HLC MEMBERSHIP BY THE NUMBERS

Key Findings of the Application of the Criteria for Accreditation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This retrospective analysis of the comprehensive evaluations conducted in the last five years (2017-2021) shows how HLC member institutions have demonstrated their quality by meeting the Criteria for Accreditation. The analysis sheds light on the evolving nature of quality assurance, areas of challenge faced by institutions, as well as HLC's efforts to continuously improve processes and strengthen support for the membership. Below are some takeaways from the analysis.

- During the past five years HLC has conducted 701 comprehensive evaluations of the institutions in the Open, Standard and AQIP Pathways. Accreditation policy changes during this time included the phaseout of the AQIP Pathway completed by August 2020 and the implementation of the revised Criteria for Accreditation starting in September 2020.

- The aggregated outcomes of the comprehensive evaluations indicate that, while most or very high percentages of the institutions had shown evidence of meeting the standards of quality under Criteria 1 and 2, the percentages of evaluations resulting in monitoring were noticeably higher with respect to Criteria 3, 4, and 5.

- During the past five years the proportion of institutions that met the expectations of each Criterion in its entirety without concerns has improved. Notable improvement to Criterion 4 (Teaching and Learning:

Evaluation and Improvement) reflected the enhanced focus on improving student learning and success on campuses, as well as HLC's efforts to support institutions and to ensure consistency in the institutional understanding and peer reviewer evaluation.

- Evaluative results by Core Components of the Criteria for Accreditation provide important information on focus areas for improvement. The persistence of the top 5 most cited Core Components in the recent years underscores the ongoing challenges for many institutions in assessing and improving student learning (4B), ensuring the quality of educational offerings (4A), developing qualified faculty and staff (3C), strengthening the resource base (5B), and planning for long-term sustainability and improvement (5C).

- Close examination of the most cited Core Components and trends over time helps guide HLC in enhancing resources, peer corps training and programming activities to meet the needs of member institutions.

A description of HLC's comprehensive evaluation process is available on our website at https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/comprehensive-evaluation.html

Adhered to the Guiding Values, HLC is committed to strengthening the comprehensive evaluation process to ensure that the process leads to meaningful results, advances educational quality, improves student success, and strengthens institutions of higher education.

OUTCOMES

Among the 701 comprehensive evaluations that occurred between 2017 and 2021, 511 were comprehensive evaluations for reaffirmation of accreditation (73%) and 109 were Year 4 comprehensive evaluations (27%). The evaluations were conducted among 671 institutions, 30 of which had both Year 4 and Year 10 comprehensive evaluations.

Academic year 2020-2021 was the first year in which the AQIP Pathway was completely phased out. As shown in the chart below, the number of comprehensive evaluations that took place each year ranged from 104 in Academic Year 2021 to 166 in Academic Year 2017. This large decrease in the number of scheduled evaluations over time may be attributed to sunsetting of the AQIP Pathway, which operated on a shorter cycle (eight years as opposed to 10) resulting in higher frequency of evaluations.

In September 2020 the revised Criteria for Accreditation went into effect, involving several changes in the Core Components. In this report, the evaluative results by Core Component have been recoded to reflect the revised Criteria. The recoding of the Core Components facilitates a consistent interpretation of the outcomes that are comparable across the period of the analysis.
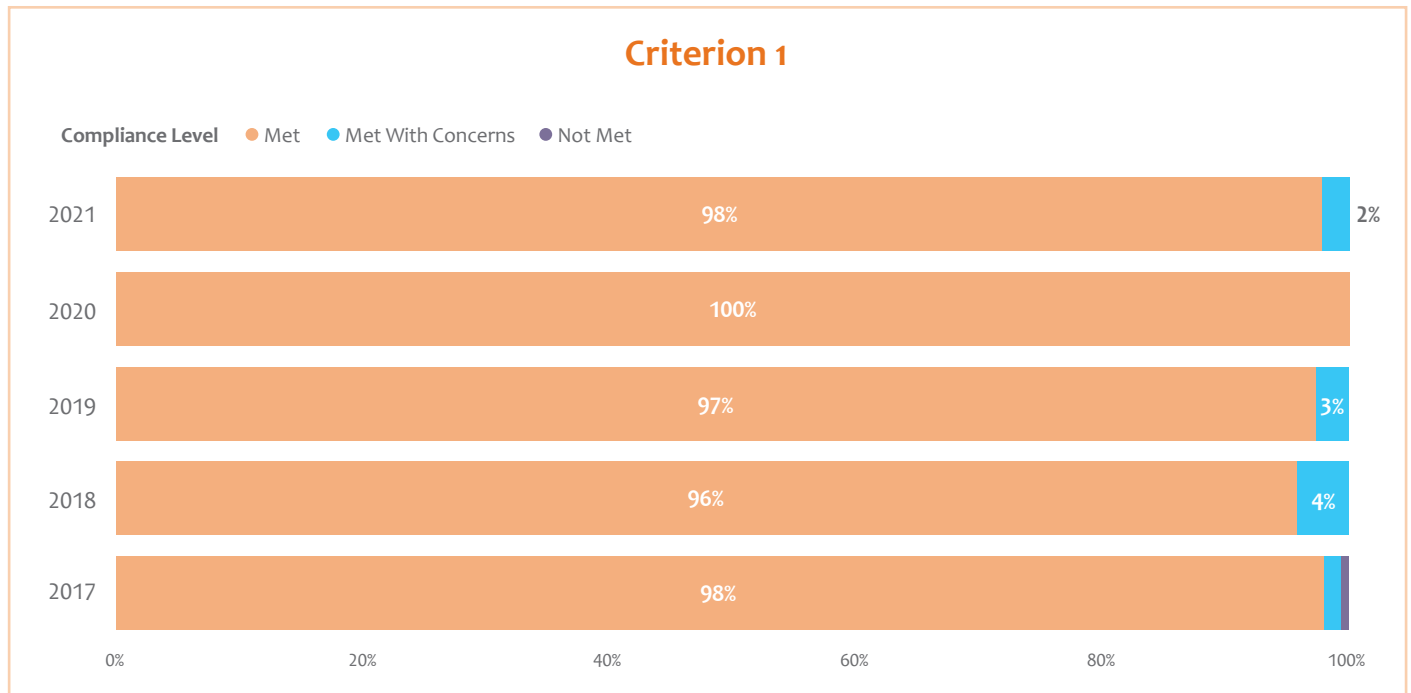
MEETING THE CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION

In this section the outcomes of comprehensive evaluations are examined by the Criteria for Accreditation and their Core Components.

Number of Scheduled Comprehensive Evaluations by Pathway
Academic Years (AY) 2017-2021

Legend: AQIP Pathway, Open Pathway, Standard Pathway, Total
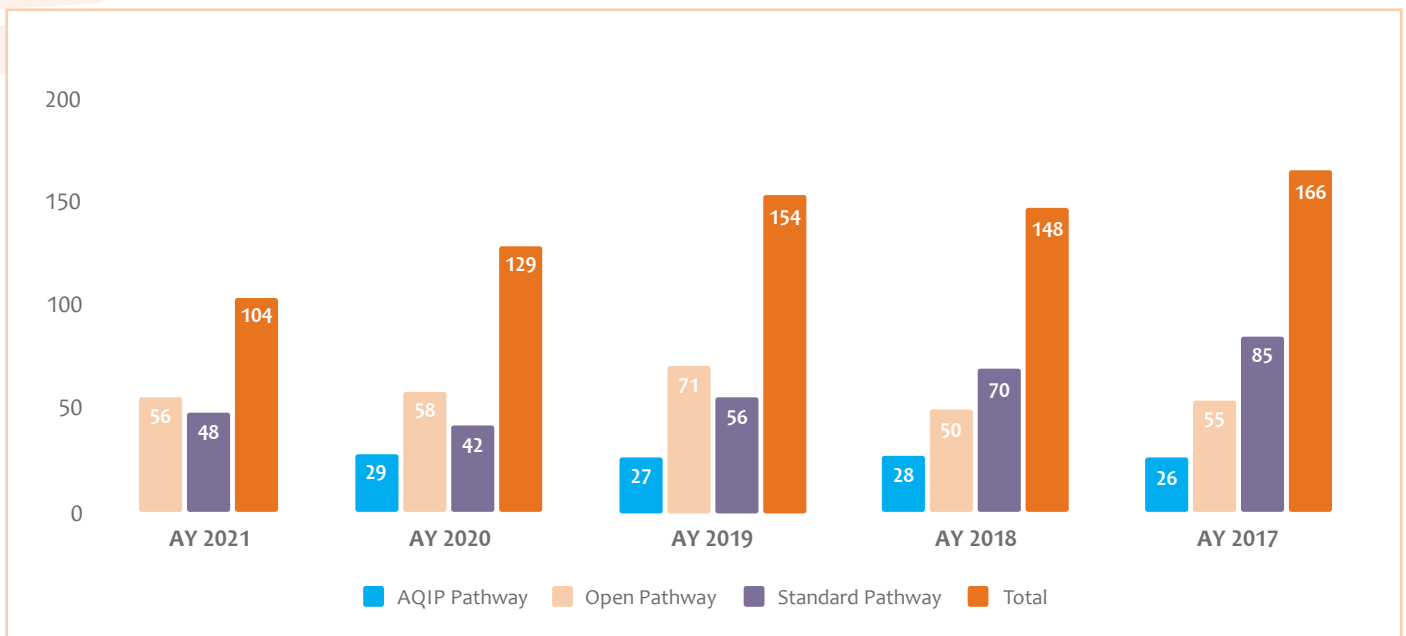
Criterion 1. Mission

For the most part, member institutions have consistently demonstrated evidence of meeting the standards of quality under this Criterion. As indicated in the graph below, the percentage of institutions meeting the Criterion in its entirety without concerns was in the range of 96% to 100%. In the past 5 years, only a handful of member institutions came under scrutiny for failing to meet one or more aspects of Criterion 1 or for meeting the Criterion but with concerns.

Criterion 1

Compliance Level ● Met ● Met With Concerns ● Not Met

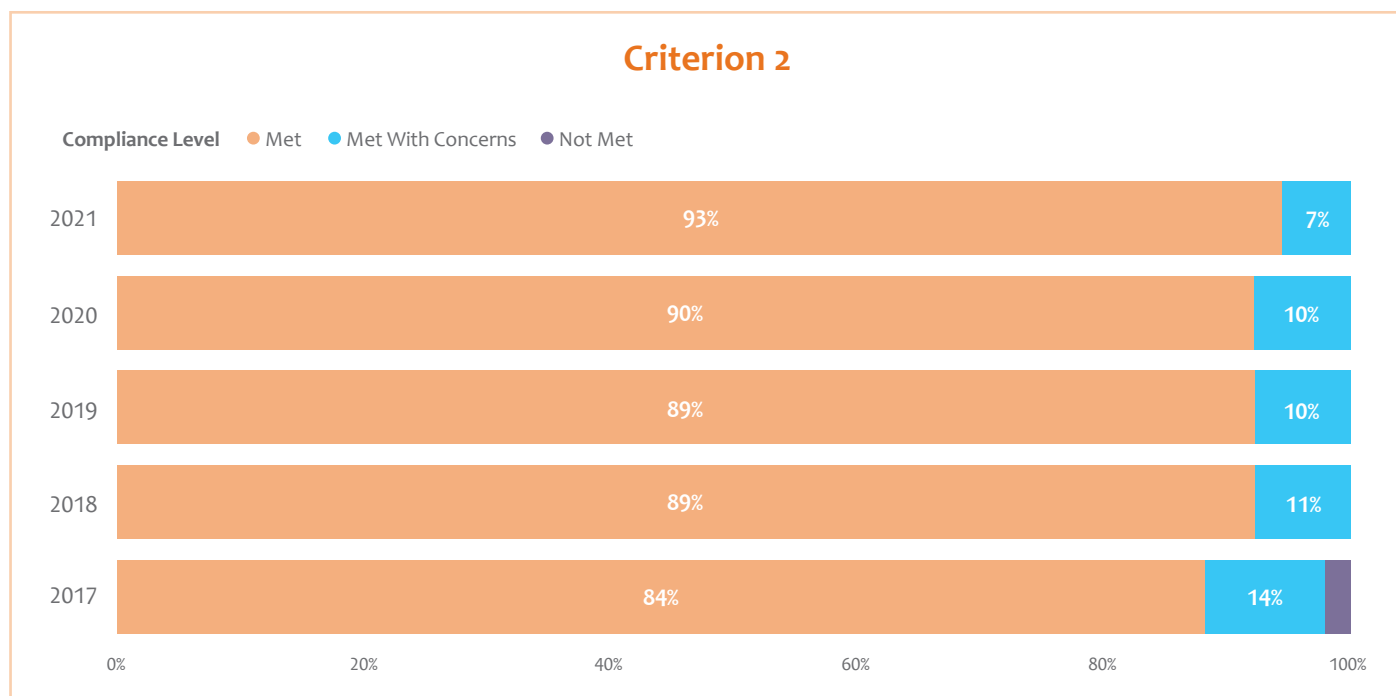| Year	Met	Met With Concerns
2021	98%	2%
2020	100%	
2019	97%	3%
2018	96%	4%
2017	98%	

An examination of the identified areas of concern shows that Core Components 1A and 1C were cited more than Core Component 1B. Citations with regards to Criterion 1 were few, examples of which include cases when institutional resources were not allocated equitably across student populations or when the evidence indicated a misalignment between the stated mission and operations of the institution.

Criterion 1 Core Component Short Description	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1A Mission publicly articulated and operationalized	**2**	**3**	**2**		
Met With Concerns	1	3	2		
Not Met	1				
1B Mission and public good	**1**	**1**			
Met With Concerns	1	1			
1C Mission and diversity of society	**1**	**2**	**2**		**2**
Met With Concern	1	2	2		2
Total Number of Institutions with a Citation	**3**	**6**	**4**		**2**

Table 1. Number of "Met With Concerns" or "Not Met" by Core Component, AY 2017-2021

Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

HLC member institutions are required to act with integrity and conduct themselves ethically and responsibly. Results show that the proportion of institutions meeting the expectations underlying Criterion 2 without concerns has gradually increased over the past 5 years. In Academic Year 2021 this proportion was 93%, a gain of nearly 9 percentage points in comparison to Academic Year 2017. Correspondingly, the proportion of institutions that were evaluated as "met with concerns" or "not met" dropped from 16% in 2017 to 7% in 2021.

Criterion 2

Compliance Level   ● Met   ● Met With Concerns   ● Not Met

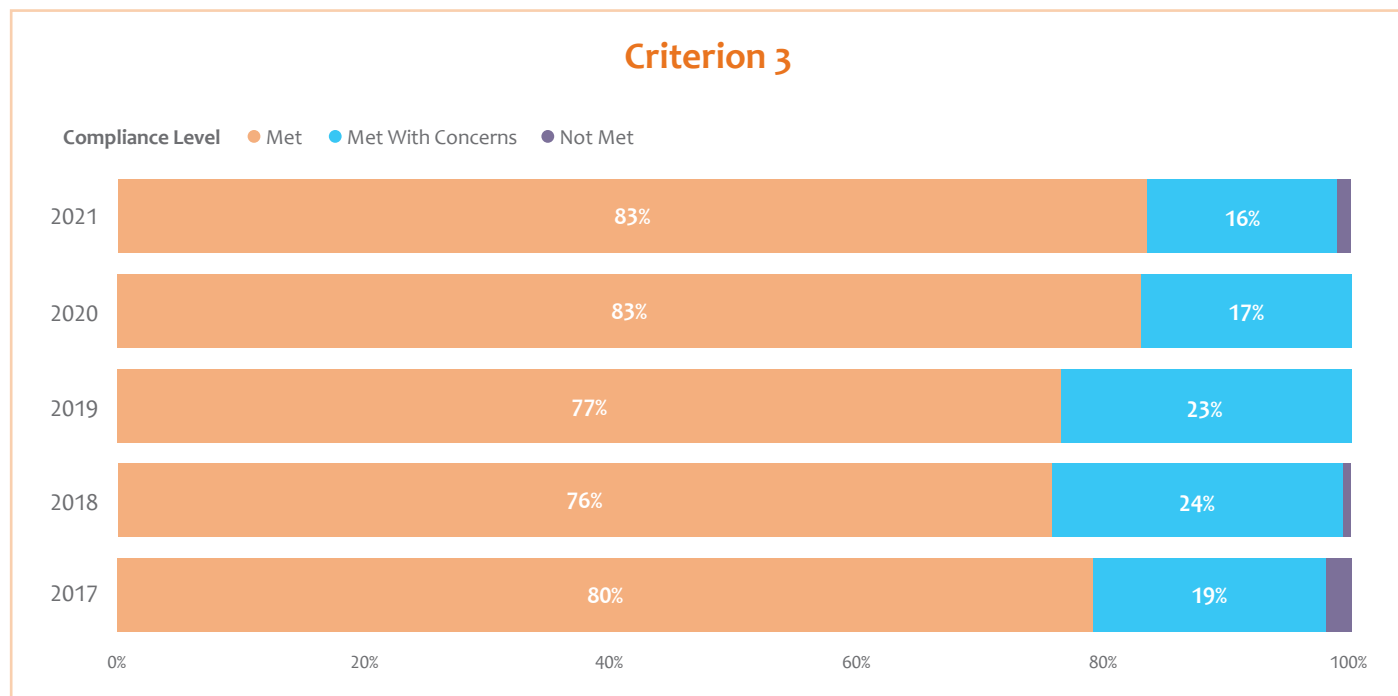| Year	Met	Met With Concerns
2021	93%	7%
2020	90%	10%
2019	89%	10%
2018	89%	11%
2017	84%	14%

Among the Core Components of the Criterion 2, Core Components 2A, 2B, and 2C have received the majority of citations in comparison to Core Components 2D and 2E. Although few institutions received a citation in this area, ensuring the autonomy of the governing board (Core Component 2C) continues to be an important issue.

Criterion 2 Core Component Short Description	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
2A Integrity	**14**	**9**	**12**	**3**	**3**
Met With Concerns	14	9	11	3	3
Not Met			1		
2B Transparency	**6**	**4**	**5**	**7**	**2**
Met With Concerns	5	4	5	7	2
Not Met	1				
2C Academic freedom and freedom of expression	**11**	**4**	**5**	**4**	**3**
Met With Concerns	8	4	4	4	3
Not Met	3		1		
2D Academic freedom and freedom of expression	**1**		**1**		
Met With Concern	1		1		
2E Knowledge acquisition, discovery & application	**4**	**2**	**2**		
Met With Concerns	4	2	2		
Total Number of Institutions with a Citation	**26**	**16**	**17**	**13**	**2**

Table 2. Number of "Met With Concerns" or "Not Met" by Core Component, AY 2017-2021

The data related to Criterion 3 indicates a slight shift in the past 5 years. In Academic Year 2021, 83% of the institutions met the expectations of Criterion 3 without concerns, an increase of about 3% from Academic Year 2017. In addition, of the completed evaluations in Academic Year 2021, 16% of institutions were cited for meeting Criterion 3 with concerns and one institution did not meet the expectations of Criterion 3.

Criterion 3

Compliance Level ● Met ● Met With Concerns ● Not Met

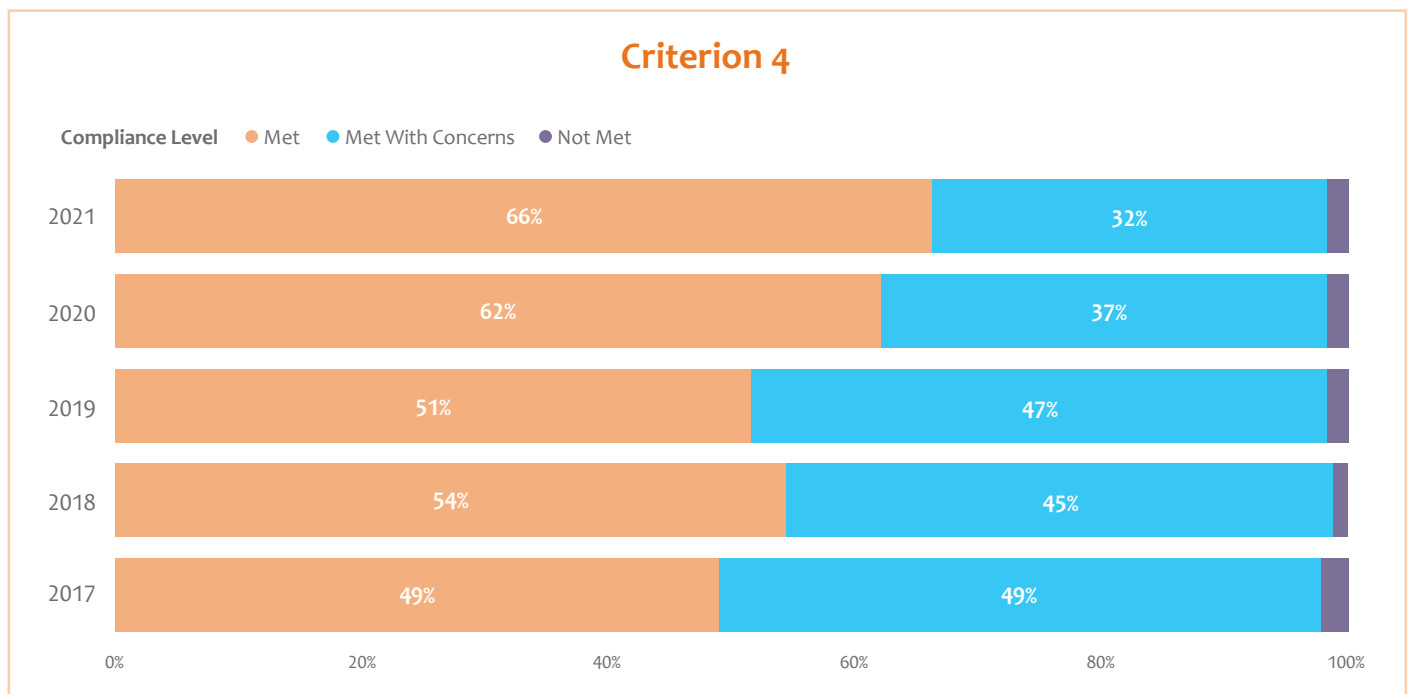| Year	Met	Met With Concerns
2021	83%	16%
2020	83%	17%
2019	77%	23%
2018	76%	24%
2017	80%	19%

Since Academic Year 2018 the number of citations with regards to Criterion 3 were led by Core Components 3C, followed by Core Components 3A, 3B and 3D. The main area for improvement under Core Component 3C is to meet the faculty qualification requirements as outlined in the Assumed Practices. Specifically, institutions were cited for the lack of evidence regarding documentation processes, policy development and application, and/or system sustainability relative to faculty qualifications.

Criterion 3 Core Component Short Description	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
3A Academic offerings appropriate to higher education	**20**	**15**	**16**	**8**	**6**
Met With Concerns	19	14	16	8	6
Not Met	1	1			
3B Exercise of intelligence inquiry integral to programs	**5**	**6**	**6**	**3**	**2**
Met With Concerns	5	6	6	3	2
3C Sufficiency of faculty and staff	**13**	**20**	**19**	**12**	**11**
Met With Concerns	11	20	19	12	10
Not Met	2				1
3D Support for student learning and effective teaching	**3**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Met With Concerns	3	3	1	1	
Not Met					1
Total Number of Institutions with a Citation	**34**	**36**	**36**	**22**	**17**

Table 3. Number of "Met With Concerns" or "Not Met" by Core Component, AY 2017-2021

Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The trend data on Criterion 4 indicates a significant improvement over the 5-year period. Specifically, two thirds (66%) of the institutions undergoing comprehensive evaluations in Academic Year 2021 met the expectations of the Criterion without concerns, a gain of about 17 percentage points from the level in Academic Year 2017. This gain happened over time and not in a straight line, as there was a decline in Academic Year 2019 followed by a rebound of 11 percentage point gain in Academic Year 2020. Related to the improvement mentioned above was the reduction in the proportion of the institutions evaluated as "met with concerns" or "not met", down from 51% in Academic Year 2017 to 34% in Academic Year 2021.

Criterion 4

Compliance Level ● Met ● Met With Concerns ● Not Met

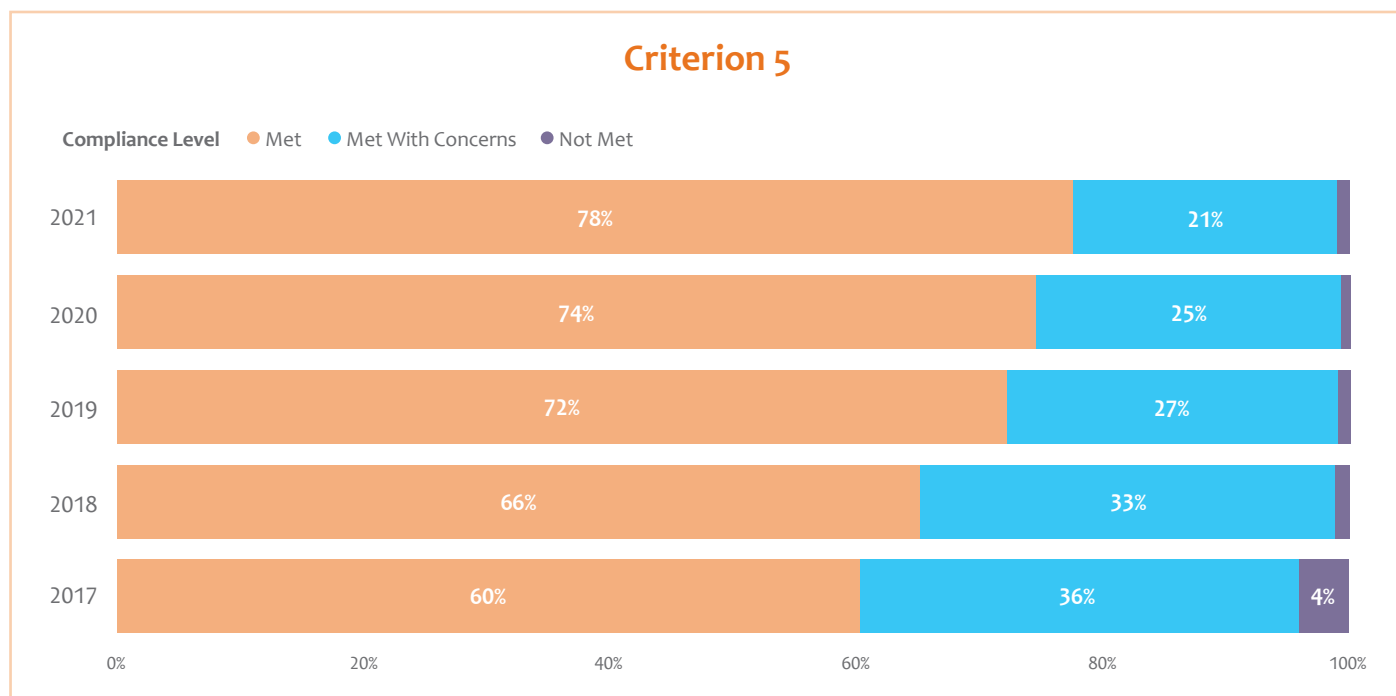| Year	Met	Met With Concerns
2021	66%	32%
2020	62%	37%
2019	51%	47%
2018	54%	45%
2017	49%	49%

Among the three Core Components of Criterion 4, 4B (assessment of student learning) has consistently been at the top based on the number of "Met With Concerns" or "Not Met". The proportion of institutions receiving a citation in 4B has decreased in recent years. In Academic Year 2021 this proportion was 28%, down nearly 7 percentage points from previous year's level.

Criterion 4 Core Component Short Description	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
4A Ensuring quality of educational offerings	**35**	**26**	**38**	**11**	**12**
Met With Concerns	33	25	38	10	11
Not Met	2	1		1	1
4B Assessment of student learning	**68**	**54**	**65**	**45**	**29**
Met With Concerns	66	52	63	44	27
Not Met	2	2	2	1	2
4C Persistence, retention, and completion outcomes	**24**	**22**	**11**	**8**	**6**
Met With Concerns	21	21	11	8	5
Not Met	3	1			1
Total Number of Institutions with a Citation	**85**	**68**	**75**	**49**	**35**

Table 4. Number of "Met With Concerns" or "Not Met" by Core Component, AY 2017-2021

Criterion 5. Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

In Academic Year 2021 the proportion of institutions meeting the expectations of Criterion 5 without concerns was 78%, a gain of 18 percentage points in comparison to Academic Year 2017. This overall gain was achieved in a relatively short time through a series of yearly jumps, including 6 percentage points in Academic Years 2018 and 2019, followed by 2 percentage points in Academic Year 2020 and 4 percentage point in Academic Year 2021.

Criterion 5

Compliance Level   ● Met   ● Met With Concerns   ● Not Met

Year	Met	Met With Concerns	Not Met
2021	78%	21%	
2020	74%	25%	
2019	72%	27%	
2018	66%	33%	
2017	60%	36%	4%

The issues cited under Criterion 5 are often crucial to the viability and sustainability of the institution such as having sufficient resources to support future operations or long-term planning to address financial concerns. The trend data by Core Component in the last 5 years shows that the citations were mostly found among Core Components 5B and 5C. In Academic Year 2021 Core Components 5B and 5C had nearly four times the number of citations that Core Component 5A received.

Criterion 5 Core Component Short Description	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
5A Effective governance and administrative structures	**16**	**9**	**11**	**6**	**4**
Met With Concerns	13	9	11	6	4
Not Met	3				
5B Resource base	**40**	**29**	**22**	**15**	**15**
Met With Concerns	33	29	21	14	15
Not Met	7		1	1	
5C Systematic and integrated planning & improvement	**39**	**33**	**27**	**21**	**15**
Met With Concerns	36	31	27	20	14
Not Met	3	2		1	1
Total Number of Institutions with a Citation	**66**	**51**	**43**	**33**	**23**

Table 5. Number of "Met With Concerns" or "Not Met" by Core Component, AY 2017-2021

MOST CITED CORE COMPONENTS OF THE CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION

The table below shows the trend in the most frequently cited Core Components based on the combined percentage of "Met With Concerns" and "Not Met" results in the past five years. While Core Component 4B has consistently been the top area of concern, the proportion of institutions with citations in 4B in Academic Year 2020-21 was 28%, a decline of 14 percentage points from the highest level in Academic Year 2019. In addition to 4B, Core Components 5B, 5C, 4A, 4C, and 3C have also been among the Top 5 most cited within this 5-year period. Notably, the Top 5 most cited Core Components were the same in the last three years, even though the rank order based on the proportion of citations might differ.

TABLE 6

Top 5 Core Components by Percent of "Met with Concerns" or "Not Met"
Academic Years 2017-2021

RANK/YEAR	AY 2021	AY 2020	AY 2019	AY 2018	AY 2017
Rank 1	**4B** 28.2%	**4B** 34.9%	**4B** 42.2%	**4B** 36.5%	**4B** 41.0%
Rank 2	**5B** 14.6%	**5C** 16.3%	**4A** 24.7%	**5C** 22.3%	**5B** 24.1%
Rank 3	**5C** 14.6%	**5B** 11.6%	**5C** 17.5%	**5B** 19.6%	**5C** 23.5%
Rank 4	**4A** 11.7%	**3C** 9.3%	**5B** 14.3%	**4A** 17.6%	**4A** 21.1%
Rank 5	**3C** 10.7%	**4A** 8.5%	**3C** 12.3%	**4C** 14.9%	**4C** 14.5%

Note: Evaluation results by Core Component were recoded to reflect the Revised Criteria which became effective in September 2020. *Data for AY 2021 was based on the completed evaluations (n=103, 99%).*

The persistence of the top 5 most cited core components underscores the ongoing challenges for many institutions in assessing and improving student learning, ensuring the quality of educational offerings, developing qualified faculty and staff, strengthening the resource base, and planning for long-term sustainability and improvement.

HLC'S RESOURCES AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

RESOURCES SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

HLC provides support resources for institutions including Assurance System training, guidance on Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation, Sample Assurance Arguments, webinars on Criteria for Accreditation, as well as the Accreditation Workshop and Standard Pathway Seminar.

In a recent Member Survey conducted by HLC, most respondents expressed satisfaction (either "extremely satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied") with the resources. A range of 85% to 93% of the respondents were satisfied with Assurance System training, guidance on Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation, Sample Assurance Arguments, or Accreditation Workshop, while 81% were satisfied with the Standard Pathway Seminar.

In addition, training resources for Accreditation Liaison Officers (ALOs), especially orientation workshops and materials for new ALOs, have been revamped and frequently evaluated for improvement.

INITIATIVES UNDER HLC'S EVOLVE 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

As Core Component 4B has been the most cited area for concern in recent years, an Assessment Task Force was formed in December 2019 to help HLC fully understand the current challenges in assessment practices and improve the consistency and clarity of HLC communication and guidance on the topic of assessment. Among the task force members were Assessment Academy scholars and mentors, leaders of the Peer Corps, and HLC staff members.

Working through the first year of the pandemic and the early part of 2021, the task force examined a sampling of institutional Assurance Arguments, peer review reports, evaluations by decision-making bodies, Academy and Peer Corps training materials, HLC communications related to outcomes assessment, and reviewed trends in assessment and student learning in higher education.

As a result, the task force has produced a plan for HLC to improve consistency in the evaluation of Criterion 4, particularly Core Component 4B, and expand programmatic and training support for peer reviewers and institutional practitioners. Implementation of the Assessment Task Force's plan will be a significant effort and will align with other related efforts under the EVOLVE 2025 strategic plan. The task force will continue its work on developing and enhancing assessment-related resources.

PEER CORPS TRAINING AND EVALUATION

HLC staff members will continue to strengthen engagement with the Peer Corps to ensure common understanding and consistent application of the Criteria for Accreditation in practice. The work by the Assessment Task Force has begun to inform peer reviewers' training and have shown an overall positive effect on evaluation of Core Component 4B in 2021.

ELECTIVE PROGRAMS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HLC has continued to develop and offer a wide range of resources, educational programming and training activities for institutional representatives, peer reviewers, and IAC members. HLC has added Workshops on Effective Administrators and Advancing Strategy, a new Speaker Series on a wide range of topics including Financial Sustainability, Strategic Enrollment Management, Business Models, and Strategic Partnerships, as well as additional programming on curricular and co-curricular assessment of student learning. HLC continues to explore ways to engage institutions through training resources and elective programming activities.