



The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the
North Central Association
of Colleges and Schools



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North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
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The Criteria for Accreditation and the Operational Indicators

The Board of Trustees of the Higher Learning Commission, at its meeting on February 21, 2003, voted to adopt the new Criteria for Accreditation and to endorse the Operational Indicators. This document provides the new Criteria and Operational Indicators. Fuller documents will be distributed at the 2003 Annual Meeting and posted on the Commission's web site in the coming weeks. A revised *Handbook of Accreditation* will be drafted by July 1, with production and mailing time placing distribution around September 1.

Timetable for Implementation

First Major Training: Annual Meeting*	April 2003
Parts of new Report on Operational Indicators piloted	Spring 2003
New Eligibility Requirements Effective	May 2003
Focused Training for Institutions and CEs	from April 2003–2004
Second Major Training: Annual Meeting	March 2004
Second iteration of Report on Operational Indicators piloted	Spring 2004
Ongoing Targeted CE Training	April–December 2004
New Criteria for Accreditation Effective	January 2005 (with option for institutions in fall 2004)
Report on Operational Indicators fully implemented	Spring 2005

*Check the Commission's Web site for information on the 2003 Annual Meeting

www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org

The Criteria for Accreditation

The Criteria Headings Defined

The Criteria for Accreditation are organized under five major headings. Each criterion has three elements: Criterion Statement, Core Components, and Examples of Evidence. These elements are defined as follows.

Criteria Statements: These statements, adopted by the Commission, define necessary attributes of an organization accredited by the Commission. An organization must be judged to have met each of the Criteria to merit accreditation. Sanctions may be applied if an affiliated organization is in jeopardy of not meeting one or more of the Criteria.

Core Components: The Commission identifies Core Components of each criterion. An organization addresses each Core Component as it presents reasonable and representative evidence of meeting a criterion. The review of each Core Component is necessary for a thorough evaluation of how an organization meets a criterion.

Examples of Evidence: The Commission provides in the Examples of Evidence illustrative examples of the specific types of evidence that an organization might present in addressing a Core Component. Organizations may provide other evidence they find relevant to their mission and activities. Some types of evidence suggested by the Commission may not be appropriate for all organizations; therefore, the absence of a specific type of evidence does not in and of itself mean that the organization fails to meet a Core Component.

Criterion One: Mission and Integrity

Criterion Statement:

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.

Examples of Evidence:

- The board has adopted statements of mission, vision, values, goals, and organizational priorities that together clearly and broadly define the organization's mission.

- The mission, vision, values, and goals documents define the varied internal and external constituencies the organization intends to serve.
- The mission documents include a strong commitment to high academic standards that sustain and advance excellence in higher learning.
- The mission documents state goals for the learning to be achieved by its students.
- The organization regularly evaluates and, when appropriate, revises the mission documents.
- The organization makes the mission documents available to the public, particularly to prospective and enrolled students.

Core Component - 1B. In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.

Examples of Evidence:

- In its mission documents, the organization addresses diversity within the community values and common purposes it considers fundamental to its mission.
- The mission documents present the organization's function in a multicultural society.
- The mission documents affirm the organization's commitment to honor the dignity and worth of individuals.
- The organization's required codes of belief or expected behavior are congruent with its mission.
- The mission documents provide a basis for the organization's basic strategies to address diversity.

Core Component - 1C. Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization

Examples of Evidence:

- The board, administration, faculty, staff, and students understand and support the organization's mission.
- The organization's strategic decisions are mission-driven.
- The organization's planning and budgeting priorities flow from and support the mission.
- The goals of the administrative and academic sub-units of the organization are congruent with the organization's mission.
- The organization's internal constituencies articulate the mission in a consistent manner.

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.

Examples of Evidence:

- Board policies and practices document the board's focus on the organization's mission.

- The board enables the organization's chief administrative personnel to exercise effective leadership.
- The distribution of responsibilities as defined in governance structures, processes, and activities is understood and is implemented through delegated authority.
- People within the governance and administrative structures are committed to the mission and appropriately qualified to carry out their defined responsibilities.
- Faculty and other academic leaders share responsibility for the coherence of the curriculum and the integrity of academic processes.
- Effective communication facilitates governance processes and activities.
- The organization evaluates its structures and processes regularly and strengthens them as needed.

Core Component - 1E. The organization upholds and protects its integrity.

Examples of Evidence:

- The activities of the organization are congruent with its mission.
- The board exercises its responsibility to the public to ensure that the organization operates legally, responsibly, and with fiscal honesty.
- The organization understands and abides by local, state, and federal laws and regulations applicable to it (or by laws and regulations established by federally-recognized sovereign entities).
- The organization consistently implements clear and fair policies regarding the rights and responsibilities of each of its internal constituencies.
- The organization's structures and processes allow it to ensure the integrity of its co-curricular and auxiliary activities.
- The organization deals fairly with its external constituents.
- The organization presents itself accurately and honestly to the public.
- The organization documents timely response to complaints and grievances, particularly those of students.

Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future

Criterion Statement:

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.

Examples of Evidence:

- The organization's planning documents reflect a sound understanding of the organization's current capacity.
- The organization's planning documents demonstrate that attention is being paid to emerging factors such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.
- The organization's planning documents show careful attention to the organization's function in a multicultural society.
- The organization's planning processes include effective environmental scanning.
- The organizational environment is supportive of innovation and change.
- The organization incorporates in its planning those aspects of its history and heritage that it wishes to preserve and continue.
- The organization clearly identifies authority for decision making about organizational goals.

Core Component - 2B. The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

Examples of Evidence:

- The organization's resources are adequate for achievement of the educational quality it claims to provide.
- Plans for resource development and allocation document an organizational commitment to supporting and strengthening the quality of the education it provides.
- The organization uses its human resources effectively.
- The organization intentionally develops its human resources to meet future changes.
- The organization's history of financial resource development and investment documents a forward-looking concern for ensuring educational quality (e.g., investments in faculty development, technology, learning support services, new or renovated facilities).
- The organization's planning processes are flexible enough to respond to unanticipated needs for program reallocation, downsizing, or growth.
- The organization has a history of achieving its planning goals.

Core Component - 2C. The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.

Examples of Evidence:

- The organization demonstrates that its evaluation processes provide evidence that its performance meets its stated expectations for institutional effectiveness.
- The organization maintains effective systems for collecting, analyzing, and using organizational information.
- Appropriate data and feedback loops are available and used throughout the organization to support continuous improvement.

- Periodic reviews of academic and administrative sub-units contribute to improvement of the organization.
- The organization provides adequate support for its evaluation and assessment processes.

Core Component - 2D. All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

Examples of Evidence:

- Coordinated planning processes center on the mission documents that define vision, values, goals, and strategic priorities for the organization.
- Planning processes link with budgeting processes.
- Implementation of the organization's planning is evident in its operations.
- Long-range strategic planning processes allow for reprioritization of goals when necessary because of changing environments.
- Planning documents give evidence of the organization's awareness of the relationships among educational quality, student learning, and the diverse, complex, global, and technological world in which the organization and its students exist.
- Planning processes involve internal constituents and, where appropriate, external constituents.

Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching

Criterion Statement:

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.

Examples of Evidence:

- The organization clearly differentiates its learning goals for undergraduate, graduate, and post-baccalaureate programs by identifying the expected learning outcomes for each.
- Assessment of student learning provides evidence at multiple levels: course, program, and institutional.
- Assessment of student learning includes multiple direct and indirect measures of student learning.
- Results obtained through assessment of student learning are available to appropriate constituencies, including students themselves.

- The organization integrates into its assessment of student learning the data reported for purposes of external accountability (e.g., graduation rates, passage rates on licensing exams, placement rates, transfer rates).
- The organization's assessment of student learning extends to all educational offerings, including credit and non-credit certificate programs.
- Faculty are involved in defining expected student learning outcomes and creating the strategies to determine whether those outcomes are achieved.
- Faculty and administrators routinely review the effectiveness and uses of the organization's program to assess student learning.

Core Component - 3B. The organization values and supports effective teaching.

Examples of Evidence:

- Qualified faculty determine curricular content and strategies for instruction.
- The organization supports professional development designed to facilitate teaching suited to varied learning environments.
- The organization evaluates teaching and recognizes effective teaching.
- The organization provides services to support improved pedagogies.
- The organization demonstrates openness to innovative practices that enhance learning.
- The organization supports faculty in keeping abreast of the research on teaching and learning, and of technological advances that can positively affect student learning and the delivery of instruction.
- Faculty members actively participate in professional organizations relevant to the disciplines they teach.

Core Component - 3C. The organization creates effective learning environments.

Examples of Evidence:

- Assessment results inform improvements in curriculum, pedagogy, instructional resources, and student services.
- The organization provides an environment that supports all learners and respects the diversity they bring.
- Advising systems focus on student learning, including the mastery of skills required for academic success.
- Student development programs support learning throughout the student's experience regardless of the location of the student.
- The organization employs, when appropriate, new technologies that enhance effective learning environments for students.
- The organization's systems of quality assurance include regular review of whether its educational strategies, activities, processes, and technologies enhance student learning.

Core Component - 3D. The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

Examples of Evidence:

- The organization ensures access to the resources (e.g., research laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites) necessary to support learning and teaching.
- The organization evaluates the use of its learning resources to enhance student learning and effective teaching.
- The organization regularly assesses the effectiveness of its learning resources to support learning and teaching.
- The organization supports students, staff, and faculty in using technology effectively.
- The organization provides effective staffing and support for its learning resources.
- The organization's systems and structures enable partnerships and innovations that enhance student learning and strengthen teaching effectiveness.
- Budgeting priorities reflect that improvement in teaching and learning is a core value of the organization.

**Criterion Four:
Acquisition, Discovery, and
Application of Knowledge**

Criterion Statement:

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.

Examples of Evidence:

- The board has approved and disseminated statements supporting freedom of inquiry for the organization's students, faculty, and staff, and honors those statements in its practices.
- The organization's planning and pattern of financial allocation demonstrate that it values and promotes a life of learning for its students, faculty, and staff.
- The organization supports professional development opportunities and makes them available to all of its administrators, faculty, and staff.
- The organization publicly acknowledges the achievements of students and faculty in acquiring, discovering, and applying knowledge.

- The faculty and students, in keeping with the organization's mission, produce scholarship and create knowledge through basic and applied research.
- The organization and its units use scholarship and research to stimulate organizational and educational improvements.

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.

Examples of Evidence:

- The organization integrates general education into all of its undergraduate degree programs through curricular and experiential offerings intentionally created to develop the attitudes and skills requisite for a life of learning in a diverse society.
- The organization regularly reviews the relationship between its mission and values and the effectiveness of its general education.
- The organization assesses how effectively its graduate programs establish a knowledge base on which students develop depth of expertise.
- The organization demonstrates the linkages between curricular and co-curricular activities that support inquiry, practice, creativity, and social responsibility.
- Learning outcomes demonstrate that graduates have achieved breadth of knowledge and skills and the capacity to exercise intellectual inquiry.
- Learning outcomes demonstrate effective preparation for continued learning.

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.

Examples of Evidence:

- Regular academic program reviews include attention to currency and relevance of courses and programs.
- In keeping with its mission, learning goals and outcomes include skills and professional competence essential to a diverse workforce.
- Learning outcomes document that graduates have gained the skills and knowledge they need to function in diverse local, national, and global societies.
- Curricular evaluation involves alumni, employers, and other external constituents who understand the relationships among the courses of study, the currency of the curriculum, and the utility of the knowledge and skills gained.
- The organization supports creation and use of scholarship by students in keeping with its mission.
- Faculty expect students to master the knowledge and skills necessary for independent learning in programs of applied practice.

- The organization provides curricular and co-curricular opportunities that promote social responsibility.

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

Examples of Evidence:

- The organization's academic and student support programs contribute to the development of student skills and attitudes fundamental to responsible use of knowledge.
- The organization follows explicit policies and procedures to ensure ethical conduct in its research and instructional activities.
- The organization encourages curricular and co-curricular activities that relate responsible use of knowledge to practicing social responsibility.
- The organization provides effective oversight and support services to ensure the integrity of research and practice conducted by its faculty and students.
- The organization creates, disseminates, and enforces clear policies on practices involving intellectual property rights.

Criterion Five: Engagement and Service

Criterion Statement:

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.

Examples of Evidence:

- The organization's commitments are shaped by its mission and its capacity to support those commitments.
- The organization practices periodic environmental scanning to understand the changing needs of its constituencies and their communities.
- The organization demonstrates attention to the diversity of the constituencies it serves.
- The organization's outreach programs respond to identified community needs.
- In responding to external constituencies, the organization is well-served by programs such as continuing education, outreach, customized training, and extension services.

Core Component - 5B. The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.

Examples of Evidence:

- The organization's structures and processes enable effective connections with its communities.
- The organization's co-curricular activities engage students, staff, administrators, and faculty with external communities.
- The organization's educational programs connect students with external communities.
- The organization's resources—physical, financial, and human—support effective programs of engagement and service.
- Planning processes project ongoing engagement and service.

Core Component - 5C. The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.

Examples of Evidence:

- Collaborative ventures exist with other higher learning organizations and education sectors (e.g., K-12 partnerships, articulation arrangements, 2+2 programs).
- The organization's transfer policies and practices create an environment supportive of the mobility of learners.
- Community leaders testify to the usefulness of the organization's programs of engagement.
- The organization's programs of engagement give evidence of building effective bridges among diverse communities.
- The organization participates in partnerships focused on shared educational, economic, and social goals.
- The organization's partnerships and contractual arrangements uphold the organization's integrity.

Core Component - 5D. Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.

Examples of Evidence:

- The organization's evaluation of services involves the constituencies served.
- Service programs and student, faculty, and staff volunteer activities are well-received by the communities served.
- The organization's economic and workforce development activities are sought after and valued by civic and business leaders.
- External constituents participate in the organization's activities and co-curricular programs open to the public.
- The organization's facilities are available to and used by the community.
- The organization provides programs to meet the continuing education needs of licensed professionals in its community.

— end of Criteria for Accreditation —

Operational Indicators

THE OPERATIONAL INDICATORS will be the centerpiece of the new on-line Annual Report. We expect this new report will strengthen the continuous relationship between the affiliated organization and the Commission in several ways:

1. They will provide regular snapshots of an organization's ongoing health.
2. They will mark dramatic or sudden changes in an organization's profile.
3. They will provide longitudinal data on individual organizations.
4. When appropriately aggregated, they will provide trend and normative data for the various groups of organizations.
5. They will lessen the special reporting required of an organization before team visits.
6. They will provide more objective information for visiting teams.
7. They will provide a means for both the organization and the Commission to remain accountable to their various stakeholders.

We ask for data on *Demographics* because changes in the numbers and types of students served may have a strong relationship to information provided on financial strength, program diversity, and scope of educational operations. Changes over time in faculty and staff demographics may relate to these other variables as well. Data on *Educational Programs* should help us to understand possible shifts in organizational priorities as well as demographics and financial strength. Moreover, we seek assurance of basic financial support for those educational programs. We include credit and non-credit certificate programs because they have come to constitute a growing component in many organizations. The ratios identified under *Financial Strength* follow the recommendations of financial experts who hold that the ratios serve monitoring purposes better than reading of audits. Information required under *Scope of Activities* allows us to assure that we know the full scope of the organization's educational offerings, thereby helping us to fulfill our gatekeeping function for federal funds.

We will introduce a transitional Annual Report in February 2003 which will contain more than half of the Operational Indicators. The full Report will be launched the following year by which time the institution will have designated an internal liaison who will be responsible for its completion. You will notice that you can refer to your IPEDS reports to gather much of the required data. Specific definitions will be provided in the web-based Report.

Coding identifies numbers that are reported on IPEDS (IPEDS) or can be readily calculated from IPEDS-reported numbers (IPEDS-computed). Some tentative working definitions are provided; other definitions and explanations will be created as needed.

I. DEMOGRAPHICS

a. Student count by status

1. full-time undergraduate (IPEDS)
2. part-time undergraduate (IPEDS)
3. full-time graduate (IPEDS)
4. part-time graduate (IPEDS)
5. full-time post-baccalaureate first professional (IPEDS)
6. part-time post-baccalaureate first professional (IPEDS)
7. non-credit students (all levels)

b. Student count by category

1. degree-seeking undergraduate (IPEDS-computed)
2. certificate-seeking undergraduate (credit and non-credit). (This includes students seeking pre-associate certificates as well as students enrolled in any other free-standing certificate programs that do not require the holding of a baccalaureate degree. Do not include certifications integrated into a degree.)
3. post-baccalaureate certificate seeking (credit and non-credit). (This includes students enrolled in certificate programs created specifically for students already holding a baccalaureate degree; the credits may or may not count as graduate credits. Do not include certifications integrated into a degree.)
4. degree-seeking graduate (IPEDS-computed)

c. Total entering undergraduate count

1. full-time
2. part-time

d. Count of

1. faculty (IPEDS-computed)
2. administration (IPEDS-computed)
3. staff (IPEDS-computed)

e. Faculty status by count

1. full-time (IPEDS)
2. part-time (IPEDS)

II. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

a. Numbers of programs (note: IPEDS classifies credit programs by CIP code)

1. Programs leading to award of pre-associate certificates
2. Programs leading to award of other undergraduate certificates/diplomas
3. Programs leading to award of undergraduate degrees

4. Programs leading to award of graduate degrees
5. Programs leading to award of post-baccalaureate certificates
6. Programs leading to award of post-baccalaureate first professional degrees

b. Addition/deletion in the last completed academic year of programs leading to degrees and/or certificates

c. Completion rates

1. Number of undergraduate degrees awarded (IPEDS-computed)
2. Number of undergraduate certificates/diplomas awarded (for pre-associate, IPEDS-computed)
3. Number of graduate degrees awarded (IPEDS-computed)
4. Number of post-baccalaureate certificates awarded
5. Number of post-baccalaureate first professional degrees awarded (IPEDS-computed)

d. Credit hours generation (note: IPEDS asks for Total Credit Activity for graduate and undergraduate programs, but does not ask by faculty status)

1. Undergraduate credit hours generated by full-time faculty
2. Undergraduate credit hours generated by part-time faculty
3. Graduate and post-baccalaureate first professional credit hours generated by full-time faculty
4. Graduate and post-baccalaureate first professional credit hours generated by part-time faculty

e. Instructional spending per FTE (IPEDS-computed) and percent of unrestricted revenues (excluding non-mandatory transfers) used for instruction

III. FINANCIAL STRENGTH

a. Net Operating Income or Deficit (excluding non-mandatory transfers)

b-e. see chart below

f. Bond Rating, if applicable

1. Current Bond Rating(s)
2. Changes, if any, from previous year

IV. SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES

a. Distributed Education

1. List of locations by Commission-defined categories where institution provides credit-bearing instruction to students registered in the institution. Provide student count for each location (duplicated count is acceptable). The Commission will provide three levels of operation and three categories of locations:

- a) *levels of operation*: **course** (courses only), **site** (50% or more of degree offered), **campus** (significant range of program offerings supported by a full range of services taught and administered by campus personnel)
- b) *categories of locations*: in-state, out-of-state, out-of-nation

2. Count in dual enrollment (high school) programs

3. List of distance education degree and certificate programs

Definition:

- Include only programs that provide a complete degree or credit-bearing certificate, that are designed for students away from the campus, and that do not require students to attend a specified physical instructional site to participate in the course offerings.
- Include programs that might require only attendance of an on-site orientation and/or the taking of proctored exams at a specific site. The list will include primary instructional modality [e.g., Video/TV/CD ROM; Internet; Correspondence; Dial-Up; Audio Bridge].
- Reporting enrollment count in these programs will be optional.

b. Collaborative Education

1. List of consortia or other collaborative arrangements necessary for admitted students to complete programs offered by the institution. Provide enrollment count in these programs (duplicated count acceptable).

Financial Strength – b.-e.	1. Public institutions	2. Private institutions	3. Proprietary institutions
b. Viability Ratio (resources to cover debt)	$\frac{\text{Expendable Fund Balances}}{\text{Plant Debt}}$	$\frac{\text{Expendable Net Assets}}{\text{Long Term Debt}}$	$\frac{\text{Adjusted Equity}}{\text{Total Long Term Debt}}$
c. Primary Reserve Ratio (length of time the institution could operate)	$\frac{\text{Expendable Fund Balance}}{\text{Total Expenditures and Mandatory Transfers}}$	$\frac{\text{Expendable Net Assets}}{\text{Total Expenses}}$	$\frac{\text{Adjusted Equity}}{\text{Total Expenses}}$
d. Net Income Ratio (capacity to operate within revenues)	$\frac{\text{Net Reserves}}{\text{Total Revenue}}$	$\frac{\text{Changes in Unrestricted Net Assets}}{\text{Total Unrestricted Income}}$	$\frac{\text{Income Before Taxes}}{\text{Total Revenues}}$
e. Debt Burden Ratio (excluding depreciation expense)	$\frac{\text{Debt Principal and Interest}}{\text{Total Expenses}}$	$\frac{\text{Debt Principal and Interest}}{\text{Total Expenses}}$	$\frac{\text{Total Debt Service}}{\text{Total Unrestricted Revenue}}$