

March 8, 2017

Colonel Michael Cartney
President
Lake Area Technical Institute
1201 Arrow Ave, PO Box 730
Watertown, SD 57201

Dear President Cartney:

This letter serves as formal notification and official record of action taken concerning Lake Area Technical Institute by the Institutional Actions Council of the Higher Learning Commission at its meeting on February 28, 2017. The date of this action constitutes the effective date of the institution's new status with HLC.

Action. IAC continued the accreditation of Lake Area Technical Institute with the next Reaffirmation of Accreditation in 2026-27.

Further, IAC voted to change the team's evaluation of Criterion 4.B from "Met with Concerns," to "Met" with the following evidence: The team report indicated Criterion 4.B was "Met with Concerns". IAC believes evidence presented by the institution and in the President's response letter to the team report indicate the institution met Criterion 4.B without concerns.

After a previous site visit to Lake Area Technical Institute (LATI), the institution was cited for weak assessment practices. The institution revamped their program and institutional assessments and began doing the Institutional Dashboard and Program Assessment in 2007 and added a General Education Assessment plan in 2008. Course assessments were added in 2011 and in 2015, Program Dashboards were developed and utilized. The results of these assessments are used to identify areas needing change as well as professional development needs for those involved in the assessment process.

Seven items mentioned in the HLC recommendation from the previous team visit report were specifically addressed, including participation in two HLC assessment workshops by LATI cross-disciplinary staffs.

The institution retention rate of 83% and placement rate of over 99% (employed or continuing their education) for 2015-16 were attributed in part to assessment both at the course and program level and using those assessments to make changes to meet both academic transfer and employer needs. Their graduation rate is three times the national average. LATI has been a Finalist with Distinction seven straight years in the Aspen Community College Excellence Prize with the institution being cited by that group as "one of the most assessment heavy institutions in the top ten each year". Considering the fact that 40-55% of their students are considered "low income" with 92% receiving SFA, the retention and placement rates are remarkable and the institution feels that is partially attributable to their on-going assessment of learning outcomes and industry programs and the use of that data for decision making.

The team report indicated a need for LATI to focus on expanding on some of the program outcomes in some of the technical programs to be more specific as one of its concerns while at the same time saying some programs are exemplary. This would not indicate a concern, but rather a need for LATI to review some outcomes for some programs to match what has already been done in other program areas. The placement rate of 99% is an obvious indicator that the program outcomes reflect employer expectations and student achievement in meeting those outcomes.

The team concern for attainment of consistency of outcomes for multiple sections of a given course is a legitimate issue but one that can easily be addressed through faculty consensus of those outcomes for those teaching the same course.

The concern for general education assessment in both general education courses and outcomes embedded in technical courses seemed to stem more from a concern about the rigor of the expected outcomes than LATI not having legitimate rubrics assessments in place.

The team acknowledged the institution using multiple methods of assessment (including the NCRC) and that LATI had attempted institution-wide rubrics unsuccessfully in the past. The team report acknowledged evidence of collaboration with faculty in different programs sharing rubrics and the evaluation of gen ed learner outcomes assessed on a one-year rotation (one per year over a four-year cycle) to promote ongoing improvement of student learning. Again the concern was the level of rigor of evaluation and not the lack of assessment.

The last concern was co-curricular assessment and the team report even acknowledged here that students that were able to clearly identify and state how learning in co-curricular activities supported their curricular goals. We agree the institution needs to capture that information.

In summary, LATI has developed a “culture of assessment” that involves faculty and staff gathering data and using those results to make changes with significant results achieved in key areas (retention and placement). The IAC feels the institution has met Criterion 4.B without concerns and that the issues identified in the team report would best be addressed by the institution in their Mid Cycle review without the need for a monitoring report.

Rationale: The team report indicates the extremely high student retention and graduation rates and the good assessment processes and continuous evaluation of those processes that take place. The president believes their recognition by the Aspen Institute in evaluating LATI for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence (and the comments and recognition given to them as one of the most assessment heavy institution in the top ten each year) should be factors in determining whether they should have the “with concerns” removed from the team recommendation.

In two weeks, this action will be added to the *Institutional Status and Requirements (ISR) Report*, a resource for Accreditation Liaison Officers to review and manage information regarding the institution’s accreditation relationship. Accreditation Liaison Officers may request the ISR Report on HLC’s website at <http://www.hlcommission.org/isr-request>.

Information on notifying the public of this action is available at <http://www.hlcommission.org/HLC-Institutions/institutional-reporting-of-actions.html>.

If you have any questions about these documents after viewing them, please contact the institution’s staff liaison Steph Brzuzy. Your cooperation in this matter is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

CC: ALO