



CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION

Policy Number CRRT.B.10.010

In February 2019, HLC’s Board of Trustees adopted revisions to the Criteria for Accreditation that go into effect on September 1, 2020. The revised Criteria address redundancies among Core Components and provide clarification and elaboration in needed areas that were identified through feedback from institutions and peer reviewers. The revised Criteria are provided in full below. The current Criteria are available at hlcommission.org/criteria.

The Criteria for Accreditation are the standards of quality by which the Commission determines whether an institution merits accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. They are as follows:

CRITERION 1 / MISSION

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

Core Components

- 1.A.** The institution’s mission is articulated publicly and operationalized throughout the institution.
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.** The institution’s mission demonstrates commitment to 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.** 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.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/criteria

CRITERION 2 / INTEGRITY: ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT

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

Core Components

2.A. The institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff.

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

2.B. The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public.

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. The governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution's integrity.

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

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

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

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

Core Components

3.A. The rigor of the institution's academic offerings is appropriate to higher education.

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.** The institution offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.
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.** 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.** The institution provides support for student learning and resources for effective teaching.
1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
 2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
 3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its 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).

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. INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS, RESOURCES AND PLANNING

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

Core Components

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

1. Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.
2. The institution's administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.

3. The institution's administration ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.

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

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

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities, including, as applicable, its comprehensive research enterprise, associated institutes and affiliated centers.
2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning and budgeting.
3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity, including 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.



PREPARING FOR THE REVISED CRITERIA

HLC has provided multiple resources to help institutions and peer reviewers prepare for the revised Criteria, including the following:

Crosswalk Between the Current and Revised Criteria

hlcommission.org/criteria-crosswalk: These charts provide a summary of how the Core Components have been merged and reorganized in the revised Criteria.

Video Presentations on the Criteria

hlcommission.org/criteria-videos: These presentations walk through each Criterion in detail, with discussions of their content, context and intent.

DETERMINING WHETHER AN INSTITUTION MEETS THE CRITERIA

HLC reviews institutions against the Criteria and Core Components according to the evaluative framework described in HLC policy (INST.A.10.020):

The institution meets the Core Component if:

- a.** 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
- b.** 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, and peer review or a decision-making body has determined that monitoring is required to assure that the institution ameliorates the concerns.

The institution does not meet the Core Component if the institution fails to meet the Component in its entirety or is so deficient in one or more aspects of the Component that the Component is judged not to be met.

The institution meets the Criterion if:

- a.** 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
- b.** 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, and peer review or a decision-making body has determined that monitoring is required to assure that the institution ameliorates the concerns.

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 institution must be judged to meet all five Criteria for Accreditation to merit accreditation. For purposes of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, findings of “met” and “met with concerns” both constitute compliance.

The Commission will grant or reaffirm accreditation (with or without conditions or sanctions), deny accreditation, or withdraw accreditation based on the outcome of this evaluation.

GLOSSARY OF CRITERIA TERMINOLOGY

This glossary explains how these words are used within the Criteria for Accreditation. Its intent is not to prescribe how institutions must use a particular word or phrase locally, but rather to offer a means to ensure a consistent reading of the meaning and expectations of the Criteria for Accreditation. It is not part of the Criteria policy and will be updated as needed to respond to questions and feedback from institutions and peer reviewers.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM / 2.D.

The ability to engage differences of opinion, evaluate evidence and form one’s own grounded judgments about the relative value of competing perspectives. This definition implies not just freedom from constraint but also freedom for faculty, staff and students to work within a scholarly community to develop intellectual and personal qualities.

ACADEMIC OFFERINGS

Any educational experience offered at an institution for academic credit. This includes, but is not limited to, degree and certificate programs and courses.

APPROPRIATE TO HIGHER EDUCATION / 3.A.

Curricular and cocurricular programming of the quality and rigor for the degree level that prepares students to think critically and function successfully. It is distinctly different from K-12 education.

AUTONOMOUS / 2.C.

The institution’s governing board acts independently of any other entity in determining the course of direction and policies for the institution.

AUXILIARY / 2.A.

Activities and services related to, but not intrinsic to, educational functions: dining services, student housing, faculty or staff housing, intercollegiate athletics, student stores, a Public Radio station, etc. In many institutions, “auxiliary” simultaneously denotes a segregated budget and dedicated revenues.

CAPACITY / 1.A., 5.C.

An institution’s ability to effectively deliver its educational offerings. Determining capacity refers to an institution’s demonstrable ability to establish and maintain academic quality. Indicators of sufficient capacity may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Financial resources to support academic offerings at start-up and in the future.
- Evidence of planning that allocates necessary resources and shows ongoing development.
- Alignment of academic offerings with the institution’s mission and evidence of the institution’s long-term commitment.
- Evidence of new or revised policies and procedures that demonstrate commitment and sustainability.
- Qualified faculty and staff to serve students.
- Learning environments (whether classrooms, laboratories, studios or online infrastructure) with technological resources and equipment.
- Print and electronic media and support for the access and use of the technological resources across modalities.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT / 1.C.

Community service or any number of other efforts (by individuals or groups) intended to address issues of public or community concern.

COCURRICULAR / 3.C., 4.B.

Learning activities, programs and experiences that reinforce the institution’s mission and values and complement the formal curriculum. Examples: Study abroad, student-faculty research experiences, service learning, professional clubs or organization, athletics, honor societies, career services, etc.

CONSORTIAL ARRANGEMENT / 3.A., 3.C.

An arrangement in which an HLC-accredited institution develops an agreement with an institution or group of institutions, all of which are accredited by accreditors

recognized by the U.S. Department of Education—that is, the consortial party(ies)—through which the consortial party(ies) agree to provide some portion of one or more educational programs (i.e., degrees or certificates offered for academic credit) offered by the HLC-accredited institution.

CONTROL / 2.B.

The entity that is responsible for the fiscal and operational oversight of an institution and its programs. Control also includes the structure and organizational arrangements of an institution. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The state board or agency that oversees a public university.
- The board of trustees that oversees a private, nonprofit college.
- The parent corporation of a private, for-profit college.
- The public board authorized by Congress to oversee an institution under federal control.
- Religious bodies and tribal councils.

DUAL CREDIT / 3.C., 4.A.

Courses taught to high school students for which the students receive both high school credit and college credit. These courses or programs are offered under a variety of names; the Core Components that refer to “dual credit” apply to all of them as they involve the accredited institution’s responsibility for the quality of its offerings.

GOOD PRACTICE / 4.B., 4.C.

Practice that is based in the use of processes, methods and measures that have been determined to be successful by empirical research, professional organizations and/or institutional peers.

INFORMED CITIZENSHIP / 1.C.

Having sufficient and reliable information about issues of public concern and having the knowledge and skills to make reasonable judgments and decisions about them.

OPERATIONAL STAFF / 5.B.

Personnel who support the academic enterprise, such as those who may work in the areas of finance, human resources, facilities, dining/catering, information technology, planning, security, student services, academic support, etc.

PUBLIC / 1.A.

In phrases such as “makes available to the public” or “states publicly,” this refers to people in general, including current and potential students. In phrases such as “the public good,” the Criteria refer to public, as opposed to private, good.

PUBLIC INFORMATION / 1.A.

Information publicly available on websites or other materials that are available freely to the public, without having to ask specifically for it.

STUDENT OUTCOMES / 5.C.

Education-specific results to measure against the objectives or standards for the educational offerings. Examples could be results from licensure or standardized exams, course and program persistence, graduation rates and workforce data.

SUPERORDINATE ENTITY / 1.B.

An entity situated hierarchically above the institution, which includes but is not limited to state boards, private owners, corporate parents, Tribal councils or religious denominations.

UNDUE INFLUENCE / 2.C.

Overreach, suspicious transactions and relationships that are exclusive (without oversight) that could yield influence over the institution’s governing board.

WHEREVER AND HOWEVER DELIVERED / 2.E., 5.B.

All modes of delivery of academic offerings and all locations, modalities and venues, including but not limited to the main campus, additional locations, distance delivery, dual credit and contractual or consortial arrangements.

CRITERIA GUIDELINES

Determining Qualified Faculty

hlcommission.org/qualified-faculty

HLC’s *Determining Qualified Faculty* provides guidance to institutions and peer reviewers in evaluating the qualifications of faculty, including full-time, part-time, adjunct, temporary and/or non-tenure-track faculty. The guidelines highlight the Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices that speak to the importance of institutions accredited by HLC employing qualified faculty for the varied and essential roles faculty members perform.

Dual Credit

hlcommission.org/dual-credit

Dual Credit Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviewers offers institutions and peer reviewers formal guidance

on the evaluation of dual credit activity at member institutions. HLC defines dual credit courses as “courses taught to high school students for which the students receive both high school credit and college credit.” Dual credit programs are reviewed during an institution’s comprehensive evaluation, but also may be reviewed at other times if concerns about the programs arise.

School of Record

hlcommission.org/school-of-record

Institutions acting as a School of Record must be able to ensure academic integrity and transparency in the transcription of coursework taken abroad by students. They also must ensure appropriately trained personnel are evaluating such courses or programs and that the institution has established processes for evaluation that are applied in a consistent fashion. *School of Record Guidelines* highlights the Criteria and Assumed Practices relevant for these institutions.

Two-Year Institutions Seeking to Offer the Baccalaureate Degree

hlcommission.org/baccalaureate

Before launching baccalaureate programs, two-year institutions must seek HLC approval through a substantive change request. As more two-year institutions seek to offer baccalaureate degrees, HLC has developed guidelines, *Two-Year Institutions Seeking to Offer the Baccalaureate Degree: Considerations of Readiness*, to assist these institutions in an internal review of readiness. The guidelines also serve as a reference to peer reviewers who may be asked to evaluate the change requests.

PROVIDING EVIDENCE FOR THE CRITERIA

Note: The following information is available as a separate document at hlcommission.org/criteria.

An institution has to provide a narrative and supporting evidence that demonstrate it meets HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation. A team of peer reviewers evaluates the institution to validate its argument and determine if each Core Component of the Criteria is met. HLC provides suggestions to assist institutions in thinking about possible sources of evidence. These suggestions should not be viewed by institutions or peer reviewers as an exhaustive list or be used as a checklist when preparing institutional materials or conducting a review.

IDENTIFYING EVIDENCE

The evidence an institution provides to demonstrate that it complies with HLC's Criteria should do the following:

- Substantiate the facts and arguments presented in its institutional narrative.
- Respond to the prior peer review team's concerns and recommendations.
- Explain any nuances specific to the institution.
- Strengthen the institution's overall record of compliance with HLC's requirements.
- Affirm the institution's overall academic quality and financial sustainability and integrity.

HLC encourages institutions to provide thorough evidence and ensure that the sources it selects are relevant and persuasive. To identify compelling evidence, it may be helpful to consider the three categories of evidence presented in Black's Law: clear, corroborating and circumstantial.

Clear evidence

Clear evidence is precise, explicit and tends to directly establish the point it is presented to support. Institutions should provide clear evidence of their compliance with each Core Component.

Example: Clear evidence that a president was duly appointed by an institution's board would be a board resolution or meeting minutes showing a motion and vote to hire the president.

Corroborating evidence

Corroborating evidence is supplementary to evidence already given and tends to strengthen or confirm it. This type of evidence can be useful in illustrating points made in the institution's narrative, but it may not be persuasive to peer reviewers on its own.

Example: Corroborating evidence that a president was duly appointed by an institution's board would be a copy of the offer letter addressed to the president.

Circumstantial evidence

Circumstantial evidence establishes a condition of surrounding circumstances, from which the principal fact may be inferred. This type of evidence is never sufficient on its own.

Example: Circumstantial evidence that a president was duly appointed by an institution's board would be a copy of a letter from the president to the chair of the board, accepting the presidential appointment.

Finally, institutions should remember the peer review team will base much of its recommendations on the evidence presented. In order to identify whether any gaps exist in the institution's evidence, it is recommended institutions analyze each Core Component from the perspective of the peer review team. Peer reviewers will consider all materials presented and ask questions if they determine information is missing, but it is ultimately the institution's responsibility to present evidence of their compliance with the Criteria.

POSSIBLE SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

The following are examples of the types of information institutions may present in addressing the Core Components. This list was developed based on input from institutions and peer reviewers.

Criterion 1. Mission

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

- 1.A.** The institution's mission is articulated publicly and operationalized throughout the institution.

Examples

- Documentation of the history, development and adoption of the institution's mission statement.
- Documentation that the mission statement is regularly reviewed by the administration and reviewed and approved by the governing board.
- Documentation that academic programs, student support services and planning and budgeting priorities align with the mission (e.g., documents with budget allocations to instruction, student services, etc.).
- Enrollment profile.
- Information about new student, employee, and board member orientation that imparts the mission.
- Information about where the mission statement, purpose, vision, values, plans and goals are located and their accessibility to staff, faculty, students and the general public.
- Documentation of the policies and actions implemented or discontinued to achieve clearer alignment between an institution's practices and its mission.
- Recruitment materials.

- 1.B.** The institution's mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.

Examples

- The institution's mission documents, if they specifically address the institution's role in the community.
- List of efforts, programs and certificates that meet community or constituent needs.
- Information about the institution's sustainability program.
- A list of partnerships and consulting arrangements with local businesses.
- Documentation of public events and series the community is able to attend.
- Documentation of the utilization of campus facilities by the community.
- Engagement of faculty, staff, and students in the community (i.e., community service, service-learning, etc.).

1.C. 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.

Examples

- Documentation of course-based activities that promote civic engagement, including alternative spring break experiences, capstone experiences, community service projects, international service projects, professional or clinical practicum, community-based student employment, organized mission- or faith-based services in the community, military service or entrepreneurship.
- Documentation of student or residential-life-based service or experiences, such as service clubs, fraternity or sorority service projects, athletic team service

activities, resident advisor employment or residential life service projects, or institution-led volunteer experiences.

- Documentation of extramural and independent volunteer or community service activities, including arts- and culture-based activities, children/youth-based service, human rights service or advocacy, public health and public policy-based activities, environmental and sustainability activities, food security/hunger-relief volunteering, church-based community service, or political campaign volunteering.
- Documentation of how diversity and inclusion are addressed in the institution's mission documents and strategic plan.
- Student demographics and enrollment strategies that demonstrate a focus on diversity and inclusion.
- List of on-campus centers, offices and committees that address societal diversity, inclusion, and/or global awareness.
- List of student organizations that support societal diversity, inclusion, and/or global awareness.
- Listing of activities that the institution hosts or participates in that emphasize diversity, inclusion, and/or global awareness.

Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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

2.A. The institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff.



Important

Please note that the sources are not exhaustive, and institutions may provide different information relevant to their specific context and mission. The examples will not be applicable to all institutions. Further, institutions are not required to use these examples, and peer reviewers should defer to institutional preference instead of requiring the sources listed. This document is not intended to serve as a checklist.

Examples

- Hiring qualifications and processes for faculty and staff, including a search committee procedure or handbook.
- External (independent) and internal audits since last comprehensive evaluation.
- Investment policy and documentation demonstrating compliance.
- Internal budget control policies.
- Bond rating since last comprehensive evaluation, if available.
- Schedule of and minutes for board audit and/or finance committee meetings.
- Documentation supporting ongoing training related to integrity issues and ethical behavior for all employees and board members (e.g., sexual harassment, sexual assault, campus- safety, etc.).
- Annual conflict of interest affirmation forms signed by board and senior leadership.
- Handbooks for employees (staff and/or faculty), students, student athletes (if applicable).
- List of auxiliary functions and information about each (e.g., dining services, residential life, bookstore, parking, student health services).
- Grievance policy for faculty, staff and students if not delineated in faculty, staff and student handbooks.
- Academic catalog.
- Institutional policies on non-discrimination, anti-harassment, FERPA, anti-nepotism, intellectual property, Title IX, etc.

2.B. The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public.

Examples

- Academic catalog that includes program requirements for all degree levels.
- Course schedule for all degree levels offered.
- Published list of all current accreditations and statuses.
- Listing of tuition and fees and net price calculator.
- Faculty and staff roster.

- Recruitment and admissions documents for prospective students indicating requirements for institutional and program entry.
- Information pertaining to the entity that is responsible for the fiscal and operational oversight of the institution.
- Sample evaluations of activities that support the learning claimed in activity.
- A sample of academic student organizations and clubs demonstrating the diversity of groups on campus.
- Agendas and minutes from student athlete advisory committee and/or student government association.
- Information about athletic academic services.
- A list of fine arts offerings.
- Documentation of partnerships with internal and external entities to offer community service opportunities or service-learning experiences.
- Documentation of any volunteer clubs and detail of student participation.
- Campus newspapers, magazines, radio programming, and/or cable TV shows.
- List of cultural events and research and academic symposiums.
- Study abroad opportunities.

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

Examples

- Board manual, policies and bylaws, including a conflict of interest policy.
- List and bios of board members.
- Documentation of the selection process for board members and for selection of chair, vice- chair, etc.
- Dates, agendas and minutes of board meetings for multiple years (and town hall or community meetings with the board).
- On-boarding and orientation process for new board members.
- Information about professional development and training for board members.

- Board approval of planning and budgeting documents.
- Board selection, evaluation, and right to terminate president of institution.
- Board self-evaluation.

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

Examples

- Institutional learning principles.
- Listing of activities supported and sponsored by the institution that allow for a discussion of varying views and opinions.
- Policy on freedom of expression and/or academic freedom.
- Course listing including the range of options for general education courses.
- Policies and procedures for peaceful assembly of students.
- Statement on censorship.

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

Examples

- Research opportunities and policies.
- Policy on academic integrity.
- Protocol, bylaws, and training documentation for Institutional Review Board (or similar entity).
- Institutional animal care and research policy, if appropriate.
- Training programs on plagiarism, citations, use of library resources, online research, etc.
- Applicable policies and procedures in student and faculty handbooks, including student honor code.
- Judicial affairs or student conduct meeting and training agendas.
- Information about sponsored program and grant office.
- Documentation of research symposia, highlighting faculty and student scholarship.

Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support

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

3.A. The rigor of the institution's academic offerings is appropriate to higher education.

Examples

- Academic catalog.
- Documentation that the institution is in compliance with federal policy for credit hour requirements, where appropriate.
- Agendas and minutes from graduate council, faculty senate and/or curriculum review committee meetings.
- Examples of course- and program-learning goals for each degree level across all modes and locations.
- A syllabus template or guidelines for course outlines.
- Documentation that supports the method in which the institution determines program levels, e.g., Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains or other methodology or framework.
- Program-level admission requirements.
- External reviews conducted of programs.
- Documentation of any linkages between undergraduate and graduate level programs and differentiation of student learning outcomes by level.

3.B. The institution offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

Examples

- Documentation of the process for developing curriculum and course outlines.
- List of graduate and undergraduate internship and practicum program sites.
- Agendas and minutes of committees related to educational programs.
- Departmental improvement plans.
- Agendas, minutes and activities of multicultural committees.

- General education learning goals and curriculum.
- Notification from the state that the institution meets the state requirements for general education coursework, if applicable.
- Notable faculty and student achievements relative to scholarship and creative work.
- Dual credit guidelines.
- Documentation that programs meet programmatic accreditation requirements.
- Research symposia.

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

Examples

- Statement on faculty expectations and minimum qualifications.
- Student-to-faculty ratio (overall, on-ground, online).
- Faculty handbook.
- Summary of qualifications of Student Affairs staff.
- Documentation of professional development and training opportunities for staff and faculty, including support for instructional design.
- Sabbatical policy.
- Complete faculty roster (full-time, part-time, adjunct, online, dual credit) with information on highest degree and teaching content area with evidence of courses taught.
- Guidelines and process for hiring faculty (includes full-time, part-time, adjunct, online, dual credit) that are in compliance with HLC and specialized accreditors, as appropriate.
- Faculty and staff professional development plans and annual evaluations.
- Orientation program for all faculty (includes full-time, part-time, adjunct, online, dual credit).

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

Examples

- Student handbook.
- Academic catalog.

- List of student support services, disability services, financial aid, advising, career counseling, campus childcare, cocurricular activities and health services (include for all modalities).
- Information about writing and math assistance, tutoring programs, or other support provided to students.
- Schedule or documentation of student activities, programming and organizations.
- List of veterans' affairs office activities.
- Listing of remedial or developmental courses.
- Documentation on how campus advising works (matriculation through graduation).
- Information about computer labs, clinical sites, scientific labs and performance spaces.
- First-year experience program (academic and cocurricular).
- Documentation of undergraduate and graduate student processes and research.
- Documentation of programming offered by residence life and student affairs.
- Plagiarism and academic integrity training.
- Information about libraries and resources (e.g., interlibrary loan, reference services, Ask a Librarian).
- Information about utilization of data from internal resources and external national surveys, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement or Community College Survey of Student Engagement.

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.

4.A. The institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings.

Examples

- Program review policy, processes, schedule and guidelines.

- Sample program review.
- Program advisory board agendas and minutes. Curriculum review committee minutes.
- Transfer credit policies, course equivalency guides, and credit validation process for prior learning and third-party providers.
- Transfer student resources.
- Advanced Placement and College Level Examination Program policies and procedures.
- Academic catalog, specifically information about transfer credit and experiential learning.
- Internal and external curricular review process.
- Guidelines for hiring faculty and a hiring process.
- Dual credit programs and guidelines.
- Published list of all current accreditations and statuses.
- Data on where students go after graduation, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and AmeriCorps).
- State degree requirements and evidence of compliance.
- Documentation of a process for reviewing, approving and implementing new programs.
- Licensure or certification exam results.
- Surveys of alumni.
- Articulation agreements with other institutions.
- Documentation of engagement of faculty, academic administration, and governing board in academic program review process.

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

Examples

- General education and course, program- and institutional-level learning goals and outcomes.
- Annual reports of the assessment process.
- Faculty senate minutes.
- Curriculum maps.

- Faculty expectations and evaluation processes.
- Assessment and/or curriculum committee minutes.
- Meeting minutes and agendas demonstrating departmental use of assessment data with evidence of action taken based on review and analysis of data.
- Institutional learning outcomes and rubrics.
- Documentation of cocurricular assessment and improvements based on data.
- Assessment plan and/or process and calendar/ cycle.
- Documents and reports using direct measures for assessment of student learning.

4.C. The institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

Examples

- Current rates of and goals for institutional persistence, retention and completion (include the institution's definitions of these terms).
- Strategies or initiatives implemented based on review and analysis of data to make improvements in persistence, retention and completion, such as agendas, meeting minutes and action items of units working in these areas.
- Enrollment management plan.
- Documentation of a consortium for student retention data exchange.
- Information about the institution's student success center.
- Documentation of utilization of datasets to make improvements.
- Analysis of graduation and retention rates by distinctive student populations (e.g., age, gender, race, ethnicity, first-generation status).
- Documentation of campus services to support student needs (e.g., writing center, math tutoring, study skills, time management, etc.).
- Suspension and probation trends.
- Student advising procedures and policies.

- Participation in Federal TRiO programs as it relates to persistence, completion, and retention, if applicable.
- Student exit survey results and action taken to address as applicable.

Criterion 5. Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

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

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

Examples

- List of campus committees and teams, such as faculty or university senate, assessment committee, general education committee, library committee, etc.
- Bylaws, policies, procedures and schedules for the institution's faculty or university senate, student government association, staff senate or council, and governing board.
- Documentation outlining the organizational structure.
- Document resolutions and meeting minutes of different constituent groups.
- Agendas and minutes of governing board demonstrating knowledge and oversight of finances and academic functions.

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

Examples

- Independent audited financial statements and Composite Financial Index patterns for multiple years.
- Documentation of investments in facilities and technology, including deferred maintenance.
- Campus master plan including additions and deferred maintenance.
- Policy for faculty and staff credentials.

- Information about training and professional development for faculty and staff.
- Documentation of strategic plan investments.
- Budget requests and procedures delineating flow of decision making.
- Projected budgets/Pro-forma.
- Compliance with bank covenants and lines of credit.
- Endowment drawdown policy.
- Process for monitoring expenses.
- Mission statement and activities of institution's foundation or advancement office.
- Fundraising documentation and results.
- Enrollment plan, current enrollment and projections.
- Allocation of budget for instruction, strategic plan, mission, professional development, etc.
- Duration and amount of grants received by the institution.
- Evidence of linkage to planning initiatives related to current educational programs.
- Collective bargaining agreement(s).

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

Examples

- History and process of strategic plan creation and constituencies involved.
- Annual updates to strategic plan.
- Budget requests and procedure for budget planning.
- Budget allocation by major area.
- Budget projections for multiple years.
- Enrollment management plan.
- Environmental scan results.
- Evidence of resources used to aid in planning activities, such as, state reports on demographics, industry/vocational employment demands, etc.
- Facilities and technology plans.
- Evidence of attainment of strategic planning goals.
- Documentation delineating linkage between planning, budgeting and evaluation/assessment.

- Retention and completion data and reports.
- Student success data and reports.
- Documentation of institutional effectiveness plans and strategies, including goals and measurable outcomes for identified functional areas.
- Student learning and academic program assessment documentation.
- Documentation regarding assessments of and satisfaction with facilities, libraries, technology, human resources, security, and other services (e.g., counseling, dining, residence life, student recreation, student activities, parking, etc.).
- Key performance indicators/dashboard.
- Meeting minutes, agendas and/or task lists indicating review and analysis of data to inform improvements of operational activities (e.g., counseling, residence life, information technology, parking, student activities).

