



# CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION

ALPHA REVISION—MARCH 2018

## BACKGROUND

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is required by federal regulations and its own policies to initiate a substantive review of its Criteria for Accreditation every five years. Throughout the last year, HLC conducted an internal analysis, held listening sessions, conducted and analyzed a member institution and Peer Corps survey, analyzed the rigor of team reports and analyzed trends across interim reporting. These efforts resulted in the findings that directed the changes identified in this alpha version of a Criteria revision for review by HLC's Board of Trustees at its February 2018 meeting.

# FINDINGS

**Some redundancies exist among Core Components and should be addressed. Some specific issues need clarification or elaboration.** In addition to other improvements, the edits documented in the alpha version of the Criteria are intended to address the noted redundancies and needs for clarification or elaboration.

## Criterion 1

Staff noted that institutions and peer reviewers routinely ask what HLC means by “diversity of society” or “role in a multicultural society.” Many of the edits intend to elaborate on this idea. The goal was to build on the concept communicated in the [Guiding Value #3](#): Education for a diverse, technological, globally connected world.

## Criterion 2

Institutions and peer reviewers noted redundancy with regard to the governing board in two places (Criterion 2 and 5). The edits intend to unite the language about governing boards under one Criterion and clarify that all constituents are part of planning.

## Criterion 3

The edits in Criterion 3 address redundancies identified by institutions and peer reviewers.

## Criterion 4

Institutions and peer reviewers have identified issues with the phrase “ongoing attention” with regard to student success. The edits intend to fine-tune the language for clarity, knowing that the work being done on HLC’s [Student Success Initiatives](#) will provide additional guidance on the changes that may need to occur to clarify HLC’s approach to student success within the Criteria for Accreditation.

## Criterion 5

The edits in Criterion 5 address redundancies identified by institutions and peer reviewers.

**Institutions and peer reviewers need more guidance on supporting documentation.** In addition to the edits documented in this alpha version of the Criteria, HLC will create a guide of commonly used evidence, with language on how institutions can demonstrate compliance in situations that require institutions to “prove the negative.”

**Certain words are vague and can mean different things to different people.** HLC is also in the process of creating a more comprehensive glossary for the Criteria. The glossary will include words and phrases such as diversity, control, understands, sufficient autonomy, appropriate to higher education, cocurricular, and good practice.

As the alpha version of the Criteria revision, HLC expects and welcomes feedback from the membership and the Peer Corps about whether these changes address our goals.

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Note: Wording that was deleted is shown as strikethrough (~~wording~~); new language is shown in bold (**wording**). Wording that has been relocated is in italics (*wording*). Wording that is new but situated within relocated wording is in bold and in italics (***wording***); explanation of the change is in red (**explanation**).

# UPDATED CRITERIA REVIEW SCHEDULE

ACTIVITY	WHEN
<b>A</b> Initial HLC staff analysis of Criteria and Core Components	Fall 2016
<b>B</b> Board approval to initiate formal review	February 2017
<b>C</b> Annual conference listening session	April 2017
<b>D</b> Survey of institutions and Peer Corps	Summer 2017
<b>E</b> Analysis of various evaluations, comments, and survey data	September 2016
<b>F</b> Board discussion of preliminary findings	November 2017
<b>G</b> Staff draft alpha version of Criteria revisions	December 2017
<b>H</b> Board review of alpha version of Criteria revisions	February 2018
<b>I</b> Release alpha version to membership and Peer Corps; collect feedback electronically and at annual conference	Spring 2018
<b>J</b> Analysis of alpha version comments and surveys	Summer 2018
<b>K</b> Staff integrate analysis of alpha version into beta version for the Board	September 2018
<b>L</b> Board first reading of beta version	November 2018
<b>M</b> Official 60-day comment period for membership	November through December 2018
<b>N</b> Review membership comments for beta version; create final draft	January 2019
<b>O</b> Second Board reading, approval and release of final version	February 2019
<b>P</b> Begin institutional and Peer Corps training on Criteria updates at annual conference and throughout summer	April 2019
<b>Q</b> Effective date for implementation of updated Criteria	Fall 2019 <i>if minor revision</i> Fall 2020 <i>if substantial revision</i>

# ALPHA VERSION, TRACKED CHANGES

## Criterion 1. Mission

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

### Core Components

~~1.A D:~~ The institution's mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.

1. Actions and decisions reflect **demonstrate** an understanding that in its educational role the institution serves the public, not solely the institution **or any superordinate entity**, and thus entails a public obligation.
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 **external to the educational mission**.
3. The institution **promotes student** engagements with its identified external constituencies and communities of interest and responds to its **identified external constituencies'** needs as its mission and capacity allow.

~~1.B:~~ The mission is articulated publicly.

1. The institution clearly articulates its mission through one or more public documents, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans, or institutional priorities. **(Moved to 1.C)**
2. The mission document or documents are current and explain the extent of 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. **(Moved to 1.C)**
3. The mission document or documents identify the nature, scope, and intended constituents of

the higher education programs and services the institution provides. **(Moved to 1.C)**

~~1.B E:~~ The institution **advances civic engagement in a diverse and multicultural society**, understands the relationship between its mission and the diversity of society:

1. The institution **fosters civic learning and civic discourse**, addresses its role in a multicultural society. **(Clarification of language)**
2. The institution's processes and activities **ensure inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations** reflect attention to human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves. **(Clarification of language, move to 3.C.1)**
3. **The institution fosters a climate of respect among all students, faculty, staff and administration from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.**

~~1.C:~~ ~~1.A:~~ The institution's mission is **articulated publicly** and **broadly understood operationalized** within **throughout** the institution, and guides its operations. **(Clarification of language, differentiate from Criterion 5.)**

1. ~~1.B.1~~ The institution clearly articulates its mission through **one or more public documents information**, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans or institutional priorities.
2. ~~1.B.2~~ The mission **and related statements** document or documents are current and **reference** explain the extent of the institution's emphasis on the various **areas** aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, application of research, creative work, clinical service, public service, economic development and religious or cultural purpose.
3. ~~1.B.3~~ The mission **and related statements** document or documents identify the nature, scope and intended constituents of the higher

education programs **offerings and nature of services** the institution provides. (Moved up from 1.B.3)

4. 1.A.1 The mission statement is developed through a process suited to the nature and culture **context** of the institution and is adopted by the governing board. (Moved to 2.A, Clarification of language)

5. 1.A.2 The institution's academic programs **offerings**, student support services and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.

1.A.3 The institution's planning and budgeting priorities align with and support the mission. (This sub-component may be addressed by reference to the response to Criterion 5.C.1.) (Deleted because of duplication in Criterion 5)

## Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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

### Core Components

2.A. The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it establishes and follows policies and processes **to ensure** for fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff.

1. **The institution develops and seeks adoption of its mission from its governing board.** (From former Criterion 5.B)

2. *The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel **human resources** and auxiliary functions.* (Formerly part of 2.A)

2.B. The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public. with regard to its programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control and accreditation relationships.

1. 2.B **The institution ensures the accuracy of any representations it makes regarding** programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control and accreditation relationships. (Formerly 2.B)

2. 3.E.2 *The institution demonstrates is **truthful regarding** any claims it makes about contributions to its students' educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as regarding its contributions to the educational experience through research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose and economic development.* (Clarification of language, Moved from 3.E.2)

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

1. *The governing board is **trained and knowledgeable so that it makes informed decisions** about the institution; it provides oversight of the institution's financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.* (From former subcomponent 5.B.1)

2. 1: The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.

3. 2: The governing board reviews and considers the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.

4. 3: The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties when such influence would not be in the best interest of the institution. (Simplification of language)

5. 4: 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 of expression** and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning **as well as freedom of expression.**  
(Clarification of language.)

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

1. **Institutions supporting basic and applied research maintain professional standards and provide oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability.**
2. ~~1-~~The institution provides effective ~~oversight~~ and support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff and students. (Oversight is covered in 2.E.1)
3. ~~2-~~**The institution provides** students are offered guidance in the **ethical ethics of research and** use of information resources. (Concept moved from 3.D.5)
4. ~~3-~~The institution ~~has~~ and enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

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

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

#### Core Components

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

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of **student** performance by students appropriate to the **credential** degree or certificate awarded. (Clarification of language)
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 demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs.~~

*The institution offers degree 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.* (Moved from 3.B.3, clarification of language)

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.* (Moved from 3.B.2)
2. ~~The institution articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements.~~ 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. (Moved to 3.B.1)
3. ~~Every degree program offered by the institution engages students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; in mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.~~ (Became Core Component statement)
3. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity of the world in which students live and work.

4. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their **programs 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's processes and activities reflect attention to~~ **ensures that the overall composition of its faculty and staff reflects** human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves. **(Moved from former 1.C.2 with clarifying language)**
2. ~~1-~~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; involvement in assessment of student learning. **(Clarification of language)**
3. ~~2-~~All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual and consortial **programs offerings**.
4. ~~3-~~Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.
5. ~~4-~~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. ~~5-~~Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.
7. ~~6-~~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 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 **programs 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, museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).

~~3.D.5 The institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources. (Moved to 2.E)~~

~~3.E. The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment. (Concept moved to 2.B)~~

1. ~~Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.~~
2. ~~The institution demonstrates any claims it makes about contributions to its students' educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, and economic development. (Concept moved to 2.B)~~

## 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** ~~demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs offerings.~~

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews **and acts upon its 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** ~~assure~~ 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** ~~assures~~ 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** ~~assures~~ that the **credentials** ~~degree or certificate programs~~ 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, ~~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).~~ **(Relocated this to the evidence example document.)**

4.B. The institution ~~demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.~~ **The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.** **(Clarification of language)**

1. The institution has ~~clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals~~ **in academic and cocurricular programs.** **(From 4.B.2)**

~~2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and cocurricular programs.~~ **(Moved to 4.B.1)**

2. ~~3.~~ The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.

3. ~~4.~~ The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

4.C. The institution ~~demonstrates a commitment to~~ **pursues** educational improvement ~~through ongoing attention to~~ **through goals that seek to increase** 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 but 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. Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

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

### Core Components

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

1. The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; it provides oversight of the institution's financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities. **(Moved to 2.C)**

2. **Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies** has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—in the institution's governance **through 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. **for contribution and collaborative effort.**

**5.A.B.** The institution's resource base **and related activities** support its current educational programs **offerings** and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

1. The institution has the **qualified and trained** fiscal and **operational staff** human resources and physical and technological infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
2. The goals incorporated into mission **and any related** statements or elaborations of mission statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources and opportunities. **(Formerly 5.A.3)**
4. The institution's staff in all areas are appropriately qualified and trained. **(Integrated within 5.B.1)**
3. 5. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring **its finances** expense.
4. 2. The institution's **fiscal** resource allocations process ensures that its educational purposes **are achieved.** are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations to other areas or disbursement of revenue to a superordinate entity. **(Moved to 1.A.1 and 1.A.2)**
- 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.** Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue, such as enrollment, the economy, and state support.

5. Institutional planning anticipates emerging **evolving external** factors, such as technology **advancements**, demographic shifts, and globalization, **the economy and state support**.
6. **The institution implements its plans to systematically improve its operations and student outcomes.**

5.D. The institution works systematically to improve its performance: **(Integrated into 5.C)**

~~1. The institution develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations:~~

~~2. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts:~~

### Policy History

Last Revised: June 2014

First Adopted: August 1992

Revision History: Criterion 3 revised August 1998, revised February 2002, revised February 2007. New Criteria for Accreditation adopted February 2003, effective January 2005, New Criteria for Accreditation adopted February 2012, effective January 2013

Notes: Former Policy Number: 1.1(a), 2013 – 1.1 Part A, 1.1 Part B. The Revised Criteria for Accreditation, Assumed Practices, and other new and revised related policies adopted February 2012 are effective for all accredited institutions on January 1, 2013.