

The Institutional Accreditor Assessment Group recommends that Santa Fe College applies for accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission. The rational for this recommendation include, but are not limited to the following:

1. HCL bears the most similarities with SACSCOC of the three options, which will facilitate the transition to a new institutional accreditor.
2. HCL communicates quickly and effectively with potential member institutions.
3. They include a Quality Improvement Plan in their standards that is similar to a SACSCOC QEP.
4. Dr. Southerland has experience working with HCL and has done onsite reviews, so he will be able to help us through the transition smoothly.
5. A significant portion of institutions that are accredited by HCL are similar to Santa Fe College. (Community Colleges, and State Colleges.)
6. So far, the other florida colleges that have selected a new institutional accreditor have all chosen HCL, therefore, HCL will be accustomed to working with Florida colleges.

Higher Learning Commission

Pros	Cons
Other Florida Colleges have chosen HLC	Very little specifics about library requirements. Without adequate rubrics, leaves room for interpretation of visiting team and peer reviewers.
Similar review cycle to SACSCOC (10 year cycle with 4th year review).	Potential issue with General Education and AS degrees. (Requires 24 credits, and states that "Any exceptions are explained and justified".)
No pre-application fees	Rigor seems lacking; Concern that on-campus visit may be rigorous "fact-finding"
Shorter application process	
Shorter compliance certification report (2022 SF SACSCOC was 400+ pgs vs. 96 in sample report found online)	
Quality Improvement Plan (Similar to QEPs)	
Dr. Southerland has experience as an HCL onsite reviewer	

HCL's response to when asked about potential issue with General Education requirements for AS degrees, and their library requirements:

"Eligibility Requirement #6 pertaining to General Education:

Yes, you are correct that you should "explain and justify" the variance from HLC's general expectations for that degree level. It might be helpful to list your programs and identify the number of general education credits required for each (or put in groups of some logical sort, etc.). Clearly, the state requirement is the foundation for the explanation, but it would help to develop a statement about how the number of credits that are required are sufficient in their number/scope for the particular program or type or programs. For example, certain highly technical fields might require more courses that detail subject matter that is unique to the program, resulting in less "room" for general education. Given that programs are sometimes "capped" at a total number of credits, this helps explain that the shift is in response to ensuring depth in the program/major content area (just an example). Similarly, there may be other institutional or graduation requirements (which are not also identified as general education) that contribute toward a well-rounded individual, so if that's the case, mentioning those efforts also helps provide a justification. Given that AS and AA degrees are generally considered

“transferrable” to 4-year institutions where bachelors programs build on that foundation, information about the transferability of those credits to other Florida institutions also builds a case (in other words, the lower number of gen ed credits isn’t a deal breaker when students wish to transfer to a 4-year program).

Library resources and staffing:

HLC expects institutions to make library resources available to students and to the extent called for by institutional mission (research, for example), faculty. These resources could be made available in various ways: Physical resources in a centralized or decentralized location(s), online/electronic resources, participation in library-oriented consortia, and so on. Relatedly, a description of how and when students can access such materials is something we are interested in. We do ***not*** require certain numbers of volumes or specify that staffing be done in a particular way (although we would expect the institution to determine that qualified individuals are available to oversee overall efforts and to assist patrons). *Importantly, HLC understands that the library/information resources made available closely reflect the institution’s mission and programs offered.* Some key areas that provide additional perspective (although keep in mind that terms other than only “library” collectively describe HLC’s requirements):

- [Criterion for Accreditation #3](#) (especially 3C and 3D)
- [Eligibility Requirement #11](#)

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Pros	Cons
More specifics about library requirements than HLC including the nature and breadth of collections, remote access, staffing levels, as well as access to and instruction in the use of library collections and resources. Comprehensive plan for facilities, including libraries.	Least friendly to issues of shared governance and academic freedom.
Institution defines DEI within the context of its mission	DEI is a core principle: in Florida, it's not.
Philadelphia is easy to get to from Gainesville.	Lowest percentage of board from similar institutions (22%) of the three institutional accreditors.
	Longer application process (at least 26 months)
	Biggest pre-application fee (\$4800, + \$1000/ Center/OCIS, + expenses)
	Poor communication with institutions

MSCHE's February 22nd response when asked about how we could abide by their Guiding Principle 3 about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, without conflicting with the law passed in Florida Senate Bill 266:

"Hello Mitch,

Thank you for outreaching to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). I have forwarded your message to the appropriate staff, and someone will follow up with you. Please let us know how we can be of additional assistance."

(I've received nothing further from MSCHE.)

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

Pros	Cons
Most detailed and robust statement regarding academic freedom of the three institutional accreditors.	Shortest review cycle, (7 years, with 3rd year review).
Highest percentage of board from similar institutions (34%)	Expense of sending liaison and other personnel to Seattle for annual meetings; expense of flying reviewers from furthest points from Florida possible.
More specifics about library requirements than HLC but less than MSCHE. Includes nature and breadth of collections and qualified personnel but does not specifically call out access or instruction.	Pacific time zone is three hours earlier than Florida, which would complicate communication