



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 February 28–March 1, 2019.

Background

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is required by federal regulations and its own policies to initiate a substantive review of its Criteria for Accreditation every five years. Throughout the last two years, HLC conducted an internal analysis, held listening sessions, and analyzed the rigor of team reports, trends across interim reporting and feedback from a survey of member institutions and peer reviewers. These efforts resulted in the alpha version of a Criteria revision, which was published in March 2018. Adjustments were made to the draft Criteria language based on feedback from HLC’s membership. A beta version was sent to HLC’s Board of Trustees in November 2018 and approved as a proposed policy on first reading.

HLC circulated these policy changes to the membership and other interested parties after the Board’s November 2018 meeting. HLC received further input from member institutions and peer reviewers regarding the beta version and made minor changes based on those comments.

HLC has also published a booklet on the revised Criteria that includes a clean version of the policy language (without tracked changes), a crosswalk between the current and revised Criteria, and a glossary of Criteria terminology. It is available on HLC’s website at hlcommission.org/criteria.

Implementation

This policy is effective September 1, 2020.

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**). Changes between first and second reading, other than minor editing, are indicated in bold italics (*new wording*).

Policy Title: **Criteria for Accreditation**
Number: **CRRT.B.10.010**

CRITERION 1. MISSION

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

Core Components

1.A. The institution's mission is **articulated publicly and operationalized throughout the institution** ~~broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations.~~

1. The mission ~~statement is was~~ developed through a process suited to the ~~nature and culture~~ **context** of the institution ~~and is adopted by the governing board.~~
2. The mission ~~document or documents and related statements~~ are current and **explain the extent of reference** the institution's emphasis on the various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, application of research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development, and religious or cultural purpose.
3. The mission ~~document or documents and related statements~~ identify the nature, scope, and intended constituents of the higher education ~~programs offerings~~ and services the institution provides.
4. ~~2.~~ The institution's academic ~~programs offerings~~, student support services, and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.
5. The institution clearly articulates its mission through ~~one or more~~ public information ~~documents~~, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans, or institutional priorities. ~~The institution's planning and budgeting priorities align with and support the mission. (This sub-component may be addressed by reference to the response to Criterion 5.C.1.)~~

1.B. ~~The mission is articulated publicly. The institution's mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.~~

- ~~1. The institution clearly articulates its mission through one or more public documents, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans, or institutional priorities.~~
- ~~2. The mission document or documents are current and explain the extent of the institution's emphasis on the various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research,~~

application of research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development, and religious or cultural purpose.

- ~~3. The mission document or documents identify the nature, scope, and intended constituents of the higher education programs and services the institution provides.~~
1. *The institution's actions **Actions** and decisions demonstrate ~~that as part of its educational role the institution serves the public; not solely its educational role is to serve the public, not solely the institution or any superordinate entity, and thus entails a public obligation.~~*
2. The institution's educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.
3. The institution engages with its ~~identified~~ external constituencies and communities of interest and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.

1.C. The institution ~~understands the relationship between its mission and the~~ provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural ~~diversity of society and globally-connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.~~

1. The institution ~~addresses its role in a multicultural society~~ encourages *learning curricular or cocurricular activities that prepare students for informed citizenship and workplace success.*
2. The institution's processes and activities ~~demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations reflect attention to human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.~~
3. The institution fosters a climate of respect among all students, faculty, staff and administrators from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.

1.D. ~~The institution's mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.~~

1. ~~Actions and decisions reflect an understanding that in its educational role the institution serves the public, not solely the institution, and thus entails a public obligation.~~
2. ~~The institution's educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.~~
3. ~~The institution engages with its identified external constituencies and communities of interest and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.~~

CRITERION 2. INTEGRITY: ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

Core Components

2.A. The institution ~~operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it~~ establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure ~~for~~ fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff.

1. **The institution develops and the governing board adopts the mission.**
2. **The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, human resources and auxiliary functions.**

2.B. The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public ~~with regard to its programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control, and accreditation relationships.~~

1. **The institution ensures the accuracy of any representations it makes regarding academic offerings, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, governance structure and accreditation relationships.**
2. **The institution ensures evidence is available to support any claims it makes regarding its contributions to the educational experience through research, community engagement, *service experiential* learning, religious or spiritual purpose and economic development.**

2.C. The governing board of the institution is ~~sufficiently~~ autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution's ~~and to assure its~~ integrity.

1. **The governing board is trained and knowledgeable so that it makes informed decisions *about the institution; it provides direction of* with respect to the institution's financial and academic policies and practices ~~and; the board~~ meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.**
2. ~~1-~~ The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.
3. ~~2-~~ The governing board reviews ~~and considers~~ the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.
4. ~~3-~~ The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests, or other external parties ~~when such influence would not be in the best interest of the institution.~~
5. ~~4-~~ The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the **institution's** administration and expects the **institution's** faculty to oversee academic matters.

2.D. The institution is committed to **academic freedom and** freedom of expression ~~and in~~ the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.

2.E. The institution's policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, **staff and** students, ~~and staff.~~

1. **Institutions supporting basic and applied research maintain professional standards and provide oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability.**
2. ~~1-~~ The institution provides effective ~~oversight and~~ support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff, and students.
3. ~~2-~~ **The institution provides** students ~~are offered~~ guidance in the ethics **of research and** ~~al-~~ use of information resources.
4. ~~3-~~ The institution ~~has and~~ enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

CRITERION 3. TEACHING AND LEARNING: QUALITY, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT

The institution provides ~~high-~~ quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

Core Components

3.A. **The rigor of the institution's academic offerings is** ~~degree programs are~~ appropriate to higher education.

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of **student** performance ~~by students~~ appropriate to the **credential** ~~degree or certificate~~-awarded.
2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for its undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate, and certificate programs.
3. The institution's program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).

3.B. The institution **offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments** ~~demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs.~~

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution. **The institution articulates the purposes, content and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements.**
2. ~~The institution articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements.~~ The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.
3. ~~Every degree program~~ **The education** offered by the institution recognizes ~~the~~ human and cultural diversity and provides students with growth opportunities and lifelong skills to live

and work in a diverse-multi-cultural world engages students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; in mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

- ~~4. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity of the world in which students live and work.~~
4. ~~5.~~ The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their ~~programs offerings~~ and the institution's mission.

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

1. **The institution strives to ensure that the overall composition of its faculty and staff reflects human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.**
2. ~~1.~~ The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance, **assessment of student learning**; and establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; ~~involvement in assessment of student learning.~~
3. ~~2.~~ All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial **offerings programs**.
4. ~~3.~~ Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.
5. ~~4.~~ The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.
6. ~~5.~~ Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.
7. ~~6.~~ Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising, and cocurricular activities are appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their professional development.

3.D. The institution provides support for student learning and *resources for* effective teaching.

1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its ~~programs offerings~~ and the needs of its students.
4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories,

libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites, **and** museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).

5. ~~The institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.~~

~~3.E. The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment.~~

1. ~~Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.~~
2. ~~The institution demonstrates any claims it makes about contributions to its students' educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, and economic development.~~

CRITERION 4. TEACHING AND LEARNING: EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

Core Components

~~4.A. The institution demonstrates responsibility for~~ **ensures** the quality of its educational **offerings** ~~programs.~~

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews **and acts upon the findings.**
2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.
3. The institution has policies that **ensure** ~~assure~~ the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It **ensures** ~~assures~~ that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.
5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution **ensures** ~~assures~~ that the **credentials** ~~degree or certificate programs~~ it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission, ~~such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced~~

~~degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and Americorps).~~

4.B. The institution ~~demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through~~ **engages in** ongoing assessment of student learning **as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.**

1. The institution has ~~clearly stated goals for student learning and~~ effective processes for assessment of student learning and **for achievement of learning goals in academic and cocurricular offerings programs.**
- ~~2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.~~
2. ~~3.~~ The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
3. ~~4.~~ The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty, ~~and other instructional and other relevant~~ **staff members.**

4.C. The institution ~~demonstrates a commitment to~~ **pursues** educational improvement through ~~ongoing attention to goals and strategies that improve~~ retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious, ~~but~~ attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

CRITERION 5. INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS, RESOURCES, AND PLANNING

The institution's resources, structures, ~~and~~ **processes and planning** are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. ~~The institution plans for the future.~~

Core Components

5.A. Through its administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution's leadership demonstrates that it is effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission.

1. Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.
2. The institution's administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.
3. The institution's administration, ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.

5.A.B. The institution's resource base supports its ~~current~~ educational offerings programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

1. The institution has **qualified and trained operational staff and infrastructure** ~~the fiscal and human resources and physical and technological infrastructure~~ sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
- ~~2. The institution's resource allocation process ensures that its educational purposes are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations to other areas or disbursement of revenue to a superordinate entity.~~
2. ~~3.~~ The goals incorporated into **the mission and any related** statements ~~or elaborations of mission statements~~ are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources, and opportunities.
- ~~4. The institution's staff in all areas are appropriately qualified and trained.~~
3. ~~5.~~ The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for **monitoring its finances** ~~expense~~.
4. **The institution's fiscal allocations ensure that its educational purposes are achieved.**

~~5.B. The institution's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.~~

1. ~~The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; it provides oversight of the institution's financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.~~
2. ~~The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students—in the institution's governance.~~

- ~~3. Administration, faculty, staff, and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.~~

5.C. The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning **and improvement.**

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities, **including as applicable, its comprehensive research enterprise, associated institutes and affiliated centers.**
2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning and budgeting.
3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity, including, **Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue, such as and enrollment. the economy, and state support.**
5. Institutional planning anticipates ~~emerging~~ **evolving external** factors, such as technology **advancements**, demographic shifts, globalization, **the economy and state support.**
6. **The institution implements its plans to systematically improve its operations and student outcomes.**

~~5.D. The institution works systematically to improve its performance.~~

- ~~1. The institution develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations.~~
- ~~2. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts.~~

Policy History

Last Revised: February 2019

First Adopted: August 1992

Revision History: Criterion 3 revised August 1998; revised February 2002; revised February 2007. New Criteria for Accreditation adopted February 2003, effective January 2005. New Criteria for Accreditation adopted February 2012, effective January 2013; revised June 2013, June 2014. New Criteria for Accreditation adopted February 2019, effective September 2020.