

The Insight

The HLC sets forth clear guidelines for determining faculty credentials to teach in a discipline. It is up to us to ensure that we apply these guidelines and document how each faculty member teaching a course is qualified to do so in accordance with those standards.

Implications

A careful examination of faculty credentials and evidence of adhering to HLC requirements will help support the university's bid for re-accreditation in 2020.

Now is a good time to ensure that our processes support this goal and that documentation is available for HLC review.

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ASSESSMENT, ACCREDITATION, and FACULTY CREDENTIALS

One of the uses of assessment is to demonstrate to external accrediting bodies that the university and its various programs are graduating students who have actually learned what they are expected to learn.

Educational institutions have a variety of means at their disposal to ensure that learning is truly taking place - the purpose of assessment. One essential element is faculty qualifications to teach. With the university facing its Higher Learning Commission (HLC) re-accreditation in the next year or so, this is a good time for us to ensure that faculty credentials are not only documented but properly applied.

Per the HLC, “faculty in higher education should have completed a program of study in the discipline.” And that “completion of a degree in a specific field enhances an instructor’s depth of subject matter knowledge and is easily identifiable.” The expectation is that faculty possess 18 graduate credit hours of study in the discipline in which he or she teaches, or the institution must explain and justify why that individual is teaching those classes.

In the case where equivalent experience is used in lieu of academic credits, the university must determine a minimum level of experience required and determine how that experience is evaluated as part of the faculty appointment process. This practice ensures consistency in determining faculty preparedness for teaching in a discipline and supports the quality of that instruction – and student learning.

With reaccreditation looming, now is the time to ensure that faculty credentials are clearly identified and documented, and that there is a demonstrable process in place to ensure that quality faculty are appointed to instruct our students.

A copy of the HLC guidelines for faculty qualifications can be obtained from:
http://download.hlcommission.org/FacultyGuidelines_2016_OPB.pdf