

March 4, 2025

BY CERTIFIED MAIL

Veronica Hipolito
President
Maricopa Community Colleges-South Mountain Community College
7050 South 24th Street
Phoenix, AZ 85042-5806

Dear President Hipolito:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Maricopa Community Colleges-South Mountain Community College (“the Institution”). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, February 27, 2025. In taking this action, the Board considered materials from the most recent Assurance Review, including, but not limited to: the Assurance Filing the Institution submitted, the report from the peer review team, the report of the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) Hearing Committee, and the institutional responses to these reports.

Summary of the Action: The Institution has been placed on Notice because it is at risk of being out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. The Institution meets Core Components 3.A, 4.A, and 4.B with concerns. The Institution is required to host a Notice Visit no later than September 2026 to determine whether the Institution has ameliorated the findings that led to the imposition of the sanction.

Institutional Disclosure Obligation: HLC policy¹ requires that an institution inform its constituencies, including Board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students, prospective students, and any other constituencies about the sanction and how to contact HLC for further information. The policy also requires that an Institution on sanction disclose this status whenever it refers to its HLC accreditation. HLC will monitor these disclosures to ensure they are accurate and in keeping with HLC policy. The Institution must submit drafts of its planned disclosures to these various audiences to its HLC Staff Liaison in advance of transmission and provide its Staff Liaison with a link to relevant information on its website. At a minimum, an institution must: i) provide a copy of this Action Letter to its governing board, administration, and faculty, ii) provide a copy of the enclosed Public Disclosure Notice to its currently enrolled students, and iii) prominently display the Mark of Accreditation Status where accreditation status is described on its website. Once disclosures have been made, the Institution must submit copies of its disclosure documents as a single .pdf file to <https://www.hlcommission.org/sign-in/submit-documents-to-hlc/> (by selecting “Information about Institutional Disclosures”) no later than seven (7) business

¹ INST.E.10.010, Notice.

days following receipt of this Action Letter. HLC will retain this information as part of the Institution's record.

Substantive Change: HLC policy² requires that an institution placed on Notice be subject to additional requirements for substantive change during the Notice period and for three (3) years following the removal of Notice.

Notification Program: HLC policy³ states that an institution placed on notice is ineligible for the Notification Program for Additional Locations for three (3) years following the removal of Notice, providing all other requirements for the Notification Program are met.

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:

Maricopa Community Colleges-South Mountain Community College ("the Institution") meets, but with concerns, Criterion Three, Core Component 3.A, "the rigor of the institution's academic offerings is appropriate to higher education," for the following reasons:

- The Institution is actively addressing issues related to its online courses by formalizing processes for online teaching requirements, ensuring consistency across all online courses, and overseeing the implementation of consistent syllabi across different modalities, including dual enrollment.
- While the Institution has established a requirement to monitor and document regular and substantive interaction (RSI) practices in all online course, there is not yet documentation available demonstrating consistent application of the Institution's process and the additional review process for RSI requiring faculty members to upload two screen shots of evidence as part of the submitted course review materials does not demonstrate a quality review of RSI.
- While the Institution has made positive movement towards the implementation of a meaningful assessment culture supported by professional development, evidence of ongoing, relevant professional development continuing over the next several years is needed.

The Institution meets, but with concerns, Criterion Four, Core Component 4.A, "the institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings," for the following reasons:

- The Institution is still in the early phases of development and implementation of a program review process that includes all programs and general education.
- While the Institution is moving forward in implementing its new program review process and using the information it collects to promote improvement, much work remains to be completed for the process to lead to practical usage of the information for quality program and budget decisions.

² INST.G.10.010, Substantive Change.

³ INST.E.10.010, Notice.

- While the Institution has started to address issues regarding its approach to program review, its procedure has yet to be integrated into all programs and it remains at an early stage of adoption.

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 is still in the beginning phases of developing an assessment plan focused on program and general education student learning outcomes.
- While the Institution intends to utilize available resources available from the district regarding the general education curriculum, evidence needs to be provided to demonstrate that this actually occurs, and that such activities have informed change at the institution.
- Evidence is lacking of the systematic use of meaningful data to improve and provide the necessary feedback loops to inform the curriculum changes that might be warranted.

The Board of Trustees of the Higher Learning Commission has determined based on the preceding findings and the evidence in the record that the Institution is at risk of being out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Notice Report: The Board required that the Institution submit a Notice Report at least eight weeks prior to the Notice Visit providing evidence that the Institution is no longer at risk for non-compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and that it has ameliorated the issues that led to the Notice sanction.⁴

Notice Visit: The Institution will host a Notice Visit no later than September 2026 to determine whether The Institution has ameliorated the findings that led to the imposition of Notice and to make a recommendation about whether to remove Notice or take other action.

Board Review: The Board will review the documents associated with the evaluation at its February 2027 meeting to determine whether the Institution has ameliorated the findings of Met with Concerns and is no longer at risk of noncompliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and thus whether Notice shall be removed, or if the Institution has not ameliorated the findings, or is no longer in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, whether other action should be taken under HLC policy, up to and including withdrawal of accreditation.

⁴ Please note: Revisions to HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices will go into effect on September 1, 2025. Institutions will be evaluated against these revised HLC requirements for all reviews conducted after that date, including reviews related to previously assigned monitoring. Institutional reports submitted on or after September 1, 2025, or institutional reports or Assurance Arguments for visits that will take place on or after September 1, 2025, should be written to the revised version of the Criteria or Assumed Practices as applicable. More information, including a crosswalk between the current and revised versions of the Criteria, is available on HLC’s website at <https://www.hlcommission.org/accreditation/policies/criteria/>.

Comprehensive Evaluation: The Institution has been placed on the Standard Pathway with its next comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation in 2029-30.

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,⁵ 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. Thomas Bordenkircher.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Enc: Public Disclosure Notice

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Maricopa Community Colleges-South Mountain
Community College
Alice Murillo, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Maricopa Community Colleges-South
Mountain Community College
Evaluation Team Chair
IAC Hearing Committee Chair
Thomas Bordenkircher, Vice President of Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning
Commission
Marla Morgen, Vice President and General Counsel, Higher Learning Commission
Elizabeth Daggett, Director, Accreditation Group, Office of Postsecondary Education,
U.S. Department of Education

⁵ COMM.A.10.010, Notice of Accreditation Actions, HLC Public Notices and Public Statements