

Chapter B: Criteria for Accreditation

CRRT.B.10.010

Criteria for Accreditation

The HLC Board of Trustees adopted revisions to this policy on June 27, 2024. The revisions went into effect on September 1, 2025.

See [Appendix B](#) for the previous Criteria for Accreditation, which remain in effect after September 1, 2025, only as long as necessary to complete specific evaluative events already begun under the previous Criteria for Accreditation prior to September 1, 2025.

The Criteria for Accreditation convey the standards of quality by which HLC determines whether an institution merits accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Recognition of the widely varying institutional missions across HLC's membership is essential to these Criteria as standards of quality.

Institutional Mission

Mission is foundational to an institution's curriculum, instructional activities and the success of its students. Mission further informs an institution's research and innovation pursuits, its community engagement activities and services, its role within the higher education ecosystem, its student body, and its decisions regarding operations and resource allocations. An institution's distinctive mission is the cornerstone around which the institution's effectiveness, integrity and commitment to continuous improvement are evaluated.

When demonstrating that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation, an institution has the opportunity to reflect on the significance of its distinctive mission as well as across the wider higher education landscape. Against these backdrops, the institution is able to speak to its current state, aspirations and plans for the future.

Specifically, the distinctiveness of an institution's mission may inform the strategies it adopts and the evidence it provides to demonstrate that it meets each Criterion and Core Component. In preparing for a review, an institution may provide evidence relevant to additional topics related to a Core Component beyond those specified in any HLC resource document. During the review process, peer reviewers will determine whether an institution meets the Criteria and Core Components on the basis of such evidence.

Criterion 1. Mission

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 1.

1.A. Mission Alignment

The institution's educational programs, enrollment profile and scope of operations align with its publicly articulated mission.

1.B. Mission and Public Good

The institution's operation of the academic enterprise demonstrates its commitment to serving the public good.

1.C. Mission and Diversity of Society

The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 2.

2.A. Integrity

Actions taken by the institution's governing board, administration, faculty and staff demonstrate adherence to established policies and procedures.

2.B. Transparency

The institution presents itself accurately and completely to students and the public with respect to its educational programs and any claims it makes related to the educational experience.

2.C. Board Governance

In discharging its fiduciary duties, the institution's governing board is free from undue external influence and empowered to act in the best interests of the institution, including the students it serves.

2.D. Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

The institution supports academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of knowledge as integral to high-quality teaching, learning and research.

2.E. Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery and Application

The institution adheres to policies and procedures that ensure responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge.

Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning for Student Success

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 3.

3.A. Educational Programs

The institution maintains learning goals and outcomes that reflect a level of rigor commensurate with college-level work, including by program level and the content of each of its educational programs.

3.B. Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry

The institution's educational programs engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in practicing modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

3.C. Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff

The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

3.D. Support for Student Learning and Resources for Teaching

The institution provides student support services that address the needs of its student populations, as well as the teaching resources and infrastructure necessary for student success.

3.E. Assessment of Student Learning

The institution improves the quality of educational programs based on its assessment of student learning.

3.F. Program Review

The institution improves its curriculum based on periodic program review.

3.G. Student Success Outcomes

The institution's student success outcomes demonstrate continuous improvement, taking into account the student populations it serves and benchmarks that reference peer institutions.

Criterion 4. Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 4.

4.A. Effective Administrative Structures

The institution's administrative structures are effective and facilitate collaborative processes such as shared governance; data-informed decision making; and engagement with internal and external constituencies as appropriate.

4.B. Resource Base and Sustainability

The institution's financial and personnel resources effectively support its current operations. The institution's financial management balances short-term needs with long-term commitments and ensures its ongoing sustainability.

4.C. Planning for Quality Improvement

The institution engages in systematic strategic planning for quality improvement. It relies on data, integrating its insights from enrollment forecasts, financial capacity, student learning assessment, institutional operations and the external environment.

Policy Number Key

Section CRRT: Criteria and Requirements

Chapter B: Criteria for Accreditation

Part 10: General

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Notes:

** In the history, “revised” indicates that the HLC Board of Trustees adopted changes to the policy, and “edited” indicates that HLC staff made technical amendments or minor editorial revisions that did not require formal Board approval.*