

November 6, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dr. Vann Newkirk
President
Wilberforce University
P. O. Box 1001
1055 N. Bickett Road
Wilberforce, OH 45384-1001

Dear President Newkirk:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Wilberforce University (“the Institution”). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, October 31, 2024. In taking this action, the Board considered materials from the recent Notice Visit, including, but not limited to: the Notice Report the Institution submitted, the report from the Notice Visit team, the report of the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) Meeting Committee, and the institutional responses to these reports.

Summary of the Action: The Board determined that the Institution is no longer at risk of noncompliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and removed the Institution from Notice. The Institution meets Core Component 5.B with concerns and does not meet Assumed Practice D.3. The Institution is required to submit an embedded Interim Report with its next Assurance Filing, as outlined below.

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:

Wilberforce University (“the Institution”) now meets without concerns Criterion Three, Core Component 3.C, “the institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high quality programs and student services,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution hired several new faculty and each educational program has at least one terminally credential faculty member.
- The Institution has signed agreements with several Ohio colleges and universities to provide additional research and other opportunities for students and faculty.
- The Institution has restricted and expanded its professional development program.

- The Institution monitors the timeliness of student interactions with support staff, which alerts the Institution when additional personnel are needed to meet the needs of students.

The Institution now meets without concerns Criterion Four, Core Component 4.C, “the institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution has an upgraded student information system that is operational and provides the Institution the opportunity to better extract and analyze data.
- The Office of Institutional Effectives, Assessment and Research is designated as the clearinghouse for all data.
- The Institution has outlined policies and processes to ensure the accuracy and reliability of data in decision-making.
- The Institution’s IPEDS data demonstrates a stable retention rate over the last three years.

The Institution continues to meet with concerns Criterion Five, Core Component 5.B, “the institution’s resource base supports its educational offerings and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution has made progress in developing a financial model, generating new revenue, and building reliable and integrity-based financial systems.
- The Institution’s cash and liquidity are an ongoing concern for the Institution.
- The Institution is in the process of developing a debt restructuring plan.
- The Institution is in the process of obtaining additional loan sources.
- The Institution does not yet have multi-year trend data to assure the sustainability of increased enrollment projections and alternative sources of funding.

The Institution now meets without concerns Criterion Five, Core Component 5.C, “the institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution’s planning and budgeting are guided by the current strategic plan.
- The Institution has an emerging culture of using data for planning and allocating resources.
- Providing adequate student housing continues to be a top priority for the Institution, with the Institution engaging in fundraising efforts for this priority.

The Institution does not meet Assumed Practice D.3, “the institution has future financial projections addressing its long-term financial sustainability,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution relies on a line of credit for ongoing operations.
- While the Institution’s enrollment has increased enrollments, there is not yet enough data to demonstrate that this will result in stable operating budgets.
- The Institution is planning for a capital campaign, which has not yet been launched.

The Institution now meets Assumed Practice D.4, “the institution maintains effective systems

for collecting, analyzing, and using institutional information,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution has dedicated resources to hire seasoned professionals to direct the collection, analysis and distribution of data.
- The Institution has invested in an upgraded student information system that provides the appropriate infrastructure for data collection.
- The Institution has a functional Office of Institutional Effectives, Assessment and Research.

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 otherwise demonstrated that it is in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, and is not at risk of noncompliance with the Criteria, and thus, should be removed from Notice.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Interim Report: The Board required that the Institution submit an embedded Interim Report with its next Assurance Filing on Core Component 5.B and Assumed Practice D.3.¹

Comprehensive Evaluation: The Board maintained the Institution on the Standard Pathway with its next comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation in 2025-26.

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,² 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.

¹ 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/>.

² 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

Enc: Public Disclosure Notice

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Wilberforce University
Michael Self, Sr., Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, Wilberforce University
Evaluation Team Chair
IAC Meeting Committee Chair
Mike Duffey, Chancellor, Ohio Department of Higher Education
Karen J. Solomon, Vice President and Chief Transformation Officer, Higher Learning
Commission
Marla Morgen, Vice President and General Counsel, Higher Learning Commission