

FEB 2020

NEW MEXICO
HIGHLANDS
UNIVERSITY

HLC Update

Accreditation Overview

Highlands University is fully accredited by and in good standing with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

The Higher Learning Commission accredits approximately 1,000 colleges and universities that have a home base in one of 19 states that stretch from West Virginia to Arizona. HLC is a private, nonprofit regional accrediting agency.

HLC's mission is to assure and advance the quality of higher learning. It is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. The institutions HLC accredits include public, private not-for-profit, and proprietary institutions at degree levels from the associate's through the doctoral degree level and from small, specialized institutions through large research universities.



this issue

Focused Visit: Status Update **P.1**

HLC Committee Membership **P.2**

Summary of Evidence Report **P.3**

Last Word: Focused Visit & Beyond **P.4**

HLC Focused Visit: Status Update

In their final report removing the university from probation, the HLC specified three areas of continuing concern (see page 3 of this newsletter for details). In order to address these three areas of concern, the university will host a Focused Visit on March 30-31, 2020. A Focused Visit basically consists of a small team of peer reviewers who will visit Highlands to determine whether the university has fully and appropriately addressed the areas of concern.

Along with hosting a Focused Visit, the university recently submitted an evidence report to the HLC, outlining the actions that we have taken to address each of the three areas of concern.

As one of the final steps in our preparation process, we have scheduled a campus-wide HLC Forum for Monday, March 9, at 3:00 PM in the SUB Ballroom. Please try to attend if possible! This will be a great opportunity to prepare for the Focused Visit.

For more information about the accreditation process, please visit the [NMHU accreditation website](#).

The peer review team for our Focused Visit consists of the following members.

- Dr. Janet V. Smith, Assistant VP for Institutional Effectiveness, Pittsburg State University (Kansas)
- Mr. Scott Ellinghuysen, VP of Finance and Administration, Winona State University (Minnesota)
- Dr. Maryalyce Burke, Professor of Management, Dominican University (Illinois)

Two of the team members are from regional comprehensive universities similar to Highlands, so they should be in a good position to understand some of the challenges we face.

The peer review team will let us know in advance what offices or individuals on campus they would like to meet with. However, they are also free to interact on a spontaneous basis with anyone on campus (and it is likely they will do so).

Please address any questions or comments to Lee Allard, Director of Institutional Effectiveness, at lallard@nmhu.edu.

HLC Focused Visit: Timeline for Preparation

- ✓ May 2019: First draft of evidence document published on the HU website
- ✓ August 2019: Second draft of evidence document published on the HU website
- ✓ Fall 2019: Three campus-wide HLC forums scheduled
- ✓ October 2019: Third draft of evidence document published on HU website for review by campus community
- ✓ Late fall 2019: Editing and final writing of evidence document
- ✓ December 2019: Evidence document was submitted to University Relations for professional finish
- ✓ January 2020: Evidence document was submitted to HLC in preparation for the Focused Visit
- ✓ March 2020: Campus-wide HLC forum scheduled
- March 2020: Detailed plans will be laid out for hosting Focused Visit
- March 30-31, 2020: HLC Focused Visit will take place



HLC Committee Membership: Thanks to All!

Several campus committees have been working diligently for the past two years to help prepare for the Focused Visit.

Our preparation for the Focused Visit has been a team effort, involving many members of the Highlands community. To help shape the preparation process, a number of committees were formed representing a broad range of campus constituents. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of all these committee members.

HLC Steering Committee

- Nariman Arfai
- Kevin Corcoran
- Gloria Gadsden
- Rob Karaba
- Brandon Kempner
- David Sammeth
- Orit Tamir
- Ian Williamson

HLC 5A Subcommittee

- Max Baca
- Adam Bustos
- Kevin Corcoran
- Stephanie Gonzales
- Brandon Kempner
- Denise Montoya

HLC 5D Subcommittee

- Nariman Arfai
- Michelle Bencomo
- Kim Blea
- Susan Chavez
- Lauren Fath
- Shawn Flood
- Katie Gray
- Terri Law
- Lawrence Montano
- Buddy Rivera
- Ian Williamson

HLC 4C Subcommittee

- Vick Evans
- Gloria Gadsden
- Jessica Hurtado
- Terri Law
- Edward Martinez
- Benito Pacheco
- Carla Romero
- Ivy Romero
- Josephine Sena
- Keith Tucker
- Ann Wolf

HLC Guiding Values

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. These guiding values are listed below.

- Focus on student learning
- Education as a public purpose
- Education for a diverse, technological, globally connected world
- A culture of continuous improvement
- Evidence-based institutional learning and self-presentation
- Integrity, transparency, and ethical behavior or practice
- Governance for the well-being of the institution
- Planning and management of resources to ensure institutional sustainability
- Mission-centered evaluation
- Accreditation through peer review



HLC Evidence Report: Key Points

Following is a list of some key activities and initiatives that were included in the HLC Evidence Report as part of our response to the HLC concerns.

Enrollment Management: Core Component 4C

- Administrative changes to provide a more systematic approach to enrollment management
- Development of a comprehensive Strategic Enrollment Management Plan
- Development of a set of Key Enrollment Indicators to support data-informed decision making
- Development of Success Coaching model and Enrollment Success Program to promote retention
- Participation in HLC Persistence and Completion Academy
- Improved recruitment process to allow more intentionality in student recruitment
- Development of new academic programs and program modalities to attract new students
- Enhanced student activities offerings to help promote student engagement

Finance: Core Component 5A

- Commitment to increase reserves in order to reduce dependence on state funding
- Careful tuition increases to improve revenue stream while still maintaining affordability
- Implementation of numerous initiatives in an attempt to stabilize enrollment
- Institutional audit for 2017-18 had no repeat findings
- Clean audits for Highlands Foundation and Highlands Stable Isotopes
- Reduction in expenses associated with auxiliary operations
- Maintaining CFI above 2.0 for last three years

Planning and Institutional Improvement: Core Component 5D

- Initiation of process to develop a new institutional strategic plan
- Significant operational improvements in Financial Aid Office
- Significant operational improvements in the Office of Advancement (Foundation)
- Improved management of student complaints, including the hiring of a Student Service Coordinator
- Use of student survey data to inform unit-level and institution-level improvements
- Development of a set of executive level Key Performance Indicators, tied to the institutional strategic plan, which help to promote data-informed decision making
- Development of an annual strategic planning process for administrative units and academic departments

After the Focused Visit...

On April 1, 2020 (no fooling!) the HLC Focused Visit will be over, and the peer review team will be headed back to their respective institutions. What then?

The peer review team will prepare a final report based on their findings during the visit. They may recommend that we be removed from all further sanctions and monitoring (the best outcome!), they may recommend that we be subject to additional monitoring but no additional sanctions, or they may recommend that additional sanctions be imposed (e.g. being placed back on probation). This report will be submitted to the HLC.

The Institutional Actions Council (IAC) of the HLC will then decide whether to accept the recommendations of the peer review team (which is typically the case) or to take additional or alternative actions on their own.

We can expect to receive notification of the IAC decision within a few months of the Focused Visit, although the response time may vary according to circumstances.

Hopefully by the 4th of July we will be able to celebrate a clean slate with the Higher Learning Commission!



Last Word: The Focused Visit and Beyond

Interacting with the Focused Visit Team

As mentioned above (page 1), the peer review team will let us know in advance what offices or individuals on campus they would like to meet with. However, they are also free to interact on a spontaneous basis with anyone on campus (and it is likely they will do so). Here are a few tips for interacting with the peer review team if they happen to talk with you.

- Be honest but positive. The overall purpose of this visit (or any HLC visit) is to perform an honest evaluation of the institution's strengths and weaknesses, with an eye towards how we can improve.
- No dirty laundry! In any complex organization, including Highlands, there may be tensions and disagreements. All these are part of organizational dynamics, and there are appropriate internal channels for addressing these issues. However, an HLC visit is not the appropriate channel. Grinding your personal ax with the peer review team will do no good, and will make you appear unprofessional (or worse).
- Be informed! Understand why the HLC is here, and what they are looking for. Be ready to provide a meaningful response to any questions they may ask. Have a few key data points handy to impress them with your data proficiency!

Above all we need to show that we care about our students, our institution, and our community. Working together we can make this visit a positive opportunity for the university to move forward and improve at all levels of functioning.

Other Key HLC Dates

The annual HLC Conference will take place in April in Chicago. Highlands will be sending a contingent of faculty, administrators, and one of the regents to this event. The conference provides an excellent opportunity to learn more about HLC policies and expectations.

The next major event in our accreditation process is the Comprehensive Visit, which is scheduled for February 28 – March 1, 2022. The Comprehensive Visit is a part of the regular accreditation cycle for all HLC institutions. In this visit, all aspects of institutional functioning at Highlands University will be examined to determine if we are in compliance with HLC expectations. Needless to say, it is critically important that we have a successful Comprehensive Visit. Failure to do so will result in further sanctions for the university (e.g. being placed back on probation, or worse).