CRITERIA, CORE COMPONENTS, AND COMMISSION STATEMENTS

CRITERION 1: 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.

**CORE COMPONENT 1A**
The organization’s mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization’s commitments.

**CORE COMPONENT 1B**
In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.

**CORE COMPONENT 1C**
Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.

**CORE COMPONENT 1D**
The organization’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.

**CORE COMPONENT 1E**
The organization upholds and protects its integrity.

CRITERION 2: PLANNING 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.

**CORE COMPONENT 2A**
The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.

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1 Criteria and Core Component definitions also available in the Higher Learning Commission’s *Handbook of Accreditation, 3rd edition* (2003), Chapter 3.1, available from the [Higher Learning Commission](http://www.higherlearningcommission.org)
CORE COMPONENT 2B
The organization’s resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

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

CORE COMPONENT 2D
All levels of planning align with the organization’s mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

CRITERION 3: STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING
The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

CORE COMPONENT 3A
The organization’s goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.

CORE COMPONENT 3B
The organization values and supports effective teaching.

CORE COMPONENT 3C
The organization creates effective learning environments.

CORE COMPONENT 3D
The organization’s learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

CRITERION 4: 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.

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

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

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

CRITERION 5: ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE
As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

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

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

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

CORE COMPONENT 5D
Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.

COMMISSION STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY
(reprinted from Higher Learning Commission Downloads page)

The Commission recognizes that much of the vitality that characterizes the higher education system in the United States is derived from the diversity found within the universe of organizations that comprise it. The Commission further recognizes that the diversity inherent among the people of the United States enriches American higher education and contributes to the capacity that students develop for living in a culturally pluralistic and interdependent world.

Diversity is represented in many forms, ranging from differences in organizational mission and educational levels to differences in the ideas, viewpoints, perspectives, values, religious beliefs, backgrounds, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, human capacity, and ethnicity of those who attend and work in the organizations. Individual and group differences add richness to teaching and learning, and also challenge them. People become more aware of their differences and similarities in a variety of ways, including through the processes of discovery and exploration, interaction,
collaboration, and partnering. In this context, the Commission champions diversity as a value to be upheld, and it looks to its member organizations to promote diversity in both concept and practice as they realize their respective missions.

Recognizing diversity is one of the values embraced by the Commission in its overall statement of mission and its new Criteria of Accreditation. Therefore, member organizations are encouraged to evaluate their respective missions, visions, values, and character to determine how well they address issues of diversity when providing enriching educational experiences and services for their constituencies. Organizations teach by example; they model approaches to diversity by conducting their operations in an equitable and just manner.

An organization that provides diverse experiences for its constituencies establishes an environment in which greater intellectual development can occur, and from which the its constituencies can learn that focusing on commonalities, while understanding differences, binds peoples and cultures. Valuing diversity relates to experiencing it; thus, people in an environment that encourages inclusiveness and discourages acts of insensitivity and disrespect can become more enlightened. The Commission urges its member organizations to create and maintain teaching and learning environments that provide educational opportunities for diverse individuals and groups. In addition, the Commission urges its member organizations to provide learning environments, larger than its classroom settings, in which students can contribute to and learn from the diversity that broad life exposure offers.

The Commission recognizes the value that member institutions place on their histories, traditions, and missions and the effect of such factors on their policies and practices. Therefore, the Commission does not prescribe a set of actions to address issues of diversity. However, through its Criteria, the Commission does expect its member organizations to evidence positive responses to issues of diversity and to show the relationship of those responses to the integrity of their operations.

**COMMISSION STATEMENT ON ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR LEARNING**

(reprinted from [Higher Learning Commission Downloads page](https://www.higherlearningcommission.org))

The Commission posited in October 1989 that assessment of student academic achievement is an essential component of every organization's effort to evaluate overall effectiveness. The experience of the past fourteen years has demonstrated that it is key to improving student learning. Assessment of student academic achievement is fundamental for all organizations that place student learning at the center of their educational endeavors.

Among the public's many expectations of higher education, the most basic is that students will learn, and in particular that they will learn what they need to know to attain personal success and fulfill their public responsibilities in the twenty-first century. The focus has moved from considering resources as primary evidence of the quality of education to expecting documentation of student learning. An organization's focus on achieved student learning is critical not only to promoting and improving effective curricular and cocurricular learning experiences and to
providing evidence of the quality of educational experiences and programs, but also to enhancing
the public's perception of the value of higher education.

The Commission appreciates that effective assessment can take a variety of forms and involve a
variety of processes. However, faculty members, with meaningful input from students and strong
support from the administration and governing board, should have the fundamental role in
developing and sustaining systematic assessment of student learning. Their assessment strategy
should be informed by the organization's mission and include explicit public statements regarding
the knowledge, skills, and competencies students should possess as a result of completing course
and program requirements; it also should document the values, attitudes, and behaviors faculty
expect students to have developed. Moreover, while strong assessment should provide data that
satisfy any externally mandated accountability requirements, its effectiveness in improving student
learning relies on its integration into the organization's processes for program review,
departmental and organization planning, and unit and organizational budgeting.

An organization's commitment to and capacity for effective assessment of student learning will
figure more prominently than ever in the accreditation relationship established between the
Commission and that organization. The Criteria for Accreditation, the Core Components, and the
Examples of Evidence adopted by the Commission in 2003 forge important new links between
assessment of student learning and accreditation. More than just an effective strategy for
accountability or an effective management process for curriculum improvement, assessment of
student achievement is essential for each higher learning organization that values its effect on the
learning of its students. Therefore, an organization committed to understanding and improving the
learning opportunities and environments it provides students will be able to document the
relationship between assessment of and improvement in student learning.

**COMMISSION STATEMENT ON GENERAL EDUCATION**
(reprinted from Higher Learning Commission Downloads page)

Understanding and appreciating diverse cultures, mastering multiple modes of inquiry, effectively
analyzing and communicating information, and recognizing the importance of creativity and values
to the human spirit not only allow people to live richer lives but also are a foundation for most
careers and for the informed exercise of local, national, and international citizenship. The
Commission expects organizations of higher learning to address these important ends, and has
embedded this expectation in its Criteria for Accreditation.

Throughout its history, the Commission has believed that quality undergraduate higher education
involves breadth as well as depth of study. As understood by the Commission, general education is
intended to impart common knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and to develop in
them the skills and attitudes that an organization's faculty believe every educated person should
possess. From an organization's general education, a student acquires a breadth of knowledge in
the areas and proficiency in the skills that the organization identifies as hallmarks of being college
educated. Moreover, effective general education helps students gain competence in the exercise of
independent intellectual inquiry and also stimulates their examination and understanding of personal, social, and civic values.

Effective general education can be shaped to fit unique organizational contexts. As higher education changes, so too do the ways in which organizations create and provide general education. General education must be valued and owned by the organization whether its courses are created, purchased, or shared; whether faculty are full-time, part-time, or employed by a partner organization; and whether the organization creates general education opportunities primarily through curriculum or relies heavily on experiential and off-campus opportunities to achieve its learning goals for general education.

Regardless of how a higher learning organization frames the general education necessary to fulfill its mission and goals, it clearly and publicly articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of the general education it provides for its students. It also shows its commitment to the centrality of general education by including an appropriate component of general education in all undergraduate programs of substantial length, whether they lead to certificates, diplomas, or degrees. Moreover, the organization’s faculty exercises oversight for general education and, working with the administration, regularly assesses its effectiveness against the organization’s stated goals for student learning.

**COMMISSION STATEMENT ON ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECTS**
(reprinted from [Higher Learning Commission Statement on Accountability Projects](https://www.highered.org/about-the-higher-learning-commission/higher-learning-commission-statement-on-accountability-projects))

Several higher education organizations provide standardized templates through which institutions can make information about themselves publicly available on their web sites. Many colleges and universities have agreed to participate in these programs of public disclosure, which have come to be known as voluntary systems of accountability. These systems aim to make it easier for people to find the information they want.

The Commission notes that where the templates address student success, student engagement and student learning, the data represent only single markers derived from the broader and richer evidence that institutions need to foster improvements in educational programs and services. The Commission regards institutions’ participation in these systems of accountability not as substitutes for the more extensive use of data for analysis, planning and improvement, but as serious efforts to meet public calls for transparency.

The Commission applauds these efforts and encourages its affiliated colleges and universities to participate in one of them or to collaborate in the creation of similar programs to accommodate different types of institutions. The Commission will not require participation but will recognize it as evidence where its Criteria for Accreditation concern communication with the public and institutional integrity.