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March 5, 2025

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Madam Secretary:

Congratulations on being confirmed as the United States Secretary of Education.

Given the current state of the higher education environment and beyond, I know that you have many goals that you want to accomplish. One of my goals when I came to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), an institutional accreditor of colleges and universities across the United States, was to challenge the perception that accreditation is a roadblock to the goals of our institutions and demonstrate that it can be innovative and agile.

For 130 years, HLC has served U.S. higher education through external peer review to assure quality and promote continuous improvement.

I was at the negotiating table in 2019 for the regulatory changes in 2020 that allowed for greater mobility of institutions among accreditors. Indeed, since the 2020 regulatory changes, many institutions from outside HLC's historical 19-state region, including institutions from Florida and North Carolina, have indicated their interest in joining HLC. These institutions have cited HLC's innovation; focus on outcomes; thought leadership regarding workforce development and short-term credentials; rigorous quality assurance, and commitment to institutional quality improvement as their reasons for pursuing accreditation with HLC.

Overall, HLC endeavors to be a powerful lever for influencing change and providing consumer awareness, with rigorous quality standards for reasonable costs across the United States.

Below are just some of the ways we carry out this responsibility.

Holding Institutions Accountable through Rigorous Standards:

HLC works to develop and implement standards which must be met for institutions to be accredited.

Driving Institutional Focus on Student Outcomes and Return on Investment:

Today's accreditation is actively informed by data, metrics, and benchmarks that are analyzed regularly to hold institutions accountable for financial sustainability and meaningful student outcomes.

Encouraging Innovation and Focus on Workforce Readiness:

HLC has launched the Credential Lab and developed a framework to guide the evaluation of providers outside higher education who offer short-term credentials either independently of or in partnership with cooperating colleges or universities.

Informing and Protecting Students and Taxpayers through Rigorous Transparency:

HLC communicates critical information for students and the public about the accreditation status of institutions.

Facilitating Degree Attainment and Reducing Costs through Transfer of Credit:

We recognize that students are more mobile than ever, moving through multiple colleges and universities to earn their degrees. We believe it is critical for our accredited institutions to make this easier as such efforts can improve student success in degree attainment while also reducing the cost of education.

Saving Federal Resources through a Robust System of Peer and Public Review:

Accreditation is a multi-layered decision-making process that relies on rigorous peer review to define and evaluate whether institutions meet high standards. This process of peer review, conducted by approximately 1,500 HLC volunteer experts, saves the federal government significant costs and time by leveraging the resources of accreditors.

HLC is a *partner to propel* higher education forward. We will work with you and policymakers to support the success of students and assure all stakeholders of the quality and value of higher education. HLC is responsive to managing this relationship to allow higher education to flourish.

Should you have any questions or desire to talk, please contact me at bgdanley@hlcommission.org or the HLC Legal and Regulatory Affairs Team at legalaffairs@hlcommission.org. As you pursue your goals regarding higher education, I welcome the opportunity to be part of the discussion.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley, Ph.D.
President