



**Public Disclosure Notice on  
Ashford University**  
Clinton, Iowa  
Effective: February 21, 2013

The following public information is provided by the Higher Learning Commission (the “HLC” or “the Commission”) regarding Ashford University to assist current and prospective students and other individuals seeking information about the accreditation status of the institution. Ashford has a main campus in Clinton, Iowa, and a significant online student population. The HLC is a regional accrediting agency that accredits institutions of higher education in the 19 states that constitute its region.

**Current Status of Ashford University**

Ashford University, located in Clinton, Iowa, and offering programs online, is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission; it has been placed on Notice.

**Understanding Notice**

*Notice* is a Commission sanction indicating that an institution is pursuing a course of action that, if continued, could lead it to be out of compliance with one or more Criteria for Accreditation. An institution on Notice remains accredited. At the end of the Notice period, the Board of Trustees may remove the sanction, place the institution on Probation if the identified concerns have not been addressed, or take other action.

**Recent Board Action**

On February 21, 2013, the Higher Learning Commission placed Ashford University on Notice. The Board noted that the University had not demonstrated that it was substantially present in the region as required by the Commission’s jurisdictional policies but that the University was actively engaged in seeking accreditation from the regional accrediting agency with jurisdiction over California, where the University maintains a substantial administrative and executive presence. (See the next section in this notice for more information about its process for seeking accreditation with the Western Association of Colleges and Schools for Senior Colleges and Universities (WASC).) In December 2012 it filed a plan to come into compliance immediately with this requirement in July 2013 should it not achieve accreditation with WASC for whatever reason. The Board determined that the interests of students were best served by allowing the University a limited amount of time to try to complete the accreditation process with WASC prior to the Commission taking any further enforcement action with regard to this issue.

The Commission’s Board of Trustees also noted in this action concerns related to the alignment of the University mission with its instructional model, governance of the University independent from its corporate parent, sufficiency of faculty, assessment of student learning and use of data to

improve graduation and retention rates, and shared governance structures involving faculty and administration.

The Criteria for Accreditation identified in the Board's action are: **Criterion One**, "the institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations," particularly **Core Component 1.A**, "the institution's mission is broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations"; **Criterion Two**, "the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible," particularly **Core Component 2.C**, "the governing board of the institution is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and to assure its integrity"; **Criterion Three**, "the institution provides high-quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered," particularly **Core Component 3.C**, "the institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services"; **Criterion Four**, "the institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement," particularly **Core Component 4.A**, "the institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs," **Core Component 4.B**, "the institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning," and **Core Component 4.C**, "the institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs"; and **Criterion Five**, "the institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities. The institution plans for the future," particularly **Core Component 5.B**, "the institution's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission."

### Next Steps

The University has applied for accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (WASC). The University is required to file a report with the Higher Learning Commission due July 10, 2013, regarding the outcome of that process. If the University does not achieve accreditation by WASC, the University is required to host a focused evaluation no later than October 1, 2013, to evaluate whether the University has completed specific steps, following its December 2012 plan, to establish jurisdiction with the Commission. The focused evaluation will also examine any issues identified by a WASC action, if any, in June 2013 denying initial accreditation.

The University is also required to host a focused evaluation no later than December 15, 2013, to examine retention, graduation, and the University's progress in resolving the issues identified by the Board in this action.

At its meeting in February 2014, the Board will review the University's report and the reports of the evaluation teams and determine whether the University can be removed from Notice or whether probation or other action is appropriate if the College has not resolved the Board's concerns that led to the imposition of Notice and demonstrated it is in compliance with all the Criteria for Accreditation.

## Background

Ashford University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. It has been placed on Notice subsequent to Board review of information provided by the University and by an advisory visit team. The advisory visit was required after the Board met to discuss events that transpired with regard to the University in June 2012. The events described below led to the review.

Ashford University's online presence has grown significantly in recent years and the operations of that program have grown along with it. Most of those operations are based in San Diego, California. In early 2010, Ashford University informed the Commission of its intention to seek accreditation by WASC, the regional accrediting agency that covers institutions based in California. This move was consistent with an HLC bylaw adopted in 2010 and policies adopted in 2011 and 2012 that require all institutions accredited by the HLC to have a majority of their educational administration and activities, business operations and leadership located "substantially in the 19-state north central region." The effective date for the new bylaw for currently accredited institutions was July 1, 2012. On June 25, the Commission sent a reminder to Ashford regarding the jurisdictional requirement and gave Ashford until December 1, 2012, to demonstrate compliance with this requirement.

On June 15, 2012, the WASC board denied Ashford's application for initial accreditation. (The action was made public on July 9.) Information about this decision is available on the WASC website ([www.wascenior.org](http://www.wascenior.org)). According to HLC policy and federal regulations, if another institutional accrediting body takes an adverse or probationary action against an HLC institution "the Commission will undertake prompt review of the institution to determine whether additional review or Commission action, including sanction or withdrawal of accreditation, is appropriate." Therefore, the decision by WASC prompted a review and action by the HLC board.

On July 11, 2012, the HLC Board of Trustees directed the Commission President: 1) to require that Ashford University file a written report with the HLC within 30 days regarding the University's compliance with the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation related to the denial by WASC (see attached document); 2) to schedule an Advisory Visit by the HLC to Ashford within 60 days after filing of the report for review of the institution's compliance with all the Criteria for Accreditation, including the Minimum Expectations; and 3) to present the report of the Advisory Visit team and the President's recommendation to the Board for action at its February 2013 meeting. This Public Disclosure Notice provides information about the February 2013 action.

February 28, 2013.