

August 5, 2024

Dr. Terisa Riley
Chancellor
University of Arkansas-Fort Smith
5210 Grand Avenue
P.O. Box 3649
Fort Smith, Arkansas 72913-3649

Dear Chancellor Riley,

This letter is accompanied by the Quality Initiative Report (QIR) Review form completed by a peer review panel. University of Arkansas-Fort Smith's QIR showed genuine effort and has been accepted by the Commission. The attached reviewer evaluation contains a rationale for this outcome.

Peer reviewers evaluate all the QIRs based on the genuine effort of the institution, the seriousness of the undertaking, the significance of scope and impact of the work, the genuineness of the commitment to the initiative, and adequate resource provision.

If you have questions about the QIR reviewer information, please contact either Kathy Bijak (kbijak@hlcommission.org) or Pat Newton-Curran (pnewton@hlcommission.org).

Higher Learning Commission

Open Pathway Quality Initiative Report

Panel Review and Recommendation Form

Review Process

The Quality Initiative panel review process evaluates the institution's effort in undertaking the Quality Initiative Proposal approved by HLC. The Quality Initiative process encourages institutions to take risks, innovate, take on a tough challenge, or pursue a yet unproven strategy or hypothesis. Thus, failure of an initiative to achieve its goals is acceptable. An institution may learn much from such failure. What is not acceptable is failure of the institution to pursue the initiative with genuine effort. Genuineness of effort, not success of the initiative, constitutes the focus of the Quality Initiative review and serves as its sole point of evaluation.

Submission Instructions

Submit the final report as a Word document to HLC at hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Pathways/Quality Initiatives" from the list of submission options to ensure the report is sent to the correct HLC staff member. The file name for the report should follow this format: QI Report Review <Name of Institution>.

Name of Institution: Univeristy of Arkansas - Fort Smith

State: Arkansas

Institutional ID: 1035

Reviewers (names, titles, institutions): Dr. Brad Hodson, Executive Vice President, Missouri Southern State University; and Dr. Krista Hoekstra, Dean of the School of Health and Sciences, Crown University

Date: July 1, 2024

I. Quality Initiative Review

- The institution demonstrated its seriousness of the undertaking.
- The institution demonstrated that the initiative had scope and impact.
- The institution demonstrated a commitment to and engagement in the initiative.

The institution demonstrated adequate resource provision.

II. Recommendation

The panel confirms genuine effort on the part of the institution.

The panel cannot confirm genuine effort on the part of the institution.

III. Rationale (required)

The University of Arkansas-Fort Smith proposes a quality initiative focused on increasing student persistence and retention in three specific categories: conditionally admitted students participating in the Lion Scholars program; first-year students; and students on academic probation or suspension. A number of goals to be accomplished through the quality initiative were presented in the proposal including:

- Increase persistence from fall to spring, spring to second fall, and fall to third fall;
- Develop and implement a first-year experience program through “an intentional combination of academic and co-curricular efforts;”
- Increase the number of students who persist past academic probation to completion; and
- Devise interventions for student nearing academic probation (GPA of 2.5 or less).

The information provided in the proposal indicates the institution takes the quality initiative seriously by identifying persistence and completion as its over-arching goal. In addition, the QI is directly linked to the institution’s strategic plan.

Successful completion of the quality initiative will have a broad and significant impact on the institution, its students, and its future. In the proposal, institutional faculty and staff were identified as individual who would be responsible for the success of each of the three “prongs” of the QI from inception.

The institution’s proposal also provided information on resources for the three key initiatives. For example, the Lion Scholars initiative has had ample faculty and staff resources allocated to its successful completion, including 15 academic advisors, staff, and administrators meeting monthly to discuss the program. Faculty assigned to teach the courses for these Lion Scholars have also been notified of the intensive nature of that undertaking given the students’ “at risk” indicators.

The First Year Experience (FYE) working group sent participants to the NRC FYE Conference using \$8,500 in professional development resources. These individuals will bring back the knowledge they acquired to help develop FYE strategies and outcomes for that program. Finally, the Academic Standing Committee was created consisting of twelve stakeholders who have met every two weeks for over two years. Altogether, it is clear the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith is investing the human and financial resources necessary in the quality initiative to foster success.