

July 2, 2024

BY CERTIFIED MAIL

Dr. Dennis Lancaster
Chancellor
Missouri State University-West Plains
128 Garfield Avenue
West Plains, MO 65775

Dear Chancellor Lancaster:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Missouri State University-West Plains (“the Institution”). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, June 27, 2024. 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 Institution has been placed on Probation because it is out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. The Institution meets Core Components 3.A, 4.A, and 5.C with concerns. The Institution does not meet Core Components 4.B. The Institution is required to host a comprehensive evaluation for Probation no later than December 2025 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 www.hlcommission.org/upload (by selecting “Information

¹ INST.E.20.010, Probation.

about Institutional Disclosures”) no later than seven (7) business days following receipt of this Action Letter. HLC will retain this information as part of the Institution’s record.

Provisional Plan: HLC policy also requires that the Institution file a Provisional Plan with HLC for review and approval by the Institutional Actions Council according to HLC’s substantive change procedures. This Provisional Plan must comport with HLC’s requirements for Provisional Plans.² The Institution must submit its Provisional Plan within 90 calendar days of this letter.

Substantive Change: HLC policy³ states that while an institution may file one or more applications for substantive change during the probationary period, such applications will be subject to strict scrutiny and are likely to be denied or deferred until after the probationary period. HLC policy also requires that an institution placed on Probation be subject to additional requirements for substantive change during the probationary period and for three (3) years following the removal of Probation.⁴

Notification Program: HLC policy⁵ states that an institution placed on Probation is ineligible for the Notification Program for Additional Locations for three (3) years following the removal of Probation, even if 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:

Missouri State University-West Plains (“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 has not developed and analyzed student learning goals across general education, programs, and co-curricular programming.
- The Institution indicated that it plans to incorporate assessment into faculty evaluations. At this time, however, a low percentage of faculty at the Institution are engaged in submitting assessment reports for the general education program.
- The Institution has not documented consistent program quality and student learning outcomes across all modalities and locations.

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:

- Program reviews at the Institution, across all modalities and locations, do not consider student learning outcomes when determining changes that need to be implemented.
- The primary level of evaluation occurs at the course level, leading to concerns about how programs are meeting learning expectations.

² FDCR.B.10.010, HLC Approval of Institutional Teach-Out Arrangements.

³ INST.E.20.010, Probation.

⁴ INST.F.20.040, Substantive Change.

⁵ INST.E.20.010, Probation.

- Program reviews do not sufficiently analyze student success when considering revisions to the curriculum.

The Institution does not meet 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 not sufficiently developed assessment policies and processes.
- Faculty engagement in assessment processes is not evident.
- Data gathering and analysis is inconsistent across academic departments and programs.
- The Institution cannot report on achievement of student learning outcomes at the program level.
- The Institution has outlined future plans to improve student learning for its student populations at the course or program levels.
- The Institution has indicated that it intends to develop a campus-wide committee and reframe its focus on assessment of student learning.

The Institution 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 lack of a coordinated, long-term assessment process inhibits the Institution’s ability to address opportunities for change within the evaluation of operations, planning and budgeting.
- Data currently being collected is not adequate to make institutional-level decisions.
- The Institution intends to redevelop its budgeting processes in order to utilize the analysis of student learning outcomes to develop long- and short-term funding decisions, but these plans must be enacted and evaluated.
- The Institution is in the process of purchasing software to support institutional efforts, but it has not yet been implemented.

The Board of Trustees of the Higher Learning Commission has determined based on the preceding findings and evidence in the record that the Institution has demonstrated that it is not in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and should therefore be placed on Probation.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Assurance Filing: The Board required that the Institution submit an Assurance Filing at least eight weeks prior to the comprehensive evaluation for Probation providing evidence that the Institution has ameliorated the findings of noncompliance identified in this action that resulted in the imposition of Probation and the findings of Met with Concerns, and providing evidence that the Institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation and Federal Compliance Requirements.

Comprehensive Evaluation: The Institution will host a comprehensive evaluation for Probation no later than December 2025 to enable a team of peer reviewers to determine whether the Institution has ameliorated the findings of noncompliance that led to the imposition of

Probation and whether the Institution otherwise meets the Criteria for Accreditation, and to make a recommendation about whether the Board should remove Probation or take other action.

Board Review: The Board will review the documents associated with the comprehensive evaluation for Probation at its June 2026 meeting to determine whether Probation shall be removed, or if the Institution has not provided sufficient evidence of amelioration as noted above, whether other action should be taken, up to and including withdrawal of accreditation.

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,⁶ 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 Solomon.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Enc: Public Disclosure Notice

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Missouri State University-West Plains
Leigh Adams, Dean of General Education and Pre-Professional Programs, Missouri State University-West Plains
Evaluation Team Chair
IAC Hearing Committee Chair
Karen J. Solomon, Vice President and Chief Transformation Officer, Higher Learning Commission

⁶ COMMA.10.010, Notice of Accreditation Actions, HLC Public Notices and Public Statements

Chancellor Lancaster, July 2, 2024 5

Marla Morgen, Vice President and General Counsel, Higher Learning Commission
Ben Boggs, Commissioner, Missouri Department of Higher Education & Workforce
Development

Herman Bounds, Director, Accreditation Group, Office of Postsecondary Education,
U.S. Department of Education