

June 30, 2025

Mr. Brad Smith
President
Marshall University
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, West Virginia 25755

Dear President Smith

This letter is accompanied by the Quality Initiative Report (QIR) Review form completed by a peer review panel. Marshall University's QIR showed genuine effort and has been accepted by the Commission. The attached reviewer evaluation contains a rationale for this outcome.

Peer reviewers evaluate all the QIRs based on the genuine effort of the institution, the seriousness of the undertaking, the significance of scope and impact of the work, the genuineness of the commitment to the initiative, and adequate resource provision.

If you have questions about the QIR reviewer information, please contact either Kathy Bijak (kbijak@hlcommission.org) or Pat Newton-Curran (pnewton@hlcommission.org).

Higher Learning Commission

Open Pathway Quality Initiative Report

Panel Review and Recommendation Form

Review Process

The Quality Initiative panel review process evaluates the institution's effort in undertaking the Quality Initiative Proposal approved by HLC. The Quality Initiative process encourages institutions to take risks, innovate, take on a tough challenge, or pursue a yet unproven strategy or hypothesis. Thus, failure of an initiative to achieve its goals is acceptable. An institution may learn much from such failure. What is not acceptable is failure of the institution to pursue the initiative with genuine effort. Genuineness of effort, not success of the initiative, constitutes the focus of the Quality Initiative review and serves as its sole point of evaluation.

Submission Instructions

Submit the final report as a Word document to HLC at hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Pathways/Quality Initiatives" from the list of submission options to ensure the report is sent to the correct HLC staff member. The file name for the report should follow this format: QI Report Review <Name of Institution>.

Name of Institution: Marshall University

State: West Virginia

Institutional ID: 1665

Reviewers (names, titles, institutions):

Lynn Merklin, PhD, Assistant Provost for Institutional Effectiveness (retired), Andrews University;

Mr. Glen Roberson, Assistant Vice President and Professor, Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana

Date: 06/30/2025

I. Quality Initiative Review

- ☒ The institution demonstrated its seriousness of the undertaking.
- ☒ The institution demonstrated that the initiative had scope and impact.
- ☒ The institution demonstrated a commitment to and engagement in the initiative.

☒ The institution demonstrated adequate resource provision.

II. Recommendation

☒ The panel confirms genuine effort on the part of the institution.

☐ The panel cannot confirm genuine effort on the part of the institution.

III. Rationale (required)

Project Significance and Scope

Marshall University's QIP was to Build a Stronger and More Inclusive Marshall Community. This aligns specifically with two of the commitments within the University's mission: "to foster understanding and appreciation of the rich diversity of thought and culture," and "to cultivate the development of an inclusive, just, and equitable community." The project had applications for undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff, and to the community. The first project goal to "increase students' readiness to work and live in a global and/or otherwise diverse community" was acted on through themed readings and presentations, intercultural dinner groups for new students, and intercultural learning communities. The second goal to increase access and reduce barriers involved efforts to increase student enrollment and recruit faculty and staff from underrepresented groups, as well as inviting visiting diversity scholars. The third goal to "promote student learning through outreach into the community" involved student mentoring of high school students and creating community development internships for students.

Demonstrated Impact

The Quality Initiative (QI) has had positive impacts both in the University and in the community. The Intercultural Dinner Groups for new freshmen brings students together from diverse backgrounds through shared interests. Comments from students afterwards have been positive. Through a change in Marshall's admissions policy to test optional, the University has seen significant increases in enrollment of students from underrepresented groups among first-time full-time freshmen, first-time graduate students and in total enrollment. Furthermore, the commitment of the Honors College dean to the Quality Initiative (QI) led to changes in the Honors application process and the incorporation of QI goals into the curriculum, which has resulted in greater participation of underrepresented students in the Honors program. The learning communities, themed readings/presentations, new opportunities for internships, and the near-peer mentoring program, while reaching smaller numbers of students, contribute to the goals of promoting student learning through community engagement, and increasing student readiness to live and work in a diverse community. For example, as a result of the near-peer mentor program at WV Health Sciences & Technology Academy (HSTA), which helps students from rural communities in West Virginia to succeed in STEM, program leaders report "significant improvement in the quality of high school students' science projects."

The decision to invite two visiting diversity scholars has been impactful. One came in fall 2021, and he has organized presentations, taught an Honors Seminar, secured funding to launch the Appalachian Freedom Heritage Tourism Initiative, and has contributed to knowledge and understanding of the Underground Railroad. He was recently appointed as Assistant Provost for Access and Opportunity. The second scholar is described as a "perfect fit for Marshall's Lewis College of Business." He has received a one-million-dollar grant from the state and is working "with the state and minority-owned businesses to ensure that technology and innovated practices are used to benefit minority and isolated communities."

Institutional Commitment and Resources

Marshall University has demonstrated a commitment to their Quality Initiative. The QI Oversight Committee consists of 14 individuals from administration, faculty and staff. There are 10 project directors, with 2 being from the Oversight Committee. Twenty-two individuals served as speakers and event organizers. Forty-two faculty and staff served on committees or in other capacities. Funding for most of the Quality Initiative came from moneys set aside within Marshall University's budget. Additional financial support came from "the John Deaver Drinko Academy, University Communications, the Office of Academic Affairs, the Marshall Artist Series Masters at Marshall Distinguished Speaker Series, and grants obtained through one of the visiting scholars, from the Truist Foundation, and from the West Virginia Humanities Council."

Assessment and Sustainability

In Marshall University's reflection on challenges and opportunities through the Quality Initiative, they reported that their biggest challenges were reduction of staff from retirements and resignations, and a smaller budget than anticipated. However, they see new opportunities with new leaders, including a new provost and president.

Plans for the future include continuing to recruit and support underserved students, continuing the themed readings and speaker series, and expanding the intercultural learning communities and internship and practicum experiences. Marshall reports that it also hopes to continue the Near-Peer Mentors project with HSTA. Furthermore, after a 100-day listening tour, the new president has developed a plan called "Marshall for All, Marshall Forever," a commitment to "make a Marshall education available to all" and to "do what we can to ensure that our students graduate without debt," both of which are congruent with the purpose of the Quality Initiative.

Conclusion

Marshall University's Quality Initiative has expanded diversity, strengthened inclusion, and deepened community involvement. Higher enrollment of underrepresented students, more robust intercultural programs, and a wider array of mentoring and internship opportunities show substantial progress. Active collaboration among faculty, staff, students, and visiting scholars, supported by targeted funding, underscores institutional dedication. Though financial and staffing constraints posed challenges, new leadership and the Marshall for All, Marshall Forever roadmap will sustain and build upon these achievements. Altogether, Marshall University has demonstrated genuine effort, with broad scope, tangible impact, adequate resources, and long-term sustainability.