

Criteria for Accreditation

Proposed Policy Change Approved on First Reading

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) approved this policy on first reading at its meeting on February 29, 2024.

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Summary of Proposed Changes

HLC is required by policy to comprehensively review the Criteria for Accreditation at least every five years to determine what, if any, improvements should be made. Based on this schedule, over the past two years HLC has gathered feedback from institutions, peer reviewers, state agencies and other stakeholders regarding the continued efficacy of the Criteria. The Board and staff also examined HLC's values and approaches to quality assurance, with a particular focus on quality assurance through a student-focused lens and as relevant to the current higher education ecosystem.

From this work, HLC has identified several proposed changes to the Criteria, as well as the Assumed Practices and policy regarding HLC's evaluative framework.

Mission-Reflective Approach

The proposed revisions add a new "Institutional Mission" section at the beginning of the Criteria for Accreditation policy. This change relocates language about the importance of institutional mission from the Evaluative Framework for the HLC Criteria policy and subsequently expands upon the concept that an institution is expected to demonstrate how it meets the Criteria through a mission-reflective lens.

The relationship between the Criteria and an institution's mission is then also threaded throughout the Criteria with mentions of "mission" in each of the four proposed Criteria. Foundationally, this approach builds on the extensive exploration regarding differential accreditation that HLC has conducted over the last two years.

Removal of Subcomponents

The proposed revisions eliminate "subcomponents" from the Criteria. Subcomponents were intended to be examples of potential aspects of each Core Component that were only relevant to the extent applicable to the institution. However, as both a substantive and a structural matter, the subcomponents created confusion for institutions and peer reviewers.

Concepts from the subcomponents will be handled in three ways:

1. Some concepts will be relocated, with refinements as appropriate, to an expanded and updated version of the *Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation* document.
2. Some concepts will be relocated to the Assumed Practices.
3. A select few concepts will be integrated into Core Components.

Consolidated Criterion on Teaching and Learning

The proposed revisions consolidate the current Criteria 3 and 4, both related to teaching and learning, into a single Criterion titled “Teaching and Learning for Student Success.” This change provides a more coherent framework for institutions to holistically demonstrate their accomplishments and quality in this essential area.

Language Refinements

The proposed revisions clarify, simplify and streamline language in the Criteria, while simultaneously preserving their inherent rigor. Special attention was paid to avoiding redundancy and duplication in concepts. For ease of readability and organization, titles have been added to the Core Components.

Relatedly, where appropriate, language has been removed from the Assumed Practices where those concepts are explicitly addressed in the Criteria themselves.

Timeline for Implementation

Policy comment period and Board action on second reading:

March 13–May 13, 2024: Member institutions, peer reviewers and other HLC stakeholders invited to submit their feedback on the proposed changes, including at the HLC Annual Conference (April 13–16, 2024).

June 27–28, 2024: HLC’s Board of Trustees will vote on adopting the revised Criteria on second reading.

If the revised Criteria are adopted in June 2024:

July 2024–August 2025: HLC provides training and resources to prepare institutions and peer reviewers for the revised Criteria.

September 1, 2025: The revised Criteria go into effect for all evaluations that take place on or after September 1, 2025.

Planned Resources to Support Institutions and Peer Reviewers

Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation

As a companion to the revised Criteria, HLC will develop an expanded and updated version of *[Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation](#)*. This document will emphasize that the varied ways in which institutions demonstrate how they meet the Criteria are inextricably linked to each institution's distinctive mission.

HLC Glossary Revisions

HLC will update the [Glossary](#) to define new terms and phrases that are included in the proposed revisions.

Tools for Transitioning to the Revised Criteria

After the Criteria revisions are adopted, HLC will provide additional training and resources to help institutions and peer reviewers transition to the new Criteria. This will include a crosswalk document that maps where concepts in the current Criteria appear in the revised Criteria (or where they have been relocated, if applicable), instructions for preparing for reviews, and other guidance.

Assurance Filings Moving to Canopy

With the transition to the revised Criteria, HLC will also streamline the technology that supports comprehensive evaluations and Assurance Reviews. The current stand-alone Assurance System will be sunset, and institutions and peer reviewers will conduct their work for these reviews in Canopy. Institutions with a comprehensive evaluation or Assurance Review scheduled for the 2025–26 academic year will be the first to gain access to this new feature in Canopy. HLC will provide details about this transition after the Criteria revisions are adopted. Institutions and peer reviewers working on Assurance Reviews or comprehensive evaluations that take place prior to September 1, 2025, will complete their reviews in the current system.

Comments Invited

Please submit feedback on the proposed revisions at hlcommission.org/criteria-comments.

Comments are due by May 13, 2024. The Board will take all comments into consideration before voting on the proposed revisions on second reading at its June 2024 meeting.

Proposed Changes

Proposed Criteria for Accreditation Without Markup

Policy Title: Criteria for Accreditation

Number: CRRT.B.10.010

The Criteria for Accreditation convey the standards of quality by which HLC determines whether an institution merits accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Recognition of the widely varying institutional missions across HLC's membership is essential to these Criteria as standards of quality.

Institutional Mission

Mission is foundational to an institution's curriculum, instructional activities and the success of its students. Mission further informs an institution's research and innovation pursuits, its community engagement activities and services, its role within the higher education ecosystem, its student body, and its decisions regarding operations and resource allocations. An institution's distinctive mission is the cornerstone around which the institution's effectiveness, integrity and commitment to continuous improvement are evaluated.

When demonstrating that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation, an institution has the opportunity to reflect on the significance of its distinctive mission as well as across the wider higher education landscape. Against these backdrops, the institution is able to speak to its current state, aspirations and plans for the future.

Specifically, the distinctiveness of an institution's mission may inform the strategies it adopts and the evidence it provides to demonstrate that it meets each Criterion and Core Component. In preparing for a review, an institution may provide evidence relevant to additional topics related to a Core Component beyond those specified in any HLC resource document. During the review process, peer reviewers will determine whether an institution meets the Criteria and Core Components on the basis of such evidence.

Criterion 1. Mission

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

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 1.

1.A. Mission Alignment

The institution's educational programs, enrollment profile and scope of operations align with its publicly articulated mission.

1.B. Mission and Public Good

The institution's operation of the academic enterprise demonstrates its commitment to serving the public good.

1.C. Mission and Diversity of Society

The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 2.

2.A. Integrity

Actions taken by the institution's governing board, administration, faculty and staff demonstrate adherence to established policies and procedures.

2.B. Transparency

The institution presents itself accurately and completely to students and the public with respect to its educational programs and any claims it makes related to the educational experience.

2.C. Sufficient Board Autonomy

In discharging its fiduciary duties, the institution's governing board is autonomous and empowered to act in the best interest of the institution, including the students it serves.

2.D. Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

The institution supports academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of knowledge as integral to high-quality teaching, learning and research.

2.E. Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery and Application

The institution adheres to policies and procedures that ensure responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge.

Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning for Student Success

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission through procedures designed to promote continuous improvement and student success. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 3.

3.A. Educational Programs Appropriate to Higher Education

The institution maintains learning goals and outcomes that reflect a level of rigor commensurate with the program level and content of each of its educational programs.

3.B. Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry Integral to Programs

The institution's core requirements 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.

3.C. Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff

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

3.D. Support for Student Learning and Resources for Effective Teaching

The institution provides an appropriate range of student support services that take into account the needs of its student populations, as well as the teaching resources and infrastructure necessary to drive student success.

3.E. Assessment of Student Learning

The institution improves the quality of its educational programs based on its assessment of student learning.

3.F. Program Review

The institution improves its curriculum based on periodic program review.

3.G. Student Success Outcomes

The institution's student success outcomes demonstrate improvement, taking into account the institution's mission, the students it serves, and benchmarks that reference peer institutions.

Criterion 4. Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 4.

4.A. Effective Administrative Structures

The institution's administrative structures are effective and facilitate collaborative processes such as shared governance; data-informed decision making; and engagement with internal and external constituencies as appropriate.

4.B. Resource Base and Sustainability

The institution's financial and personnel resources effectively support its current operations. The institution's financial management balances short-term needs with long-term commitments and ensures its ongoing sustainability.

4.C. Systematic and Integrated Planning and Improvement

The institution engages in systematic strategic planning. It relies on data-supported enrollment forecasts and integrates its planning with insights it has gained based on assessment of student learning, evaluation of institutional operations, scanning of the external environment, and financial capacity.

Proposed Criteria for Accreditation With Markup

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**). Wording that was moved is shown with a double underline in its new location (moved to) and a double strikethrough in its previous location (~~moved from~~).

Policy Title: Criteria for Accreditation

Number: CRRT.B.10.010

The Criteria for Accreditation ~~are~~ **convey** the standards of quality by which HLC determines whether an institution merits accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. ~~They are as follows:~~ **Recognition of the widely varying institutional missions across HLC's membership is essential to these Criteria as standards of quality.**

Institutional Mission

Mission is foundational to an institution's curriculum, instructional activities and the success of its students. Mission further informs an institution's research and innovation pursuits, its community engagement activities and services, its role within the higher education ecosystem, its student body, and its decisions regarding operations and resource allocations. An institution's distinctive mission is the cornerstone around which the institution's effectiveness, integrity and commitment to continuous improvement are evaluated.

When demonstrating that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation, an institution has the opportunity to reflect on the significance of its distinctive mission as well as across the wider higher education landscape. Against these backdrops, the institution is able to speak to its current state, aspirations and plans for the future.

Specifically, ~~The distinctiveness of an institution's mission may condition~~ **inform** the strategies it adopts and the evidence it provides to demonstrate that it meets each Criterion and Core Component. In preparing for a review, ~~An institution may provide evidence relevant to additional topics related to a Core Component beyond those specified in the sub-components to be evaluated in determining whether the institution meets the relevant Core Component in any HLC resource document. In its review~~ **During the review process,** ~~peer reviewers may will determine that whether an institution meets the relevant Criteria and Core Components~~ on the basis of such evidence.

Criterion 1. Mission

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

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 1.

~~Core Components~~

1.A. Mission Alignment

The institution's **educational programs, enrollment profile and scope of operations align with its publicly articulated** mission is articulated publicly and operationalized throughout the institution.

- ~~1. The mission was developed through a process suited to the context of the institution.~~
- ~~2. The mission and related statements are current and 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 and related statements identify the nature, scope and intended constituents of the higher education offerings and services the institution provides.~~
- ~~4. The institution's academic offerings, student support services and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.~~
- ~~5. The institution clearly articulates its mission through public information, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans or institutional priorities.~~

1.B. Mission and Public Good

The institution's ~~mission~~ **operation of the academic enterprise** demonstrates **its** commitment to **servicing** the public good.

- ~~1. The institution's actions and decisions demonstrate that its educational role is to serve the public, not solely the institution or any superordinate entity.~~
- ~~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 external constituencies and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.~~

1.C. Mission and Diversity of Society

The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

- ~~1. The institution encourages 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.~~
- ~~3. The institution fosters a climate of respect among all students, faculty, staff and administrators from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.~~

Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

In fulfilling its mission, ~~the~~ institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 2.

Core Components

2.A. Integrity

~~The institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its~~ **Actions taken by the institution's** governing board, administration, faculty and staff **demonstrate adherence to established policies and procedures.**

- ~~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. Transparency

The institution presents itself ~~clearly~~ **accurately** and completely to its students and ~~to~~ the public **with respect to its educational programs and any claims it makes related to the educational experience.**

- ~~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, experiential learning, religious or spiritual purpose and economic development.~~

2.C. Sufficient Board Autonomy

~~In discharging its fiduciary duties, the institution's governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions and empowered to act in the best interest of the institution, in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution's integrity including the students it serves.~~

- ~~1. The governing board is trained and knowledgeable so that it makes informed decisions with respect to the institution's financial and academic policies and practices; the board meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.~~
- ~~2. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.~~
- ~~3. The governing board reviews the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.~~
- ~~4. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties.~~
- ~~5. 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. Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

~~The institution is committed to supports academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth knowledge in as integral to high-quality teaching, and learning and research.~~

2.E. Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery and Application

~~The institution's adheres to policies and procedures call for that ensure responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, staff and students.~~

- ~~1. Institutions supporting basic and applied research maintain professional standards and provide oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability.~~

- ~~2. The institution provides effective support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff and students.~~
- ~~3. The institution provides students guidance in the ethics of research and use of information resources.~~
4. The institution enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: ~~Quality, Resources and Support~~ for Student Success

~~The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered. The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning in fulfilling its mission through processes~~ procedures designed to promote continuous improvement and student success. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 3.

~~Core Components~~

3.A. Educational Programs Appropriate to Higher Education

~~The rigor of the institution's academic offerings is appropriate to higher education. The institution maintains learning goals and outcomes that reflect a level of rigor commensurate with the program level and content of each of its educational programs.~~

- ~~1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of student performance appropriate to the credential 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. Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry Integral to Programs

The institution's ~~offers programs that~~ **core requirements** 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.

- ~~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 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. 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 multicultural world.~~
4. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their offerings and the institution's mission.

3.C. Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff

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. 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.~~
- ~~3. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual and consortial offerings.~~
- ~~4. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.~~
- ~~5. 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. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.~~
- ~~7. 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. Support for Student Learning and Resources for Effective Teaching

~~The institution provides support for student learning and resources for effective teaching. The institution provides an appropriate range of student support services suited to that take into account the needs of its student populations, as well as the teaching resources and infrastructure necessary to drive student success.~~

- ~~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 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).~~

3.E. Assessment of Student Learning

The institution improves the quality of its educational programs based on its assessment of student learning.

3.F. Program Review

The institution improves its curriculum based on periodic program review.

3.G. Student Success Outcomes

The institution's student success outcomes demonstrate improvement, taking into account the institution's mission, the students it serves, and benchmarks that reference peer institutions.

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 ensures the quality of its educational offerings.~~

- ~~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 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 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 that the credentials 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.~~

~~4.B. The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.~~

- ~~1. The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and cocurricular offerings.~~
- ~~2. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.~~
- ~~3. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty, instructional and other relevant staff members.~~

~~4.C. The institution pursues educational improvement through 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, 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 5-4. Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

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

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 4.

Core Components

5 4.A. Effective Administrative Structures

~~Through its~~ **The institution's** administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution's leadership demonstrates that it is **are** effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission **facilitate** collaborative processes such as shared governance; data-informed decision making; and engagement with internal and external constituencies as appropriate.

- ~~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 4.B. Resource Base and Sustainability

The institution's **financial and personnel** resources ~~base~~ **effectively** supports its **current operations** educational offerings and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future. **The institution's financial management balances short-term needs with long-term commitments and ensures its ongoing sustainability.**

- ~~1. The institution has qualified and trained operational staff and infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.~~
- ~~2. The goals incorporated into the mission and any related statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources and opportunities.~~
- ~~3. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring its finances.~~
- ~~4. The institution's fiscal allocations ensure that its educational purposes are achieved.~~

5 4.C. Systematic and Integrated Planning and Improvement

The institution engages in systematic ~~and integrated~~ **strategic** planning ~~and improvement~~. It relies on data-supported enrollment forecasts and integrates its planning with insights it has gained based on assessment of student learning, evaluation of institutional operations, scanning of the external environment, and financial capacity.

- ~~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 fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue and enrollment.~~
5. ~~Institutional planning anticipates 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.~~

Proposed Changes to Related Policies

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**). Wording that was moved is shown with a double underline in its new location (moved to) and a double strikethrough in its previous location (~~~~moved from~~~~).

Policy Title: Assumed Practices

Number: CRRT.C.10.010

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, these Assumed Practices are (1) generally matters to be determined as facts, rather than matters requiring professional judgment and (2) not expected to vary by institutional mission ~~or context~~. Every institution is expected to 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 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. When otherwise required by HLC as circumstances warrant.

An institution determined not to be in compliance with any Assumed Practice, even if in compliance with all other HLC requirements, may be subject to monitoring, Probation, a Show-Cause Order, or an adverse action, as defined by HLC policy based on the gravity of the finding as measured by (a) in the case of Probation, the extent to which a substantial remediation period is necessary to address such non-compliance or; (b) in the case of a Show-Cause Order or adverse action, the extent to which the very existence of the finding suggests that the institution should not remain accredited.

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 establishes and publicizes clear **policies and** procedures for receiving complaints from students and other constituencies, responding to complaints in a timely manner, and 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~~
 - ~~e. b.~~ requirements for admission both to the institution and to ~~particular~~ **educational** programs ~~or majors~~
 - ~~d. c.~~ its policies on acceptance of transfer credit, including how the institution applies such credit to its ~~degree~~ **educational program** 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 the institution has conducted an evaluation of such students' credits in accordance with its transfer policies.)
 - ~~e. d.~~ all student costs, including tuition, fees, training, and incidentals; its financial aid policies, practices, and requirements; and its policy on refunds

- f. e. policies regarding academic good standing, probation, and dismissal; residency or enrollment requirements (if any)
 - g. f. 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 ~~success outcomes 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~~ **HLC** and with any other institutional, specialized, 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 institutional 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,~~ includes 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~~ **publicly elected** members or members appointed by ~~publicly elected~~ **publicly elected** individuals or bodies (governors, elected legislative bodies) are **considered** public members.¹

9. The governing board has the authority to approve the annual budget and to ~~engage~~ **hire, evaluate** and dismiss the chief executive officer.¹
10. ~~The governing board is trained and knowledgeable so that it~~ **on all subject matter necessary to discharge its legal and fiduciary responsibilities, and to otherwise** makes informed decisions with respect to the institution's financial and academic policies and procedures and practices; the board meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
11. 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.
- ~~10.~~ 12. The institution remains in compliance at all times with all applicable laws, including laws related to **research**, authorization of educational activities, and consumer protection wherever it does business.
- ~~11.~~ 13. The institution documents outsourcing of all services in written agreements, including agreements with parent or affiliated organizations.
- ~~12.~~ 14. The institution takes responsibility for the ethical and responsible behavior of its contractual partners in relation to actions taken on its behalf.

¹ *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~~ **an academic credential**. 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 HLC. 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.~~ e. The institution has ~~a process~~ **policies and procedures** for ensuring that all courses transferred and applied toward ~~degree~~ **educational program** requirements demonstrate equivalence with its own courses required for that ~~degree~~ **educational program** or are of equivalent rigor.
- ~~g.~~ f. 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~~ **academic credential** awarded. (Note that this requirement does not apply to courses transferred from other institutions.)
- ~~h.~~ g. 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.

- h. If the institution makes any claims for student learning related to its cocurricular programs, it assesses such student learning and makes improvements.**

2. Faculty Roles and Qualifications

- a. The institution establishes and maintains reasonable policies and procedures to determine that faculty are qualified. The factors that an institution considers as part of these policies and procedures could include, but are not limited to: the achievement of academic credentials, progress toward academic credentials, equivalent experience, or some combination thereof. The institution’s obligations in this regard extend to all instructors and all other entities to which it assigns the responsibility of instruction. HLC will maintain “Institutional Policies and Procedures for Determining Faculty Qualifications Guidelines” to further explain requirements for reasonable policies and procedures in accordance with this Assumed Practice.
- b. Faculty participate substantially in:
 - i. oversight of the curriculum offered – its development, vetting and implementation; academic substance; currency; and relevance for internal and external constituencies;
 - ii. assurance of consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in the expectations of student performance;
 - iii. establishment of the qualifications for instructors, including instructors provided by third parties;
 - 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.

- 4. 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.

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 any measures of student **success outcomes achievement**. (This requirement allows for collective responsibility, as, for example, when a faculty committee has the authority to override a grade on appeal.)
2. The institution evaluates all ~~the~~ academic credit that it transmits, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning. **The institution has clear policies for evaluating and accepting credits awarded by other education providers and may rely, ~~or relies on~~ the credit evaluation of undertaken by responsible third parties.** 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 relevant accreditor for each field, as sufficient for licensure, if such a recognized accreditor 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 **success outcomes 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 well-developed ~~process in place~~ procedure for budgeting and for monitoring its finances. **It 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.²
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.

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

Policy Title: Evaluative Framework for the HLC Criteria Number: INST.A.10.020

An institution demonstrates that it meets each of the Criteria for Accreditation, and the Core Components comprising them, 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.~~

~~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 may provide evidence relevant to additional topics related to a Core Component beyond those specified in the sub-components to be evaluated in determining whether the 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.~~

The judgment that the 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 peer reviewers or in other review documents identified by HLC.

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

Core Components. The institution meets the Core Component if:

1. 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
2. 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.

The institution does not meet the Core Component if the institution fails to meet the Component in its entirety or is so deficient 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:

1. 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
2. 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.

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 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.