

HIGHER EDUCATION

Adams State University on accreditation probation

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ALAMOSA — The commission that oversees the accreditation of Adams State University has placed the school on probation due to its handling of online and correspondence courses.

The Higher Learning Commission, which oversees accreditation of roughly 1,000 institutions in 19 states, informed Adams State of the probation in a March 3 letter.

"We are committed to helping our students succeed and to meeting accreditation criteria," school President Beverlee McClure said in a press release reaction.

The commission, which sent representatives to campus in September, found a lack of interaction or set due dates in online courses and no visible student-instructor interaction in semester-based courses.

It also found the school's Extended Studies program to have courses with between 450 and 600 students taught by the school's faculty even though it was outside a faculty full-time teaching load.

"This heavy stu-

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dent-to-faculty loading calls into question the academic integrity of the courses and quality of instruction," the letter from the commission stated.

The commission also said the lack of faculty interaction with students in the online courses may endanger funding and the ability of students to transfer credits from the courses under U.S. Department of Education guidelines.

The commission's attention on the matter was prompted by a December 2014 article in the Chronicle of Higher Education that detailed how a former junior college administrator and basketball coach fraudulently took online courses at Adams and other schools for athletes seeking credits to transfer to four-year institutions.

No Adams State athletes or coaches were involved.

McClure, who has been in her post only since July, said the commission ignored a January report that laid out the steps the school had made to

shore up those courses and provided significant evidence to avoid probation.

"We have requested the HLC review all the information we had submitted, which I believe will lead to a reversal of this onerous decision," she said.

Should the commission stick to the schedule in its probation notice, Adams State may have to wait to shed the probation.

The commission's website said the university shall file evidence that it has remedied the concerns by May 2017 and host a campus visit by the commission three months later.

In February 2018, the commission will determine whether the university can be removed from probation.

At that time, the commission could renew the university's accreditation, extend the probation by up to one more year, or withdraw accreditation.

If the university were to lose its accreditation, Adams State students would no longer be eligible for federal financial aid.

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