Higher Learning Commission Accreditation Criteria

I. Criterion One: Mission.
*Mission is clear and publicly articulated; guides the institution’s operations.*

1A. Mission is broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations.
   1. Mission statement is developed through a process suited to the nature and culture of the institution and is adopted by the governing board.
   2. Institution’s academic programs, student support services, and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.
   3. Planning and budgeting priorities align with and support the mission.

1B. Mission is articulated publicly.
   1. Clearly articulates its mission through one or more public documents, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans, or institutional priorities.
   2. Mission documents are current and explain extent of institution’s emphasis on various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development, and religious or cultural purpose.
   3. Identifies the nature, scope, and intended constituents of the higher education programs and services the institution provides.

1C. Understands the relationship between its mission and the diversity of society.
   1. Addresses its role in a multicultural society.
   2. Processes and activities reflect attention to human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

1D. Mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.
   1. Actions and decisions reflect an understanding that in its educational role the institution serves the public, not solely the institution, and thus entails a public obligation.
   2. Educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.
   3. Engages with its identified external constituencies and communities of interest and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allows.

II. Criterion Two: Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct.
*The Institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.*

2A. Operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; establishes and follows fair and ethical policies and processes for its governing board, administration, faculty and staff.

2B. Presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public with
regard to its programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control, and accreditation relationships.

2C. Governing board of the institution is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and to assure its integrity.

III. Criterion Three: Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support. The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

3.A. Degree programs are appropriate to higher education.
   1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degree or certificate awarded.
   2. Articulates and differentiates learning goals for its undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate, and certificate programs.
   3. Program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements or any other modality).

3.B. Demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs.
   1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution.
   2. Articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.

3.C. Has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.
   1. Sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance; establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning.
   2. All instructors are appropriately credentialed, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial programs.
   3. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.
4. Has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.
5. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.
6. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising, and co-curricular activities, are appropriately qualified, trained, and supported in their professional development.

3D. Provides support for student learning and effective teaching.
   1. Provides student support services suited to the needs of its student population.
   2. Provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
   3. Provides academic advising suited to its programs and the needs of its students.
   4. Provides infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning.
   5. Provides guidance to students in effective use of research and information resources.

3E. Fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment.
   1. Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution's mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.
   2. Demonstrates any claims it makes about contributions to its students' educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, and economic development.

IV. Criterion Four: Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement.
   The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

4A. Demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.
   1. Maintains a practice of regular program reviews.
   2. Evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning.
   3. Has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
   4. Maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. Assures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are
equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.
5. Maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
6. Evaluates the success of its graduates. Assures that the degree or certificate programs it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplishes these purposes. Looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships, and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and Americorps).

4B. Demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.
   1. Clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.
   2. Assesses achievement of learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
   3. Uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
   4. Processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

4C. Demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.
   1. Defined goals for student retention, persistence, and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations, and educational offerings.
   2. Collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs.
   3. Uses information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
   4. Processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence, and completion of programs reflect good practice.

V. Criterion Five: Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness.
The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future.

5A. Resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
   1. Has the fiscal and human resources and physical and technological infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
2. Resource allocation process ensures that its educational purposes are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations to other areas or disbursement of revenue to a superordinate entity.
3. Goals incorporated into mission statements or elaborations of mission statements are realistic in light of organization, resources, and opportunities.
4. Staff in all areas are appropriately qualified and trained.
5. Well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring expense.

5B. Governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.
1. Has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies – including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students – in the institution’s governance.
2. Governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; provides oversight for the institution’s financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
3. Enables the involvement of its administration, faculty, staff, and students in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.

5C. Engages in systematic and integrated planning.
1. Allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities.
2. Links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting.
3. Planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. Plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity. Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution’s sources of revenue, such as enrollment, economy, state support.
5. Planning anticipates emerging factors, such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.

5D. Works systematically to improve its performance.
1. Develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations.
2. Learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts.