

January 29, 2021

Dr. Scott Rich  
President  
Sterling College  
125 W. Cooper  
Sterling, KS 67579

Dear President Rich:

This letter serves as formal notification and official record of action taken concerning Sterling College by the Institutional Actions Council of the Higher Learning Commission at its meeting on January 25, 2021. The date of this action constitutes the effective date of the institution's new status with HLC.

**Action with Interim Monitoring.** IAC continued the accreditation of Sterling College with the next Reaffirmation of Accreditation in 2029-30. Despite comprehensive review modifications associated with COVID-19, the institution's next Reaffirmation of Accreditation date remains aligned with the start date of the original comprehensive review in Spring 2020.

In conjunction with this action, IAC required the following interim monitoring.

**Embedded Report.** An Embedded Report in the 2023-24 mid-cycle review on assessment processes and collecting data using those improved processes.

Further, IAC voted to change the team's evaluation of Criterion 3.C from "Met with Concerns" to "Met"; therefore removing the interim report on faculty qualifications for General Development courses with the following evidence.

The institution has made a deliberate exception to its credentialing policy in the General Development courses, such as the GD 105 Foundations of Servant Leadership course and the GD 330 internship courses. GD 105 is required for each student in the first year, as well as new transfer students, and GD 105 credit counts toward the graduation requirement of 124 credit hours. Instructors of record for these courses include staff who hold bachelor's degrees but have completed no graduate coursework. These staff members complete additional internal training prior to teaching. The institution understood this to be acceptable because these courses are mission focused. However, the GD 105 instructors were not included in any lists of faculty, including full-time, adjunct, and dual credit faculty, which were provided to the HLC Team. In addition, this process is not consistent with the Sterling College Faculty Handbook which indicates that instructors must hold at least a master's degree. A review of the GD 105 syllabus shows that it is not solely mission-based but focuses approximately 60% on student success objectives that are not unique to the institution or the mission. The Assurance Argument in 2.E.2 also describes GD 105 as an introduction to academic integrity for first-year students. The Assurance Argument further describes, in 3.C.6 and 4.C.3, the academic advising activities in GD 105, including the creation of an academic plan and the completion of an CSI inventory and reflection. However, the Assurance Argument states in 3.C.6 that academic advising is provided by faculty in the students' areas of study. The institution will ensure that instructors for all GD courses are included on faculty lists. Further, the institution will review its credentialing policies and other associated documents such as the Faculty and Student Handbooks to create and publish a process for creating and approving exceptions for faculty credentials and/or altering wording in such policies and documents stating or implying that all faculty must hold master's degrees for teaching credit classes.

In taking this action, the IAC considered materials from the most recent evaluation and the institutional response (if applicable) to the evaluation findings.

**Rationale:** HLC Criteria and Assumed Practices provide that institutions establish and monitor faculty credentials considering academic background, work experience and other factors associated with courses. The evaluation team's recommended monitoring for Core Component 3.C is prescriptive to the institution about faculty credentials for these general development courses.

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 <https://www.hlcommission.org/isr-request>.

Within the next 30 days, HLC will also publish information about this action on its website at <https://www.hlcommission.org/Student-Resources/recent-actions.html>.

Please note: Revisions to HLC's Criteria for Accreditation will go into effect on September 1, 2020. Institutions will be evaluated against the revised Criteria for all reviews conducted after that date, including reviews related to previously assigned monitoring. Institutional reports submitted after September 1, 2020, that reference the Criteria should be written to the revised version. More information about the revised Criteria, including a crosswalk between the current and revised versions, is available on HLC's website at <https://www.hlcommission.org/criteria>.

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

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley  
President

CC: ALO