



## DETERMINING QUALIFIED FACULTY: GUIDELINES FOR INSTITUTIONS AND PEER REVIEWERS

### || INTRODUCTION

The following information provides guidance to institutions and peer reviewers in determining and evaluating faculty qualifications at institutions accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. These guidelines serve to amplify the Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices that speak to the importance of institutions employing qualified faculty for the varied and essential roles faculty members perform.

These guidelines apply to all faculty members whose primary responsibility is teaching, including part-time, adjunct, temporary, and/or non-tenure-track faculty. Although some institutions place a heavy reliance on adjunct faculty, or give graduate teaching assistants the predominant responsibility for instruction in many course sections, an institution committed to effective teaching and learning will be able to demonstrate consistent procedures and careful consideration of qualifications for all instructional faculty.

### || RELEVANT CRITERIA AND ASSUMED PRACTICES

*Criterion Three. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support*

Core Component 3.C. The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

3.C.1. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both

the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance; establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning.

3.C.2. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial programs.

3.C.4. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.

*Assumed Practice B. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support*

#### B.2. Faculty Roles and Qualifications

- a. Instructors (excluding for this requirement teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty) possess an academic degree relevant to what they are teaching and at least one level above the level at which they teach, except in programs for terminal degrees or when equivalent experience is established. In terminal degree programs, faculty members possess the same level of degree. When faculty members are employed based on equivalent experience, the institution defines a minimum threshold of experience and an evaluation process that is used in the appointment process.
- b. Instructors teaching at the doctoral level have a record of recognized scholarship, creative endeavor,

or achievement in practice commensurate with doctoral expectations.

## || KNOWING WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD LEARN

Within a specific discipline or field of study, “the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services” stated in Core Component 3.C. refers to a faculty member’s ability to understand and convey the essentials of the discipline that a student should master at various course and programs levels. Qualified faculty should be able to engage professionally with colleagues in determining the specific, stated learning objectives for all graduates of a specific program as well as possess the full scope of knowledge, skills, and dispositions appropriate to the degree awarded.

In addition, qualified faculty should know the broad learning objectives of the institution for all of its students. The Commission expects that, through the higher education curricula that faculty develop, the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs.

Qualified faculty should also be aware of whether and how much students learn, since an institution should be able to demonstrate a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

*Note: See the Commission’s Criteria 3 and 4 (specifically 3.B. and 4.B.) for more information on expectations regarding teaching and learning.*

## || QUALITY ASSURANCE EXPECTATIONS IN DETERMINING QUALIFIED FACULTY

The Commission expects that “Determination by Credentials” will be the primary mechanism used by institutions to ascertain faculty qualifications.

## DETERMINATION BY CREDENTIALS

Faculty credentials generally refer to the degrees faculty have earned that provide a foundation for knowing what students should learn in a specific discipline or field. Over the years, some hallmarks and common expectations for faculty credentials have emerged within the higher education community, such as:

- Faculty teaching in higher education institutions should have completed a program of study in the discipline or subfield in which they will teach, and/or for which they will develop curricula, with coursework at least one level above that of the courses being taught or developed. Successful completion of a coherent degree better prepares a person than an unstructured collection of credit courses.
- Faculty teaching in undergraduate programs should hold a degree at least one level above that of the program in which they are teaching. Those teaching general education courses, or other courses that transfer, typically hold a master’s degree or higher in the discipline or subfield. If a faculty member holds a master’s degree or higher in a discipline or subfield other than that in which he or she is teaching, that faculty member should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which they teach.
- Faculty teaching in graduate programs should hold the terminal degree determined by the discipline and have a record of research and scholarship appropriate for the graduate program.
- Faculty guiding doctoral education should have a record of scholarship and preparation to teach at the doctoral level. Research and scholarship should be appropriate to the program and degree offered.

## DETERMINATION BY FACTORS OTHER THAN CREDENTIALS

Qualified faculty are identified primarily by credentials, but other factors may be considered in addition to the degrees earned. For example:

- Besides credentials, other attributes may be necessary to qualify someone to teach, such as the ability to design curricula, develop and implement effective pedagogy, and appreciate the breadth of knowledge in quality undergraduate and graduate education.
- Knowledge of a specific discipline as indicated by the credential is not all that is required since faculty carry other significant responsibilities, such as conducting research, advising students, participating in co-curricular activities, and contributing to shared governance.
- An earned degree does not necessarily attest to a faculty member's ongoing professional development in the field. Knowing what students should know is dependent upon the discovery of new knowledge and currency in the field.
- Because of changing academic, societal, and workforce needs, institutions are developing interdisciplinary and other non-traditional programs that require faculty to think beyond their own disciplines and traditional academic programs to determine what students should know and to design curricula accordingly.
- In some cases, such as in practice-oriented disciplines or programs, tested experience in the field may be needed as much as the formal educational preparation at the prescribed level in determining what students should know to practice.

### USING “TESTED EXPERIENCE” AS A BASIS FOR DETERMINING QUALIFIED FACULTY

The value of using tested experience to determine faculty qualifications depends upon the relevance of the experience both to the degree level and to the specific content of the course(s) for which the faculty member is responsible. Tested experience implies that some objective measure ensures that the individual's knowledge and expertise are sufficient for determining what students should learn and

have learned (see Assumed Practice B.2.). For example:

- A faculty member teaching baccalaureate-level courses in human resources or business ethics may not have a relevant degree at the appropriate level but can provide evidence of effective work as a practicing labor relations attorney.
- A faculty member who teaches courses in a pre-associate technology program may not possess a graduate degree but might have the industry certification and years of experience working in that field.
- A faculty member teaching clinical courses in a master's program in education may not have a doctorate in education but, instead, may have documented recognition of excellence in teaching.
- A faculty member teaching creative writing, painting, or music may have had his or her expertise, ability, and talent validated through publications or through wide critical and public acclaim.
- A faculty member teaching conversational courses in Native American or foreign language may demonstrate his or her qualification through recognition of competence by tribal elders or through a nationally recognized rating of proficiency in foreign language.

## || WHEN FACULTY QUALIFICATIONS ARE REVIEWED

Faculty qualifications are reviewed at all institutions accredited by the Commission at least at the time of an institution's comprehensive evaluation but may also be a subject of examination at other times if the issue becomes a matter of concern.

### *Contact Information*

Questions? Contact a staff liaison for clarification.