

## **Institutional Accreditation Update**

July 2016

### **Background**

Lake Superior State University is once again scheduled for a regular review by our Regional Accreditation body, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). This visit is scheduled for November 7-8, 2016. Since our last visit in October of 2011, the University successfully completed a Multi-Location Evaluation Visit, and successfully completed our participation in the HLC's Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning. In January 2015, the University appointed a six-member Accreditation Review Team (ART) comprised of three faculty: Barb Light, Janice Repka, Derek Wright; and three staff: Joe Barrs, Craig Krouth, Sharmay Wood. This team, with support from across campus, worked over the span of 18 months auditing the University's compliance with the HLC's Assumed Practices, documented evidence needed for the Federal Compliance Report, and most importantly developed a refined evidence-driven draft of our Assurance Argument addressing the five Criteria for Accreditation.

<https://www.hlcommission.org/Criteria-Eligibility-and-Candidacy/criteria-and-core-components.html>

The ART held multiple campus dialog sessions to review the drafts of each of the five sections of the Assurance Argument to solicit input, additional evidence and broad participation with the campus community. The work of this team has been documented on our website:

<http://www.lssu.edu/hlc/AccreditationReviewTeam.php>

During the spring semester the university employed an experienced HLC reviewer to provide an independent read of the Assurance Argument, this feedback has been useful in helping us improve the documentation. This summer the President's Cabinet has also been reviewing the Assurance Argument and working with their staff to refine and finalize the narrative. Several areas in the Assurance Argument are currently being updated based on developments through the summer. These include: the nature and role of shared governance in Section 5.B.2, including the disbanding of the Shared Governance Oversight Committee; allocation of resources in alignment with mission and priorities in Section 5.C.2, including recent layoffs and budget plans; and implementation of policies relative to Faculty Qualification defined in Assumed Practice B.2.a.

### **Peer Review Team**

The HLC has identified the Peer Reviewer team which will visit campus. This team is comprised of experienced professionals from institutions similar to LSSU from across the HLC region. The team includes: Dr. Rebecca Timmons, Director of Assessment and Accountability at University of Arkansas-Fort Smith (Fort Smith, AR), Dr. Collen Jo Nolan, Dean of Natural Sciences and Mathematics at Shepherd University (Shepherdstown, WV), Dr. John Comerford, President of Blackburn College (Carlinville, IL), and Dr. Kimberly Jacobs-Beck, Chair and Professor of English at University of Cincinnati-Clermont College (Batavia, OH). Prior to the team visit another group of HLC reviewers will have reviewed our Federal Compliance documentation. The visiting team will have also read our Assurance Argument and the evidence documents which support our claim to having met the five Criteria for Accreditation. The team chair may contact the University to request additional information and clarification prior to or during the visit. Once on campus, the team's task during their day-and-a-half of meetings will be to validate the

claims made in the Assurance Argument through a series of individual, drop-in, open forum and targeted focus group sessions. The Peer Reviewer team begins their deliberations and writing by noon of the second day, but does not make a presentation to discuss their findings.

### **HLC Actions and Outcomes**

At the end of the site visit, the Peer Reviewers submit their findings in the form of a report to the University's HLC Liaison for review. Once granted preliminary approval for release, the report is returned to the University to identify errors in fact or omissions prior to the report being submitted to the HLC's Institutional Action Committee which prepares the official recommendation including any actions and/or sanctions. The final report from the HLC should be available by late in the calendar year. The HLC will continue accreditation (with or without conditions or sanctions), deny accreditation or withdraw accreditation based on the outcome of its review.

An institution must be judged to have met all five Criteria for Accreditation (comprised of 21 Core Components) to merit accreditation. An individual Criterion is deemed to be met if all its Core Components are deemed to be either have been "met" (fully meeting or exceeding the expectations) or "met with concerns" (the key expected characteristics are present but performance in relation to some aspect must be improved). If any Core Component within a given Criterion is "met with concerns" then the overall Criterion is also deemed to be "met with concerns". In every case where a Core Component (and thus the overall Criterion as well) has been shown to be "met with concerns" some form of follow-up will be required, for example a monitoring report, site visit, etc. If, through the review process, any Core Component is judged to have been "not met" then the entire Criterion is "not met".

### **Final Preparations**

The Federal Compliance Report and Assurance Argument must be ready for submission by the end of September, in preparation for the site visit in early November. There are several final activities planned for the next two months to reach that goal. First, it is important that all members of the university community, including the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff and students, become familiar with the standards defined in the Criteria for Accreditation and the claims presented in the Assurance Argument of how we met those standards. We will provide multiple opportunities and resources to familiarize the campus community with the Assurance Argument in events during convocation week, and the first few weeks of classes, coordinating with all members of the campus community. More specifically, each of the VPs will coordinate meetings with the leadership teams in their areas to review the Mission/Vision, the Criteria for Accreditation, and discuss what to expect during the site visit. A final schedule for the site visit will be developed by the Peer Reviewer Team and distributed as soon as it is available.

We are looking forward to the HLC site visit with optimism and confidence, recognizing the work of many across campus to develop a robust and detailed documentation supporting our claims to have met all the Criteria for Accreditation. However, it is important to note that we are engaged in a process of continuous improvement as the "institution works systematically to improve its performance" (C.5.D).

Questions: contact David Myton, Ph.D. Associate Provost, Lake Superior State University