

June 29, 2023

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Jonathan Brand
President
Cornell College
600 First St. S.W.
Mount Vernon, IA 52314-1098

Dear President Brand:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Cornell College (“the Institution”). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, June 22, 2023. In taking this action, the Board considered materials from the most recent comprehensive evaluation, including, but not limited to: the Assurance Filing the institution submitted, the report from the comprehensive evaluation team, the report of the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) Hearing Committee, and the institutional responses to these reports.

Summary of the Action: The Board reaffirmed the accreditation of the Institution. The Institution meets Core Components 4.B and 5.B with concerns. The Institution is required to submit an embedded report, as outlined below, with its next Assurance Filing.

Board Rationale

The Board based its action on the following findings made with regard to the Institution as well as the entire record before the Board:

Cornell College (“the Institution”) meets, but with concerns, Criterion Four, Core Component 4.B, “the institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution has developed a comprehensive assessment plan and has begun to address the numerous deficiencies noted during the November 2022 visit;
- A software system has been purchased that will allow the Institution to better document and track student learning outcomes and other assessment data;
- The Institution has put into place a more systematized infrastructure including a set of tools and procedures to accurately measure student learning assessment;

- Despite significant improvements in assessment substantiated by the institutional response, institutional testimony at the IAC Hearing and lauded by the team chair, there is still much to do relative to collecting and utilizing assessment data to improve teaching and learning.

The Institution meets, but with concerns, Criterion Five, Core Component 5.B, “the institution’s resource base supports its educational offerings and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution’s 2022 audit report shows a reduction in unrestricted net assets of approximately \$5.67 million and a reduction of approximately \$13.84 million in total net assets;
- According to the documents presented by the CFO, expected 2023 operating expenses would exceed revenue;
- Projections for the coming years anticipate an increase in student aid expenses, some strategic initiative spending, and inflationary pressure on the expense side that the Institution will need to consider;
- Unfunded tuition deduction is approximately \$8 million more than three years ago, but the Institution hopes to avoid increasing the tuition discount over the next several years;
- The institutional response reported that the Office of Business Services created Co-Controller positions that are expected to address the internal control issue initially cited by the auditor.

The Board of Trustees of the Higher Learning Commission has determined based on the preceding findings and evidence in the record the Institution has demonstrated that it is otherwise in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and Federal Compliance requirements but that monitoring is required based on the aforementioned concerns.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Interim Report: The Board required that the Institution submit an embedded report with its next evaluation (which takes the form of an Assurance Review) regarding Core Components 4.B and 5.B.

Comprehensive Evaluation: The Institution will be maintained on the Open Pathway with its next comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation in 2032-33.

HLC Disclosure Obligations

The Board action resulted in changes that will be reflected in the Institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status as well as the Institutional Status and Requirements Report. The Statement of Accreditation Status, including the dates of the last and next comprehensive evaluation visits, will be posted to the HLC website.

HLC policy¹ requires that a summary of Board actions be sent to appropriate state and federal agencies and accrediting associations. It also will be published on HLC's website. The summary will include this HLC action regarding the Institution.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, thank you in advance for your cooperation. If you have questions about any of the information in this letter, please contact your HLC Staff Liaison, Dr. Thomas Bordenkircher.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Gellman-Danley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Cc: Angela Bauman Power, Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Cornell College
Evaluation Team Chair
IAC Hearing Committee Chair
Thomas Bordenkircher, Vice President of Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning
Commission
Anthea Sweeney, Vice President of Legal and Regulatory Affairs, Higher Learning
Commission
Marla Morgen, General Counsel, Higher Learning Commission

¹ COMM.A.10.010, Notice of Accreditation Actions, HLC Public Notices and Public Statements