



**UCCS Accreditation Visit
November 14-15, 2016
Assurance Argument Criteria 1-5
UCCS Answer Summaries**

Higher Learning Commission Overview

The following document is intended for community members and others who seek a brief summary of the Higher Learning Commission process and the position of the University of Colorado Colorado Springs in support of continued accreditation.

What is the Higher Learning Commission? The Higher Learning Commission is an independent corporation that was founded in 1895 as one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States. HLC accredits degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions in the North Central region, which includes 19 states including Colorado.

Why is the HLC important? By law, the U.S. Department of Education relies in part on accrediting agencies to determine eligibility for U.S. government assistance under certain legislation. Maintaining UCCS ability to receive federal funds in the form of student loans and research grants is vital to the university's continued success. Accreditation, put simply, is the university equivalent of a "Good Housekeeping" or Underwriter's Laboratory seal of approval. Continued accreditation is vital for UCCS' continued ability to attract high quality students and faculty.

What is the process? HLC accreditors – usually people who work at other universities – will soon begin an online evaluation of UCCS and will visit the campus personally in November. The accreditors will focus on five core areas and the university's ability to show that it has met HLC standards.

The five areas are: 1. Mission, 2. Integrity, 3. Teaching and Learning, 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement, and 5. Resources, Planning and Institutional Effectives. They are summarized in the pages that follow. A complete copy of the university's response to the core areas will be available online once it has been submitted to HLC.



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Criterion One: Mission. The institution's mission is broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations. The HLC is specifically interested how the mission statement was developed, whether academic programs, student support services and enrollment profile are consistent with the mission and whether planning and budgeting support the mission. The HLC seeks to ensure the mission of the university is articulated publicly, the university understands its relationship between its mission and the diversity of society, and demonstrates commitment to public good.

The UCCS statutory mission statement: *The Colorado Springs campus of the University of Colorado shall be a comprehensive baccalaureate and specialized graduate research university with selective admission standards. The Colorado Springs campus shall offer liberal arts and sciences, business, engineering, health sciences, and teacher preparation undergraduate degree programs, and a selected number of master's and doctoral degree programs. (Colorado Revised Statutes, §23-20-101(1)(c))*

The UCCS vision statement: *UCCS, a premier comprehensive undergraduate and specialized graduate research university, provides students with academically rigorous and life-enriching experiences in a vibrant university community. We advance knowledge, integrate student learning with the spirit of discovery, and broaden access to higher education for the benefit of southern Colorado, the state, nation and world.*

Goals:

UCCS established 12 goals in the 2012-2020 Strategic Plan. They describe UCCS plans for instruction, research, scholarship and creative work, student support, international programs and services, multicultural and global engagement, sustainability, responsible growth, revenue diversification, infrastructure development, community engagement and marketing and communication. The 2012-2020 Strategic Plan received a mid-point review with broad input from faculty and staff in early 2016. The updated plan was approved by the University of Colorado Board of Regents in April.

Supporting Examples:

- More than 11,000 students (fall 2015), 85 percent of whom are undergraduate, 15 percent graduate; 2,000 online students.
- UCCS is among the fastest growing universities in Colorado.
- 31 percent of all UCCS students and 36 percent of freshmen are ethnic minorities.
- One-third of undergraduates come from low-income families.
- 2,000 military veterans, active duty military and family members are enrolled.
- UCCS offers 45 bachelor's, 22 master's and five doctoral degrees and programs in close coordination with regional workforce needs.
- Community outreach includes the UCCS Economic Forum, the National Reach Higher Summit, the Pre-Collegiate Development Program as well as collaborations with both public and private organizations.
- Chancellor Ambassadors and University Partner groups, as well as college and program specific advisory boards, provide opportunity for community input.

Criterion Two: Integrity Ethical and Responsible Conduct. HLC seeks to ensure the institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel and auxiliary functions; and follows policies and processes for fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff. The HLC is also interested in ensuring that UCCS presents itself clearly and completely, is committed to academic freedom and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning, and enforces integrity.

UCCS identified integrity as one of its values of excellence in the 2012-2020 Strategic Plan, stating "We value integrity and expect ethical behavior from each member of the campus community in all interactions."

At the Colorado, University of Colorado and UCCS levels, there are multiple policies and procedures that require fair and ethical conduct by the members of the University of Colorado Board of Regents, UCCS employees and students. Specific attention is paid to research to ensure that faculty research not only complies with federal, state and university policy but also protects people and humanely treats animals and follows non-discrimination practices, conflict of interest and regulatory compliance.

Supporting Examples:

- The Colorado Constitution severely limits gifts that university employees receive.
- The CU Board of Regents has stringent ethical principles and standards for the CU community.
- UCCS participates in the College of Business Daniels Ethics Initiative and has spread its principle-based ethics curriculum to other UCCS colleges and colleges throughout southern Colorado.
- CU non-discrimination policies state that qualification for positions and institutional need are the sole basis for hiring employees.
- CU policy prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy.
- University employees are expected to avoid actual and perceived conflicts of interest and complete annual disclosure surveys.
- UCCS has established an institutional ethics and compliance program and a Compliance Office.
- CU maintains an ethics hotline where employees can anonymously report concerns.
- Marketing materials such as the Viewbook and references such as the Academic Catalog and Enrollment Handbook are regularly updated and distributed; Institutional Research provides specific data.
- CU Board of Regents meetings are open meetings and the board is subject to open records laws.
- Regent law designates that faculty have the principal role in developing academic and scholastic policy

Criterion Three: Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support. HLC seeks to ensure the institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered. The HLC is specifically interested in whether UCCS degree programs are appropriate to higher education, if they are current and require appropriate levels of performance, if goals for students are articulated and if program quality is consistently delivered. Additionally, the HLC seeks demonstration that intellectual inquiry and broad learning skills are integral and that sufficient support is given for high quality programs and student services.

Before they are offered, UCCS degrees undergo a rigorous review process that includes the campus, the University of Colorado Board of Regents and the Colorado Department of Higher Education. Additionally, all degrees are reviewed on a seven year cycle. Following those reviews, programs submit updates for two years to both the campus and University of Colorado System.

Additionally, UCCS programs in business, education, engineering, public affairs, nursing, psychology and chemistry are currently accredited externally. All programs have continuous accreditation from the time of the last HLC visit to the present. Many students in these areas undergo professional exam licensing. Those students who take professional licensure exams consistently score highly on them.

Last year, the CU Board of Regents instituted a Program Review process that reviewed all teaching and non-teaching programs. A small number of programs were identified for additional review and are working through the process at this time.

Supporting Examples:

- A general education curriculum ensures university goals for writing, inclusiveness, sustainability and quantitative reasoning are met throughout the campus
- Diversity summits at the campus and CU System levels routinely garner large attendance
- The Office of Veteran and Military Student Affairs has specific programs to help returning military students succeed
- Mountain Lion Research Day and Undergraduate Research Academy ensure students work closely with faculty in the pursuit of new knowledge
- UCCS has 706 faculty members. Tenure track faculty have a terminal degree, usually a Ph.D. Non tenure track faculty must have a master's. Multiple year contracts and a senior instructor category are used to provide continuity.
- All faculty are evaluated annually; tenured faculty undergo comprehensive reviews every five years.
- UCCS employs student success professionals in areas such as advising, residence hall management, tutors and enrollment management; each group is highly qualified academically and in professional work with students.
- Online teaching is supported through a nationally recognized Quality Matters program to ensure academic rigor.

Criterion Four: Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement. HLC is interested in making sure UCCS demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs and support services and regularly evaluates their effectiveness.

UCCS reviews its programs frequently using both self-study and external processes. Additionally, UCCS closely evaluates courses transferred from other schools in an effort to assure both quality and student success upon arrival. Student success is also measured in graduation rates and retention rates as students make progress toward a degree.

Supporting Examples:

- 96 percent of alumni who responded in a 2016 survey were satisfied (very or somewhat satisfied) with their education at UCCS; 76 percent were employed with a median income of \$57,000
- Retention efforts include
 - **Gateway Program Seminar.** GPS courses are freshman-only and enrolled students are retained at higher rates.
 - **University Studies Program.** At-risk students are enrolled in a special program where they receive additional academic support.
 - **Math Placement Exams.** An exam is used to place students in appropriate mathematics courses.
 - **Academic Advising.** Additional advisers were added in response to student concerns.
 - **EXCEL Centers.** Students can receive additional academic assistance in key areas (written communication, oral communication, science, math, foreign language and social sciences) at no charge.
- The Office of Veteran and Military Student Affairs has designed processes specifically for returning military members including transfer credit policy, priority registration for veterans and a transitions course; the office recently moved to a newly renovated space that is larger and more centrally located.

Criterion Five: Resources, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness. HLC is interested in examining the institution's resources, structures and processes to make sure they are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Despite a national retreat from investments in higher education by state government, UCCS has flourished by diversifying revenues, improving efficiency, investing in human and physical capital and increasing degree offerings in response to student demand and community needs.

Though UCCS receives support from the State of Colorado, it is a tuition dependent institution. Led by enrollment growth, tuition revenues increased from \$48 million in 2005-06 to \$109 million in 2014-15. Enrollment grew from 7,615 to 11,295. Tuition rates have increased in response to state support declines.

In addition to enrollment growth, UCCS increased its efforts with auxiliary enterprises such as residential housing, food services and parking in addition to philanthropic support from both foundations and individuals.

UCCS employs about 3,300 people including 1,720 student employees. In recent years, UCCS has improved its hiring policies and procedures to attract (and retain) top employees. The university has also instituted substantial improvements in technology and facilities.

Supporting Examples:

- State support was \$17.1 million in 2005-06 and \$23.5 million in 2015-16, a relatively flat level of support when inflation is factored.
- Auxiliary revenues increased from \$25 million in 2005 to \$45.4 million in 2014-15.
- Restricted funds (federal financial aid, sponsored projects and gifts) increased from \$17.2 million in 2005 to \$33 million in 2014-15.
- Philanthropy increased from \$2.4 million in 2005-06 to \$10 million in 2014-15.
- Investments in faculty positions occurred at faster rates than budget planning models predicted.
- In the past 10 years, UCCS has renovated or added more than 1.14 million square feet of space and improved infrastructure at a cost of \$286 million.
- Projects underway include the Ent Center for the Arts, a Sports Medicine and Performance Center, expanded intercollegiate athletic facilities and the renovation of a building to house a new National Cybersecurity Center.
- UCCS employs a shared governance system and includes faculty, staff and students in major decisions and planning.