



EVALUATING THE CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION

Policy Change Adopted on Second Reading

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) adopted this policy on second reading at its meeting on November 4–5, 2021.

Background

At its February 2021 meeting, the Board directed HLC staff to explore ways of performing more accreditation activities through multiple lenses that take into account the various institutional missions, models and approaches of HLC’s membership. At its core, HLC seeks not only to conceptually recognize the diversity and differences among institutions, but to prioritize the interests, needs, aspirations and constraints of various institutional types when applying its standards. As HLC moves toward launching a [pilot project](#) with this in mind, the proposed policy change adds a broad policy statement signaling this enhancement of HLC’s approach to evaluating its institutions. Given the extent of discretion inherent in the evaluative framework for the Criteria for Accreditation as compared to other HLC requirements, a broad statement is offered solely within that context.

The adopted change also clarifies that the judgment as to whether an institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation is made at the level of each Core Component and Criterion and not at the level of subcomponents. This is partly because not all subcomponents may be relevant in every instance and partly because institutions may legitimately offer additional evidence not covered by the subcomponents that demonstrates compliance with a Core Component.

HLC circulated these policy changes to the membership and other interested parties after the Board’s June 2021 meeting. No comments were received that warranted changes in language.

Implementation

This policy is effective immediately.

Adopted Policy

Wording that was deleted or revised is shown as strikethrough (~~old wording~~); new language, whether through addition or revision, is shown in bold (**new wording**). These revisions have been made on HLC's website at hlcommission.org/policies.

Policy Title: Evaluative Framework for the HLC Criteria

Number: INST.A.10.020

An institution ~~must be judged by HLC to have met~~ **demonstrates that it meets** each of the Criteria for Accreditation, **and the Core Components comprising them,** ~~and the Federal Compliance Requirements to merit the grant of initial accreditation or the reaffirmation of accreditation in addition to other HLC requirements articulated in policy.~~ **In evaluating the Criteria for Accreditation, HLC shall take into account varying institutional missions, models and approaches within higher education.**

~~In preparation for accreditation and reaffirmation of accreditation, an institution shall provide evidence through a self-study or self-evaluation process that it meets each of the Criteria and the Core Components.~~ The distinctiveness of an institution's mission may condition the strategies it adopts and the evidence it provides that it meets each Core Component. The institution shall also provide evidence with regard to those sub-components of the Criteria that apply to the institution. An institution ~~in its evidence or a team in its review may identify~~ **provide evidence relevant to additional topics or issues** related to a Core Component ~~other than~~ **beyond** those specified in the sub-components to be ~~included in evaluating~~ **evaluated in determining whether the institution's meeting of institution meets the relevant Core Component.** **In its review, peer reviewers may determine that an institution meets the relevant Core Component on the basis of such evidence.**

~~For institutions applying for initial accreditation the submission of evidence from the self-study or self-evaluation process constitutes the official application for accreditation. An institution applying for initial accreditation shall also demonstrate conformity with the Assumed Practices.~~

The judgment that the ~~organization~~ **institution** meets the Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components is based on detailed information about all parts of the institution. Such information may be acquired through evidence provided to HLC by the institution or acquired by HLC from other sources prior to, during, or subsequent to an evaluation process. This information will be confirmed in the written report of the ~~visiting team~~ **peer reviewers** or in other review documents identified by HLC ~~as core elements of a process for reaffirmation of accreditation.~~

In the evaluation process, HLC will review the institution's **compliance with** ~~against~~ the Criteria and Core Components according to the following evaluative framework.

Core Components. The institution meets the Core Component if:

- a. the Core Component is met without concerns, that is the institution meets or exceeds the expectations embodied in the Component, or to the extent opportunities for improvement exist, peer review or a decision-making body has determined that monitoring is not required; or
- b. the Core Component is met with concerns, that is the institution demonstrates the characteristics expected by the Component, but performance in relation to some aspect of the Component must be improved, ~~and peer review or a decision-making body has determined that monitoring is required to assure that the institution ameliorates the concerns.~~

The institution does not meet the Core Component if the institution fails to meet the Component in its entirety or is so deficient ~~in one or more aspects of the~~ **in the area covered by the Core Component** that the Component is judged not to be met.

Criteria for Accreditation. The institution meets the Criterion if:

- a. the Criterion is met without concerns, that is the institution meets or exceeds the expectations embodied in the Criterion, or to the extent opportunities for improvement exist, peer review or a decision-making body has determined that monitoring is not required; or
- b. the Criterion is met with concerns, that is the institution demonstrates the characteristics expected by the Criterion, but performance in relation to some Core Components of the Criterion must be improved, ~~and peer review or a decision-making body has determined that monitoring is required to assure that the institution ameliorates the concerns.~~

The Criterion is not met if the institution fails to meet the Criterion in its entirety or is so deficient in one or more Core Components of the Criterion that the Criterion is judged not to be met.

The institution meets the Criterion only if all Core Components are met. ~~The institution must be judged to meet all five Criteria for Accreditation to merit accreditation.~~ **The team's judgment in applying this evaluative framework shall be exercised at the level of each Core Component and each Criterion for Accreditation.** For purposes of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, findings of "met" and "met with concerns" both constitute compliance.

~~HLC will grant or reaffirm accreditation (with or without conditions or sanctions), deny accreditation, or withdraw accreditation based on the outcome of this evaluation.~~

Policy Number Key

Section INST: Institutional Processes

Chapter A: Implementation of HLC Criteria and Requirements

Part 10: General

Last Revised: November 2021

First Adopted: February 2003

Revision History: February 2012 (effective January 2013), November 2018, November 2021

Notes: Formerly policy number 1.1(a)2, 2013 – 1.1(a)1, 1.1(a)1.1. In February 2021, references to the Higher Learning Commission as “the Commission” were replaced with the term “HLC.”

Related Policies: INST.F.10.010 Routine Monitoring and Data Collection