

University Accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission

A team of Peer Reviewers from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) conducted a comprehensive review of the University of Iowa during spring 2019, culminating in a site visit on March 25-26. Review procedures, accreditation criteria, and materials submitted to HLC prior to the review are available at [accreditation.uiowa.edu](https://www.hlc.edu/accreditation/uiowa). Following their review and site visit, the team recommended re-affirming the university's accreditation status and provided feedback on university accomplishments and areas for improvement.

Affirmations of University Accomplishments

Reviewers affirmed procedures established by the university to assure **quality and transparency**:

- systems for maintaining a community of highly qualified faculty and staff
- assigning course credit
- administering financial aid
- facilitating credit transfer
- providing information to students and the public
- monitoring complaints
- publishing student outcomes data, and
- meeting expectations of specialized accrediting agencies.

Reviewers acknowledged that sound structures are in place for **institutional governance**. They noted that Board members are well-informed and actively involved in institutional oversight and accountability, and also that shared governance provides relevant opportunities for substantive involvement in institutional decision-making, including

- numerous standing committees and planning groups
- campus-wide participation in devising and implementing the university's strategic plan
- collaborative implementation of the new budget model
- recent cooperative efforts by the Faculty Senate and the Board of Regents that led to the lifting of the AAUP sanction and the generation of a new process for executive searches.

Reviewers recognized the substantial **support for student success** through the work of

- University College, the Student Success Team, and other offices and partnerships dedicated to supporting undergraduate success
- Systematic implementation of undergraduate advising through the Academic Advising Center and collegiate advising offices (though they noted that in some cases advisor caseloads exceed limits recommended by the National Academic Advising Association)

Reviewers affirmed practices established to maintain **high-quality programs** for students, including

- deliberative processes for creating new programs
- systematic and rigorous review of existing programs
- regular cycles for assessment of undergraduate and co-curricular program outcomes, and
- the continuous development and oversight of the General Education program.

Reviewers affirmed the university's recent efforts to gain a better understanding of **campus climate** for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

- The percentage of underrepresented minority students has increased considerably during the last decade, and now exceeds the percentage of the estimated minority population of the state.
- Reviewers agreed with the university's concern that persistence and completion rates for first-generation and underrepresented minority students have remained the same or declined even while overall campus rates have increased.
- It was also noted that the percentage of underrepresented minority faculty and staff remains significantly lower than the percentage of the estimated minority population of the state.

In light of concerns about campus climate raised by respondents to the DEI survey and in open forums with reviewers during the site visit, reviewers agreed that strategies outlined in the newly launched DEI Action Plan will be important for helping address campus climate issues and for supporting the retention and success of diverse faculty, staff, and students.

Areas to Address During the Next Four Years

Reviewers identified two areas as needing improvement and requested a report on progress at the time of the university's next regularly scheduled HLC Assurance Review in 2022.

- Reviewers acknowledged that Graduate Council reviews of graduate degree programs have led to improvements. However, they noted that learning outcomes have not been consistently articulated or assessed for graduate programs that do not have their own disciplinary accrediting agencies.
- Reviewers likewise acknowledged work done by Distance and Online Education to assure quality and consistency of distance and online courses, but expressed a similar concern about assessment of learning outcomes in distance programs that do not have separate disciplinary accreditation.

Reviewers noted that to some extent, student retention and graduation rates may be seen as a reflection of admissions policies, and suggested that the university may face limits on further progress in this area due to enrollment policies that are relatively more open than those of other flagship public research universities. Because the university remains committed to serving the students we admit, we recognize that for the purposes of improving university support for undergraduate persistence and completion, it may be useful to examine outcomes at peer institutions with undergraduate population profiles that closely match our own, rather than basing analyses solely on experiences at other institutions with more selective enrollment.

In highlighting these issues, reviewers have identified areas for continued development that are aligned with the university's strategic goals, and for which the university has established a strong foundation on which to build. The HLC review provides an important affirmation of university priorities for further improvement as we seek to expand the effective reach of student success initiatives, transform campus culture through implementation of the DEI action plan, and further examine learning outcomes in graduate, distance, and online degree programs.

For more information about University of Iowa accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission, visit [accreditation.uiowa.edu](https://www.hlc-ia.org/accr/accr-ia/accr-ia-ia.html).