

## THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF OUR ACCREDITATION




*BRCTC employees kicked off HLC training in August of 2019 with a creative video. A world-wide pandemic challenged employees to successfully prepare for a virtual visit while transitioning their daily tasks and classes to an online environment.*

This edition of the newsletter contains a lot of very good news for Blue Ridge. First, our accreditation from last year is now complete. As you remember, a coronavirus pandemic stopped our on-site visit for last March, and we converted quickly and mightily to a virtual visit. I thank everyone who participated in the virtual visit as it was a well-structured and well executed operation. So well, in fact, that Blue Ridge was asked by HLC along with the chair of our visiting team to educate peer reviewers in the conducting of virtual visits. That is quite an honor. To date, we have conducted two trainings for peer reviewers. Our follow up live visit in November went flawlessly as well. Congratulations to all who helped!

Second, as a result of our very successful accreditation, we are permitted to choose the format of our next accreditation. Blue Ridge is choosing the Open Pathway format. In short, we have an Assurance Argument due in Year 4 that will be reviewed by a team, but there is no live visit. For Year 10, we have an Assurance Argument with visitation and a pathway project. The project is actually chosen in Year 5 and worked on for a number of years in order to gain measurable feedback on the success and improvement. So, once again, congratulations to everyone who brought us to this point.

Third, we are well positioned to meet the rigors of another accreditation. Believe it or not, even though we seemed to have just completed our last one, the next preparation could begin in the next year! We will be tapping into the reading, writing, and editing resources of many of you. So get ready, but first take some time to bask in the glory of a terrifically successful effort that we put together last year. Considering our circumstances and the conditions under which the accreditation took place, it was a remarkable outcome.

Kudos to everyone!  
Dr. Checkovich



# THE HIGHER LEARNING CONNECTION

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**“The mountains you  
climb will take you  
to greater heights.”**

# BlueRidge

COMMUNITY AND  
TECHNICAL COLLEGE

## HAVE YOU READ ALL OF THE HLC NEWSLETTERS?

The newsletter will help you understand the accreditation process and how BRCTC addresses each criterion in the Assurance Argument.

Find all publications on:

**TUNA at Accreditation 2020**

## HLC INTERNAL COMMUNICATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The HLC Internal Communications Committee serves as ambassadors to the college. If you have any questions you can reach out to members of this committee for assistance!

Amanda Burnell

Amber Butcher

Alexis Dixon

Dr. Apryl McDonough

Christopher Cobian

Diana Crouse

Elizabeth Brautigam

Janet Branch

Dr. Jennifer Barrett Smith

Jessica Leake

Dr. Kathryn Moore

Lisha Burks

Sara Gordon

Kevin Cappello

Vickie Wiles

### Committee Advisors

Laura Busey

Dr. Ann Shipway

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HLC PROCESS?

For more information, please email:

[accreditation@blueridgectc.edu](mailto:accreditation@blueridgectc.edu)

## BUSINESS PARTNERS DESCRIBE BLUE RIDGE WITH GLOWING REMARKS

**The College invited business partners to campus on November 6, 2020 to meet with HLC Peer Reviewers. Ten executives represented seven companies:**

### BERKELELY COUNTY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

FIRSTENERGY

LOGOPLASTE

P&G

SHOCKEY

TECHNIMARK

THE CLOROX COMPANY

### **Q: How does Blue Ridge help your business?**

A: Blue Ridge is our Number 1 marketing tool when promoting and selling Berkeley County to prospective businesses.

A: Blue Ridge partnered through wrap around incubation support when we first arrived four years ago. They met our every need from supporting recruitment sessions, meetings with team leaders, meetings with Global leaders, offering space for onboarding, testing and interviews. We would not be where we are today without their help.

A: By designing customized curriculum.

A: Blue Ridge is dedicated to our FirstEnergy PSI program and students. They offer superior service and are our best provider regionally for our program.

### **Q: Does Blue Ridge support your businesses in the training of soft skills?**

A: Yes, Blue Ridge designs customized training for our employees.

### **Q: How does Blue Ridge CTC help students?**

A: A majority of the students at Blue Ridge are non-traditional. The funding we offer to the Foundation targets the student in most need who may be working a full-time job and raising a family while attending college to better their lives financially.

### **Q: What is one word that describes Blue Ridge?**

“OPPORTUNITY”

“PARTNERSHIP”

“FLEXIBLE”

“DEDICATED”

“CUSTOM”

“PROBLEM-SOLVER”

“OVERACHIEVING”

## INTERESTING FACT!

T21 has been the office space for Fortune 500 companies!



## HLC ADOPTS REVISIONS

The HLC is required by federal regulations and its policies to initiate a substantive review of its Criteria for Accreditation every five years. Throughout the last two years, HLC conducted an internal analysis, held listening sessions, and analyzed the rigor of team reports, trends across interim reporting, and feedback from a survey of member institutions and peer reviewers. The final version of the revised criteria was adopted by the Board at its February 2019 meeting. The new criteria went into effect on September 1, 2020; however, the previous criteria remained in effect for any institution that was still under review due to Covid.

### **Terminology Changes:**

**Academic Freedom (2.d.):** The ability to engage differences of opinion, evaluate evidence and form one's own grounded judgments about the relative value of competing perspectives. This definition implies not just freedom from constraint but also freedom for faculty, staff and students to work within a scholarly community to develop intellectual and personal qualities.

**Academic Offerings:** Any educational experience offered at an institution for academic credit. This includes, but is not limited to, degree and certificate programs and courses.

**Appropriate to Higher Education (3.A.):** Curricular and cocurricular programming of the quality and rigor for the degree level that prepares students to think critically and function successfully. It is distinctly different from K-12 education.

**Autonomous (2.C.):** The institution's governing board acts independently of any other entity in determining the course of direction and policies for the institution.

**Capacity (1.A., 5. C.):** An institution's ability to effectively deliver its educational offerings. Determining capacity refers to an institution's demonstrable ability to establish and maintain academic quality.

**Civil Engagement (1.C.):** Community service or any number of other efforts (by individuals or groups) intended to address issues of public or community concern.

**Cocurricular (3.C., 4. B.):** Learning activities, programs and experiences that reinforce the institution's mission and values and complement the formal curriculum.

**Good Practice (4.B., 4.C.):** Practice that is based in the use of processes, methods and measures that have been determined to be successful by empirical research, professional organizations and/or institutional peers.

**Informed Citizenship (2.C.):** Having sufficient and reliable information about issues of public concern and having the knowledge and skills to make reasonable judgments and decisions about them.

**Operational Staff (5. B.):** Personnel who support the academic enterprise, such as those who may work in the areas of finance, human resources, facilities, dining/catering, information technology, planning, security, student services, academic support, etc.

**Public Information (1.A.):** Information publicly available on websites or other materials that are available freely to the public, without having to ask specifically for it.

**Student Outcomes (5.C.):** Education-specific results to measure against the objectives or standards for the educational offerings

**Superordinate Entity (1. B.):** An entity situated hierarchically above the institution, which includes but is not limited to state boards, private owners, corporate parents, Tribal councils or religious denominations.

**Undue Influence (2.C.):** Overreach, suspicious transactions and relationships that are exclusive (without oversight) that could yield influence over the institution's governing board.



**REVISIONS TO  
THE CRITERIA:**

The [revisions to the Criteria](#) included some reorganization of the Core Components.

\*Article Sources: HLC website and the above PDF

### **Criterion 1: Mission**

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

#### **Core Components**

- 1.A.** The institution's mission is articulated publicly and operationalized throughout the institution.
- 1.B.** The institution's mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.
- 1.C.** The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

### **Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct**

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

#### **Core Components**

- 2.A.** The institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff.
- 2.B.** The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public.
- 2.C.** The governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution's integrity.
- 2.D.** The institution is committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.
- 2.E.** The institution's policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, staff and students.

### **Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support**

The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

#### **Core Components**

- 3.A.** The rigor of the institution's academic offerings is appropriate to higher education.
- 3.B.** The institution offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.
- 3.C.** The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.
- 3.D.** The institution provides support for student learning and resources for effective teaching.

### **Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement**

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

#### **Core Components**

- 4.A.** The institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings.
- 4.B.** The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.
- 4.C.** The institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

### **Criterion 5. Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning**

The institution's resources, structures, and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

#### **Core Components**

- 5.A.** Through its administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution's leadership demonstrates that it is effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission.
- 5.B.** The institution's resource base supports its educational offerings and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
- 5.C.** The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement.



## THE ABILITY TO CHOOSE: A BENEFIT OF A SUCCESSFUL ACCREDITATION VISIT

For those who have experienced Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation visits in the past, the cycle is familiar: 10-year standard pathway with a comprehensive visit during year 4 and year 10. Blue Ridge CTC's recent comprehensive visit marked the end of the 10-year standard cycle, resulting in new options for maintaining accreditation.

HLC offers two pathways for accreditation, the standard pathway or the open pathway. The option to select a pathway for accreditation is not available to all institutions. To be eligible, a College or University must first complete a comprehensive visit without receiving an action requiring show-cause, probation, or withdrawal. The 2020 visit marked the second comprehensive visit Blue Ridge CTC concluded without requiring these types of action items. As such, HLC declared Blue Ridge CTC eligible to choose an accreditation pathway.

Blue Ridge CTC has selected the open pathway for the next accreditation cycle. The open pathway is a 10-year cycle that focuses on quality assurance and federal compliance. One difference between the open and standard pathways is the timing of comprehensive visits. On the open pathway, the College has one comprehensive visit during year 10. The College continues to complete familiar components of the evaluation process, including an Assurance Review, during year four, and regular annual Institutional Updates.

While the open pathway requires only one comprehensive visit at the commencement of the 10-year cycle, the rigor of the HLC assessment remains unchanged. One of the benefits of the open pathway is the Quality Initiative component completed year five through year seven. To begin the Quality Initiative phase, the College must first submit a topic to a panel of HLC reviewers for approval. Once approved, this project and the subsequent report are used to evaluate Blue Ridge CTC's commitment to improvement.

***"The Open Pathway is unique in that its improvement component, the Quality Initiative, affords institutions the opportunity to pursue improvement projects that meet their current needs and aspirations."***

(Higher Learning Commission, n.d.)\*

College leadership decided upon the open pathway due to the emphasis on quality improvement. Operational evaluation and assessment is a common theme across the Blue Ridge CTC campus community. One of the key advantages of the open pathway is the ability to work toward reaffirmation of accreditation while simultaneously evaluating operations through the Quality Initiative. This alignment assists with operational efficiency and maximizes Blue Ridge CTC's impact on the local community.

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To learn more about the Open Pathway, visit the [Higher Learning Commission website](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/open-overview.html#).

\* Higher Learning Commission. (n.d.) Open Pathway Overview.  
<https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/open-overview.html#>

## OPEN PATHWAY PROCESS

