2012 SELF-STUDY REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION
SITE VISIT

OCTOBER 8-10, 2012

Submitted to the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
Northcentral University’s 2012 Self-Study report spans 121 pages and includes references to nearly 400 unique documents. The full report is available for review on the public website (www.ncu.edu/SelfStudy2012/accred_higher_learning.html), and was presented to the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC) in August 2012 in preparation for a reaffirmation of accreditation site visit that will occur October 8-10, 2012.

This summary provides highlights of key evidence by Criterion. The Self-Study demonstrates how NCU continues to meet and exceed the Commission’s requirements for reaffirmation of accreditation.

The NCU Self-Study represents the contributions of our entire community. Six groups played particularly key roles in developing the Self-Study: the Steering Committee and five Criterion Work Groups. We provided regular communication and accreditation updates through a dedicated public webpage; student, faculty, and team member newsletters; emails; all-University meetings and webinars; and departmental meetings. Additionally, community members were provided the opportunity to submit comments and suggestions via multiple channels including email, phone calls, letters, and live chat sessions during University-hosted webinars. The success of this Self-Study is directly related to the diversity of participants and the quality of their feedback in response to requests for input throughout the process.
NCU was established in 1996 in Prescott, Arizona. We were accredited by the HLC in 2003 and have been continuously accredited since that time.
Q. Do we have a Mission and do we operate with integrity?

A. Yes!

- Clear Mission documents are publically available and part of faculty and team member training and student orientation.

- Our Mission, Vision, and Values consistently guide each individual community member and the overall University through our strategic plan and institutional policies and processes.

- Our governance and administrative structures ensure integrity with academic decisions driven by faculty and academic leaders.
The full Self-Study answered these questions as part of Criterion One:

- Do we have clear Mission documents?
- Do we recognize diversity in our Mission documents?
- Does the NCU community understand and support the Mission?
- Are our governance and administrative structures effective?
- Do we protect and uphold our integrity?

As an institution committed to continuous improvement, in the fall of 2011, Northcentral’s community engaged in a webinar requesting feedback on the University’s Mission documents. As of July 16, 2012, there have been over 5,900 instances of constituents (representing faculty, students, team members, and members of the Board of Trustees) attending or viewing the webinars. The refined Mission documents were approved by the Board of Trustees on March 13, 2012 and appear below.

The update to our values includes highlighting the critical importance of Integrity and articulating those key values most important to the community and aligned with the achievement of our Mission (see illustration that follows).

**MISSION**
Northcentral University educates professionals throughout the world and provides an accessible opportunity to earn a U.S. regionally accredited degree. Northcentral mentors students One-to-One with highly credentialed faculty via advanced delivery modalities. Northcentral commits to helping students achieve academically and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions.

**VISION**
Northcentral University is a premier online graduate University and a global leader in providing unprecedented access to U.S. regionally accredited higher education.

**VALUES**
I.D.E.A.s Founded on INTEGRITY: We hold all members of our community to the highest ethical standard of professional and academic conduct and the rules and regulations of U.S. higher education.

MISSION. VISION. VALUES.
IDEAs

**INNOVATION**
We envision new and innovative education delivery systems and support proven concepts of teaching and learning. We encourage our community to seek solutions to educational challenges that will improve the quality of our programs and services.

**DIVERSITY**
We value diversity of thought and action as a strength that allows our community to transcend organizational and geographical boundaries. We expect members of our community to treat people with respect and dignity.

**EXCELLENCE**
Our community is committed to excellence in academics and service. We value leadership and strive for continuous improvement in everything we do. We define and measure outcomes and take action to ensure that our community’s passion for excellence is never compromised.

**ACCOUNTABILITY**
We are deeply committed to holding each member of the University responsible for their scholarly and professional work. We expect financial responsibility in the actions of our students and University team.

As part of the refresh, we challenged ourselves to fully articulate how the Values support our Mission as illustrated below.

Northcentral University educates professionals throughout the world...

...and provides an accessible opportunity to earn a U.S. regionally accredited degree. Northcentral mentors students One-to-One with highly credentialed faculty

...via advanced delivery modalities.

Northcentral commits to helping students achieve academically and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions.

*Northcentral University Values Mapped to our Mission*
Q: A key question for Criterion One

• Does the NCU community understand and support the Mission?

A: Where the evidence can be found

• Board of Trustee meeting minutes
• Strategic plan
• Team member training materials
• Newsletters
• Webinars
• Community-wide meetings
• Program goals across the university are aligned with our Mission

Q: A key question for Criterion One

• Do we protect and uphold our integrity?

A: Where the evidence can be found

• Office of Compliance Management
• Team member training and quality assurance
• Internal and external audits
• Administrative and academic policies
• Institutional Review Board
• Verification of student identity

DID YOU KNOW?

NCU has a Youtube channel with videos on each Value; visit the channel and see your leadership team speaking off the cuff and from the heart.

Subscribe to our channel at www.youtube.com/NorthcentralUniv
Q. Do we use our resources and follow a plan (that includes evaluation) that helps us fulfill our Mission?

A. Yes!

• We are agile and respond to societal and economic trends such as “increased demand for graduate education by non-traditional students.”

• We have an integrated planning and budgeting model that aligns our Mission all the way through strategic action planning and assessment.

• We have a solid budgeting process and regular reviews that ensure we stay on track.

• We are financially healthy.
The full Self-Study answered these questions as part of Criterion Two:

- Do we prepare for the future?
- Do we spend money in ways that support our programs and makes them better?
- Do we have assessment processes, and do we use what we find during assessment to make changes for improvement?
- Do have a plan? And, does it align with our Mission?

The University has experienced consistent and sustainable growth in revenue and the number of courses taken by our students since the last Comprehensive Visit. The resulting financial strength of the University ensures adequate resources are available for our educational programs and maintaining and enhancing their quality in the future (see figure below).
The Northcentral University Mission cascades to our strategic goals. Northcentral’s strategic planning and budgeting processes are mapped directly to our Mission and are responsive to our academic needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MISSION</th>
<th>GOALS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northcentral University educates professionals throughout the world and provides an accessible opportunity to earn an U.S. regionally accredited degree.</td>
<td>Quality: Continuously elevate our academic quality and outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northcentral mentors students One-to-One with highly credentialed faculty via advanced delivery modalities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northcentral commits to helping students achieve academically and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions.</td>
<td>Student Success: Achieve the highest standard of student success through our values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northcentral University educates professionals throughout the world.</td>
<td>Growth: Achieve efficient growth by meeting demand from professionals throughout the world who will benefit from a Northcentral degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northcentral commits to helping students achieve academically and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions.</td>
<td>Community: Build and maintain excellent relationships with our students, team members, partners, governance bodies, and other stakeholders</td>
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STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT CYCLE

Academic Program Review and assessment inform our strategic plan which leads to goals, strategies, and action plans.

Q: A key question for Criterion Two
- Do we have assessment processes, and do we use what we find during assessment to make changes for improvement?

A: Where the evidence can be found
- Academic Program Review
- Center for Faculty Excellence
- Faculty review process
- Financial and budget alignment

Q: A key question for Criterion Two
- Do we spend money in ways that supports our programs and makes them better?

A: Where the evidence can be found
- Strategic plan
- Budget
- Center for Faculty Excellence
- Curricula enhancement
- Full-time foundation faculty
- Full-time dissertation chairs
- Academic Program Review
- New student orientation
Q. Can we show that we fulfill our educational Mission through evidence of student learning and effective teaching?

A. Yes!

- We have clearly stated student outcomes making effective assessment possible.

- We hire, train and support a well-qualified faculty and regularly evaluate their effectiveness.

- We have a highly regarded library and many other support services, including time management training, that foster student success.
The full Self-Study answered these questions as part of Criterion Three:

- Do we have clearly stated student outcomes (making assessment possible)?
- Do we value and support effective teaching?
- Do we create effective learning environments?
- Do we have resources that support student learning and effective teaching?

By implementing strategies that encourage student learning and effective teaching, Northcentral University demonstrates its commitment to fulfilling our Mission. Evidence of this commitment includes the adoption of Applied Experiential Learning in our curriculum and our One-to-One faculty mentoring approach. Through rigorous multi-faceted assessment activities and processes (please see pages 14-16 of the Self-Study for illustration), NCU is measuring whether effective teaching and learning occurs, analyzing those measurements and designing appropriate improvements. In this way, we are building a culture of assessment at Northcentral University. As displayed by the assessment map below, Northcentral links our Mission to understanding student learning and effective teaching down through individual course activities.

Assessment Map
Northcentral University recognizes the importance of providing our students with an educational experience they can directly apply to their field. We have made a strategic commitment to enhance all courses through implementing an applied experiential learning approach, as described below:

**ACT:**
A CONCRETE EXPERIENCE. LEARNING FROM SPECIFIC EXPERIENCES.
- In our courses, students are provided with opportunities to engage in real world scenarios, thus applying program content and achieving objectives.

**REFLECT:**
REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION. LOOKING FOR THE MEANING OF THINGS.
- Within their program, students are invited to critically reflect on their learning. This reflection leads to an increased sense of confidence and competency, as well as an integrated understanding of the student’s field of study.

**CONCEPTUALIZE:**
ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALIZATION. ANALYZING OF IDEAS AND EXPERIENCES.
- Student experience and reflection inform student learning
- Student learning is facilitated by engaged and prepared instructors.

**APPLY:**
ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION. APPLYING IDEAS AND THEORIES IN PRACTICE.
- Based on reflection and conceptualization, students develop course work applicable to their professional field of study and relevant to our times.

{ All of NCU Faculty Hold a Doctoral Degree }
### Q: A key question for Criterion Three

- Do we have clearly stated student outcomes (making assessment possible)?

### A: Where the evidence can be found

- Course Catalog
- Curriculum maps
- Syllabi
- Academic Program Review

### Q: A key question for Criterion Three

- Do we value and support effective teaching?

### A: Where the evidence can be found

- Faculty qualifications
- Professional development policies
- Faculty training
- Faculty evaluations
- Center For Faculty Excellence
- Full-time foundations faculty
- Full-time dissertation chairs

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**AT NCU WE USE A LONG ESTABLISHED EDUCATIONAL MODEL FOCUSING ON A ONE-TO-ONE STUDENT TO FACULTY RELATIONSHIP. THIS MODEL IS COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS THE OXFORD MODEL.**
Q. Do we promote life-long learning consistent with our Mission?

A. Yes!

- We demonstrate through the actions of the Board of Trustees, administrators, students, faculty, and team members that we value a life-long learning.

- We possess clear and public policies, handbooks for team members and students, a comprehensive catalog, and other resources (such as the Library, Dissertation Center, and Writing Center) to support life-long learning and the responsible application of knowledge.

- We ensure our curriculum is applicable to students who live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.
The full Self-Study answered these questions as part of Criterion four:

- Do our actions demonstrate that we value life-long learning?
- Do our programs provide an opportunity for gaining knowledge and skills as well as exercising intellectual inquiry?
- Do we assess the usefulness of our curricula?
- Do we ensure that our community applies knowledge responsibly?

Northcentral University promotes life-long learning; the essence of our commitment is encompassed in our Mission documents, which express a commitment to helping students achieve academically and become valuable contributors to their communities and within their professions.

Life-long learning requires a willingness to commit time to explore, to discover, and to understand. We enable our constituents to pursue a life of learning personally and professionally through the flexibility offered by distance education.

Q: A key question for Criterion Four

- Do our programs provide an opportunity for gaining knowledge and skills as well as exercising intellectual inquiry?

A: Where the evidence can be found

- Organizational structure of Graduate School
- Full-time dissertation chairs
- Dissertation Center
- Comprehensive exam
- Writing Center
- Library
- Capstone courses

Q: A key question for Criterion Four

- Do our actions demonstrate that we value life-long learning?

A: Where the evidence can be found

- Writing center
- Public recognition for academic advancement
- Tuition support/scholarships
- Courses for non-degree students
- Library
- Professional development
- Professional organizations and societies

The Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE) was created in 2012 to increase support for our faculty.
Q. Have we identified our constituencies and do we serve them in valuable ways?

A. Yes!

- Constituents include prospective students, applicants, students, alumni, Northcentral partners, local communities where we do business, accreditting and regulatory bodies, Northcentral faculty, Board of Trustees, and team members.

- The needs of our constituents are continuously examined through survey and assessment.

- We provide a model of stewardship through our engagement and service efforts.

- Institutional strategies to “continuously improve our students’ experiences” and “build and maintain excellent relationships” with constituents direct our resources and energies.
NCU’s constituents include everyone in our learning community: from community members to Board of Trustee members – if you have any interaction with the NCU community you are a constituent.

The full Self-Study answered these questions as part of Criterion Five:

- Do we learn from our constituencies?
- Do we have the capacity and commitment to engage with our constituencies and communities?
- Are we responsive to our constituencies?
- Do our constituencies value the service we provide?

As an institution, we value our constituents as integral to our Mission. Each of these groups shares a vested interest in the success of Northcentral and each is served by the organization. Northcentral learns from its constituents, engages them, responds to them, and serves them in ways that are valued by both the constituent and the University.

Q: A key question for Criterion Five

- Do we learn from our constituencies?

A: Where the evidence can be found

- University surveys including: Priorities Survey for Online Students (PSOL), Time Management Survey, Post Course Survey, Annual Library Survey, Graduate Satisfaction Survey, Information Technology Assessment Survey, Campus Employee Satisfaction Survey, MFT Alumni Survey, Smarthinking Survey

Q: A key question for Criterion Five

- Do our constituencies value the service we provide?

A: Where the evidence can be found

- Graduate satisfaction survey
- Graduate testimonials
- Northcentral University Ambassadors

NCU’s constituents include everyone in our learning community: from community members to Board of Trustee members – if you have any interaction with the NCU community you are a constituent.
WHAT IS ACCREDITATION AND WHY SHOULD I CARE?
It is a higher education seal of approval for schools, employers, and most importantly, for students. Students who earn a degree at an accredited institution can be confident that the quality of education, and commitment of an institution to maintain and improve quality, meets the standards of the accrediting body. Also, accreditation allows institutions the ability to participate in the Title IV program.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACCREDITATION?
Yes. Institutional accreditation (regional or national) looks at the institution in its entirety and focuses on academic quality, administrative effectiveness, and excellence in other institutional-related services. Regional accrediting agencies review schools in a specific geographical location (Arizona is part of the HLC region). Programmatic or specialized accreditation focuses on specific aspects of a department, program or school’s academic quality (for example ACBSP, COAMFTE, etc.).

WHAT IS A SELF-STUDY?
Some accrediting agencies, such as the HLC, rely on an institutional Self-Study process in addition to peer evaluation for assessing an institution. The Self-Study process consists of a critical self-analysis on behalf of the institution and an explanation in the form of a Self-Study report of evidence that the institution fulfills the criteria for accreditation. The process also helps the institution define areas where there is room for improvement with the goal of continuously improving the quality of programs and services in support of student success.

WHAT IS A SITE VISIT?
A site visit is a critical part of the accreditation process that includes an evaluation by a team of trained peer reviewers. The team evaluates the institution to ascertain the extent to which it fulfills the agency’s Criteria for Accreditation; provides consultation relative to the ongoing improvement of the institution; and also recommends the affiliation status that the institution should have with the accrediting agency.

CONCLUSION
This Self-Study illustrates continuing progress since the last Comprehensive Visit in 2008. The University is advancing a number of initiatives and maturing as an institution of higher learning focused on graduate education. We believe the University has the appropriate structures and processes in place to continue to grow, govern itself responsibly, maintain financial strength, execute strategies, accomplish goals, achieve its Mission, and ultimately realize its Vision.

NCU CONTINUES TO MEET OR EXCEED THE REQUIREMENTS FOR CONTINUED ACCREDITATION BY THE HLC.

FAQS ABOUT ACCREDITATION
FAQS ABOUT NCU

ARE WE ACCREDITED?
Yes. Northcentral University is regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC). Northcentral’s School of Business and Technology Management is accredited by ACBSP, an accreditation association for business education.

WHY DO WE HAVE TO BE REAFFIRMED?
Reaffirmation helps ensure that an institution continues to meet the standards of quality set by the accrediting agency. At the conclusion of each comprehensive site visit, which evaluates an institution’s continued accreditation, the HLC determines the number of years that accreditation will be extended before the next reaffirmation visit is scheduled.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE SITE VISIT?
The visit team will be on-site to review documents referenced in the Self-Study and to validate the statements in the Self-Study through meetings with members of the NCU community. The HLC team may schedule appointments with anyone within our community, such as members of the Board of Trustees, faculty, team members, students, alumni and community leaders.

WHO WROTE THE SELF-STUDY?
The planning for this document started with the creation of the Institutional Self-Study Steering Committee made up of academic and administration leaders. This committee worked cooperatively with the appointed Self-Study chairs to identify members for each criterion work group. The criterion work groups included faculty members from each school, administrative department heads, and team members from numerous departments across the University.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ONE-TO-ONE MENTORING?
Our One-to-One faculty mentored approach to online learning (one student paired with one faculty member) means students will be personally educated by a highly-credentialed faculty member, (100% of our graduate faculty hold Doctoral degrees). This One-to-One teaching method (inspired by the traditional Oxford tutorial model) ensures that our students receive the critical support and feedback they need to achieve their academic goals, and ultimately, to make an impact in their communities and within their professions.

WHERE DO I GO IF I HAVE MORE QUESTIONS?
You can always start with Dr. Heather Frederick, but below are key contacts by Criterion:

a. Criterion 1: Any member of the Senior Leadership Team, but especially George Burnett, Dr. Scott Burrus or Chris Lynne

b. Criterion 2: Chris Lynne or Alex Piacenza

c. Criterion 3: Dr. Scott Burrus, Katia Nyysti or Dr. Branden Henline

d. Criterion 4: Dr. Scott Burrus or Dr. Greg Bradley

e. Criterion 5: Erin Walsh or Dr. Greg Hickman
1. Have you read the Self-Study?

2. How does your job fit into the NCU Mission?

3. What “Goal” and/or “Strategy” do you support in your role at NCU?

4. What “Value” within NCU do you aspire to or best exemplify?

5. How does NCU use assessment to improve student learning?

6. What is our teaching model and curriculum approach?