

Eligibility Requirements

Proposed Policy Change Approved on First Reading

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) approved this policy change on first reading at its meeting on June 27, 2024.

Background

All HLC member institutions must meet HLC’s Eligibility Requirements at all times.

Institutions demonstrate their compliance with the Eligibility Requirements at various points in the process of seeking accreditation, whether they are participating in the traditional Eligibility process with a period of Candidacy, or whether they are participating in the Accelerated Process of Initial Accreditation.

Institutions also demonstrate their compliance with the Eligibility Requirements as part of select other HLC processes, including the Change of Control process, or as otherwise required by HLC.

The proposed revisions streamline and update the Eligibility Requirements overall and better align the Eligibility Requirements to other HLC requirements, including the [revisions to the Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices](#) that the Board adopted at its June 2024 meeting, as well as the Federal Compliance Requirements.

If the Board adopts the proposed changes on second reading at its October 2024 meeting, the revised Eligibility Requirements would be effective September 1, 2025.

Comments Invited

HLC invites comments on this change before the Board takes final action at its meeting on October 31–November 1, 2024. Comments can be sent to policycomments@hlcommission.org. Comments are due by September 17, 2024.

Proposed 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~~~~).

Policy Title: Eligibility Requirements
Number: CRRT.A.10.010

An institution must meet all Eligibility Requirements before it is granted candidate status or accredited status.

~~Institutions participating in the Eligibility Process must present *initial* evidence that it meets these requirements before a pre-application interview is scheduled with HLC. Through submission of the Eligibility Filing it must present *full* evidence that it meets these requirements before a site visit for candidacy is scheduled.~~

~~Institutions participating in the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation must present *full* evidence that it meets these requirements before a site visit for initial accreditation is scheduled.~~

1. Jurisdiction of HLC

The institution falls within HLC's jurisdiction as defined in HLC's Bylaws (Article II). HLC extends accreditation and candidacy to higher education institutions that (1) are incorporated in or operating under federal authority within, the United States; and (2) have substantial presence, as defined in HLC policy, within the United States.

2. Legal Status

The institution is **legally authorized to award degrees as an institution of higher education in at least one state or sovereign nation within HLC's jurisdiction.** ~~The institution is appropriately authorized in each of the states, sovereign nations, or jurisdictions in which it operates to award degrees, offer educational programs, or conduct activities as an institution of higher education. At least one of these must be in HLC's jurisdiction.~~

3. Governing Board

The institution has an ~~independent~~ governing board that **is free from undue external influence and that possesses and exercises the necessary legal powers necessary to establish and review the basic policies that govern the institution, including with respect to budget and authority for engaging and dismissing the Chief Executive Officer of the institution.**

4. Stability

During the two years preceding its submission of the application to seek membership with HLC, and extending throughout the duration while seeking initial accreditation with HLC, ~~the~~ institution demonstrates a history of **stable continuity and stability, including as to operations and consistent control**

~~during the two years preceding the submission of the Eligibility Filing or the application for initial accreditation through the accelerated process.~~

5. Mission Statement

The institution has a **mission** statement ~~of mission that is~~ approved by its governing board and appropriate for a degree-granting institution of higher education. The **institution's** mission ~~defines~~ **identifies** the nature and purpose of the higher learning provided by the institution and the students for whom it is intended.

6. Educational Programs

The institution has educational programs that are appropriate for an institution of higher education. ~~HLC may decline to evaluate an institution for status with HLC if the institution's mission or educational programs fall outside areas in which HLC has demonstrated expertise or lacks appropriate standards for meaningful review.~~

In appropriate proportion, the institution's **educational** programs are degree-granting and involve coursework provided by the institution, ~~establishing the institution's commitment to degree-granting higher education.~~

The institution ~~has~~ clearly **and publicly articulated** articulates the purposes, content and intended learning goals for **outcomes** of its ~~academic~~ **educational** programs. ~~and~~ It has strategies for assessment of **student learning** in place.

The institution:

- a. maintains a minimum requirement for general education for all of its undergraduate programs whether through a traditional practice of distributed curricula (15 semester credits for AAS degrees, 24 for AS or AA degrees, and 30 for bachelor's degrees) or through ~~integrated, embedded, interdisciplinary, or~~ other accepted **equivalent** models ~~that demonstrate a minimum requirement equivalent to the distributed model.~~ Any ~~exceptions are~~ **variation is** explained and justified.
- b. has a program of general education **for all of its undergraduate programs** that is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework; **and that** ~~It~~ imparts **common broad** knowledge and ~~intellectual concepts to students~~ **and develops skills to students** and attitudes ~~that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.~~ ~~The institution clearly and publicly articulates the purposes, content and intended learning outcomes of its general education program.~~

- c. conforms to commonly accepted minimum program length: 60 semester credits for associate's degrees, 120 semester credits for bachelor's degrees, and 30 semester credits beyond the bachelor's for master's degrees. Any ~~exception to these minima must be~~ **is** explained and justified.
- d. ~~meets the federal requirements for credit ascription described in HLC's Federal Compliance Program.~~

7. Information to the Public

The institution makes **the following information** public:

- a. ~~its s~~**Statements of mission, vision, and values;**
- b. ~~F~~**Full descriptions of **the requirements for its educational programs requirements;****
- c. ~~its e~~**Requirements for admission both to the institution and to **particular individual educational programs or majors;****
- d. ~~its p~~**Policies on acceptance of transfer credit **and prior learning,** including how credit is applied to **degree educational program** requirements;**
- e. ~~e~~**Clear and accurate information on all student costs, including tuition, fees, training and incidentals;**
- f. ~~and~~ **Financial aid policies, including its policy on refunds;**
- g. ~~its p~~**Policies regarding **academic** good standing, probation, and dismissal;**
- h. ~~all e~~**Residency **and enrollment** requirements;**
- i. **Information about its relationship with any parent organization and any external providers of instruction;** and
- j. ~~grievance and e~~**Complaint procedures.**

The institution portrays clearly and accurately to the public its **legal authorization to award degrees, offer educational programs, or conduct activities as an institution of higher education within any jurisdictions in which it so operates; and its accreditation status with institutional, specialized, and professional accreditation agencies as well as with the Higher Learning Commission, including a clear distinction between candidate or accredited status and an intention to seek status HLC and any other recognized accreditors. As applicable, The institution always makes clear to students the distinction between the various types of accreditation; and the relationship between licensure and these various types of accreditation.**

8. Financial Capacity

The institution has the financial base to support its operations and sustain them in the future. It demonstrates a record of responsible fiscal management, ~~including appropriate debt levels.~~

The institution:

- a. has a prepared budget for the current year and the capacity to compare it with budgets and actual results of previous years; and
- b. undergoes external financial audit by a certified public accountant or a public audit agency **that reports financial statements on the institution separately from any other related entity or parent corporation.** For private institutions the audit is annual; for public institutions it is at least every two years. (Institutions under federal control are exempted provided that they have other reliable information to document the institution's fiscal resources and management.)

9. Administration

The institution has a Chief Executive Officer ~~appointed by its governing board.~~

The institution has governance and administrative structures that enable it to carry out its operations.

10. Faculty and Other Academic Personnel

The institution employs faculty and other academic personnel **who are** appropriately qualified and sufficient in number to support its ~~academic~~ **educational** programs.

11. Learning Resources

The institution ~~owns or has secured access to the~~ learning resources ~~and support services~~ necessary to support ~~the learning expected of~~ its students, **such as** (research laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites, **and** museum collections, ~~etc.~~).

12. Student Support Services

The institution ~~makes available to its students~~ **has** support services ~~appropriate for its mission~~ **necessary to support its students**, such as **academic** advising, academic records, financial aid, and ~~placement~~ **career services**.

13. Planning

The institution demonstrates that it engages in planning with regard to its current and future business and ~~academic~~ **educational** operations.

14. Policies and Procedures

The institution has appropriate policies and procedures for its students, administrators, faculty, and staff.

15. Current Activity

The institution has students enrolled in ~~its~~ **at least one** degree programs.

~~(To be granted initial accreditation, an institution must have either graduated students from at least one degree program or, as further detailed in the Effective Date of Accreditation Actions policy, must be prepared to graduate students from at least one degree program within 30 days of the date on which initial accreditation is awarded.)~~

16. Integrity of Business and ~~Academic~~ **Educational** Operations

~~The institution has no~~ **In general, within the two years prior to applying for membership and extending throughout the duration while seeking initial accreditation with HLC, the institution does not have a record of inappropriate, unethical, and untruthful dealings, including with its students, with the business community the public, or with agencies of governmental entities. If any of the above circumstances are present, they are explained and justified so as to meet this requirement.**

The institution complies with all legal requirements (~~in addition to~~ **including** authorization of ~~academic educational~~ programs) wherever it does business.

17. Consistency of Description Among Agencies

The institution describes itself consistently to all ~~accrediting~~ **recognized accreditors** and governmental ~~agencies~~ **entities** with regard to **matters such as** its mission, **educational** programs, governance, and finances.

18. Accreditation Record

In general, ~~W~~within the ~~five~~ **two years ~~preceding the initiation of the process of~~ **prior to applying for membership and extending throughout the duration while** seeking **initial** accreditation with HLC;**

- a. ~~€~~The institution has not ~~(a)~~ been subject to a sanction, ~~or~~ Show-Cause Order, or other similar **negative action** with ~~another~~ **any** recognized accreditor or state authorizing agency.;
- b. **The institution** has not been subject to an adverse action (**withdrawal, suspension, denial or termination**) with ~~another~~ **any** recognized accreditor; or state authorizing agency.
- c. **The institution** has not voluntarily resigned its status with ~~another~~ **any** recognized accreditor or state authorizing agency while subject to (a.) or (b.) or **while any circumstances that would give rise to (a.) or (b.) were pending.**

- d. There are no pending circumstances that would give rise to (a.) or (b.).

If any of the above circumstances are present, their actual or anticipated resolution are explained and justified so as to meet this requirement.

If the institution offers educational programs that require accreditation from by a recognized accreditor or recognition by a state licensing board or other entity in order for its students to be certified or to sit for licensing examinations in states where its students reside, it either has the appropriate accreditation, is in the process of seeking such accreditation, or discloses publicly and clearly the consequences of the lack thereof.

19. Good Faith and Planning to Achieve Accreditation

The **institution's** board has authorized the institution to seek membership with HLC. ~~and~~ **The institution has** indicated its intention, ~~if a member of HLC, to accept to abide by~~ the Obligations of Membership.

The institution has a realistic plan for achieving accreditation with HLC within the ~~period of time~~ **timeframes** set by HLC policy.

- ~~a. If the institution offers programs that require accreditation from a recognized accreditor in order for its students to be certified or sit for licensing examinations, it either has the appropriate accreditation or discloses publicly and clearly the consequences of the lack thereof. The institution always makes clear to students the distinction between the various types of accreditation and the relationship between licensure and these various types of accreditation.~~
- ~~b. If the institution is predominantly or solely a single purpose institution in fields that require licensure for practice, it demonstrates that it is also accredited by or is actively in the process of applying to a recognized accreditor for each field, if such a recognized accreditor exists.~~