



Key Findings of the Application of the Criteria for Accreditation

Academic Year 2023

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Executive Summary

Based on the findings from the comprehensive evaluations conducted in academic year (AY) 2023, September 2022 – August 2023, this analysis addresses the differences across institutional contexts, examines how the Criteria for Accreditation work for HLC member institutions over the years, and explores the areas of challenge. Key takeaways from the analysis include:

- The overall outcomes of the AY 2023 comprehensive evaluations were consistent with the improvement trend in recent years. The proportion of HLC institutions meeting the standards of quality under the Criteria for Accreditation without concerns has increased 9 percentage points, compared to AY 2019.
- The most frequently cited Core Components in AY 2023 have followed a persistent pattern established in the last five years, which included 3.C (sufficiency of faculty and staff), 4.A (ensuring quality of educational offerings), 4.B (assessment of student learning), 5.B (resource base), and 5.C (systematic and integrated planning and improvement).
- Core Component 4.B continued to be the most frequently cited area of concern, with citations in 27% of all the comprehensive evaluations. The proportion of institutions cited on Core Component 4.B has decreased 6 percentage points from last year, continuing a noticeable downward trend in the last five years.

An examination of the most frequently cited Core Components by Carnegie Classification provides further information on the specific areas of challenge by institutional sector. The insights gained from this analysis of comprehensive evaluations help guide HLC's efforts to revise the Criteria for Accreditation and strengthen support and resources to meet the membership's needs.

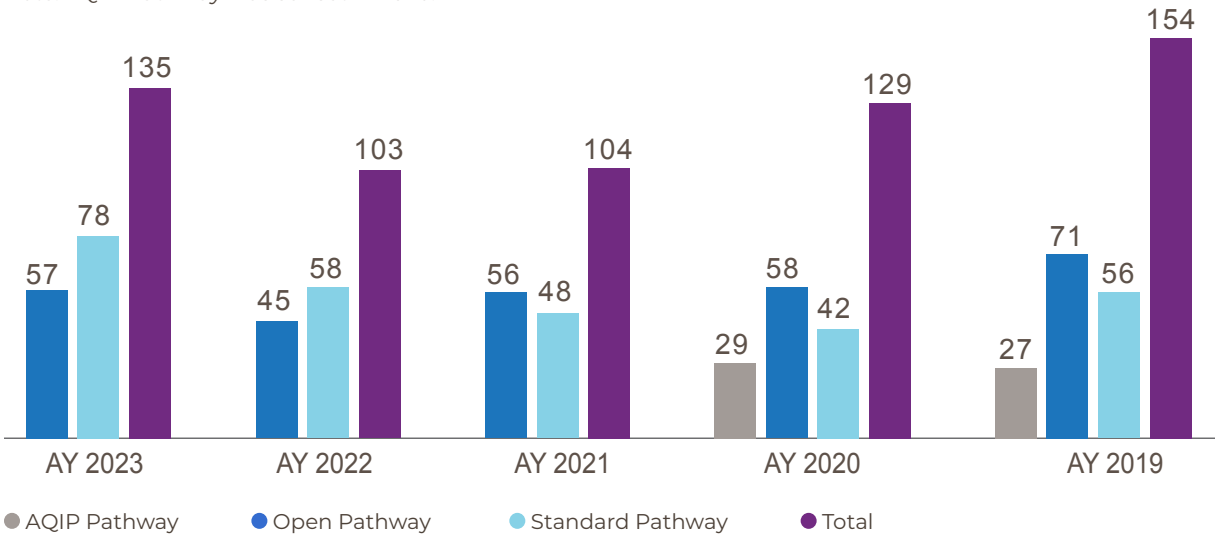
Overview

In AY 2023 HLC conducted 135 comprehensive evaluations, of which 57 (42%) were in Open Pathway and 78 (58%) institutions were in Standard Pathway (see Figure 1). Among the institutions, 108 (80%) were evaluated for reaffirmation of accreditation and 27 (20%) were evaluated for continuation of accreditation (Year 4).

Figure 1

Number of Scheduled Comprehensive Evaluations by Pathway, AY 2019 – AY 2023

Note: AQIP Pathway was sunset in 2020.



The distribution of evaluated institutions by control slightly skewed toward private not-for-profit (NFP) institutions (n=67, 50% of total), compared to their share of membership (44% of total). Public institutions accounted for 44% of the comprehensive evaluations in AY 2023 (n=59), followed by private for-profit (n=5, 4%) and tribal colleges (n=4, 3%).

The distribution of evaluated institutions by Carnegie Classification¹ showed that baccalaureate colleges was the largest group (n=46, 34% of the total), followed by associate’s colleges (n=35, 26%), master’s institutions (n=31, 23%), doctoral (n=9, 7%), doctoral/professional universities (n=10, 7%), and tribal colleges (n=4, 3%). This distribution varied slightly from the overall membership composition, where associate’s colleges account for 34%, baccalaureate 28%, master’s 22%, doctoral 8%, doctoral/professional 5%, and tribal institutions 3%.

¹ Please note that the Carnegie Classifications of institutions with similar attributes were consolidated into “groups” to facilitate the presentation of data in this paper. Specifically, associate’s colleges, in this report, included associate’s, baccalaureate/associate’s, and special focus two-year colleges; and baccalaureate colleges included baccalaureate and special focus four-year colleges. All other Classifications were unchanged. For more information on the Carnegie Classifications, please visit [Carnegie Classifications | Basic Classification](#).

Outcomes

Please note: The outcomes reflect all the comprehensive evaluations conducted in AY 2023, except one which does not have a final decision at the time of publishing.

The outcomes of the 134 completed comprehensive evaluations in AY 2023 are:

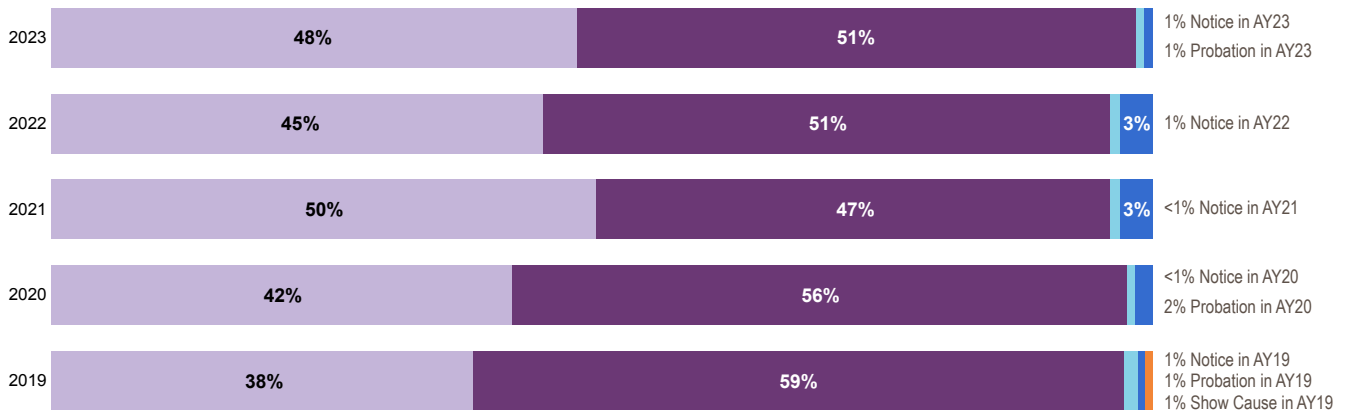
- 64 institutions (48%) continued accreditation,
- 68 institutions (51%) continued accreditation with concerns and were assigned interim monitoring, and
- Two institutions (1%) were placed on sanction, including one on Notice and one on Probation.

In comparison to the evaluation outcomes in AY 2022, as seen in Figure 2, the proportion of institutions that met the Criteria increased 3 percentage points. Conversely, the proportion of institutions with assigned interim monitoring decreased nearly a percentage point and the proportion of institutions placed on sanction (Notice or Probation) decreased 2 percentage points.

Figure 2

Overall Evaluation Outcomes of Comprehensive Evaluations, AY 2019 – AY 2023

Evaluation Outcome ● Accredited ● Accredited with Montioring ● Notice ● Probation ● Show Cause



In the context of the most recent five-year data trend, evaluation outcomes have improved as the proportion of institutions that were found in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation increased 9 percentage points (from 38.3% to 47.7%), and the proportions of those with assigned interim monitoring decreased 8 percentage points (from 59% to 51%) since AY 2019.

Evaluation Outcomes by Carnegie Classification

A breakdown of AY 2023 evaluation outcomes by Carnegie Classification, shown in Figure 3, indicates that the proportion of institutions that were found in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation was highest among doctoral institutions (n=8, 89%), followed by master’s (n=17, 55%), associate’s colleges (n=17, 50%), and others.

On the other hand, the proportion of institutions that were assigned interim monitoring was highest among tribal colleges (n=3, 75%), followed by baccalaureate and special-focus 4-year colleges (n=28, 61%), doctoral/professional institutions (n=6, 60%), associate’s colleges (n=16, 47%), master’s institutions (n=14, 45%), and doctoral institutions (n=1, 11%). Of the institutions that were placed on sanction, one associate’s college (3% of this group) was placed on Notice and one baccalaureate college (2%) was placed on Probation.

Figure 3

Evaluation Outcomes by Carnegie Classification, AY 2023

Carnegie Classification Group	Accredited		Accredited w Monitoring		Notice		Probation		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Associate's	17	50%	16	47%	1	3%			34	100%
Baccalaureate	17	37%	28	61%			1	2%	46	100%
Master's	17	55%	14	45%					31	100%
Doctoral	8	89%	1	11%					9	100%
Doctoral/Professional	4	40%	6	60%					10	100%
Tribal Colleges	1	25%	3	75%					4	100%
Total	64	48%	68	51%	1	<1%	1	<1%	134	100%

Figure 4 below provides a visual summary of evaluation outcomes in the last three years for comparison within and across Carnegie Classifications.

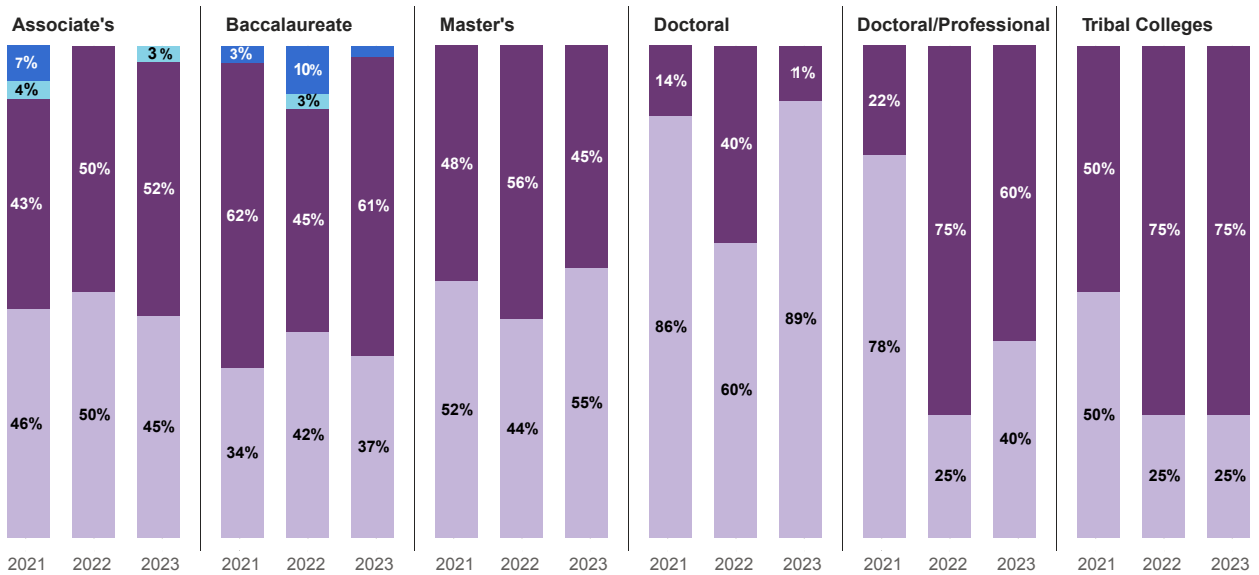
As indicated in Figure 4, the proportion of associate's colleges that met the Criteria for Accreditation was in the range of 45% to 50%, while the same measure among baccalaureate and special focus 4-year colleges was lower by 8 percentage points in the last two years, namely in the range of 37% to 42%. The proportion of master's institutions that met the Criteria gained 11 percentage points over the previous year, moving from 44% to 55% in AY 2023.

The 3-year trend data in Figure 4 also showed that doctoral institutions have consistently had the highest proportion of institutions that meet the Criteria (89% in AY 2023), while the same measure among doctoral/professional institutions had fluctuated widely, decreasing from 78% in AY 2020 to 40% in AY 2023. Evaluation outcomes of tribal colleges were consistent in the last two years, with 3 out of 4 colleges (75%) assigned interim monitoring.

Figure 4

Evaluation Outcomes by Carnegie Classification, AY 2021 – AY 2023

Compliance Rating ● Met ● Met With Concerns ● Not Met



Evaluation Outcomes by Core Components of the Criteria for Accreditation

Figure 5 provides a summary of the AY 2023 evaluation findings on each Core Component of the Criteria for Accreditation.

Figure 5

Evaluation Outcomes by Core Component of Criteria for Accreditation, AY 2023

Compliance Rating	Met		Met With Concerns		Not Met		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1A Mission publicly articulated and operationalized	134	100%					134	100%
1B Mission and public good	134	100%					134	100%
1C Mission and diversity of society	134	100%					134	100%
2A Integrity	128	96%	6	4%			134	100%
2B Transparency	133	99%	1	1%			134	100%
2C Sufficient Board autonomy	131	98%	3	2%			134	100%
2D Academic freedom and freedom of expression	134	100%					134	100%
2E Knowledge acquisition, discovery & application	134	100%					134	100%
3A Academic offerings appropriate to higher education	127	95%	7	5%			134	100%
3B Exercise of intellectual inquiry integral to programs	132	99%	2	1%			134	100%
3C Sufficiency of faculty and staff	122	91%	12	9%			134	100%
3D Support for student learning and effective teaching	131	98%	3	2%			134	100%
4A Ensuring quality of educational offerings	124	93%	10	7%			134	100%
4B Assessment of student learning	98	73%	36	27%			134	100%
4C Persistence, retention, and completion outcomes	125	93%	9	7%			134	100%
5A Effective governance and administrative structures	126	94%	8	6%			134	100%
5B Resource base	118	88%	15	11%	1	1%	134	100%
5C Systematic and integrated planning & improvement	118	88%	16	12%			134	100%

As indicated in Figure 5, all institutions (100%) Met Core Components 1.A, 1.B, 1.c, 2.D, and 2.E. Aside from that, the percent of institutions evaluated as “Met with concerns” or “Not Met” ranged from a low of 1% (in Core Components 1.A, 2.D) to a high of 27% (in Core Component 4.B). The higher frequency in citations, namely at or above 7% of the total evaluations, occurred in six Core Components.

Most Frequently Cited Core Components

In AY 2023 the most frequently cited Core Components, based on the number and proportion of findings as “Met with concerns” or “Not Met”, included the following:

- 4.B Assessment of student learning (n=36, 27%)
- 5.B Resource base (n=16, 12%)
- 5.C Systematic and integrated planning and improvement (n=16, 12%)
- 3.C Sufficiency of faculty and staff (n=12, 9%)
- 4.A Ensuring quality of educational offerings (n=10, 7%)

As in recent years, Core Component 4.B was the most frequently cited area of concern. The proportion of Core Component 4.B citations decreased 6 percentage points from last year’s level, continuing a noticeable downward trend in the last five years.

As indicated in Figure 6, the five most frequently cited Core Components in AY 2023, have been consistent with the trend established in the past five years.

Figure 6

Most Frequently Cited Core Components, AY 2019 – AY 2023

Rank/Year	AY 2023	AY 2022	AY 2021	AY 2020	AY 2019
Rank 1	4B 26.9%	4B 33.0%	4B 28.2%	4B 34.9%	4B 42.2%
Rank 2	5B 11.9%	5B 16.5%	5B 14.6%	5C 16.3%	4A 24.7%
Rank 3	5C 11.9%	5C 15.5%	5C 14.6%	5B 11.6%	5C 17.5%
Rank 4	3C 9.0%	4A 12.6%	4A 11.7%	3C 9.3%	5B 14.3%
Rank 5	4A 7.5%	3C & 4C 8.7%	3C 10.7%	4A 8.5%	4A 12.3%

(*) Evaluative results by Core Component prior to AY 2021 have been recoded to reflect the current Criteria

(**) Ranking order in AY 2022-23 was based on the completed evaluations (99% of total).

Most Frequently Cited Core Components by Carnegie Classification

A breakdown of the most frequently cited Core Components by Carnegie Classification provides institutional context of the areas of challenge institutions are facing. The analysis explores the most frequently cited Core Components in AY 2023, starting with Core Component 4.B. The reader should continue to bear in mind the small number of doctoral, doctoral/professional, and tribal institutions when considering the reported percentages in the analysis by Carnegie Classification.

Core Component 4.B

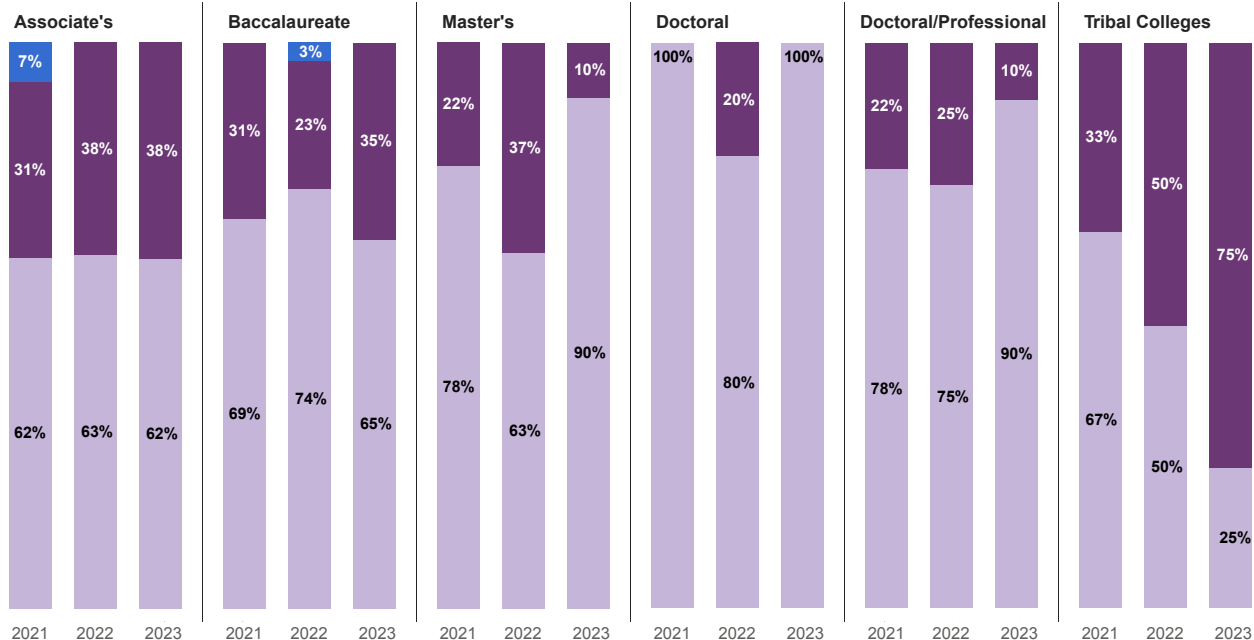
As noted in Figure 7, the frequency of citations in 4.B varied across Carnegie Classifications over the last three years (AY 2021 to 2023). The frequency of citations among associate's colleges remained level around 38%. While baccalaureate colleges had a 4 percentage-point increase in citations (from 31% to 35%), the citations decreased from 22% to 10% among master's institutions, as well as from 22% to 10% among doctoral/professional institutions in this 3-year period. In AY 2023, all doctoral institutions were in full compliance with the Core Component, while 75% (3 out of 4) of tribal colleges received citations in 4.B.

Figure 7

Core Component 4.B by Carnegie Classification, AY 2021 – AY 2023

4.B Assessment of student learning

Compliance Rating ● Met ● Met With Concerns ● Not Met



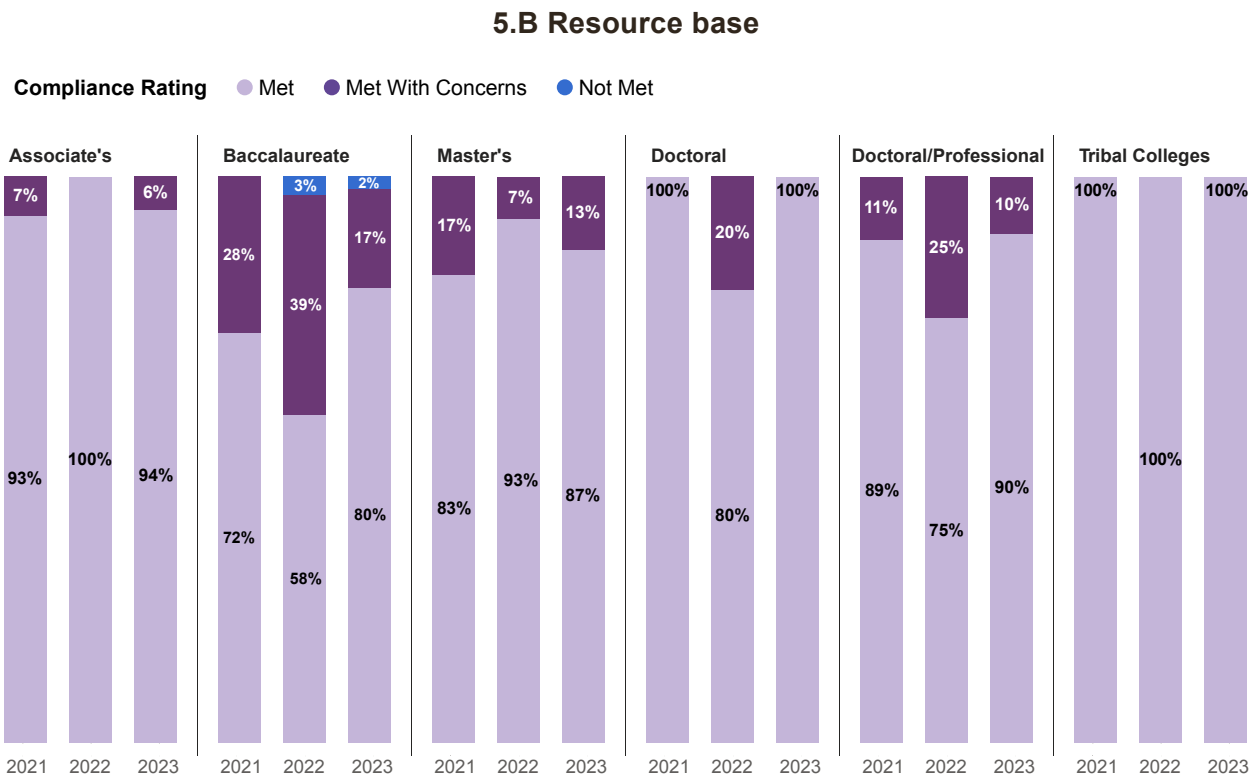
Core Component 5.B

As indicated in Figure 8, baccalaureate colleges had some of the highest percentages of citations in Core Component 5.B. However, the frequency of citations dropped sharply this year, changing from 42% in AY 2022 to 19% in AY 2023. In addition to baccalaureate institutions, citations in 5.B were found in 13% of master’s institutions, 10% among doctoral/professional institutions as well as in 3% of associate colleges. Doctoral and tribal institutions all met 5.B in AY 2023.

Citations of Core Component 5.B often referenced aspects of institutional financial health and sustainability, such as the uncertainty about state appropriation levels, declining enrollment trends, as well as unclear pathways to a balanced budget, increased revenue opportunities, and/or reduced debt.

Figure 8

Core Component 5.B by Carnegie Classification, AY 2021 – AY 2023



Core Component 5.C

Core Component 5.C citations were identified among baccalaureate colleges (n=9, 20%), and, to a smaller extent, associate's colleges (n=4, 12%) and master's institutions (n=3, 10%). Doctoral, doctoral/professional, and tribal institutions all met 5.C.

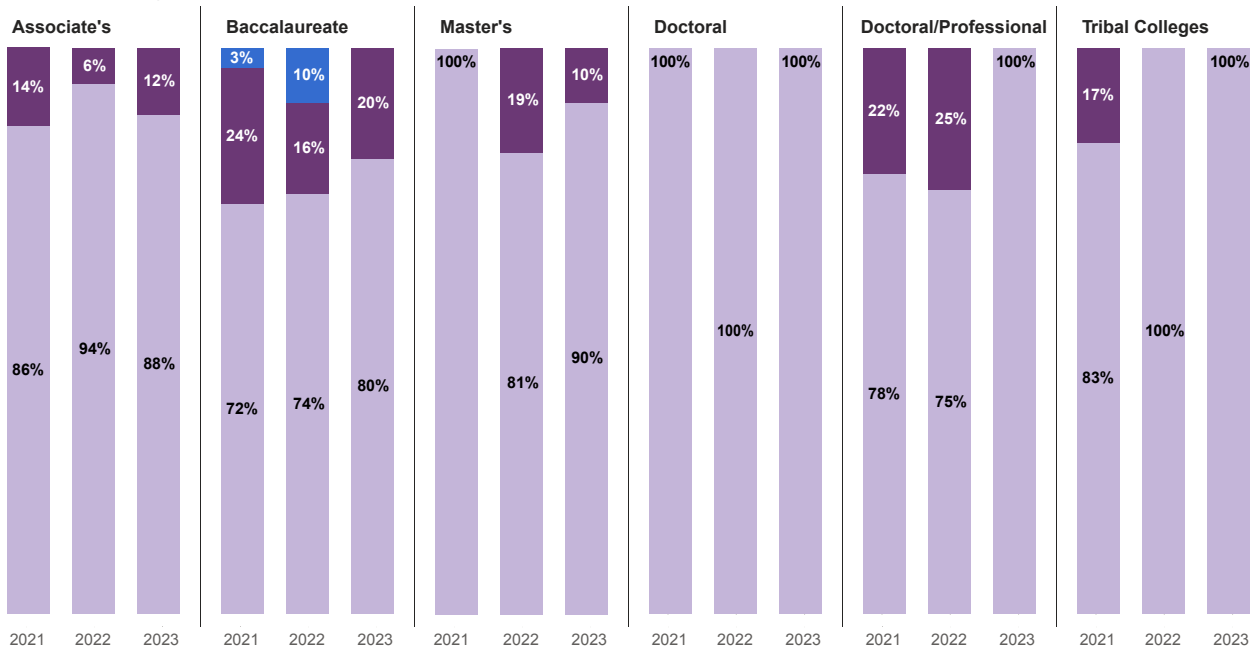
Cited concerns regarding 5.C included the lack of a strategic enrollment management plan; insufficient planning for a balanced budget; explanation of how enrollment, recruitment, and retention strategic goals were to be met; or how program reviews were integrated in strategic budget and financial planning processes.

Figure 9

Core Component 5.C by Carnegie Classification, AY 2021 – AY 2023

5.C Systematic and integrated planning & improvement

Compliance Rating ● Met ● Met With Concerns ● Not Met

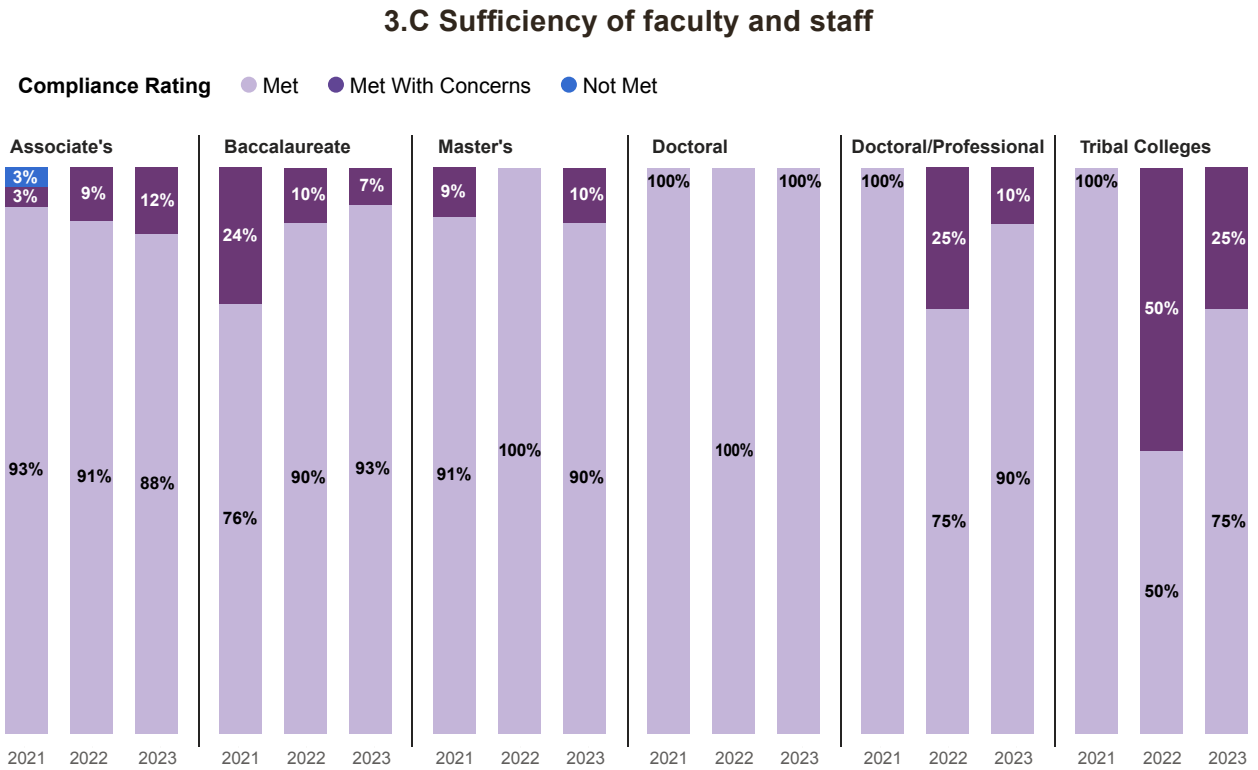


Core Component 3.C

In AY 2023 the proportion of institutions being cited in Core Component 3.C was at 9%, consistent with last year's level. Notably, the proportion of citations among associate's colleges increased from 6% to 12% in the last three years, while the same measure among baccalaureate colleges had dropped from 23% to 7%. Citations in Core Component 3.C were also found among master's (n=3, 10%) and doctoral/professional institutions (n=1, 10%), as well as in one out of four tribal colleges.

Figure 10

Core Component 3.C by Carnegie Classification, AY 2021 – AY 2023



Core Component 4.A

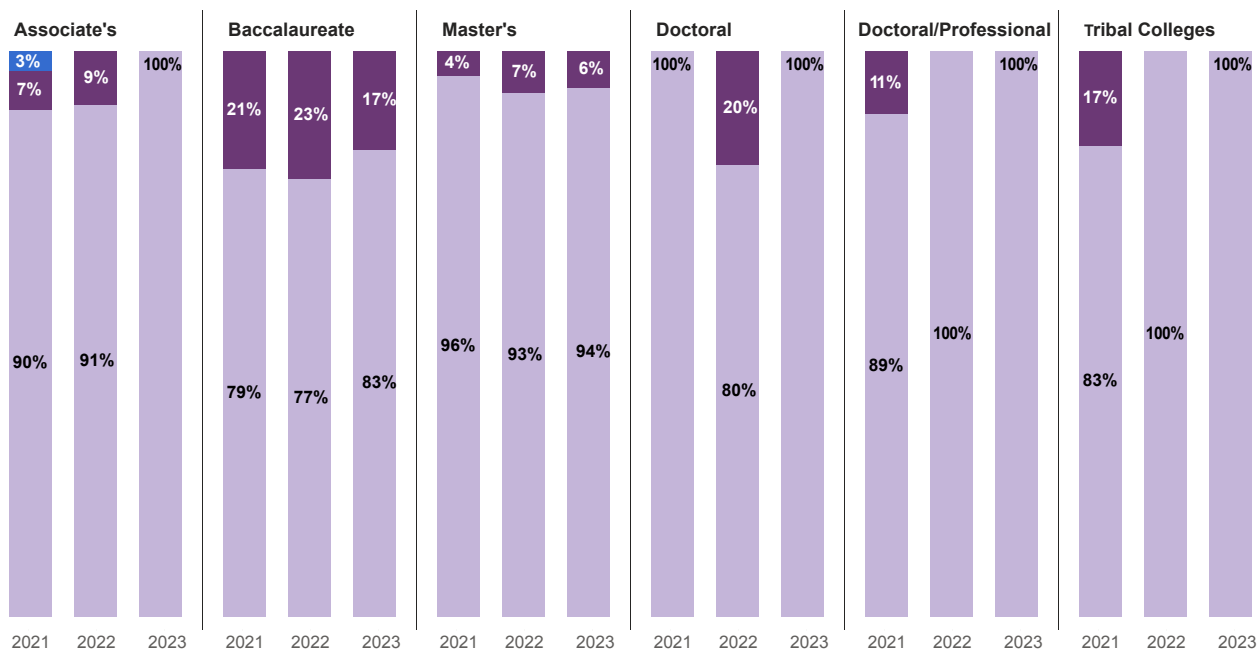
As depicted in Figure 10, in AY 2023 Core Component 4.A citations were found among baccalaureate colleges (n=8, 17%) and master’s institutions (n=2, 6%). Notably, the frequency among baccalaureate colleges decreased 6 percentage points from last year’s level, while the frequency among master’s institutions remained stable.

Figure 11

Core Component 4.A by Carnegie Classification, AY 2021 – AY 2023

4.A Ensuring quality of educational offerings

Compliance Rating ● Met ● Met With Concerns ● Not Met



Implications for Practice

The findings from the comprehensive evaluations conducted in AY 2023 were congruent with the trend in the top areas of concern in recent years. This trend continues to underscore the issues that institutions are facing such as those related to ensuring the quality and sufficiency of faculty (Core Components 3.C), ensuring quality of educational offerings (4.A), assessing for improvements in student learning outcomes (4.B), strengthening institutional resource base (5.B), and planning and allocating resources for sustainable future (5.C).

Evaluation findings provide insights into specific areas pertaining to institutions based on the Carnegie Classification. HLC continues to use this type of analysis to foster a deeper understanding of institutional-level and sector-level context and to enhance engagement with and support for the membership.

In continuing efforts to address the areas of concern identified through comprehensive evaluations, HLC has strengthened educational resources for institutions and developed new targeted training and education offerings for the member institutions and Peer Corps members alike.

HLC will continue to strengthen their engagement with the Peer Corps to ensure shared understanding and consistent application of the Criteria for Accreditation during reviews.

HLC is working to align all these initiatives with the roll-out of the new Criteria for Accreditation in September of 2025.

