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August 18, 2025

Dr. Michael Davis
President
Fairmont State University
1201 Locust Ave.
Fairmont, WV 26554-2470

Dear President Davis:

Fairmont State University's interim report on Planning has been reviewed. The staff analysis of the report is attached.

On behalf of the Higher Learning Commission, staff received the report on Planning.

No further reports are required.

The institution's next Mid-Cycle Review is scheduled for 2026-27.

The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2032-33.

Please note: Revisions to HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices will go into effect on September 1, 2025. Institutions will be evaluated against these revised HLC requirements for all reviews conducted after that date, including reviews related to previously assigned monitoring. Institutional reports submitted on or after September 1, 2025, or institutional reports or Assurance Arguments for visits that will take place on or after September 1, 2025, should be written to the revised version of the Criteria or Assumed Practices as applicable. More information, including a crosswalk between the current and revised versions of the Criteria, is available on HLC's website at <https://www.hlcommission.org/criteria>.

For more information on the interim report process, contact HLC at interimreports@hlcommission.org. Your HLC staff liaison is Linnea Stenson.

Thank you,
Higher Learning Commission

cc: Lindsey Graham-Guinn, Accreditation Liaison Officer
Linnea Stenson, HLC Staff Liaison

STAFF ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

DATE: August 15, 2025

STAFF LIAISON: Linnea Stenson

REVIEWED BY: Lee Bash

INSTITUTION: Fairmont State University, Fairmont, WV**EXECUTIVE OFFICER:** Michael Davis, President**PREVIOUS HLC ACTION AND SOURCES:**

A report on systematic and integrative plan development, implementation, and the reporting out of results for the areas to include institutional planning; financial planning; online and distance education; and assessment planning. The report should include demonstrated improvements in increasing a culture of data efficiency, quality, and data-informed decision making. All institutional planning efforts should include metrics that will allow units to demonstrate progress towards enrollment, retention, and persistence efforts.

REPORT PRESENTATION AND QUALITY: The Fairmont State University interim report is contained within a 37-page narrative, supported by five appendices that are published in 869 pages. The interim report is provided as a result of the team report relating to an HLC reaffirmation visit in 2023, where the team identified five areas of focus with recommendations for each. These areas included: 1) Institutional Planning, 2) Financial Planning, 3) Data Efficiency, Quality, and Data-Informed Decision Making, 4) Online and Distance Education, and 5) Assessment Planning. Each area is addressed in a separate portion of the narrative in the interim report and is linked with an Appendix citation for each. The interim report is extensive, thorough, comprehensive and responsive to each of the areas of concern.

REPORT SUMMARY: The Fairmont State University interim report begins with a short section that summarizes the steps and progress the institution has completed, based on each of the areas of focus articulated above. This is followed by a Table of Contents that, given the complexity of the document, is helpful in tracking each of the areas of focus.

The narrative proceeds with the heading, “Focus Area 1: Institutional Planning Response.” It begins by describing a strategic plan for 2025 to 2035 titled *Strategic Vision* which identifies three aspirational goals that are linked to five priorities that provide further details. The remainder of this section is comprised of subsections that are summarized below.

The first subsection is titled “Institutional Planning Process: July 2023 – August 2024,” which notes how the strategic planning process has been spearheaded by the institution’s new president who encouraged all constituencies with an inclusive, transparent, and flexible approach. The institution launched a public website “to disseminate information about the process to all constituencies.”

The next subsection is titled “Integration of Plans with Institutional Missions and Priorities: September 2024 – May 2025.” After initial discussion, the institution’s constituents decided to revise the Mission Statement, with updated terms and concepts that were reflective of the ongoing discussion and decisions.

The next subsection, titled “October 2024,” initiates the period after the *Strategic Vision* document was completed and eleven Implementation Plans in key areas were proposed. Leaders and

timeline/deadlines were designated and shared with the Board of Governors in June 2025. The subsection also notes that “the University engaged Evergreen Solutions consulting firm to perform a classification and compensation study that took place between January and June 2025.” Further developments took place that emphasized processes for consistency and documentation, all leading to the next stage.

The next subsection is titled, “Integrated Cross-Organizational Planning: June 2025 – July 2025,” which, instead of separating employee groups into individual silos, fostered collaboration in cross-divisional meetings, in part supported by a U.S. Department of Education grant titled “*Bridging the Gap for Underserved Students: Constructing a Comprehensive and Integrated Infrastructure for Student Success at Fairmont State University*” whose goals, like the efforts described in this subsection, emphasized the use of connections to create synergies.

The next subsection, titled, “Budget” outlines how the planning described throughout this section “is supported through responsible financial planning and diverse funding sources.” As in all subsections cited in this section, the narrative is supported by extensive appendix content.

“Monitoring and Evaluating Progress: July – August 2025” is the title of the next subsection that relates how the institution is “developing a system of virtual dashboards that will allow the University to monitor and evaluate progress on both an iterative and an annual basis.” Since this is still a work in progress, the subsection also projects how the dashboards are expected to be fully operational by October 2025.

The next subsection, “Observations on Institutional Planning, serves as a summary for the material provided in this section and concludes with how the aspirational goals, planning process, design, and budget will assist the institution to achieve its objectives as it moves towards implementation of the system of integrated planning.

The final subsection is titled “Strengths,” which iterates six examples of its related strengths and accomplishments that the institution has achieved in this area so far.

The next section is titled “Focus Area 2: Financial Planning Response,” which contains ten subsections and utilizes tables, as well as appendix citations to help illustrate and support the narrative.

The first subsection, “Operating Revenue and Expenses,” begins with a graph that displays total revenues and expenses by fiscal year for 2021-2025. The narrative notes that, “operating expenses had formerly been rolled from budget year to budget year for the past several years but are now being implemented on prior year actuals. The FY25 and FY26 budget are reflections of this refinement of the budget process and demonstrate improved alignment of resource and allocation methodologies toward the mission and strategic priorities.” The subsection also provides two tables: the first reveals the auxiliary operating budget from 2021 to 2025, while the second “demonstrates a successful operating surplus across all University Funds.” The subsection concludes by noting that “Over the period 2021-25, net tuition has remained relatively flat” and “No cash losses occurred,” but indicates that, “cash that could have been used to finance debt or the existing physical facilities went to increase current assets through cash reserves.”

The next subsection is titled “Composite Financial Index (CFI),” which includes a table and brief narrative that concludes, “The University has performed well across aspects of the core ratios and has no ongoing concerns about meeting or exceeding levels.”

This is followed by “Reserves and Liquidity,” that explains that the institution, in an extreme financial crisis, is able “to access approximately \$65M of unrestricted board-designated (quasi endowment) resources.”

The next subsection is titled, “Approved Reserve Spending,” which summarizes how, as of April 2025, the Board has agreed that the goal for the institution is to “maintain 180 days cash on hand to spend down cash resources in a manner consistent with the strategic plan over a period of three years.” The remainder of the subsection provides further details that confirm the status of this agreement.

The next subsection, titled “Budgeting,” specifies how the institution is undergoing improvement “to enhance collaboration and improve input from key stakeholders toward expressing needs and proposing new endeavors.” Furthermore, it notes that “‘A Great Place – to Learn, to Work, and to Call Home’ is currently underway to vision 2025-2035 and financial planning is foundational.” It also notes that, in order to accomplish strategic planning, budgeting and financial analysis as part of Implementation Planning will be completed by August 2026.

The focus on Finance has led to the forecast of a “Rolling Three-Year Plan” (the next subsection) that allows for line-item planning and projections, which are also integrated into the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, “to model and forecast tuition revenue and net financial aid planning.”

The next subsection is titled “Capital Project Planning,” that is now more responsive to the planning structure. The narrative notes, “The University is committed to maintaining flexibility to reassess priorities as the strategic planning process continues to move forward and unfold.”

“Financial Governance and Internal Review” follows with the statement, “Each budget cycle follows a defined calendar of events starting in November of the fiscal year culminating in BOG approval in the Spring/Summer depending on BOG meeting timing,” and culminates with, “These collaborative efforts support ongoing financial planning that enables resource allocation toward strategic planning and implementation work.

The next subsection relates to “Fiscal Controls and Audits,” with a brief description of the process and a note that “auditors have reported no material deficiencies in internal control over financial reporting.”

As in the first section, the subsection titled “Observations on Financial Planning” provides an overview summary of the work and challenges the institution has encountered, as well as some of the positive actions listed in the above subsections, to conclude by stating, “The governance structures ensure consistent financial oversight, with regular review by the BOG and an unqualified (clean) audit record.

As in the previous section, the final subsection provides seven bullets that reflect the “Strengths” of the financial response it has presented thus far.

The next section is titled “Focus Area 3: Data Efficiency, Quality, & Data-Informed Decision Making Response.” This section outlines how the institution is: taking proactive steps to improve data accuracy, streamline reporting, and support evidence-based decision-making. It contains nine subsections, and as is true throughout the interim report, is supported by appendix citations.

The first subsection is titled “Process for Data Requests,” which describes its process that has recently been supplemented by the addition of new application, which is still in the process of the institution learning its full potential.

The next subsection, “Routine Data Needs,” reviews how the institution utilizes data and seeks to enhance information sharing in the future.

The next subsection describes “Data Governance,” with an explanation that emphasizes how crucial its reliance is on “accurate, consistent, and accessible data,” and the strategic framework it has created as well as the process that makes it “easier to track who collects, maintains, and use the data within the university.”

This subsection is followed by one titled, “Technology Infrastructure,” that describes how the institution is considering purchasing an application that is used by businesses and the process it is currently following to determine whether it’s a good fit with its systems and needs.

The next subsection is titled “GAP Assessment,” that is a byproduct of a Title III \$2.2M grant that runs from October 2024 to September 2029, which allows the institution to conduct a gap assessment of all technological applications with the dual objectives of increasing student success and best align resources to its technological needs. As noted, “This assessment will help the University eliminate applications that are redundant but also identify technological needs that are not being utilized within the suite of current applications.”

“Strategies to Increase Student Success” is the title of the next subsection that emphasizes how the institution is using its three-year Implementation Plan to build a “robust infrastructure that supports student success.” It also makes note of how the Implementation Plan uses a framework for continuous assessment that enables the institution to monitor progress, adjust initiatives in real-time, and remain agile in addressing emerging challenges.

Prior to the final two subsections that have characterized each of the sections, a subsection title “Transparency and Communication,” notes that “this is the first semester that Fairmont State will have an official internally established census date,” that will provide a level of stability since everyone will be working together from the same dataset.

As in the previous sections, the next-to-last subsection summarizes the section, under the heading “Observations on Data-Informed Decision Making.” The summary serves the purpose of assembling the various components of data-informed decision making together to demonstrate its cohesiveness and interconnectivity.

The final subsection, “Strengths,” articulates six bullets that relate to the section and demonstrate positive examples.

The next section is titled, “Focus Area 4: Online and Distance Education Response,” that is offered in direct response to the expectation articulated in the team report.

The first subsection is titled “Aim of Distance Education at Fairmont State University.” The narrative begins by suggesting that the institution’s mission is to provide “relevant, high-quality educational opportunities that serve the needs of West Virginia,” and how distance education is critical in meeting those needs. It also emphasizes how distance and online education are central to advancing the state’s economic and workforce development goals.

This is followed by a subsection titled “Distance Education Oversight Management,” which begins by describing the institution’s Center for Teaching and Learning Innovation that has existed since Fall 2023 and serves as “the central unit responsible for supporting and advancing distance education and online learning across the university.” The subsection continues by describing key functions of the unit, before also describing how the institution also provides oversight of distance education with the key governance bodies who provide review and development of distance education policies and practices.

The next subsection is titled “Faculty Distance Education Requirements and Training,” which describes the multiple examples of training for faculty in online, hybrid, and HyFlex modalities. It also notes that the institution will launch a learner-centered teaching approach for online pedagogy and androgogy in the Spring of 2026.

“Quality Assurance Measures for Online Programs and Courses” is the title of the next subsection, that uses a multi-level review process to ensure quality of its online courses and programs.

The next subsection, titled “Online Course and Program Review Process,” describes how “all online course and programs undergo a formal review” that includes four steps, each of which is described in greater detail.

In addition, the next subsection, “Ongoing Evaluation through Program Review,” notes that all online programs are also subject to the institution’s 5-year Academic Program Review cycle.

The next subsection, “Learning Management System Role Access Policy,” describes the institutional policy that “outlines clear procedures for adding or removing users, including instructors, from Blackboard.” This policy helps uphold the integrity of online and distance education at the institution.

Another policy, the “Course Syllabus Policy,” provides a standardized syllabus template and clearly defined requirements for all courses, and must include core components, thereby promoting “clarity, transparency and alignment with institutional goals for academic quality and student engagement across all learning modalities.”

The next subsection describes how peer evaluations are incorporated into the annual faculty review, including “Online Course Evaluations.”

The next subsection is titled “2025-2026 Academic Year: Fairmont State Online Teaching Credential Program,” begins with the statement: “Fairmont State is actively developing an Online Teaching Credential Program with implementations plans during the 2025-2026 academic year.” The narrative continues to provide details regarding the design and outcomes associated with the new program and concludes: “This credential initiative reflects our commitment to high-quality online instruction and supports compliance with HLC expectations for faculty qualifications in distance and online education.” After the narrative for this subsection, the institution provides a “Timeline for Online and Distance Education Efforts” in a table that starts with initiatives in Spring 2022 and extends to Spring 2026. Each entry has at least two bullets to describe the critical events.

The final subsection is titled “Observations on Online and Distance Education,” which serves as a summary of all the information provided throughout the subsection.

The final section is titled “Focus Area 5: Assessment Planning Response,” that asserts that the institution has “focused on implementing institutional reforms to address assessment planning.” As a preview of the

following subsections, it states that the section “outlines the University’s progress in: (a) developing a comprehensive assessment infrastructure; (b) using assessment results to guide continuous improvement efforts; (c) aligning assessment with resource and operational planning; and (d) promoting transparent, evidence-informed decision-making.”

The first subsection, titled “Program Assessment (Learning Outcome Assessment),” describes the infrastructure and procedures that characterize program assessment at the institution.

The next subsection is titled “Annual Program Assessment, Data Collection, and Assessment System Transition,” which describes the annual procedures. The narrative also notes that, “Until May 2025, TaskStream by Watermark served as the institution’s primary assessment platform” which leads to the next subsection.

“Assessment System Transition” follows the previous subsection and describes how in Fall 2023, the institution “launched a comprehensive review of its academic assessment platform” to determine whether to remain with its current system or adopt a new system. After a cross-campus review in the Spring and Fall of 2024, selected a new system “for its ability to improve operations by unifying assessment, curriculum, scheduling and planning in a single environment.” The transition from the prior to new system began in Spring 2025 and full implementation is expected by the 2026-2027 academic year, linked to professional development functions for faculty.

The next subsection is titled “Program Assessment Cycle,” which reiterates the HLC Review Team that said, “Fairmont State provided evidence documenting that an effective assessment process is in place for its academic programs and general education curriculum.”

The next subsection, “Annual Timeline and Responsibilities,” provides a graphic depiction that demonstrates how the institution fulfills the title of the subsection.

This is followed by a subsection, titled “Faculty Development and Assessment Resources,” that first notes that the institution has prioritized “faculty and staff support by developing resources and embedding assessment efforts” to build and sustain the institution’s assessment infrastructure.

The next subsection, “Fall 2025: Assessment Use and Communication Plan,” reveals how the institution seeks to enhance its current system “to inform faculty development priorities, curriculum enhancements, and resource/budget planning.”

The title of the next subsection, “2025-2026 Academic Year: Linking Assessment Planning Results,” describes how the institution is seeking to strengthen its already “well-structured, comprehensive, and transparent curriculum development and planning process,” by “implementing a system that aligns assessment, curriculum, and budgeting processes in a meaningful way to inform transparent decision making”

The next subsection title is “5-Year Program Review,” which explains that the institution “maintains a transparent, inclusive, and rigorous program evaluation” that was updated during the 2024-2025 Fall semester.

Another important segment of the institution’s assessment cycle is detailed in the next subsection, “Core Curriculum (General Education) Assessment.” The Core Curriculum (CC) is evaluated on a 5-year cycle, and a provided table outlines which portion of the Core Curriculum for each year of the 5-year cycle. The assessment process “is well-structured, inclusive and collects meaningful student learning data to determine how well students are meeting CC learning outcomes. Faculty

teaching these courses must submit a course portfolio every five years that contains five factors that are rigorous, comprehensive, and help demonstrate how well learning outcomes are met.

The next subsection, “2025-2026,” notes that, while the institution has a “well-structured and Core Curriculum assessment process,” it seeks to strengthen the impact during this period with an expanded annual Faculty Senate report “to inform broader planning and decision-making.”

Furthermore, in “2026-2027,” three additional steps will be taken to evaluate the Core Curriculum “to evaluate it holistically, beyond course-level outcomes; and integrate results into institutional operations, planning, and budgeting.”

In addition, the institution will take steps “refine and implement a cohesive, campus-wide infrastructure for “Co-Curricular Assessment Planning,” the next subsection.

The next subsection, “Development of Infrastructure for Aggregation and Institutional Use,” outlines changes beginning in Fall 2025 that will utilize a new infrastructure “intentionally designed to allow for the meaningful aggregation and analysis of co-curricular learning data to inform the institutional decision-making.”

“Ongoing Implementation and Continuous Improvement” is the title of the next subsection that lays out how the institution will “focus on aligning co-curricular unit outcomes with appropriate institutional domains such as problem solving, civic responsibility and integrated learnings.

Another example of how the institution will intentionally link co-curricular assessment to the broader institutional planning is outlined in the next subsection, “Linking Assessment Results to Operations, Planning, and Budgeting.”

As in other sections, the next subsection, “Observations on Assessment Planning,” summarizes this section on assessment planning.

“Strengths,” the final subsection, contains five bullets that describe the institution’s achievements and success in this area.

REPORT ANALYSIS: The Fairmont State University interim report provides extensive examples of how the institution has addressed the areas of focus presented by the HLC Review Team. The narrative, supported by appendix citations for each of the areas of focus, is thorough and organized. As such, the interim report fulfills expectations and therefore satisfies the requirements for this interim report.

ANALYSIS CONCLUDING STATEMENT: The Fairmont State University interim report will go a long way in preparing for the institution’s upcoming Mid-Cycle Review in 2026-27.

STAFF FINDING:

Note the relevant Criterion, Core Component(s) or Assumed Practice(s) 5.C.

Statements of Analysis (check one below)

- ☒ Evidence demonstrates adequate progress in the area of focus.
- ☐ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention is required in the area of focus.
- ☐ Evidence demonstrates that further organizational attention and HLC follow-up are required.
- ☐ Evidence is insufficient and a HLC focused visit is warranted.

STAFF ACTION: Receive the report on Planning.

No further reports are required.

The institution's next Mid-Cycle Review is scheduled for 2026-27.

The institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation is scheduled for 2032-33.