculty and facilities is not a problem. Average building usage ranges from 27-33% with small class sizes and numerous independent studies. It is more difficult to ascertain the University's enrollment disaggregated targets, whether by location, student profile, or program participation. Declining enrollment and variable retention rates over the last decade have not yet been met with a focused plan to bring total enrollment to the 2,400-2,600 student levels that senior management team members indicate would result in a more stable budget. Further, a calculation of

the link between enrollment and tuition calculations would provide greater clarity regarding the relationship between student headcount and financial resilience.

The global pandemic has sharpened the focus on contingency planning across higher education. LSSU quickly convened a COVID-19 Response Team that monitored and responded to the pandemic. It quickly purchased a Zoom license to ensure the continuity of instruction. It partnered with area health agencies to incorporate the needs of the surrounding community.

On campus, technology planning includes regular updates and improvements to its website and Learning Management System, Moodle. Attention has been given to classroom technology such as iClickers and online test proctoring software. Broadband access in the Upper Peninsula is lower than other regions of the State and for this reason, student access to the campus broadband on nights and weekends is a concern. However, it did not seem to be a major barrier to student success.

The University's development of new programs in cutting-edge fields like robotics is a sign of its commitment to innovation. It responded quickly to a new market possibility with its cannabis business, chemistry, and production courses. Recognizing the important and growing role of tourism in the area, it partnered with a local culinary school in 2018 to offer the culinary arts chef certificate program.

The University has recognized its role in a global community, especially given its location on an international border. Its "One-Rate" tuition program and its development of transfer agreements with Canadian colleges are signs that it is serious about its goals regarding international education.

The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan shows evidence of broad engagement across the University. The assignment of specific objectives to members of the senior management team and the integration of shared governance units bodes well for a systems approach that will be measurable and productive.

The assurance argument, the supporting documentation, and the interactions of the HLC site visit team with faculty and staff shows a dynamic University with well-intentioned engagement from faculty, staff, and students. This can be a great strength on what is likely to be a steep enrollment and budget climb. More work needs to be done to tie enrollment and budget objectives to the strategic plan and shared governance activities so that all members of the community understand these challenges.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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The HLC site visit team identified two issues in Core Component 5C that merited a "met with concern" rating. These were:

1) Lack of a clear financial plan that aligns with the institution's strategic goals. Lake Superior State should identify a coherent financial plan to achieve the goals outlined in LSSU's strategic plan. For example, the strategic plan calls for enrollment growth of more than 25% (from the current 1,900 students to 2,400 by 2025). In contrast, the high-level budget materials provided by the institution's chief financial officer project an enrollment decline of 1% for FY22, followed by modest enrollment growth of 1-2% in each of the following three years. These two plans are not in alignment and give the HLC site visit team a sense that there is a lack of clear financial planning to achieve strategic goals.

This lack of a clear financial plan that aligns with the institution's strategic goals leads the site visit team to conclude sub-component 5.C.2 is met with concern: The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning and budgeting.

2) Greater transparency and engagement with faculty and staff in the budget process. While conversations with faculty and staff indicated such transparency and engagement had been the norm in prior years, it was not the case in the development of the most recent budget. The institution should return to the norms established in prior years and involve academic and administrative leadership (deans, department chairs, directors, etc.) as well as faculty and staff governance groups in the budget process.

This lack of a transparency and engagement with faculty and staff in the budget process leads the site visit team to conclude sub-component 5.C.3 is met with concern: The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.

**Because sub-components 5.C.2 and 5.C.3 have been met with concern as evidenced above, Core Component 5C is found by the site visit team to have been "met with concern."**



## 5.S - Criterion 5 - Summary

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The institution's resources, structures, processes and planning are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

### Rationale

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Lake Superior State University has accomplished much since its 2016 HLC Review. A new leadership team is in place and has taken important steps to strengthen the University's approach to shared governance. The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan was developed in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders; the delegation of specific goals to members of the Senior Management Team should enable accountability and fulfillment. The atmosphere for teaching and learning is characterized by a number of high impact practices. Small class sizes and a low student-faculty ratio allow for students to receive considerable individual attention. New programs are innovative and aligned well to the University's mission and location. Course and program assessment strategies have been significantly improved. The assurance argument was well-organized and submitted in a timely manner. The HLC site visit team, despite the challenges of the COVID pandemic, met with many stakeholders. The atmosphere was welcoming and cordial with expressed enthusiasm for the University and its current direction.

However, persistent declines in its HLC composite financial index (CFI) for the last four years require greater examination by the Commission. While it is clear that faculty and staff are working hard toward the success of the University and its students, external factors (such as a declining population base and a remote location) and internal factors (such as a significant debt load and aging campus infrastructure), pose real challenges to the University's vitality. LSSU would benefit from a stronger, more accurate, and more aligned understanding of its own data. In the material provided to the HLC Team, enrollment and financial projections seem to point in different directions. The relationship between high debt service and limited general fund availability has not been clearly articulated. Variable retention and low completion rates call into question whether the institution has a clear understanding of the student experience, especially that of part-time students. Nailing down and dealing with its enrollment, retention, and financial numbers will be a critically important next step in the University's development.

## Review Dashboard

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Number	Title	Rating
1	Mission	
1.A	Core Component 1.A	Met
1.B	Core Component 1.B	Met
1.C	Core Component 1.C	Met
1.S	Criterion 1 - Summary	
2	Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct	
2.A	Core Component 2.A	Met
2.B	Core Component 2.B	Met
2.C	Core Component 2.C	Met
2.D	Core Component 2.D	Met
2.E	Core Component 2.E	Met
2.S	Criterion 2 - Summary	
3	Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support	
3.A	Core Component 3.A	Met
3.B	Core Component 3.B	Met
3.C	Core Component 3.C	Met
3.D	Core Component 3.D	Met
3.S	Criterion 3 - Summary	
4	Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement	
4.A	Core Component 4.A	Met
4.B	Core Component 4.B	Met
4.C	Core Component 4.C	Met
4.S	Criterion 4 - Summary	
5	Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning	
5.A	Core Component 5.A	Met
5.B	Core Component 5.B	Met With Concerns
5.C	Core Component 5.C	Met With Concerns
5.S	Criterion 5 - Summary	

## Review Summary

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### Interim Report(s) Required

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#### Due Date

*Not Set.*

#### Report Focus

The comprehensive site visit team in 2016 asked the 2021 team to provide an interim monitoring report on finances, budgeting, and enrollment. With special attention given to those areas, the 2021 team finds the institution has not made sufficient progress in these areas. In fact, LSSU has regressed further in the areas of financial position, budget planning and transparency, and enrollment recovery.

Of notable concern in arriving at this conclusion is the fact that:

- The university's HLC composite financial index has slipped from 2.85 in 2017 to -0.08 in 2020. These two data points are the bookends of a four year consistent decline in CFI scores for Lake State;
- LSSU has no clear multi-year budget plans nor projections for either the institution as a whole nor for its new academic programs;
- Lake State has no clear plans for increasing enrollment beyond starting three new academic programs and hoping for increased headcount. In addition, there is a lack of clarity about what enrollment increase is desirable or realistic. For example, the strategic plan calls for an annual increase of 5%+ in enrollment (from 1,900 students to 2,600 students) while internal projections show a Fall 2022 decrease in enrollment of 1% and modest 1-2% increases the following three years.
- Rather than increasing engagement with faculty and staff during this financial challenge, the university has instead limited information available to internal parties and decreased their role in making budget decisions.

Based on these fact, the Year Four site visit team finds that not only have the concerns expressed by the Comprehensive Year Ten site visit team not been remediated, but also, as of April 2021, core components 5B and 5C are "met with concern."

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### Focused Visit(s)

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#### Due Date

10/31/2023

#### Visit Focus

The Year Four site visit team recommends a focused visit on the issues of financial position, budget planning and transparency, and enrollment recovery to take place no later than October 31, 2023. This gives Lake Superior State University two full financial years to address the concerns expressed in this report and demonstrate progress to a focused visit team.

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## Conclusion

Faculty, staff, students, the governing board, and external partners at Lake Superior State University have much to be proud of in their institution. It was clear to the site visit team that Lake State closely aligns its strategic plan, mission, and vision to create a very special academic environment for its students. This strategic plan, mission, and vision, were created collaboratively with input from internal and external stakeholders, and were imbued in the institution from top to bottom.

Also collaboratively created was the institution's general education program that touches on seven distinct learning outcomes. These outcomes are designed to impart broad knowledge, growth opportunities, and lifelong learning among students that equips them to live and work in a multi-cultural world. These outcomes were reinforced consistently throughout the university's academic endeavors and appear to be actively "lived" by faculty, staff, and students alike.

Clearly communicated was Lake State's commitment to continuous improvement. This was evidenced by a program review process that puts each degree program and many co-curricular activities on a five-year review cycle. Evidence collected during program review is used to determine future actions including updating curriculum, expanding or contracting offerings, and informing the program's relevance to the students and the region's workforce needs. LSSU also has a robust program of course, program, and institutional assessment outcomes that feed into the program review process. Most notable for the visit team was how assessment has been infused into the institution's culture - a clear step forward from what was observed by the previous site visit team.

Interactions with the university's Board of Trustees showed individuals who took their leadership responsibilities seriously and were engaged in the realities of leading a small, public university in a rural part of the state and nation. The institution's array of baccalaureate degrees (50), associate degrees (25), minors (63), and certificates (8) showed an attentiveness to both a general education and discipline-specific academic programs closely tied to the regions workforce needs.

There was also ample evidence that Lake State is intently engaged with the community through economic development, cultural and athletic events, and academic research.

It was also clear to the site visit team that faculty, staff, and board members have worked diligently over the last four years to address the institution's financial challenges. This includes starting new academic programs, renovating facilities, creating an aggressive strategic plan, and recruiting students from beyond the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

However, despite these valiant efforts, the Year Four site visit team found the institution has continued to slip further into a troubling financial status. This fact was evidenced by the HLC Composite Financial Index score for LSSU. In 2017, Lake State had a CFI score of 2.85 - a very positive financial outlook. In 2020, that score had declined to -0.08. While during the site visit, the administration attributed this decline to COVID-19 and inconsistent payments of 2020-21 state appropriations, this decline did not happen overnight. In fact, since 2017, each subsequent CFI scores has been lower than the one before, showing a four-year deterioration of this metric. The site visit team believes the four-year decline in CFI scores corresponds to LSSU having increased its debt service by over 100% in the last few years. Despite this clear evidence of a trajectory of concern, the institution could not provide clear information about how they planned to increase the strength of their financial position beyond "increase enrollment."

In that regard, the institution indicated in its strategic plan that it intended to increase enrollment from its current level of 1,900 students to over 2,400 students by 2025 - a 26% increase in four short years. In fact, during the site visit, members of the senior management team indicated an enrollment of at least 2,600 students would be necessary for financial stability. In contrast, the high-level budget materials provided by the institution's chief financial

officer project an enrollment decline of 1% for FY22, followed by modest enrollment growth of 1-2% in each of the following three years. These two plans are not in alignment and give the HLC site visit team a sense that there is a lack of clear financial planning to achieve strategic goals.

While broad targets for enrollment growth were provided, they lacked underlying data and specific strategies that would demonstrate the likelihood that they can be achieved. Disaggregated projections by program, remote location, and demographic groups were not available. In reality, any institution serious about achieving a 5%+ annual enrollment growth over the next five years should have such plans and data close at hand. This led to site visit team to conclude there were no concrete plans for Lake State to realistically increase enrollment over the next four years barring an unplanned and unexplainable enrollment increase.

When asked how Lake Superior State planned to increase enrollment, the institution relied primarily on the launch of three new academic programs: freshwater research, cannabis, and robotics. New academic programs certainly do provide the opportunity to increase enrollment, but they also cost money, which an institution struggling financially may not have to spend. Therefore, the site visit team felt it was of utmost importance to see a detailed five year financial plan for these new programs, including recruitment plans, enrollment targets for each of the next five years, capital needs (facilities, equipment, etc.), additional faculty required, five year revenue and expense projections, etc. The institution did provide a backward looking report on revenue and operating expenses in prior fiscal years for each new program, but no forward-looking, strategic, actionable plans nor projections.

When an institution is struggling financially and simultaneously expanding its academic offerings, the creation of an annual operating budget based on a multi-year budget plan is of utmost necessity. In the case of Lake Superior State, no such multi-year budget plan or projection was available. Therefore, the site visit team can only conclude that the campus budgets only one year to the next with no forward-looking perspective. In the case of an annual operating budget, financially stressful times necessitate a greater openness to internal constituents to fully communicate the current situation and the plan to remediate it in coming years. It would appear based on conversations with faculty and staff that rather than opening up more in difficult financial times, the institution has closed the budget creation process. When asked about their role in the budget process, members of the Faculty Association recounted a far more active role with greater transparency in years past. They indicated in Fiscal Year 2020, there was little, if any, information forthcoming from the administration to governance groups that would indicate an interest in the Board of Trustees or senior leadership team in a collaborative, transparent budget process. This is counterintuitive to a strategy for openness and collaboration that will yield the best results as Lake State attempts to emerge from this financial malaise.

The comprehensive site visit team in 2016 asked the 2021 team to provide an interim monitoring report on budgeting, finances, and enrollment. With special attention given to those areas, the team finds, as described above, that the institution has not made sufficient progress in these areas and, in fact, has regressed further in both financial position, budget transparency, and enrollment recovery. Based on this fact, the site visit team finds core components 5B and 5C to be "met with concern." This leads to a finding that Criterion 5 is "met with concern."

Such a finding also leads the team to recommend to the Institutional Actions Council that Lake Superior State have a focused visit no later than October 31, 2023. At that time, the team anticipates LSSU will have made the following improvements to demonstrate full compliance:

- The institution's composite financial index returns to an acceptable range;
- The institution demonstrates a clear, strategic plan for increasing enrollment;
- The institution demonstrates a clear, strategic plan for leveraging new academic programs in a cost-effective manner; and
- The institution returns to a budget process that fully engages faculty and staff in an open, transparent manner.

## **Overall Recommendations**

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### **Criteria For Accreditation**

Met With Concerns

### **Sanctions Recommendation**

No Sanction

### **Pathways Recommendation**

Limited to Standard

## Institutional Status and Requirements Worksheet

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<b>INSTITUTION and STATE:</b>	Lake Superior State University, MI
<b>TYPE OF REVIEW:</b>	Standard Pathway Comprehensive Evaluation
<b>DESCRIPTION OF REVIEW:</b>	<p>Year 4 Comprehensive Evaluation. Will include an embedded interim report on enrollment and budget/finances. The report should include, at minimum, the following: 1) The operating budget for FY2021 (AY2020-2021) and final budget figures for FY2019 and FY2020; 2) Budget projections through FY2023; 3) Current (Fall 2020) enrollment figures for degree-seeking students, broken down by full-and part-time status with comparative numbers for Fall 2019; 4) Comprehensive student retention figures for AY2018-2019, AY2019-2020 and retention projections for AY2020-2021.</p> <p>Embedded monitoring is to be addressed by the institution in the applicable core components of its Assurance Argument. The review team is to ascertain whether the institution has satisfactorily addressed the monitoring issue(s) and will document its findings in the conclusion section of the team report.</p> <p>Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only the following will travel to campus: Christine Hammond. The rest of the team will conduct the evaluation remotely.</p>
<b>DATES OF REVIEW:</b>	3/22/2021 - 3/23/2021
<input type="checkbox"/>	No Change in Institutional Status and Requirements

### Accreditation Status

Nature of Institution

Control: Public

**Recommended Change: no change**

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Degrees Awarded: Associates, Bachelors

**Recommended Change: no change**

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Reaffirmation of Accreditation:

Year of Last Reaffirmation of Accreditation: 2016 - 2017

Year of Next Reaffirmation of Accreditation: 2026 - 2027

# Institutional Status and Requirements Worksheet

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**Recommended Change: no change**

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## Accreditation Stipulations

General:

The institution is approved at the following program level(s): Associate's, Bachelor's

The institution is not approved at the following program level(s): Master's, Specialist, Doctoral

**Recommended Change: no change**

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Additional Location:

Prior HLC approval required.

**Recommended Change: no change**

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Distance and Correspondence Courses and Programs:

Approved for distance education courses and programs. The institution has not been approved for correspondence education.

**Recommended Change: no change**

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## Accreditation Events

Accreditation Pathway

Standard Pathway

**Recommended Change: no change**

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## Upcoming Events

Comprehensive Evaluation: 2026 - 2027

An Embedded Report on program review and assessment will be included in the Year 4 Comprehensive Evaluation.

**Recommended Change: Focused visit on finances, budget planning and enrollment no later than 10/31/2023.**

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## Monitoring

Upcoming Events

None

**Recommended Change: Focused visit on finances, budget planning and enrollment no later than 10/31/2023.**

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## Institutional Status and Requirements Worksheet

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### Institutional Data

Educational Programs		Recommended Change:
<b>Undergraduate</b>		
Certificate	8	_____
Associate Degrees	25	_____
Baccalaureate Degrees	50	_____
<b>Graduate</b>		
Master's Degrees	0	_____
Specialist Degrees	0	_____
Doctoral Degrees	0	_____

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### Extended Operations

#### Branch Campuses

None

**Recommended Change: no change**

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#### Additional Locations

Bay de Noc Community College, 2801 N US2, Iron Mountain, MI, 49801 - Active

Escanaba Regional Center, 2001 N. Lincoln, Escanaba, MI, 49829 - Active

Les Cheneaux Culinary School and Restaurant, 186 S. Pickford Ave., Hessel, MI, 49745 - Active

Petoskey Regional Center, 1515 Howard St., Petosky, MI, 49770 - Active

St. Helen Regional Center, 1250 N. St. Helen Road, St. Helen, MI, 48656 - Active

**Recommended Change: no change**

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#### Correspondence Education

None

**Recommended Change: no change**

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#### Distance Delivery

43.0103 - Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement Administration, Bachelor, BS, Criminal Justice - Generalist

43.0201 - Fire Prevention and Safety Technology/Technician, Bachelor, BS, Fire Science

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# Institutional Status and Requirements Worksheet

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**Contractual Arrangements**

None

**Recommended Change: no change**

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**Consortial Arrangements**

None

**Recommended Change: no change**

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