

Faculty Qualifications

Policy Change Adopted on Second Reading

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) adopted this policy on second reading at its meeting on November 2, 2023.

Background

Several HLC requirements address the need for institutions to have qualified faculty, including Criterion 3, Criterion 4, and the Assumed Practices. HLC requires that its member institutions have policies and procedures to assure that all instructors are qualified. The intent of HLC requirements is to provide robust quality assurance while also allowing institutions flexibility to meet the requirements based on mission and related factors.

The adopted policy change revises the faculty qualifications provision in HLC’s Assumed Practices to emphasize that an institution must establish and maintain processes for determining that instructors are qualified. This obligation extends to all instructors, including any other entities to whom the institution assigns instruction. If an institution issues credit for a course, even if the course is offered by other entities, the instructor must meet the institution’s policies and procedures on instructor qualifications.

Additionally, the policy change specifies that an institution can deem instructors qualified on the basis of a variety of factors, including academic credentials, progress towards academic credentials, equivalent experience, or some combination thereof.

In conjunction with this policy change, HLC has published updated [guidelines for determining qualified faculty](#) and updated [guidelines on dual credit](#), which both reflect the new policy language.

The policy and updated guidelines are based on feedback HLC has collected over a number of years from member institutions, as well as knowledgeable experts, regarding HLC’s requirements in this area. Most recently, HLC invited comments from the membership and other interested parties after the Board’s June 2023 meeting. More than 40 comments were received from various stakeholders, including HLC member institutions, K-12 schools, career and technical centers, and advocacy groups. In response to the comments, HLC clarified in the guidelines for determining qualified faculty the language regarding faculty involvement in the establishment of institutional policies and procedures. HLC also emphasized in the guidelines that

reasonable policies and procedures developed by the institution may use the factors listed (i.e.—academic credentials, progress towards academic credentials, equivalent experience) or other factors.

Implementation

This policy is effective immediately.

Adopted Policy Change

Wording that was deleted or revised is shown as strikethrough (~~old wording~~); new language, whether through addition or revision, is shown in bold (**new wording**). Wording that was moved is shown with a double underline in its new location (moved to) and a double strikethrough in its previous location (~~~~moved from~~~~). Changes between first and second reading, other than minor editing, are indicated in bold italics (*new wording*). These revisions have been made on HLC’s website at hlcommission.org/policies.

Policy Title: Assumed Practices

Number: CRRT.B.10.020

Foundational to the Criteria and Core Components is a set of practices shared by institutions of higher education in the United States. Unlike the Criteria for Accreditation, these Assumed Practices are (1) generally matters to be determined as facts, rather than matters requiring professional judgment and (2) not expected to vary by institutional mission or context. Every institution is expected to be in compliance with all Assumed Practices at all times.

Because institutions are assumed to be adhering to the Assumed Practices on an ongoing basis, peer review teams will not review their compliance with these requirements except as follows:

1. When an institution is seeking HLC accreditation, and has not yet been granted initial accreditation by the Board of Trustees, the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with all the Assumed Practices as part of any reports to gain and maintain candidacy, and to gain initial accreditation.
2. When the Board of Trustees has placed an institution on the sanction of Probation and has cited the institution for being out of compliance with one or more Assumed Practices, the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with the cited Assumed Practices as part of its report to have Probation removed.
3. When the Board of Trustees has placed an institution under a Show-Cause Order the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with all the Assumed Practices as part of its report to have the Show-Cause Order removed.

4. When an accredited institution's compliance with one or more Criteria for Accreditation raises questions concerning its compliance with related Assumed Practices, the institution must be prepared to provide evidence that it is in compliance with such related Assumed Practices.
5. When otherwise required by HLC as circumstances warrant.

An institution determined not to be in compliance with any Assumed Practice, even if in compliance with all other HLC requirements, may be subject to monitoring, Probation, a Show-Cause Order, or an adverse action, as defined by HLC policy based on the gravity of the finding as measured by (a) in the case of Probation, the extent to which a substantial remediation period is necessary to address such non-compliance or; (b) in the case of a Show-Cause Order or adverse action, the extent to which the very existence of the finding suggests that the institution should not remain accredited.

A. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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5. The institution makes readily available to students and to the general public clear and complete information including:
 - a. statements of mission, vision, and values
 - b. full descriptions of the requirements for its programs, including all pre-requisite courses
 - c. requirements for admission both to the institution and to particular programs or majors
 - d. its policies on acceptance of transfer credit, including how the institution applies such credit to its degree requirements. (Except for courses articulated through transfer policies or institutional agreements, the institution makes no promises to prospective students regarding the acceptance of credit awarded by examination, credit for prior learning, or credit for transfer until the institution has conducted an evaluation of such students' credits in accordance with its transfer policies.)
 - e. all student costs, including tuition, fees, training, and incidentals; its financial aid policies, practices, and requirements; and its policy on refunds
 - f. policies regarding academic good standing, probation, and dismissal; residency or enrollment requirements (if any)
 - ~~g. a full list of its instructors and their academic credentials.~~
 - h. g. its relationship with any parent organization (corporation, hospital, or church, or other entity that owns the institution) and any external providers of its instruction.

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B. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support

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2. Faculty Roles and Qualifications

- ~~a. Qualified faculty members are identified primarily by credentials, but other factors, including but not limited to equivalent experience, may be considered by the institution in determining whether a faculty member is qualified. Instructors (excluding for this requirement teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty) possess an academic degree relevant to what they are teaching and at least one level above the level at which they teach, except in programs for terminal degrees or when equivalent experience is established. In terminal degree programs, faculty members possess the same level of degree. When faculty members are employed based on equivalent experience, the institution defines a minimum threshold of experience and an evaluation process that is used in the appointment process. Faculty teaching general education courses, or other non-occupational courses, hold a master's degree or higher in the discipline or subfield. If a faculty member holds a master's degree or higher in a discipline or subfield other than that in which they are teaching, that faculty member should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which they teach.~~
- ~~b. Instructors teaching in graduate programs should hold the terminal degree determined by the discipline and have a record of research, scholarships or achievement appropriate for the graduate program.~~
- ~~c. Instructors teaching at the doctoral level have a record of recognized scholarship, creative endeavor, or achievement in practice commensurate with doctoral expectations.~~
- a. The institution establishes and maintains reasonable policies and procedures to determine that faculty are qualified. The factors that an institution considers as part of these policies and procedures could include, but are not limited to: the achievement of academic credentials, progress toward academic credentials, equivalent experience, or some combination thereof. The institution's obligations in this regard extend to all instructors and all other entities to which it assigns the responsibility of instruction. HLC will maintain "Institutional Policies and Procedures for Determining Faculty Qualifications Guidelines" to further explain requirements for reasonable policies and procedures in accordance with this Assumed Practice.**
- ~~b. Faculty participate substantially in:~~

- i. oversight of the curriculum **offered**—its development, **vetting** and implementation;; academic substance;; currency;; and relevance for internal and external constituencies;
- ii. assurance of consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in the expectations of student performance;
- iii. establishment of the ~~academic~~ qualifications for ~~instructional personnel~~ **instructors, including instructors provided by third parties;**
- iv. analysis of data and appropriate action on assessment of student learning and program completion.

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C. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

1. **Instructors** (excluding for this requirement teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty) have the authority for the assignment ~~of grades~~ **of any measures of student achievement.** (This requirement allows for collective responsibility, as, **for example**, when a faculty committee has the authority to override a grade on appeal.)

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Policy Number Key

Section **CRRT**: Criteria and Requirements

Chapter **B**: Criteria for Accreditation

Part 10: General

Last Revised: November 2023

First Adopted: February 2012

Revision History: June 2013, June 2014, June 2016, September 2017, November 2020, June 2021, February 2022, November 2023

Notes: Institutions that received HLC extensions to bring their dual credit faculty into compliance with Assumed Practice B.2. are responsible to do so before such extensions have expired. In all other respects, the current Assumed Practices apply to such institutions. In February 2021, references to the Higher Learning Commission as “the Commission” were replaced with the term “HLC.”