

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION REAFFIRMATION VISIT: March 30-31, 2026

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost

Iowa State University: Reaffirmation of Accreditation Executive Summary

Iowa State University of Science and Technology enters its 2026 reaffirmation confident in its identity and ready to work towards our future. As the nation's first land-grant university established under the Morrill Act, Iowa State has long translated discovery into public value—"science with practice." That ethos is visible in the university's contemporary mission—to *create, share, and apply knowledge to make our students, Iowa, and the world better*—and is operationalized through a 2022–2031 Strategic Plan that organizes ambition into five clear aspirations and ties progress to measurable KPIs.

CRITERION 1. Mission

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

1.A. Mission Alignment

The institution's educational programs, enrollment profile, and scope of operations align with its publicly articulated mission.

1.B. Mission and Public Good

The institution's operation of the academic enterprise demonstrates its commitment to serving the public good.

C. Mission and Diversity of Society

The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

Iowa State University demonstrates strong alignment between its publicly articulated mission and its operations. The university's mission—to *create, share, and apply knowledge to improve students, Iowa, and the world*—is operationalized through the 2022–2031 Strategic Plan, which serves as the central guide for decision-making across academic, research, extension, and outreach functions. As a land-grant institution, Iowa State emphasizes access, applied knowledge, and service to the public good, evident in its academic portfolio, enrollment strategy, and statewide engagement.

The university's academic footprint is broad and deep: more than 140 bachelor's, 120 master's, 81 doctoral programs, the DVM, and dozens of certificates. This array, curated to align with workforce demand and evolving student interest, is evidenced by new programs in precision agriculture, game design, sports media, integrated health, among others. Online expansion is deliberate, supported by Iowa State Online, and integrates quality frameworks such as Quality Matters (QM) and faculty development via the Course Design Institute.

Enrollment patterns align with mission priorities, including strong representation of Iowa residents, national reach, and a globally diverse graduate population. Iowa State draws a majority of its undergraduates from Iowa while engaging learners from all 99 counties, all 50 states, and 110 countries. Fall 2025 enrollment totaled 31,105 students: 85% undergraduate, and the remainder at the graduate and professional levels. Online education has expanded strategically to meet student and workforce needs while maintaining academic standards. The campus remains largely residential, with more than 90% of first-year students choosing to live on campus—an early marker correlated with persistence and belonging.

Iowa State's commitment to the public good is especially visible through Extension and Outreach, research commercialization, and economic development initiatives. Extension and Outreach is present in 100 county offices and four program areas (Agriculture & Natural Resources; Community & Economic Development; Health & Human Sciences; and 4-H Youth Development) and material in impact: nearly one million educational contacts in 2024, 154,000+ professional certifications, and tangible community outcomes (e.g., RHRA-enabled housing development and Planter University's precision agriculture returns). The university demonstrates sustained civic engagement through curricular requirements, co-curricular programs, and partnerships that promote democratic participation and global awareness. Overall, the evidence supports a mission that is clear, widely communicated, and consistently enacted through teaching, research, engagement, and service.

CRITERION 2: Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

2.A. Integrity

Actions taken by the institution's governing board, administration, faculty, and staff demonstrate adherence to established policies and procedures.

2.B. Transparency

The institution presents itself accurately and completely to students and the public with respect to its educational programs and any claims it makes related to the educational experience.

2.C. Board Governance

In discharging its fiduciary duties, the institution's governing board is autonomous and empowered to act in the best interest of the institution, including the students it serves.

2.D. Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

The institution supports academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of knowledge as integral to high-quality teaching, learning, and research.

2.E. Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery, and Application

The institution adheres to policies and procedures that ensure responsible acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge.

Iowa State demonstrates a comprehensive and well-documented commitment to ethical conduct, transparency, and institutional integrity. The assurance argument makes clear that ethical conduct and transparency are systemic features, not episodic responses. Governance is grounded in shared responsibility among the Board of Regents, administration, faculty, staff, and students,

Clearly articulated policies are housed in a centralized and accessible Policy Library with a standing advisory committee, open comment processes, and routine internal and state audits provide structural accountability. Policies governing conduct, discrimination, harassment, conflicts of interest, financial operations, and academic integrity are robust, regularly reviewed, and supported by training and enforcement mechanisms. Transparency is evident in public access to information about programs, admissions, costs, accreditation, and student outcomes. Iowa State accurately represents its educational offerings and requirements through the catalog, websites, and consumer information disclosures.

The governing structure is stable and appropriately independent. The Iowa Board of Regents—nine gubernatorial appointees confirmed by the Senate and bipartisan by statute—holds fiduciary authority for budgets, tuition, bonding, investments, property, and program approvals. Its work is public-facing (open meetings/streams, posted agendas, roll-call votes), and its committee architecture and reporting cadence (e.g., campus safety, enrollment, distance education, tenure) ensure oversight with discipline.

The university maintains strong oversight through internal and external audits, a compliance hotline, non-retaliation protections, and clearly defined reporting responsibilities. Ethical expectations are reinforced through required training for employees and students, including First Amendment education and research ethics. Business and financial practices emphasize accountability and stewardship, supported by board-level codes and independent audits of affiliated entities such as the ISU Foundation.

Academic freedom and free expression are foundational. The institution explicitly affirms academic freedom and freedom of expression through board policy, the Faculty Handbook, required syllabus statements, and campus training.

On the research side, the Office of the Vice President for Research coordinates an integrated compliance ecosystem for research integrity—Research Ethics, Sponsored Programs, Sponsored Accounting, and Environmental Health & Safety—using training, protocol review (IRB, IACUC, IBC, Radiation Safety), post-approval monitoring, export control, and conflicts management. Academic integrity policies extend into pedagogy and scholarship via Turnitin/iThenticate access, LIB 1600 information literacy, and GRST 5650 responsible conduct of research for graduate students.

Collectively, these practices demonstrate an institutional culture in which ethical conduct is embedded, expected, and actively supported.

CRITERION 3. Teaching and Learning for Student Success

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates its effectiveness. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location, or other differentiating factors.

3.A. Educational Programs.

The institution maintains learning goals and outcomes that reflect a level of rigor commensurate with college-level work, including by program level and the content of each of its educational programs.

3.B. Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry.

The institution's educational programs engage students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; in practicing modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

3.C. Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff.

The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs, and student services.

3.D. Support for Student Learning and Resources for Teaching.

The institution provides student support services that address the needs of its student populations, as well as the teaching resources and infrastructure necessary for student success.

3.E. Assessment of Student Learning.

The institution improves the quality of educational programs based on its assessment of student learning.

3.F. Program Review.

The institution improves its curriculum based on periodic program review.

3.G. Student Success Outcomes.

The institution's student success outcomes demonstrate continuous improvement, taking into account the student populations it serves and benchmarks that reference peer institutions.

Iowa State provides strong evidence of responsibility for educational quality, student learning, and continuous improvement across all programs and modalities. Learning outcomes are clearly articulated at the course, program, college, and university levels, with four institution-wide undergraduate outcomes guiding curricular coherence. Faculty maintain primary responsibility for curriculum design, assessment, and academic standards, supported by structured governance, regular review cycles, and external accreditation where applicable.

The institution ensures rigor and consistency across delivery modes, including online education, through shared outcomes, faculty oversight, and quality-assurance frameworks such as Quality Matters. Academic credentials are clearly differentiated by level, with transparent requirements for certificates, degrees, and professional programs. Iowa State demonstrates innovation through micro-credentials, interdisciplinary programs, and workforce-aligned offerings.

Faculty and staff sufficiency is well documented, with stable student-faculty ratios, clear qualification standards, and comprehensive review and professional development systems. Extensive student support services—spanning advising, tutoring, health and wellness, learning technologies, libraries, and experiential learning—address the needs of diverse student populations.

Assessment of student learning is systematic and multi-layered, with evidence of closing the loop at course, program, college, and institutional levels. Retention, graduation, and post-graduation outcomes compare favorably with peers, and targeted initiatives show measurable improvements, particularly in gateway courses and historically underserved populations.

Iowa State organizes learning around four university-level outcomes—critical thinking and problem solving; communication; diversity and global citizenship; information literacy—that sit atop college and program outcomes and reach the course level through outcomes-aligned syllabi. Annual catalog governance, Workday-enabled prerequisite enforcement, and clear rules for dual-listed courses sustain coherence and rigor across modalities. The university intentionally supports online course quality through QM training/certifications and CDI participation. At the college and program levels, disciplinary accreditations (e.g., ABET, AACSB, NAAB) and seven-year external program reviews keep curricula current, evidence-based, and profession-aligned.

Evidence of continuous improvement is consistent and concrete. For example, a long-standing concern about high DFW rates in the calculus-based physics sequence led to redesigns in pedagogy, content focus, and coordinated support. Early results are striking: DFW rates fell to 14% (PHYS 2310) and 9% (PHYS 2320), with continued monitoring of downstream effects. Similarly, the coordinated calculus model in Mathematics and core-course coordination in the Ivy College of Business address cross-section consistency while raising performance expectations.

Iowa State's student success architecture blends high-touch human support with targeted technology. The Division of Student Affairs and Division of Academic Affairs collaborate on both offering services and providing referrals to academic advising, tutoring, health and wellness, accessibility, career services, learning communities, testing services, and more. Student Health and Wellness reflect the reality that belonging and well-being are preconditions for academic performance; the unit logged over a million student engagement touchpoints, with notable service volumes in primary care, labs, prescriptions, mental health, and basic needs supports (e.g., campus food pantry).

Additional campus student success efforts demonstrating agile learning design, rapid evaluation, and resource reallocation to meet actual student behavior include:

- **Cyclone 101**, a new five-part onboarding course for direct-from-high-school entrants, quickly achieved meaningful penetration with strong student ratings for relevance and accessibility.
- **Cyclone Check-In**, a quick-poll campaign using EAB Navigate360 to identify friction early each term; after early automation proved insufficient, ISU added a Cyclone Support Specialist to drive proactive, personalized follow-through—tripling student connections to care. Living-learning evidence is strong: first-year students who reside on campus show higher term and first-year GPAs and better second-year retention; sustained on-campus living correlates with higher four- and six-year graduation.
- **Learning Communities** remain a distinctive strength with very high participation ($\approx 94\%$ of first-year students) and well-documented gains in retention and graduation.

Outcomes confirm the value proposition of an Iowa State education: a record 4-year graduation rate of 59.6%, a 6-year rate of 75.3%, first-year retention at 89.1%, and consistently >90% placement within six months across degree levels. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) benchmarking shows Iowa State above peer groups in high-impact practices such as learning communities and internships. Post-graduation data from college-based career offices are consistently strong.

CRITERION 4. Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources, and Planning

The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures, and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

4.A. Effective Administrative Structures

The institution's administrative structures are effective and facilitate collaborative processes such as shared governance; data-informed decision making; and engagement with internal and external constituencies as appropriate.

4.B. Resource Base and Sustainability

The institution's financial and personnel resources effectively support its current operations. The institution's financial management balances short-term needs with long-term commitments and ensures its ongoing sustainability.

4.C. Planning for Quality Improvement

The institution engages in systematic strategic planning. It relies on data-supported enrollment forecasts and integrates its planning with insights it has gained based on assessment of student learning, evaluation of institutional operations, scanning of the external environment, and financial capacity.

Iowa State demonstrates strong institutional sustainability through effective governance, strategic planning, and responsible resource management. Administrative structures support shared governance, data-informed decision-making, and engagement with internal and external stakeholders. The Board of Regents provides appropriate oversight, while faculty, staff, and student governance bodies play active roles in institutional planning and policy development.

Shared governance is both formal and functional at Iowa State. The Faculty Senate collaborates closely with the Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost on academic, personnel, and governance matters. The Professional & Scientific Council serves a similar role for staff members. Student governments (Student Government and GPSS) help to raise student issues to university leadership. Open policy development, external engagement through advisory councils, and deep municipal partnerships (e.g., CyRide, public safety, regional economic development) reflect a university that is both public-minded and procedurally strong.

Financially, the university is stable and well positioned, with diversified revenue streams, strong reserves, favorable bond ratings, and a Composite Financial Index consistently above HLC benchmarks. As of June 30, 2025, total assets stand at \$2.78B, net position rose by \$100M year-over-year, operating revenues reached \$1.14B, sponsored funding was \$545M, and the Composite Financial Index has topped 4.0 for four consecutive years. Bond ratings (Moody's Aa2; S&P AA) remain strong, and outstanding debt decreased by \$20M year-over-year. Human resources, facilities, and technology infrastructure are sufficient to support current operations and future growth. Strategic capital investments (Student Innovation Center, KENT Feed Mill and Grain Science Complex, CyTown infrastructure, Thekildsen Industrial Engineering Building) align with academic and research priorities.

The faculty headcount is steady at 1,746, with the vast majority of tenured/tenure-eligible faculty holding doctorates, a student-faculty ratio of 18:1, and stable section sizes. Iowa State has deliberately increased term-faculty capacity to absorb credit hour growth while protecting research time for tenure-line faculty. This workforce strategy is paired with development programs (CELT; ADVANCE; leadership academies), rigorous annual and post-tenure review, and a faculty onboarding/mentoring structure that supports early and mid-career success.

The institution's digital core has been modernized over the last five years. The multi-year Workday transition improved data integrity, enforced prerequisites, and enabled better analytics via DataMart and Adaptive Planning. Canvas is universal and supports course materials affordability via Immediate Access ONE (flat \$259/semester with 91% student participation in the first year), while testing services and over 100 learning tools operate within clear governance for privacy, accessibility, and efficacy.

Facilities planning is disciplined through the Capital Planning Advisory Committee and a long-horizon Strategic Facilities Plan, with a five-year capital plan refreshed annually. The university's physical and cyber infrastructures are sized for growth in research, advanced manufacturing, biosciences, and digital learning.

Data culture is maturing rapidly. The university's DataMart and Fact Book are widely used for strategic planning in the form of enrollment modeling, financial aid optimization, and student-success interventions.

Key progress indicators suggest these strategies are paying off. Four-year graduation is at an all-time high; six-year graduation and retention remain above national and peer benchmarks; NSSE shows above-peer engagement in high-impact practices; and career outcomes remain consistently strong. Extension and Outreach continues to deliver statewide value at scale, while research growth, patents, and industry partnerships point to durable innovation capacity.

Conclusion

The through-line of this Assurance Filing is institutional coherence: mission informs strategy; strategy anchors investment; investment advances teaching, research, and service; and evidence feeds a continuous improvement loop. Iowa State's systems—academic quality, ethical conduct, shared governance, data-informed management, and financial stewardship—work cohesively to manage both current and long-term goals for the university. Iowa State is well prepared for reaffirmation of accreditation and poised to expand its impact on students, Iowa, and the world.