



Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal

Institutional Template

The enclosed Quality Initiative Proposal represents the work that the institution will undertake to fulfill the quality improvement requirements of the Open Pathway.

[Handwritten Signature]

4/10/23

Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor

Date

José Luis Cruz Rivera, Phd, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Northern Arizona University

Name of Institution

Flagstaff, AZ

City and State

The institution completes the Quality Initiative Proposal by responding to the questions in each category of the template. Proposals should be no more than 4,500 words. The institution may choose to submit a brief implementation plan or supplemental charts or graphs as appendices to the template. The Quality Initiative Proposal will be accepted beginning September 1 of Year 5. It is due no later than June 1 of Year 7.

Submit the proposal as a PDF file to hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Pathways/Quality Initiative" from the list of submission options to ensure the institution's materials are sent to the correct HLC staff member. Submission file names should utilize the following format: QIProposal[InstitutionName][State].pdf (e.g., QIProposalNoNameUniversityMN.pdf). The file name must include the institution's name (or an identifiable portion thereof) and state.

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. Provide a title and brief description of the Quality Initiative. Explain whether the initiative will begin and be completed during the Quality Initiative period or if it is part of work already in progress or will achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative.

NAU's Quality Initiative project, **100% Career Ready**, focuses on preparing NAU graduates to flourish in a wide range of careers. To do this, NAU will offer a broad portfolio of high-quality academic programs that are responsive to the workforce and social needs of Arizona and beyond. By providing well-designed degree programs and appropriate support and resources, NAU graduates will be prepared to contribute to the workforce with meaningful and family-sustaining careers. NAU will shepherd students through their postsecondary journey with a career mapping process, with clear milestones and activities that take place inside and outside of the classroom to support an outcomes-based approach to delivering value from their college education. In the end, every NAU graduate will truly be 100% career ready as a result of our intentional scaffolding of the collegiate journey.

This two-year project will engage faculty, staff, and academic leaders in intentionally integrating career preparation and skill development into undergraduate and master-level degree programs to better align with workforce needs. We will also identify complementary career exploration opportunities and support services. The 100% Career Ready project began in fall semester 2022, and recommendations for modifications will be completed by the end of fall semester 2024 - within years 5 and 9 of the 10-year Open Pathway cycle for NAU.

The Quality Initiative report will include a set of recommendations for comprehensive curricular changes and co-curricular support structures and services, noting timelines for full implementation. While efforts to implement many of these improvements will occur prior to the submission of the Quality Initiative report in early 2025, full implementation and assessment of the 100% Career Ready project will extend beyond the proposed Quality Initiative project timeline.

Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

2. Explain why the proposed initiative is relevant and significant for the institution.

NAU aims to be the nation's preeminent engine of opportunity, vehicle of economic mobility, and driver of social impact by delivering equitable postsecondary value in Arizona and beyond.

Our strategic plan, **NAU 2025 – Elevating Excellence**, includes seven strategic priorities and 29 associated objectives that will collectively:

1. **Broaden Participation and Increase Educational Attainment** by increasing access points and the number of Arizona resident and non-resident students, especially from underserved and rural communities, and by increasing retention, persistence, and graduation rates to uniformly high levels.
2. **Strengthen Post-College Outcomes** by better aligning educational offerings to Arizona's workforce needs, ensuring students have access to meaningful internships and experiential learning opportunities, improving career placements in Arizona, and powering graduates' economic mobility.
3. **Drive Social and Economic Impact** by catalyzing communities' economic vitality, supporting Arizona's workforce needs, delivering public service activities, generating impactful scholarship and research, and promoting DEIJ and an institutional commitment to Indigenous Peoples, in the service of advancing a more just society.

100% Career Ready is a signature project associated with two of our strategic priorities:

- **Academic Excellence** - NAU's high-quality academic programs, general studies curriculum, and the teaching excellence of our faculty will foster students' knowledge and competencies necessary for professional success, informed civic engagement, global citizenship, lifelong learning, and the promotion of a more just and sustainable future.

- **Student Success** - Grounded in a student-centered institutional culture of care, NAU will provide accessible and affordable educational opportunities, with tailored support services that enable students to complete their academic credentials and realize transformative outcomes from their collegiate experience.

To meet our institutional mission of providing equitable access to economic mobility for all students, we must offer workforce-aligned programs and support that will launch graduates confidently into relevant and exciting careers serving the needs of the region and beyond. The institution-wide 100% Career Ready efforts will ensure that all undergraduate and master's level programs, regardless of location or modality, intentionally integrate career preparation into our curriculum and that we offer comprehensive career development services to all of our students.

3. Explain the intended impact of the initiative on the institution and its academic quality.

100% Career Ready will positively impact workforce development in Arizona and beyond by offering academic programs aligned with workforce needs and designed for the enhanced professional preparation of graduates.

Most importantly, the intended impact will be for our students. While our professionally focused programs, such as Education, Engineering, and Dental Hygiene, have incorporated career preparation into their degree programs as guided by specialized accreditation and licensing requirements, the majority of NAU academic programs do not have career preparation as a cornerstone of the curriculum. Students often pick a major based on interest in the subject and then are left alone to figure out how what they learned in their major and general studies prepares them for a wide range of careers. The often-asked questions, such as, "What are you going to do with a history degree? What type of job can you get with a psychology degree?", are challenging for students.

100% Career Ready aims to help students understand and translate the skills (and content) they are learning to a wide range of career opportunities and future success. Graduates will understand their academic and professional trajectories more clearly and will enter the workforce with strong professional skills. Helping students better understand and talk about how what they are learning prepares them for career success is especially important now, with many questioning the value of higher education.

Our students' post-graduation success will signal the quality of our academic programming and student support services. We are poised to serve as a national role model for prioritizing successful post-graduate outcomes that translate into economic mobility and a workforce that serves our dynamic society.

Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose

4. Describe the purposes and goals for the initiative.

The purpose of the 100% Career Ready initiative is to prepare all NAU students to successfully launch into meaningful careers upon graduation. This project takes a comprehensive view of career preparation. We commit to ensuring that every NAU student is provided opportunities to develop career confidence and competency through curricular and co-curricular experiences and the integration of high impact practices into all programs. As a regional comprehensive public university, it is our responsibility to offer a strong return on investment for students and families in Arizona and beyond. The 100% Career Ready project will elevate career preparation and build the confidence of our students, as they carry their disciplinary training into the professional workplace.

The initiative has several key goals:

1) Develop a 100% Career Ready Curriculum: Faculty and academic leaders will a.) examine and revise program learning outcomes and progression plans, infusing career information appropriate for each step in a student's career from entering freshmen to graduating seniors and master's students; b.) incorporate career competencies from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), which are specific for each phase from exploration to placement.; c.) pay attention to general competencies, which are necessary for most careers and workplaces, and discipline-specific professional skills that vary by degree program, d.) integrate high impact practices, such as internships, e-portfolio development, international experiences, independent research experiences, and information relevant to the development of professional competencies and skills, and e.) review and modify the portfolio of academic programs to ensure alignment with workforce needs, based on data provided by NAU-specific Hanover workforce reports, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports, and appropriate software platform(s).

2) Develop a 100% Career Ready Support Structure: Strong centralized and college-specific co-curricular programming and career advisement will provide students with focused out-of-classroom activities and guidance that prepares them for key career preparedness, awareness, and competencies. Career advising will involve a team approach, which includes career advising professionals embedded into each academic college, in collaboration with the Office of Career Development.

3) Develop a 100% Career Ready University Infrastructure: In conjunction with the programming above, NAU will develop a university-wide infrastructure to support and sustain the success of this program, which will include technological platforms and data integration to support and scale out all dimensions of the 100% Career Ready initiative, as well as industry partnerships that will create a more tangibly connected college-to-career ecosystem for NAU students. These resources will afford faculty, students, and staff access to academic, career, and employer information to bring career insights and planning into every interaction, including curricular, co-curricular, and experiential learning, resulting in customized and personalized recommendations for content and automated newsletters based on individual student and alumni interests.

5. Select up to three main topics that will be addressed by the initiative.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Advising | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Retention |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civic Engagement | <input type="checkbox"/> Online Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Learning |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum | <input type="checkbox"/> Persistence and Completion | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student Success |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching/Pedagogy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engagement | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Underserved Populations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Evaluation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Workforce |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First-Year Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality Improvement | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Education | | |

6. Describe how the institution will evaluate progress, make adjustments and determine what has been accomplished.

As articulated in Question 5, NAU is pursuing three key goals (workstreams), which form the foundation of this initiative. Maribeth Watwood, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, serves as the primary lead of the 100% Career Ready initiative. In tight coordination with academic deans and the Office of Career Development, Dr. Watwood will coordinate support for the efforts and track progress, per the timeline noted in Question 10.

To evaluate progress Dr. Watwood will track the following metrics: Number of degree programs revised within each college, number of courses examined and modified within each degree program, number of co-curricular opportunities embedded in curricula, and, importantly, the number of faculty actively involved in curricular revision for each degree program.

The Provost Team and academic deans will regularly discuss progress within colleges in order to recognize accomplishments and address challenges throughout the initiative.

Similarly, progress, accomplishments, and challenges identified through the Office of Career Development and related institutional infrastructure will be tracked and discussed quarterly throughout the two-year timeframe.

Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

7. Describe the level of support for the initiative by internal or external stakeholders.

The Arizona Board of Regents approved NAU President Cruz Rivera's AY22-23 At-Risk Compensation Goal that is aligned with this project, titled, Academic Excellence and Student Success. *NAU will develop a plan and begin enhancing career preparation opportunities to support students' post-college success. The plan will outline the launch of a phased 100% Career Ready initiative that will strengthen linkages and highlight pathways from NAU's exceptional academic programs to workforce outcomes.* President Cruz Rivera proposed this goal given its significance to NAU's strategic priorities and our institutional commitment to broaden equitable access and increase economic mobility of our students.

Additional evidence of external support of our mission and the goals of the 100% Career Ready initiative is the Arizona Board of Regents' adoption of an institutional metric that utilizes the Economic Mobility Index – A national index that identifies which schools enroll the highest proportion of students from low- and moderate-backgrounds AND provide these students with a strong return on their educational investment.

Internal stakeholder support is evidenced by profound engagement of faculty and academic leaders from all colleges and staff in Student Affairs, where the Office of Career Development is housed. Student government has also enthusiastically endorsed these efforts.

8. Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.

Karen Pugliesi, University Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, is responsible for the 100% Career Ready initiative. She has assigned Maribeth Watwood, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, with leadership responsibilities for the curricular aspects of the initiative and coordination of efforts across the institution.

All academic deans have been closely involved from the inception of this work, and they express, to a person, their commitment to lead NAU colleges in the development and implementation of career preparation in all degree programs. The deans have formed college-level leadership teams to guide their work. Faculty across the institution will actively participate in course and curriculum revisions.

Margot Saltonstall, Vice President of Student Affairs, and John Gartin, Director of the Office of Career Development, are close partners in this project and will oversee the co-curricular career support for students. Staff in the academic colleges and other NAU offices (e.g., the Office of Career Development, the academic advising, Cline Library, Student Affairs, etc.) will play pivotal roles in advising students, contributing to the implementation of project features, and assisting faculty in curriculum enhancement and syllabus construction.

9. List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.

Given the importance of these efforts to our institutional mission, NAU is committing considerable human, financial, and technological resources to support the 100% Career Ready project.

NAU is committing substantial resources to fund this project through support for faculty time dedicated to 100% Career Ready work, placement of career professionals in each college, and a comprehensive software platform to provide critical job information, interactive dashboards, and guidance for students in the exploration phase of career preparation. For example, in response to an institution-wide call for proposals under the broad umbrella of Elevating Student Success, the 100% Career Ready project was awarded \$375,000. This funding will provide the staff scaffolding necessary to help develop and to implement our recommendations regarding curricular and co-curricular aspects of the project.

As noted above, faculty and academic leaders in every academic college will devote their time and talent to revising their degree programs and courses. As appropriate, allocation of faculty time to this work will be compensated through summer stipends and adjustments of annual Statement of Expectation documents. Career-focused professionals will be placed in each academic college, providing strong support for the goals of this work. While some colleges with unique accreditation and licensing requirements already have career staff, most do not, and the addition of these career -focused staff will elevate this work.

The ITS and marketing support that will be needed to implement the career-focused software platform and revise webpages are examples of technological and human resources being allocated to this project. The W. A. Franke College of Business is currently utilizing UConnect as a pilot for evaluation and potential implementation across the institution. Other platforms are being considered as well.

Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative

(The institution may include a brief implementation or action plan.)

10. Describe the primary activities of the initiative and timeline for implementing them.

The following primary activities and timelines have been articulated for the 100% Career Ready project, which launched in fall 2022.

Fall 2022

- Introduce the project and goals of 100% Career Ready to President's Cabinet, the Academic Leadership Collaborative, Faculty Senate, and other internal and external stakeholders.
- Engage with each academic dean team to identify unique college attributes, needs for career development, and aspects of their career work to date that they can share with the rest of NAU.
- Compile and disseminate existing college-level best practices, such as the development of a micro-credential, the Managing Career Badge, offered through the Office of Career Development in conjunction with the W.A. Franke College of Business.

Spring 2023

- Colleges (deans and college leadership teams) will develop and submit timelines that articulate when degree programs will be reviewed (and modified) by faculty, based on the local context and resources in their college.
- Begin offering faculty and staff workshops for each college to engage colleagues in this work and demonstrate how straightforward modifications to course planning and syllabus design can be accomplished without being onerous.
- University Strategic Planning Advisory Board and University Advisory Board will review and endorse 100% Career Ready initiative as our Quality Initiative project.
- Submit Quality Initiative proposal to Higher Learning Commission.

Summer 2023

- Faculty teams from each college will review and modify curricula to expand student learning beyond discipline specific content and strong general studies preparation to ensure tangible alignment with requirements for entry and advancement in likely career paths linked to NAU degree programs.
- Colleges will develop career-focused activities and milestones for each academic level (first semester freshmen to graduating seniors).
- Explore partnership with Arizona Commerce Authority for institutional adoption of Arizona Career Readiness Credentialing.
- Select software platform(s) to provide to faculty and students current real-time labor market data for specific areas of interest such as top employers, salaries, occupation demands & skills, and occupations for graduates of a specific major.

Fall 2023, Spring 2024, and Fall 2024

- Continue to offer workshops for faculty to share available support and practices that can be incorporated into courses and promote the 100% Career Ready culture.
- Pilot Arizona State University's Work+ approach, where student employees and their supervisors explicitly identify employability skills and the tasks and job duties that develop those skills.
- Faculty and academic leaders will review and modify courses and degree programs to better support students career exploration and preparation. Curricula will be analyzed relative to career information provided through several key sources of workforce data, such as National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) standards and competencies, and ability to better integrate AAC&U-identified High Impact Practices, such as internships, e-portfolios, international experiences, and capstone projects.
- Faculty will submit curricular changes, as appropriate, through the curriculum review process.
- Convene groups of employers, who currently serve on discipline-specific advisory boards, to meet with our faculty and students to assist with post-graduation placements.
- Strengthen support for resume preparation, job searches, and other key components of successful employment.
- Implement the user-friendly software platform, chosen during summer 2023, to serve as a key resource, information hub, and interactive dashboard.
- Revise institutional webpages to reflect NAU's 100% Career Ready curriculum, support, and culture.

Early 2025

- Continue implementing curricular and co-curricular changes.
- Submit Quality Initiative report to HLC, including recommendations for curricular and co-curricular changes, noting timelines for full implementation.

2025 and Beyond

- Assess post-graduate outcomes to determine effectiveness of 100% Career Ready initiative.

Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal

Include the name(s) of the primary contact(s) for the Quality Initiative.

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