



APPENDIX  
Response to Concerns







## Appendix C:

# Response to Concerns

## Response to Concerns Raised in the Last HLC/NCA Visit

***Concern: “Despite improvement in the level of faculty salaries compared with 1987, there has been a recent erosion in the competitiveness of faculty salaries.”***

While UNL salaries continue to trail the salaries of its peer institutions, there was some improvement for several years relative to these institutions. This improvement in the competitiveness of salaries continued until 2005-06 when there was a 1.5 percent drop-off.

However, our commitment to faculty salary improvement has not waived. Our percentage investment in faculty salaries actually increased at a time when our state appropriations dropped 7.6 percent. During that time, 54.6 percent of total budgeted salaries in 2003-04 was allocated to faculty. Much more progress needs to be done, but we are committed to success.

UNL's peer institutions, established by the Board of Regents are: the University of Colorado-Boulder, Colorado State University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Iowa, Iowa State University, University of Kansas, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, University of Missouri-Columbia, The Ohio State University and Purdue University.

***Concern: “Insufficient progress has been made in the implementation of plans for the assessment of student academic achievement.”***

See the document “Response to the Commission Statement on Assessment” [[www.unl.edu/resources/SD-1](http://www.unl.edu/resources/SD-1)] and the information included for Core Components 2c and 3a.

[www.unl.edu/resources/SD-1](http://www.unl.edu/resources/SD-1)

***Concern: “There is limited progress in increasing the number of women in senior administrative and senior faculty positions.”***

- From fall 1996 (29) to fall 2005 (55) we saw an 83 percent increase in the number of women in administrative positions.
- From fall 1996 (50) to fall 2005 (89) we saw a 78 percent increase in the number of women full professors.

***Concern: “The university has a backlog of deferred maintenance.”***

Since 1997, the university has built or completely renovated 13 buildings through the expenditure of \$323.1 million on capital repair and renewal and new construction projects. In addition, the university has demolished 379,039 gross square feet of space removing an estimated \$25 million in expenses from the deferred maintenance backlog. Much of this was addressed through passage, in 1998, of LB1100, a deferred maintenance initiative allowing the University of Nebraska to issue revenue bonds to renovate or replace aging buildings on all four campuses. The bill authorized state general funds of \$5.5 million per year from FY 1999-00 through FY 2008-09, with one-to-one matching funds required from the university. Fourteen buildings across the four campuses have been renovated at a cost of \$79 million. Among UNL projects were the renovation of historic Richards Hall for fine arts and the demolition of two buildings that were replaced by newly constructed Teachers College Hall.

In FY 2000, a policy was established for all new construction that required 2 percent of construction costs be set aside from the annual operating budget to create a maintenance reserve to address future maintenance needs. While this does not address maintenance needs for buildings constructed prior to FY 2000 nor programmatic renovations, it has developed an improved situation through budgetary reallocations of the long-term investment associated with new construction.

In the spring 2006 legislative session, the Nebraska Unicameral passed LB605, which will provide funds over the next several years to address physical facilities in several areas. These funds will support a new facility for a physical sciences center and important renovations to the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Animal Science Hall and Keim Hall among others. LB605 requires the state to invest an additional \$5.5 million a year in addition to the \$5.5 million already being invested through LB1100. This supports additional debt service of \$5.5 million for three years and \$11 million for 11 additional years from the state. Combined with matching contributions of university funds, LB605 will produce a total of \$154 million for building maintenance. UNL's costs for projects earmarked from this funding source are \$78.5 million.

***Concern: “There is inadequacy of space and acquisitions funding for the library.”***

Some of the space issues identified in the last accreditation report have been addressed. With funding from the state, the 1942 portion of Love Library, the main library on campus, was

completely renovated. The project, which was finished in 2002, included rearrangement of service areas to make it easier to use wireless service throughout the building and included the restoration of a large quiet reading room for students. Additional group study spaces were also added. In 2004, the university received approval to build a high-density storage facility for the Libraries. This building, which opened in summer of 2005, is located on the East Campus and has a capacity of more than 800,000 volumes. With the opening of the Library Depository/Retrieval Facility, the Library closed three small science libraries and consolidated collections in Love Library to create a science wing.

In 2003-04, the University of Nebraska system approved a \$2 per credit hour library fee that generates approximately \$1 million annually. Over half of the fee funds are spent on additional acquisitions for the Libraries. The other half are spent on expanding services to library users through multi-media workstations, access to additional databases, and additional faculty, including a multi-cultural service librarian. The Libraries have also received two new major endowments so that the Library endowment now generates \$1.5 million annually for acquisitions and other library needs.

***Concern: “There is a need for financial support for information technology for faculty development, student use, technical support services, software, equipment, and maintenance.”***

#### **Increased Funding and Investment**

A student technology fee of \$2 per credit hour was established in 1997-98 (the fee is now \$6.50). This generated \$3,004,000 in 2004-05 and helped to support technology upgrades such as the following:

- Wiring of all campus buildings to provide connections among all buildings on the two campuses and additional speed and capacity;
- Participation in Internet-2 to provide additional support for research;
- Upgraded student labs and classrooms to include more instructional technology;
- A wireless network with free loaner laptops to students in all campus libraries and unions; and
- Advanced networking in residence halls (A more complete description of upgrades in classrooms is available in General Purpose Classroom Report and Appendices, 2005, [[www.unl.edu/resources/C-1](http://www.unl.edu/resources/C-1)]).

[www.unl.edu/resources/C-1](http://www.unl.edu/resources/C-1)

Funding now supports the New Media Center's instructional technology support and training services; faculty workshops; students hired to work with individual faculty; and instructional design specialists hired to support distance learning programs.

The Office of Student Affairs created a number of technologies. These included SIS+ (integrated student information system), WAM (“What About Me” a web portal for students that provides

access to the Blackboard system, on-line registration, financial aid, and the monthly student financial accounts, among others) and a degree-audit system. Admissions also initiated Talisma, a database software product that significantly improved recruiting efforts and target marketing to high school students.

### **Course Management System**

In 1997, UNL was beginning to explore online course management systems. The Blackboard Academic Suite was adopted. It now includes all courses at UNL. Blackboard has been integrated with back-end systems such as the Student Information System (SIS+) at UNL. Its functionality has also been extended over time through custom development by the vendor, third-party products and software developed at UNL.

The many ways in which faculty use the Blackboard course management system range from simply posting a syllabus to extensive daily use for assignments, to class discussion, communication, instruction, testing and record keeping. Table C.1 shows the steady growth in Blackboard use by faculty and students from the first fall semester it was deployed. Every UNL course is enabled for Blackboard integration, and every student has access to Blackboard. At any given time during a typical day and evening, UNL generally sees 1,000 or more concurrent users of Blackboard, and the peak periods show about 4,000 concurrent users.

Table C.1 Faculty and Student Use of Blackboard

	Fall 2000 <sup>1</sup>	Fall 2001 <sup>1</sup>	Fall 2002	Fall 2003	Fall 2004	Fall 2005
<b>Active courses<sup>2</sup></b>	65	480	1,094 (21%)	1,372 (27%)	2,100 (44%)	2,424 (49%)
<b>Active faculty accounts<sup>3</sup></b>	100	450	710 (36%)	831 (42%)	1,214 (62%)	1,362 (69%)
<b>Active student accounts<sup>4</sup></b>	1,300	8,000	17,166 (77%)	17,816 (81%)	18,615 (88%)	19,165 (89%)

<sup>1</sup> Prior to 2002, counts are approximate because usage statistics were not produced by the software and percentages are not available.

<sup>2</sup> The percentage of active courses is the proportion of course sections that have stored Blackboard content out of all course offerings having a unique call number, counting each lab, recitation, studio and “arranged” section as a course. This percentage is artificially low because of the way information is reflected in the system. For example, if a large lecture course has an enrollment of 150 students, that course may be associated with six recitation sections of 25 students each for a total course count of 7. If the 150 students utilize a single Blackboard site associated with the course (a common scenario), the above statistics would indicate one active course out of 7. The active course percentage is also artificially low because some courses only use the discussion, chat and/or gradebook functions of Blackboard, but those particular types of activity escape the detection method used here. Finally, studio and “arranged” courses are frequently one-to-one instructional arrangements.

- <sup>3</sup> The percentage of active faculty accounts is the proportion of faculty, instructors and graduate teaching assistants actively using Blackboard for at least one course out of all unique staff assignments to courses.
- <sup>4</sup> The percentage of active students is the proportion of students enrolled in at least one Blackboard course out of all unique student enrollment IDs. Note that the percentage of active students is much higher than the percentage of active faculty. This indicates that the faculty who use Blackboard teach the courses that capture the bulk of student enrollments. The gap between the 89 percent of students who currently use Blackboard and the logical limit of 100 percent is at least partly attributable to missing information for courses that use only discussion, chat and/or gradebook functions (see note above).

### **Other Developments:**

Efforts are under way to provide wireless access to students in all residence halls. In the Institute of Agricultural and Natural Resources, funds are being provided to faculty to build interactive learning modules (e.g., in Biotechnology, Crop Technology and Meat Science). And several computing services are provided by the Department of Computer Science and Engineering.

The Research Computing Facility is available campus-wide to researchers who require high performance computing resources. RCF originated in 1998 as the result of a successful NSF/EPSCoR proposal. RCF aims to facilitate computationally intensive research by:

- Developing ongoing collaborative partnerships with research groups;
- Providing user training and support to utilize parallel and other high performance resources; and
- Providing local high-performance computing resources.

### **System Support of Information Technology**

The University of Nebraska's Central Administration has provided partial funding, oversight, and leadership for the following major initiatives since the 1997 accreditation review (UNL has had to fund new support environments, which include staffing, training, office or computer operations space, servers, and continuing maintenance to support these initiatives):

- System-wide business and financial system (SAP);
- Single course management system (Blackboard);
- U-wide web portal ([www.unl.edu/resources/C-2](http://www.unl.edu/resources/C-2));
- State-wide education computer network for K-20 and government partners (Network Nebraska);
- Founding and charter member of Internet-2, Midnet, and the Great Plains Network (GPN);
- Internet-2-SEGP membership; and
- Single university-wide email and office management system (Lotus Notes).

[www.unl.edu/resources/C-2](http://www.unl.edu/resources/C-2)

**Summary of Progress in Support for Information Technology**

Table C.2 provides a brief analysis of technology support and usage since our last accreditation review. In most cases, we have seen dramatic increases in investment and usage.

Table C.2 Increases in UNL Technology Support and Usage since FY 1995-2005

	<b>FY 1995-96</b>	<b>FY 2004-05</b>	<b>% increase</b>
<b>Usage</b>	UNL consumed 10 Mb of Internet-1 capacity	UNL consumed 105 Mb of Internet-1 capacity	950%
<b>Internet-2 Connectivity</b>			
<b>Usage</b>	(Internet-2 did not exist)	UNL had a 155 Mb connection to Internet-2, upgraded to 622 Mb in February 2006	
<b>Investment</b>	\$0	\$421,000	
<b>Campus Network</b>			
<b>Usage</b>	3,000 network connections	26,500 network connections	780%
<b>Investment</b>	\$1,763,437	\$2,578,000	48%
<b>Campus Network</b>			
<b>Usage</b>	75 users	4,200 users	5,500%
<b>Investment</b>	\$4,000	\$130,000	3,100%
<b>Course Management System</b>			
<b>Investment</b>	\$25,000 (1997)	\$255,000 (2005)	1,020%

[www.unl.edu/resources/SD-4](http://www.unl.edu/resources/SD-4) Description of Federal Compliance Measures

[www.unl.edu/resources/SD-5](http://www.unl.edu/resources/SD-5) Institutional Snapshot