

ACCREDITATION

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

What is accreditation?

Accreditation is formal recognition of the quality of an educational program or institution. There are two types of educational accreditation: institutional and specialized.

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools grants institutional accreditation. Institutional accreditation results from a positive evaluation of the entire institution. The evaluation encompasses everything from admissions to educational activities and student learning, as well as overall institutional effectiveness, governance, administration, financial stability, student services, institutional resources, and relationships with internal and external constituencies.

Specialized accreditation, also called program accreditation, is conducted by national professional accrediting bodies and focuses on particular schools or programs within an institution. Shepherd's accredited programs are listed on the [accreditations page](#) of the [Academic Affairs website](#).

What is The Higher Learning Commission?

Institutional accreditation is provided by regional associations of schools and colleges (each named after the region in which it operates – Middle States, New England, North Central, Northwest, Southern, Western). The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is part of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) and is empowered to conduct accrediting activities for degree-granting organizations of higher education. Specifically, it grants membership to educational institutions in the nineteen-state North Central region: Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, New Mexico, South Dakota, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

The Commission sums up its mission as: "Serving the common good by assuring and advancing the quality of higher learning. The Higher Learning Commission is committed to developing and maintaining high standards of excellence."

How does accreditation work?

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) has developed [Criteria for Accreditation](#) by which an institution is reviewed for quality. The Criteria for Accreditation are summarized as follows:

[Mission & Integrity](#) - 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.

[Preparing for the Future](#) - 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.

[Student Learning and Effective Teaching](#)- The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

[Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge](#)- 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.

[Engagement and Service](#)- As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

Source: Handbook on Accreditation, The Higher Learning Commission, a commission of the North Central Association

What is The Higher Learning Commission Self-Study?

Prior to applying for reaccreditation, the institution engages in a study of its own effectiveness in achieving its mission. The Self-Study, typically extending for approximately two years, is an opportunity for the institution to engage in a comprehensive self-examination of how well it is meeting its identified goals and to put into place changes or plans for improvements. In this process, the institution evaluates itself based on the [Criteria for Accreditation](#) established by [The Higher Learning Commission](#) (HLC). The Self Study is conducted through a concerted effort involving individuals from the entire campus community. In an effort to ensure broad participation in our self-study process, writing teams include representatives from the faculty, staff, student body, and administration. At the end of the self-study the institution prepares a Self-Study Report for The HLC to use as a basis for evaluating the

institution

How can I become involved in the self-study process at Shepherd University?

Be sure to read the posted [self-study document](#) and to participate in the open forums for faculty, staff and students during the comprehensive visit.

What is a comprehensive visit?

The Higher Learning Commission consultant-evaluators will make a three-day visit to our campus to review and confirm that what we stated in the self-study report is accurate. They will accomplish by reviewing not only the self-study report, but also processes and evidence, and by conducting interviews with representative individuals and groups.

The team will have received the complete Self-Study Report eight weeks before the visit and will have had access to documents via the [Virtual Resource Room](#). Prior to leaving campus, the team will make an Exit Report to key administrative officers on their preliminary findings.

To learn more about comprehensive visits, go to the [HLC Comprehensive Visit Page](#).

When is the comprehensive visit?

The consultant-evaluators will arrive on our campus Monday, March 5, 2012 through Wednesday, March 7, 2012.

Who are the consultant-evaluators?

Consultant evaluators are administrators and faculty members from other universities under the auspices of The Higher Learning Commission. They have been highly trained in using the criteria for accreditation in reviewing the quality of academic institutions.

Will the consultant-evaluators meet with other faculty, staff and students?

There will be open forums for faculty, staff, and students to speak with the consultant-evaluators. Forum schedules and locations will be distributed prior

to the visit. The consultant-evaluators might also stop individuals on campus to ask general questions about their experience at the university. They will introduce themselves to you as members of The Higher Learning Commission team visiting the campus.

What types of questions will the consultant-evaluators ask?

The consultant-evaluators will gather a broad array of perspectives about Shepherd University from students, faculty, staff, and administrators. They may ask members of the university community to share their understanding of the school's mission and/or to describe Shepherd based on their own experiences. They may also ask questions about an area they consider being within the individual's area of expertise.

How will the findings be reported?

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) will write a report that addresses the [Criteria for Accreditation](#) set forth by The HLC, along with the core components for each criterion. The first section of the report is referred to as the Assurance section. In this section, for each core component the team will note whether or not that component has been met, along with any questions or concerns. The report also includes an Advancement section, which is used to offer advice to the University about issues that might be of concern. The President should receive a draft of the report within six-eight weeks of the visit.

Is Shepherd University accredited?

Yes. Shepherd University has been accredited since 1950 by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges, one of the six regional agencies that accredit U.S. colleges and universities at the institutional level.

Why is accreditation important to Shepherd University?

Institutional accreditation has two fundamental purposes: quality assurance and institutional improvement.

Related to quality assurance, institutional accreditation provides recognition that an institution meets certain quality standards. Meeting these standards provides assurance that credits and degrees earned will be respected at other educational institutions, thus facilitating the transferability of coursework. It also provides access to student financial aid and certain federal funding opportunities.

Related to institutional improvement, the Self-Study provides a means and opportunity to identify strengths and challenges. Accreditation is recognition that the university has gone through the evaluation process and developed a strategy for continuous improvement in meeting its goals.

Where can I get more information on accreditation?

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools web site: www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org

Comments or Questions?

Questions and/or comments are welcome and encouraged. Please direct them to Dr. Scott Beard (sbeard@shepherd.edu) or Dr. Dot Hively (dhively@shepherd.edu)