



November 8, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dr. Alfred Pinkard, President
Wilberforce University
P.O. Box 1001
1055 N. Bickett Rd.
Wilberforce, OH 45384

Dear President Pinkard:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Wilberforce University (“the Institution”). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, November 4, 2021. In taking this action, the Board considered materials from the most recent Focused Visit, including, but not limited to: the Focused Visit report the Institution submitted, the report from the peer review team, and the institutional response to the report.

Summary of the Action: The Board determined that the Institution is no longer out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and removed the Institution from Probation and assigned interim monitoring. This action also resulted in a reaffirmation of the Institution’s accreditation, as outlined below. The Institution meets Core Components 3.C, 4.C, 5.B, and 5.C with concerns. The Institution is required to host a Focused Visit, as outlined below, no later than May 2023.

Substantive Change: HLC policy¹ states an institution removed from Probation shall be subject to additional requirements for substantive change for three (3) years following the removal of Probation.² However, because the institution was placed on probation prior to the effective date of the revised federal regulations it is not subject to this restriction under HLC policy.

Notification Program: HLC policy³ states that an institution removed from probation remains ineligible to apply for the Notification Program for Additional Locations until it has completed ten (10) years in good standing as required for access.

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:

¹ INST.E.20.010, Probation.

² INST.F.20.040, Substantive Change.

³ INST.E.20.010, Probation.

The Institution continues to meet with concerns Criterion Three, Core Component 3.C, “the institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services,” for the following reasons:

- The new Credentials for Leadership in Management and Business (CLIMB) program director has completed program reviews and faculty evaluations, and implementation of strategies is just emerging.
- Professional development opportunities are provided to support the CLIMB faculty in terms of skill development and improvement of expertise in the field of online delivery.
- The Institution does not have complete information on the placement and status of graduates and there was no alumni database at the time of the peer review team visit, which impacts complete and thorough program reviews to align curricula with the needs of the industries that would hire graduates.
- While the Institution has hired five new full-time faculty, it presently has only 16 full-time faculty for its 21 undergraduate and graduate programs, and continues recruiting for open positions.

The Institution continues to meet with concerns Criterion Four, Core Component 4.C, “the institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution has re-established a Strategic Retention Committee, which has developed a comprehensive plan that includes an approach to developing informed, realistic goals; however, the Institution needs to establish a pattern of successful recruitment and retention beyond assistance made available as a result of the pandemic.
- New institutional effectiveness tools will be launched beginning in fall 2021 to inform decisions and project future enrollments, but data is not presently available.
- Ongoing leadership changes in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Assessment and Research (OIEAR) have continued since 2019 and a consultant is assisting in the launch of the new tools.
- Training for an updated student information system is scheduled to occur in September and October 2021.
- Based on data from the 2019 student survey, several initiatives were recently launched for summer and fall 2021 to assist students with academic engagement, educational commitment, and social comfort.

The Institution now 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 unaudited summary statement for FY 2021 reflects a positive change in net assets of more than \$22 million.
- Changes to the financial status are due to the forgiveness of a \$21.9 million loan. This change reflects the first positive net equity in at least five years.
- Funds received through the American Rescue Plan totaled more than \$8.1 million, which provided new opportunities to support technology and other upgrades across the campus, along with the ability to reduce or eliminate student debt for many graduates.
- Total net assets for FY 2021 are projected to be \$9.7 million.

- Based on the financial improvements in operations and cash flows, it is now anticipated that the Institution will be a going concern for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021.
- The estimated Composite Financial Index (CFI) is projected to be 2.47 due to debt forgiveness and a balanced operating budget for fiscal year 2021, which is significantly higher than the previous year of -0.2.
- Existing outstanding loans and vendor settlements continue to exist.
- Creation of an institution-wide Budgeting Committee resulted in implementation of a new budget process for FY 2022, which is linked to university-wide planning efforts; however, results of key forecast assumptions are not yet available.
- A balanced budget and net income is projected for FY 2022 due to the positive change in enrollment of undergraduate students.

The Institution is now in conformity with Assumed Practice D.1, “the institution is able to meet its current financial obligations,” for the reasons noted above under Core Component 5.B.

The Institution is now in conformity with Assumed Practice D.3, “the institution has future financial projections addressing its long-term financial sustainability,” though its forecasting assumptions remain to be tested as noted above under Core Component 5.B.

The Institution now meets, but with concerns, Criterion Five, Core Component 5.C, “the institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution has just completed the first year of its five-year strategic plan (2020-2025) and is making adjustments to the process for year two based on an analysis of challenges to date.
- Development of a data reporting infrastructure, processes and procedures are in the initial stages and the Institution is learning how to use a system for data-driven decision making.
- A Continuous Professional Education Plan has been implemented and OIEAR will hold seminars and workshops to support all personnel who will be using new technology systems throughout institutional operations.
- Retention plans have been developed by the Strategic Retention Committee, with membership including units that normally interact with students on a daily basis.

The Board of Trustees of the Higher Learning Commission has determined based on the preceding findings and evidence in the record that the Institution is otherwise in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, Assumed Practices and Federal Compliance requirements, and can therefore be removed from Probation.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Focused Visit: The Board required that the Institution host a Focused Visit regarding Core Components 3.C, 4.C, 5.B, and 5.C no later than May 2023.

Comprehensive Evaluation: The Institution has been placed on the Standard Pathway with its next comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation in 2025-26.

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.

In accordance with HLC policy,⁴ information about this action is provided to members of the public and to other constituents in several ways. This Action Letter and the enclosed Public Disclosure Notice will be posted to HLC's website not more than one business day after this letter is sent to the Institution. Additionally, a summary of Board actions will be sent to appropriate state and federal agencies and accrediting associations. This summary 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. Karen J. Solomon.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Enc: Public Disclosure Notice

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Wilberforce University
Jonny Jones, Interim Provost, Wilberforce University
Evaluation Team Chair
Karen J. Solomon, Vice President and Chief Transformation Officer, Higher Learning
Commission
Anthea Sweeney, Vice President of Legal and Regulatory Affairs, Higher Learning Commission
Tom Sudkamp, Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs, Ohio Department of Higher Education

⁴ COMM.A.10.010, Notice of Accreditation Actions, HLC Public Notices and Public Statements