

Higher Learning Commission: The Criteria for Accreditation

A. Higher Learning Commission Expectations of Institutions: Five Fundamental Questions

1. How are your stated student learning outcomes appropriate to your mission, programs, and degrees?
2. What evidence do you have that students achieve your stated learning outcomes?
3. In what ways do you analyze and use evidence of student learning?
4. How do you ensure shared responsibility for assessment of student learning?
5. How do you evaluate and improve the effectiveness of assessment of student learning?

B. Criteria and Core Components

1. Criterion One: Mission and Integrity. The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

- 1a. The organization's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization's commitments.
- 1b. In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.
- 1c. Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.
- 1d. The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.
- 1e. The organization upholds and protects its integrity.

2. Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future. The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

- 2a. The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.
- 2b. The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

2c. The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.

2d. All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

3. Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching. The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

3a. The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.

3b. The organization values and supports effective teaching.

3c. The organization creates effective learning environments.

3d. The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

4. Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge. The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

4a. The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.

4b. The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.

4c. The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.

4d. The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.

5. Criterion Five: Engagement and Service. As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

5a. The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.

5b. The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.

5c. The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.

5d. Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.

C. Cross-Cutting Themes: Underlying Model of an Effective Organization for Advancing Quality of Higher Learning

1. Future Oriented Organization

- Focuses on Futures of Constituents
- Engages in Planning
- Driven by Mission
- Understands Social and Economic Change
- Integrates new technology

2. Learning Oriented Organization

- Focus on Student and Organizational Learning
- Assesses Student Learning
- Supports Learning
- Supports Scholarship
- Creates Capacity for Life-long Learning
- Strengthens Organizational Learning

3. Connected Organization

- Serves the Common Good
- Serves Constituents
- Creates a Culture of Service
- Collaborates
- Engages in Healthy Internal Communication

4. Distinctive Organization

- Unambiguous Mission
- Appreciates Diversity
- Is Accountable
- Is Self-reflective
- Is Committed to Improvement

C. Focus on Assessment

1. Assessment is *THE* Core Institutional Strategy:

- Assessment of student learning is a strategy for institutional accountability, institutional distinctiveness, accreditation and effectiveness
- Assessment informs decision making at all levels of an institution

2. Assessment is:

- Stranded through core components of all criteria (over 50% of sub-components)
- A matter of commitment not compliance
- About analyzing and using information to improve student learning
- Should inform what we do
- Central to demonstrating educational quality
- A key strategy for enhancing perception of the value of higher education

3. Assessment should be:

- Fitting with institutional distinctiveness (mission and programs)
- Meaningful and useful
- On-going
- Flexible
- Refined with practice

For more information go to the HLC website: <http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/>.