

Open Pathway Quality Initiative Report Institutional Template

The institution uses the template below to complete its Quality Initiative Report. The institution may include a report it has prepared for other purposes if it addresses many of the questions below and replaces portions of the narrative in the template. This template may be used both for reports on initiatives that have been completed and for initiatives that will continue and for which this report serves as a milestone of accomplishments thus far. **The report should be no more than 6,000 words.**

Submission Instructions

The report must be submitted by June 1 of Year 9.

Submit the report as a PDF file at hlcommission.org/upload. Select “Pathways/Quality Initiatives” from the list of submission options to ensure the institution’s materials are sent to the correct HLC staff member. The file name of the report should follow this format: QIReport[InstitutionName] [State].pdf (e.g., QIProposalNoNameUniversityMN.pdf). The file name must include the institution’s name (or an identifiable portion thereof) and state.

Date: April 22, 2025

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The enclosed Quality Initiative Report represents the work that the institution has undertaken to fulfill the quality improvement requirements of the Open Pathway.

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

Report Categories

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. Provide a one-page executive summary that describes the Quality Initiative, summarizes what was accomplished and explains any changes made to the initiative over the time period.

Northern Arizona University's Open Pathway Quality Initiative (QI) Project, titled 100% Career Ready, reflects NAU's commitment to ensuring every undergraduate and masters-level student engages in meaningful, career-relevant experiences before graduation. This institutional effort aligns with NAU's mission to advance student access, success, and economic mobility by embedding career readiness across academic programs and co-curricular offerings. NAU has achieved these goals in the following areas --

- **100% Career Ready Curriculum:** Faculty and academic leaders have invested nearly two years embedding career competencies and preparation throughout our curriculum. The goal is to align learning outcomes for courses and programs from the bachelor's to the master's level with competencies requisite for entry and advancement in career paths linked to undergraduate and master's degree programs. Over 80% of NAU's syllabi have incorporated career-related outcomes or competencies as of April 2025. Career Development (CD) has supported this effort by providing college-specific workshops to help faculty with revising courses and degree programs to include career preparation as a critical, not an ancillary, component of the curriculum. This work also revises course syllabi to help students understand the connection between specific learning objectives and their career preparation.
- **100% Career Ready Support Structure:** With university-level strategic initiative funding, we hired career development coordinators for colleges that have previously lacked dedicated career support. These positions support faculty curricular and co-curricular efforts and work in conjunction with CD staff to advise students, coordinate career fairs, provide interview practice, and promote opportunities for students to engage with employers, industry leaders and alumni.
- **100% Career Ready Internship Offerings:** 100% Career Ready curriculum is coupled with expansion of opportunities and participation in internships and other pre-professional experiences for undergraduates. With support from NAU's President, we have created a small team to lead the strategy for partnership expansion to develop a greater array of innovative and flexible internship options for students. We are also deploying virtual internships with companies from around the world. Virtual internships are either full time immersive experiences or course-embedded, project-focused intensives. Internships with external entities are rounded out by Work+, which enhances the value of on-campus employment through training for supervisors with the objective of strengthening the career preparation aspects of these positions.
- **100% Career Ready Technological and Cultural Support:** We are using technological platforms to better connect students with career planning resources and employment opportunities, while also exploring scalable options to increase student engagement.

As a result of these efforts, 100% Career Ready has become an integral part of NAU's identity and is shaping institutional strategy, culture, and student outcomes. The initiative now informs academic review processes, guides new curricular design, and is embedded into institutional planning. It has also prompted increased collaboration between the Career Development office and college advising teams, with shared goals of career competency development and student success.

Over the course of the program's implementation, we not only achieved these goals but also expanded the scope, attaching each goal to concrete strategies and metrics. These goals and achievements will be articulated in response to Question 2 and Question 3 of this report.

Scope and Impact of the Initiative

2. Explain in more detail what was accomplished in the Quality Initiative in relation to its purposes and goals. (If applicable, explain the initiative's hypotheses and findings.)

The 100% Career Ready initiative serves as a holistic endeavor to positively impact every NAU student and enable them to realize the lifelong value of a college degree. This initiative enhances post-college outcomes by aligning educational preparation with workforce needs, providing meaningful work-related experiences, improving career placement, and driving graduates' economic mobility. Career readiness is central to NAU's vision, strategic goals, and commitment to our students.

In Spring 2023, we proposed to include a set of recommendations for comprehensive curricular changes and co-curricular support structures and services, noting timelines for full implementation. I'm happy to report that by early 2025, we have exceeded our proposed expectations by implementing most of our intended curricular changes and co-curricular support structures and services, thus this report focuses on these achievements and outlines next steps for full implementation and assessment of the 100% Career Ready project on pages 9-10.

During the past two years, NAU built the infrastructure and made significant progress in all of the following areas. In the response to Question #3 below, we will report the concrete achievements and progress under each of these areas.

1) Curriculum: 100% of NAU's academic programs will have career-oriented learning goals embedded in degree program curricula and course syllabi. The goal is to have all career-relevant learning outcomes translated into language students can readily incorporate into resumes and applications. The focus of 100% Career Ready on degree programs is synergistic with the implementation of a new undergraduate general education program in Fall 2025. The General Studies program emphasizes transferrable competencies, which are developed in courses across knowledge areas of the program.

2) Integrated career/pre-professional opportunities: 100% of NAU's students will have career/pre-professional experiences integrated into their academic programs. These experiences include, but are not limited to, internships (including virtual internships), industry/career-oriented experiential learning, service learning, research opportunities, and other work-related learning initiatives. These opportunities are either full-time immersive experiences or course-embedded, project-focused intensives. The key is the intentional design of these career-oriented experiences within students' educational journeys, aligning with their academic and career goals to enhance post-graduation career outcomes.

3) University-wide ecosystem: The university-wide ecosystem of career readiness connects the above-mentioned learning outcomes and career/pre-professional experiences with holistic career advising provided by faculty as embedded in the curriculum and career service professionals with the goal of integrating education-to-career guidance into activities and experiences that reach every student throughout their educational journey.

4) Connection to Workforce, Industry, and Alumni: 100% of NAU students will have access to NAU's network of 200,000 alumni through intentional engagement programs and outreach initiatives, including Lumberjack Thrive, externships, networking events, community-building activities, alumni engagement programs, and extensive industry-specific mentorship opportunities.

3. Evaluate the impact of the initiative, including any changes in processes, policies, technology, curricula, programs, student learning and success that are now in place in consequence of the initiative.

1) Curriculum:

Over 80% of the undergraduate academic programs have completed the revision of their curricula to incorporate career competencies. Program-level learning outcomes have been updated to reflect skills such as communication, critical thinking, professionalism, teamwork, and digital literacy. Faculty were supported with summer stipends and templates to facilitate this redesign, and course syllabi now often feature language aligning assignments and learning objectives with the NACE competencies. In addition, a number of departments, such as Criminology and Communication Studies, piloted efforts to integrate resume-building assignments and mock interviews directly into core courses.

Faculty participation in workshops and fellowships has resulted in a deeper understanding of how to support students' career development through classroom practice. Faculty in College of Arts and Letters, for example, have integrated career readiness into first-year seminars and writing-intensive courses, ensuring that students begin thinking about their career pathways early in their academic journey. In some departments, career preparation assignments have become part of program-level assessment strategies.

NAU's Faculty Senate is in the process of approving a university-wide syllabus template change that includes identifying career-related learning outcomes that can be used for all courses in all colleges. Below is the description of this draft requirement--

- Career-related Learning Outcomes or Competencies: Each academic unit should use its disciplinary standards or recognized frameworks, such as the career competencies outlined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), to complete this section. Consider identifying which of the student learning outcomes listed above align with career-readiness or contribute to career-related skills, competencies, and industry expectations in ways that are meaningful within your field.

2) Integrated career/pre-professional opportunities:

NAU has established an infrastructure to embed career/professional opportunities, such as internships (including virtual internships), industry/career-oriented experiential learning, service learning, research opportunities, and other work-related learning initiatives, in both curricular and co-curricular areas. In the curricular area, these opportunities are embedded at the levels of program design, curriculum, and courses. These initiatives have significantly enriched NAU's curriculum across all colleges and programs.

3) University-wide ecosystem:

A university-wide Career Council was established and meets regularly. This Career Council includes leaders and professionals from Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, the Office of Alumni Engagement, and Information Technology. The ongoing work of the Council provides a sustainable structure for NAU to continue strengthening the career-ready ecosystem from curricular to co-curricular initiatives.

4) Connection to Workforce, Industry, and Alumni:

A significant outcome of this initiative is to connect NAU students with our alumni and industry partners in an organized and systematic manner. An example is the Lumberjacks Thrive Externship Program which inspires students to apply their learning beyond the classroom by participating in a transformative experience that will impact their lives long after graduation. These externships connect students with top-level Lumberjack executives for career exploration and discovery.

Additionally, employer engagement has grown across colleges, with events such as the Humanities Career Week and Environment & Natural Sciences Networking Night drawing alumni and industry partners into campus life.

4. Explain any tools, data or other information that resulted from the work of the initiative.

The 100% Career Ready initiative led to the development and implementation of several tools, data sources, and resources that support long-term success and continuous improvement:

- **Labor Market Data Integration:** Curriculum design and revisions were informed by workforce data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Arizona Commerce Authority, and third-party labor market analysis. The use of this data helped align learning outcomes with employer expectations and emerging job market trends.
- **First Destination and Institutional Surveys:** NAU uses the First Destination Survey and internally developed surveys to track post-graduation employment data. This data helps evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative and inform new strategies.
- **Create-Design-Launch Framework:** A Canvas-based framework was developed to guide career advising and student coaching across the university. This tool is used by career professionals to help students reflect on, plan, and achieve their career goals.
- **UConnect Platform:** Piloted in the Franke College of Business, this tool connects students with industry resources and integrates career readiness into curriculum. It is currently being scaled to the College of Engineering and other units.
- **Canvas Modules for Career Learning:** The College of Social and Behavioral Sciences has developed career-aligned Canvas modules to support faculty and students. These are being adapted by other colleges.

5. Describe the biggest challenges and opportunities encountered in implementing the initiative.

Challenges:

Faculty time: NAU's faculty have been tremendously collaboratively in the implementation of the 100% Career-ready initiatives. However, since NAU's 100% Career Ready initiative is curriculum-focused and student-centered, executing these initiatives requires a significant time investment from faculty in all colleges.

Resources: Linking students with paid internships (which is advocated both by higher education institutions and associations such as NACE) requires significant financial resources, especially for an access-focused institution.

Opportunities:

The 100% Career Ready Initiative significantly increases the value of NAU's degrees, strengthens NAU's connection with the regional and local workforce development, improves the quality of NAU's curriculum, and most importantly, ensures all students are provided meaningful opportunities and tools to assist them in preparing their career path. In the sections above, we have articulated the work and achievements of this initiative. Ultimately, this initiative has transformative value to enhance the quality of education at NAU.

Another opportunity that the implementation of this initiative made possible is the enhanced structure of cross-divisional collaboration between Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and the Office of Alumni Engagement.

Commitment to and Engagement in the Quality Initiative

6. Describe the individuals and groups involved at stages throughout the initiative and their perceptions of its worth and impact.

- **President:** NAU's President is committed to the 100% Career Ready initiative as a top institutional priority, as evidenced by its prominent place in our strategic roadmap, adoption as our Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Quality Initiative project, and direct past, present, and future financial support from the

Office of the President. With President Cruz Rivera’s leadership, NAU has developed a fresh charter and vision to be a preeminent institution that is an engine of opportunity, vehicle of upward mobility and driver of social impact. President Cruz Rivera frequently describes NAU’s aspiration to prepare graduates for “lives of purpose and careers of consequence” and how this initiative supports “NAU’s most important objective as to become a preeminent engine of opportunity, a vehicle of upward mobility and a driver of social impact.”

President Cruz Rivera has committed a dollar-for-dollar match for the Strada/AASCU grant to further expand the scale and impact of this project (see page 9 for more information about the grant). The multifaceted work required to support our students’ successful entry into, and advancement through, their careers is a critical component of fulfilling our promise of ‘access’ to all students and post-secondary value for students and the people of Arizona.

- **Provost:** NAU’s Executive Vice President and University Provost serves as the Executive Leader for this project and also leads the 100% Career Ready initiative. Provost Pugliesi launched this initiative within the division of Academic Affairs believing it was a powerful strategy for strengthen graduate career preparation and success. Explicit alignment of NAU’s degree programs with requirements for career success will ensure that the university is delivering on its promise of post-secondary value for all graduates.
- **Vice Provosts:** The Office the Provost has been taking a team approach to achieve this comprehensive goal. Dr. Maribeth Watwood (Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Academic Programming) and Dr. Yimin Wang (Vice Provost for Global Affairs) co-lead the initiative. Deeply convinced by the transformative value of career-ready initiatives, they keep building the campus-wide ecosystem for sustainable development of career ready initiatives in both curricular and co-curricular areas.
- **Deans:** NAU deans are leading the 100% Career Ready initiative within their respective colleges. Deans and their colleges have embraced the 100% Career Ready initiative as an opportunity to strengthen the value of degrees and career outcomes for students.
- **The Vice President of Student Affairs** has been actively collaborating with the Office of the Provost and other divisions to develop a university-wide ecosystem focused on career readiness. The Director of the Career Development office, which offers centralized career services, is a key partner for 100% Career Ready. The close, positive nature of this collaboration is reflected in the large number of joint projects (e.g., career fairs, workshops for supporting faculty doing curricular work, etc.) and frequent gatherings of colleagues from across both of these divisions. This deep collaboration will continue to strengthen as we build on the 100% Career Ready initiative.
- **College-based Career Professionals:** New positions funded through the Provost’s Office helped address longstanding service gaps in CAL, SBS, and CEFNS. These staff members ran college-specific programs, coordinated employer engagement, and helped students connect academic learning to career pathways. Their reports highlight the success of targeted events, such as Alumni Days and panel discussions featuring underrepresented professionals in the arts and sciences.
- **Faculty:** It is thanks in large part to the overwhelming support from faculty in all colleges and programs that NAU achieved the initial goal of having over 80% of syllabi updated to include career-related learning outcomes. Faculty have also expressed that the more intentional connection between curriculum and career outcomes, and aligning these efforts with the industry needs, serves to add new meaning to their work.
- **External partners:** Employers, including those in the government, health, non-profit, and private/industry sectors will be external partners for the project. In addition to being essential to growing internship and professional placements, these partners inform faculty refinements of curricula, and contribute to

programming supporting student career exploration, planning, and strategy. The Arizona Board of Regents supported the project through initiatives to promote career related learning and develop infrastructure supporting student planning and decision making. The career-focus of NAU's direction has been widely applauded in Arizona and beyond, especially because of its contribution to workforce development.

7. Describe the most important points learned by those involved in the initiative.

- **Focus on the “why”:** the mission alignment between NAU's access goal and career readiness has created university-level buy-in and boosted morale.
- **Strong leadership at each level:** from the President to the Provost to the Deans, everyone has invested significant leadership, energy, and work in building the 100% Ready ecosystem which is crucial to the success and sustainability of this transformative initiative.
- **Cross-divisional coordination:** NAU's Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and the Office of Alumni Engagement created a university-level Career Council to strengthen the ecosystem of NAU's immersive college-to-career guidance structure.
- **Focus on the curriculum:** embedding career-readiness as an integral part of NAU's academic excellence and student success plan and built the necessary infrastructure to achieve this goal.
- **Innovation:** NAU has adopted innovative practices such as the use of project-based, industry-oriented virtual internships, and embedded them into both courses and curriculum in innovative ways.
- **Student feedback drives improvement:** Insights from surveys and focus groups highlighted the importance of clear communication, early exposure to career services, and representation in employer and alumni programming.
- **Continued improvement and learning:** Building the ecosystem of career readiness, especially in the curricular realm, is a relatively new endeavor in the history of higher education, so continued learning and improvement is crucial to making our endeavors sustainable. One of the areas that NAU is currently exploring is the systematic use of AI to enhance our overall career advising services.

Resource Provision

8. Explain the human, financial, physical and technological resources that supported the initiative.

Human and Financial Resources

- The Office of the Provost has dedicated significant leadership time and effort from the Provost and two Vice Provosts.
- Through an internal Elevating Excellence grant and other high level resource allocations, the Office of the Provost has funded five new career development positions. These new colleagues include the Director and Assistant Director of Internships and Placements and three college-based career coordinators. These positions ensure that all academic colleges have resources for students seeking career guidance and for faculty and staff focused on embedding career information and guidance into all courses in every NAU degree program. In addition to hiring these professionals and providing necessary operational expenses, the Provost's Office has provided generous stipends for the many faculty who are infusing career development into their curriculum.

- The Office the Provost and academic colleges have collaborated with the Office of the Alumni Engagement on fundraising initiatives to enhance access to opportunities such as internships and industry-based mentorship programs. Below are some examples--
 - The Center for Service and Volunteerism (CSV) within the College of Social and Behavior Sciences received \$945,000 in private philanthropic funding to begin the Arizona Climate Resilience Corps, which provided paid internships for 34 NAU students, in addition to paid volunteer experience for 13 NAU alumni and 10 community members.
 - With the addition of the Climate Resilience Corp, CSV provided 2 million dollars in stipends and \$585,000 in education awards to AmeriCorps members, reaching a total of 310 community members, 245 being NAU students. AmeriCorps serves as a role model for paid internship experiences through strong collaboration with community agency partners.
 - The College of Nursing and the College of Health and Human Services obtained a one million dollar grant to provide travel stipends for students completing their placements in rural and underserved communities, allowing NAU to expand our clinical partnerships with healthcare organizations in these areas while also reducing the financial burden for NAU students.
 - 178 students received traveling funding, with the average amount per student being \$600 dollars, totaling \$106,799. Students traveled an average of 313 miles for their placement, demonstrating that funding for travel allows NAU to expand our placement sites.
 - 92% of students said that their education at NAU prepared them to work with underserved communities and 86% of students said that their placement experience will have an influence on pursuing employment in the state of Arizona following graduation.
- The NAU Advancement strengthened the donor funded Thrive Externship Program, providing students with the opportunity to engage in experiential learning and career development with Alumni Mentors across the United States.
- Funds that support paid internship programs such as the Public Lands Internships Program, The Washington Center Summer Academic Internship Program, and the Arizona Legislative Internship Program.

Technical Resources

- This initiative has enhanced the university-level coordination of the use of technological platforms such as Handshake. We are also in the processing of expanding this service in collaboration with local community colleges.
- NAU’s academic colleges have been connecting the technological platforms with their career-related program goals, academic resources, and alumni network. One example is the systematic implementation of Uconnect in the Franke College of Business, and this practice is now being expanded to the Steve Sanghi College of Engineering.
- Embedding career-ready goals in the course platforms, such as Canvas. The College of Social and Behavioral Sciences has embedded the resource-rich career-roadmap in the Canvas system. Having this available in Canvas facilitates the career related learning resources and goals in both curricular and co-curricular areas to serve students in holistic ways.

Plans for the Future (or Future Milestones of a Continuing Initiative)

9. Describe plans for ongoing work related to or as a result of the initiative.

With NAU’s institutional commitment and broad support by faculty and staff, the 100% Career Ready initiative is now a hallmark of the university's culture and strategic goals. Below are examples of ongoing work and future goals.

By Spring 2026, NAU will achieve the goal of 100% syllabi having at least one career-related learning outcome. As of April 2025, 85% of programs have revised their curricula; the remaining 15% are on track for completion within one year. Moving forward, we also plan to establish more targeted goals and a tracking system for career-oriented learning outcomes and strategies specific to both undergraduate and masters levels.

In December 2024, NAU secured a grant from the Strada Education Foundation and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) to support the initiative “Strengthening University-wide Career-ready Ecosystem” which will meet students where they are with career-readiness resources, equipping them with program-specific, information-rich and action-oriented career roadmaps at every stage of their educational journey, from pre-matriculation to post-graduation. This project strengthens what we have already achieved in the 100% Career-ready initiative during the past two years.

This Foundation’s Innovation in Career Services grant, matched dollar-by-dollar by NAU’s Office of the President, putting a grand total of \$599,985 toward strengthening career readiness over the next two years. Below are the key areas that we aim to strengthen during the next two years with support from this grant and university-level resources--

- **Dynamic Alignment of Workforce and Career Information with Curricular and Program Goals:** A key feature of NAU’s 100% Career Ready initiative is the integration of career preparation into all academic programs. Dynamic and relevant labor market and career information shape the ongoing stewardship of curricula and planning for new academic programs that are responsive to changes in professional careers and workforce demands.
- **Strengthening a Career Readiness Ecosystem that Serves All Students:** Our career-readiness ecosystem is designed to support students from all backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences. We are particularly focused on building a structure that addresses the needs of traditionally underserved students, including first-generation students, Pell Grant recipients, and other underrepresented groups. NAU is a Hispanic-Serving Institution and has a longstanding commitment to serving Indigenous peoples and communities.
- **Career Guidance Through Students’ Educational Journey:** This initiative supports students through their entire educational journey, from pre-matriculation to post-graduation, with an approach focused on integrating career mapping and preparation at every stage. Career-related outcomes are emphasized in courses at all levels. Course-embedded activities guide students through career exploration with planning and strategy incorporated from the first year through graduation. Innovative programming enables student engagement with alumni which in turn fosters learning and networking, both of which support career success.
- **Enhance Technological Integration and Data Collection:** We seek to develop a single, scalable technological infrastructure designed to empower every student to reach their professional goals. This all-encompassing career system will enable robust data collection and program assessment. By analyzing indicators such as initial placement, career advancement, and feedback from alumni and employers—while considering students' backgrounds, majors, and other relevant factors—this integrated system will provide valuable insights to enhance our career-readiness ecosystem.

10. Describe any practices or artifacts from the initiative that other institutions might find meaningful or useful and please indicate if you would be willing to share this information.

Practices

- a. The comprehensive and coordinated practice of incorporating career-oriented learning outcomes at the college, program, curriculum, and course level sets a good example among higher education institutions in the U.S.
- b. The establishment of the ecosystem of systematically embedding pre-professional opportunities such as internships, practicum, externships, experiential learning, and mentorship programs, at the college, program, curriculum, and syllabus level.
- c. The access focus of this initiative is to provide opportunities opportunities for students of all backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences. An example is the establishment of virtual internships to serve students who are place-bound.

NAU is willing to share all these practices when requested.

Artifacts

- a. Career Roadmaps: each college has been developing information-rich and action-oriented career roadmaps to guide students throughout their educational journey at NAU. The overall project is going to be completed in Spring 2027, but some of them are completed, and we are willing to share these artifacts.
- b. Syllabi examples: NAU will be willing to share syllabi that coordinated the learning outcomes and/or innovative practices such as virtual internships in the courses.