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An Overview of Reaffirmation Visits

Oklahoma State University

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Topics

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What is a Reaffirmation Visit?

- Every HLC institution is on a ten-year evaluation cycle, called a "Pathway." Every institution is evaluated in Years 4 and 10.

- The evaluation in Year 10 is known as the "comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation" and always entails an onsite visit.

- For reaffirmation visits, institutions must affirmatively demonstrate compliance with HLC's **Criteria for Accreditation** and the **Federal Compliance** requirements. (Expect to write to these requirements.)

- Institutions must "otherwise be in compliance" with HLC requirements (particularly, the Assumed Practices). Please **do not write** to these other HLC requirements, but please be sure to review them internally.

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Information about Your Reaffirmation Visit

- OSU's Reaffirmation Visit April 20-21, 2026.
- Team Chair: Dr. Ying Sun, Arizona State University
- Deadline for Assurance Filing is March 23, 2026 (at 11:59 p.m.).
- Team typically arrives in town on Sunday evening and spends its time having one last private planning meeting.
- After the onsite visit ends on Tuesday, the team will remain in town until Noon on Wednesday discussing, comparing notes and beginning to draft the report. They may ask for additional items after they've left.
- The team will also recommend whether the institution will remain "eligible to choose" an accreditation pathway (because it provides strong evidence of compliance),whether it will be "limited to the Standard Pathway" (because it appears that more frequent follow-up in the form of HLC monitoring will be required.
- The team will take into account the history of the institution's accreditation relationship. Specifically, everything that has occurred since the institution's Year 4 Assurance Review leading up to the reaffirmation, with one caveat (see next slide).

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Role of Quality Initiatives in Reaffirmation Visits

- The institution's successful completion of an Open Pathway Quality Initiative **plays no role** in the determination of whether the institution meets HLC requirements for reaffirmation.
- Quality Initiatives are intended to encourage institutions to pursue continuous improvement efforts, but they are not evaluated against the Criteria for Accreditation or any other HLC requirement.
- Instead, the rubric for Quality Initiatives is simply: "Genuine Effort"/"No Genuine Effort."
- For this reason, while institutions can and should describe any and all evidence that supports their compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, they cannot point to the successful completion of the Quality Initiative as evidence of compliance.

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Overview of HLC Requirements

Overview of HLC Requirements

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Reaffirmation Team Reviews

Only if concerns arise about a related Core Component

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Criteria for Accreditation *(revised September 2025)*

Description	HLC's standards for quality; mission-reflective
Points of Review	Periodically reviewed throughout the accreditation relationship, including comprehensive evaluations and Assurance Reviews
Evaluative Framework	Met, Met with Concerns, Not Met
Potential Outcomes	• Routine monitoring (interim report and focused visit) • Special Monitoring • Sanctions and Show-Cause Order • Adverse Actions

Criterion #1: Mission

- Core Component 1.A Mission Alignment
- Core Component 1.B Mission and Public Good
- Core Component 1.C Mission and Diversity of Society

Criterion #2: Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

- Core Component 2.A Integrity
- Core Component 2.B Transparency
- Core Component 2.C Board Governance
- Core Component 2.D Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression
- Core Component 2.E Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery and Application

Criterion #3: Teaching and Learning for Student Success

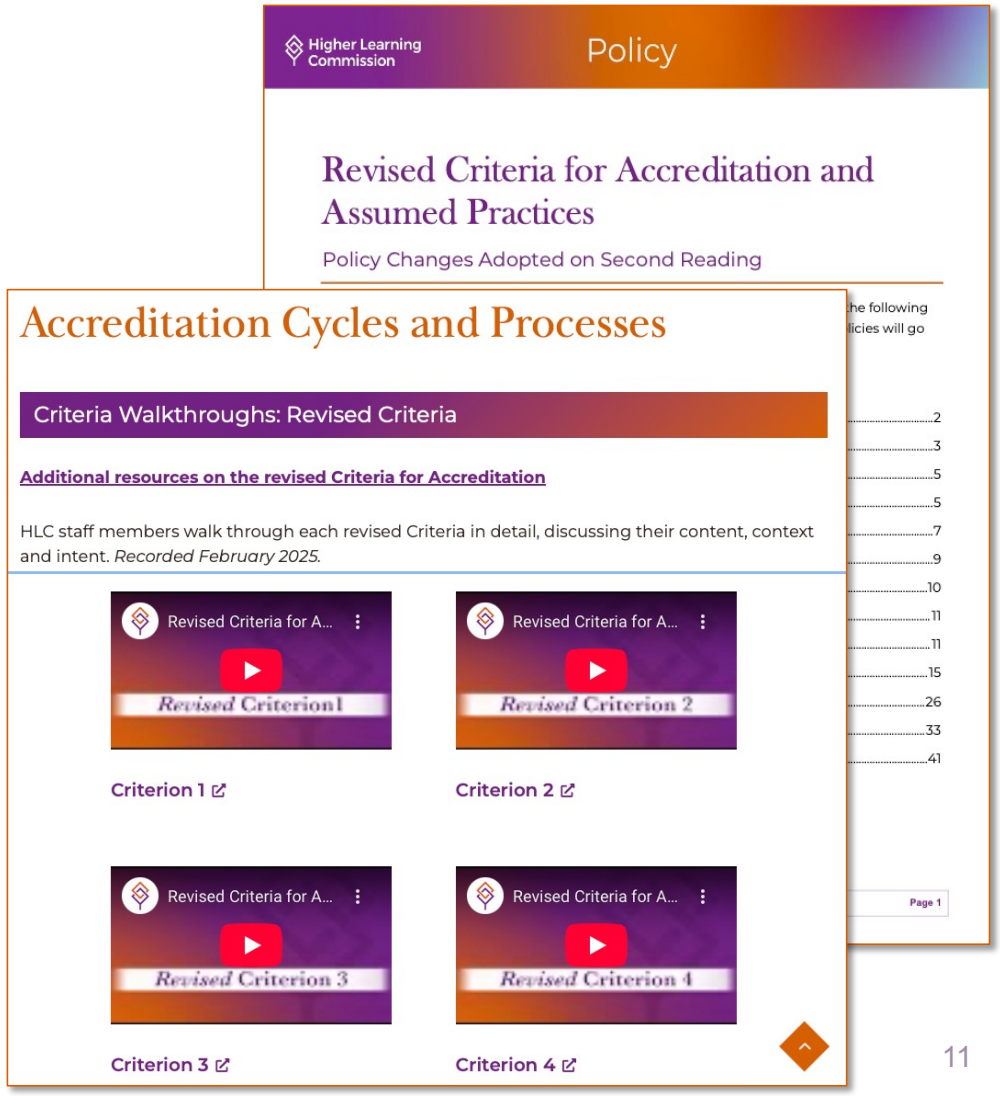
- Core Component 3.A Educational Programs
- Core Component 3.B Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry
- Core Component 3.C Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff
- Core Component 3.D Support for Student Learning and Resources for Teaching
- Core Component 3.E Assessment of Student Learning
- Core Component 3.F Program Review
- Core Component 3.G Student Success Outcomes

Criterion #4: Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

- Core Component 4.A Effective Administrative Structures
- Core Component 4.B Resource Base and Sustainability
- Core Component 4.C Planning for Quality Improvement

Criteria Resources

- Revised Criteria
- Crosswalk (Old → New)
- Online Videos/Webinars
- “Providing Evidence” supplement
- FAQs



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Federal Compliance Requirements

Description	Complement the Criteria for Accreditation and are part of HLC's approach to quality assurance for all institutions, regardless of Title IV status; represent aspects of an institution's compliance with Title IV program responsibilities
Points of Review	• Federal Compliance Program (comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation) • Substantive change reviews (limited) • As otherwise required by HLC
Evaluative Framework	Met, Not Met
Potential Outcomes	• Routine monitoring (interim report and focused visit) • Special Monitoring • Sanctions and Show-Cause Order • Adverse Actions

Federal Compliance Requirements

- Assignment of Credits, Program Length and Tuition
- Institutional Mechanisms for Handling Student Complaints
- Publication of Transfer Policies
- Practices for Verification of Student Identity
- Protection of Student Privacy
- Publication of Student Outcome Data
- Standing with States and Other Accreditors
- Recruiting, Admissions, and Related Enrollment Practices
- Fraud and Abuse
- Title IV Program Responsibilities

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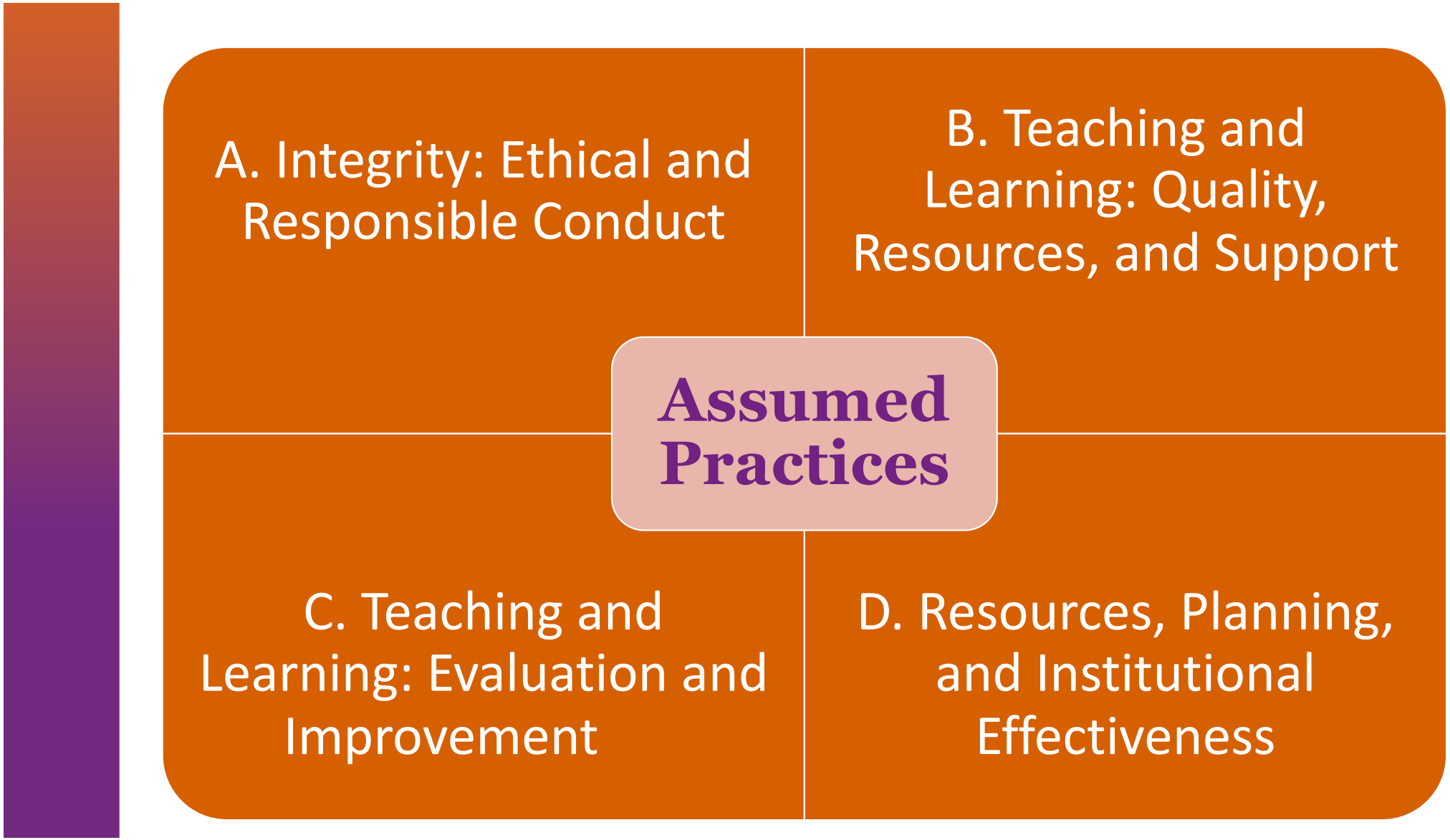
Assumed Practices *(revised September 2025)*

Description	Basic practices shared by all institutions; focus on facts, not judgment and are not likely to vary by institutional mission or context
Points of Review	• Seeking Accreditation reviews • Show-Cause Order • As otherwise required by HLC
Evaluative Framework	Met, Not Met
Potential Outcomes	• Routine monitoring (interim report and focused visit) • Special Monitoring • Sanctions and Show-Cause Order • Adverse Actions


A. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct
B. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support
Assumed Practices
C. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement
D. Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

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An Overview of the Criteria for Accreditation

Providing Evidence Resource

Resource for institutions and for peer reviewers in thinking about possible sources of evidence

Provides suggestions to assist institutions in thinking about possible sources of evidence (as a starting point as they consider their compliance)

It should not be viewed by institutions or peer reviewers as an exhaustive list or used as a checklist!

The examples seek to make the centrality of mission explicit as institutions write to the Criteria using evidence relevant to their particular sectors and unique institutional contexts.

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Overview of Criteria for Accreditation

- Beginning September 1, 2025, HLC will review institutions against four Criteria for Accreditation.
- Each Criterion has one or more Core Components representing an aspect of institutional quality.
- An institution's distinctive mission plays a primary role in its demonstration of evidence that it meets the Core Components of each Criterion.
- Language to this effect appears throughout the Criteria, signaling HLC's respect for the institution's mission in the evaluation process.
- As a practical matter, this means many different examples of evidence are acceptable.

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Criterion 1. Mission

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

Core Components:

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.

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Criterion 1. Mission

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

Core Components (continued):

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 1: Examples of Evidence

- Published mission statement; strategic and operational plans; and a list of institutional values and priorities. **(1.A)**
- Resource allocations demonstrating priorities aligned with mission. **(1.A)**
- Enrollment and programmatic profiles. **(1.A)**
- Community engagement activities and relationships. **(1.B)**
- List of efforts, programs and certificates that meet community or constituent needs. **(1.B)**
- Documentation of public events and/or program series the community is able to attend. **(1.B)**
- Documentation of course-based activities that promote civic engagement. **(1.C)**
- Documentation of how diversity and inclusion are addressed in the institution's mission documents and strategic plan. **(1.C)**
- Student support strategies that demonstrate a focus on diversity and inclusion. **(1.C)**

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Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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

Core Components:

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.

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Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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

Core Components (continued):

2.C. Board Governance

In discharging its fiduciary duties, the institution's governing board is free from undue external influence and empowered to act in the best interests of the institution, including the students it serves.

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Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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

Core Components (continued):

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 2: Examples of Evidence

- Faculty, staff, and student handbooks, including policies on academic honesty and integrity; and any (anonymized) examples of enforcement of these policies. **(2.A)**
- Examples of the institution's disposition of recent grievances as well as any changes made based on identified trends. **(2.A)**
- Board membership, declared conflicts-of-interest, notices of public meetings, meeting minutes, Trustee policies and bylaws. **(2.A)**
- Website, catalogs, & course schedules. **(2.B)**
- List of the institution's accreditation relationships and their current status. **(2.B)**
- Examples of decision making in the best interest of the institution that relies on the Board's institutional knowledge. **(2.C)**

Criterion 2: More Examples of Evidence

- Policy on freedom of expression and/or academic freedom. **(2.D)**
- Protocol, by-laws, and training documentation for Institutional Review Board (or similar entity). **(2.E)**
- Training programs on plagiarism, citations, use of library resources, online research, etc. **(2.E)**

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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. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

Core Components:

3.A. Educational Programs

The institution maintains learning goals and outcomes that reflect a level of rigor commensurate with college-level work, including by program level and the content of each of its educational programs.

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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. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

Core Components (continued):

3.B. Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry

The institution's educational programs engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in practicing modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

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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. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

Core Components (continued):

3.C. Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff

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

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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. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

Core Components (continued):

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

The institution provides student support services that address the needs of its student populations, as well as the teaching resources and infrastructure necessary for student success.

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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. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

Core Components (continued):

3.E. Assessment of Student Learning

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

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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. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

Core Components (continued):

3.F. Program Review

The institution improves its curriculum based on periodic program review.

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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. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

Core Components (continued):

3.G. Student Success Outcomes

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

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Criterion 3: Examples of Evidence

- Documentation that the institution is in compliance with federal policy for credit hour requirements, where appropriate. **(3.A)**
- Examples of course- and program-learning goals for each degree level across all modes and locations. **(3.A)**
- General education learning goals and curriculum. **(3.B)**
- Research symposia. **(3.B)**
- Documentation of professional development and training opportunities for staff and faculty, including support for instructional design. **(3.C)**
- List of student support services, disability services, financial aid, advising, career counseling, campus childcare, cocurricular activities and health services (including for all modalities). **(3.D)**
- Information about writing and math assistance, tutoring programs, or other support provided to students. **(3.D)**

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Criterion 3: More Examples of Evidence

- Effective processes: assessment plan, templates, cycle, student learning outcomes, rubrics, curriculum maps, direct measures, indirect measures, annual reports, faculty review, assessment/curriculum committee(s), faculty senate, assessment office/coordinator/director, data. **(3.E)**
- Employer feedback, licensure exams, curricular changes, revisions (SLOs, measures, rubrics), agendas and minutes (program, Gen. Ed., institution). **(3.E)**
- Agendas/minutes, training, faculty hiring, faculty evaluations, assessment office, instructional designers, Chairs/Deans/Provost, student affairs personnel. **(3.E)**
- Academic integrity of courses/programs: internal/external curriculum review, substitutions, co/pre-requisites, compliance (State, accreditors), new program approval process, faculty hiring, faculty credentials, dual enrollment practices. **(3.F)**
- Specialized accreditation: necessary/optional, status, monitoring or sanction, actions taken. **(3.F)**
- Current data and goals for institutional persistence, retention and completion (include the institution's definitions of these terms). **(3.G)**
- Analysis of graduation and retention rates by distinctive student populations. **(3.G)**

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.

Core Components:

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.

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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.

Core Components:

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.

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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.

Core Components:

4.C. Planning for Quality Improvement

The institution engages in systematic strategic planning for quality improvement. It relies on data, integrating its insights from enrollment forecasts, financial capacity, student learning assessment, institutional operations and the external environment.

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Criterion 4: Examples of Evidence

- Bylaws, policies, procedures and schedules for the institution's faculty or university senate, student government association, staff senate or council, and governing board. **(4.A)**
- Agendas and minutes of governing board demonstrating knowledge and oversight of finances and academic functions. **(4.A)**
- Independent audited financial statements and Composite Financial Index patterns for multiple years. **(4.B)**
- Fundraising documentation and results. **(4.B)**
- Allocation of budget for instruction, strategic plan, mission, professional development, etc. **(4.B)**

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Criterion 4: More Examples of Evidence

- History and process of strategic plan creation, constituencies involved and annual updates. **(4.C)**
- Documentation delineating linkage between planning, budgeting and evaluation/assessment. **(4.C)**
- Documentation of institutional effectiveness plans and strategies, including goals and measurable outcomes for identified functional areas. **(4.C)**

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Federal Compliance: Deeper Dive & Mechanics

Federal Compliance Requirements

- Assignment of Credits, Program Length and Tuition
- Institutional Mechanisms for Handling Student Complaints
- Publication of Transfer Policies
- Practices for Verification of Student Identity
- Protection of Student Privacy
- Publication of Student Outcome Data
- Standing with States and Other Accreditors
- Recruiting, Admissions, and Related Enrollment Practices
- Fraud and Abuse
- Title IV Program Responsibilities

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Focus of Review

Topic of Review	Focus of Review
Assignment of Credits, Program Length & Tuition	Policies regarding credit hours (and other equivalencies, program length, and tuition variation), with a focus on Carnegie Unit equivalency *Note—Worksheets are used for CBE/DA substantive change applications.*
Institutional Mechanisms for Handling Student Complaints	Institution's mechanisms for addressing complaints
Publication of Transfer Policies	Required disclosures
Practices for Verification of Student Identity	Institution's mechanisms to verify student identity in distance/correspondence courses and disclosure of additional costs, if any
Protection of Student Privacy	Institution's mechanisms to protect student privacy, protect privacy and security of student data, and be transparent regarding use of personal data

Focus of Review

Topic of Review	Focus of Review
Publication of Student Outcome Data	Transparency of minimum required disclosures *Note—not a review of sufficiency of any data*
Standing with State Agencies & Other Accreditors	If applicable, action letters and responses
Recruiting, Admissions and Related Enrollment Practices	Training materials and code of conduct for employees and third-party contractors *Note—Overall compliance with policy may be addressed as needed*
Title IV Program Responsibilities (if applicable and institution submits an Appendix A)	Implications of negative findings

Mechanics of Review

- Role of Federal Compliance Reviewer
  - Conducts preliminary review during the 4 weeks preceding the visit
  - Will contact institution to get syllabi samples (upload through Assurance System Addendum tab)
  - Participates in team conference calls and communicates with team chair, as needed
  - Provides insight to the evaluation team for on-site review

- Role of Evaluation Team
  - Conducts the on-site review
  - Follows up on any preliminary findings of the FC reviewers
  - Finalizes the Federal Compliance section as well the full report

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Mechanics of Review

- Role of the Institution
  - Completes Federal Compliance Institutional Filing Form
  - Conforms to Personally Identifiable Information (PII) requirements
  - Uploads Federal Compliance Institutional Filing Form into Assurance System
  - Makes additional evidence available to Federal Compliance Reviewer and to on-site team, as requested
  - Reviews draft of the Federal Compliance section of report (a part of full report) and corrects any errors of fact
  - Submits an institutional response within two weeks of final report with any areas of substantive disagreement with findings

Mechanics of Review

- Evaluative Framework
  - The institution meets requirements
  - The institution does not meet requirements
- Implications for Criteria or other HLC requirements are noted.
- Sanctions **may** apply under policy or monitoring may be appropriate.
  - "Not Met" for federal compliance requirements does not automatically result in a sanction; monitoring could be appropriate.
  - Monitoring could include routine monitoring or special monitoring.

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Additional Reminders

- Third-Party Comments
  - Members of the public ("third-parties") may provide comments at any time through the HLC website. There is no need for the institution to solicit third-party comments.
  - Institutions generally inform stakeholders when visits are occurring; HLC publishes list of upcoming visits on its website.
  - Comments are provided to the visiting team prior to a comprehensive evaluation visit.

- Cohort Default Rates
  - HLC makes determinations related to follow-up based on the U.S. Department of Education's prior identification of institutions with troubling rates.

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Tips for Success

Common Issues with Evidence

- Marshalling evidence
  - Does the institution regularly take an internal inventory of new initiatives, developments, achievements with attention to collecting related documents and other evidence of activities?
  - How can the institution ensure a mechanism for collecting timely information across the institution about its success in achieving its strategic objectives?
  - Has the institution identified the significance of the evidence presented and "connected the dots" for the team in terms of impact?
  - How well does the institution perceive and respond to unanswered questions or concerns from peer review teams?
  - Has the institution ensured that those who are knowledgeable about the evidence are available to the team?

Address the prompts within the framework of the Criteria!

How Much Evidence to Provide?

Three Important Considerations:

1. Documentation of the ***existence*** of relevant policies, procedures, systems, and resources
2. Documented ***use*** of these policies, procedures, systems, and resources
3. Documentation of the ***effectiveness*** of institutional practices addressing Criteria and Core Components

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How Much Evidence to Provide?

An institution will have provided enough evidence of its compliance with a Core Component when evidence provided documents a clear pattern of maintaining necessary policies, procedures, systems, and resources; reliably using these resources for their intended purposes; and documenting the effectiveness of its efforts.

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Role of the HLC Staff Liaison

- Ahead of scheduled evaluations, liaisons routinely brief team chairs about an institution's accreditation history and recent interactions.
- The liaison provides the team chair with contact information in the event there is a need for outreach about a complex question during or shortly after the visit.
- The liaison explains any relevant HLC policies, reinforces HLC procedures, provides historical context when needed regarding HLC decisionmaking bodies' findings in light of certain kinds of evidence.
- During the evaluation, the liaison is not present but remains available to the team chair should something out of the ordinary arise.
- The liaison reviews the draft report before it is transmitted to the institution for corrections of errors of fact. The main goal is to ensure the report meets HLC's quality assurance standards.
- The HLC staff liaison **plays no role** in evaluating the institution's evidence or in making decisions about the outcome of the review.
- Should the team recommend an action that warrants an IAC Hearing or a Board meeting, the HLC staff liaison briefs those bodies ahead of their decisions.

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Conclusion

In evaluating the Criteria for Accreditation, HLC always considers varying institutional types, missions, models and approaches within higher education.

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.

The onus is on the institution to direct the attention of peer reviewers to evidence that makes its case for accreditation as well as to highlight areas that represent the institution's fulfillment of its land-grant mission to "promote learning, advance knowledge, enrich lives, and stimulate economic development through teaching, research, extension, outreach and creative activities."

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