

University of Central Arkansas

According to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), “Accreditation’ is the primary means of assuring and improving the quality of higher education institutions and programs in the United States.”¹ UCA’s institutional accreditor is the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The HLC evaluates and monitors its member institutions through comprehensive evaluations (typically every ten years), focused evaluations (as dictated by institutional change), and a variety of reports, ranging from annual data updates to issue-specific reports as required. UCA’s last comprehensive evaluation took place in April 2000. The next comprehensive evaluation visit is scheduled for March 8–10, 2010. Between now and the visit in 2010, UCA’s HLC2010 Self-Study Steering Committee will publish this monthly update for the campus.



On Our Plates

The Steering Committee has completed an initial draft of the HLC2010 self-study. The self-study documents have now gone to an external consultant for initial review and advice. The consultant will provide a report by mid-November, and soon after that the self-study will be posted in the UCA web portal for an all-campus review. In the meantime, the Steering Committee continues to make corrections and fill in gaps in the self-study draft documents. The schedule and self-study outline posted online have been updated now that an initial draft is in hand. Link to the updated schedule <http://www.uca.edu/panda/hlc2010/#timeline> and outline <http://www.uca.edu/panda/hlc2010/ssoutline.html>.

Focus On . . . Consultants in the Self-Study Process

The Higher Learning Commission review process depends for much of its effectiveness on the role of peers as consultant-evaluators. For every visit, the team comprises a group of peers with particular areas of expertise necessary to a specific situation. The team report, then, includes not only evaluative assertions, but also advice, offered peer to peer. (See, for example, the Advice/Consultative Suggestions in the team report from 2000, linked here: http://www.uca.edu/panda/hlc2010/2000_team_report_summary.pdf.) Collectively, the HLC’s peer consultant-evaluators are called the Peer Review Corps.

Institutions may use peer consultants at other points in the process as well. In the 1997–2000 self-study process, for example, UCA engaged an external consultant to review the university’s self-study plan before the process began. For HLC2010, the university, with the advice of the Steering Committee, has engaged an external consultant to review our self-study’s initial draft. Selection criteria for the consultant included most importantly significant experience of HLC accreditation processes from two points of view – that of a self-study participant on a university campus and that of an HLC consultant-evaluator. The expectation is that a fresh set of experienced eyes with appropriate distance from the immediate self-study context will be able to provide us with substantive suggestions about the appropriateness and adequacy – in extent and specificity – of the self-study we have prepared, with practical advice about how to make the self-study stronger. We expect to post the consultant’s report in the UCA web portal with the self-study draft documents.

Accreditation Resource Links

UCA – University of Central Arkansas

- :: HLC2010: <http://www.uca.edu/panda/hlc2010/>
- :: Accreditors: <http://www.uca.edu/ubulletin/01/103.html> (link to the *Undergraduate Bulletin*)
- :: Strategic Framework: http://www.uca.edu/panda/sti/uca_strategic_framework.pdf (see especially UCA’s Mission and Principles)

HLC – Higher Learning Commission

- :: Home: <http://www.ncahlc.org/>
- :: Overview of Accreditation: http://www.ncahlc.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=83&Itemid=111
- :: Directory of Affiliated Institutions: http://www.ncahlc.org/index.php?option=com_directory&Itemid=192

CHEA – Council for Higher Education Accreditation

- :: Home: <http://www.chea.org/>
- :: Informing the Public about Accreditation: http://www.chea.org/public_info/

¹ Council for Higher Education Accreditation, “Talking Points: Accreditation, Students and Society.” February 2009. Online at http://chea.org/pdf/2009_Talking_Points.pdf.