



HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

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November 12, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Rabbi Shmuel L. Schuman, Chief Executive Officer
Hebrew Theological College
7135 N. Carpenter Rd.
Skokie, IL 60077

Dear Rabbi Schuman:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Hebrew Theological College (HTC or “the Institution”). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, November 1, 2018. In taking this action, the Board considered materials from the most recent comprehensive evaluation, including, but not limited to: the Assurance Filing the Institution submitted, the report from the comprehensive evaluation team, the report of the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) Hearing Committee, and the institutional responses to these reports.

Summary of the Action: The Board determined that the Institution is no longer out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and removed the Institution from Probation and assigned interim monitoring. The Institution meets Core Component 4.B with concerns. The Institution is required to submit an Interim Report, as outlined below, no later than June 30, 2020.

Board Rationale

The Board based its action on the following findings made with regard to the Institution:

The Institution now meets without concerns Criterion Two, Core Component 2.E “the institution’s policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, students and staff,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution, in collaboration with Touro University, implemented an Institutional Review Board and processes for review of academic research conducted within current majors that have the potential for research with human subjects.
- The Institution has also established a protocol for “Human Subject Research and protections.” Owing to HTC’s modest size and limited research funding, the policy was planned with Touro University academic leaders and supported by its related communities.
- The Institution also developed new policies related to faculty research and intellectual property, which are now included in the Faculty handbook.

The Institution now meets without concerns Criterion Three, Core Component 3.C “the institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services,” for the following reasons:

- HTC has introduced several key initiatives to ensure that its faculty and staff are of adequate numbers to maintain high degree program standards and sufficient student services:
 - A strategic faculty plan was drafted in February 2017 oriented toward hiring three new full-time faculty by the fall of 2017. This plan was grounded in review of peer institutions based on Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data about faculty-to-student ratios and total full-time instructors.
 - HTC actually added four new faculty members, bringing the full-time faculty up to 15 members. Furthermore, a faculty staffing report documented that 53% of all HTC courses are taught by full-time faculty, which exceeds the 50% goal noted in the 2017 faculty strategic plan.
- As defined in the Faculty Handbook, HTC faculty possess the requisite qualifications to serve as course instructors in their respective disciplines.
- The HTC Faculty Handbook sets forth appropriate protocols for faculty evaluations. In the interviews with department chairs and deans, the team confirmed that good practice is being followed.

The Institution meets Criterion Four, Core Component 4.B “the institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning,” but with concerns for the following reasons:

- The Institutional Actions Council (IAC) Hearing revealed that the Institution has developed and is in the beginning phases of deploying course assessments using Canvas Learning Management System rubrics. The team report indicates that a foundation has been established over the past two years that should result in robust assessment processes across the Institution. According to the Chief Academic Officer, these practices will eventually be expanded to include all academic programs but have not yet had institution-wide reach.
- The Institution is in the early stages of implementing college-wide assessment and much work is yet to be done to develop and build such assessment tools and measures into the Canvas system. After the design has been created, approved by faculty, and implemented throughout the courses/programs offered at HTC, data collection and analysis will need to be aggregated and reported. Furthermore, evidence is not currently available on how the results will be used to make systematic improvements in the teaching and learning process across all programs.
- The Institution shared two examples of assessment of co-curricular programs during the IAC Hearing and described assessment in this area as the “next frontier” for the Institution.
- Specific details related to data collection, benchmarks, tools utilized, actual results, analysis, and improvements made for the majority of academic programs should be embedded within the Institution’s biannual report.

The Institution now meets Criterion Four, Core Component 4.C “the institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs,” for the following reasons:

- The visiting team found clear evidence that HTC has addressed its retention and completion issues with the appropriate policies, protocols, tools, and personnel to ensure that the Institution meets the expectations of this Core Component. The primary historical issue that created the low retention rates had to do with HTC's Israel Experience Program (IEP). To address this issue, HTC implemented a newly constructed admission rubric that created a more rigorous set of admission standards for IEP students. This vetting process produced significantly greater retention (just over 49%) among freshman-level students completing the IEP program and returning to HTC the following year. With this rubric in place, HTC anticipates reaching the 73% aggregate average for the retention of freshman-level students for fall 2019 to fall 2020, which compares favorably with the national average.
- Through HTC's merger with the Touro College and University Systems (TCUS), the Institution has gained access to state-of-the-art technologies and software programs that provide it with immediate access to the various reports on retention and completion for each student. The Banner and Tableau software systems now provide the raw data, which empowers HTC to more effectively evaluate its at-risk students. HTC has employed and empowered a number of personnel to fully engage this data for applying the intervention necessary to assist its students in persisting through their respective degrees. The Banner and Tableau systems also support the data collection process for the annual IPEDS report and reports for the Illinois Department of Education related to enrollment and retention.

The Institution now meets without concerns Criterion Five, Core Component 5.A “the institution’s resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future,” for the following reasons:

- Sufficient evidence (audited and unaudited financial statements, review of CFI, budget reports produced by Banner, interview with the chair of the Board budget committee) was provided during the team's visit to conclude that HTC’s financial stability, and HTC’s achievement of its financial goals established by TCUS, have been satisfactorily addressed. This was demonstrated by HTC’s history and projection of financial support from TCUS, including both operational and capital funds, and reinstatement of its federal student aid (Title IV) eligibility.
- In 2016 and 2017 HTC integrated its previously disparate finance, human resources, and student systems to the Touro One system based on Banner by Ellucian. This provides ready access to data and reports needed to inform decision making.
- HTC is currently in the process of acquiring a new property featuring 22 classrooms/ laboratory spaces and 22 offices for the men's college. A benefactor is providing an interest-free loan for the acquisition. Potential growth in the Institution’s graduate programs is being considered.

The Institution now meets without concerns Criterion Five, Core Component 5.B “the institution’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission,” for the following reasons:

- HTC has demonstrated progress in the development, dissemination and implementation of written policies and procedures that clearly define qualifications, duties, roles, and responsibilities of employees, including systematic evaluation of employee performance and a written framework for local governance involving all constituents of HTC.
- HTC’s Faculty Senate controls all teaching and learning initiatives pertaining to the Institution. This body meets at least once per semester and deploys several committees to gather information and make decisions. The Faculty Senate is also attended by student government representatives from each campus, thereby empowering undergraduates with a strong voice to be heard on major academic matters.
- Students participate in course evaluations and annual surveys that are reviewed at Senior Leadership Meetings and by the Faculty Senate.
- A faculty meeting is held once per semester to become better informed and vote on general academic matters. The faculty role in governance is described fully in the Faculty Handbook.

The Institution now meets Criterion Five, Core Component 5.D “the institution works systematically to improve its performance,” for the following reason:

- HTC has established a systematic, data-driven, and repeatable process with concomitant procedures to evaluate its institutional effectiveness, and the Institution has developed, approved and implemented faculty and employee handbooks.

The Institution has demonstrated that it is otherwise in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, Assumed Practices and Federal Compliance requirements, and can therefore be removed from Probation.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Interim Report: The Board required that the Institution submit an Interim Report no later than June 30, 2020, regarding Core Component 4.B.

Comprehensive Evaluation: The Institution has been placed on the Standard Pathway with its next comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation in 2022-23.

HLC Disclosure Obligations

The Board action resulted in changes that will be reflected in the Institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status as well as the Institutional Status and Requirements Report. The Statement of

Accreditation Status, including the dates of the last and next comprehensive evaluation visits, will be posted to the HLC website.

Information about this action is provided to members of the public and to other constituents in several ways. In accordance with HLC policy,¹ this Action Letter and the enclosed Public Disclosure Notice will be posted to HLC's website not more than 24 hours after this letter is sent to the Institution.

HLC policy² requires that a summary of Board actions be sent to appropriate state and federal agencies and accrediting associations. It also will be published on HLC's website. The summary will include this HLC action regarding the Institution.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, thank you in advance for your cooperation. If you have questions about any of the information in this letter, please contact your HLC Staff Liaison, Dr. Mary Vanis.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Enc: Public Disclosure Notice

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Hebrew Theological College
Zev Eleff, Chief Academic Officer, Hebrew Theological College
Evaluation Team Chair
IAC Hearing Committee Chair
Stephanie Bernoteit, Deputy Director for Academic Affairs, Illinois Board of Higher Education
Mary Vanis, Vice President for Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission
Anthea Sweeney, Vice President for Legal and Governmental Affairs, Higher Learning Commission

¹ INST.G.10.010, Management of Commission Information

² COMM.A.10.010, Commission Public Notices and Statements