



## ASSUMED PRACTICES

### Policy Change Adopted on Second Reading

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The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) adopted this policy on second reading at its meeting on November 5–6, 2020.

#### Background

The adopted policy change clarifies the circumstances under which Assumed Practices are reviewed, articulates the evaluative framework that governs these requirements, prohibits institutional retaliation against complainants, clarifies institutional responsibility for evaluating transfer credits, and creates more accountability for institutions in their planning activities to demonstrate attention to student needs in the event of an institutional closure.

HLC circulated these policy changes to the membership and other interested parties after the Board’s June 2020 meeting. No comments were received.

#### 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](https://hlcommission.org/policies).

Policy Title: Assumed Practices

Number: CRRT.B.10.020

Foundational to the Criteria and Core Components is a set of practices shared by institutions of higher education in the United States. Unlike ~~the Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components~~, these Assumed Practices are (1) generally matters to be determined as facts, rather than matters requiring professional

judgment and (2) ~~unlikely~~ **not expected** to vary by institutional mission or context. **Every institution must be in compliance with all Assumed Practices at all times.**

Because institutions are assumed to be adhering to the Assumed Practices on an ongoing basis, peer review teams will not review their compliance with these requirements except as follows:

1. When an institution is seeking HLC accreditation, and has not yet been granted initial accreditation by the Board of Trustees, the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with all the Assumed Practices as part of any reports to gain and maintain candidacy, and to gain initial accreditation;
2. When an accredited institution's compliance with one or more Criteria for Accreditation raises questions concerning its compliance with related Assumed Practices, the institution must be prepared to provide evidence that it is in compliance with such related Assumed Practices;
3. When the Board of Trustees has placed an institution on the sanction of Probation and has cited the institution for being out of compliance with one or more Assumed Practices, the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with the cited Assumed Practices as part of its report to have Probation removed.
4. When the Board of Trustees has placed an institution under a Show-Cause Order the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with all the Assumed Practices as part of its report to have the Show-Cause order removed.
5. When otherwise required by HLC as circumstances warrant.

In every case, peer reviewers and any applicable decision-making body will determine whether the institution meets or does not meet the Assumed Practices under review and institutions will thus be determined to be in compliance or out of compliance with HLC requirements accordingly.

#### A. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

1. The institution has a conflict of interest policy that ensures that the governing board and the senior administrative personnel act in the best interest of the institution.
2. The institution has ethics policies for faculty and staff regarding conflict of interest, nepotism, recruitment and admissions, financial aid, privacy of personal information, and contracting.

3. The institution provides its students, administrators, faculty, and staff with policies and procedures informing them of their rights and responsibilities within the institution.
4. The institution ~~provides clear information regarding its~~ **establishes and publicizes clear** procedures for receiving complaints and grievances from students and other constituencies, ~~responds~~ **responding to them** ~~complaints~~ in a timely manner, and ~~analyzes them~~ **analyzing complaints** to improve its processes. **The institution does not retaliate against those who raise complaints.**
5. The institution makes readily available to students and to the general public clear and complete information including:
  - a. statements of mission, vision, and values
  - b. full descriptions of the requirements for its programs, including all pre-requisite courses
  - c. requirements for admission both to the institution and to particular programs or majors
  - d. **its** policies on acceptance of transfer credit, including how **the institution applies such** credit ~~is applied~~ to its degree requirements. (Except for courses articulated through transfer policies or institutional agreements, the institution makes no promises to prospective students regarding the acceptance of credit awarded by examination, credit for prior learning, or credit for transfer until ~~an evaluation has been conducted~~ **the institution has conducted an evaluation of such students' credits in accordance with its transfer policies.**)
  - e. all student costs, including tuition, fees, training, and incidentals; its financial aid policies, practices, and requirements; and its policy on refunds
  - f. policies regarding academic good standing, probation, and dismissal; residency or enrollment requirements (if any)
  - g. a full list of its instructors and their academic credentials
  - h. its relationship with any parent organization (corporation, hospital, or church, or other entity that owns the institution) and any external providers of its instruction.
6. The institution assures that all data it makes public are accurate and complete, including those reporting on student achievement of learning and student persistence, retention, and completion.
7. The institution portrays clearly and accurately to the public its current status with the Higher Learning Commission and with specialized, national, and professional accreditation agencies.
  - a. An institution offering programs that require specialized accreditation or recognition by a state licensing board or other entity in order for its students to be certified or to sit for the licensing

examination in states where its students reside either has the appropriate accreditation and recognition or discloses publicly and clearly the consequences to the students of the lack thereof. The institution makes clear to students the distinction between regional and specialized or program accreditation and the relationships between licensure and the various types of accreditation.

- b. An institution offering programs eligible for specialized accreditation at multiple locations discloses the accreditation status and recognition of the program by state licensing boards at each location.
  - c. An institution that provides a program that prepares students for a licensure, certification, or other qualifying examination publicly discloses its pass rate on that examination, unless such information is not available to the institution.
8. The governing board and its executive committee, if it has one, include some “public” members. Public members have no significant administrative position or any ownership interest in any of the following: the institution itself; a company that does substantial business with the institution; a company or organization with which the institution has a substantial partnership; a parent, ultimate parent, affiliate, or subsidiary corporation; an investment group or firm substantially involved with one of the above organizations. All publicly-elected members or members appointed by publicly-elected individuals or bodies (governors, elected legislative bodies) are public members.<sup>1</sup>
  9. The governing board has the authority to approve the annual budget and to engage and dismiss the chief executive officer.<sup>1</sup>
  10. The institution remains in compliance at all times with ~~state~~ **all applicable** laws, including laws related to authorization of educational activities and consumer protection wherever it does business ~~and state law applies~~.
  11. The institution documents outsourcing of all services in written agreements, including agreements with parent or affiliated organizations.
  12. The institution takes responsibility for the ethical and responsible behavior of its contractual partners in relation to actions taken on its behalf.

<sup>1</sup> *Institutions operating under federal control and authorized by Congress are exempt from these requirements. These institutions must have a public board that includes representation by individuals who do not have a current or previous employment or other relationship with the federal government or any military entity. This public board has a significant role in setting policy, reviewing the institution’s finances, reviewing and approving major institutional priorities, and overseeing the academic programs of the institution.*

## B. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support

### 1. Programs, Courses, and Credits

- a. The institution conforms to commonly accepted minimum program length: 60 semester credits for associate's degrees, 120 semester credits for bachelor's degrees, and 30 semester credits beyond the bachelor's for master's degrees. Any variation from these minima must be explained and justified.
- b. The institution maintains structures or practices that ensure the coherence and quality of the programs for which it awards a degree. Typically institutions will require that at minimum 30 of the 120 credits earned for the bachelor's degree and 15 of the 60 credits for the associate's degree be credits earned at the institution itself, through arrangements with other accredited institutions, or through contractual relationships approved by the Commission. Any variation from the typical minima must be explained and justified.
- c. The institution's policy and practice assure that at least 50% of courses applied to a graduate program are courses designed for graduate work, rather than undergraduate courses credited toward a graduate degree. (Cf. Criterion 3.A.1 and 2.)  
(An institution may allow well-prepared advanced students to substitute its graduate courses for required or elective courses in an undergraduate degree program and then subsequently count those same courses as fulfilling graduate requirements in a related graduate program that the institution offers. In "4+1" or "2+3" programs, at least 50% of the credits allocated for the master's degree – usually 15 of 30 – must be for courses designed for graduate work.)
- d. The institution adheres to policies on student academic load per term that reflect reasonable expectations for successful learning and course completion.
- e. Courses that carry academic credit toward college-level credentials have content and rigor appropriate to higher education.
- f. The institution has a process for ensuring that all courses transferred and applied toward degree requirements demonstrate equivalence with its own courses required for that degree or are of equivalent rigor.
- g. The institution has a clear policy on the maximum allowable credit for prior learning as a reasonable proportion of the credits required to complete the student's program. Credit awarded for prior learning is documented, evaluated, and appropriate for the level of degree awarded.  
(Note that this requirement does not apply to courses transferred from other institutions.)

- h. The institution maintains a minimum requirement for general education for all of its undergraduate programs whether through a traditional practice of distributed curricula (15 semester credits for AAS degrees, 24 for AS or AA degrees, and 30 for bachelor's degrees) or through integrated, embedded, interdisciplinary, or other accepted models that demonstrate a minimum requirement equivalent to the distributed model. Any variation is explained and justified.

## 2. Faculty Roles and Qualifications

- a. Qualified faculty members are identified primarily by credentials, but other factors, including but not limited to equivalent experience, may be considered by the institution in determining whether a faculty member is qualified. Instructors (excluding for this requirement teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty) possess an academic degree relevant to what they are teaching and at least one level above the level at which they teach, except in programs for terminal degrees or when equivalent experience is established. In terminal degree programs, faculty members possess the same level of degree. When faculty members are employed based on equivalent experience, the institution defines a minimum threshold of experience and an evaluation process that is used in the appointment process. Faculty teaching general education courses, or other non-occupational courses, hold a master's degree or higher in the discipline or subfield. If a faculty member holds a master's degree or higher in a discipline or subfield other than that in which he or she is teaching, that faculty member should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which they teach.
- b. Instructors teaching in graduate programs should hold the terminal degree determined by the discipline and have a record of research, scholarship or achievement appropriate for the graduate program.
- c. Instructors teaching at the doctoral level have a record of recognized scholarship, creative endeavor, or achievement in practice commensurate with doctoral expectations.
- d. Faculty participate substantially in:
  - ~~1.~~ i. oversight of the curriculum—its development and implementation, academic substance, currency, and relevance for internal and external constituencies;
  - ~~2.~~ ii. assurance of consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in the expectations of student performance;

- ~~3.~~ ~~iii.~~ establishment of the academic qualifications for instructional personnel;
- ~~4.~~ ~~iv.~~ analysis of data and appropriate action on assessment of student learning and program completion.

### 3. Support Services

- a. Financial aid advising clearly and comprehensively reviews students' eligibility for financial assistance and assists students in a full understanding of their debt and its consequences.
- b. The institution maintains timely and accurate transcript and records services.

## C. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

1. Instructors (excluding for this requirement teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty) have the authority for the assignment of grades. (This requirement allows for collective responsibility, as when a faculty committee has the authority to override a grade on appeal.)
2. The institution refrains from the transcription of credit from other institutions or providers that it will not apply to its own programs.
3. The institution has formal and current written agreements for managing any internships and clinical placements included in its programs.
4. A predominantly or solely single-purpose institution in fields that require licensure for practice is also accredited by or is actively in the process of applying to a recognized specialized accrediting agency for each field, if such agency exists.
5. Instructors communicate course requirements to students in writing and in a timely manner.
6. Institutional data on assessment of student learning are accurate and address the full range of students who enroll.
7. Institutional data on student retention, persistence, and completion are accurate and address the full range of students who enroll.

## D. Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

1. The institution is able to meet its current financial obligations.
2. The institution has a prepared budget for the current year and the capacity to compare it with budgets and actual results of previous years.
3. The institution has future financial projections addressing its long-term financial sustainability.

4. The institution maintains effective systems for collecting, analyzing, and using institutional information.
5. The institution undergoes an external audit by a certified public accountant or a public audit agency that reports financial statements on the institution separately from any other related entity or parent corporation. For private institutions the audit is annual; for public institutions it is at least every two years.<sup>2</sup>
6. The institution's administrative structure includes a chief executive officer, chief financial officer, and chief academic officer (titles may vary) with appropriate credentials and experience and sufficient focus on the institution to ensure appropriate leadership and oversight. (An institution may outsource its financial functions but must have the capacity to assure the effectiveness of that arrangement.)
7. **The institution's planning activities demonstrate careful and detailed consideration of student needs (including but not limited to the preservation of student records) and protocols to be followed in the event an orderly institutional closure becomes necessary.**

<sup>2</sup> Institutions under federal control are exempted provided that they have other reliable information to document the institution's fiscal resources and management.

## Policy Number Key

Section CRRT: Criteria and Requirements

Chapter B: Criteria for Accreditation

Part 10: General

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*Last Revised: November 2020*

*First Adopted: February 2012*

*Revision History: June 2013, June 2014, June 2016, September 2017, November 2020*

*Notes: See the Appendix for the previous version of the Assumed Practices that remains in effect only as long as necessary to complete the evaluations of institutions begun under the previous Assumed Practices and until any extensions that HLC granted to institutions for bringing their dual credit faculty into compliance with Assumed Practice B.2. have expired. For all other institutions, the previous Assumed Practices sunset on August 31, 2017. See Appendix A for the immediately preceding version of the Assumed Practices that remains in effect only as long as necessary to complete the evaluations of institutions begun under such Assumed Practices. For all other institutions, the current Assumed Practices apply. Institutions that received HLC extensions to bring their dual credit faculty into compliance with Assumed Practice B.2. are responsible to do so before such extensions have expired. In all other respects, the current Assumed Practices apply to such institutions.*