



# Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Overview/Primer

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**FALL PRESENTATION**

Oversight Committee Member

Fall 2025



# What is HLC?

- Independent corporation
- One of seven national accreditors in the U.S.
- Accredits degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions
- Accredits institutions as whole
- Part of the program integrity triad or three areas of oversight for U.S. higher education that operate independently: Federal government, state in which the institution is located and the **regional accrediting agency**



# Missouri State University – The Facts

- Missouri State has been continuously accredited since **1915**
- We are required to undergo comprehensive evaluations every 10 years – our last visit was **2015**
- We are part of the "open pathway" for the reaffirmation of accreditation
- The open pathway requires a "quality initiative project" (QIP) and an assurance argument with evidence – across five criteria (*now four*)
- A 4-year assurance review is completed based on an updated assurance argument with evidence – ours occurred in **2020**
- Our last QIP project started in 2022 and our final report submitted in **summer 2025** was reviewed and accepted

# Our other reporting Requirements and required approvals (*continued*)

- New programs
  - Doctor of Defense and Strategic Studies – approved July 27, 2020
  - Doctor of Occupation Therapy – approved and stipulations changed July 15, 2022
  - Doctor of Psychology approved – October 6, 2022
  - Doctor of Education in Leadership, Learning, and Educational Change – approved April 23, 2024



# Missouri State University – The Facts

- Annual reports submitted to HLC.

- IPEDS information

Examples: Accredited programs, percentage of pell eligible students, student headcount, faculty headcount, administrative headcount, # of degrees and certificates awarded, additional locations

- Financial information

Examples: Audit results, composite financial index (CFI)



# Update from Springfield HLC Oversight Team

**TEAM MEMBERS – TAMMY JAHNKE, ANDREA WEBER, MARK WOOLSEY, EGON HEIDENDAL, SHAWN WAHL, KELLY WOOD, MARY-MARGARET BOHLEN, ALGERIAN HART, CLARENDIA PHILLIPS**

- The following must be submitted in early February of 2026.
  - Assurance Argument (35,000 word limit)
  - Evidence (meeting agendas and minutes, reports, data, syllabi, learning outcomes, policy library, strategic plan, budget, audit reports, etc)
  - Federal Compliance Report
  - Student Survey



# The Four Criteria

(APPROVED BY HLC BOARD JUNE 2024)

- 1) The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.
  - a) Mission Alignment
  - b) Mission and Public Good
  - c) Mission and Diversity of Society
- 2) In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.
  - a) Integrity
  - b) Transparency
  - c) Board Governance
  - d) Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression
  - e) Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery and Application



# The Four Criteria (*continued*)

- 3) The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.
  - a) Educational Programs
  - b) Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry
  - c) Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff
  - d) Support for Student Learning and Resources for Teaching
  - e) Assessment of Student Learning
  - f) Program Review
  - g) Student Success Outcomes
- 4) The institutions resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.
  - a) Effective Administrative Structures
  - b) Resource Base and Sustainability
  - c) Planning for Quality Improvement





# Timeline

- ✓ Draft of complete assurance argument posted for campus review.  
All comments due by November 1.
- ✓ Oversight committee will work on final documents through January of 2026.
- ✓ Executive summaries will be distributed to all faculty, staff and students in February of 2026.
- ✓ Exact schedule of meetings will not be known until late March.  
Please hold March 30-31 on your calendars.

# Missouri State University – Springfield

## MARCH 30 AND 31, 2026- HLC VISIT



QR code for  
feedback on draft  
of argument

## **Criterion 1. Mission**

***The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations***

Strengths:

- Missouri State University fosters a robust, campus-wide identity with its public affairs mission.
- The 2025-2030 strategic plan, Igniting Opportunity, reaffirms the mission with a vision for MSU to become the nation's leading public affairs university. The process was shaped by faculty, students, administration, alumni and community partners which led to more clarity of the mission, vision and values.
- The university has a commitment to investing in local, regional and international partnerships, demonstrating its dedication to the public good.

Opportunities:

- While public affairs is widely identified and recognized on campus, MSU could improve by developing an overarching plan or comprehensive public affairs program to avoid duplication of efforts.
- On July 9, 2025 Governor Mike Kehoe signed legislation that granted Missouri State the authority to independently offer Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree programs. This legislation becomes effective August 28, 2025. This gives Missouri State University the opportunity to respond to workforce needs and expand academic opportunities for current and future students across Missouri.

## **Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct**

***In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.***

Strengths:

- Missouri State University has a committed board of governors that functions effectively, providing feedback and maintaining connections to the student body. The board demonstrates intentionality with its training, standards, orientation, and bylaws.
- The university's commitment to continuous improvement and transparency is evidenced through updates and online publication of the Policy Library, Faculty Handbook, Employee Handbook for Administrative, Professional, and Support Staff, and the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities.
- Transparency is demonstrated through the annual publication of student learning outcomes and student fees. All faculty use the Bright Space learning management system to post their syllabi and gradebook for all students to have access.

Opportunities:

- The use of generative artificial intelligence tools on a university campus is a challenge for faculty, staff and students. The campus community is regularly reviewing policies and procedures related to this usage. Currently only the academic integrity policy has language related to the use of artificial intelligence.
- A new University Council (UC) was formed in late 2024 to increase communication and provide vital information to stakeholders. It meets for two hours each month. During UC meetings there are presentations to update members on operations across the university and discussions addressing a variety of topics so we can collaboratively address challenges facing our university. This was a significant culture change for campus stakeholders and we continue to learn how to take advantage of this new communication style.

## **Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning for Student Success**

***The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.***

Strengths:

- Missouri State University's faculty are highly qualified. More than 90% hold a terminal degree in their field.
- Support services for students are robust and comprehensive and are available to all students – on campus, off campus and online. This includes attention to student success and a commitment to mental health.
- In 2024, MSU created the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, committed to a data-informed, customer-service oriented framework that includes the Office of Institutional Research and the Office of Assessment and Accreditation. As part of this new structure the university created an Academic Performance Management System (APS) document that describes assessment processes at the university, college, and department or school level.

#### Opportunities:

- Missouri State has a history of a robust and comprehensive program review process. However, the university paused program review during COVID. With the rebuild of the Office of Institutional Research, the university took the opportunity to develop a new program review process in 2024 and piloted this program review in spring 2025. The university has an opportunity to fully implement program review in fall 2025, using dean and faculty feedback from the pilot.
- MSU recognizes the importance of recruitment and retention. Building on years of enrollment management and student success initiatives, the university has created a new position, the Vice President of Enrollment Management during the summer of 2025.
- Faculty and administration, in the spirit of shared governance, have come to the conclusion that the current general education needs review and maybe revision. A task force will begin looking at this.

#### **Criterion 4. Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning**

***The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.***

#### Strengths:

- Missouri State University demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement in its strategic planning process. In 2024-2025, stakeholders including administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members identified shared values and five strategic goal areas in its 2025-2030 strategic plan.
- The university's budget process is made as transparent as possible through committee involvement and public communication of results, available to external, as well as internal constituents, primarily on the University's comprehensive website.
- The university is dedicated to developing its infrastructure. Numerous campus buildings have been upgraded and improved, including Blunt Hall and Kampeter Hall and Cheek Hall. New structures, such as the John Goodman Amphitheatre have been built and others are in development, including the Judith Enyeart Reynolds Performing Arts Complex and the Clifton M. Smart University Advancement Center.

#### Opportunities:

- Missouri State University is committed to improving retention and developing its strategic enrollment management (SEM) plan.
- The university has an opportunity to implement the strategic plan that was developed in 2024-2025 and approved by the board of governors in June 2025.
- The 2025–2030 Facilities Master Plan has been approved, and implementation will begin immediately. In addition, the University has redirected a substantial portion of funds previously used for property leases to strengthen the deferred maintenance budget for future needs.

