

November 6, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Rev. Gary Kidwell
President
Phillips Theological Seminary
901 North Mingo Road
Tulsa, OK 74116-5612

Dear President Kidwell:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Phillips Theological Seminary (“the Institution”). Note that this action letter contains updated contact information for the Institution’s President and Accreditation Liaison Officer and replaces the action letter sent earlier today.

This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, October 31, 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 granted the status of Candidate for Accreditation. The term of Candidacy is four years.

The Institution must have an evaluation, known as a biennial evaluation, to determine whether the Institution is making reasonable progress toward meeting accreditation requirements by the end of the Candidacy period. The Board action scheduled the Institution’s biennial evaluation for academic year 2025-26. The Institution will be scheduled to host its comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation no later than Spring 2028 to allow for consideration by the Board at its November 2028 meeting.

The institution is approved at the following program level(s): Master's, Doctoral. The institution is not approved at the following program level(s): Associate's, Bachelor's, Specialist.

Provisional Plan: HLC policy¹ 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. The Institution must submit its Provisional Plan within 90 days of this letter.

¹ FDCR.B.10.010, HLC Approval of Institutional Teach-Out Arrangements.

Institutional Disclosure: The Institution must accurately disclose its status as Candidacy.² While Candidacy represents membership with the Higher Learning Commission, it is not accredited status. If the Institution chooses to reference its Candidacy status in advertising and recruiting materials or other documents or locations, those disclosures must accurately describe the Institution's status as a Candidate with the Higher Learning Commission. The Institution must accompany that reference with information on how to contact HLC. HLC reserves the right to issue a Public Statement correcting any incorrect or misleading information HLC determines that an Institution has publicized about its status.³

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:

Phillips Theological Seminary ("the Institution") meets all the Eligibility Requirements, Assumed Practices, and Federal Compliance Requirements required of an institution seeking Candidacy status.

The Board of Trustees of the Higher Learning Commission has determined based on the preceding findings and evidence in the record the Institution has demonstrated that it has the capacity to meet the Criteria for Accreditation, including all Core Components, within the period of Candidacy.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Updated Assurance Filing: The Institution must provide information to update the Assurance Filing assembled at the time the Institution was evaluated for Candidacy. The updated Assurance Filing will address specific areas of concern identified by the Candidacy visit team and provide information relevant to the Institution's continued progress toward meeting the Criteria for Accreditation.⁴ The Institution must also continue to demonstrate that it meets the Eligibility Requirements and Assumed Practices. (Federal Compliance is not a component of the biennial evaluation.)

Biennial Evaluation: The Institution will host a biennial evaluation in 2025-26 to determine whether the Institution is making sufficient progress toward meeting the Criteria for Accreditation and continues to meet all the Eligibility Requirements and Assumed Practices, and whether a recommendation to continue the schedule of Candidacy may be made.

² CRRT.A.10.010 Eligibility Requirements

³ FDCR.A.10.070, Public Information

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/>.

Institutional Actions Council Review: The Institutional Actions Council (IAC) will review the documents associated with the biennial evaluation to determine whether the schedule of Candidacy may be continued because the Institution is making sufficient progress toward meeting the Criteria for Accreditation and continues to meet all the Eligibility Requirements and Assumed Practices. Alternatively, if the Institution fails to continue to meet all the Eligibility Requirements and Assumed Practices, or is not making sufficient progress toward meeting the Criteria for Accreditation, the peer review team and/or IAC may recommend that the Board withdraw Candidacy.

Supplemental Information about Early Initial Accreditation

As a general matter, candidate institutions also have the opportunity to request to file an application for early initial accreditation – before the completion of the four-year candidacy term – and host a comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation to determine whether they meet the requirements to become accredited. The Institution may request to seek early initial accreditation provided that it has graduated or will graduate its first graduating class within thirty days of any Board action to award early initial accreditation. This comprehensive evaluation may be in addition to, or instead of, the biennial evaluation. Regardless, the Institution is limited to one request for early initial accreditation during the four-year candidacy period. Following an evaluation for early initial accreditation, the Board has the discretion to continue the Institution in candidacy, instead of granting early initial accreditation, if a determination is made that one or more Core Components are Not Met or Met with Concerns, or if the Board otherwise determines that continuation of Candidacy is warranted.⁵ The Board may also withdraw Candidacy. If the Institution applies for early initial accreditation and is not successful in gaining accreditation, and the Board does not withdraw Candidacy, the Institution remains scheduled for its comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation as stated above.

HLC Disclosure Obligations

The Board action resulted in changes that will be reflected in a Statement of Accreditation Status as well as an 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.

HLC policy⁶ requires that a summary of Board actions be sent to appropriate state and federal agencies and accrediting associations. It also will be published on HLC's website. The summary will include this HLC action regarding the Institution.

⁵ INST.B.20.020, Candidacy and Initial Accreditation

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

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Barbara Gellman-Danley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Barbara" being the most prominent.

Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Phillips Theological Seminary
Lisa Davison, Vice President of Academic Affairs & Dean, Phillips Theological Seminary
Evaluation Team Chair
IAC Hearing Committee Chair
Allison Garrett, Chancellor, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education
Karen J. Solomon, Vice President and Chief Transformation Officer, Higher Learning
Commission
Marla Morgen, Vice President and General Counsel, Higher Learning Commission