New Mexico Highlands University
Focused Visit Report
In Preparation for the HLC Focused Visit in March 2020
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Background</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of Focused Visit</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Process for Addressing HLC Concerns</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of Evidence Document</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Component 4C</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Component 5A</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Component 5D</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Component 4C</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background: Core Component 4C</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary: Core Component 4C</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment and Retention Trends at NMHU</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Management Plan</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Retention and Persistence Data</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of 2016 and 2017 Persistence Goals</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement Process for Enrollment Management</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary: Core Component 4C</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Component 5A</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background: Core Component 5A</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary: Core Component 5A</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction in Reliance on State Funding</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stabilization of Enrollment</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit Findings</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a Balanced Budget</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary: Core Component 5A</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Component 5D</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background: Core Component 5D</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary: Core Component 5D</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation and Implementation of Policies for Stakeholder Agreement</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Key Performance Indicators</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit Level Planning</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary: Core Component 5D</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Summary and Conclusions</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix: Links to Key Institutional Documents</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables
Table 1: Enrollment in New Mexico Universities .................................................. 8
Table 2: Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates for New Freshmen .................................. 14
Table 3: Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates for New Freshmen ................................... 14
Table 4: Graduation Rates for New Freshmen ..................................................... 14
Table 5: Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates for Transfer Students ........................... 15
Table 6: Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates for Transfer Students ............................... 15
Table 7: Graduation Rates for Transfer Students ............................................. 15
Table 8: Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates for New Graduate Students ..................... 15
Table 9: Graduation Rates for New Graduate Students ..................................... 16
Table 10: Fall-to-Fall Retention for Enrollment Success Program ....................... 16
Table 11: Fall-to-Fall Retention for Native American Students ......................... 17
Table 12: Fall-to-Fall Retention for African American Students ......................... 17
Table 13: Reserves and Cash Balance ............................................................... 26
Table 14: In-State Tuition and Fees ................................................................... 26
Table 15: Out-of-State Tuition and Fees ............................................................ 26
Table 16: Actual Revenues by Fiscal Year .......................................................... 27
Table 17: Advancement Revenue and Activity ..................................................... 27
Table 18: Expenses by Fiscal Year ................................................................... 28
Table 19: Enrollment and Persistence Measures ............................................... 31
Table 20: Composite Financial Index (CFI) ......................................................... 35
Table 21: NSSE Engagement Indicators ............................................................. 44
Table 22: NSSE Advising Module .................................................................... 45

List of Figures
Figure 1: NMHU Enrollment Across Time ......................................................... 9
Figure 2: NMHU Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates for New Freshmen .................... 9
Figure 3: Graduation rates for New Freshmen .................................................. 9
Figure 4: Community College Enrollment in New Mexico ............................... 19
Figure 5: NSSE Peer Comparison .................................................................... 44
Introduction

This document, prepared by New Mexico Highlands University, is presented to the Higher Learning Commission in preparation for our Focused Visit scheduled for March 30-31, 2020.

Institutional Background

New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU) is one of seven four-year public universities in New Mexico, and the only one in the northern half of the state offering graduate degrees. The main campus is located in Las Vegas, New Mexico in San Miguel County. NMHU has centers in Albuquerque, Farmington, Rio Rancho, Santa Fe, and Roswell as well as online and off-campus learning programs. The University currently offers 37 bachelor's degree programs, 20 master's degree programs, and a number of certificates and associate degrees in four schools: the College of Arts and Sciences, the Facundo Valdez School of Social Work, the School of Education, and the School of Business, Media and Technology. It is classified as a Carnegie Master's/large institution, reflecting the high proportion of master's degrees granted.

In fall 2019, the university had a total enrollment of approximately 2,900 students with an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 1,800. The main campus at Las Vegas serves approximately 1,600 students with the remainder attending one of our centers, attending online, or engaging in more than one location/delivery method.

NMHU is a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in a majority-minority state. In fall 2019, our student body was 54 percent Hispanic, 9 percent Native American, 5 percent other ethnic minorities, and 4 percent international. Among first-time freshmen, 66 percent are Pell grant recipients and/or first-generation college students.

NMHU prides itself on affordability and accessibility. We are an open-enrollment institution with an extensive scholarship program which, in conjunction with state scholarship programs, ensures that almost all first-time freshmen are eligible to receive a tuition scholarship. NMHU offers one of the lowest tuition schedules of any of four-year college or university in the southwestern United States. NMHU has a long history of serving first-generation, low-income college students.

Background of Focused Visit

NMHU is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). In an action letter dated September 8, 2016, the HLC notified NMHU that it was being placed on probation. The university was given until November 2017 to submit an Assurance Argument demonstrating that it had addressed all areas of concern as specified in the September 8, 2016 letter.

The university submitted an Assurance Argument to the HLC on schedule with intent to demonstrate that the university had met all areas of concern specified in the September 8, 2016 letter. In an action letter dated July 9, 2018, the HLC informed the university that it was being removed from probation, but the university would be required to host a Focused Visit to address three remaining areas of concern:

“The Board determined that the institution is no longer out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and removed the institution from Probation. The institution meets Core Components 4.C, 5.A, and 5.D with concerns. The institution is required to host a Focused Visit, as outlined below, no later than June 30, 2020.”

In subsequent communications with the HLC, a date of March 30-31, 2020 was set for the Focused Visit.

The action letter of July 9, 2018 specified the remaining areas of concern as quoted below:

“Focused Visit: The Board required that the institution host a Focused Visit regarding Core Components 4.C, 5.A, and 5.D no later than June 30, 2020. The Focused Visit will specifically address the following:

Core Component 4.C
- Completion and implementation of a comprehensive Enrollment Management Plan. This plan should, at a minimum, identify target enrollments with supporting rationale for student population types (e.g., first-time, first-year students, transfer students, graduate students); mechanisms for recruiting students; and targets for retention, persistence, and completion rates for each student type.
- Documentation of improvement in the collection and analysis of data on student retention, persistence, and completion, with consistency in data reporting. These data should include a comprehensive review of the 2017 retention, persistence, and completion goals.
- Increased use of information to make improvements as warranted by the data on student retention, persistence, and completion. Evidence should be provided that demonstrates the use of the evaluation of the 2016 and 2017 retention, persistence, and completion goals for continuous improvement.

Core Component 5.A
- Evidence of a reduction in the reliance on state funding to balance the institution's budget.
- Stabilization or growth in student enrollment through the identification of a clear strategy linked to metric-driven recruitment and student persistence goals.
- Independent audits of the institution, the Foundation, and Isotopes that do not yield any findings or, at minimum, do not yield any repeat findings.
- Continued year-end actual change in net assets at break-even levels or that yield surplus.

Core Component 5.D
- Evidence of the creation and implementation of policies related to new processes for the institutionalization of stakeholder agreements in all areas, including strategic planning and budgeting, student complaint management, the Office of Advancement, and Student Financial Aid administration.
- An executive Strategic Plan Indicators update that includes outcomes that provide evidence that the institution is improving its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, both as a whole and in its component parts.
- A unit and/or department strategic plan update that includes outcomes that provide evidence that the institution is improving its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, both as a whole and in its component parts.”

This document will address each of these concerns and demonstrate the manner in which NMHU has made progress towards ameliorating the concerns. The document also acknowledges areas in which there are continuing challenges and possibilities for further improvement.
Institutional Process for Addressing HLC Concerns

To address the HLC’s concerns, we formed an HLC Focused Visit Steering Committee to oversee the process of preparing a response. We also formed three subcommittees to address each of the three areas of concern specified by the HLC. These subcommittees each consist of several faculty and staff members reflecting a broad range of experience and expertise. The subcommittees have met periodically to engage in planning and oversight activities relevant to each of the three HLC areas of concern. Committee membership, meeting dates, agenda, and minutes are available on the NMHU Institutional Accreditation website.

The university has also worked diligently to keep the campus community informed and engaged throughout the preparation process for the Focused Visit. First, we have held a series of campuswide HLC forums. These forums are hour-long sessions, open to all institutional stakeholders, in which key aspects of the accreditation process and Focused Visit preparation are discussed. These HLC forums have been well received and well attended. More information about the forums can be found on the NMHU Institutional Accreditation website.

Second, we have included regular HLC updates at key meetings of university stakeholders, including Board of Regents meetings, Executive Management Team meetings, Provost Council meetings, Deans’ Council meetings, and Budget Listening sessions. These meetings provide an opportunity to inform a range of campus stakeholders about key developments or activities in the accreditation process.

Third, we have several web pages (linked to dozens of supporting documents) devoted to the institutional accreditation process. This extensive web presence, which is publicized through multiple channels, allows campus stakeholders to review accreditation documents and activities at any time. Additionally, we have been publishing an HLC Update newsletter on a regular basis, which is designed to serve a similar informational purpose and is sent via email to all campus employees.

Fourth, we have sent a large and diverse contingent of campus stakeholders to the annual HLC Conference. In the past two years, attendees have included two regents, our president, our provost, two vice presidents, three faculty members, the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO), and other administrative personnel. This experience has allowed conference participants to increase their knowledge and understanding of the accreditation process and has also allowed attendees to share their experiences with a larger group of stakeholders.

Fifth, the NMHU campus community has been provided with numerous opportunities to review and comment on this evidence document. Each of the three subcommittees mentioned above, as well as the Steering Committee, were involved in the entire process of document preparation. In May 2019 we posted a draft version of the evidence document on the NMHU website and sent out an email to all campus stakeholders inviting them to provide comments or suggestions. In August 2019 a revised version of the document was posted on the NMHU website; once again the campus community was invited via email to read and comment on the document. In September 2019, a third version was posted on the website. In all cycles of posting the document on the website, we received responses from various stakeholders offering helpful recommendations, which were incorporated into the document.

The campus community of NMHU has worked diligently to address the shortcomings specified by the HLC in its July 9, 2018 action letter. This document addresses those concerns and outlines the corrective actions taken by the campus community to rectify the noted problem areas. Additional documentation and supporting materials will be provided as requested.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the HLC for working with us through this process. We are confident that we are a better and stronger institution as a result of addressing the legitimate concerns expressed by the HLC, and we remain committed to a process of continual improvement for the benefit of our students and all other stakeholders we serve. We are also grateful to the Focused Visit team of peer reviewers for their time and commitment and look forward to working with them.

Organization of Evidence Document

This document is organized in six main sections, as follows.

- Introduction
- Executive Summary
- Core Component 4C
- Core Component 5A
- Core Component 5D
- Summary and Conclusions
Executive Summary
New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU) has worked diligently to address the concerns of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in preparation for our Focused Visit in March 2020. This executive summary outlines our key accomplishments and acknowledges areas where continued improvement is needed.

Core Component 4C
The university has completed a comprehensive Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan which identifies target enrollments for key student populations, outlines recruitment strategies, and identifies retention and completion targets by student type. In addition to the SEM Plan, we have produced several other documents relating to our enrollment management processes which help to define and guide our operations and activities.

The university has made significant improvements in the collection and analysis of retention and completion data. We have developed a set of Key Enrollment Indicators (KEIs), which are updated each semester and show retention and graduation metrics broken down by student type. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (OIER) produces regular enrollment, retention, and graduation reports, which are disseminated to multiple stakeholders across campus. The OIER also provides responses to ad hoc requests for data relating to enrollment and persistence. Additionally, the OIER produces a range of external reports and internal publications (IPEDS, Common Data Set, Performance Effectiveness Report, and annual Factbook) that provide additional data supporting our enrollment management operations.

We have carefully analyzed retention and completion data from the past several years to determine key trends and determine whether we have met our enrollment and retention goals. Summary reports of these analyses are available from the OIER and have been shared with the Board of Regents, Executive Management Team, Office of Strategic Enrollment Management, and Provost’s Office.

Based on our analysis of enrollment and retention data and our efforts to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves, we have made a number of changes in our enrollment management operations and activities. These changes are described in more detail in the 4C chapter of this document.

We feel confident that we have significantly improved our enrollment management operations as well as our collection and use of enrollment and retention data. We have seen improvements in certain key metrics, e.g. retention and four-year graduation rate. However, we continue to see declines in enrollment. Although these enrollment declines reflect larger demographic trends within the state of New Mexico and the country, we remain committed to stabilizing our enrollment stream. We will continue to evaluate our data and operations to determine areas in which we can leverage improvements in our enrollment management activities.

For a detailed description of activities undertaken by NMHU to address the HLC concerns in the area of Core Component 4C, please refer to the 4C chapter in this document.

Core Component 5A
The university has significantly reduced its reliance on state funding in its revenue stream. We have made strategic tuition increases, enhanced our fundraising capabilities, and implemented more effective budgeting procedures. Our financial records demonstrate a decreasing reliance on revenue from state appropriations over the past few years.

Our most recent audit reports have shown no repeat findings. The findings that were reported have been addressed. The most recent audits for both the Foundation and Highlands Stable Isotopes were clean.

Beginning in March 2018, with approval from the Board of Regents, we have been adding substantial funds on an annual basis to our reserve account. This reserve account will help the university to maintain a stable budget even in the face of uncertain state funding.

We have also implemented a number of austerity measures to help ensure a balanced budget. However, these austerity measures have been carefully selected to avoid compromising essential operations or activities and to avoid extreme measures such as layoffs or furloughs.

Our Composite Financial Index (CFI) has increased and stabilized, with the most recent value being 2.27 for FY18.

As noted above under Core Component 4C, we continue to see continued enrollment declines, which place additional pressure on our budgeting process. However, through a combination of tuition increases, enhanced fundraising, new program development, and implementation of various austerity measures we have continued to move in a positive financial direction.

For a detailed description of activities undertaken by NMHU to address the HLC concerns in the area of Core Component 5A, please refer to the 5A chapter in this document.

Core Component 5D
The university is in the process of developing a new institutional strategic plan, which will guide the institution toward making systemic improvements across all areas of activity. The new strategic plan will be developed with feedback and input from multiple campus and community stakeholders and will follow standard practice for strategic planning development and implementation. The new plan will also have a set of Key Performance Indicators, which will be updated regularly to help the campus community gauge our progress toward achieving our objectives.

We have made significant improvements in our budgeting process, as outlined in the 5D chapter of this document, and are working toward more effectively integrating the planning, budgeting, and assessment activities of the university.

We have made significant improvements in our handling of student complaints. Procedures for handling student complaints have been collected in a single section of our Student Handbook, thereby helping our students navigate the process more effectively. We have also hired a full-time Student Service Coordinator, who serves as an ombudsman to handle student complaints. We are exploring ways to provide a more automated process for managing student complaints.

The Office of Advancement (Foundation), under new leadership, has taken significant steps to improve its efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness. The Foundation has produced a number of key documents to guide Foundation operations in a responsible and ethical manner.

The Financial Aid Office, also under new leadership, has likewise implemented a range of improvements in operations and structure. These improvements have been intended first and foremost to provide better service to our students and have also helped to create
greater efficiencies and improved integration with other offices.

We have developed a set of Strategic Plan Indicators (also referred to as Key Performance Indicators or KPIs) linked to our current strategic plan. We acknowledge that the current set of KPIs are not as tightly linked to our strategic plan as desirable, since the current plan lacks measurable objectives. However, in the formulation of our new institutional strategic plan, we will develop a set of KPIs that derive directly from measurable objectives specified in the plan.

We have developed a strategic planning process that operates at the level of individual academic departments and administrative units. Each department or unit is required to develop a strategic plan, and then assess, on an annual basis, the extent to which it has met the goals specified in the plan. Department and unit plans must be linked to the institution's strategic plan, Vision 2020. This process helps to ensure that all departments and units remain committed to a process of continual improvement.

For a detailed description of activities undertaken by NMHU to address the Commission’s concerns in the area of Core Component 5D, please refer to the 5D chapter in this document.

Core Component 4C
The first major section of this document outlines how NMHU has addressed Core Component 4C. Consistent with HLC expectations, the university has developed a Strategic Enrollment Management Plan with input from multiple stakeholders across campus. We have significantly improved our data collection, analysis, and dissemination practices and have developed numerous data-informed initiatives to increase enrollment and promote persistence. We have developed new programs and new modalities to expand our academic portfolio.

Background: Core Component 4C
HLC Core Component 4C specifies:

“The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.”

In its letter of July 9, 2018, removing NMHU from probation, the Higher Learning Commission Board of Trustees identified Core Component 4C as an area of continuing concern. Specifically, the HLC letter made three broad recommendations in this area in preparation for the Spring 2020 Focused Visit.

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following:

• Completion and implementation of a comprehensive Enrollment Management Plan. This plan should, at a minimum, identify target enrollments with supporting rationale for student population types (e.g., first-time, first-year students, transfer students, graduate students); mechanisms for recruiting students; and targets for retention, persistence, and completion rates for each student type.

• Documentation of improvement in the collection and analysis of data on student retention, persistence, and completion, with consistency in data reporting. These data should include a comprehensive review of the 2017 retention, persistence, and completion goals.

• Increased use of information to make improvements as warranted by the data on student retention, persistence, and completion. Evidence should be provided that demonstrates the use of the evaluation of the 2016 and 2017 retention, persistence, and completion goals for continuous improvement.”

Each of these three recommendations will be addressed in the major sections below.

Executive Summary: Core Component 4C
Following is a summary of key activities and initiatives implemented by NMHU to respond to the concerns of the HLC with reference to Core Component 4C. These activities and initiatives will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

• Formation of the Strategic Enrollment Management Office to help coordinate recruitment and retention efforts in a centralized manner

• Restructuring of the offices of admissions and recruitment to improve outreach to prospective students and also to streamline the onboarding process to more effectively enroll students;

• Development of a comprehensive Strategic Enrollment Management Plan with specific goals and objectives;

• Production of annual recruitment and retention plans to help gauge progress and identify areas of strength and weakness in our enrollment management processes;
• Development of an Institutional Marketing Plan to guide our marketing and recruitment efforts in a more coherent and intentional approach;
• Development of a set of Key Enrollment Indicators, updated every semester, including both enrollment and retention data;
• Participation in HLC Persistence and Completion Academy to help develop creative and effective ideas for promoting increased retention among our students;
• Defining and tracking retention targets for key student cohorts, including:
  – First-time, full-time, degree-seeking students,
  – Incoming transfer students,
  – New graduate students,
  – Academically at-risk student subpopulations;
• Using enrollment and retention data to develop recruitment and retention initiatives, including:
  – Contacting eligible non-enrolled students prior to the start of each semester,
  – Development of a success coaching model,
  – Restructuring of Native American Center to better improve recruitment and retention of Native American students,
  – Development of Enrollment Success Program to help at-risk students reach their academic potential,
  – Purchase of TutorTrac software to allow more effective tracking of student behaviors associated with academic success,
  – Evaluation and revision of financial aid awards to allow more effective leveraging of financial aid to promote recruitment and retention,
  – Enhanced student activity offerings, financed by a recently levied student activity fee, to help promote recruitment and retention;
Development and improvement of additional data reports including:
  – Detailed enrollment and retention reports produced every semester,
  – NMHU Factbook,
  – Weekly enrollment and admissions reports during the registration cycle;
• Formation of Matriculation Task Force to revise admissions procedures and identify areas of possible improvement;
• Improved recruitment process to allow more intentionality in student recruitment and to provide higher yield ratios;
• Consolidation of previously separate offices into a single Office of Admissions, thereby allowing more centralized and focused recruiting and onboarding efforts;
• Hiring of Transfer Coordinator to promote recruitment and retention of transfer students;
• Development of new academic programs and program modalities to attract new students;
• Improved website to help with student recruitment.

Enrollment and Retention Trends at NMHU
The first section of this chapter reviews and summarizes some key enrollment, retention, and graduation trends at NMHU that provide some context for the remaining sections.

College Enrollment Trends in New Mexico
College and university enrollment has been declining across the state of New Mexico for several years. These declines reflect a combination of demographic and funding challenges. As noted below, these trends have impacted NMHU as well as other institutions across the state.

Demographically, the state of New Mexico has seen a decline in school-age population in recent years. This decline has been especially marked in rural areas, including San Miguel County, from which NMHU has traditionally drawn a substantial percentage of our incoming freshmen. According to the US Census Bureau, San Miguel County experienced an overall population decline of 6.1 percent between 2010 and 2018, and a 16.1 percent decline in students age 15-19 between 2010 and 2017. The state of New Mexico as a whole experienced a decline of 7.3 percent in students age 15-19 between 2010 and 2017. Additionally, New Mexico has always struggled to attract students from neighboring states, which are more populous and more affluent.

These demographic pressures have led to declining enrollments across four-year institutions in the state of New Mexico as reflected in Table 1. These data are taken from the Performance Effectiveness Report produced by the New Mexico Council of University Presidents in November 2018. Enrollment figures are full-time equivalents for the respective fall term. These data indicate that the enrollment decreases at NMHU are consistent with statewide trends.

NMHU accepts its responsibility to develop viable enrollment management initiatives in the face of these demographic challenges. The

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution:</th>
<th>Fall 14</th>
<th>Fall 15</th>
<th>Fall 16</th>
<th>Fall 17</th>
<th>Fall 18</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico Highlands</td>
<td>2,627</td>
<td>2,637</td>
<td>2,608</td>
<td>2,438</td>
<td>2,348</td>
<td>-10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern New Mexico</td>
<td>4,032</td>
<td>4,023</td>
<td>3,899</td>
<td>3,980</td>
<td>3,850</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico Tech</td>
<td>1,820</td>
<td>1,831</td>
<td>1,809</td>
<td>1,665</td>
<td>1,612</td>
<td>-11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico State</td>
<td>12,930</td>
<td>12,584</td>
<td>12,533</td>
<td>12,250</td>
<td>12,175</td>
<td>-5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern New Mexico College</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>799</td>
<td>-6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of New Mexico</td>
<td>23,173</td>
<td>23,005</td>
<td>22,857</td>
<td>21,982</td>
<td>20,245</td>
<td>-12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western New Mexico</td>
<td>2,408</td>
<td>2,313</td>
<td>2,215</td>
<td>2,046</td>
<td>2,073</td>
<td>-13.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
section below provides a more detailed description of enrollment and persistence trends at NMHU. Subsequent sections of this chapter outline our increased use of data to inform strategic enrollment management decisions and describe some of the activities and initiatives we have implemented to help develop and sustain a healthy enrollment and positive student outcomes.

**Enrollment History**

As noted above, NMHU has experienced steady enrollment declines for the past several years. Figure 1 shows the total enrollment for NMHU for the past 10 years as reported to IPEDS. (Note that the fall 2019 value is provisional.)

![Figure 1: NMHU Enrollment Across Time](image)

After reaching a high point of 3,781 in fall 2011, total enrollment has declined steadily. Historically, NMHU does not have a record of aggressive or intentional enrollment management. As an open-access institution, NMHU has accepted all undergraduate applicants without formulating a comprehensive strategic enrollment management plan. However, it is now clear in the face of changing demographics and increased institutional competition that such a passive strategy cannot sustain institutional enrollment in the long term. To address this challenge, NMHU has created an Office of Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) and developed an SEM Plan, described in more detail below.

**Completion Rates**

Fall-to-fall retention rates at NMHU for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students have remained relatively stable across time with some recent increases as shown in Figure 2. Although these retention rates in part reflect the demographic populations we serve (low-income, rural, ethnically diverse), it is clear that improvement is needed. Furthermore, improvements in retention rates will translate to increased enrollment numbers even without recruiting new students.

![Figure 2: NMHU Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates for New Freshmen](image)

Similarly, graduation rates have remained relatively stable across time with a recent increase in four-year graduation rates. Figure 3 shows four-year and six-year graduation rates for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students for the past 10 IPEDS reporting cycles.

![Figure 3: Graduation rates for New Freshmen](image)

It should be noted that retention and graduation outcomes are significantly better for other cohorts of NMHU students, notably incoming transfer students and incoming graduate students. Nevertheless, the above data clearly point to a number of enrollment management concerns at NMHU. The HLC wisely challenged NMHU to develop a strategic enrollment management (SEM) plan to prepare for a changing future and to ensure sustainable institutional growth and student success.

NMHU remains committed to our open-access policy, which is essential to providing educational opportunities for the lower-income, diverse, and rural populations we serve. However, we recognize and acknowledge that a properly formulated SEM plan will allow us to continue serving this vulnerable population while also promoting growth among other demographic sectors.

With this historical background, in response to the recommendations articulated by the HLC, we have initiated a series of ambitious but carefully planned recruitment and retention initiatives to help stabilize enrollment and improve student retention and graduation outcomes. We have also made an institutional commitment to using enrollment management data more effectively to inform our decision-making processes. These initiatives and activities are outlined in the remainder of this chapter, with specific reference to areas of concern cited by the HLC.

**Enrollment Management Plan**

With respect to Core Component 4C, the Higher Learning Commission challenged NMHU to develop a comprehensive strategic enrollment management plan, as evidenced in the quotation below from the HLC recommendations in preparation for the Focused Visit:

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following... Completion and implementation of a comprehensive Enrollment Management Plan. This plan should, at a minimum, identify target enrollments with supporting rationale for student population types (e.g., first-time, first-year students, transfer students, graduate students); mechanisms for recruiting students; and targets for retention, persistence, and completion rates for each student type.”

This section of the evidence document will focus on the steps taken by NMHU to address this concern.
Administrative Reorganization
As a first step toward developing a more systematic approach to enrollment management, a significant administrative reorganization was implemented. A new division of Strategic Enrollment Management, under the direction of a vice-president, was created in January of 2016. Dr. Edward Martinez, a professor of Natural Resources Management at NMHU, was appointed interim Vice-President of Strategic Enrollment Management. Dr. Martinez is a native of northern New Mexico and a graduate of NMHU who has been a faculty member since 2005. He has served as Director of the ARMAS Center (Achieving in Research, Math and Science), which provides comprehensive support services to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) students and faculty. Dr. Martinez was also the principal investigator (PI) for major ARMAS and STEM grants. Dr. Martinez’ extensive experience at NMHU in multiple roles and his familiarity with our service region made him uniquely qualified to lead the enrollment management efforts at NMHU.

During academic year, 2019-20 Dr. Martinez is participating in the prestigious ACE (American Council on Education) fellowship program at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas. Theresa Law JD, CFRE, current Vice President for Advancement, has stepped in as interim Vice President for Enrollment Management.

The creation of the Strategic Enrollment Management Division consolidated multiple student-service offices and is now composed of the Office of Financial Aid, Office of Academic Support, International Education Center, Native American Center, and the Office of Admissions. Additional administrative restructuring has taken place in the area of admissions and recruitment. In 2016, the admissions staff, who previously reported to the Registrar, were reassigned to the recruitment office, which led to the creation of the Office of Student Recruitment and Undergraduate Admissions, now known simply as the Office of Admissions. A Campus Tour office was also created along with the onboarding of a YouVisit virtual campus tour showcasing the Las Vegas campus and residence halls for more comprehensive recruitment efforts of prospective students.

As of this writing, we are in the process of consolidating a number of previously disparate admissions activities within a single office. Historically, graduate admissions have been handled by the Office of Graduate Studies, but the process was somewhat ineffective and decentralized. These operations have been moved to the Office of Admissions effective September 2019. Similarly, the Facundo Valdez School of Social Work previously handled its own admissions, and this process has also been assumed by the Office of Admissions. This change has been especially helpful given that the School of Social Work has course programming at multiple campus centers.

Working in conjunction with the Office of Admissions, the campus managers at our three primary centers (Rio Rancho, Santa Fe, and Farmington) have assumed additional responsibilities for helping to recruit students to the campus centers. This cooperative effort has helped to strengthen our recruitment efforts at the centers.

The Native American Center has been restructured to better meet the needs of our Native and Indigenous students. As noted above, about 9 percent of NMHU students identify as Native American, with an additional 2-3 percent identifying as having some Native American ancestry. Historically, these students have had poorer outcomes than the student population as a whole. By committing resources to address the needs of our Native population, our goal is to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for these students. Additionally, the university is exploring the possibility of attaining federal designation as a Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institution (NASNTI). Achieving this designation would help with our recruitment of Native students and provide access to grant funds that could be directed to improving outcomes for this population.

In summary, the administrative changes outlined above provided NMHU with an opportunity to reevaluate and reformulate our enrollment management processes and procedures. The recommendations for Core Component 4c made by the HLC in preparation for the Focused Visit provided additional guidelines and parameters for developing a more effective enrollment management strategy. The changes and developments in our enrollment management operations are outlined below with specific reference to HLC recommendations.

Strategic Enrollment Management Plan
One of the first and most important actions undertaken by the new division of Enrollment Management was the development of a Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan, essential for ensuring that the enrollment management efforts of the university take place in a carefully planned and organized manner with buy-in and participation from stakeholders across campus, including students, faculty, staff, administration, and the Board of Regents. As noted above, the development of this plan also addressed a key concern of the HLC.

To prepare the SEM Plan, a committee was formed consisting of approximately 25 members of the NMHU community, including students, faculty, staff, and administration. This committee, led by the Interim Vice-President for Enrollment Management, spent several months developing the SEM Plan. The final version of the plan was approved by the Student Senate, Staff Senate, and Executive Management Team during fall 2018, and was presented to the Board of Regents in spring of 2019. The plan was presented to the Faculty Senate in fall 2018, which recommended a number of revisions and greater specificity with respect to the action steps in the plan. In fall 2019, the SEM committee presented a revised plan, which was granted a one-year approval by the Faculty Senate. NMHU values and respects the principle of shared governance, so we are committed to working together to achieve a plan that thoroughly and effectively expresses the interests and concerns of all members of the campus community. The SEM Plan can be accessed on our website. The SEM Plan includes the following key elements. We discuss our use of enrollment data in a later section of this document.

Demographic trends
The SEM Plan contains extensive background information on demographic trends that inform our enrollment management activities. Analysis of these demographic trends can help the university to formulate realistic enrollment goals, and to determine emerging markets where enrollment growth might be leveraged.

Institutional data
The SEM Plan includes institutional data showing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates across time. An evaluation of these data will help to identify areas of vulnerability as well as strengths within our enrollment management stream, allowing us to set realistic goals and to aggressively address areas of concern.

Recruitment goals
The SEM Plan sets clearly defined undergraduate recruitment goals. Although these goals are very ambitious, they provide a vision for NMHU that includes maintaining enrollment and ensuring optimal
success for all of our students. The SEM plan provides concrete goals for each stage in the enrollment funnel, from inquiry to application to admission to enrollment. The plan specifies both the action steps and responsible parties necessary to achieve each of these recruitment goals. This section of the SEM Plan is driven by the annual Undergraduate Recruitment Plan.

Retention and completion goals
The SEM Plan includes clearly defined undergraduate retention and completion goals. These goals are moderately ambitious, and reflect the challenges of our student population, which is predominantly lower-income, rural, and highly diverse. The retention and graduation targets for new freshman were set based on the national average for similar institutions as defined by ACT (ACT 2016). Once again, the SEM plan specifies both the action steps and responsible parties necessary to achieve each of these retention and completion goals.

Graduate recruitment and persistence goals
The SEM Plan includes recruitment and persistence goals for graduate students. Historically, NMHU has not had a university-wide, graduate-level recruitment office. Instead, students enter our graduate programs through the individual recruiting efforts of the various graduate programs across campus. As noted above, we have developed more centralized enrollment strategies for graduate students, who comprise almost 40 percent of our student population. The SEM plan formulates specific strategies to increase enrollment and improve retention of graduate students.

Academic initiatives
Finally, the SEM Plan outlines academic initiatives designed to strengthen enrollment management. A basic principle of our overall enrollment management strategy is that all university stakeholders need to be invested and involved in our enrollment management efforts and initiatives. Faculty and academic affairs can play a key role in these efforts. The SEM Plan, with input from faculty representatives, includes a range of academic initiatives that could help increase enrollment and promote student retention and completion.

Application and use of the SEM Plan
The SEM Plan is a foundational document for our enrollment and retention efforts. The Strategic Enrollment Management Committee has met regularly to evaluate progress towards achieving the goals outlined in the SEM Plan. The Key Enrollment Indicators (see below) are tied to the goals specified in the SEM Plan. The SEM Plan also guides the publication of various annual reports (outlined below). Through these reports and other channels, the SEM Committee helps to keep the university community informed about key enrollment and retention data points.

Other Key Documents
While the Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan remains the key document in our enrollment management efforts, there are several other important documents that have been developed to help address our recruitment and retention concerns. All these documents are data based and linked to concrete recommendations for increasing enrollment and/or improving retention. These documents are summarized below.

SEM Plan Update Spring 2019
The Strategic Enrollment Management Plan Progress Report was published in spring 2019 to provide an update on our level of achievement of some of the key goals identified in the SEM Plan itself (see above). This report provides a summary of fall-to-spring retention rates compared with previous cohorts, clearly identifying areas of improvement and decline. These data help to identify areas of concern where more resources or a different approach may be indicated. The report also summarizes the efforts of the Student Success Center (formerly Academic Support Office), which plays a key role in our retention efforts. Additionally, the report provides a summary of key activities and accomplishments by a range of other university offices that are instrumental in the success of our retention efforts. The report as a whole is data-informed and provides comprehensive data support for all offices and areas reviewed.

2018-19 Retention Plan
This is the latest version of an annual document that is produced by the SEM office. The 2018-19 Retention Plan documents a disciplined approach to goal setting and to the development of a blueprint that identifies priority improvement targets, strategies, and action plans. It was developed through a collaborative process and serves as a communication tool that outlines what NMHU expects to achieve and how we will accomplish it. This document summarizes our current retention goals and provides detailed data support for the development of these goals and implementation of strategies to achieve these goals. The 2018-19 Retention Plan is posted on our website.

2017-18 Retention Accomplishments Report
This is the most recent version of another document produced by the SEM office. The Retention Advisory Council (described in more detail below) has distributed a list of accomplishments to faculty, staff, students, administration, and the Board of Regents to document progress towards achieving the goals of the Retention Plan (see above). The accomplishments for academic year 2017-18 are documented in the 2017-18 Retention Accomplishments Report. This document summarizes some key accomplishments in the area of retention at NMHU, as well as identifying some continuing challenges.

2018-2019 Mid-Year Retention Report
We have also prepared a Mid-Year Retention Report, which provides a detailed look at fall-to-spring retention rates for the fall 2018 cohort. This report provides retention data and strategies broken down by various key offices involved in all aspects of our retention efforts, including the Student Success Center, the Registrar, ARMAS (a support center for STEM students and courses), the Native American Center, Athletics, and Highlands University Enrichment (our first-year experience program).

2018-2019 Undergraduate Recruitment Plan
The 2018-2019 Undergraduate Recruitment Plan informs the various marketing, recruiting, and predictive modeling strategies that will be implemented by the Office of Admissions. The recruitment team will work to convert student raw leads into inquiries that will be engaged throughout the rest of the student lifecycle using specialized communication flows and on-campus events based on student classification and lifecycle stage. This plan will be revised yearly based on the previous year’s accomplishments and new strategy development and implementation.

Institutional Marketing Plan 2018-19
The Institutional Marketing Plan 2018-19 is designed to increase the university’s visibility, strengthen the university’s reputation, build interest for our academic programs among prospective students, assist with fundraising efforts, and align communication efforts across the institution’s Las Vegas campus and centers in Albuquerque, Farmington, Rio Rancho, and Santa Fe. This plan
Student Retention and Persistence Data

Another area of concern noted by the HLC was our relative lack of readily available data on student retention and completion rates, as evidenced in the quotation below from the HLC recommendations in preparation for the Focused Visit.

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following... Documentation of improvement in the collection and analysis of data on student retention, persistence, and completion, with consistency in data reporting. These data should include a comprehensive review of the 2017 retention, persistence, and completion goals.”

This section of the evidence document will focus on the steps taken by NMHU to address this concern.

Key Enrollment Indicators

In response to the legitimate concerns expressed by the HLC, the SEM Office has developed a comprehensive set of Key Enrollment Indicators or KEIs. These KEIs include retention and completion goals and outcomes for several student cohorts, including the following:

- First-time, full-time, degree-seeking students
- Freshmen student athletes
- Freshmen Native American students
- At-risk freshmen students
- Freshmen STEM majors
- Transfer students with and without an associate degree
- Graduate students

The KEIs are closely and intentionally aligned to the cohorts addressed in the SEM plan (see above), and provide a concise system for tracking our achievement of retention and completion goals. Most of the data elements included in the KEIs are extracted from our Banner ERP system by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (OIER). The OIER has developed a set of turnkey queries to quickly and efficiently extract these data, so as to provide timely tracking of the KEIs. A snapshot of the KEI Report for 2019-2020 can be found online.

After the KEIs are produced for each term, the data are evaluated by the SEM Office to determine areas where we have met our goals and areas where we are still lagging behind. The KEIs are shared with multiple campus stakeholders and are also posted on the university website. By determining areas of continued need, the university can channel the necessary resources to address ongoing enrollment and retention concerns. In some cases, the retention and completion goals for future terms may be increased if it is apparent that there is an upward trend. In other cases, the goals may need to be lowered if it appears that they were set at an unrealistically high level.

The sections below provide a brief summary of some key retention and completion trends we have detected upon evaluation of the KEI data.

Retention rates

Fall-to-fall retention rates for the fall 2016 cohort of new students dropped to 45.2 percent, the lowest figure in several years. This cohort might have been impacted by our probationary status (we were placed on probation by the HLC in September 2016). Additionally, this was a slightly weaker cohort academically, with an average high school GPA of 2.99, compared with 3.03 for the fall 2017 cohort and 3.13 for the fall 2018 cohort. However, the retention rate for the fall 2017 cohort rebounded to 51.6 percent, close to our recent historical average, and improved to 55.4 percent for the fall 2018 cohort. These appear to have been academically stronger cohorts compared to 2016, possibly reflecting improvements in our recruitment strategies. We also believe that some of our recent retention initiatives, as outlined in the documents referenced above, may have helped improve recent retention rates.

Fall-to-spring retention rates for new students have increased for the past three years, from 72.1 percent for the fall 2016 cohort, to 75.6 percent for the fall 2017 cohort, to 76.9 percent for the fall 2018 cohort. As noted above, we believe that recent retention initiatives might have helped improve these retention rates.

For transfer students with an associate degree, which constitute the majority of our incoming transfer students, we also saw an increase in fall-to-fall retention rates from 76.4 percent for the fall 2016 cohort to 79.2 percent for the fall 2017 cohort. However, the fall 2018 cohort’s fall-to-fall retention rate dropped to 73.0 percent, which is still respectable but below our historical average. For transfer students without an associate degree, there was a marked increase in fall-to-all retention rates from 40.4 percent for the fall 2016 cohort to 51.8 percent for the fall 2017 cohort and 59.2 percent for the fall 2018 cohort.

Similarly, for incoming graduate students we saw a significant increase in fall-to-fall retention rates from 81.5 percent for the fall 2016 cohort to 85.3 percent for the fall 2017 cohort, followed by a slight decline to 83.3 percent for the fall 2018 cohort.

Graduation rates

Four-year graduation rates have also shown some improvements for all of the above cohorts. For new students, the four-year graduation rate improved significantly from 10.9 percent for the fall 2013 cohort to 20.4 percent for the fall 2014 cohort and 17.8 percent for the fall 2015 cohort, well above our historical average. Once again, we also believe that some of our recent persistence initiatives as outlined in the documents referenced above might have helped improve our graduation rates.

For transfer students with an associate degree, the four-year graduation rate has remained stable at 69.6 percent for the fall 2013 cohort, 69.8 percent for the fall 2014 cohort, and 69.3 percent for the fall 2015 cohort.

For transfer students without an associate degree, the four-year graduation rate improved significantly from 17.6 percent for the fall 2013 cohort to 21.4 percent for the fall 2014 cohort to 32.4 percent for the fall 2015 cohort.

For incoming graduate students, the four-year graduation rate improved significantly from 67.8 percent for the fall 2013 cohort to 73.5 percent for the fall 2014 cohort, then leveled off at 71.9 percent for the fall 2015 cohort.
Enrollment

While we have seen significant improvements in retention and graduation rates across multiple cohorts, we continue to experience overall enrollment declines. For fall 2018, our total enrollment was 3,181, down from 3,284 in fall 2017. However, we did see a significant increase in the number of new freshman (from 254 to 280), and a slight increase in the number of incoming transfer students from 355 to 362. Conversely, we saw declines in the number of incoming graduate students, continuing students, and re-admit students.

In fall 2019 we saw another decline in enrollment, with a total enrollment of 2,902. New freshman enrollment remained steady, as did new graduate student enrollment, but we saw significant declines in transfer students and continuing students. The recent increase in the number of students graduating in four years (as opposed to five or six years) might have contributed to our enrollment declines, although other factors clearly have played a role as well.

As described in a later section of this chapter, we have implemented a number of strategies and initiatives to address these enrollment declines.

KEI-based initiatives

Several initiatives and activities have been developed in response to the data provided by the KEIs. Two of the key trends that clearly emerge from the KEI report are the decline in enrollment and the relatively stagnant retention and graduation rates for certain cohorts of students. Two recent initiatives have been developed to help address these enrollment and retention concerns. First, based on the Georgia State University (GSU) model, we have formulated a plan to develop a “success coaching” model, in which professional counselors or “coaches” help guide students through the key decisions they need to make to be successful and persist to completion. This proposal has been endorsed by the university president and put in place for the fall 2019 semester. The success coaching model and other best practices based on the GSU model are described in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

A second initiative has been our student call-out process. During the preregistration period (i.e. the time before the start of a new term when students are allowed to register for classes) we have attempted to contact previously enrolled students who have not yet registered. This effort has been led by the Student Success Center and by the campus center managers. This process is described in more detail below.

Other Data Reports

In addition to the Key Enrollment Indicators described above, we have a number of other data sources we use to track enrollment and persistence trends, and disseminate those data to a larger audience.

NMHU Factbook

The OIER office produces an annual Factbook, which includes enrollment and completion data. This Factbook is available to all campus stakeholders on our website as well as in hardcopy form with limited distribution. Although the Factbook contains much useful information in a familiar format, we continue to work with our stakeholders to try to determine if there are additional metrics or formatting options that might be helpful. In fall 2019 we sent out a campus survey requesting feedback on ways that we can improve the usefulness of the Factbook.

Performance Effectiveness Report

The Performance Effectiveness Report, a project of the New Mexico Council of University Presidents, is designed in part to respond to state legislative mandates for performance accountability among colleges and universities in the state of New Mexico. This annual report includes a broad range of enrollment, affordability, and student success measures. Each of the seven universities in the state of New Mexico supplies institutional data for this report, which thereby provides a useful channel for benchmarking our performance on these metrics against other state institutions. The report is posted on our website (see link above) and is also available in a hardcopy version.

OIER data reports

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research posts a wide range of data reports on the OIER website. These reports, which are available to all campus stakeholders, include annual enrollment data, degrees conferred, retention and graduation rates, IPEDS survey data, and the Common Data Set.

In addition to the reports posted on the OIER website, every fall and spring term after census day the OIER office produces a detailed analysis of enrollment and retention trends. These reports are produced in an Excel format (available for review) with an executive summary produced in Word format. Examples of these executive summaries are available online (Fall 2019 Enrollment Report and Fall 2019 Retention Report). These reports are distributed to key stakeholders including the Executive Management Team, Faculty and Staff Senate, deans, admissions personnel, and center managers.

Weekly enrollment and admissions reports

Concerns about declining enrollment prompted us to develop a better tracking system for examining live enrollment trends. During the course registration process, we freeze enrollment data on a weekly or daily basis. This allows us to compare enrollment data for the current term with enrollment data from the previous year at exactly the same time point. Data are disaggregated by key academic and demographic categories. These comparisons can alert us to any enrollment concerns in particular areas, and thereby allow us to take proactive measures to address the areas of concern, such as contacting unregistered students. A sample enrollment report is available online; additional reports are available for review.

Similarly, the office of admissions has been freezing admissions data on a weekly basis to detect positive or negative trends in the enrollment funnel. These reports track the number of recruits and applicants and provide a comparison to similar data from previous years. Once again, analysis of these data allows us to take proactive measures to address areas of concern, including reaching out to applicants to encourage them to complete their application packets or to register for classes. A sample admissions report is also available online.

These reports are broadly distributed to a range of institutional stakeholders, including senior administration, academic deans, faculty and staff representatives, campus managers, and key office directors. By broadly publishing these reports, we help to keep the university community informed of key enrollment and recruitment indicators. These data can be used by various offices or departments to take action to address enrollment concerns. For example, we have used live registration data to identify and reach out to students who were eligible to enroll for the upcoming term but have not yet done so. We also recently reexamined our policy of placing business holds on student accounts based on the evidence from the weekly enrollment reports that fall enrollment was down significantly from where we expected it to be.
Deartment enrollment and retention reports
The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (OIER) has been working on preparing an enrollment and retention report for each academic unit, with separate reports for undergraduate and graduate departments. These reports show enrollment and retention disaggregated by various academic and demographic variables, presented in a graphical format. The reports include multiyear trends on key data points. This reporting structure is a relatively new initiative, begun in summer of 2018. The OIER continues to work with academic departments to help identify data metrics or report formats that will be optimally effective.

Evaluation of 2016 and 2017 Persistence Goals
With respect to Core Component 4C, the HLC has challenged NMHU to use data, specifically 2016 and 2017 retention and completion goals, to inform strategic enrollment management decisions for institutional improvement. As stated in the HLC letter of July 9, 2018:

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following...
Increased use of information to make improvements as warranted by the data on student retention, persistence, and completion. Evidence should be provided that demonstrates the use of the evaluation of the 2016 and 2017 retention, persistence, and completion goals for continuous improvement.”

This section of the evidence document will focus on the ways in which NMHU has conducted a systematic evaluation of 2016 and 2017 retention and completion goals. These goals as well as detailed trend data for multiple cohorts are included in the Key Enrollment Indicators report. These data will be discussed in more detail below, with an emphasis on how we have used the data to inform institutional improvement in the area of enrollment management.

In general terms, our overall strategy has been to develop retention and completion goals that are realistic and attainable, given our student population, but at the same time are ambitious enough to challenge the university community to work more effectively to promote student progress toward completion. We have carefully evaluated past data trends in developing the goals and will continue to monitor our progress towards attaining these goals and modify them as needed based on our ongoing data collection procedures.

Retention Targets for Primary Cohorts
As noted above, the Key Enrollment Indicators report specifies clearly defined retention and completion targets for several key cohorts of students at NMHU. Each of these key cohorts will be discussed below.

First-time, full-time, degree-seeking students
The standard cohort for retention and graduation tracking (reported to IPEDS, the New Mexico Higher Education Department, and other agencies) is first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students. It should be noted that at NMHU, this group of students accounts for a relatively small percentage of incoming students in a given year since we attract a relatively large number of transfer and graduate students and have a significant number of returning or readmit students.

Table 2 shows our target fall-to-spring retention rates and our actual retention rates for the fall 2016 and fall 2017 cohorts of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students. The table also includes data from prior and subsequent cohorts.

Table 2: Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates for New Freshmen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Freshmen: Fall-Spring Retention Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 2015 2016 2017 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>275 298 312 254 280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Fall-Spring Retention (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78 78 78 78 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Fall-Spring Retention (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.7 74.5 72.1 75.6 76.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data show that since our probationary year, we have made steady progress in increasing our retention rates towards our 78 percent goal. We are now only 1 percent below the goal, which shows that the goal is reasonable and attainable.

Table 3 shows our target fall-to-fall retention rates and our actual retention rates for the fall 2016 and fall 2017 cohorts of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students. Once again, data is also included from prior and subsequent cohorts.

Table 3: Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates for New Freshmen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Freshmen: Fall-Fall Retention Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 2015 2016 2017 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>275 298 312 254 280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Fall-Fall Retention (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53 53 53 53 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Fall-Fall Retention (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.0 52.7 45.2 51.6 55.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data show that we failed to reach our target fall-to-fall retention rates for the 2016 and 2017 cohorts. However, we did see a marked jump in retention rates for the fall 2017 cohort compared with the fall 2016 cohort, and we exceeded our retention target with the fall 2018 cohort.

Table 4 shows our target four-year and six-year graduation rates and our actual graduation rates for the most recent cohorts of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students for whom graduation rates could be calculated.

Table 4: Graduation Rates for New Freshmen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Freshmen Four-And Six-Year Graduation Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>379 320 414 424 349 275 298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year Completion Target (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 9 9 9 9 9 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Four-Year Completion (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0 10.3 8.0 9.9 10.9 20.4 17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six-Year Completion Target (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 20 20 20 20 20 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Six-Year Completion (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.9 22.2 22.2 21.5 22.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These data indicate that we easily exceeded our target four-year graduation rate for both the fall 2014 and fall 2015 cohorts. The magnitude of the increase, compared with previous cohorts, was impressive, and likely reflects a combination of factors including some of the persistence initiatives we have put into place. Notably, we have been working to increase the rate at which students complete their degrees through better advising and more efficient course management. Also, for the fall 2015 cohort of new freshmen we were offering a monetary incentive to students who graduated within four years.

The six-year graduation rates have remained relatively stable and have been slightly above our target of 20 percent. We will continue to monitor our graduation rates and might increase our targets for future cohorts if the data continue to show positive results.

**Transfer students**

Another important cohort we track for retention and completion is incoming transfer students. At NMHU, this cohort is actually larger than the new student cohort.

Table 5 shows our target fall-to-spring retention rates and our actual retention rates for the fall 2016 and fall 2017 cohorts of incoming transfer students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incoming Transfer Students: Fall-Spring Retention Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Fall-Spring Retention (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Fall-Spring Retention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data indicate that retention rates for this cohort vacillate somewhat from year to year. We failed to reach our goal of 80 percent retention for the fall 2016 cohort, but we exceeded the goal for the fall 2017 cohort. However, we fell back slightly below the goal for the fall 2018 cohort. These results suggest that we need to work toward stabilizing retention rates for this cohort. Clearly, the goal of 80 percent is attainable, but we have not consistently reached it.

Table 6 shows our target fall-to-fall retention rates and our actual retention rates for the fall 2016 and fall 2017 cohorts of incoming transfer students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incoming Transfer Students: Fall-Fall Retention Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Fall-Fall Retention (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Fall-Fall Retention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data indicate that we failed to reach our target of 71 percent for the fall 2016 cohort, but almost attained the target for the fall 2017 and fall 2018 cohorts. The target of 71 percent seems reasonable and attainable with continued diligence in our retention efforts.

Table 7 shows our target four-year and six-year graduation rates and our actual graduation rates for the most recent cohorts of incoming transfer students for whom graduation rates could be calculated.

These data show that our four-year graduation rates have basically been increasing for the past several cohorts, exceeding the target value for the past three years. We have also exceeded our goals for the past four cohorts for our six-year graduation rate. We will continue to monitor these trends and will evaluate the appropriateness of the targets if the actual graduation rates continue to increase.

**Graduate students**

A third cohort of students we regularly track for retention and graduation rates is graduate students. Currently, we only offer master’s degrees, not doctoral degrees, which impacts the projected time to completion.

Table 8 shows our fall-to-fall retention rates for incoming graduate students for the past five years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incoming Graduate Students: Fall-Fall Retention Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Fall-Fall Retention (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Fall-Fall Retention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data indicate that retention rates for graduate students have been quite high and relatively stable with a peak value attained by the fall 2017 cohort.

Table 9 shows four-year graduation rates for incoming graduate students for the past five years.
Once again, these data show fairly strong completion trends with a steady increase from the fall 2011 cohort to the fall 2014 cohort.

As of this writing, we have not yet defined target retention and completion rates for our graduate student cohorts. The Office of Graduate Studies has been in a state of transition and our enrollment management efforts for graduate students have primarily been coordinated at the departmental level. As of fall 2019, the Office of Admissions has assumed responsibility for recruitment of graduate students. This will allow us to address enrollment management concerns for graduate students in a more systematic and centralized way.

**Retention Targets for At-Risk Populations**

In fall 2016, the Retention Advisory Council (RAC) was formed to address institutional retention concerns, particularly with reference to first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students, who historically have relatively low retention rates at NMHU. One of the first initiatives undertaken by the RAC was to identify specific subpopulations of students who have especially low retention rates to help determine the most effective methods for increasing retention in these vulnerable subpopulations.

This initiative took a data-informed approach to determining the appropriate subpopulations to target. We worked closely with a consultant (Ruffalo Noel-Levitz) in this process, providing the consultant with a large amount of raw institutional data. The consultant then used their own algorithms and statistical procedures to help identify several subpopulations of concern, including:

- Native American students
- Late applicants
- Students with a permanent address more than 93 miles away
- Academically at-risk students (operationalized as low high school GPA)
- Students with an undeclared major

For each of these subpopulations, a subcommittee was formed to further delve into the specific challenges these subpopulations might be facing and to recommend possible initiatives that could help to address the academic and personal needs of these subpopulations so as to improve their retention outcomes. Each subcommittee produced a report summarizing relevant data pertaining to their subpopulation and providing a list of key recommendations. These subpopulation retention reports are available on our website.

While the RAC and its various subcommittees were not charged with implementing or authorizing changes in institutional policies or procedures, these reports and subsequent committee discussions were instrumental in informing subsequent decisions on how to develop meaningful and effective retention initiatives. The reports also informed the development of the Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan. Some of the key findings of the RAC reports, as well as retention activities derived from those reports, are outlined below.

### Retention Advisory Council (RAC)

- Formed to address institutional retention concerns.
- Identified specific subpopulations with lower retention rates.
- Provided recommendations for increasing retention.

### Enrollment Success Program

During the summer of 2017, the RAC further analyzed the data from the five subpopulations identified above. At that point, it was determined that a subset of students within each of the subpopulations shared the following criteria:

- Were admitted within 35 days of the first day of class (late admits)
- Were admitted on probationary admission (GPA less than 1.75)
- Were admitted with an ACT score of less than 13 or SAT score less than 740

For the fall 2018 cohort, the criteria were modified to include more students. Therefore, students who were admitted on probationary status or had an ACT score of 14 or less were included.

Based on this analysis, the RAC developed the Enrollment Success Program (ESP). This program is for first-time freshmen and it provides students meeting the above criteria opportunities to achieve academic success by engaging in orientation, advisement, and support services.

As part of the program, participating students are asked to abide by the Enrollment Success Contract for a period of one academic year. The contract requires students to attend weekly meetings with their academic adviser, participate in 30 hours of academic enrichment activities (e.g. ARMAS, Writing Center, Net Tutor, etc.), maintain 15 credit hours per semester, earn at least a 1.75 GPA, attend all class sessions, and fulfill all course responsibilities as outlined in the course syllabi. Based on academic success measures for these students (see below), the increased contact between advisers and at-risk students appears to be having a positive impact on student success, especially for the fall 2018 cohort. As a student-centered strategy designed to foster measurable improvements in retention rates, time to graduation, and completion rates, the Enrollment Success Program will continue to be evaluated every semester to determine its effectiveness.

Because this initiative is relatively new, we have not yet developed data-informed targets for retention and completion rates for these students. However, the available data suggest we are having some success with this very high-risk population (see Table 10). The fall-to-fall retention rate for the fall 2017 and fall 2018 cohorts are slightly below the freshmen cohort as a whole but are slightly above our preliminary target rate of 45 percent.

### Table 10: Fall-to-Fall Retention for Enrollment Success Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Success Program: Fall-Fall Retention Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retained Fall-Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Rate (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Rate (%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Native American students

We have developed a number of initiatives designed to increase engagement, retention and academic success among Native American students. The RAC subcommittee for this group identified a number of possible ways to more deeply engage Native American students.
students with the goal of increasing retention and success. Some of the proposed ideas included the following:

- Require all first-time freshmen to live in the Community Center for Indigeneity at Melody Hall (one of our residence halls);
- Provide academic support by encouraging study groups;
- Introduce students to available support services by providing in-house presentations;
- Introduce students to peer mentors and Native American Center (NAC) staff;
- Require peer mentors to live and establish office hours in Melody Hall;
- Meal Away from Home initiative and other culturally relevant social opportunities;
- Call and contact students at least twice a semester;
- Encourage students to participate in NAC events and workshops;
- Host events that highlight different New Mexico tribes and pueblos;
- Work with faculty and staff to educate student population about different tribes and pueblos.

All of these recommendations have been implemented, at least on an experimental basis, although it might take some time to determine their effectiveness. We are monitoring the success of these initiatives using retention and GPA data and are exploring opportunities for expanding academic success programming for Native American students. A spring 2019 progress report is available online.

### Table 11: Fall-to-Fall Retention for Native American Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates: Native American Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cohort Size</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target Rate (%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actual Fall-Fall Retention Rate (%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 shows retention data for Native American students. The target fall-to-fall retention rate for the fall 2016 cohort of Native American first-time freshmen was 28 percent, while the target for the fall 2017 cohort was 30 percent. We exceeded the targets for both cohorts (the actual retention rate for the fall 2016 cohort was 39 percent, while the actual retention rate for the fall 2017 cohort was 32 percent). For the fall 2018 cohort, we saw an even higher retention rate of 47 percent, close to the value for the freshman cohort as a whole. The relatively high retention rate for the fall 2018 cohorts suggests that some of the initiatives noted above are having a positive effect.

The target retention rates were admittedly very modest but were higher than the actual retention rates for the fall 2014 cohort and the fall 2015 cohort. While we are pleased that we met our targets for these cohorts, it is clear that we need to aspire to higher targets for these students. We will continue to explore multiple channels for improving retention among Native American students.

### African American students

African American students at NMHU have also had historically low retention and completion rates. Because this is a relatively small cohort at NMHU, we have struggled to provide adequate resources to address the academic needs of this population. We have, however, made some recent progress. As noted below we have a working group of faculty and administrators who have developed a number of low-cost initiatives to provide better social support to African American students. However, it is still too early to assess the effects of these efforts.

A significant proportion (47 percent in fall 2018) of African American students are athletes, especially football players (by far the largest sport numerically at NMHU). Historically, football players at NMHU have had poor retention and success rates, which translated to low retention rates for the African American student population as a whole. However, our Athletic Office, working with the SEM Office, has recently developed more effective recruiting strategies to ensure that student athletes who come to NMHU have the appropriate academic background to succeed. To better support student athletes once they matriculate, the athletic department implemented a study hall initiative for all athletes in which they are provided necessary academic support to be successful in college. We have seen significant improvements in retention rates for student athletes as a result of these efforts.

Table 12 shows fall-to-fall retention rates for African American students. The fall 2015 cohort of African American first-time freshmen had a fall-to-fall retention rate of 20 percent. Based on this admittedly disappointing value, we set a target retention rate of 23 percent for the fall 2016 cohort and a target of 25 percent for the fall 2017 cohort. For fall 2016, the retention rate was a very disappointing 11 percent, reflecting in part an overall academically weak cohort and in part a class of athletic recruits who struggled academically. However, with improved recruitment and academic support, we saw a marked increase in retention for the fall 2017 cohort, with a 48 percent rate that was very close to the overall rate of 52 percent. We did see a decline in retention rate with the fall 2018 cohort, although we still exceeded our target. We will continue to monitor this group of students and adjust our targets as appropriate.

### Table 12: Fall-to-Fall Retention for African American Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates: African-American Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cohort Size</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target Rate (%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actual Fall-Fall Retention Rate (%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Improvement Process for Enrollment Management

With respect to Core Component 4C, the Higher Learning Commission challenged NMHU to develop a process for systematic improvement in all areas of strategic enrollment management, as evidenced in the quotation below from the Commission recommendations in preparation for the Focused Visit:

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following... Increased use of information to make improvements as warranted by the data on student retention, persistence, and completion. Evidence should be provided that demonstrates the use of the evaluation of the 2016 and 2017 retention, persistence, and completion goals for continuous improvement.”
The previous section specifically addressed our analysis of 2016 and 2017 retention and completion goals. This section focuses more broadly on some of the initiatives that we have developed at NMHU to address our enrollment management challenges. These initiatives were developed through the evaluation of institutional enrollment and persistence trends, survey results, and faculty and staff input based on prior experience.

**Persistencand Completion Academy**

In June 2017 NMHU committed to participate in the HLC sponsored Persistence and Completion Academy (PCA). In this multiyear initiative, NMHU has focused on improving our advising model for undergraduate students in the hope that improved advising would lead to better persistence. At the time of joining the PCA, NMHU was relying on a somewhat traditional model of faculty-based advising with additional support for first-year students provided by the Student Success Center. This advising process is outlined in the NMHU Undergraduate Advising Manual.

While this traditional model offers many benefits, anecdotal and survey-based evidence (from the advising questions on the NSSE and FSSE surveys as well as a native advising survey and the annually administered Student Satisfaction Survey) suggested that students were not always receiving optimum advising to help them move toward graduation in a timely manner. Careful analysis of institutional data indicated that a relatively high percentage of students who graduate from NMHU have a significant excess of credit hours beyond what is needed to graduate. In some cases, these excess hours might be a result of student “swirl” at multiple prior institutions, but in other cases the hours appeared to result from students taking unnecessary courses at NMHU. A working hypothesis for the PCA team was that improving student advising would help to increase the likelihood that students would graduate in a timely manner.

There were some modest but positive outcomes from the initial work of the PCA team. The SEM Office prepared a detailed and data-informed presentation on the relationship between advising and retention. Many faculty members were engaged in the process of evaluating our current advising model, resulting in a report from the Faculty Senate. The Student Success Center initiated a number of processes and procedures to ensure that first-year students were receiving more effective and timely advising.

Although there is widespread commitment across campus to improving academic advising services, there remain some challenges in determining the optimal path toward achieving improvement in this area. Faculty have expressed legitimate concerns about losing vital connections with students if faculty advising is replaced by another model. We have therefore focused our attention on developing a success coaching model similar to the approach taken at Georgia State University (see below), to provide more extensive curricular and extracurricular support to help students make good decisions and persist to completion. This success coaching model became the basis for our revised project for the Persistence and Completion Academy and was discussed in detail during the May 2019 academy workshop in Chicago, to which NMHU sent a team of five participants. For more information on the success coaching model at NMHU, see below.

**Georgia State University Model**

The enrollment management team at NMHU as well as the entire campus community have been working diligently to improve student retention. However, we recognize our limitations and lack of experience in this area. Therefore, we have explored best practices at other institutions. In particular, we have worked with Georgia State University (GSU), which has become a national model for improving retention and student success in at-risk populations. Although GSU is much larger than NMHU, there are key similarities in our respective undergraduate student bodies: a high percentage of incoming students are first-generation minority students from academically and/or financially challenged backgrounds. We therefore felt we could adopt some effective retention strategies from our colleagues at GSU.

In fall 2018 a team of six representatives from NMHU traveled to GSU to learn more about its retention practices. This team included the Vice President for Enrollment Management, the Provost, the Dean of Students, the Director of Human Resources, and two faculty members. The team brought back a number of recommendations for practices, outlined below, that could be reasonably implemented at NMHU in a version proportionate to our institution’s size. Additionally, the SEM office produced a summary report of GSU-based proposals for retention activities at NMHU.

**Early alert system**

One recommendation was to develop a more effective early alert system to determine if a student is struggling or disengaged as soon as possible to provide timely support to that student. Currently, NMHU does not have a class attendance policy, but we do have a system in place whereby faculty can alert the Student Success Center staff if a student is not showing up for class or is struggling academically. We continue to explore ways to improve this early alert system, which is a cornerstone of the GSU approach. In particular, we are exploring options for using existing software tools (primarily BrightSpace and TutorTrac) to provide more extensive monitoring of students’ academic activities, which would provide real-time data that could alert us to potential problems in student attendance or class engagement.

**Data analytics**

A second recommendation was to delve more carefully into our student databases (Banner and BrightSpace in particular) to track student engagement and participation in both academic and cocurricular activities. GSU tracks hundreds of data points on each student and applies complex data analytic algorithms to identify students who might be struggling in a particular area. While we do not have the resources to duplicate the comprehensive data analytics approach used at GSU, we are exploring ways of an adapted approach to apply at NMHU.

NMHU has recently purchased the TutorTrac software system, which will allow more careful tracking of student participation in a range of support services and cocurricular activities. TutorTrac can be set up to scan a student’s ID card when he or she enters an academic or student services office on campus. These “touchpoint” data can then be cross-referenced with Banner data to determine if there are relationships between student success measures and accessing various offices and services on campus.

NMHU has also contracted recently with Ad Astra to implement more effective course scheduling software. Effective use of this software should help us to schedule courses in a way that both promotes student progress towards graduation as well as providing financial efficiencies for the university.

**Freshman first-year experience**

A third recommendation was to reevaluate our first-year experience for incoming freshmen, to develop a more engaging and supportive...
academic and cocurricular experience. We have made numerous changes to our first-year experience and continue to explore various options, although we have not yet, as of this writing, settled on an approach that we feel to be optimally effective. The current system is summarized below under the heading “Highlands Undergraduate Enrichment program.”

Success coaching model
A fourth recommendation was to supplement our current faculty-based advising model by developing a team of “success coaches,” who would be full-time employees dedicated to working with students to maximize their success. These success coaches would not replace faculty advisers, but would rather supplement the work faculty is already doing in this domain. As noted above, there have been ongoing discussions at NMHU regarding ways to improve and optimize academic advising for our students.

The success coaching model, which has been used very successfully at GSU, has support from our President and our Strategic Enrollment Management Office, but is resource intensive. After considerable discussion involving multiple campus stakeholders, in fall 2019 we hired or reassigned three staff members in the Student Success Center (formerly Academic Support Office) to serve as success coaches. As of this writing, we are in the process of implementing this new model. It is too early at this point to determine the effectiveness of the model. It should also be noted that some faculty members have continued to express some concerns about the interface of the success coaching model with the more traditional model of faculty-based academic advising.

As part of the success coaching model, the Student Success Center has implemented the “Cowboy Up” program to help students who are struggling academically. This program offers multiple channels through which students can work with the Student Success Center to address their academic challenges and maintain progress toward graduation.

Two of our centers (Farmington and Santa Fe) have already adopted an advising model that closely resembles the success coaching model used at GSU. The relatively strong academic outcomes of our center students support the effectiveness of this advising model, although it should be noted that most of our center students are transfer students who typically have better outcomes at NMHU than new freshmen.

Recruitment Strategies
NMHU is taking a multipronged approach to increasing enrollment. Some of the strategies we have already implemented or are exploring are summarized below.

Matriculation Task Force
The Matriculation Task Force was instituted in October 2016 and remained active until May 2018. The task force was responsible for reviewing the university’s processes that affect prospective students from the inquiry phase through the enrollment phase. More specifically, the role of the task force was to develop more efficient and effective interdepartmental communication processes to support students from inquiry to matriculation.

The Matriculation Task Force provided an opportunity for all functional areas of the college to collaborate to improve recruitment and enrollment experiences for prospective and current students. Task force members included representatives from both Student Services and Academic Affairs who collaborated closely to identify and reduce barriers to student enrollment. Additionally, the task force helped to monitor, support, and encourage communication among various offices to increase enrollment, retention and graduation of NMHU students.

The task force was decommissioned after the May 2018 meeting as it had succeeded in achieving its goals. Our current recruitment and admissions policies and procedures reflect the productive work performed by the task force. Meeting minutes for the Matriculation Task Force are available online. The May 2018 minutes provide a summary of some of the key projects and initiatives undertaken by the task force.

Transfer Coordinator position
The university recently hired a new employee in the position of Transfer Coordinator, whose role is to help recruit community college students in the state of New Mexico to attend NMHU. This employee is housed at Central New Mexico Community College in Albuquerque, which is by far the largest community college in New Mexico. Given that a high percentage of our incoming students are transfers from community colleges, we felt that this position would be a good investment in our enrollment management efforts.

The early returns have been positive as we have seen an increase in enrollment of transfer students in both the fall 2018 term and in the spring 2019 term relative to the previous year. However, we saw a decline in incoming transfer students in fall 2019 relative to fall 2018. A careful data analysis was conducted to help identify specific subgroups of transfer students for which the decline was most marked. It should also be noted that community college enrollment in New Mexico has declined in recent years (see Figure 4 below), so this could also be hurting our recruitment efforts. There is some anecdotal evidence that we might be facing increased competition for transfer students from other New Mexico state universities, which have also seen significant enrollment declines in recent years.

We will continue to evaluate our transfer recruitment procedures to ensure optimal efforts in this area.

Streamlined application process
The Office of Admissions has made a number of key changes to the application process, designed primarily to make the process more streamlined and more user friendly. In the competitive environment of higher education recruitment, we want to ensure our application process will allow interested students to complete the process quickly and efficiently with optimal communication between the university and the prospective student. We have implemented a new application software (Slate), revised our application forms, and significantly decreased response time to communicate with applicants.

Some key features of the Slate software system, implemented effective for applications for the spring 2020 and fall 2020 terms, include the following:
The Regional Partnership School (RPS) is an educational partnership between Pojoaque Valley School District (PVSD), New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU), and Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). The partnership has been officially in existence since the signing of an institutional agreement on September 27, 2018. The primary goals of the RPS are to directly develop and grow new teachers by creating multiple pathways to entry, build capacity in new and existing teachers by implementing systems of professional learning and development with a focus on mathematics and English language arts, and become a model residency program for the state of New Mexico. The partnership has spent much of the last year laying the foundational groundwork for professional development and learning systems. This program will help to strengthen recruitment efforts for our School of Education.

Website changes
The university has recently made dramatic improvements to our institutional website. Previously the website was difficult to navigate and unappealing to prospective students. We hired a web content manager in early 2019 and contracted with a web designer to provide a complete data-driven facelift of our website. We are confident that the improved website will serve as an effective tool for recruitment of new students. The new website can be viewed at www.nmhu.edu/.

Recruitment for Centers and Online Programs
Our campus centers work closely with the Office of Admissions, and each center participates in a number of center-specific recruitment activities. For our Farmington Center, some of these activities are:

- San Juan College transfer and career fairs;
- Diné College transfer fair;
- Navajo Technical University career fair;
- Local high school college fairs;
- Tribal career fairs.

Similarly, some center-specific activities for our Santa Fe Center are:

- Recruitment tables at Santa Fe Community College;
- Job fairs and college nights at Santa Fe Community College;
- Advertising on local radio shows in Santa Fe;
- Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce job fairs.

We have also been exploring the possibility of developing a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program in conjunction with Eastern New Mexico University. This discussion is still in the preliminary stages and would be subject to approval from the HLC and from the New Mexico Higher Education Department, but such a program would complement and build upon our existing BSN, potentially attracting a significant number of new students. The New Mexico Higher Education Department has been very supportive of this effort, so we are optimistic about the possibilities.

Our School of Business, Media and Technology has recently developed an entrepreneurship concentration at both the BBA and MBA level. This concentration addresses a specific area of interest expressed by current and former students and addresses a pressing need within our region and the state of New Mexico to promote business development. The new concentration went into effect in fall of 2019.

The State of New Mexico for a Master of Fine Arts program, which will build on our successful Media Arts program. The MFA is our first terminal degree in several decades and fills an obvious need within a large geographic region in which there are no other MFA programs offered. Our first cohort of students was admitted to the MFA program in fall 2019.

In late fall 2018 we also received approval from the HLC and the state of New Mexico for an Alternative Teacher Certification program. This program is directed toward residents of New Mexico who currently have a bachelor’s degree and an interest in entering the teaching profession. The program will not only boost enrollment at NMHU but will also help to address the critical teacher shortage in New Mexico. There has already been considerable interest in the program, with 31 students enrolling in the program in fall 2019.

In fall 2019 we began a search for a new employee in the Registrar’s Office for the position of Transfer Evaluation Specialist, whose role will be to help process transcripts from incoming transfer students in a more efficient manner. This position should also help our recruitment efforts by streamlining the process of onboarding new transfer students and will also help us to broaden our recruiting efforts for nontraditional transfer students (e.g. those needing to transfer in credit for prior learning experiences).

Intentional recruitment
The university has recently updated its recruitment strategies for new freshmen. Specifically, we have taken a more intentional and focused approach, targeting potential students who are more likely to be interested in attending NMHU. This has resulted in higher yield rates for admitted students (32 percent for new freshmen in fall 2019), and also allows us to provide more attention to a smaller but more select group of applicants. We remain committed to our open-access policy for incoming undergraduate students, but we feel that a more intentional recruiting strategy will allow us to recruit students who are more likely to be successful at NMHU and therefore more likely to be retained.

New program development
Until recently, NMHU had not initiated any new programs in more than a decade, although we have made some changes to existing programs and added new concentrations to some existing majors. We believe that an essential strategy for increasing enrollment is to add high-profile programs that will attract new students. We recently received approval from the HLC and the State of New Mexico for a Master of Fine Arts program, which will build on our successful Media Arts program. The MFA is our first terminal degree in several decades and fills an obvious need within a large geographic region in which there are no other MFA programs offered. Our first cohort of students was admitted to the MFA program in fall 2019.

In late fall 2018 we also received approval from the HLC and the state of New Mexico for an Alternative Teacher Certification program. This program is directed toward residents of New Mexico who currently have a bachelor’s degree and an interest in entering the teaching profession. The program will not only boost enrollment at NMHU but will also help to address the critical teacher shortage in New Mexico. There has already been considerable interest in the program, with 31 students enrolling in the program in fall 2019.
Some recruitment activities at our Rio Rancho Center are:

- Bernalillo High School Career Day / Bernalillo High School College Fair
- CNM College & Career Fair / CNM Transfer Days
- Intel Employee College & Job Fair
- Pueblo of Jemez Job & College Fair
- Santa Ana Pueblo Job & College Fair

**Resources for Academic Support**

NMHU provides multiple channels of academic support for our students. Given the higher percentage of students from academically challenged backgrounds, these academic resources are a critically important part of our overall retention efforts. The offices and programs described below engage in data-informed improvement processes to ensure they are providing the best services possible to our students, thereby helping to improve student retention and success. Some of our key academic support offices and initiatives are summarized below.

**Student Success Office**

Our primary support channel for helping students be academically successful is the Student Success Office (formerly the Office of Academic Support). This office offers a broad range of services to help students be successful. These services include:

- Undergraduate advisement and success coaching
- Orientation
- Learning Center Computer Lab: Computers are available year-round for student use; conference tables and a Smartboard are also available for student use.
- Adaptive Needs Computer Lab: A universally accessible computer lab located in Donnelly Library.
- Online Tutoring: 24-hour tutoring and writing help is available for all students enrolled at NMHU.
- Accessibility services: The Student Success Office coordinates accessibility services starting with the high school-to-college transition for incoming freshmen and continuing throughout the college experience.
- Peer Advising: Peer advisers are here to help students address academic challenges. Peer advisers work with students to develop an individualized study plan.
- Placement testing

More information about these and other academic support services is available online at the Student Success Office website.

As an additional measure to improve retention and collect usable retention data, the Student Success Office has begun contacting in a timely fashion eligible students who have not registered for the current term. This effort has focused on students in good academic standing who do not have a large balance owed to the university. The Student Success Office participates in the cocurricular outcomes assessment (CCOA) process. In a report from its most recent CCOA cycle, outcomes data are summarized and strategies for improvement based on those data are identified. In this report, the Student Success Office focused on the effectiveness of advising services for first-time freshmen, a key aspect of our retention efforts. Additionally, the Student Success Office prepared a progress report for the Retention Advisory Council in spring 2019.

**ARMAS Center**

The ARMAS (Achieving in Research, Mathematics and Science) Center provides math tutoring, peer-facilitated study groups in gateway science courses, local science focused internships and research opportunities, a computer lab with printing capabilities, and comfortable study spaces for individuals and groups. Supplemental instruction sessions are led by trained students who have successfully completed the target course and are selected by their professors to hold group-study sessions and office hours to support students currently taking the course. All students (not just STEM students) are welcome to participate in the services and programs offered by the center. More information is online at the ARMAS website.

The ARMAS Center has conducted detailed analyses of student usage data to determine how the various services offered by ARMAS impact academic success among various groups of students. A recent analysis of four-year graduation rates for ARMAS users showed that for new freshmen and continuing sophomores, graduation rates were higher for ARMAS users. For incoming transfer students, in contrast, graduation rates were lower for ARMAS users. However, when we restricted the analysis to STEM majors, we found that transfer students who used ARMAS had a much higher graduation rate than non-ARMAS transfer students. A more detailed report of these findings is available online.

The ARMAS Center also prepared a progress report for the Retention Advisory Council in spring 2019, and is a participant in the co-curricular outcomes assessment process.

**Highlands Undergraduate Enrichment program**

The Highlands Undergraduate Enrichment (HUE) program provides First-Year Experience Learning Communities for all new freshmen students. These learning communities are basically a set of linked courses that allow students to explore a theme from multiple perspectives while forming meaningful relationships with their peers. Freshmen choose their learning community based upon their personal interests. The HUE program also includes an Integrative Seminar (iSeminar) course that helps students focus on academic and social integration as well as personal growth.

We have recently expanded the HUE program to include activities for sophomore (i.e. second-year) students. The key element of the second-year HUE program is the use of peer mentors who are embedded in select courses across the core curriculum and provide tutoring and study support in the HUE Study Lounge.

Learning communities are a well-established component of higher education institutions. The expectation at NMHU is that these learning communities will promote retention among freshmen students by increasing student engagement, both with academic activities as well as peer-related connections.
The learning community model at NMHU is still relatively new. There are some challenges that remain in optimizing the model, but we are confident that it will benefit our student learning experiences and improve academic outcomes by helping students form meaningful and supportive relationships. The HUE program participates in the cocurricular outcomes assessment process, but as of this writing the program is still too new to allow for a data-informed evaluation of its success.

Writing Center
The Writing Center provides support to undergraduate students in all disciplines, by helping them to develop their writing skills both for classroom success and for real-world applications. The Writing Center provides tutoring in a supportive environment in which students plan, write, or revise papers under the guidance of a trained tutor. The tutors are experienced writers, often with professional publication experience. More information is online at the Writing Center website.

The Writing Center participates in the cocurricular outcomes assessment (CCOA) process. In a report from its most recent CCOA cycle, the Writing Center surveyed students about their writing habits and the development of their writing skills. The Center also evaluated course grades in composition courses to determine whether students who visit the Writing Center have better grades in these courses. These data have helped to validate the effectiveness of Writing Center services and have helped the Center to improve its services.

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
In early spring 2020, NMHU will be meeting with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to conduct an assessment of how well we serve adult learners and where we need to consider improvements. Since nontraditional students comprise roughly 60 percent of our student population, any improvements we can make in this area could have a significant impact on our overall student retention.

Financial Aid leveraging
In fall 2018, the Strategic Enrollment Management Office, Financial Aid Office, and Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research assembled a team to evaluate our financial aid policies and practices. The purpose of this project was to evaluate whether financial aid awards can be more effectively used to leverage increased enrollment and retention of undergraduate students at NMHU. Specifically, the research team investigated:

- the types of scholarships that are offered to new undergraduate students at NMHU;
- the type and amount of student aid provided to NMHU students in recent years;
- the retention of scholarships by student recipients;
- the retention and graduation rates of undergraduate scholarship recipients;
- the retention and graduation rates of NMHU students based on unmet financial need;
- the amount of debt with which non-retained students leave the institution;

The research team’s overall recommendation was that NMHU should restructure our financial aid packaging to more effectively leverage scholarships and other awards to increase enrollment, retention, and graduation of students. Given the limited amount of institutional aid the university can disburse, it is essential we use those funds in a way that will help to improve our recruitment efforts and also help to ensure that students have appropriate levels of financial support to make progress toward graduation.

The work of this team is outlined in detail in a final report, which is posted on the university website.

Student Activities and Student Services
Another broad area in which we have directed our retention efforts is in Student Life. We recognize that a vibrant campus and opportunities for meaningful engagement can be powerful tools for promoting retention as well as a lifelong commitment to the university. In the last few years we have implemented numerous strategies for expanding campus life activities and more effectively engaging students. While most of these activities and services are open to all students, they can be especially beneficial from both a personal and retention standpoint for traditional students who are struggling to get connected on campus.

Outdoor Recreation Center
One of the chief attractions of our main Las Vegas campus is our proximity to a range of recreational opportunities. The Outdoor Recreation Center, which was opened in fall 2016, coordinates a wide variety of outdoor activities that are open to all students. As a few examples, almost 300 students have gone on hikes, approximately 800 students have gone on ski trips, and more than 1,800 daily equipment rentals (e.g. tents, backpacks) have been processed. These numbers are quite significant taking into account that there are only about 1,200 degree-seeking undergraduates at the Las Vegas campus in a given term.

These activities help to strengthen students’ connections to the university and help students form new friendships, which in turn can help improve retention. We have also leveraged the attraction of these outdoor opportunities as a recruitment tool.

Campus Activities Program
A $75 student activity fee supports a broad range of activities that are open to all students. These activities include outdoor activities sponsored by the Outdoor Recreation Office (see above), as well as a variety of performing arts events. In AY2018-19 we offered seven major events in the performing arts. The student activity fee also funds movie passes, museum visits (especially for our NMHU-Santa Fe students), gym memberships (for our NMHU-Farmington students), as well as a variety of social events.

Native American Center
Almost 10 percent of students at NMHU are of Native American ancestry. Historically, Native American students have had relatively poor retention rates. One of our recent initiatives to address this concern was to open the Native American Center, which provides support services to all NMHU Native American students as well as to the student body as a whole. The center offers academic support including peer mentoring, assistance with financial aid applications, and social opportunities through various clubs and organizations. Our hope is that providing these opportunities for campus engagement will help to increase retention rates among Native American students. The presence of the Native American Center can also serve as a recruitment tool among the Native American population.

We also work with several tribal-affiliated institutions to encourage Native American students to consider transferring to NMHU. As an
example, in spring 2019 NMHU hosted a group of students from Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI), a two-year college located in Albuquerque.

**African American Outreach**

Another group of students who have had historically poor retention rates at NMHU are African American students. We have recently implemented a number of initiatives to address the needs of African American students to help ensure that they have improved levels of engagement and student success. Dr. Kimberly Blea (Dean of Students), Dr. Gloria Gadsden (faculty), Dr. Ruthy Watson (CARES) and Ms. Yvette Wilkes (Director of Housing), with the support of President Minner, have created an informal working group to address the needs of African American students on campus. Thus far, the working group has brought speakers and cultural events to campus during Black History Month and is working with students to create an African American student club (the Black Student Union). The working group is also focused on various advocacy efforts. President Minner is committed to locating resources to address the needs of this population in order to improve their rates of success.

**Student Union**

Our new and state-of-the-art Student Center provides a large, comfortable, inviting space for a range of student activities. The center has study space, a game room, and numerous areas for socializing and for hosting larger events. The building also houses various offices directly connected to student activities. Part of the design strategy in constructing the Student Center was to improve student connections to the university and to create a space for building friendships and relationships among students. These strategies should translate to increased engagement and retention.

**CARES**

Many students at NMHU come from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, which can increase levels of stress and anxiety in a fast-paced and demanding university environment. To ensure these students can continue their education and be successful, the university recognizes the importance of providing emotional and social support services. The Center Advocacy Resources Education & Support (CARES) program provides services and support to students who might be struggling in their personal or social lives. Services provided by the center include counseling, advocacy, and referrals to community service providers. CARES also provides educational outreach and prevention programs. These services are available to students at our centers as well as to students at our main campus in Las Vegas.

**Student Relations Office**

Student surveys as well as anecdotal evidence have suggested that many students at NMHU, especially first-generation students, struggle to navigate through the various steps involved in registration, seeking financial aid, and working with the business office. There was concern that these difficulties could be contributing to our retention challenges.

Partly in response to these concerns, the Customer Relations Office, now known as the Student Relations (SR) Office, was established in October 2017 as an additional resource for NMHU students. The two main roles of the SR Office are to serve as a student ombuds-person, helping to resolve student issues and concerns, and to serve as a one-stop call center for students with several questions looking for answers with one phone call, email, or visit. This position has been instrumental in improving our student services. Since its establishment, the SR Office has assisted over 1,250 students. The Student Relations Coordinator assists students by appointment or walk-in, via telephone, email, live chat, or Zoom appointment and travels to HU’s centers on a monthly basis to be available for in-person student assistance. Additional data concerning the activity of this office are available in the SD chapter of this document.

**Communication**

We have also worked to ensure better dissemination of information about student activities. We have an events calendar posted online and send out regular email notifications announcing all student events and activities.

**Athletics**

The NMHU Athletic Department implemented several initiatives in the 2018-19 academic year to help address retention and enrollment concerns.

- The department recently hired a Sports Information Director. This position provides increased media exposure and increased recognition for our athletes, which might strengthen their ties to the university.
- The department has challenged coaches to reach target numbers for their rosters. This initiative has helped to increase total number of athletes, which in turn has helped our overall enrollment efforts.
- The department recently created a new position, Assistant Athletic Director – Student Services, who provides various types of academic assistance to our student-athletes, including help with class scheduling, help in communicating with faculty, and oversight of study hall and tutoring activities. This academic support will help to ensure that our student athletes are academically successful, thereby improving retention and graduation rates.

**Campuswide involvement**

As noted above, NMHU recently created an Office of Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) to oversee the recruitment and retention efforts of the institution. However, it is clear that promoting enrollment growth and improving retention must be campuswide initiatives. We have therefore worked to inform the campus community about our enrollment and retention efforts and develop opportunities for various stakeholders to contribute to our enrollment and retention efforts.

**Campuswide forums**

The university has held a number of campuswide events focusing on enrollment management. In spring 2019, we held an HLC Campus Forum in which we presented the HLC concerns with reference to Criterion 4C and outlined some of the steps we are taking to address those concerns. This forum also provided an opportunity for participants to make suggestions and recommendations for ways that all members of the campus community can contribute to the enrollment and retention efforts. A recording of this forum and a summary of the audience-generated ideas can be found on the university website. A second HLC Campus Forum on Criterion 4C was presented in fall 2019 to provide an update about our enrollment and retention efforts.

As noted above, a team of university representatives traveled to Georgia State University (GSU) in fall 2018 to learn more about the successful retention efforts implemented by GSU. In spring 2019, we held a campuswide forum to inform the campus commu-
nity about some of the initiatives underway at GSU, and about how NMHU can implement some of those initiatives on a proportionate level. This forum was well attended, well received, and prompted some productive discussion about adopting some of the strategies. A summary of this presentation is available on the website.

All campuswide forums take place in a Zoom-enabled context which allows participation from NMHU employees and students at our centers.

**Professional development workshop**

In August of 2018, during our annual Professional Development Week for faculty and staff, the Vice-President for Strategic Enrollment Management presented a session on ways that academic departments and individual faculty members can contribute to enrollment and retention efforts. The session was data-based with each academic unit being provided with a summary of its enrollment and departmental retention trends for the past several years, broken down by key demographics. Audience members were invited to reflect on and discuss ways that they could participate in the enrollment management efforts of the university. A copy of the data presentation is available on the website.

**SEM newsletters**

In fall 2018 and spring 2019, the Office of Strategic Enrollment Management released a series of enrollment management newsletters to the campus community. These newsletters provided a summary of key data points and trends related to our enrollment management efforts as well as a narrative explanation of what the data mean and how these data impact our enrollment efforts. A sample of one of these newsletters can be found on our website.

**Summary: Core Component 4C**

We believe we have effectively addressed most of the concerns of the Higher Learning Commission with respect to Core Component 4C while acknowledging that some ongoing challenges remain. Some of our key accomplishments in this area are summarized below.

- Creation of the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan and supporting documents;
- Production and maintenance of Key Enrollment Indicators (KEIs);
- Development of a data-informed approach to strategic enrollment management;
- Improvements in retention rates and four-year graduation rates for many cohorts;
- Promotion of campuswide involvement in recruitment and retention efforts;
- Initiation of new programs, including the MFA program and the Alternative Education Certificate;
- Application of best practices, notably those adapted from Georgia State University;
- Improved wraparound services to support student retention and success.

However, we acknowledge there are areas where continued improvement is needed. We have identified some of these areas below.

- Continued enrollment declines;
- Evolving process for the recruitment of graduate students;
- Flat or declining retention rates for certain cohorts;
- Philosophical differences between faculty and administration in certain areas pertaining to enrollment management.

In summary, consistent with HLC recommendations, we have taken a more data-informed approach to all aspects of strategic enrollment management. We have also worked to increase involvement of all campus stakeholders in recruitment and retention activities. Our continued enrollment decline remains a challenge, but as outlined in the above section we have taken numerous steps to stabilize enrollment.
Core Component 5A
The second major section of this document outlines how the university has addressed Core Component 5A.

Over the past several years, NMHU has taken a number of steps to improve the financial stability of the university, resulting in a CFI consistently above the zone. We have worked to increase university reserves and resolve outstanding fiscal challenges such as audit findings, Highlands Stable Isotopes, lawsuits, and the golf course. President Minner has made resolving these concerns and placing NMHU on a positive financial footing a priority, as referenced in new Board of Regents policies, the Campus Budget and Planning Committee, and regular communication to the campus community. While NMHU and the state of New Mexico continue to face enrollment and fiscal challenges, NMHU is well-positioned financially for continued success.

**Background: Core Component 5A**
HLC Core Component 5A specifies:

“The institution’s resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.”

In its letter of July 9, 2018, removing NMHU from probation, the Higher Learning Commission Board of Trustees identified Core Component 5A as an area of continuing concern. Specifically, the HLC letter made four broad recommendations in this area in preparation for the Spring 2020 Focused Visit.

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following:

- Evidence of a reduction in state funding to balance the institution’s budget.
- Stabilization or growth in student enrollment through the identification of a clear strategy linked to metric-driven recruitment and student persistence goals.
- Independent audits of the institution, the Foundation, and Isotopes that do not yield findings or, at minimum, do not yield any repeat findings.
- Continued year-end actual change in net assets at break-even levels or that yield surplus.”

Each of these four recommendations will be addressed in the major sections below.

**Executive Summary: Core Component 5A**
Following is a summary of key accomplishments achieved by NMHU to respond to the concerns of the HLC with reference to Core Component 5A. These accomplishments will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

- Increase and stabilization of Composite Financial Index (CFI), reflecting our commitment to fiscal responsibility;
- Careful monitoring of fiscal landscape in New Mexico, including extensive participation in annual legislative sessions, in order to respond more effectively to potential impacts;
- Commitment to place money in annual reserves to provide buffer against uncertain state funding appropriations, as per a policy passed by the Board of Regents;
- Careful tuition increases to improve our revenue stream while still maintaining affordability for our students, many of whom come from financially disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Managing strategic budget reductions in the face of declining enrollment, so as to maintain a balanced budget without resorting to extreme measures like layoffs or furloughs;
- Implementation of numerous initiatives to help stabilize enrollment, including the following:
  - Creation of new degree programs and new continuing education offerings matched to workforce needs and student interest;
  - Expanded online programming;
  - More effective leveraging of financial aid to attract new students;
  - Hiring of Transfer Coordinator to help recruit and retain more transfer students;
  - Expanded retention initiatives to help retain current students;
  - Development of key enrollment indicators to allow more effective tracking of enrollment and retention outcomes so as to make better data-informed decisions;
- Audit reports for 2017-18 with no repeat findings;
- Resolution of all audit findings from previous year;
- Resolution of all new audit findings;
- Clean audit for Highlands Foundation with successful resolution of prior-year findings;
- Clean audit for Highlands Stable Isotopes with successful resolution of prior-year findings;
- Improved budgeting process to provide more transparency and participation;
- Reduction in expenses associated with auxiliary operations to help achieve a balanced budget.

**Reduction in Reliance on State Funding**
With respect to Core Component 5A, a key area of concern for the Higher Learning Commission was our overreliance on state funding to balance our budget, as evidenced in the quotation below from the HLC recommendations in preparation for the Focused Visit:

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following... Evidence of a reduction in the reliance on state funding to balance the institution’s budget.”

The economy of the state of New Mexico is based heavily on resource extraction, which provides a volatile and unpredictable revenue stream for the state as a whole and public colleges and universities in particular. Historically, an overreliance on state budgeting has led to various operational challenges for NMHU, often requiring the university to make unplanned and unexpected budget cuts in many areas of institutional funding. Furthermore, given the uncertainty of future state funding levels, it has been difficult to plan effectively and make appropriate investments in initiatives that could help the university grow and fulfill our mission more effectively.

Therefore, the university fully concurs with the recommendation of the HLC to reduce our dependence on state funding. To that end, we have implemented a number of policies and procedures to help stabilize our revenue stream and allow for more intentional and effective planning. These policies and procedures are summarized below.
Monitoring the Fiscal Landscape

As a basic strategy towards achieving a greater degree of financial independence from state appropriations, we have been carefully monitoring the fiscal landscape within the state and region. Our Vice President for Finance and Administration (VPFA) closely monitors the state budgetary proceedings, traveling to the state capital extensively during the legislative budget hearing sessions. The VPFA regularly reports these findings to the campus community through forums and meetings of the Campus Budget and Planning Committee. Given the extraction-based economy in New Mexico, we also carefully monitor global oil prices and resource extraction activity within the state, trying to anticipate significant fluctuations. The university is striving to be in a position to leverage revenue surpluses, when available, but not to become dependent on uncertain revenue streams or to make unrealistic future budget projections based on current state budgetary parameters.

Annual Reserves

The university is committed to setting aside a significant amount of money annually to be placed in a reserve account per a formal policy passed by the Board of Regents. These reserve deposits will be continued until the reserve balance reaches a minimum of $12,000,000. Once this minimum reserve balance is reached, the university will be able to withdraw from the reserves as needed, subject to maintaining the minimum balance of $12,000,000. This will allow the university to maintain essential functions even in the face of state budget cuts.

The commitment to build the reserve fund was approved by the Board of Regents (BOR), as reflected in the minutes (p. 6) of the BOR meeting on March 1, 2018. The university’s annual budgets also reflect the allocation of the reserve amount under unrestricted net assets.

Table 13 shows the increase in our reserves over the past several years, and also our cash and cash equivalent balance. (The high cash balance in FY10-FY12 resulted from funds that were allocated to capital projects.)

Table 13: Reserves and Cash Balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Unrestricted Net Position (Reserves) in thousands of dollars rounded to the nearest thousand</th>
<th>Cash and Cash Equivalents in thousands of dollars rounded to the nearest thousand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY10</td>
<td>3,568</td>
<td>30,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY11</td>
<td>2,119</td>
<td>22,358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY12</td>
<td>904</td>
<td>17,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY13</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>6,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY14</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>7,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY15</td>
<td>2,848</td>
<td>9,105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY16</td>
<td>4,371</td>
<td>8,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY17</td>
<td>2,943</td>
<td>9,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY18</td>
<td>15,413</td>
<td>9,331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY19</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>9,837</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The increase in our reserve position means we are able to weather sudden downturns in state funding in ways that NMHU was not able to do previously. This means we are not reliant on state funds to maintain fiscal stability. Our financial health is further reflected in the fact that we have not had to cut any positions due to funding challenges, and we have been able to continue investing in new programs and new opportunities for our students.

Tuition and Fee Increases

Another way NMHU has decreased reliance on state funding is by a careful increase of tuition. Historically, NMHU has been one of the most affordable universities in the southwestern United States. Table 14 shows in-state tuition and fees (from IPEDS) for NMHU compared with other state universities in New Mexico, as well as comparisons with comprehensive universities in adjacent states.

Table 14: In-State Tuition and Fees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Name</th>
<th>In-State Tuition (2016-2018)</th>
<th>Fees (2016-2018)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern New Mexico College</td>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>4,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico Highlands</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>4,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern New Mexico University</td>
<td>4,885</td>
<td>5,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western New Mexico University</td>
<td>5,346</td>
<td>6,049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico State University</td>
<td>5,950</td>
<td>6,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of New Mexico</td>
<td>6,846</td>
<td>7,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sul Ross State University</td>
<td>5,676</td>
<td>8,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Lewis College</td>
<td>7,252</td>
<td>8,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams State University</td>
<td>8,014</td>
<td>9,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado State University-Pueblo</td>
<td>7,834</td>
<td>10,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Arizona University</td>
<td>9,990</td>
<td>11,059</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, Table 15 shows out-of-state tuition and fees (from IPEDS) for the same institutions.

Table 15: Out-of-State Tuition and Fees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern New Mexico College</td>
<td>11,523</td>
<td>13,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sul Ross State University</td>
<td>5,981</td>
<td>9,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Lewis College</td>
<td>8,609</td>
<td>11,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams State University</td>
<td>9,440</td>
<td>11,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado State University-Pueblo</td>
<td>10,090</td>
<td>11,059</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As these data show, NMHU has been a remarkable bargain for many years and continues to be so. Our low tuition rates reflect our commitment to serving a low-income, rural student population. It is important to all NMHU stakeholders to continue this commitment. However, we also recognize that we will not be able to continue providing quality academic programs and student services without improving our revenue stream. We have therefore implemented a series of tuition and fee increases, consciously striving to balance fiscal responsibility with affordability. Additionally, we have introduced a differentiated tuition model with slightly higher tuition rates for certain programs that are either in high demand or entail unusual costs. As the tables above show, we have made fairly significant increases in tuition while remaining very affordable compared to peer institutions.

The NMHU Board of Regents has approved these tuition increases.

Table 16 shows our revenue from tuition and fees, as well as state appropriations and other sources, for the last ten years.

As these data indicate, we significantly increased our revenues from tuition and fees through FY2018 despite declining enrollments during this same time period. These data also indicate that state appropriations have been mostly flat during this period, so the increased tuition and fees revenue has allowed us to be less dependent on state funding while maintaining a stable level of total revenue.

Table 17: Advancement Revenue and Activity

These data show a significant increase in revenue since FY2016 as well as an increase in alumni events and alumni participation. The Foundation carefully monitors its fund-raising endeavors to ensure we are maximizing our opportunities. Although the Foundation operates as an independent entity, most of the revenue raised by the Foundation is directed toward supporting NMHU.

In New Mexico, statewide enrollments often decrease as the economy improves and increase in economic downturns, leading to cyclic patterns of enrollment growth and decline. With these tuition increases, Highlands is now better positioned for both possibilities: when enrollments decline, we are able to maintain the quality and range of our offerings, and when enrollments increase, we are able to further invest in expansion and new programs. We are searching to find a tuition structure that helps maintain our financial solvency while at the same time allowing access to financially challenged students and also serving as an incentive to attend NMHU.

### Advancement Revenue

The NMHU Office of Advancement (Foundation), under a new director, has been working diligently to expand our external fund-raising efforts, further decreasing our reliance on state funding and increasing opportunity for our students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>FY16</th>
<th>FY17</th>
<th>FY18</th>
<th>FY19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Revenue</td>
<td>1,223,468</td>
<td>1,914,826</td>
<td>1,789,193</td>
<td>2,023,188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Donors</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Alumni Events</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants in Alumni Events</td>
<td>2,487</td>
<td>2,599</td>
<td>3,532</td>
<td>4,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Individual Giving Appeals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data show a significant increase in revenue since FY2016 as well as an increase in alumni events and alumni participation. The Foundation carefully monitors its fund-raising endeavors to ensure we are maximizing our opportunities. Although the Foundation operates as an independent entity, most of the revenue raised by the Foundation is directed toward supporting NMHU.

### Table 16: Actual Revenues by Fiscal Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State General Fund</th>
<th>Tuition and Fees</th>
<th>Grants, Contracts and Federal A</th>
<th>Sales, Services, Other</th>
<th>Interest and Investment Income</th>
<th>Total Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY10</td>
<td>31,268</td>
<td>8,025</td>
<td>19,315</td>
<td>3,866</td>
<td>1,418</td>
<td>63,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY11</td>
<td>28,371</td>
<td>8,982</td>
<td>18,690</td>
<td>7,884</td>
<td>1,430</td>
<td>65,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY12</td>
<td>27,606</td>
<td>10,470</td>
<td>15,886</td>
<td>6,630</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>61,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY13</td>
<td>29,218</td>
<td>10,915</td>
<td>16,685</td>
<td>6,388</td>
<td>1,201</td>
<td>64,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY14</td>
<td>30,124</td>
<td>11,412</td>
<td>15,239</td>
<td>5,752</td>
<td>1,402</td>
<td>63,929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY15</td>
<td>31,565</td>
<td>12,243</td>
<td>15,558</td>
<td>4,679</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>64,836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY16</td>
<td>31,562</td>
<td>13,157</td>
<td>15,215</td>
<td>4,285</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>64,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY17</td>
<td>29,887</td>
<td>15,198</td>
<td>14,650</td>
<td>4,550</td>
<td>1,660</td>
<td>65,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY18</td>
<td>29,091</td>
<td>18,727</td>
<td>15,376</td>
<td>3,917</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>67,951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY19</td>
<td>30,136</td>
<td>15,731</td>
<td>15,188</td>
<td>3,611</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>65,460</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
students and various campus initiatives. Therefore, increased levels of external fund-raising will help to offset certain expenses in the institutional budget.

Additionally, it should be noted that in November 2019, the Foundation was able to raise more than $300,000 in a single day on Giving Tuesday, further evidence of the improved success of the Foundation in generating revenues contributing to the financial stability of the university.

**Expense Reductions**

As noted above, NMHU is committed to increasing our reserves, which will help us to stabilize our budgeting process and avoid negative reactive responses to a reduction in student funding or a drop in enrollment. Additionally, in the wake of recent enrollment decreases, the university has implemented a series of strategic budget reductions to help balance our budget without having to resort to sudden or traumatic cost-cutting measures.

In fall 2018, NMHU experienced an overall drop in enrollment of approximately 3 percent. This drop was not unexpected and was significantly less than the statewide drop in higher education enrollment within the same time frame. However, in spring 2019 NMHU experienced an unexpectedly large decline in overall enrollment of approximately 9 percent, which resulted in a significant loss of tuition-related revenue. As a response to this revenue loss, the university immediately implemented various measures to help maintain a balanced budget. These measures included a reduction of travel, a reduction on new hiring, and departmental budget sweeps of nonessential projected expenditures. As a result of implementing these measures, the university was able to stabilize its budget without resorting to more extreme cost-saving measures like staff layoffs or furloughs. The fiscal situation has improved in academic year 2019-2020, and these measures are currently not in effect.

The campus community was notified of these expense reductions through several channels. The Vice President for Finance and Administration distributed an email on February 15, 2019, outlining the mandated austerity measures. The budget reductions were reinforced at a campuswide HLC Forum on March 25, 2019. Finally, the reductions were discussed at a special budget meeting of the Board of Regents on April 5, 2019. Once the budget situation improved in 2019-2020, the measures were removed.

The university saw another drop in enrollment of approximately 9 percent in fall 2019. However, partly as a result of increased allocations from the state of New Mexico, and partly as a result of the budget cuts implemented in spring 2019, no significant additional cost cutting measures were necessary to balance our budget.

Table 18 shows our expenses for the last ten years.

As these data indicate, we have reduced expenses in certain nonessential areas, while maintaining support for instructional expenses and student aid. This approach has allowed us to remain committed to our primary purpose of serving our students while improving our level of fiscal responsibility.

One of the fullest pictures of NMHU’s fiscal health is the continued stability of our CFI, which has remained above 2.0 for the past three years. More detailed information data on our CFI is reported below in the section Annual Budgets and CFI.

**Recent Developments**

As outlined above, NMHU has taken significant steps toward decreasing our reliance on state funding. However, we maintain an agile budgeting process, which allows us to take advantage of additional state funds when available, currently the case with the high levels of oil revenue that the State of New Mexico is receiving. We are aware these oil revenues are subject to cyclical patterns, so we are wisely investing the current surplus in sustainable institutional initiatives while preparing for a more austere budget climate in the future.

As a key example of investing the current surplus, we were recently able to provide a supplemental paycheck to all employees in December 2019. This supplemental pay was disbursed on a sliding scale, with lower paid employees receiving a larger supplement. We are committed to improving working conditions and compensation for our employees while remaining within our budget parameters.

**Stabilization of Enrollment**

In the letter of July 9, 2018, recommending that NMHU be removed from probation but subject to a Focused Visit, one of the

---

Table 18: Expenses by Fiscal Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Instruction and General</th>
<th>Student Social and Cultural</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Public Service</th>
<th>Student Aid, Grants, and Stipends</th>
<th>Auxiliary Enterprises</th>
<th>Intercollegiate Athletics</th>
<th>Other Expenditures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY10</td>
<td>35,599</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>2,037</td>
<td>9,648</td>
<td>8,102</td>
<td>5,346</td>
<td>2,492</td>
<td>5,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY11</td>
<td>34,521</td>
<td>826</td>
<td>1,730</td>
<td>9,508</td>
<td>8,916</td>
<td>5,366</td>
<td>2,211</td>
<td>7,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY12</td>
<td>33,397</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>1,751</td>
<td>8,306</td>
<td>9,160</td>
<td>4,782</td>
<td>2,216</td>
<td>2,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY13</td>
<td>35,353</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>1,704</td>
<td>7,534</td>
<td>8926</td>
<td>5,067</td>
<td>2,483</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY14</td>
<td>36,854</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>1,517</td>
<td>6,948</td>
<td>9,066</td>
<td>4,362</td>
<td>2,648</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY15</td>
<td>35,320</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>1,363</td>
<td>6,883</td>
<td>8,183</td>
<td>3,548</td>
<td>2,558</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY16</td>
<td>35,142</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>2,006</td>
<td>6,675</td>
<td>8,193</td>
<td>3,530</td>
<td>2,615</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY17</td>
<td>38,520</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>6,390</td>
<td>8,570</td>
<td>3,530</td>
<td>3,120</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY18</td>
<td>37,401</td>
<td>1,589</td>
<td>1,658</td>
<td>7,681</td>
<td>7,976</td>
<td>2,888</td>
<td>2,886</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY19</td>
<td>36,298</td>
<td>1,526</td>
<td>1,589</td>
<td>6,026</td>
<td>7,853</td>
<td>2,884</td>
<td>3,160</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
key areas of concern in Core Component 5A focused on enrollment issues:

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following: Stabilization or growth in student enrollment through the identification of a clear strategy linked to metric-driven recruitment and student persistence goals.”

Because NMHU is significantly tuition dependent, it is clear that managing our enrollment growth is a critically important factor in maintaining a healthy and balanced budget.

In the 4C chapter of this document, we have explained in detail some recent developments in our enrollment management strategy. Here we will highlight some key elements of our enrollment management strategy that speak more directly to budgetary concerns.

In addressing our enrollment management issues, NMHU has focused on two broad areas: recruitment of new students and improved retention of existing students. It is clear that growth and improvement in either of these areas will lead to increased enrollment and a stronger tuition-based revenue stream.

Recruitment Strategies
Historically, NMHU has taken a somewhat passive approach to recruiting students. As an open-access public institution, the assumption was that an appropriate number of students would matriculate without extensive recruiting efforts on our part. For years this strategy was reasonably effective, and our enrollment numbers were fairly consistent, even increasing in some years. More recently, however, NMHU has had to confront the emerging reality of higher education enrollment challenges. In response to these challenges, we have taken a much more intentional approach to recruiting new students. We have worked with a consultant (Ruffalo Noel-Levitz), we have purchased lists of high school students from standard sources (e.g. ACT), we have hired new admission counselors, and we have hired a transfer coordinator who works with our community college partners. We have also updated our admissions and financial aid policies and procedures to ensure that we can more effectively recruit prospective students and provide them with the financial support they need.

New degree and certificate programs
For several years, NMHU has not taken an aggressive approach to starting new programs or to implementing new modalities for program delivery. More recently, while we were on probation, we were not allowed to initiate new programs, but we did begin substantive discussions on various ways that we could expand our program portfolio. Now that we are off probation, we have begun to take significant practical steps in that direction. We recently received approval from the State of New Mexico and the HLC to offer an MFA program, which began accepting students in fall 2019. This is an exciting opportunity for NMHU, as this will be our first terminal degree in several decades. The MFA program builds on our successful Master of Fine Arts program but will attract a broader range of students.

NMHU also received recent approval from the state of New Mexico and the HLC for a new Alternative Teacher Certification program. This is a fast-track program geared toward adults who currently hold a bachelor’s degree in a field other than education and are interested in pursuing a career in K-12 education. We have worked closely with partners in the state government to ensure that the program curriculum meets state expectations for teacher licensure. There has been considerable interest in this program both from prospective students as well as from our education partners in the state of New Mexico. In fall of 2019 we welcomed 31 new students into this program. It is expected that, in addition to providing an enrollment boost for NMHU, the program will help to address the chronic teacher shortage in New Mexico.

Our School of Business, Media and Technology has recently developed an entrepreneurship concentration at both the BBA and MBA level. This concentration addresses a specific area of interest as expressed by current and former students, and also addresses a pressing need within our region and the state of New Mexico to promote business development. The new concentration went into effect in fall of 2019.

New programs under consideration
For many years NMHU has had a very successful RN-to-BSN program, which has trained hundreds of nurses for advanced positions in health care both within the state of New Mexico and beyond. Hoping to build on this solid foundation, NMHU has been in conversation with a partner institution about the possibility of developing a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program. This program, which would of course require state and HLC approval, would give NMHU another terminal degree (along with the MFA), and would potentially attract a significant number of new students. Furthermore, this program would train nurses for high-level administrative positions within the health care field, helping to alleviate a shortage of such professionals within the state of New Mexico.

Some additional programs we are exploring include:

- An MA in Cultural Resources Management, a program that NMHU would be uniquely positioned to offer given the cultural diversity of our university community and the surrounding region. This proposed program has been approved by the NMHU Board of Regents.
- An MS in Forestry, which would build on our successful undergraduate forestry program and master’s program in Natural Resources Management. Currently, we are the only Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in the nation which offers a degree in forestry.
- An MA in criminology, which would build on our successful undergraduate criminal justice program.
- A fully online MBA and MPA program. Currently, we offer a partially online MBA program, but we are confident we could attract more students with a fully online program.
- An online degree completion program in Leadership and Management in Public Service.

Continuing Education programs
NMHU has been expanding its offering of continuing education and workforce development programs. The NMHU Facundo Valdez School of Social Work offers a variety of continuing education programs to professionals working in the field of social work. These programs are offered at several of our campus centers. As another example, in summer 2018 we offered a course, Workplace Communications and Technical Writing, in Santa Fe with 15 students and eight hours of instruction. We have also had initial discussions with the State of New Mexico about the possibility of developing partnerships between the NMHU psychology program and the New Mexico Behavioral Health Institute.

Although these continuing education offerings do not affect our official enrollment numbers as reported to the state and federal government, they do help to generate additional revenue and can also serve as effective recruiting tools by encouraging participants to think about enrolling in credit bearing courses at NMHU.
Expanded online programming
For a number of years, NMHU has had several partially online programs available at the graduate level as well as a fully online RN- to-BSN program. All of these online programs have been successful and have attracted significant numbers of students, but we feel that there is considerable room for growth in the online domain. Recently, we have begun making an organized and strategic effort to expand our portfolio of online program offerings. Notably, our large and renowned social work program has been increasing its online offerings. At an administrative level, in spring 2019, the university hired an executive-level Director of Online and Distance Education, who reports directly to the provost. This employee’s primary responsibility is working with faculty to develop new online programs and to expand existing programs into the online domain.

We have also had preliminary discussions with a number of online program management (OPM) providers to explore the possibility of establishing a partnership with one of these companies to broaden our recruitment efforts for online students. As of this writing, no final decision has been made on whether to move forward with such a partnership.

Leveraging financial aid
In fall 2018, the Strategic Enrollment Management Office, Financial Aid Office, and Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research assembled a team to evaluate our financial aid distribution policies and practices. The purpose of this project was to determine if student financial aid and scholarships can be used to leverage increased enrollment and retention of undergraduate students at NMHU. This process is outlined in more detail in the 4C chapter of this document and is also described in detail in a separate report titled Leveraging Financial Aid and Scholarships to Increase Enrollment prepared by the Strategic Enrollment Management Office and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research.

Given that the university has a very modest amount of money allocated to financial aid, it is essential that we distribute those limited funds in a way that will benefit the maximum number of students, consistent with our mission as an open access institution. More careful leveraging of financial aid resources can help to recruit students who are more likely to be successful and can help retain current students who have demonstrated that they can be successful.

These financial aid leveraging initiatives went into effect in fall 2019. It is therefore too early to determine whether these strategies have had a positive effect on enrollment. However, we will continue to monitor the effectiveness of our financial aid strategies to ensure that we are using limited institutional funds in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

Transfer Coordinator
The university recently hired a new employee in the position of Transfer Coordinator, whose role is to help recruit community college students in the state of New Mexico to attend NMHU. Given that a high percentage of our incoming students are transfers from community colleges, we felt this position would be a good investment in our enrollment management efforts. The early returns have been mostly positive; we saw an increase in enrollment of transfer students in both the fall 2018 term and in the spring 2019 term relative to the previous year. However, in fall of 2019 we saw a decline in the number of incoming transfer students, possibly reflecting a decline in community college enrollment as well as increased competition for transfer students from other New Mexico universities.

We will continue to evaluate our processes for recruiting transfer students to ensure optimum success for these efforts.

Improvements in application process
The university has made a number of key changes to the application process, designed primarily to make the process more streamlined and more user friendly. We have implemented a new application software (Slate), revised our application forms, and significantly decreased response time to communicate with applicants. Additionally, our financial aid office has made numerous improvements to its operations and processes, which have helped us to respond more quickly and more effectively to student financial aid applications and questions. These changes are outlined in another section of this document.

In fall 2019 we began a search for a new employee in the Registrar’s Office for the position of Transfer Evaluation Specialist, whose role will be to help process transcripts from incoming transfer students in a more efficient manner. This position should also help our recruitment efforts by streamlining the process of onboarding new transfer students and will also help us to broaden our recruiting efforts for non-traditional transfer students.

Retention Strategies
Historically, fall-to-fall retention rates for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students have been modest at NMHU, typically averaging around 50 percent for a given cohort. These modest retention rates reflect in part the demographics of our incoming students, the majority of whom are minority students from rural, low-income, and academically challenged backgrounds. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is significant room for improvement in these retention rates, and obviously improved retention will translate to stronger enrollment numbers. We have therefore been working to develop multiple initiatives to help increase retention rates among new students. These initiatives are presented in more detail in the 4C chapter of this document and are outlined briefly here.

Retention Advisory Council
The Retention Advisory Council (RAC) was formed in fall 2016 to address institutional retention concerns, particularly with reference to first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students, who historically have relatively low retention rates at NMHU. One of the first initiatives undertaken by the RAC was to identify specific subpopulations of students who have especially low retention rates, to help determine the most effective methods for increasing retention in these vulnerable demographics. The RAC continues to meet on an occasional basis to monitor retention data and to track the effectiveness of various retention initiatives. Minutes of RAC meetings are available on the RAC website.

Persistence and Completion Academy
In June 2017 NMHU committed to participate in the HLC sponsored Persistence and Completion Academy (PCA). In this multi-year initiative, NMHU has focused on improving our advising model for undergraduate students with the expectation that improved advising will lead to better persistence. With input from faculty and other campus stakeholders, we have explored a number of options for improving our model of student advising. In fall 2019, the university hired a number of “success coaches,” who will work with lower-division students to help them navigate the various challenges of pursuing a university education. The PCA Committee continues to meet on a regular basis to promote the work of improving student advising and, by extension, student retention and success. Minutes of PCA meetings are available on our website.
Georgia State University model

Georgia State University (GSU) has emerged as a national leader in developing innovative and effective retention strategies for students from an at-risk background. Given the many similarities between the GSU student body and the NMHU student body (both predominantly minority students from low-income and academically challenged backgrounds), a decision was made to explore more carefully the types of retention initiatives that have been effective at GSU. To that end, we sent a team of faculty and administrators to visit GSU in fall 2018. Two key areas of activity at GSU immediately caught our attention: 1) the success coaching model, and 2) the extensive use of predictive analytics. As noted above (Persistence and Completion Academy), we have implemented a similar success coaching model at NMHU, and are exploring various options for increasing our data analytics capabilities.

Academic Success initiatives

Given the high percentage of incoming students at NMHU from financially and academically challenged backgrounds, a key retention strategy is developing academic support systems to help ensure that these students can be successful and persist towards graduation. We have a well-staffed Student Success Center that provides a range of services to our students, focusing especially but not exclusively on incoming freshmen, who tend to have the greater challenges in achieving academic success. The Student Success Center has played an integral part in all significant retention and persistence activities and has recently introduced a number of new or revised initiatives to improve its services to students. One example is our Enrollment Success Program, which targets academically at-risk freshmen by providing a comprehensive range of support services.

Student Outreach

In an effort to improve retention and better understand behaviors that contribute to non-retention, the Student Success Center, in coordination with our campus centers, has begun contacting eligible students who have not yet registered for the upcoming term. This effort has focused on students in good academic standing who do not have a large balance owed to the university. These calls have two purposes: 1) to encourage students to enroll and offer any appropriate help or support, and 2) to determine what factors might be contributing to students’ decision not to return. These efforts do appear to be beneficial in helping to bring back a certain number of students who might otherwise have left, as well as providing useful insight into student retention behavior.

Student Relations Coordinator

The university recently created a new position of Student Relations Coordinator (SRC) to provide a one-stop location for students needing assistance navigating university systems. The role of the SRC is to take charge of the issue and help the student work through all necessary channels to achieve an appropriate resolution. This position plays a key role in our retention efforts by assisting students to resolve issues that might otherwise become obstacles to persistence.

Campuswide involvement

Although the Office of Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) has primary responsibility for leading the recruitment and retention efforts of the institution, it is clear that promoting enrollment growth and improving retention have to be campuswide initiatives. We have therefore worked to inform the campus community about our enrollment and retention efforts, and also to develop opportunities for various stakeholders to contribute to our enrollment and retention efforts. Some key activities include holding campuswide forums on enrollment management issues, publishing periodic SEM newsletters, engaging faculty in enrollment and retention discussions during our Faculty Professional Development Week, and encouraging academic departments and administrative units to consider ways to incorporate enrollment and retention concerns in their unit-level strategic plans.

Key Enrollment Indicators

The HLC has emphasized the importance of taking a data-informed approach towards enrollment management. At NMHU we have taken this recommendation seriously and have developed a broad set of Key Enrollment Indicators and other data metrics to inform our strategies for expanding enrollment and improving retention. These data measures are discussed in more detail in the 4C chapter of this document. In brief, we have worked diligently to incorporate data into all discussions related to strategic enrollment management, to make sure that all decisions are appropriately informed by accurate and complete data.

Enrollment and Retention Outcomes

As noted briefly above, and as discussed in more detail in the 4C chapter of this document, we have implemented a broad range of initiatives and activities to increase enrollment and improve retention. While we have seen positive signs in some persistence measures, and modest growth in some student subpopulations, our overall enrollment has continued to decline. Table 19 provides a brief summary of enrollment and persistence measures for the last five reporting years.

Table 19: Enrollment and Persistence Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment and Retention Measures</th>
<th>15-16</th>
<th>16-17</th>
<th>17-18</th>
<th>18-19</th>
<th>19-20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Freshmen</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer Students</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Graduate Students</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment (Per IPEDS)</td>
<td>3499</td>
<td>3322</td>
<td>3098</td>
<td>3037</td>
<td>2768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall-to-Fall Retention (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Freshmen</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer Students</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>69.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Graduate Students</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year Graduation Rate (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Freshmen</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer Students</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Graduate Students</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>71.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data show some positive trends in fall-to-fall retention rates and four-year graduation rates. However, the continued decline in overall enrollment remains a concern. Institutionally, we need to continue to evaluate our enrollment and retention strategies informed by a broad range of data metrics to ensure they are having
a positive impact, discontinue ineffective strategies, and explore new strategies as necessary. In the 4C chapter of this document, we outline our process and procedures for strategic enrollment management in more detail.

**Audit Findings**

A key area of concern for the Higher Learning Commission, and one of the areas that contributed to our probationary status, was the presence of repeat findings in our annual audit statements. In the letter of July 9, 2018, recommending that NMHU be removed from probation but subject to a Focused Visit, one of the key areas of concern in Criterion 5A focused on demonstrating clean audit findings:

“The Focused visit will specifically address the following... Independent audits of the institution, the Foundation, and Isotopes that do not yield any findings or, at minimum, do not yield any repeat findings.”

**NMHU Audit**

The annual audit for fiscal year 2017-18 for NMHU has been finalized and publicly posted on our website. A summary of findings is provided below.

There were no repeat findings in the 2017-18 audit. The summary statement from the audit report (p. 73) shows that all previous findings have been cleared, as noted below:

**SCHEDULE OF PRIOR YEAR FINDINGS**

- Financial Statement Audit
  - 2015-002 University Policies Not Approved (Significant Deficiency) - Cleared
  - 2015-004 Capital Asset Accounting (Material Weakness) - Cleared
  - 2015-009 Component Unit (Highlands Stable Isotopes Corporation) (Material Noncompliance) - Cleared
  - 2016-003 Budget Overspending (Other Noncompliance) - Cleared
  - 2017-001 Segregation of duties over Cash Receipts (Significant Deficiency) - Cleared
- Findings in Accordance with 2.2.2 NMAC (State Audit Rule)
  - 2015-002 Insufficient Collateral (Other Noncompliance) - Cleared
  - 2017-001 State Auditor Referral letter (Other Noncompliance) - Cleared
  - 2017-002 Restricted Accounts (Other Noncompliance) - Cleared
  - 2017-003 Internal Controls (Other Noncompliance) - Cleared
  - 2015-009 Tax Status (Material Noncompliance) - Cleared

However, there were five new findings in the 2017-18 audit, as summarized below (p. 73 in the report).

**CURRENT YEAR FINDINGS**

- Financial Statement Audit
  - 2018-004 Financial report and closing (Significant Deficiency)
  - 2018-002 Controls over Campus Life accounting (Material Weakness)
  - 2018-005 Controls over Capital Assets (Material Weakness)
  - 2018-001 Compliance with Fuel Card activity (Other Noncompliance)
  - 2018-003 Lack of policies over budget adjustment requests (Other Noncompliance)

The university has taken the appropriate steps to correct the 2017-18 audit findings, as outlined in the Corrective Action Plan.

**Foundation Audit**

As noted above, the HLC has also requested that the university demonstrate clean audit findings for the Highlands University Foundation. The annual Foundation audit for fiscal year 2017-18 has been finalized and publicly posted on our website.

The Foundation audit was clean. There were no findings for 2017-18, and all prior findings have been cleared, as noted below:

**PRIOR YEAR FINDINGS**

- 2015-002 Foundation Budget (Other Noncompliance) - Resolved
- 2017-001 Restricted accounts (Other Noncompliance) - Resolved
- 2017-002 Internal Controls (Other Noncompliance) - Resolved

The Foundation has taken several steps to ensure that it continues to operate in a transparent, ethical, and fiscally responsible manner. These measures are outlined in more detail in the 5D chapter of this document, but are briefly summarized below:

- The Foundation recently developed a Strategic Plan to guide ongoing and future Foundation and Advancement activities.
- The Foundation recently published an Investment Policy Statement that outlines the goals and investment objectives of The NMHU Foundation.
- The Foundation recently published a Use of Funds Policy that defines and clarifies the process for use of all NMHU Foundation Funds.
- The Foundation recently developed an Advancement Policy that set forth guidelines for advancement, fundraising, and alumni activities at NMHU.
- The Foundation recently published a Conflict of Interest Policy to help ensure integrity and transparency of operations.

**Highlands Stable Isotopes Audit**

As noted above, the HLC has also requested that the university demonstrate clean audit findings for Highlands Stable Isotopes. The annual Isotopes audit for fiscal year 2017-18 has been finalized and publicly posted on our website.

The Isotopes Audit was clean. There were no findings for findings for 2017-18, and the only prior finding has been cleared, as noted below: PRIOR YEAR FINDINGS

- Financial Statement Findings Required by Government Auditing Standards
  - 2015-001 Tax Status (Material Noncompliance) - Resolved

NMHU is no longer investing any resources in the Stable Isotopes program, but we have left the auxiliary operation open so that we...
can process future revenues as needed. As such, the fiscal concerns related to Stable Isotopes have been successfully and permanently resolved by NMHU.

**Maintaining a Balanced Budget**

In the letter of July 9, 2018, recommending that NMHU be removed from probation but subject to a Focused Visit, the last area of concern in Criterion 5A emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balanced budget:

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following... Continued year-end actual change in net assets at break-even levels or that yield surplus.”

The university has taken a number of concrete steps to help ensure that we maintain a balanced budget both now and in the future. These steps are discussed below.

**More effective and open budget processes**

In recent years the university has revised its processes for developing the budget and allocating resources. Our annual operating budget process is posted on our [website](https://www.nmu.edu). Key elements of our annual budget process include the following:

- **Budget priorities are developed in a manner that facilitates planning, informed discussion, faculty, staff and student participation, and a proactive response to critical external and internal issues;**
- **The process encourages openness, trust and transparency by providing feedback to identified groups at various designated points in the budget process;**
- **Efficiency and effectiveness of the budget process is increased by implementing procedures to achieve an online, paperless budget process at the college and major unit level;**
- **Institutional divisions, colleges, and major units are assisted in their development of summary information on budget decisions, reallocation decisions, and budget actions to support budget objectives.**

The annual budget process flow is outlined below, moving from spring of the current budget year to early spring of the next budget year.

- **Spring:** The Strategic Planning Group (SPG) meets with the President and Vice President for Finance and Administration (VPFA) to establish preliminary budget priorities for the year, tying those priorities to the strategic plan;
- **Early Fall:** The VPFA distributes budget priorities to the campus via global e-mails. The VPFA then holds meetings with the campus to receive feedback on budget priorities (listening sessions). Based on this feedback, the SPG, President, and VPFA revise budget priorities and distribute them to the campus community;
- **Fall:** Academic departments and administrative units prepare budget requests based on the budget priorities, tying them to the strategic plan, academic program reviews, and academic outcomes assessments activities. Academic departments have individual budget hearings with the Budget Office and Deans to present their requests;
- **Late Fall:** The VPFA, working with the President, the Provost, the Deans, the SPG, and the Campus Budget and Planning Committee, prioritizes the budget requests from the budget hearings. The VPFA office provides written feedback to departments on their budget requests. If departments have new information or new arguments, they may submit a written appeal to the Dean, VPFA, and Provost regarding their budget requests. The response to the appeal will be yes or no;
- **Winter:** The VPFA office, working with the President, produces the final budget;
- **Early Spring:** The President presents the final budget to the Campus Community, including a list of prioritized requests.

This budgeting process is designed to ensure a balance between centralized control of the budgeting process and unit-level participation. The Vice President for Finance and Administration maintains control of the overall budgeting process, but individual departments and units have substantial input and feedback. This interactive process ensures there is an appropriate level of oversight in all budget activities while maintaining an appropriate level of responsiveness to the needs of individual departments and units. These improved processes have helped to ensure we maintain a balanced budget while being responsible to the financial needs of individual departments and units and to the university as a whole.

**Auxiliary and component operations**

The university has taken a number of measures to reduce expenses associated with auxiliary and component operations, especially those relating to Stable Isotopes and the NMHU golf course, which are not directly tied to our primary mission as an educational institution.

**Stable Isotopes**

For several years NMHU has been funding the Stable Isotopes project. This project was a technology transfer operation that received substantial funding allocations from the institution with the expectation of long-term financial gains, which would offset the initial investment. The expected financial gains have not materialized, leaving the university to support a costly venture for a number of years. However, the university has finally paid off all debts incurred by the Stable Isotopes project with no future expenditures expected. This will help to stabilize our annual budget by removing a substantial ongoing expense that was not contributing significantly to our educational mission.

We should also note that the Stable Isotopes Board has been reconstituted. It is necessary for the board to be operational to process additional revenues that may be realized in the future.

**Golf Course**

For many years NMHU has owned a golf course, which was originally a donation to the university, within the city of Las Vegas. In 2008 the university reopened the golf course after significant renovations and updates in the hope that the new course would generate increased revenue. However, that did not happen, and the golf course continued to operate at a significant annual deficit, which had to be absorbed by the university. Annual budget reports for the golf course are posted on the university [website](https://www.nmu.edu). These budget reports show the university golf course has been operating at an annual deficit of more than $200,000.

An obvious solution would be to sell the golf course. However, the golf course provides a critically important recreational outlet for the city of Las Vegas, which offers relatively few recreational activities for its residents. As part of our commitment to the local community, NMHU is reluctant to sell the golf course without some clear assurance that another entity would operate and maintain the facility. We have had various discussions with the City of Las Vegas and San
Miguel County about some type of joint operation or ownership of the golf course, but so far the city and county have not been receptive to these discussions. We have also explored options for leasing the golf course to a private operator who could potentially generate revenue for the university, but to date we have been unable to secure a partner for this type of enterprise.

In summer and fall of 2018, the university formed a task force to address the financial challenges posed by our ownership of the golf course, and to propose possible solutions to reduce the annual deficit. The university also held a community forum to elicit feedback from various stakeholders within the local community. The task force offered various recommendations for basic operating improvements, including a modified fee scale, staff reductions, and enhanced amenities such as dining. More substantively, the task force also explored options for selling currently unused portions of the golf course property for real estate development.

At the November 19, 2019 Board of Regents meeting, the regents voted to discontinue funding for golf course operations. The university continues to explore various options for the future of the golf course property, but the university will no longer continue operating the golf course at an annual deficit. This change will help the university to direct more resources to our primary mission of helping our students achieve success.

Other auxiliary operations

In the face of declining enrollment, we shut down two of our residential halls with a combined capacity of approximately 120 beds. This allowed significant savings on maintenance and utility costs. We were able to accommodate all interested students in our remaining residence halls. However, we reopened one of the offline residence halls in fall 2019 to accommodate an unexpectedly large number of students requesting residence hall rooms. This increase in campus housing will of course provide additional auxiliary revenue.

We have realized additional though modest cost savings by consolidating two coffee shops on the Las Vegas campus. Given the small size of the campus, it did not make financial sense to operate two similar establishments within a few hundred feet of each other.

Action plan for addressing auxiliary negative fund balances

To ensure the continued fiscal viability of our auxiliary operations, the university has developed an action plan for addressing negative fund balances associated with auxiliary operations. This action plan was presented to the NMHU Board of Regents on August 19, 2019 and was unanimously approved by all board members.

MAKWA dispute and litigation

In 2010, NMHU engaged the services of general contractor Makwa Builders of Albuquerque for the construction of the new Student Center. A series of disputes with this construction company led to the termination of its contract. This in turn led to a lengthy and costly period of litigation. In summer of 2019, this litigation was settled with no further financial encumbrance on NMHU. The resolution of this dispute and litigation will help the university to achieve a more stable financial state with additional resources available to direct to our mission of serving our students and community.

Communication with campus community

Another area in which NMHU has worked to improve the budget process is communication and transparency. A primary goal of the revised budget process is to ensure participation among stakeholders as well as a greater awareness of how the budgeting process takes place. Better stakeholder involvement at all levels of the budgeting process can help to ensure the outcomes of the process are fair and equitable as well as fiscally responsible, ethical, and sustainable. These are all important elements in ensuring the university can continue to maintain balanced budgets despite the uncertainty of external circumstances over which we have little control.

Some of the steps we have taken to ensure effective communication and transparency in the budget process include the following.

Budget Listening Sessions

The Office of Finance and Administration has held periodic public forums open to all university stakeholders to discuss all aspects of the budget process. These forums provide an opportunity for stakeholders to ask questions or make recommendations about the budget process. These sessions are recorded via Zoom, and the recordings have been posted to our website.

Website postings

The Budget and Finance Office maintains an extensive and up-to-date website which contains links to a wide range of documents and other artifacts relevant to the budget process. This website is available to all university stakeholders and to the general public. By providing this information, the Budget and Finance Office helps to ensure that stakeholders have relevant budget information easily and readily available, which in turn allows those stakeholders to be more informed and more intentional participants in all stages of the budget process.

Budget and Planning Committee

The university maintains a Budget and Planning Committee which meets regularly. This committee is chaired by the Vice President for Finance and Administration (VPFA) and has broad representation from across the university, including students, faculty, staff, administration, and a representative from the campus centers.

The role of this committee, as specified in the Annual Operating Budget Process document (p. 8), is:

- to serve as the primary contributor on updates to the budget, capital planning, and campus master plan;
- to help process various qualification-based request for proposals (RFPs) for any professional services contract on any capital projects or major initiative;
- to cooperate with standing administrative, faculty, staff or student financial committees; and
- to review, recommend, and provide revised policies as necessary related to budget and capital planning

The activities of this committee help to ensure broad participation and transparency in the budget process, an essential part of developing a responsible and responsive annual budget.

Annual Budget Hearings

On an annual basis, the Budget Office schedules hearings with each academic department and administrative unit to discuss budgets for the upcoming academic year. For academic departments, the meetings include the Department Chair, Budget Director, the appropriate Dean, and, if necessary, the Provost. For administrative units, the meetings include the Budget Director and Unit Director.

Prior to the meetings, the Department Chairs submit their budget requests (a standard form with references to the institutional
strategic plan), their department strategic plan, their department’s most recent program review and response, and their last two years of outcomes assessment reports. Failure to submit these documents can result in denial of budget requests.

Within four weeks of the budget hearing, the Budget Office provides written feedback to the department or unit on its budget requests, indicating whether the requests have been approved (pending funding) or denied. If departments have new information or new arguments, they may submit a written appeal to the Dean, VPFA, and Provost regarding their budget requests.

Working with the appropriate stakeholders, the Budget Office develops a list of budget priorities for submission to the President and Campus Budget and Planning Committee based on the budget hearings.

The President, working with the Budget Office and on the advice of the Campus Budget and Planning Committee, establishes budget-planning allocations at the institutional level.

This process helps to ensure that academic departments and administrative units have significant input into the budget process while ensuring regular and effective communication at all stages of the process. Additionally, by requiring multiple sources of support, the budget hearings help to integrate various key aspects of institutional functioning, including budgeting, planning, and assessment.

**Coffee and Conversation meetings**

Our president holds regular campuswide meetings (typically two or three times per semester) to inform the campus community about any significant events or activities that might impact employees or office operations. These “Coffee and Conversation” meetings are open to the entire campus community and are broadcast via Zoom technology to allow participation from stakeholders at the campus centers and other remote sites. These meetings, which are well attended, typically include an update on any important budgetary items.

**Annual Budgets and CFI**

As we have outlined above, NMHU has taken significant measures, including improved policies and procedures, to ensure we can formulate a balanced budget now and in the future. Obviously, the most important evidence is in the annual budgets themselves. All annual budget reports for NMHU are posted on our [website](#) and accessible to the university community as well as to external stakeholders.

Some key measures of our improving financial status are summarized below. These reflect the most recent figures available at the time of this writing. (Note: these calculations were made without factoring in Pension ([GASB 68]) and Retiree Health Liabilities ([GASB 72]). More detailed support for these measures is available from the Finance Office.

- Increased ending fund balance by 15.2 percent to $6.3 million;
- Increased current assets by 11 percent to $17.9 million;
- Increased endowment investments by 9.5 percent to $4.6 million;
- Decreased non-current liabilities by 4.3 percent to $24.3 million.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Table 20 shows our composite financial index (CFI) from FY09 to FY18.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Primary Reserve Ratio</th>
<th>Viability Ratio</th>
<th>Return on Net Assets Ratio</th>
<th>Net Operating Revenues Ratio</th>
<th>Combined CFA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY09</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY10</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY11</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY12</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY13</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY14</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY15</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY16</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY17</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY18</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data show a significant increase in CFI since FY12 and a stabilization of the CFI in recent years, attesting to our improved fiscal responsibility and accountability.

**Summary: Core Component 5A**

We believe we have effectively addressed the concerns of the Higher Learning Commission with respect to Core Component 5A, but we acknowledge there are areas where continued improvement is needed.

Some of our key accomplishments with reference to Core Component 5A include:

- The strong state of our CFI shows that NMHU is meeting the HLC’s expectations in terms of budget responsibility;
- We have developed a clear budget strategy, with board approval, to develop a reserve fund to provide a financial buffer in the event of reduced state funding;
- We have implemented tuition increases to help reduce our reliance on state funding while still allowing us to remain one of the most affordable institutions in the southwest;
- We have developed a comprehensive and coherent strategy for enrollment management;
- There were no repeat findings in the FY18 institutional audit;
- We have developed an action plan to address each of the new findings in the FY18 institutional audit;
- FY18 audits for the Foundation and Stable Isotopes were clean;
- We have reduced or eliminated financial losses associated with a number of auxiliary operations, including Stable Isotopes and the golf course;
- We have improved the budgeting process to insure transparency, participation, and effective communication to all stakeholders;
- The revised budgeting process has allowed us to adjust the budget in real time, so as to ensure a balanced budget despite enrollment changes or other unforeseen circumstances that may reduce revenue or increase expenses.

Some remaining challenges include:

- Despite a broad range of strategic enrollment management
initiatives, the university and the state of New Mexico continue to see continued enrollment declines;

• Although we did not have any repeat audit findings in the FY18 institutional audit, there were several new findings;

• Despite considerable improvement to the budget process, there continues to be concern among some campus stakeholders that the budget process is not as clear and transparent as desirable.
Core Component 5D
The third major section of this document outlines how the university has addressed Core Component 5D.

Background: Core Component 5D
HLC Core Component 5D specifies:

“The institution works systematically to improve its performance.”

In its letter of July 9, 2018, removing NMHU from probation, the Higher Learning Commission Board of Trustees identified Core Component 5D as an area of continuing concern, as noted in the quotation below.

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following:

• Evidence of the creation and implementation of policies related to new processes for the institutionalization of stakeholder agreements in all areas, including strategic planning and budgeting, student complaint management, the Office of Advancement, and Student Financial Aid administration.

• An executive Strategic Plan Indicators update that includes outcomes that provide evidence that the institution is improving its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, both as a whole and in its component parts.

• A unit and/or department strategic plan update that includes outcomes that provide evidence that the institution is improving its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, both as a whole and in its component parts.”

Each of these three recommendations will be addressed in the major sections below.

The university acknowledges we need to improve our processes for promoting and measuring institutional improvement. We welcome the recommendations of the Higher Learning Commission and have taken significant measures to achieve compliance with HLC expectations through a comprehensive process of institutional improvement.

At an administrative level, both the President of the university and the Provost have made systematic institutional improvement a priority. The university has worked to communicate the importance of these institutional improvement efforts to a broad range of campus stakeholders as explained in a later section of this chapter. We continue to build a campus culture of continuous improvement.

Executive Summary: Core Component 5D
Following is a summary of key activities and initiatives implemented by NMHU to respond to the concerns of the HLC with reference to Core Component 5D. These activities and initiatives will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

- Initiation of process to develop a new strategic plan, including measurable outcomes and key performance indicators, which will guide university operations and activities;
- Revised budget process to provide greater transparency and stakeholder involvement;
- Significant operational improvements in Financial Aid Office, including:
  – Revised allocation process for Financial Aid awards to ensure optimal use of institutional funds to support enrollment and retention growth,
  – Improved financial aid communication plans for new and continuing students to ensure timely application for and receipt of financial aid awards,
  – Revised Satisfactory Academic Progress policy to help promote student success and retention,
  – Creation of Financial Aid Office position responsibilities document to optimize level of service provided to students,
  – Reduction in paper-based manual processing of student financial aid application materials to allow financial aid staff to focus more directly on student needs;
- Significant operational improvements in the Office of Advancement (Foundation), including:
  – Development of a Strategic Plan to provide an appropriate vision and to guide all Foundation activities,
  – Development of an Investment Policy, Use of Funds Policy, Advancement Policy, and Conflict of Interest Policy to guide Foundation operations and maintain transparency, efficiency, and ethical conduct;
- Significant operational improvements in other mission critical offices, including the Library, Information Technology Services, and Safety and Security
- Improved student complaint processing, including the following components:
  – Hiring of a Student Relations Coordinator to serve as an ombudsperson for student complaints and concerns,
  – Updated complaint management process, with all document complaints and outcomes stored in a single repository,
  – Compilation of all student complaint and concern policies in a single section of the Student Handbook;
- Development of improved website to allow more effective communication with all campus stakeholders and to provide a more effective tool for recruiting new students;
- Use of student survey data (including NSSE and various institutional surveys) to inform unit-level and institution-level improvements;
- Development of a set of executive level Key Performance Indicators, tied to the institutional strategic plan, which allow campus stakeholders to identify areas of progress and areas of need
• Development of an annual unit and department level strategic planning process to provide units and departments with an opportunity to plan intentional improvements and identify areas of need;
• Development of a beta version of an academic dashboard to provide key department-level data to academic units, which can assist in making data informed decisions.

Creation and Implementation of Policies for Stakeholder Agreement
With reference to Core Component 5D, the first broad area of concern identified by the HLC was stated as follows:

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following... Evidence of the creation and implementation of policies related to new processes for the institutionalization of stakeholder agreements in all areas, including strategic planning and budgeting, student complaint management, the Office of Advancement, and Student Financial Aid administration.”

The sections below will address the various ways in which NMHU has addressed these concerns.

Institutional Strategic Planning
While NMHU has always had strategic planning efforts and activities in place, in recent years we have not taken a systematic approach to institution-wide strategic planning. Our current strategic plan, “HU Vision 2020,” provides a vision, mission statement, and set of broad institutional goals, but does not provide specific objectives or action steps, nor any mechanism for tracking progress toward achieving the institutional goals.

We are currently preparing a new strategic plan that will address some of the shortcomings of the current plan. The strategic planning effort is being led by our president, Dr. Sam Minner. A Strategic Planning Committee has been established with members representing faculty, staff, students, campus centers, and the local community. This committee is engaging in discussions with all stakeholders to ensure that the development of the new strategic plan is collaborative and participatory.

The outline of the new plan ensures we will have a carefully articulated set of goals and objectives, with action steps, measurable outcomes, responsible parties and an appropriate assessment process to ensure progress toward our goals.

The new strategic plan, which is expected to be complete by fall 2020, will be a foundational document for NMHU. The new plan will guide the university into the future and will help us to assess our successes and achievements as well as areas of possible improvement. The new plan will also help NMHU move towards a more mature and fully developed culture of continuous improvement. Finally, the new institutional strategic plan will drive unit-level planning as described in a later section of this chapter.

Budget Process
Our budgeting process has undergone significant revisions and improvements in recent years with a goal toward increasing stakeholder involvement in the process and also improving the transparency of the process. The budget process has been carefully documented in the Annual Operating Budget Process document, which is available on our website. Key elements of the budget process are outlined below, and are also discussed in more detail in the 5A chapter of this document.

Following are the primary goals of the budget process:
• Budget priorities are developed in a manner that facilitates planning; informed discussion; faculty, staff and student participation; and a proactive response to critical external and internal issues.
• The process encourages openness, trust and transparency by providing feedback to identified groups at various designated points in the budget process.
• Efficiency and effectiveness of the budget process have been increased by implementing procedures to achieve an online, paperless budget process.
• Administrative units and academic departments are assisted in their development of summary information on budget decisions, reallocation decisions, and budget actions to support budget objectives.

The Budget Process document (p. 6) provides a detailed annual timetable for the budget cycle. For every step of this process, the Vice President for Finance and Administration (VPFA) is responsible for making all relevant documents, including budget priorities, budget requests, and the final budget, available on the Finance and Administration website for the NMHU community to review.

On an annual basis, the Budget Office schedules budget hearings with each academic department and administrative unit to discuss budgets for the upcoming academic year. These hearings help to ensure academic departments and administrative units have significant input into the budget process and also help to ensure regular and effective communication at all stages of the process. Additionally, by requiring multiple sources of supporting documentation, the budget hearings help to integrate various key aspects of institutional functioning, including budgeting, planning, and assessment.

The university maintains a Budget and Planning Committee, that meets regularly. This committee is chaired by the VPFA and has broad representation from across the university, including students, faculty, staff, administration, and a representative from the campus centers. The activities of this committee help to ensure broad participation and transparency in the budget process, thereby helping to ensure the development of a responsible and responsive annual budget.

The Office of Finance and Administration has held periodic public forums open to all university stakeholders to discuss all aspects of the budget process. These forums provide an opportunity for stakeholders to ask questions or make recommendations about the budget process. These sessions are recorded via Zoom, and the recordings have been posted to our website.

Financial Aid Office
In its action letter of July 9, 2018, the Commission specifically challenged the Financial Aid Office to improve operations and stakeholder satisfaction: “The Focused Visit will specifically address the following... Evidence of the creation and implementation of policies related to new processes for the institutionalization of stakeholder agreements in all areas, including... Student Financial Aid administration.” This section outlines some of the measures taken by the Financial Aid Office to meet these expectations.

NMHU hired a new Director of Financial Aid, Ms. Susan Chavez, in July 2017. Under her leadership, the Financial Aid Office has made widespread and significant changes to all aspects of its operations. These changes have been designed first and foremost to im-
prove financial aid services to our students. Secondarily, the changes outlined below have helped to improve efficiency, communication, and reporting effectiveness, and to align with best practices in the financial aid sector.

**Scholarship Process Improvements**
The Financial Aid Office has worked to revise the allocation of institutional scholarships to support our recruitment and retention efforts. Recommendations were submitted to the Board of Regents and approved on December 14, 2018. These changes allow us to more effectively leverage institutional scholarships to reach potential students by incentivizing them to attend, retain, and graduate from NMHU. A summary report of these recommendations is available on our website.

As of Fall 2018, the application for foundation scholarships was restructured to be available to students throughout the academic year. In the past the foundation scholarship application would open and close on an inconsistent basis, resulting in significant student frustration and potential lost recruitment opportunities. The application, available through an online portal, is now available beginning March 1 for the upcoming fall and spring semesters and closes on February 15 of the following year. Students submit an application, and the system automatically gives them the names of the scholarships they are eligible to receive. Some of these scholarships require additional letters of reference or a personal essay. The students can upload these documents to complete their application. The Financial Aid Office reviews the applications and begins to award the students on a monthly basis. A letter and an email are sent to the students notifying them of the award. The scholarship funds are posted to the students’ financial aid package and disbursed to them on the first disbursement date of the semester.

The Financial Aid Office has also changed the process whereby we offer scholarships to freshman and transfer students. These scholarships are now offered by the date of their admission to NMHU. We review GPA and ACT/SAT scores and begin offering institutional scholarships on the first day of November for the upcoming academic year. There is no application for the scholarships, only a fully admitted date. The students are notified by letter and email and have the ability to accept the awards by mobile device. This change provides for a less complicated application and an earlier notification process, which can help with our recruitment efforts.

For incoming transfer students, scholarships are offered to applicants in March of every year as students are admitted. Students can now accept scholarships on Slate, a new software product. With this software, we have the ability to send bulk emails and collect data. These changes have allowed us to provide better service to our students as well as to track outcomes more effectively.

**Communication Plan for Financial Aid**
The Financial Aid Office recently created a Communication Plan for Prospective Students and a Communication Plan for Continuing Students. These plans were designed to help us reach out to students more effectively to assist them in navigating the financial aid process. As part of our communication plan, we work in collaboration with other offices, including the Office of Admissions, to coordinate the delivery of important email messages from these various offices. This helps alleviate oversaturation of messages to students from different offices, thereby reducing confusion and student frustration and helping improve recruitment and retention outcomes.

We have changed the communication process for satisfactory academic progress (SAP) notification by email instead of sending hard copy letters to students who are suspended. This provides students an opportunity to submit an appeal earlier and helps to reduce paper and returned letters. It also ensures only the student receives the notification. This improved communication process helps students remain on track to graduation.

We have also established a more regular schedule for monitoring and updating the financial aid website to ensure all information is relevant and current. We have restructured the landing page to provide important links which point to relevant student information, especially the net price calculator.

We have initiated a process of emailing all students who have a FAFSA but have not yet been admitted (typically indicating that they have not yet submitted all required materials). The email provides a link for the students to go directly to the admission application. This assists with recruitment efforts by reaching out to potential students who may still be deciding whether to complete their application to NMHU.

Finally, the Financial Aid Office has implemented a financial literacy initiative to improve prospective students’ understanding and awareness of the FAFSA process and to emphasize the importance of budgeting for college. We have engaged in continuous outreach to area high schools to provide FAFSA workshops. Additionally, we have provided financial aid training for staff members at our various centers and have made arrangements to meet with students at the centers. The financial aid website contains a page dedicated to the FAFSA application process.

**Operational Process Improvements in the Financial Aid Office**
The Financial Aid Office has created processes utilizing the Financial Aid Banner Module to load, select, review, and package all student ISIR (FAFSA) files, eliminating processing time for all staff members. Tasks that in the past might have required hours to complete can now be completed in minutes. For example, the file-loading process that previously required four hours to complete can now be done in approximately 30 minutes depending on the number of files loaded for the day. This improvement in process efficiency has allowed the Financial Aid Office to package awards earlier for the upcoming year. This effort will assist students in knowing what financial aid they have been awarded at an earlier point in time, which translates to stronger recruitment and retention outcomes.

The Financial Aid Office has also eliminated the manual processes for verification of student financial aid files. We now request income taxes, W2 forms, and paperwork from students by email. We also have created a process utilizing the Financial Aid Banner Module to complete verification and load corrections through the automated system. This process has reduced manual work and improved staff morale as well as allowed for other projects to be accomplished within the office. Most importantly, these improvements allow financial aid staff to focus more time and energy in providing assistance to our students.

The university has revised the Satisfactory Academic Progress policy to provide a more equitable and consistent set of criteria for all students, regardless of class level. The outcomes of these changes should translate to continued Pell Grant eligibility and increased retention rates. These changes were informed by a careful analysis of financial aid and outcomes data conducted by the Office of Finan-
cial Aid and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research. The Satisfactory Academic Progress policy is posted on our [website](#). Recently the office created a Financial Aid Office Structure and Position Responsibilities document defining duties and expectations for all staff members. The staff members have all documented their job procedures and continue to cross train to ensure that processes continue in the event of their absence. This has allowed the office to maintain a high level of service to our students even under conditions when the office might not be fully staffed.

In an effort to positively impact sustainability for the university, the Financial Aid Office has moved to create a paperless environment. The changes include the elimination of printing of all ISIR (FAFSA) files downloaded from the Department of Education. Now the ISIR (FAFSA) files are downloaded into the Banner system and reviewed electronically by a paperless process. This progressive change has eliminated the need for more than 25,000 printed copies per year. The cost savings achieved by moving to a paperless environment allow us to dedicate more resources toward directly helping our students.

The Financial Aid Office has eliminated the practice of creating a student hard copy file for every ISIR (FAFSA) received in our office. Currently, student files are only created and stored in our vault when the student is attending NMHU. Those students who will not attend NMHU have electronic files in the Banner system in the event they decide to attend at a future semester within the academic year.

**Office of Advancement / Foundation**

In its action letter of July 9, 2018, the Commission also challenged the Office of Advancement (Foundation) to improve operations and stakeholder satisfaction: “The Focused Visit will specifically address the following... Evidence of the creation and implementation of policies related to new processes for the institutionalization of stakeholder agreements in all areas, including... the Office of Advancement.” This section outlines some of the measures taken by the Office of Advancement (also referred to as the Foundation) to meet these expectations.

The NMHU Foundation has recently implemented comprehensive changes to ensure better efficiency, integrity, and transparency. These changes are articulated in several policy and planning documents, as detailed below.

**Strategic Plan**

The Foundation recently developed a Strategic Plan to guide ongoing and future Foundation and Advancement activities. This Strategic Plan, approved in July 2018, includes the following goals:

- Raise funds for the university;
- Provide administration and governance for the Foundation;
- Develop a Board that provides resources, diversity and capacity;
- Develop marketing and public relations activities.

Each goal includes specific objectives and action steps to guide the Foundation towards completion and fulfillment. The plan also identifies a number of standing committees that will play a key role in implementation.

**Investment Policy**

Another key document, published July 15, 2017, by the Foundation is the Investment Policy Statement. This document outlines the goals and investment objectives of The NMHU Foundation. This Policy Statement outlines certain specific investment policies that will govern how to achieve those goals and objectives. The policy statement, upon the review and approval of the Foundation Board:

- Defines certain responsibilities of the Board, Committee, the Consultant, the investment managers, and other specified parties;
- Describes a risk posture for the investment of the Foundation’s assets;
- Specifies the target asset allocation policy for those assets;
- Establishes investment guidelines regarding the selection of investment managers, permissible securities and diversification of assets;
- Specifies the criteria for evaluating the performance of the Foundation's investment managers and of the Foundation investment portfolio as a whole.

These policies will be reviewed by the Foundation Board periodically and revised as necessary to ensure they continue to reflect the current financial situation of the Foundation and the capital markets.

**Use of Funds Policy**

The Foundation published the Use of Funds Policy on July 11, 2018, defining and clarifying the process and guidelines for use of all NMHU Foundation funds. This policy is intended to work in coordination with the NMHU Foundation Advancement Policy (see below), as well as other NMHU Foundation policies, in addition to all applicable laws, regulations, advisory or letter rulings, or other precedent or guidance. This policy is also intended to reflect best practices, and the NMHU Foundation’s fiduciary responsibilities related to donor funds.

**Advancement Policy**

The Foundation has developed and published an Advancement Policy. The purpose of this policy is to set forth guidelines for advancement, fundraising, and alumni activities at NMHU. The policy is not meant as an exclusive or comprehensive guide to all situations that may arise, but rather sets forth basic procedures, criteria, and priorities. The Advancement Policy includes the following major sections:

- Coordination of solicitation;
- Gift acceptance;
- Gift acknowledgment;
- Gift recognition.

**Conflict of Interest Policy**

The Foundation has also published a clear Conflict of Interest Policy to help ensure integrity and transparency of operations. This conflict of interest policy is designed to help directors, officers, employees and volunteers of the Foundation identify situations that present potential conflicts of interest and to provide the Foundation with a procedure to appropriately manage conflicts in accordance with legal requirements and the goals of accountability and transparency in Foundation operations. This policy statement includes the following major sections:

- Definition of conflict of interest;
- Procedures for handling potential conflicts of interest;
- Confidentiality policies and procedures;
- Requirements for stakeholder compliance.
Finally, an amended version of the Foundation Bylaws was published on July 15, 2016. These bylaws specify in detail the operational principles and practices of the Foundation.

Collectively, the planning, policy, and procedural documents summarized above provide clear guidelines and parameters for all aspects of the NMHU Foundation’s operations, while providing flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and promote continual improvement.

It should also be noted here that the Foundation audit for fiscal year 2018 was clean, and all prior audit findings have been cleared. The Foundation audit is discussed in more detail in the 5A chapter of this document.

**Student Complaint Process**

Another key area of concern in the HLC action letter of July 9, 2018 was the student complaint process. “The Focused Visit will specifically address the following... Evidence of the creation and implementation of policies related to new processes for the institutionalization of stakeholder agreements in all areas, including... student complaint management.” This section outlines some of the measures taken by the university to meet these expectations.

We have always taken student complaints and concerns seriously at NMHU. However, in the past student complaints were handled in a decentralized manner with complaints or concerns being directed to specific offices and, too often, being redirected to another office. In many cases, this led to students getting the “runaround” when they had a complaint, which typically and understandably led to frustration on the part of our students. Additionally, the decentralized nature of complaint management did not allow for tracking the types of complaints or the manner in which they were resolved.

NMHU has taken steps to improve the complaint management process, although we have not yet reached an optimal level of maturity in this process. We continue to prioritize this area, as we understand that it is a critically important aspect of student satisfaction and of institutional effectiveness. The paragraphs below outline some of the measures we have taken to date to improve complaint management.

**Student Handbook**

We have updated our Student Handbook to document complaint handling processes in a single section. This helps students to determine more effectively where they should direct complaints and reduces the likelihood of being transferred from one office to another. We are also exploring better ways to present the complaint process on our website to allow students easy and usable access to this information. Another possibility we are exploring is developing a web-based form for submitting student complaints. This form would automatically be sent to the appropriate office based on the type of complaint specified. In addition, such a form would allow easier and more efficient tracking of the types of complaints submitted by students. With work-flow programming, such a form could also allow tracking of the resolution of the complaint along the entire complaint pathway.

**Student Relations Coordinator**

A key measure in addressing student complaints and concerns was the creation of the Customer Relations Office, now known as the Student Relations Office (SR) in October 2017 as an additional resource for all NMHU’s students, especially those taking courses online and at the centers. The two main roles of the SR Office are 1) to serve as a student ombudsperson, helping to resolve student issues and concerns; and 2) to serve as a one-stop call center for students with several questions looking for answers with one phone call, email, or visit. This position has been instrumental in improving our student services. Since its establishment, the SR Office has assisted more than 1,250 students. The Student Relations Coordinator assists students by appointment or walk-in, via telephone, email, live chat, or Zoom appointment and travels to NMHU’s centers monthly to be available for in-person student assistance.

In April 2018 the SR Office implemented a live chat feature available on NMHU’s website. Many students have taken advantage of the live chat option to receive immediate answers to their questions and concerns. Recent contact data indicates that about 43 percent of incoming communication with the SR Office is received via live chat. The Student Relations Coordinator keeps record of the reason(s) for contact and the assistance provided. Typical student concerns include transcript inquiries, FAFSA inquiries, Brightspace/Banner login problems, student account payment inquiries, and assistance in contacting faculty advisers.

The SR Office also has a Student Concern Request form available on their website. This simple form allows students to express concerns or complaints and submit the form directly to the SR Office. The SR Coordinator will then process the form and contact the student to determine an appropriate course of action.

The SR Coordinator also has the ability to track complaints to their resolution, to ensure that complaints have been addressed by the appropriate offices.

**Process improvements**

Based on prior complaint history, several campus offices have worked to improve their operations so as to ensure better student services. This will help to reduce the incidence of future complaints in those areas. It is also another example of trying to “close the loop” by identifying a problem, taking measures to address the problem then verifying that the solution was effective. In addition to numerous initiatives discussed elsewhere in this document, here are some examples of recent initiatives designed to improve our services to students and thereby reduce the incidence of student complaints and allow for better handling of complaints when they occur:

- The Business Office worked collaboratively with Financial Aid and Registrar to improve the disenrollment process so as to better support student retention and success;
- The Business Office created a Student Help Center to address customer service issues
- The Farmington Center developed program-specific transfer and advisement sheets to help students develop a clearer path toward completion;
- The Farmington Center, Santa Fe Center, and Albuquerque Center have each hired a Student Support Specialist to provide more direct and immediate advising and support to students;
- The Director of Housing and the Custodial Supervisor have planned meetings with residence hall students to listen to ideas and address concerns in a proactive manner;
- The Office of Information Technology Services has recently implemented the portal an intranet technology geared at helping students navigate our technology environment. This technology is designed to help direct students more efficiently toward the offices that can help address their questions or concerns, thus reducing student frustration and inefficient use of staff time.
Library Improvement Initiatives
The Donnelly Library at NMHU is a major asset for academic support and academic research, benefiting our students, faculty, staff, and the larger community. Our library has been and continues to be a high-functioning unit within the university and is fully committed to engaging in a process of data-informed continuous improvement. Some key initiatives and activities undertaken by the library are outlined below.

Information Gathering
The library gathers customer service input throughout the year using a variety of methods. In the fall, the library sends out a Centers, Distance Education, and Online Library Assessment Survey. In the spring, a Main Campus Library Assessment Survey is deployed. These surveys are sent out globally, and both students and faculty/staff are encouraged to participate. Additionally, the library solicits student input concerning instruction after every session that is given during the year. There is also a student satisfaction survey that is given at the end of the five-week Library Research course. Each semester, the survey data is reviewed and evaluated.

Finally, the library maintains a suggestion box as well as an online suggestion form, which are checked monthly. These suggestions are reported to the Faculty Library Committee, along with a response from the library addressing the specific suggestion or concern.

Data-Informed Decisions
Based on survey findings and other suggestions, the most frequently requested improvements or changes have included increased access to online resources (particularly professional journals) and updated computers. For several years, the library’s budget has remained static; however, the library does allocate existing resources based partly on input from library users. Reviews and changes in many areas are made on an annual basis.

Some of the areas of operation in which decisions are made at least partially on user feedback include:

Online resources: Each year, library staff evaluates usage of online resources to determine the usability and value of our database subscriptions to students and faculty. Usage data (along with input from faculty and the library’s subject specialists) is utilized to determine how to allocate online funds for the coming year. This evaluation of fund allocations is a continuous process.

Computer improvements: Although current budgetary constraints in recent years have not allowed for the replacement of the library’s computers, library staff have allocated funds and staffing to update existing computers where possible. Computer upgrades constitute one of the most common requests from surveys and user input. We are confident that with our improved budget situation we will be able to secure funding for more comprehensive computer upgrades.

Hours of operation and accessibility: Current hours are based on evaluation of past library usage. In 2017, library staff examined gate counts and user statistics to determine that the library could be closed on Saturdays with little impact on the student body. A trial run was conducted in the summer of 2017 with full implementation thereafter. This reduction in weekend hours allowed the library to re-channel resources to areas of greater need.

To meet the needs of our online and center students, the library employs a full-time staff member dedicated to assisting online and center students with library or research needs.

Instruction: When and how library research courses are offered is based on data kept on past offerings (e.g. traditionally morning classes are not as successful as afternoon ones). The decision to offer online courses is based partially on trends within the university and the changing nature of the student body and partially on requests made by students and faculty from the centers (i.e. survey results).

Awareness: Both of the campus library surveys include questions pertaining to the awareness and use of various library services. This information allows the librarians to determine which services and/or which collections require further attention, publicity, and training.

ITS Improvement Initiatives
Another key division in providing support to students, faculty, and staff at NMHU is Information Technology Services (ITS). The ITS office remains committed to the process of continual improvement. In spring 2018, the ITS office sent out a detailed survey regarding ITS services to all campus stakeholders. Based on feedback from this survey, ITS implemented a broad range of improvements to its services. A summary of some key improvement initiatives are summarized below; the complete report can be found on our website.

- We established an agreement with D2L for providing 24-7 Help Desk Service for the NMHU community. This service augments assistance provided by the ITS Help Desk;
- We repurposed a vacant position creating an ITS Support Tech for the Albuquerque and Rio Rancho Centers;
- We developed a number of training opportunities for Banner and other campus technologies;
- We performed a complete inventory of all classroom technology and computer lab technology; This inventory included both hardware and software assets, as well as room utilization data. From this inventory the following steps have been taken to address various concerns:
  - The inventory revealed deficiencies in software levels for a certain number of computers; these deficiencies on the computers have been addressed;
  - The inventory also revealed that the university was one revision level back for Smartboard updates. This issue will require an updated service agreement to address; as of this writing the ITS office was in the process of addressing this concern,
  - ITS has developed a Technology Renewal and Replacement Administrative Directive focused on a six-to-seven-year replacement strategy, as well as a process for renewal and replacement,
  - ITS developed a plan to specifically address classroom and lab technology, working and coordinating with the Provost and Deans;
- We identified portal software necessary to navigate the NMHU Technology environment more effectively. The intent of the portal is to provide better navigation of NMHU’s technology environment; to provide links that will take students and staff directly to the services and/or information; and to include improved single sign-on access, improved password reset software, and enhanced security including geo-fencing. This technology request will be included as a FY20 budget request.
We identified the following measures to improve processes, communications and transparency with the NMHU technology community:

- A work-order process targeted at improving communications throughout the work-order lifecycle as well as consistency in the manner in which problems are resolved,
- A Digital Technology Plan and associated processes for NMHU technology targeted at improving communications related to technology projects, approval status, funding and progress,
- A Technology Renewal and Replacement Directive targeted to provide replacement standards, improved communications (which equipment is being replaced and when) and transparency in the process,
- A SharePoint site as a central and one-stop-shop for the NMHU Technology community to go for support and information related to technology.

These improvement initiatives have helped ITS improve campus services while operating within tight budgetary and resource constraints. The ITS office conducted a similar user survey in spring 2019, although results of this survey were not available at the time of this writing.

Other Office Improvements

In the spirit of continuous improvement, we have worked to make improvements in all areas of institutional functioning. Below is a summary of some recent key institutional improvement activities and initiatives in various campus offices.

Campus Security

The NMHU Campus Security office, under new leadership, has made significant improvements to ensure a safe environment for our students and staff. A link to the Campus Police webpage is available on the NMHU website landing page. The Campus Police webpage includes key phone numbers and contact information, links to important documents and other offices that address safety and security issues, and a list of FAQs to help students and employees better understand safety and security policies and procedures.

Career Services

In response to recent survey results, the Career Services office has made a number of key improvements. For example, 41 percent of survey respondents from the class of 2018 indicated that they did not use the Career Services office due to not being aware of the office and the services provided. In response to this, the office will begin partnering with Handshake, a fast and powerful recruiting platform for NMHU students and alumni. It uses cutting-edge technology to better connect employers with qualified student candidates. Students, staff and employers can quickly access any part of Handshake from a browser or mobile device and see content tailored towards their individual needs. This helps drive an increase in student engagement.

As another example of responsiveness to survey results, 64 percent of survey respondents indicated that they did not begin to use the Career Center until their senior year. In response to this finding, NMHU Career Services has begun partnering with Highlands Undergraduate Experience (HUE) to offer comprehensive career counseling to incoming freshman. The counseling will include career exploration and guidance in selecting an appropriate major based on interests, abilities, and values.

Environmental Health and Safety

Under new leadership, the NMHU Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) has recently made significant, data-informed improvements. Previously, NMHU did not have an existing EHS Safety Manual. The current EHS Standard Operating Guidelines were adopted by the NMHU Board of Regents in 2018 and function as the overall safety standards for the university.

The Emergency Planning Team prioritized the need for a FEMA-based Emergency Operations Plan as the functional working document to guide response to an emergency incident on campus. NMHU’s Emergency Operating Plan (EOP) was developed, adopted and implemented in 2018 as the document to be used by NMHU during an emergency or planned event.

Additionally, the EHS office identified training needs based on OSHA standards, best practices, and industry standards. In the last two years, the EHS Department has conducted 74 trainings with 1,307 individuals trained. The EHS office has also prioritized addressing fire and safety violations identified by the New Mexico State Fire Marshal. In 2016, NMHU had 485 deficiencies, with 92 identified as major safety violations. In 2018, NMHU had 121 deficiencies with 0 major safety violations. Most deficiencies were very minor in nature and were quickly mitigated. All deficiencies have been corrected and/or repaired.

Website Improvements

For years an area of continuing concern for the NMHU community was the limited effectiveness of the university website. Faculty, staff, current students, and prospective students have all expressed frustration with navigating the website. Ongoing budget challenges have made it difficult to address these concerns; however, senior administration, supported by the Board of Regents, recently made a decision to prioritize improvement of the website. There is widespread agreement that a better website will contribute to improvements in institutional function at multiple levels, and that these improvements, based on feedback from multiple stakeholders, will justify the expense.

In early 2019, the university hired a web content manager, and secured the contractual services of an experienced web design company. The web design team held numerous open forums with varied and diverse groups of campus stakeholders, to ensure that stakeholder needs and concerns were addressed.

The new NMHU website is a cornerstone of institutional improvement efforts because it impacts so many areas of university operations and activities. Following is a short list of some of the institutional benefits that can result from our improved web presence.

- External relations: A more attractive, informative, and navigable website can help to attract and interest potential students, job applicants, and potential donors and business partners.
- Internal communication: The improved website will facilitate improved communications and information exchange within the NMHU community. This improved communication can in turn lead to improvements in efficiency and customer service.
- Campus life: The improved website will provide better information delivery to current students about upcoming activities and events, safety and health issues, and academic events and schedules. The new website may also help to facilitate a more user-friendly complaint process, which as noted above is a
Overall, the results of the NSSE survey were positive. The executive level Snapshot produced by NSSE indicated that NMHU first-year students scored significantly higher than students at peer institutions on several Engagement Indicators (see Table 21). Neither first-year students nor seniors scored significantly lower than students at peer institutions on any of the engagement indicators.

First-year students also had higher levels of participation in high-impact practices with a participation rate of 89 percent for NMHU first-year students compared to 59 percent for peer institutions. NMHU seniors scored higher on two global measures of overall satisfaction compared to students at peer institutions (see Figure 5). However, NMHU students spent less time preparing for class, and NMHU freshmen spent less time reading and writing as part of their class assignments.

**Figure 5: NSSE Peer Comparison**

NMHU also participated in the NSSE Advising Module. Results indicated that first-year students at NMHU scored higher than students at peer institutions on every measure and significantly higher on six measures. NMHU seniors scored higher than students at peer institutions on all but one measure, but none of the differences were significant (see Table 22).

As of this writing, the university is still sifting through the NSSE results and trying to determine how to use the results most effectively to inform institutional improvement. The Student Success Center has been interested in the results of the Advising Module, as we transition to a success coaching model for providing services to our students. Other university offices and groups, including the Diversity Committee, have also expressed an interest in using survey results to inform their activities. Additionally, we have had some requests from faculty for department-level survey results.

The previous NSSE survey was deployed in spring 2016. Results of that survey, along with results from the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, were used to drive ongoing discussions about our approach to student advising. Some of the key points of these discussions were summarized in a PowerPoint presentation to selected campus stakeholders. While no immediate changes were made at that time, this discussion has continued into the present and has led to more recent revisions to our advising model, as discussed in the 4C chapter of this document.

**Table 21: NSSE Engagement Indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSSE 2019 Engagement Indicators</th>
<th>Comparison with Southwest Public Peer Institutions</th>
<th>First-Year Students</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Challenge:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher-Order Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>↔</td>
<td>↔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective &amp; Integrative Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>↔</td>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>↔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Reasoning</td>
<td></td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>↔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning with Peers:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>↔</td>
<td>↔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion with Diverse Others</td>
<td></td>
<td>↔</td>
<td>↔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences with Faculty</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>↔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Teaching Practices</td>
<td></td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>↔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campus Environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td>↔</td>
<td>↔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>↔</td>
<td>↔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the results of the NSSE survey were positive. The executive level Snapshot produced by NSSE indicated that NMHU first-year students scored significantly higher than students at peer institutions on several Engagement Indicators (see Table 21). Neither first-year students nor seniors scored significantly lower than students at peer institutions on any of the engagement indicators.
Table 22: NSSE Advising Module

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison with Southwest Public Peer Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Has your academic adviser:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been available when needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened closely to your concerns and questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed you of important deadlines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped you understand academic rules and policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed you of academic support options (tutoring,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>study groups, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided useful information about courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped you when you had academic difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped you get information on special opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(study abroad, internships, research projects, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed your career interests and post-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graduation plans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison of results from the 2019 NSSE survey and the 2016 NSSE survey indicate that we have made important gains in a number of areas related to student engagement and satisfaction.

- The 2019 results showed higher scores on several of the engagement indicators for both freshmen and seniors.
- The 2019 results showed an increased level of participation in high impact practices (HIPs) for both freshmen and seniors.
- The 2019 results showed higher scores for both freshmen and seniors on the item “Rate your overall experience at this institution.”
- The 2019 results showed higher scores on all but one item from the Advising module, for both freshmen and seniors.

Overall, results of the 2019 NSSE survey indicate that we are serving our students effectively in many different areas, and our students express high levels of satisfaction with their experience at NMHU. Comparison of the 2019 and 2016 results show we have made significant gains in a number of facets of student engagement. However, survey results also point to a number of areas where continued improvement is needed. The university is committed to addressing those areas of concern.

Other institutional surveys

The Career Services office periodically deploys the First Destination survey to solicit feedback from alumni about their experiences at NMHU as well as their post-graduation experiences. These data are used by multiple stakeholders across campus, including the Career Services staff but also faculty who are interested in learning more about the experiences of graduates from their departments. This information has been instrumental in helping faculty to improve their academic programs. Results of the most recent distribution of the First Destination survey can be found in a brief report prepared by the Career Services office. Earlier survey results can be found in the annual co-curricular assessment report submitted by the Career Services office.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (OIER) annually conducts a survey of graduating seniors. This survey is typically distributed manually to students at the graduation rehearsal or graduation ceremony, which promotes a high response rate. Results of this survey are collected and analyzed, and are available to the campus community in a summary report. Results can be disaggregated by academic department and can therefore help individual departments to gain further insight into their students’ experiences. Survey results have been especially useful to departments undergoing regular program reviews.

The OIER also conducts an annual survey of alumni who graduated three years previously. The response rate for this survey is understandably low, but results nevertheless provide valuable insights about the experiences of our students and their postgraduate activities. A copy of the most recent summary of this survey is available online.

Campus Communication

NMHU has made significant efforts to inform the campus community about changes that we are making to improve our institutional effectiveness and strategic planning capabilities. We have hosted regular HLC Campus Forums to keep our faculty and staff up to date about the steps we are taking to ensure that we meet HLC expectations and recommendations. These campus forums also provide an opportunity to elicit feedback from stakeholders and, in some cases, solicit greater involvement in our institutional improvement efforts. These campus forums have been well received and well attended. The meeting times for these forums, as well as video recordings, are available on our HLC website.

The university has also hosted other informational events to keep the campus informed about all of our campus initiatives. Our president publishes a weekly newsletter touching on a range of topics relevant to institutional functioning. He also hosts monthly meetings (Coffee and Conversation) open to the entire campus community in which he updates employees and other stakeholders about key events and news items. These meetings provide an opportunity for questions and feedback. Our Vice-President for Finance and Administration hosts regular budget hearing sessions, in which he provides an overview of key budgetary and finance issues impacting the university. These sessions also allow for audience questions and comments. Recordings of these sessions are available online.

All forums and informational sessions are Zoom-enabled, allowing participation from our campus centers and online students and employees.

The Office of Strategic Enrollment Management has published a series of newsletters related to recruitment and retention concerns. These newsletters are attractively packaged, with each issue focusing on a specific topic of concern. Given the ongoing challenges faced by the university in the area of enrollment management, these newsletters are especially helpful in informing campus stakeholders about the status of our enrollment stream, about specific challenges we face, and about ways that we can all contribute to our enrollment management efforts. A sample SEM newsletter can be found on our website.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research has published a series of HLC newsletters to help keep the campus community informed about HLC activities and about our progress in preparing for the HLC Focused Visit.

Executive Key Performance Indicators

With reference to Core Component SD, the second broad area of concern identified by the Commission was stated as follows:

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following… An executive Strategic Plan Indicators update that includes outcomes that provide evidence that the
institution is improving its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, both as a whole and its component parts.”

This section will address the ways in which NMHU has addressed these concerns.

The Executive Management Team (EMT) of the university, at the request of the Board of Regents, has developed a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to track institutional performance in a wide variety of areas, including enrollment and retention, key financial indicators, faculty/staff salaries and diversity, marketing and website activity, advancement activity, and student athlete participation and success.

The Key Performance Indicators are tied to the six Strategic Goals as specified in our Strategic Plan, Vision 2020. These six goals are:

1. Highlands University will achieve academic excellence, academic integration and student success.
2. Highlands University will achieve strategic enrollment management.
3. Highlands University will achieve a vibrant campus life.
4. Highlands University will be a community partner.
5. Highlands University will achieve technological advancement and innovation.
6. Highlands University will achieve enhanced communication and efficiency.

In the sections which follow, these goals are specifically tied to the relevant KPI measures.

This KPI report is updated semiannually to ensure the measures reported are accurate and up to date. The EMT periodically reviews the KPIs to determine areas of strength and areas of potential concern in institutional functioning. A copy of the Fall 2019 KPI Report is available on the university website. Details of the KPI measures are provided below, with their associated strategic goals as mentioned above.

Enrollment and Retention Data
The first major section of the KPI report (KPIs 1 to 3) focuses on enrollment and retention data, submitted by the Strategic Enrollment Management Office and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research. These data link directly to Strategic Goal 2 (“Highlands University will achieve strategic enrollment management”), by specifically addressing recruitment and retention tasks that are essential components of the enrollment management stream. These data also include Strategic Goal 1 (“Highlands University will achieve academic excellence, academic integration, and student success”), by focusing on retention and graduation data, and more specifically focusing on certain subcohorts of students who might require additional academic support to be successful. Indirectly, these data inform Strategic Goal 5 (“Highlands University will achieve technological advancement and innovation”), since we have implemented new software solutions to support strategic enrollment management.

Enrollment and retention data in the KPI report include:

Term enrollment (KPI 1): Fall, spring, and summer enrollment are disaggregated by student level (i.e., undergraduate or graduate). Five years of data are provided to allow for analysis of recent trends in overall enrollment.

Demographics (KPI 2): Fall enrollment is disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and age, including five years of data. These data allow an evaluation of demographic trends that may be relevant to our recruitment activities.

Retention rates (KPI 3a): Fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall retention rates disaggregated by cohort, i.e., new freshmen, transfer students, and new graduate students. Five years of data are presented to determine recent trends. These data are critically important to helping track the success of our various retention activities and initiatives. These initiatives are discussed in more detail in the 4C chapter of this document.

Graduation rates (KPI 3b): Graduation rates are disaggregated by cohort, i.e., new freshmen, transfer students, and new graduate students. Three years of data are reported. These data are used to help track the effectiveness of our long-term persistence and completion initiatives.

Application funnel (KPI 3c): This section of the KPI report provides data on the number of applicants, admitted students, and registered students for the most recent five years. A yield rate is also calculated for each year. These data help to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of our recruitment efforts.

Academic Affairs
The second major section of the KPI report (KPI 4) focuses on grant activity. These data inform Strategic Goal 1 (“Highlands University will achieve academic excellence, academic integration, and student success”), by providing a measure of faculty productivity and research involvement. This KPI presents the amount of grant funding by source, disaggregated by the academic departments awarded the funding. Data are derived from the annual NSF-HERD report.

Finance and Administration
The third major section of the KPI report (KPI 5) focuses on key financial indicators, extracted from the annual IPEDS Finance Survey which is prepared by our Budget Office. These data inform Strategic Goal 6 (“Highlands University will achieve enhanced communication and efficiency”) by focusing on key financial trends which reflect recent initiatives developed by university to reduce costs and increase revenue. The finance data also inform Strategic Goal 5 (“Highlands University will achieve technological advancement and innovation”), since we have acquired a number of software solutions and improved internal IT functioning to improve efficiencies across multiple campus offices.

The financial indicators in the KPI report include the following:

Core Revenues (KPI 5a): As reported to IPEDS, core revenues include tuition and fees, state appropriations, grant income, investment income, and other key revenue sources. Three years of data are provided. These data allow us to determine significant changes in our revenue stream and make appropriate adjustments as needed.

Core Expenses (KPI 5b): As reported to IPEDS, core expenses include instruction, student services, academic support, public services, and other key expense categories. Three years of data are provided. These data allow us to determine significant changes in our expense patterns and make appropriate adjustments as needed.

Human Resources
The fourth major section of the KPI report (KPIs 6 and 7) focuses on human resources data, extracted primarily from the annual IPEDS Human Resources Survey. These data address Strategic Goal 1 (“Highlands University will achieve academic excellence, academic integration, and student success”) in several ways. First, an
examination of faculty salary data helps to ensure that we can attract and retain quality faculty, who are the key element in ensuring the academic success of our students. Similarly, the examination of staff salaries, many of whom serve in roles directly supporting student success, helps to ensure that we have quality staff on board. Finally, an examination of faculty and staff diversity helps to ensure that we maintain a diverse environment, which is a key component of the academic experience at NMHU.

Indirectly, these human resources data inform Strategic Goal 5 (“Highlands University will achieve technological advancement and innovation”), since we have recently implemented the PeopleAdmin software solution to streamline the hiring procedures for faculty, staff, and student workers.

The human resources indicators include the following:

Employee salaries (KPIs 6a and 7a): Faculty salaries, disaggregated by rank, and staff salaries, disaggregated by job category, are presented with four years of data. These data, along with comparative data from peer institutions, help us to determine whether our salary structure is equitable and competitive.

Faculty and staff diversity (KPIs 6b and 7b): Three years of data are provided. NMHU takes pride in being a very diverse and welcoming institution both for our employees as well as for our students. These data help us to determine whether we have achieved an appropriate level of faculty and staff diversity given our mission and service area.

University Relations

The fifth major section of the KPI report (KPI 8) focuses primarily on institutional website data, specifically the number of pageviews, top geographical markets for website hits, and type of source traffic. These data help us to determine who is viewing the website, which in turn informs our marketing and recruitment efforts. It should be noted that with the current website upgrades, the format of these data may change. However, we will continue to track website traffic to optimize our outreach and communication.

The website data inform Strategic Goal 4 (“Highlands University will be a community partner”) and Strategic Goal 6 (“Highlands University will achieve enhanced communication and efficiency”), since our website is a primary channel of communication between the university and the community. In a smaller community like Las Vegas, the university provides a range of activities and events that are of interest to the community. Maintaining an effective web presence helps to ensure that the community is well-informed of these events and activities.

Indirectly, these website data inform Strategic Goal 5 (“Highlands University will achieve technological advancement and innovation”), since our new website employs state of the art web technologies.

Advancement

The sixth major section of the KPI report (KPI 9) focuses on measures of activity in the Office of Advancement (Foundation). These measures include advancement revenues, number of donors, and number of alumni events. These data help us track growth and change in our fund-raising efforts.

The Advancement data inform Strategic Goal 4 (“Highlands University will be a community partner”), since our Advancement activities help to engage the community in a variety of institutional activities. These data also inform Strategic Goal 6 (“Highlands University will achieve enhanced communication and efficiency”), since the Advancement Office plays a key role in fund-raising activities which help to generate revenue for the university. Indirectly, the Advancement data also inform Strategic Goal 1 (“Highlands University will achieve academic excellence, academic integration, and student success”), since the Foundation offers a number of scholarships which support student success.

Student Services

The seventh major section of the KPI report (KPI 10) focuses on measures of activity within the Division of Student Affairs. These data clearly inform Strategic Goal 3 (“Highlands University will achieve a vibrant campus life”), but also inform Strategic Goal 1 (“Highlands University will achieve academic excellence, academic integration, and student success”), since our student services are designed to help support student success at multiple levels.

The Student Services data in the KPI report include the following:

Retention rates by residence hall (KPI 10a): These data help us to determine possible sources of student dissatisfaction with campus life that may be contributing to student attrition.

Student clinic activity (KPI 10b): These data help us to determine the extent to which our students are using the range of health services available to them.

Athletics

The eighth and final major section of the KPI report (KPI 11) focuses on measures of participation and academic success for our student athletes. These athlete data inform Strategic Goal 2 (“Highlands University will achieve strategic enrollment management”), since our intentional recruitment of student athletes is a key component of our overall strategic enrollment management plan. The athlete data also inform Strategic Goal 1 (“Highlands University will achieve academic excellence, academic integration, and student success”), since we carefully monitor and support the academic success of our student athletes. Finally, the athlete data inform Strategic Goal 3 (“Highlands University will achieve a vibrant campus life”) and Strategic Goal 4 (“Highlands University will be a community partner”), since our athletic events provide multiple opportunities for campus and community entertainment and engagement, and since our student athletes are actively involved in a range of community service projects.

The student athlete data in the KPI report include the following:

Number of athletes by sport (KPI 11a): Three years of data are provided. These data allow us to track growth or decline in particular sports, which helps to inform budget and personnel decisions.

Academic success of student athletes (KPI 11b): Three years of data are provided. Success measures include academic year GPA and retention rates, disaggregated by sport. These data provide insight into areas in which additional academic support or different recruitment strategies may be indicated.

Unit Level Planning

With reference to Core Component 5D, the third broad area of concern identified by the Commission was stated as follows:

“The Focused Visit will specifically address the following... A unit and/or department strategic plan update that includes outcomes that provide evidence that the institution is improving its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, both as a whole and in its component parts.”
The sections below will address the ways in which NMHU has addressed these concerns.

Unit Level Strategic Planning
In the recent past NMHU has been working diligently to develop a coherent and effective process for strategic planning at the level of individual units, both academic and administrative. This process is still being fine-tuned, but the system currently in place is now in its fourth cycle. Basically, all academic and administrative units with a departmental budget are expected to participate in the unit-level strategic planning process on an annual basis. Each unit is expected to provide an annual report on the extent to which the goals and objectives in the previous year’s plan have been achieved. This allows individual units to “close the loop;” units define their goals and objectives, measure attainment of those goals and objectives and, if necessary, adjust their goals and objectives for the next cycle of strategic planning. All unit level goals and objectives should be consistent with the institutional goals and objectives specified in the institutional Strategic Plan, Vision 2020 (see above).

The unit-level strategic planning process operates under the general supervision of our Provost with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research assuming responsibility for managing the collection and publication of the individual plans. We have formed a Unit Strategic Planning Committee to help oversee the process and provide recommendations for improvement and effective application. This committee has a charter and a Strategic Planning Guide posted on our website. Units are encouraged to consult this guide, which emphasizes the importance of proceeding in a cyclical fashion to promote continual improvement.

At this point in time, the unit-level strategic planning process has been moderately effective. While some departments clearly understand the process of developing goals and objectives at the unit level, other departments seem to struggle to develop appropriate goals and objectives. A more formalized approach to training in this area might be needed.

Compliance with the unit-level strategic planning process has been good but not 100 percent. Part of the problem is defining the appropriate level at which the unit plans should be produced. It might not make sense for very small administrative units to produce their own strategic plan, which could be redundant to the plans produced by a parent department. In any case, we have posted all unit-level strategic plans and annual reports on the institutional Strategic Planning website so stakeholders can view the materials than have been submitted.

One area in which further improvement is needed is better integrating the departmental strategic planning process with the budgeting process. In principle, departmental budgets are submitted in conjunction with the departmental strategic plans, but this does not always happen in practice. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, there is no clear and direct link between the strategic plans and the budgets. We are working to develop a system that allows for a stronger linkage between these two critical processes.

Overall, the unit-level strategic planning process at NMHU has been an effective mechanism to help individual departments think more strategically. The shortcomings that exist in the process are being addressed. We are confident that continued improvement in this process will strengthen our whole system of institutional effectiveness.

Departmental Dashboard
As noted above, the university has developed a process for developing and evaluating strategic plans at the departmental level. Additionally, we are in the process of developing a department-level dashboard for academic units. Such a dashboard would allow individual departments as well as senior administrators to evaluate various academic metrics on a regular basis.

A retention-based version of the department level dashboard was created in summer of 2018 and distributed to all academic departments during our annual Professional Development Week. This dashboard contained enrollment and retention data by department in both graphical and tabular formats. The primary purpose of this dashboard was to encourage academic units to reflect on ways they could support the recruitment and retention efforts of the university. Samples of this dashboard are available for review. However, subsequent discussion with faculty members and department chairs suggested that this type of data and format might not be very useful. In spring 2019 the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research prepared and distributed to the academic deans a different version of the department dashboard. This version is still under review for its utility but is available for review on our website.

A third type of the department dashboard is currently under preparation. This version, which is intended primarily for administrative review but would be available to academic departments, would include data for each department on the number of majors and graduates, number and rank of faculty, credit hour generation, and basic fiscal measures. A beta version of this dashboard is available for review but has not yet been distributed.

Departmental Improvement Initiatives
In conjunction with the unit-level strategic planning process (see above), all academic and administrative units were encouraged to submit a list of improvement initiatives reflecting activities undertaken by the units in the 2017-18 academic year that led to positive and measurable changes in departmental and/or institutional functioning. These improvement initiatives provided another opportunity for individual units to engage in a cyclical process of improvement using the “closing the loop” pattern. All academic and administrative units were given a template for listing their improvement initiatives. This template included columns for departmental goals (derived from the unit strategic plans, see above section), outcomes of goal-directed activities, and departmental or institutional improvements seen as a result of those outcomes. Some of the improvement initiatives are listed below. This list, which is only a small sampling of all the initiatives identified, serves to give some idea of the range and scope of activities undertaken by many departments across campus and helps to demonstrate the university-wide commitment to institutional improvement. A more complete summary of key improvement initiatives by department is available on our Strategic Planning website.

- The Financial Aid Office revised the Foundation scholarship application to allow for an open application throughout the academic year and continuous awarding. The office also began offering institutional scholarships to entering freshman and transfer students as they were admitted.
- The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research worked with ITS and the Outcomes Assessment Committee to explore software solutions for assessment, planning, and accreditation activities.
The Business Office created a collaboration with Graduate Office, Human Resources, Financial Aid and students. The office also improved the processes by implementing earlier distribution of Graduate Assistant reimbursements.

Campus Life has promoted enhanced participation by community organizations in campus activities. As a result, students are more aware of resources within the community and more engaged with the community.

The Farmington Center established partnerships with three local vendors to provide entertainment options for students. After poor attendance at hosted events in FY17, the Center switched to offering items that could be used at any time. Student participation improved and a weekly touchpoint opportunity was created.

Facilities instituted cost-savings measures within the department allowing for a purchase of one vehicle per year. Facilities personnel now have more workable vehicles for transport, and maintenance and other costs associated with breakdowns have decreased.

The Housing Office preprogrammed temporary keys for all resident students for fall 2018 check-in. This helped to accelerate the process for students to check into the residence halls and eliminated long lines at the Housing Office.

Information Technology Services created self-service meeting room scheduling system. This reduced the need for a staff member to manually schedule room reservations and helped to improve efficiency in the reservation process.

The Library built more partnerships with campus and community organizations. This brought in different audiences and segments of the population (i.e. high school students) to the library.

The English Department created a cutting-edge program that counters the false public narrative that an English degree does not provide many work opportunities. The department also created “Geek Week” in spring 2018 to promote awareness of the interest and value of a liberal arts education; this event was continued in spring 2019.

Media Arts faculty members attended at least one conference with students, and increased the number of professional connections and job opportunities for students.

The Forestry Department has now revised its scheduling practices and offers all required courses on a regular basis, improving scheduling predictability for students. This change will improve student success and reduce time to degree completion for students.

The Business Administration program engaged the local Economic Development Council (EDC) to be on its advisory board, and worked with the EDC to address program evaluation, internships and student advising.

The Sociology and Criminal Justice department conducts an exit survey every spring. Two years of data have indicated that it is clear that these programs need to improve their advising efforts. The programs have been discussing ways to mandate at least one advising session for all students every semester. These improvement initiatives were originally developed as one-time opportunity for units to demonstrate recent improvements, but we are exploring ways to systematize the process of collecting these improvement initiatives on a more regular basis. In fact, several units have voluntarily submitted a list of improvement initiatives for the 2018-19 academic year.

Cocurricular Assessment
In the past few years, NMHU has developed a cocurricular outcomes assessment (CCOA) model. While this area of activity primarily falls under HLC Criterion 4B, it is mentioned briefly here because the CCOA model has helped drive institutional improvement. As part of the CCOA process, several administrative units which work directly with students in a nonacademic capacity are required to submit assessment plans and reports on a regular schedule. Participating in this process has helped these units: 1) to define more clearly their role within the institution; 2) to articulate more clearly the outcomes they are trying to achieve with their students, 3) to measure the success of their efforts, and 4) to revise their goals or operations based on the result of their assessment activities. This is another example of “closing the loop” in a way that leads to institutional improvement. CCOA reports from specific offices can be found on the website.

Summary: Core Component 5D
As outlined in the above sections, NMHU is committed to creating an institutional culture of continuous improvement. We feel that we have made significant progress in meeting the expectations of the HLC with reference to Core Component 5D. At the same time, we acknowledge that, in the spirit of continual improvement, we still have a considerable amount of work to do. In this concluding section we summarize some of our key accomplishments and challenges in this area.

Accomplishments
Some key highlights of our commitment to strategic planning and institutional improvement include the following:

- Strategic Plan: A new institution-wide strategic plan is being developed under the direction of a broadly representative committee that is engaging stakeholders at all stages of the process.
- Financial Aid: New policies and procedures have been implemented to improve office efficiency, and most importantly to improve services to students. Also, the Satisfactory Academic Process (SAP) guidelines and procedures have been revised to increase opportunities for student success.
- Office of Advancement (Foundation): New policies and procedures have been implemented with comprehensive documentation support. Numerous initiatives have been implemented to ensure integrity and transparency in all operations. The most recent Foundation audit was clean.
- Student Relations Office: The newly formed position of Student Relations Coordinator has significantly helped improve student success in navigating through multiple offices, thereby helping reduce student complaints as well as providing a channel to address those complaints.
- Student complaint website: We continue to make improvements to our student complaint and concern website, although this remains a work in progress.
- Budgeting process: We have made significant improvements in efficiency, communication, and transparency.
- Survey data: Extensive student survey data from multiple sources is available, as well as a moderate amount of survey data from
faculty and staff. NSSE 2019 results indicated a relatively high level of student engagement and satisfaction, as well as improvements compared to the 2016 NSSE results.

- Key Performance Indicators: A comprehensive KPI report has been developed to serve as a mechanism for collecting and reviewing mission-critical data. The KPI measures support and inform the strategic goals articulated in our current Strategic Plan, Vision 2020.

- Unit-and department-level strategic planning: A coherent unit and department planning process has been implemented to promote continuous improvement at the unit and department level. Unit and department planning objectives are designed to be consistent with the strategic goals articulated in Vision 2020.

**Ongoing challenges**

Despite the progress that we have made in promoting institutional effectiveness and improvement, there are still a number of challenges that need to be addressed, including the following:

- Strategic Plan: The current institutional strategic plan (Vision 2020) was never fully developed, and remains primarily a vision and mission statement with a set of high level strategic goals.

- Student complaints: Despite improvements in this area, the process for handling student complaints remains somewhat decentralized; communication problems also remain.

- Budgeting process: Institutionally, there remain some challenges with the process for adjusting the budget when faced with revenue shortfalls.

- Survey data: Although we collect a significant amount of survey data, we do not always demonstrate a systematic approach to using survey data to inform institutional improvement.

- Key Performance Indicators: The KPIs are linked at a high level to strategic goals, but are not linked to specific objectives within the current strategic plan (which lacks specific objectives). It is expected that this problem will be resolved in the formulation of the new strategic plan.

- Unit and department level strategic planning: The system currently in place, while effective in many respects, needs a closer connection with the budget and assessment processes. Compliance has improved but is not yet 100 percent.

**Overall Summary and Conclusions**

For all of us at NMHU, the preparation process for the HLC Focused Visit has provided an opportunity to work together to address significant institutional concerns as articulated by the Higher Learning Commission. We are confident we have made significant progress and improvement in the three areas of concern that formed the basis for the Focused Visit, while acknowledging that we still have more work to do.

With respect to Core Component 4C, we have developed a Strategic Enrollment Management Plan to guide our recruitment and retention efforts through a multi-channel approach. We have formulated retention and completion targets for multiple cohorts of students. We have developed effective systems for collecting and disseminating enrollment and persistence data. We are using enrollment and retention data to inform institutional decision-making at multiple levels and to promote institutional improvement.

With respect to Core Component 5A, we have reduced our reliance on state funding by growing our reserves, implementing carefully balanced tuition increases, and reducing nonessential expenses. We have significantly reduced expenditures associated with auxiliary operations. Our most recent institutional audit produced no repeat findings, and we developed a plan to address the new findings, all of which were relatively minor. The audits for the Foundation and Stable Isotopes were clean. We have improved our budgeting processes to provide more transparency and stakeholder input. Our Composite Financial Index (CFI) has remained above 2.0 for the past three years.

With respect to Core Component 5D, we have improved policies and procedures in place across multiple campus offices, including the Foundation and Financial Aid. We have improved our budgeting process, strategic planning process, and student complaint management process. We are in the process of developing a new strategic plan that will address some of the shortcomings of the existing plan. We have developed a set of Key Performance Indicators tied to the strategic plan that help us to identify areas of strength and weakness. We have developed a strategic planning process at the unit and department level that helps administrative units and academic departments to more effectively identify their goals and progress toward achieving those goals.

In conclusion, we appreciate the opportunity to work with the Higher Learning Commission to make NMHU a stronger, more effective institution that can continue to serve the higher educational needs of northern New Mexico and beyond for generations to come.

We especially appreciate the work of the Visiting Team and appreciate its feedback and constructive criticism. We are committed to the process of continual improvement at NMHU and are grateful for this opportunity to work with the Commission and the Visiting Team in this improvement process.
Appendix: Links to Key Institutional Documents
Below are the links to key institutional documents requested by the Higher Learning Commission as part of the preparation process for the Focused Visit.

- Faculty Handbook
- Contingent Faculty Handbook
- Student Handbook
- Undergraduate Catalog
- Graduate Catalog