



UNIVERSITY
OF WYOMING

Office of
Academic Affairs

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August 1, 2023

To: Deans, Directors, and Department Heads
From: Kevin R. Carman, Provost and Executive Vice President
Re: HLC Faculty Credentials Documentation

Colleagues,

As a friendly reminder, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), our accrediting agency, provides specific requirements for faculty credentials to teach university-level courses. As a requirement of our continued accreditation, all instructors who teach at or for UW must hold:

- A master's degree or higher in the discipline in which they are teaching, **OR**
- A master's degree or higher in another discipline **AND** a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline in which they teach, **OR**
- A combination of education, training, and tested experience (testable/measurable experience, significant research, training, industry certification, professional licenses) that the department can verify and demonstrate qualifies the person at the appropriate level, **AND**
- A degree one level above the coursework they are teaching.

These requirements apply to all academic personnel and staff who teach UW courses, regardless of modality or FTE (e.g., full-time, part-time, or temporary). This includes Academic Professionals (extended-term and non-extended term), Visiting Professors, Professors of Practice, Clinical Faculty, and Tenure-stream faculty. It also includes staff who have been approved to teach courses. Teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty are excepted from this policy.

We must demonstrate compliance with this requirement for every person teaching our courses, from 1000 level to graduate level. Academic Affairs must have the credentials or other appropriate documentation every semester and term in order to comply with this requirement – thus, every hire you make and every section assignment to a new person must be accompanied by this documentation.

Each semester, your department, school, and/or college or unit should ensure that you have transcripts or other appropriate documentation (for tested experience) that document your teaching faculty and staff have credential commensurate with their instructional appointment. These credentials can be gathered one time for each person within the annual review process or at hiring, but must be on record for every instructional appointee.

Guidelines for documenting and establishing expertise and other FAQ can be found below. If you have any questions, contact Steve Barrett, steveb@uwyo.edu.

Regards,

Kevin R. Carman, PhD
Provost and Executive Vice President

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Guidelines and FAQ's for Instructional Appointment Credentials

Guidelines and FAQ's for Instructional Appointment Credentials

The default standard for all instructors is a terminal degree, or a degree at least one level higher than the degree for which a course being taught can be counted. Examples of the latter include a master's degree to teach a course that counts toward a bachelor's degree, or a doctoral degree to teach a course that counts toward a master's degree. Exceptions include cases where the norm in the discipline (e.g., J.D. holders teaching Ph.D. students in law-related fields or M.F.A. degree holders teaching Ph.D. students in the arts) or the accreditation standards of the profession require otherwise.

Documenting Expertise

To document and establish the expertise of each instructor who will be teaching courses in your department, use this evaluation.

- Does this instructor hold a degree in a discipline that is appropriately matched to the courses they teach?
 - *If yes...* document degree and discipline.
 - *If no...*
 - Does this instructor have a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which they teach, **OR**
 - Does this instructor have a combination of education, testable/measurable experience, significant research, training, industry certification, or professional licenses in the field in which they teach that the department can demonstrate qualifies them to teach in this field? If so, how will you document this?

- Does this instructor hold a degree at least one level above the level at which they teach (Doctoral classwork is excepted but must be taught by instructors with a doctorate in the field)?
 - *If yes...* document degree level.
 - *If no...*
 - Does this instructor have a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which they teach, **OR**
 - Does this instructor have a combination of education, testable/measurable experience, significant research, training, industry certification, or professional licenses in the field in which they teach that the department can demonstrate qualifies them to teach in this field?

What is Tested Experience?

Instructors not holding a relevant degree can be deemed qualified by tested experience by their department faculty with approval by the school/college and the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs. The Higher Learning Commission, UW's accrediting agency, defines tested experience as "experience the institution determines is equivalent to the degree it would otherwise require for a faculty position" (HLC, 2020). Tested experience must include a breadth and depth of experience outside the classroom in applied settings relevant to the discipline being taught.

At a minimum, when UW chooses to make hiring decisions based on tested experience we must adhere to the following criteria:

- Your department must have well-defined policies, procedures, and documentation for determining that the tested experience is sufficient for ensuring the faculty member has the requisite expertise to teach in the discipline.
- The minimal faculty qualifications through tested experience should be relevant for the degree level(s) being taught and the specific content of courses assigned to the faculty member.
- Tested experience qualifications should be established for specific disciplines and programs and can include skill sets, certifications or additional credentials, and relevant experience. These might include substantial graduate-level coursework and/or methodological training in a discipline appropriate to the

field of instruction; a record of research, creative activity, scholarship or achievement appropriate to the field of instruction; related research experience in industry; practical experience in the art, business, legal, or political sector; relevant clinical experience; relevant certifications or credentials; and demonstrated competency in a relevant skill set.

- Procedures for evaluating tested experience should be consistent and transparent, and easily explained to our accreditors.
- Policies and procedures for determining faculty qualifications through tested experience should be reviewed and approved through appropriate faculty governance processes.

How to Document When You Advertise For and Hire NEW Instructors (i.e., Academic Professionals (extended-term and non-extended term), Visiting Professors, Professors of Practice, Clinical Faculty, and Tenure-stream faculty):

1. Department Chairs and School or Program Directors, in association with their Academic Dean, must define the faculty credential requirements required to teach specific courses in their departments or schools. These requirements should include a combination of education, training, and tested experience as outlined above. These requirements should be reviewed on an annual basis.
2. Faculty position announcements must include a statement indicating the need for applicants to meet accreditation standards credential requirements to teach at the University of Wyoming.
3. A potential faculty member's credentials and transcripts are initially reviewed by the Department or School, and/or by an interview committee when hiring new faculty members, to determine the individual's qualification to teach in keeping with the faculty credential requirements. The Department Chair or School/Program Director and/or interview committee must document within hiring recommendations the individual's ability to teach in relation to the faculty credential requirement.
4. The Dean, in conjunction with the Department Chair or School or Program Director, reviews a faculty member or potential faculty member's qualification to teach college credit courses within a given discipline.
5. Hiring recommendations moving to the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs must also document how the preferred hire meets the faculty credential requirements.
6. **Collect from hired personnel and provide a copy to the Provost's Office the transcript of the new hire.**

Graduate Student Supervision:

HLC guidance indicates that graduate students serving as teaching assistants are excepted from the policies, as indicated above, so long as they are supervised by the faculty. This is a recognition that our graduate students should and must receive supervised experience in teaching undergraduate students "in the field," so to speak. Supervision, however, is key. You must document that you actively supervise your teaching assistants.

HLC Faculty Credentialing requirement FAQ:

Q: What's the rationale behind having us submit this information on faculty credentials?

A: We know there are many competing forces you have to consider, including timely course rotations, student demand for your courses from inside and outside your major, and your faculty's workload. HLC requires that anyone teaching in our name – any general education courses, or other non-occupational courses – must hold a master's degree or higher in the discipline or subfield. If a faculty member holds a master's degree or higher in a discipline or subfield other than that in which he or she is teaching, that faculty member must have "completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which they teach." (HLC, 2020). In terminal degree programs, faculty members must possess the same level of degree. Excepted from this policy are "teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty." (HLC 2020)

Q: What qualifies as documentation of credentials?

A: While faculty member credentials are typically identified by academic degrees, other factors (e.g., testable/measurable experience, training, industry certification, professional licenses) may be considered in making faculty appointment decisions. At a minimum faculty members teaching in our undergraduate degree programs must hold a master's degree in the field and/or have a combination of education, training, and tested experience that the department can verify and demonstrate qualifies the person at the appropriate level (for example, professors of practice must have demonstrated a distinguished career and have made substantial impact on fields and disciplines that are important to academic program employing them.)

Q: What does "equivalent" or "tested experience" mean?

A: When must be able to explain and justify to HLC our decision to assign each faculty member to the courses that they teach if requested. These decisions must be supported by policies and procedures that are acceptable to the professional judgment of HLC peer reviewers. Thus, you must be able to demonstrate a specific association between the instructional staff member's qualifications and courses taught. If a faculty member holds a degree in an area *other than that in which they teach*, they must have tested experience, or have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield that they teach. You must document and demonstrate how a faculty member attained these 18 graduate credit hours, or how you evaluated their tested experience as equivalent.

Q: What is the credential required to teach at the graduate level?

A: Faculty members teaching at the graduate level must hold the terminal degree determined by the discipline and have a record of research, scholarship or achievement appropriate for the graduate program." (HLC 2020)

Q: What about graduate students?

A: HLC guidance indicates that graduate students serving as teaching assistants are excepted from the policies, as indicated above, so long as they are supervised by the faculty. This is a recognition that our graduate students should and must receive supervised experience in teaching undergraduate students "in the field," so to speak. Supervision, however, is key. You must document that you actively supervise your teaching assistants.

Q: Is there any restriction on courses taught at high schools for dual enrollment?

A: The HLC guideline for faculty teaching dual enrollment classes (i.e., "courses taught at the high school for which students receive both high school credit and college credit") requires that "dual credit faculty members who have obtained a Master of Education degree, but not a master's degree in a discipline such as English, Communications, History, Mathematics, etc., may have preparation to satisfy HLC's expectations...the attainment of a Master of Education degree does not demonstrate a qualification to teach dual credit courses in a particular discipline unless it is demonstrated that the content of that faculty member's Master of Education degree is sufficiently related to the discipline of the dual credit course."