

ASSESSMENT MATTERS

WHAT IS THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION?

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is an independent corporation that was founded in 1895 as one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States. HLC accredits degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions in the North Central region, which includes 19 states.

The Higher Learning Commission's [Criteria for Accreditation](#) reflect a set of guiding values. HLC articulates these guiding values so as to offer a better understanding of the Criteria and the intentions that underlie them.

SERVING THE COMMON GOOD BY
ASSURING AND ADVANCING THE
QUALITY OF HIGHER LEARNING.

HLC MISSION

The responsibility for assuring the quality of an institution rests first with the institution itself. Institutional accreditation assesses the capacity of an institution to assure its own quality and expects it to produce evidence that it does so.

Many of the Criteria for Accreditation should be understood in this light. HLC expects the governing board to ensure quality through its governance structures, with appropriate degrees of involvement and delegation. HLC emphasizes planning because

planning is critical to sustaining quality. Assessment of student learning and focus on persistence and completion are ways in which the institution improves and thus assures the quality of its teaching and learning.

HLC expects that institutions have the standards, the processes, and the will for quality assurance in depth and throughout its educational offerings.

Why is HLC so important?

Decision-Making Bodies

Actions on affiliated institutions are taken by [decision-making bodies](#) comprised of institutional representatives and public members. Unless otherwise specified, the decision-making bodies are broadly representative of the colleges and universities accredited by the Commission,

with attention to institutional type, control, size, and geographical distribution. All decision-making bodies abide by the Commission's conflict of interest policies.

Peer Reviewers

The Commission relies on a cadre of carefully selected and trained professionals who serve the Commission in

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its accreditation processes. This group of more than a thousand individuals is called the [Peer Corps](#). These volunteers share their knowledge of and direct experience

with higher education, their dedication to educational excellence, and their commitment to the principles underlying voluntary accreditation.

SO WHY DOES THIS AFFECT ASSESSMENT AT OUR INSTITUTION?

The HLC will review a self-study and visit the University of Arizona every ten years. Two of the major areas they will review are:

A culture of continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is the alternative to stagnation. Minimum standards are necessary but far from sufficient to achieve acceptable quality in higher education, and the strongest institutions will stay strong through ongoing aspiration. HLC includes improvement as one of two major strands in all its pathways, the other being assurance that member institutions meet the Criteria and the Federal Requirements.

[A process of assessment is essential to continuous improvement, and therefore a commitment to assessment should be deeply embedded in an institution's activities. Assessment applies not only to student learning and educational outcomes but to an institution's approach to improvement of institutional effectiveness.](#)

For student learning, a commitment to assessment would mean assessment at the program level that proceeds from clear goals, involves faculty at all points in the process, and analyzes the assessment results; it would also mean that the institution improves its programs or ancillary services or other operations on the basis of those analyses. Institutions committed to improvement review their programs regularly and seek external judgment, advice or benchmarks in their assessments. Because in recent years the issues of persistence and completion have become central to public concern about higher education, the current Criteria direct attention to them as possible indicators of quality and foci for improvement, without prescribing either the measures or outcomes.

Innovation is an aspect of improvement and essential in a time of rapid change and challenge; through its Criteria and processes HLC seeks to support innovation for improvement in all facets of institutional practice.

Evidence-based institutional learning and self-presentation

[Assessment and the processes an institution learns from should be well grounded in evidence.](#) Statements of belief and intention have important roles in an institution's presentation of itself, but for the quality assurance function of accreditation, evidence is critical. Institutions should be able to select evidence based on their particular purposes and circumstances. At the same time, many of the Assumed Practices within the Criteria require certain specified evidence.

Our next HLC review is in 2020. This is the reason why, for the past 6 years, we have been reviewing assessment plans in the Academic Program Reviews (APR) that each department submits every 7 years. The assessment plans get re-reviewed 1, 3 and 5 years post-APR, as well. Moving into the Accountability Management System of Taskstream-TK20 will help us with this endeavor and enable us to do our HLC reports much more efficiently.