

Higher Education Legal Insights

HLC sets new minimum standards for qualified faculty

By Hayley E. Hanson on October 27, 2015

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The Higher Learning Commission's (HLC) Board of Trustees approved revisions to Assumed Practice B.2, *Faculty Roles and Qualifications*, at its June 2015 meeting. As revised, institutions accredited by HLC must identify qualified faculty members primarily by credentials, but other factors, including tested experience, may be considered. The revisions focus on the minimum qualifications for all faculty: full-time, part-time, adjunct, temporary, non-tenure track, and dual credit; the

requirements also apply to teaching assistants supervised by faculty.

All HLC-accredited institutions must be in compliance no later than Sept. 1, 2017, with the revised Assumed Practice. (HLC also clarified the interpretation of related Core Components 3.C.1-2 and 4.)

Credentials

There are many ways in which a faculty member can meet the minimum qualifications defined by HLC. Some of the examples are:

- Faculty teaching in higher education should complete a program of study in the discipline or subfield in which the faculty member teaches that is one level above the courses the member is developing or teaching.
- Faculty teaching undergraduate programs should hold a master's degree in the field the faculty member is teaching.
- Faculty teaching a general education course should hold a master's degree or higher in the discipline or subfield related to the course. If the faculty member holds a master's degree or higher but is teaching outside his or her discipline or subfield, the faculty member should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which he or she is teaching.

- Faculty teaching in career or technical education should hold a bachelor's degree in the field and/or combination of education, training and testing experience.
- Faculty teaching graduate programs should hold a terminal degree in the faculty member's discipline or field and have a record of research and scholarship.
- Faculty teaching doctoral education should have a terminal degree and research and scholarship appropriate to the degree being offered.
- Faculty teaching dual credit courses must hold the same minimal qualifications as other teachers teaching on the institution's campus. The faculty member must have completed a program one level above that of the program he or she is teaching. (Thus, dual credit faculty must hold master's degrees in the fields or disciplines they are teaching.)

Tested Experience

An institution may measure tested experience, including the breadth and depth of experience outside the classroom in real-world situations, as a qualification for a faculty member to teach a particular course. However, in order for the institution to consider tested experience, the institution must have a well-defined policy and procedure that sets forth the minimum thresholds of experience needed to be hired to teach the course. The minimum thresholds should include the skill sets, certification, and amount of real-world experience to be considered adequate to meet the minimum qualification standard. The policy must be reviewed through the faculty governance process of the institution. Institutions should document in personnel files all faculty, adjunct, part-time or others who will be allowed to teach on the basis of tested experience to show they are minimally qualified.

What This Means For You

All HLC institutions must be in compliance with Assumed Practice B.2 on Sept. 1, 2017. Institutions reviewed prior to Sept. 1, 2017, do not need to submit review information as if they are meeting the revised Assumed Practice B.2, but must identify their process to determine minimal qualifications for faculty in Core Component 3C, which has not changed. These institutions will not be subject to any consequence if they are not in compliance with the revised Assumed Practice B.2.

Institutions reviewed after Sept. 1, 2017, will be expected to be in compliance. If they are not in compliance, HLC may decide to continue to monitor the institutions' plans to come into compliance with the Assumed Practice. HLC has been explicit that the revisions to Assumed Practice B.2 should not be the basis to terminate any faculty member for performance issues.

We recommend all institutions analyze whether their faculty currently meet minimum qualifications under HLC's guidance and, if they do not, begin developing a plan to come into compliance prior to Sept. 1, 2017. In addition, if your institution is using tested experience as a basis for minimum qualification, your institution

should begin developing a policy and procedure as required by Assumed Practice B.2.

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