

Key Findings of the Application of the Criteria for Accreditation

Academic Year 2024

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the findings from the comprehensive evaluations that have received final actions in academic year (AY) 2024, September 2023 – August 2024. The analysis addresses the differences across institutional contexts, examines how HLC member institutions have met the Criteria for Accreditation over the past five years, and explores the areas of challenge faced by the institutions. Below are some takeaways from the analysis.

- The overall outcomes of the AY 2024 comprehensive evaluations were consistent with the improvement trend in recent years. The percentage of HLC institutions meeting the standards of quality under the Criteria for Accreditation without concerns has improved 18 percentage points since AY 2020.
- The most frequently cited Core Components have followed a persistent pattern in the last five years, which included 4.B (assessment of student learning), 5.B (resource base), and 5.C (systematic and integrated planning and improvement) at the top.
- Core Component 4.B continued to be the most frequently cited area of concern, with citations in 25% of all comprehensive evaluations in AY 2024. However, the proportion of institutions with citations in Core Component 4.B has decreased 3 percentage points from last year and 8 percentage points from two years ago.
- An examination of the most frequently cited Core Components by Carnegie Classification provides further information on the specific areas of challenge by institutional sector.

The insights gained from this analysis of comprehensive evaluations help guide HLC's efforts to strengthen communication, programming, and resources in support of the membership.

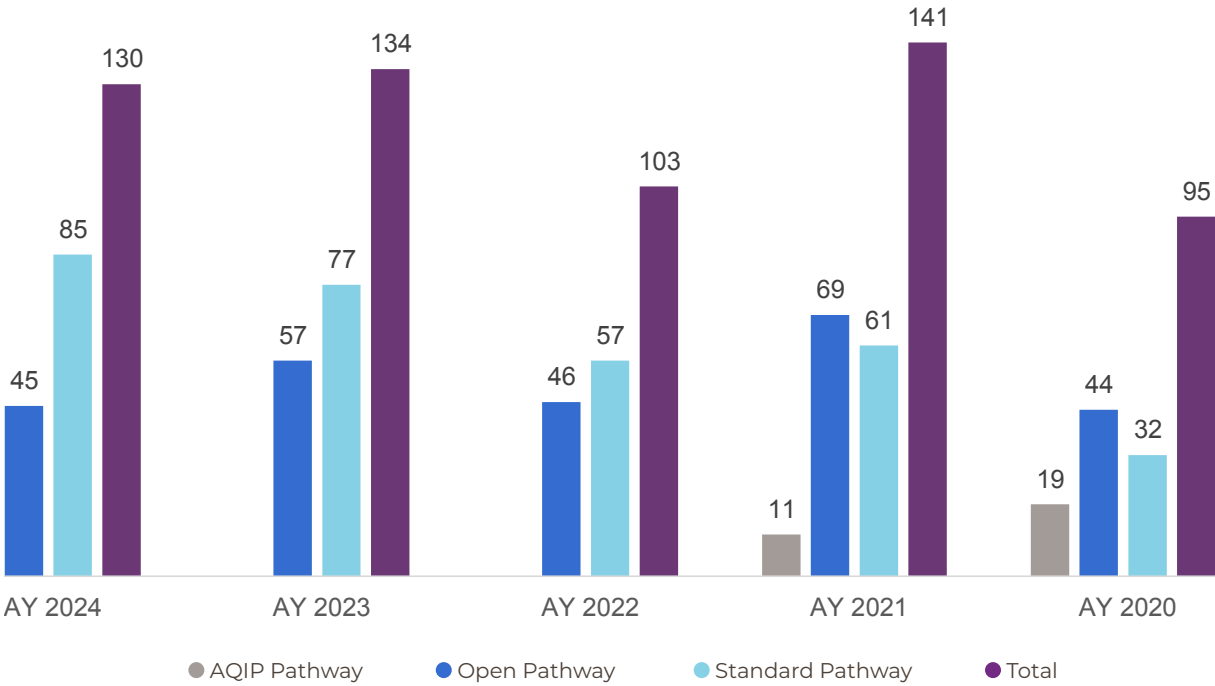
Overview

In AY 2024 HLC took final action on 130 comprehensive evaluations, of which 91 (70%) were Year 10 reviews for reaffirmation of accreditation and 39 (30%) were Year 4 reviews. Among the evaluated institutions, 45 (35%) were in Open Pathway and 85 (65%) institutions were in Standard Pathway.

Figure 1

Number of Completed Comprehensive Evaluations by Pathway, AY 2020 – AY 2024¹

Note: AQIP Pathway was sunset in 2020; some AQIP Pathway evaluations received final action in AY 2021.



The distribution of evaluations by institutional control indicated that public institutions accounted for more than half of all the completed evaluations in AY 2024 (n=70, 54%), followed by private nonprofit institutions (52 institutions, 40%), private for-profit (4 institutions, 3%), and tribal colleges (4 institutions, 3%).

Considering the distribution of evaluated institutions by Carnegie Classification, associate's colleges accounted for the largest group (n=51, 39% of the total), followed by baccalaureate and special focus 4-year colleges (n=34, 26%), master's institutions (n=27, 21%), doctoral (n=8, 6%), doctoral/professional universities (n=3, 2%), baccalaureate/associate's colleges (n=3, 2%), and tribal colleges (n=4, 3%).

¹ In this report, the number of comprehensive evaluations by year was calculated based on the date of the final decisions, instead of the date of the peer review team's site visit, which was used in previous reports.

Outcomes

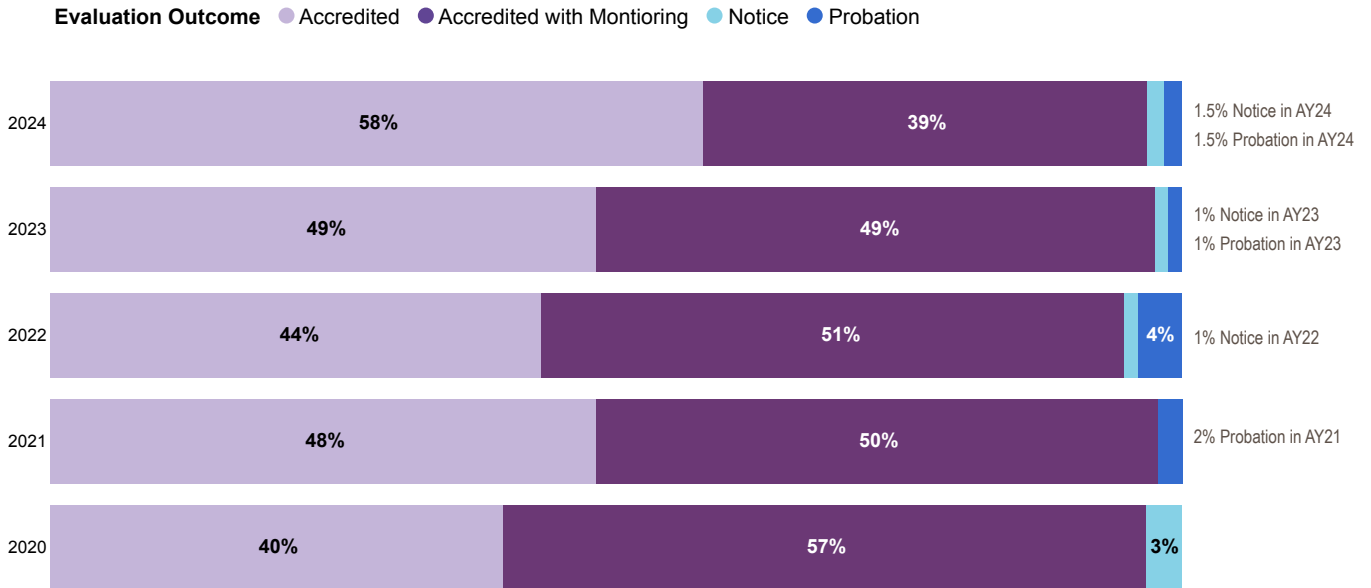
The overall outcomes of the 130 completed comprehensive evaluations in AY 2024 were as follows:

- 75 institutions (58% of the total) merited continued or reaffirmed accreditation without concerns,
- 51 institutions (39%) merited continued or reaffirmed accreditation with interim monitoring,
- 2 institutions (1.5%) were placed on Notice, and
- 2 institutions (1.5%) were placed on Probation.

Notably, AY 2024 was the first time in the last 5 years when more than half (58%) of the evaluated institutions merited continued or reaffirmed accreditation without concerns, a gain of 9 percentage points compared to the previous year.

Figure 2

Overall Evaluation Outcomes of Comprehensive Evaluations, AY 2020 – AY 2024



As seen in Figure 2, the overall outcomes of comprehensive evaluations in the last five years (AY 2020-2024) showed continuing improvements. Specifically, the proportion of institutions that were found in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation without concerns increased by 18 percentage points (from 40% to 58%) in this period. Conversely, the proportions of institutions with assigned interim monitoring decreased by 18 percentage points since AY 2020, while the proportion of institutions placed on sanction remained at 3%.

Evaluation Outcomes by Carnegie Classification

A breakdown of AY 2024 evaluation outcomes by Carnegie Classification, as seen in Figure 3, shows large variations across categories. Specifically, the proportions of institutions that were found in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation without concerns were highest among baccalaureate/associate colleges (n=3, 100%), doctoral/professional institutions (n=2, 67%), and doctoral institutions (n=5, 63%).

Among associate's colleges, more than half (55%) merited continued accreditation without concerns, while over a third (n=19, 37%) were assigned interim monitoring. Baccalaureate and master's institutions had similar outcome distributions where 59% of institutions were accredited without concerns and 41% were assigned interim monitoring. One out of four tribal colleges were found in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation without concerns. Notably, in AY 2024 all 4 institutions that were placed on sanction were associate's colleges.

Figure 3

Evaluation Outcomes by Carnegie Classification, AY 2024

Carnegie Classification Group	Accredited		Accredited w Monitoring		Notice		Probation		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Associate's	28	55%	19	37%	2	4%	2	4%	51	100%
Baccalaureate/Associate's	3	100%							3	100%
Baccalaureate	20	59%	14	41%					34	100%
Master's	16	59%	11	41%					27	100%
Doctoral	5	63%	3	38%					8	100%
Doctoral/Professional	2	67%	1	33%					3	100%
Tribal	1	25%	3	75%					4	100%
Grand Total	75	58%	51	39%	2	2%	2	2%	130	100%

Figure 4 below provides a summary of evaluation outcomes in the last five years for comparison within and across Carnegie Classifications².

² Please note that for ease of presenting data across time dimension and Carnegie Classifications in Figure 4 and in other similar figures that follow, the category of "associate's" included associate's, baccalaureate/associate's, and special focus two-year colleges; and the category of "baccalaureate" included baccalaureate and special focus four-year colleges. Other Carnegie Classifications remained unchanged.

As shown in Figure 4, more than half of the associate's colleges were found in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation without concerns in the last two years. While the evaluation outcomes of this group have improved significantly in the last 5 years, gaining 26 percentage points in the percentage of institutions accredited without concerns since AY 2020, this group had institutions placed on sanction in the last 4 out of 5 years.

Baccalaureate colleges were the only other Carnegie Classification group, besides associate's colleges, that have had institutions placed on sanction in the last three years. The proportion of institutions in full compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation without concerns in AY 2024 increased 14 percentage points from the previous year.

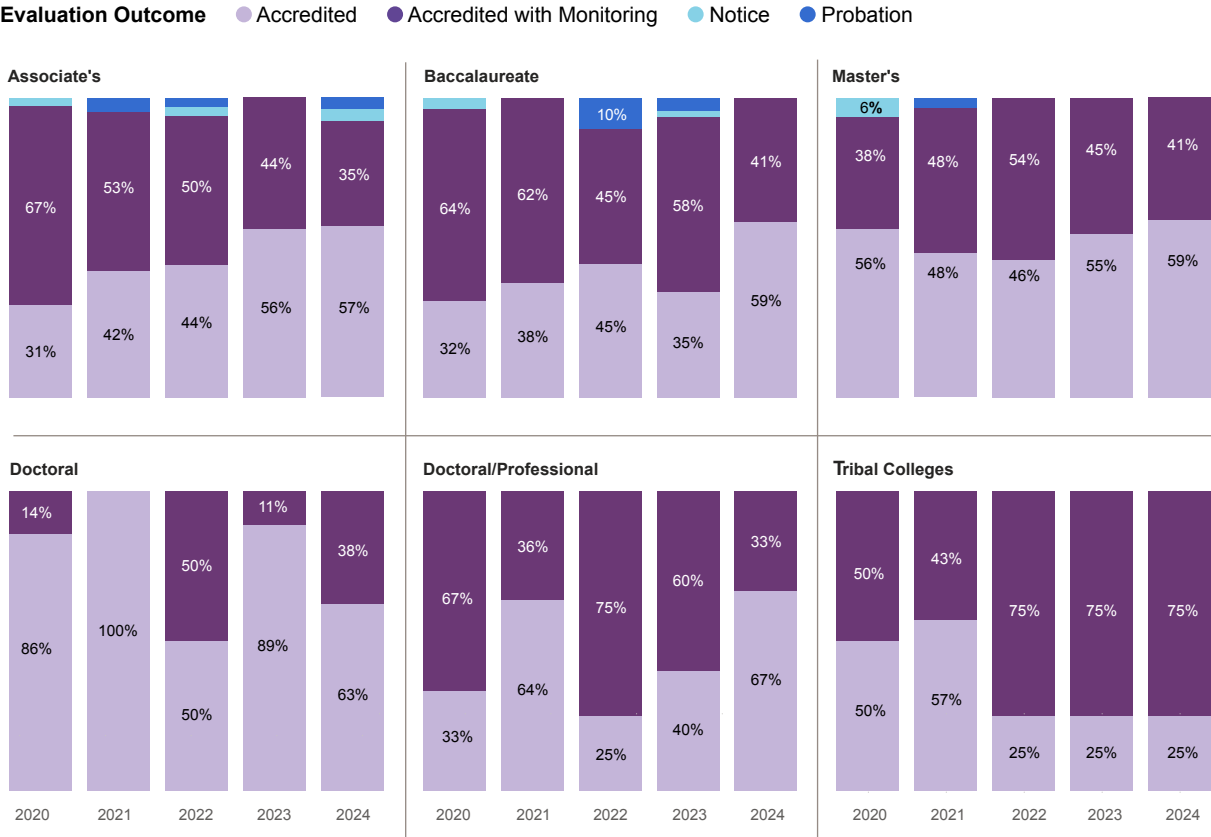
The outcomes of master's institutions continued to improve in the last 3 years, where the proportion of institutions in full compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation in AY 2024 (59%) increased 13 percentage points since AY 2022 (46%).

The outcomes of doctoral institutions did not follow a consistent trend in the last 3 years. The proportion of institutions assigned with interim monitoring in AY 2024 increased to 38% (3 out of 8 institutions), compared to 11% (1 out of 9 institutions) in the previous year.

The proportion of doctoral/professional institutions in full compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation in AY 2024 was 67% (2 out of 3 institutions), much higher in comparison to last year (40%, 4 out of 10 institutions).

Lastly, the proportion of tribal colleges in full compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation (25%, 1 out of 4 colleges) was consistent in the last three years.

Figure 4
Evaluation Outcomes by Carnegie Classification, AY 2020 – AY 2024



Evaluation Outcomes by Core Components of the Criteria for Accreditation

Figure 5 provides a summary of the AY 2024 evaluation findings by Core Component of the Criteria for Accreditation.

Results of the AY 2024 evaluations show that all institutions (100%) “Met” Core Components 1.A, 1.B, and 2.B., and 95% (or higher) met Core Components 1.C, 2.A, 2.C, 2.D, 2.E, 3.B, 3.C, 3.D, and 5.A.

Aside from that, the percentage of institutions evaluated as “Met with concerns” or “Not Met” ranged from a low of 1% (in Core Components 1.C and 2.E) to a high of 25% (in Core Component 4.B). The top 5 Core Components by frequency in citations were Core Components 4.A, 4.B, 4.C, 5.B, and 5.C.

Figure 5

Evaluation Outcomes by Core Component of Criteria for Accreditation, AY 2024

Compliance Rating	Met		Met With Concerns		Not Met		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1A Mission publicly articulated and operationalized	130	100%		0%		0%	130	100%
1B Mission and public good	130	100%		0%		0%	130	100%
1C Mission and diversity of society	129	99%	1	1%		0%	130	100%
2A Integrity	125	96%	5	4%		0%	130	100%
2B Transparency	130	100%		0%		0%	130	100%
2C Sufficient Board autonomy	126	97%	4	3%		0%	130	100%
2D Academic freedom and freedom of expression	128	98%	2	2%		0%	130	100%
2E Knowledge acquisition, discovery & application	129	99%	1	1%		0%	130	100%
3A Academic offerings appropriate to higher education	121	93%	9	7%		0%	130	100%
3B Exercise of intellectual inquiry integral to programs	128	98%	2	2%		0%	130	100%
3C Sufficiency of faculty and staff	124	95%	6	5%		0%	130	100%
3D Support for student learning and effective teaching	128	98%	2	2%		0%	130	100%
4A Ensuring quality of educational offerings	115	88%	15	12%		0%	130	100%
4B Assessment of student learning	98	75%	31	24%	1	1%	130	100%
4C Persistence, retention, and completion outcomes	119	92%	10	8%	1	1%	130	100%
5A Effective governance and administrative structures	124	95%	5	4%	1	1%	130	100%
5B Resource base	111	85%	19	15%		0%	130	100%
5C Systematic and integrated planning & improvement	110	85%	19	15%	1	1%	130	100%

Most Frequently Cited Core Components

The most frequently cited Core Components in AY 2024, based on the proportion of compliance findings as “Met with concerns” or “Not Met”, included the following:

- 4.B Assessment of student learning (n=32, 25%)
- 5.C Systematic and integrated planning and improvement (n=20, 15.4%)
- 5.B Resource base (n=19, 14.6%)
- 4.A Ensuring quality of educational offerings (n=15, 11.5%), and
- 4.C Persistence, retention, and completion outcomes (n=11, 8.5%)

As indicated in Figure 6, while Core Component 4.B continued to be the most cited area of concern, the proportion of citations in AY 2024 (25% of total) reached a five-year low, down 13 percentage points since AY 2020.

Core Components 4.B, 5.B, and 5.C have consistently ranked among the most frequently cited Core Components in the last 5 years. Results from AY 2024 showed that following the top 3 by frequency of citations were Core Components 4.A and 4.C, while the frequency of citations in Core Component 3.C continued to decline.

Figure 6

Most Frequently Cited Core Components, AY 2020 – AY 2024

Rank/Year	AY 2024	AY 2023	AY 2022	AY 2021	AY 2020
Rank 1	4.B 24.6%	4.B 27.6%	4.B 33.0%	4.B 30.5%	4.B 37.9%
Rank 2	5.C 15.4%	5.B 14.2%	5.C 16.5%	5.C 14.9%	5.C 18.9%
Rank 3	5.B 14.6%	5.C 10.4%	5.B 15.5%	5.B 12.8%	5.B 11.6%
Rank 4	4.A 11.5%	3.C 8.2%	4.A 12.6%	4.A 11.3%	3.C & 4.A 10.5%
Rank 5	4.C 8.5%	4.C 7.5%	3.C 9.7%	3.C 9.9%	4.C 5.3%

Methodological Notes:

() The most cited Core Components was based on the percentage of “Met with Concerns” or “Not Met” ratings.*

*(**) Results of the evaluations conducted under the prior Criteria were recoded to reflect the current Criteria.*

Most Frequently Cited Core Components by Carnegie Classification

A breakdown of the findings on the most frequently cited Core Components by Carnegie Classification provides additional context for examining the areas of challenge institutions are facing. The following analysis explores the most frequently cited Core Components in AY 2024, including Core Components 4.B, 5.B, 5.C, 4.A, and 4.C. The reader should continue to bear in mind the small number of doctoral, doctoral/professional, and tribal institutions when considering the reported percentages in the analysis by Carnegie Classification.

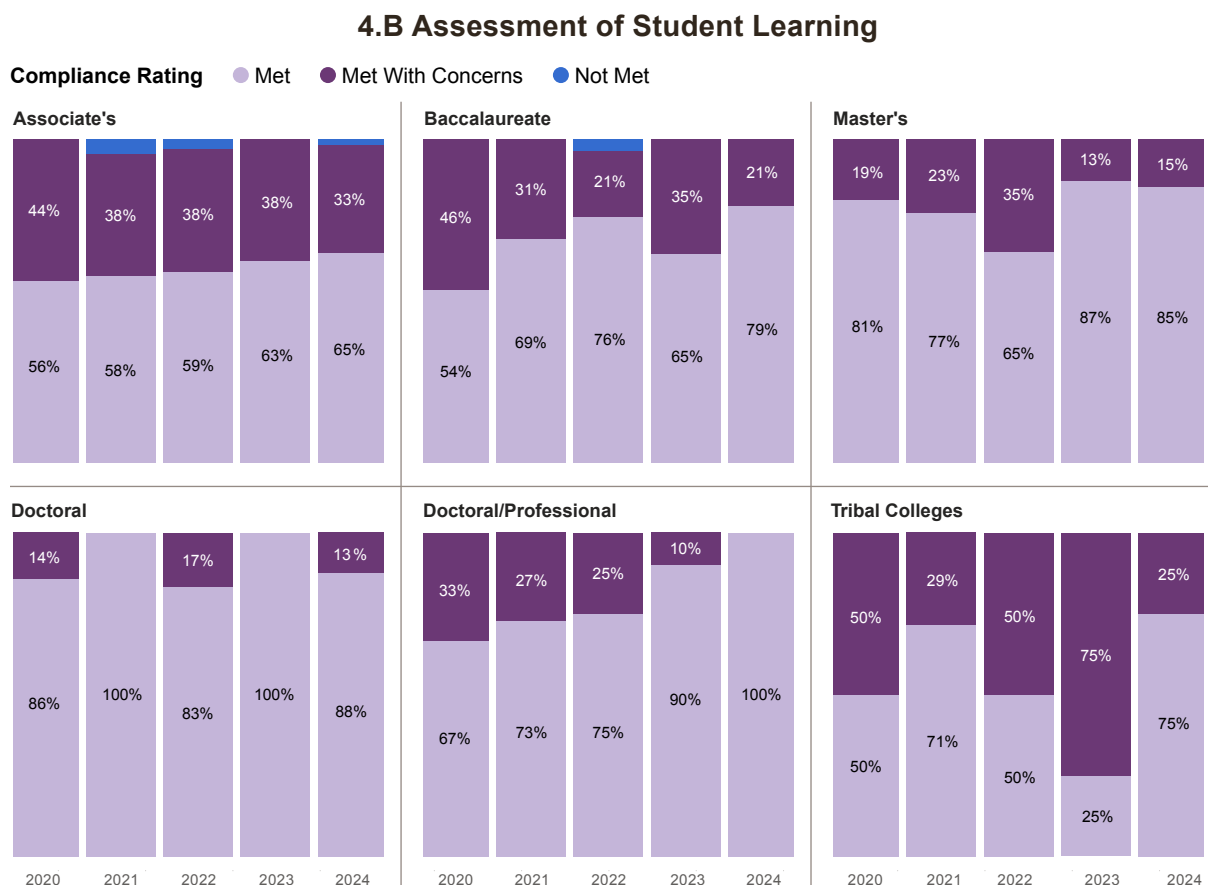
4.B Assessment of Student Learning

As indicated in Figure 7, the frequency of citations in 4.B varied across Carnegie Classifications over the last five years (AY 2020 to AY 2024). While associate colleges had the highest frequency of citations in 4.B in AY 2024 (n=19, 35%) compared to other Carnegie Classification groups, this group has shown continuing improvements in the last 5 years. Baccalaureate colleges also had a decrease in the citation frequency in AY 2024, down from 35% to 21%, while the frequency of citations slightly increased among master’s institutions (up 2 percentage points), compared to the previous year. Among doctoral institutions, there were very few citations in 4.B in the last 5 years; specifically, 1 out of 8 was cited in AY 2024, and none were cited in the preceding year. In AY 2024, all doctoral/professional institutions were in full compliance with the Core Component, showing a consistent improvement trend in the last 5 years. The frequency of citations in 4.B in AY 2024 among tribal colleges (25%, 1 out of 4) was lower compared to previous years.

Cited areas of concern related to Core Component 4.B often referred to the lack of effective processes for assessment of student learning at the course, program, and institutional levels, lack of faculty participation in assessment practices, or lack of efforts in collecting and using assessment data to improve student learning.

Figure 7

Compliance with Core Component 4.B by Carnegie Classification, AY 2020 – AY 2024



5.B Resource Base

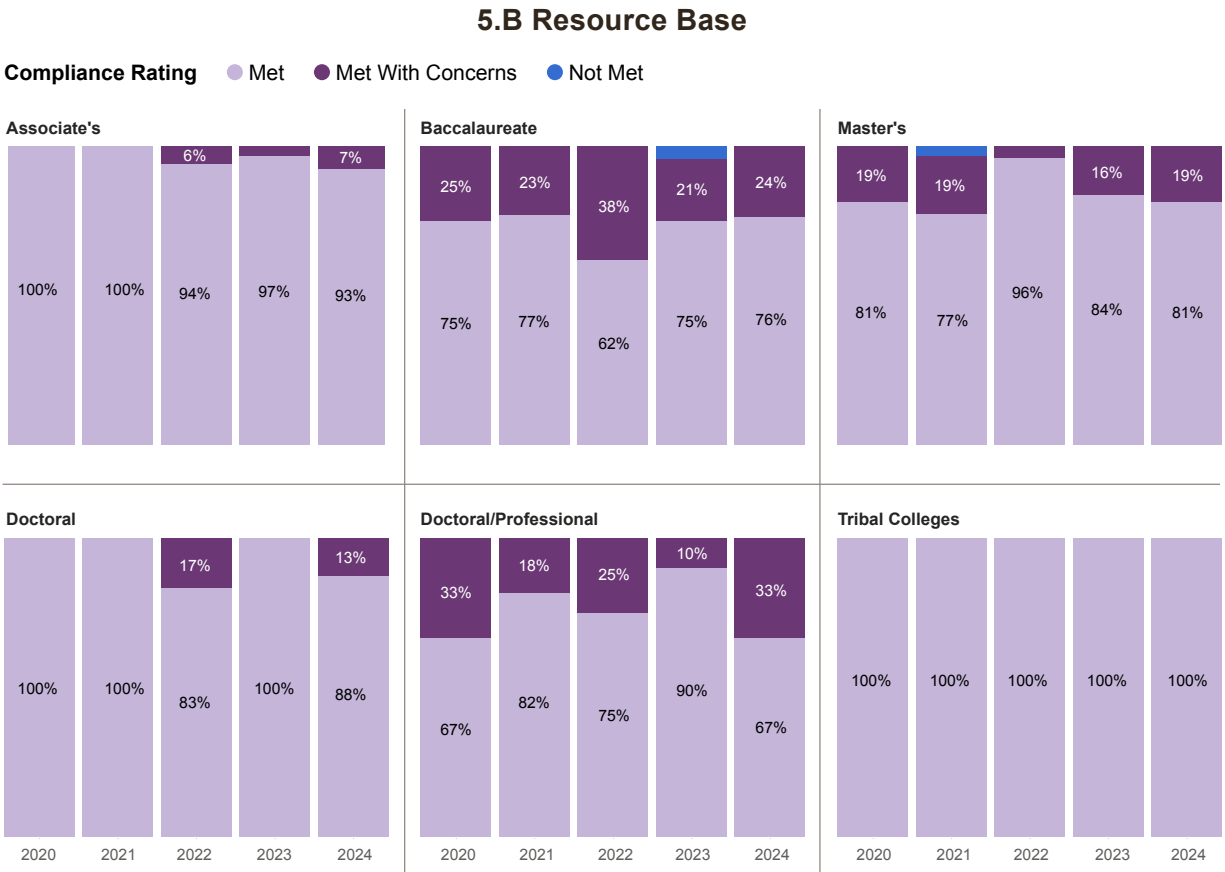
As indicated in Figure 8, while tribal colleges were found in full compliance with 5.B in AY 2024, the frequency of citations was 7% among associate’s colleges, 24% among baccalaureate colleges, 19% among master’s, 13% (1 out of 8) among doctoral, and 33% (1 out of 3) among doctoral/professional institutions.

The frequency of citations in Core Component 5.B among associate’s colleges increased by 6 percentage points in AY 2024 compared to the prior year. The citation rate among baccalaureate colleges was consistently in the range of 23 to 25% in the last 5 years, except for a big jump in AY 2022 to 38%. On the other hand, citations in 5.B among master’s institutions dropped to a low of 4% in AY 2022 and then returned to the range of 16 to 19% in last 2 years. Citations in 5.B among doctoral institutions were infrequent, namely, 2 citations within the last 3 years, while citations among doctoral/professional institutions occurred in each of the last 5 years.

Areas of concern regarding Core Component 5.B often referenced aspects of institutional financial health and sustainability. Financial challenges such as enrollment fluctuations, increasing costs, and long-term debt obligations, as well as operating budget deficits due to declining tuition revenue and deferred maintenance costs were cited.

Figure 8

Compliance with Core Component 5.B by Carnegie Classification, AY 2020 – AY 2024



5.C Systematic and Integrated Planning and Improvement

In AY 2024, associate's colleges had the highest proportion of citations for Core Component 5.C (20%), followed by baccalaureate colleges (15%) and master's institutions (15%). Doctoral, doctoral/professional, and tribal institutions did not have any citations regarding 5.C.

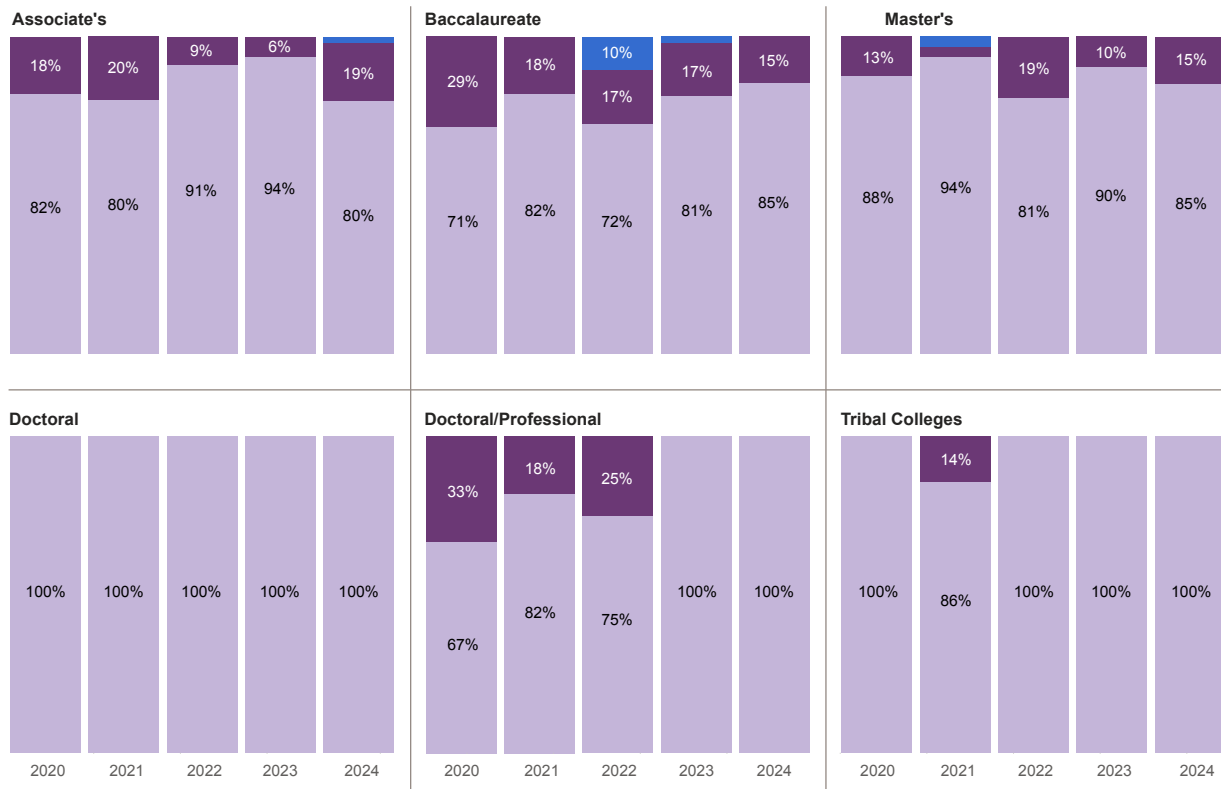
Examples of cited concerns regarding 5.C included the lack of a strategic enrollment management plan; insufficient planning for a balanced budget; explanation of how enrollment, recruitment, and retention strategic goals were to be met; or how program reviews were integrated in strategic budget and financial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

Figure 9

Compliance with Core Component 5.C by Carnegie Classification, AY 2020 – AY 2024

5.C Systematic and Integrated Planning and Improvement

Compliance Rating ● Met ● Met With Concerns ● Not Met



4.A Ensuring Quality of Educational Offerings

As depicted in Figure 10, in AY 2024 areas of concern relative to Core Component 4.A were found among associate’s colleges (n=5, 9%), baccalaureate colleges (n=5, 15%), master’s institutions (n=3, 11%), and in 2 out of 4 tribal colleges. Doctoral and doctoral/professional institutions did not have any citations regarding 4.A in AY 2024.

The frequency of citations in 4.A among baccalaureate colleges was in the range of 14% to 21% in the last 5 years, higher than among other Carnegie Classifications . Both associate’s and master’s institutions had a higher frequency of citations in AY 2024 compared to the previous year, an increase of 9 percentage points.

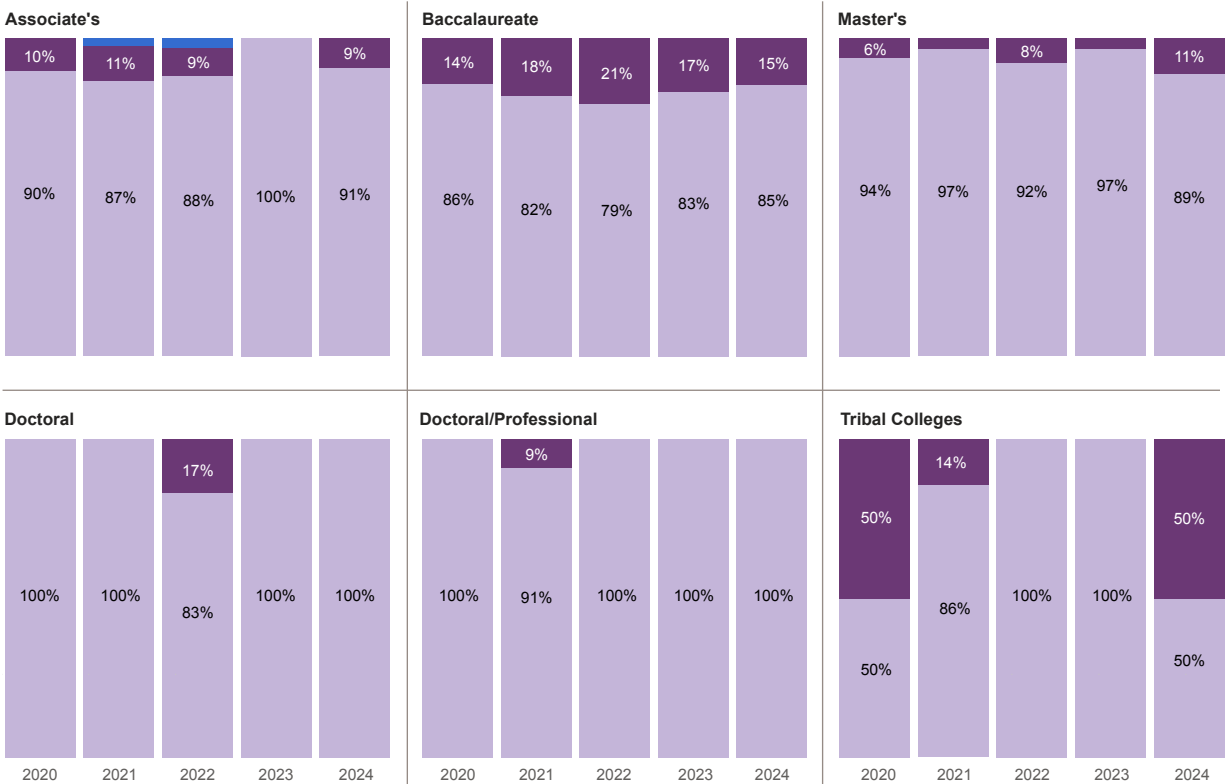
Examples of cited areas for concern in 4.A included the lack of systematic implementation of program review process such as a comprehensive program review cycle, measures of academic quality, or use of assessment of student learning outcomes in the academic programs.

Figure 10

Compliance with Core Component 4.A by Carnegie Classification, AY 2020 – AY 2024

4.A Ensuring Quality of Educational Offerings

Compliance Rating ● Met ● Met With Concerns ● Not Met



4.C Persistence, Retention and Completion Outcomes

In AY 2024 the overall proportion of institutions being cited in Core Component 4.C was at 8.5%, consistent with the level in the previous two years. The frequency of citations among associate’s colleges was 7%, an increase of 4 percentage points from the previous year, while 6% of baccalaureate colleges were cited, down from 17% in AY 2023. In addition, last year 15% of master’s institutions and one out of four tribal colleges were cited for 4.C. Doctoral and doctoral/professional institutions did not have any citations regarding 4.C in AY 2024.

Peer reviewers cited concerns about student success outcomes when institutions did not have cohesive and coordinated operational plans to meet stated retention and graduation rate goals, systematic processes to use student outcomes data to inform planning and resource allocation and to make program improvements, or strategies to impact outcomes for different student populations.

Figure 11

Compliance with Core Component 4.C by Carnegie Classification, AY 2020 – AY 2024

4.C Persistence, Retention, and Completion Outcomes

Compliance Rating ● Met ● Met With Concerns ● Not Met



Implications for Practice

The overall outcomes of the comprehensive evaluations conducted in the last five years, as evidenced by the increased proportion of institutions that merited continued or reaffirmed accreditation without concerns, indicate the successful efforts of HLC member institutions in meeting the standards of quality.

At the same time, findings from the evaluations also highlight the persistent patterns of issues and challenges that institutions are facing such as those related to ensuring the quality of programs (Core Components 4.A), assessing for improvements in student learning outcomes (4.B), advancing student outcomes (4.C), strengthening institutional resource base (5.B), and planning and allocating resources for sustainable future (5.C). Additionally, the analysis of evaluation outcomes by institutional Carnegie Classification provides further insight into emerging issues or areas of concern pertaining to institutions of similar or related characteristics.

This information will prove instructive as HLC prepares for the September 1, 2025 launch of the revised Criteria for Accreditation with an increased focus on student outcomes and other success measures. HLC staff will continue to use these findings to foster an even deeper understanding of the institutional context in relation to mission and student body, and to enhance engagement with and support for the membership, including with members of HLC's Peer Corps, to ensure fair and equitable application of these requirements.

Analysis of the patterns and trends in the application of the current Criteria for Accreditation and their Core Components will enable HLC staff to further shape communication strategy, programming content, and training activities to support the membership as the revised Criteria and other changing processes converge in the coming year.

