



HLC Trends and Update

Karen J Solomon, Vice President and Chief Transformation Officer
CATYC | October 7, 2025

1

Trends & Updates

- Trends
- Revised Criteria
 - Assurance Filing
- Student Success
 - Core Component
 - Indicators
 - Open Pathway SSQI
- Substantive Change
- Credential Lab



2

Trends

- Change Leadership
- Leadership Turnover- Opportunities & Threats
- Teaching, Learning & Faculty
- Financial Stability & Sustainability
- Crisis Management, Disaster Recovery and Preparation
- More Complex Legal Issues



3

Trends (continued)

- Mental Health Issues Continue
- The New Landscape of Higher Education
- Value of Higher Ed- Demonstrating a Return on Investment
- Past is no longer Prologue
- Systemic Reform- a New Political Environment
- Accreditation



4

Revised Criteria

- Effective 9/1/2025
- Significant focus on institutional mission
- Resources to assist during transition



5

Crosswalk Between the Current and Revised Criteria

- Several subcomponents were relocated to Assumed Practices.
- One subcomponent was integrated into a revised Core Component.
- Some concepts from other subcomponents will be relocated to an expanded and updated version of the *"Providing Evidence"* document.

https://download.hlcommission.org/policy/updates/AdoptedPolicy-Criteria_2024-06_POL.pdf



6

Crosswalk Between the Current and Revised Criteria



2020 Criteria	Location in Revised Criteria & Assumed Practices
Criterion 1. Mission	Criterion 1. Mission
1.A	1.A Mission Alignment
1.B	1.B Mission and Public Good
1.C	1.C Mission and Diversity of Society
Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct	Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct
2.A	2.A Integrity
2.B	2.B Transparency
2.C	2.C Board Governance & Assumed Practices A.11–12 ¹
2.D	2.D Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression
2.E	2.E Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery and Application
Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support	Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning for Student Success
3.A	3.A Educational Programs
3.B	3.B Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry

2020 Criteria	Location in Revised Criteria & Assumed Practices
3.C	3.C Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff & Assumed Practice B.4 ²
3.D	3.D Support for Student Learning and Resources for Teaching ³
Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement	Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning for Student Success
4.A	3.F Program Review & Assumed Practice C.2 ⁴
4.B	3.E Assessment of Student Learning
4.C	3.G Student Success Outcomes
Criterion 5. Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning	Criterion 4. Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning
5.A	4.A Effective Administrative Structures
5.B	4.B Resource Base and Sustainability & Assumed Practice D.2 ⁵
5.C	4.C Planning for Quality Improvement

7

Updated Resource

- Document to be utilized as a resource to consider possible sources of evidence
- Document is not exhaustive or to be used as a checklist
- Common Types of Evidence



Resource

Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation

Updated for Criteria for Accreditation
Effective September 1, 2025



https://download.hlcommission.org/ProvidingEvidence-2025Criteria_INF.pdf

8

Assurance System moving to Canopy

- Export all materials by 10/31/2025
- Messages sent 10/7/2025
 - [In November 2025](#): for institutions in Pathway Years 2 and 8
 - [In 2026 or later](#): for institutions in Years 1, 5, 6, 7
 - [Already have access, Assurance Filing in progress](#): for institutions in Years 3, 4, 9, 10
 - [Already have access and Assurance Filing submitted](#): for institutions in Years 4 & 10 with lock dates before October 7
- Exporting your materials is essential if you plan to repurpose any narrative or evidence for your next Assurance Filing or simply want a record of your previous Assurance Filing. HLC will not be able to recover anything from the Assurance System after it is taken offline.



9

Student Success

- Revised Criteria expect benchmarks that reference peer institutions
- Risk Indicator
 - Focused on three educational measures:
 - ✓ First-year retention rate
 - ✓ Graduation rate within 150% of normal time
 - ✓ Completion and transfer rate at 8 years after entry to college
 - Launch of indicator process



10

Student Success Institutional Peer Groups

Individual institution's outcomes will be compared against the median of their peer group and categorized as one of the following:

- At or above the median
- Between the median and 25th percentile
- Between the 25th percentile and 5th percentile
- Within the lowest 5th percentile



11

Student Success Institutional Peer Groups

- For two-year institutions, participation in a Student Success Improvement Plan would be required when either of the following conditions are met:
 - The institution's completion and transfer rate is within the lowest 5th percentile of their peer group;
- or
- The institution's completion and transfer rate is between the 5th and 25th percentile and its retention rate or graduation rate is within the lowest 5th percentile of their peer group.



12

Open Pathway Student Success Quality Improvement (SSQI)

- Open Pathway option instead of Year 4 Assurance Review
- Eligibility requirements
- In effect for institutions completing a Year 10 comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation on or after 9/1/2025
- Option must be selected when selecting Pathway for next cycle



13

Substantive Change



14

Evolving Bachelor's Degrees

- Stackable
- Reduced Time to Degree
 - Less than the typical four years
- Reduced Credits to Degree
 - Less than recognized standard of at least 120 credits
- Requires review by accrediting agency



15

Reduced-Credit Bachelor's Degree

...a program in which the number of credit hours required to complete the program is less than the commonly accepted minimum program length specified in HLC's Assumed Practices.

Institutions offering a degree program at less than this commonly accepted minimum program length must explain and justify the variation.

For a bachelor's degree program, the commonly accepted minimum program length is 120 semester credits.



16

Application Especially Focuses on...

- Focus on planning
 - Rationale, especially as relate to mission and student populations
 - Market, including student demand and post-graduation opportunities
- Focus on curriculum and rigor
 - Program learning outcomes
 - Assessment
- Focus on transparency to students
 - Differences between programs
 - Potential consequences of opting for this format
 - Intentional communications strategies



17

17

Perspectives Along the Way: Trends

- Since Fall 2024, applications received and programs approved beginning Spring 2025
- Most common degrees requested:
 - Business and Management
 - Computer and Information Science
 - Exercise Science
- Typical request is for 90 credit hours



18

18

Approved Programs as of August 2025

Bachelor of Science in Applied Cybersecurity (2)
Bachelor of Science in Information Technology
Bachelor of Science in Applied Pre-Athletic Training/Physical
Therapy (2)
Bachelor of Applied Science in Business
Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (2)
Bachelor of Arts in Fashion Business Management
Bachelor of Applied Arts in Digital Marketing
Bachelor of Science in Semiconductor Materials and Devices
Bachelor of Education



19

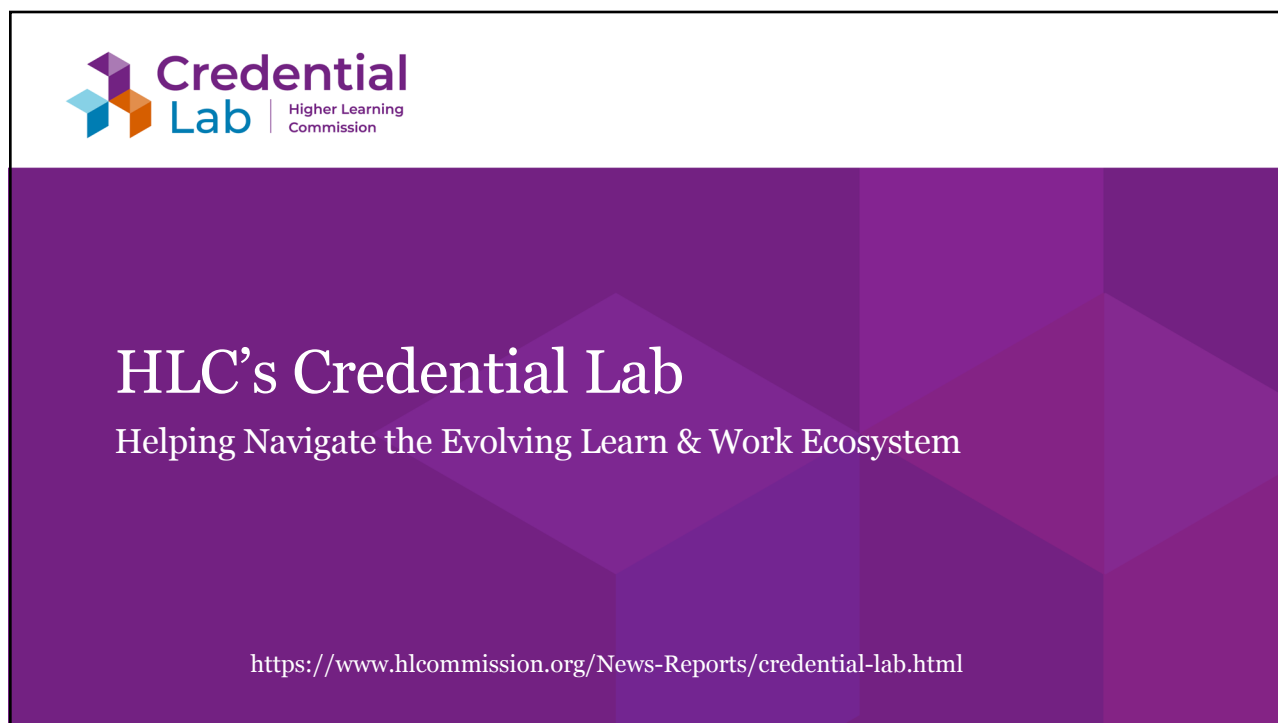
Contractual Arrangements


- Redesigned screening form
- Services may include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - ✓ Instruction
 - ✓ Oversight of instruction, including establishing academic qualifications for instructional personnel
 - ✓ Curriculum design and development, including final authority for curriculum
 - ✓ Establishment of academic requirements
 - ✓ Assessment of student learning
 - ✓ Program administration
- USDE guidance on how to determine services provided



<https://www.hlcommission.org/accreditation/cycles-and-processes/substantive-change/contractual-arrangements/>

20



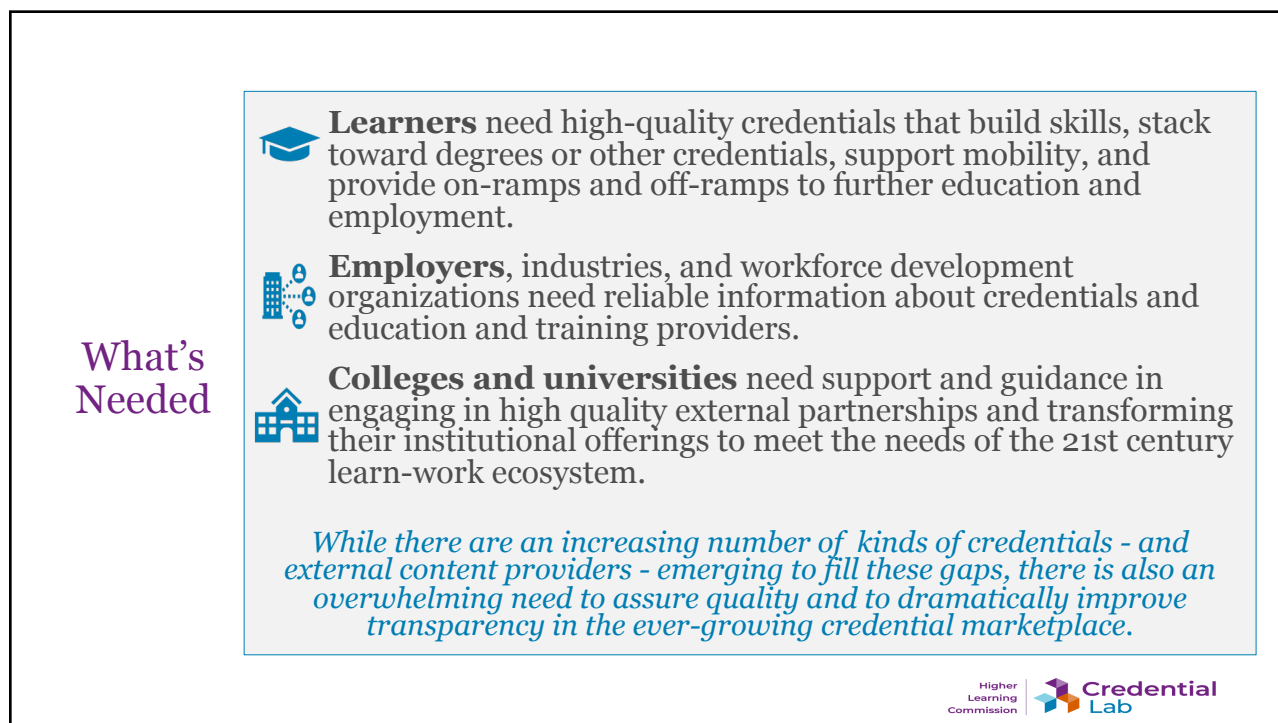
 **Credential Lab** | Higher Learning Commission

HLC's Credential Lab



Helping Navigate the Evolving Learn & Work Ecosystem

<https://www.hlcommission.org/News-Reports/credential-lab.html>


21



What's Needed

-  **Learners** need high-quality credentials that build skills, stack toward degrees or other credentials, support mobility, and provide on-ramps and off-ramps to further education and employment.
-  **Employers**, industries, and workforce development organizations need reliable information about credentials and education and training providers.
-  **Colleges and universities** need support and guidance in engaging in high quality external partnerships and transforming their institutional offerings to meet the needs of the 21st century learn-work ecosystem.

While there are an increasing number of kinds of credentials - and external content providers - emerging to fill these gaps, there is also an overwhelming need to assure quality and to dramatically improve transparency in the ever-growing credential marketplace.

Higher Learning Commission  **Credential Lab**

22

The Credential Lab's Two Initial Offerings

Microcredential Provider Review & Endorsement

- Quality Assurance of Organizations
- Trusted providers identified through "HLC Endorsement"
- Voluntary

Launching October 2025!

Credential Lab Innovation Center

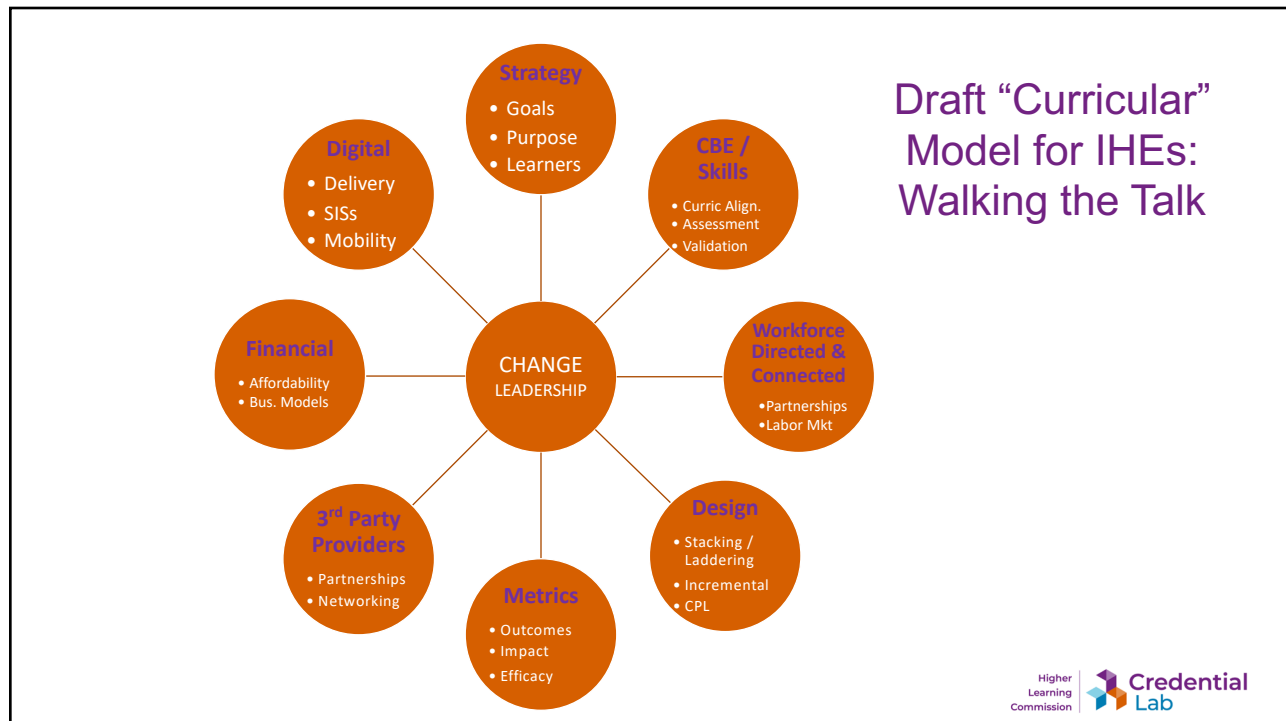
- Resources & Tools
- Networking
- Training and Technical Assistance
- Employer and Provider Support

Pilot underway!

The Provider Endorsement

Review Categories

1. Provider Organization Stability, Operational Strength, and Agreement to HLC Credential Lab Requirements - *pilot*
2. Alignment to Industry, Employer, Labor Market Needs - *pilot*
3. Learner Experience & Protections - *pilot*
4. Design, Delivery, and Assessment Processes of Offerings – *phase 2*
5. Outcomes – *phase 2*



25

Other topics to explore....

Karen J Solomon

ksolomon@hlcommission.org

26