NECHE Quality Assurance Framework for Non-Credit Programming

Introduction

The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) is an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education that accredits institutions in the United States and internationally. The Commission provides public assurance about the educational quality of its member degree-granting institutions.

As an institutional accreditor, NECHE’s focus to date has been on credit-bearing courses, programs, and degrees. Over the past several years, however, there has been significant growth in the offering of and enrollment in non-credit programming. In recognition of this development, this Framework is intended to articulate the dimensions of quality specific to non-credit programming. It is to be used to both assure the quality of non-credit programming at an institution as well as provide an aspirational framework for continuous improvement.

NECHE defines non-credit programming as a course, series of courses, or program that provides knowledge in a subject matter area that may lead to the award of a certificate, badge, or, in some cases, licensure. Non-credit programming has industry and employer relevance and may, in some cases, transfer to credit-bearing programs. For the purposes of this Framework, non-credit programming does not include courses offered exclusively for personal enrichment.

For those institutions that offer non-credit programming, the criteria below provide qualitative benchmarks that can be used both to assure the quality of non-credit offerings as well as foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Mission and Purposes
The offering of non-credit programming is encompassed in the institution’s mission and purposes. Non-credit programming aligns with an institution’s commitment to lifelong learning.

Planning and Evaluation
There is regular engagement in program, enrollment, and financial planning for its non-credit courses and programs. The institution balances short- and long-term/strategic planning to ensure it is able to effectively respond to market needs and requests.

Key performance indicators, to include learning outcomes and competencies, are developed to assess the effectiveness of the institution’s non-credit programming. It regularly evaluates its progress towards achieving its goals.

The institution has sufficient capacity to systematically collect and use data to support its planning efforts and to enhance its non-credit courses and programs.

As appropriate, industry/employers are involved in the identification and development of non-credit programming. Systematic feedback from employers and other relevant constituencies is a demonstrable factor in the improvement of the programs.
Organization and Governance
The institution employs staff and faculty sufficient in role, number, and qualifications to support the institution’s non-credit programming.

Non-credit programs are integrated into the institution’s internal governance structures and provide for the appropriate participation of its staff and faculty.

The institution recognizes and supports the need to develop non-credit programming in a timely manner to respond to industry/employer needs.

There is engagement with and across relevant stakeholder groups including employers and relevant state agencies, as appropriate

Academic Program
Structured processes exist that ensure the design of quality non-credit courses and programs.

A relevant set of competencies and learning outcomes are identified for each course that lead to outcomes of value (e.g., employment, job advancement, transfer to credit-bearing program). Courses are of an appropriate length and level to achieve the established competencies.

The subject matter of non-credit courses and programs is current, relevant, and connects to industry or work force needs.

As appropriate, non-credit courses and programs have transfer pathways to credit-bearing programs. The content and learning outcomes of stackable non-credit courses are appropriately scaffolded.

Students
There are effective processes and systems in place for enrolling non-credit students and for issuing credentials/transcripts to students who successfully complete the program of study. The institution maintains a record of course/program completions of its non-credit students.

The institution has established goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion as appropriate for its non-credit student populations and is implementing plans to achieve those goals.

There are sufficient learner support systems in place to ensure the success of the institution’s non-credit students to include advising, tutoring, and library and technology services.

The institution offers an array of student services appropriate to the needs and goals of its non-credit student. Non-credit students have access to other campus resources, as appropriate, and are considered a part of the campus community.
**Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship**
There are sufficient and qualified educators/professionals to develop and teach the non-credit courses and programs.

The programs are overseen by educators with degrees and/or industry experience appropriate to the subject matter.

The institution’s academic faculty are informed about and supportive of the offering of non-credit programming.

**Institutional Resources**
There are sufficient financial resources from tuition, grants, and other sources of funding to carry out its plans to offer quality non-credit programming.

The organization has sufficient human resources, including faculty and staff, to support effective instruction of its non-credit programming, provide needed student services, and evaluate the effectiveness of its offerings.

The organization has sufficient physical, information, and technological resources to ensure the quality of its non-credit programming and the success of its students.

**Educational Effectiveness**
The institution’s non-credit courses and programs have clear, measurable learning competencies and/or outcomes.

For each non-credit course and program, there is a plan for assessment of learner outcomes and competencies. Assessment is conducted on a regular basis and the results, along with student success data, are analyzed and used for program improvement.

The institution’s non-credit course and program have identified student success measures including, but not limited to, retention, pass rates, licensure rates, employment rates, job promotion rates, and return on investment. Student success data is gathered and analyzed regularly, including the disaggregation of data to ensure the program is meeting its goals for equity among its relevant populations.

**Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure**
For each non-credit course and program, the institution publicly discloses to the public (via its website and other promotional materials) information about program costs, learning outcomes, and measures of student success.