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December 3, 2021

Board of Trustees
North Idaho College
1000 W. Garden Ave.
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

Dear Trustees Banducci, Barnes, McKenzie, Howard and Wood,

We are writing to express deep concern about the current trajectory of North Idaho College. Documented complaints submitted to your accrediting body, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), followed by an exodus of top-level leadership, including all three vice presidents, is extremely concerning.

Idaho Constitution Article IX, Section 2 provides: “The *general supervision of the state educational institutions* and public school system of the state of Idaho, shall be vested in a state board of education, the membership, powers and duties of which shall be prescribed by law” (emphasis added).

Pursuant to this constitutional grant of authority, the Idaho Legislature has defined the “powers and duties” of the State Board of Education in Idaho Code Title 33. Specifically, Idaho Code § 33-101 provides: “For the general supervision, governance and control of all state educational institutions, to wit: University of Idaho, Idaho State University, Boise State University, Lewis-Clark State College, the School for the Deaf and the Blind and any other state educational institution which may hereafter be founded, and for the *general supervision, governance and control* of the public school systems, *including public community colleges*, a state board of education is created” (emphasis added).

While the State Board respects the local governance of community colleges, it also has a legal and moral interest in the health of the colleges.

As you know, NWCCU has directed NIC’s trustees to “submit an Ad Hoc Report as an attachment to its 2022 Annual Report, no later than August 1, 2022 for evaluation and possible follow-up monitoring.” The focus of the report is to address specific questions about the proper roles and responsibilities of the trustees and college administration.

We urge you to complete the Accreditation Response Action Plan as developed by Dr. Lita Burns and posted on [NIC's website](#) as soon as possible and in good faith. As NWCCU stated, “[t]he requested Ad Hoc report will be critical to ensure the College remains compliant with NWCCU’s Eligibility Requirements, Standards of Accreditation, and Policies, and as such, will strengthen your efforts to continue to fulfill the institutional mission to serve students.” For the sake of the College, students, and the community, we believe this action needs to be taken and resolved well before the August 1, 2022 deadline.

As duly elected fiduciaries and stewards of the College, it is imperative that you recognize the consequences of being sanctioned by NWCCU, many of which are numerous and severe. Given the gravity of the situation, we believe it necessary and appropriate to enumerate very specific and tangible impacts of placing your accreditation in jeopardy. The following points are illustrative, not exhaustive:

- If accreditation is lost, the value of a degree from NIC will be significantly reduced, or even negated entirely, for all students. Idaho Code § 33-3728(1) provides: “Any student who completes the requirements for the associate of arts or associate of science degree at a postsecondary institution *accredited by a regional accrediting body recognized by the state board of education* will be considered as *satisfying the general education requirements*, as defined by the state board of education, upon transfer to a public postsecondary institution in Idaho and *will not be required to complete any additional general education requirements*” (emphasis added). If NIC loses accreditation, AA and AAS degrees earned by students will no longer be transferable to other Idaho institutions for the purpose of degree completion (i.e. earning a baccalaureate degree). To put a finer point on it, a degree from an unaccredited institution is a liability, not an asset. Perhaps only an unscrupulous and predatory diploma mill would recognize credits from an unaccredited institution.
- Without accreditation, students who complete general education credits, including dual credits, at NIC would not be allowed to transfer these credits to other accredited institutions in Idaho. Idaho Code § 33-3728(2) provides: “A student who has completed the general education framework as defined by the state board of education, without an associate of arts or associate of science degree, and transfers from a postsecondary institution in Idaho *accredited by a regional accrediting body recognized by the state board of education* will not be required to complete additional general education requirements at the receiving Idaho public postsecondary institution” (emphasis added). Completion of courses at accredited institutions in Idaho which satisfy the general education framework (as defined in [State Board Policy III.N.](#)) transfer and articulate fully throughout the system. Idaho Code § 33-3728(3) emphasizes this point: “If a student who has completed a general education course or general education courses ... from a postsecondary institution in Idaho *accredited by a regional accrediting body recognized by the state board of education*; and transfers to a public postsecondary institution, *those general education course credits will be applied towards the associated general education course requirements at the receiving public postsecondary institution*” (emphasis added). Once again, loss of accreditation status would make NIC general

education credits non-transferable to other Idaho public institutions.

- One of the eligibility criteria for the state's Opportunity Scholarship is for students to attend an accredited public or private institution. Therefore, if NIC were to lose its accreditation, its students would not be eligible for the Opportunity Scholarship. For the current academic year, 154 NIC students are recipients of the Opportunity Scholarship.
- It is estimated that over 60% of jobs in the private and public sectors now require some form of postsecondary education. Most employers stipulate credentials must be granted by an accredited institution. Therefore, loss of accreditation would negatively impact the ability of many northern Idaho businesses and industries (e.g., aerospace, forestry, heavy equipment manufacturing) to meet their workforce needs.

In short, action or inaction by the College's Board of Trustees that places accreditation at risk would result in long-term injury to the very students you were elected to serve. It would also significantly impair the College's ability to recruit and retain students, faculty and staff. Indeed, the very viability of the College itself could hang in the balance.

We respectfully request that you set aside parochial or partisan interests, and urgently focus on the best interests of students and the College before both are irreparably harmed.

Sincerely,



Kurt Liebich
President



Matt Freeman
Executive Director

Cc: Dr. Mike Sebaaly, Interim President, North Idaho College
Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy, President, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
Governor Brad Little
Sen. Steven Thayn, Chairman, Senate Education Committee
Rep. Lance Clow, Chairman, House Education Committee
Legislative Delegation Districts 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7