

July 17, 2024

BY CERTIFIED MAIL

Dr. Leslie Hannah
Interim President
Bacone College
2299 Old Bacone Road
Muskogee, OK 74403-1568

Dear President Hannah:

This letter is formal notification that the action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) to withdraw accreditation from Bacone College (“the Institution”) is now final. As you know, at its meeting on June 27, 2024, the Board acted to withdraw the accreditation of the Institution. This action was communicated to the Institution via an action letter dated July 2, 2024.

As an adverse action, the Board’s action to withdraw accreditation was subject to appeal. Therefore, the action was not a final action until the later of (1) the expiration of the time period in which to appeal if no appeal was filed; or (2) the conclusion of the appeal if an appeal was filed.

The deadline for the Institution to file its intent to appeal was July 16, 2024. The Institution did not notify HLC of its intent to appeal by this date. Therefore, in accordance with HLC procedure, the Institution has forfeited its opportunity to appeal the action.

Withdrawal of Accreditation Effective Date: In accordance with HLC policy INST.E.60.010, Denial or Withdrawal of Status, once final, an action to withdraw accreditation is effective the later of either (1) the date on which degrees are conferred following the conclusion of the current academic term in which students are enrolled, if any, or (2) the date on which the action becomes final if there is no such academic term in progress.

In accordance with this policy, the withdrawal of accreditation from the Institution is effective as of July 17, 2024.

Basis for Withdrawal of Accreditation: At its meeting on June 27, 2024, the Board acted to withdraw the accreditation of Bacone College because the Institution was found to be out of compliance with HLC requirements. The Board determined that the Institution did not meet Core Components 2.C, 3.B, 3.C, 3.D, 5.A, 5.B, and 5.C. The Institution did not meet Assumed Practices D.1, D.3, and D.5 and Eligibility Requirements #8, #10, #12, and #15. Additionally, the Institution met Core Components 4.A and 4.B with concerns.

Board Rationale: The Board based its action on the following findings made with regard to the Institution as well as the entire record before the Board:

Bacone College (“the Institution”) does not meet Criterion Two, Core Component 2.C, “the governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution’s integrity,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution lacks appropriate attention to its fiduciary responsibilities, including that there is very limited interaction between the Institution’s board of trustees, and the Chief Financial Officer and there is a history of many trustees not attending regular meetings of the Institution’s board of trustees.
- The Institution’s board of trustees has not reviewed or approved an annual budget.
- The Institution’s board of trustees has operated for many years with inadequate structures and policies. While the Institution’s board of trustees is interested in creating policies and procedures related to the discharge of its duties, along with an evaluation process, these plans are in the infancy stages with a significant amount of work still needed to construct a strong and efficient board of trustees.

The Institution does not meet Criterion Three, Core Component 3.B, “the institution offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments,” for the following reason:

- The Institution has suspended new enrollment and ceased offering courses and programs until at least fall 2025. Its enrollment for spring 2024 consisted of a small number of students who were scheduled to complete in May 2024. Therefore, the Institution will not be offering programs for at least one academic year.

The Institution does not meet 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:

- Some administrators taught courses during the spring 2024 term. However, the Institution intends to eliminate instructors from its payroll after May 2024.
- While the Institution had nine employees during the spring 2024 term, the Institution has indicated that it will be unable to make payroll for more than two employees after May 2024.
- Because the Institution has suspended new enrollment, will not offer courses or programs and will employ as few as two administrative personnel for at least one academic year, it does not have the faculty and staff to support high-quality programs and student services.

The Institution does not meet Criterion Three, Core Component 3.D, “the institution provides support for student learning and resources for effective teaching,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution has suspended new enrollment until at least fall 2025 and until enrollment resumes, the Institution will only employ a skeleton staff.
- During the spring 2024 term, the Institution’s remaining staff were prioritizing the needs of the current students to ensure that they were able to graduate by May 2024, after which, the Institution will not have dedicated faculty and student learning staff.
- Because the Institution does not have dedicated faculty and student learning staff, due to the fact that it has suspended new enrollment and ceased offering courses and programs, it lacks the ability to effectively support student learning and effective teaching.

The Institution meets, but with concerns, Criterion Four, Core Component 4.A, “the institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution successfully completed some comprehensive program reviews. However, these programs were subsequently eliminated. The Institution has placed on hold the expansion of its program review process and anticipates restructuring the process next year.
- Because of the Institution’s suspension of new enrollment and reduction in staff, it will be exceedingly difficult for the Institution to improve or continue with its program review processes, despite having built a good foundation and processes. Similarly, given the circumstances, the Institution will not be able to maintain the current processes and practices of regular program reviews, nor will it be able to act upon the findings of program reviews.

The Institution meets, but with concerns, Criterion Four, Core Component 4.B, “the institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution’s current under-resourced situation precludes it from implementing its recently developed assessment tools for remaining programs that could potentially be offered in the future.
- While the Institution has created a foundation on which to build assessment processes, without enrolled students or courses offered after May 2024, the Institution may be unable to fully implement its plans regarding assessment of student learning.

The Institution does not meet Criterion Five, Core Component 5.A, “through its administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution’s leadership demonstrates that it is effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission,” for the following reason:

- The Institution has suspended new enrollment and ceased offering courses or programs until at least fall 2025 and has not had enrolled students since May 2024. The Institution cannot fulfill its mission if it is neither offering courses nor enrolling students.

The Institution does not meet Criterion Five, Core Component 5.B, “the institution’s resource base supports its educational offerings and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution only had funds to cover payroll for its remaining employees through the end of May 2024.
- The Institution does not have audited financial statements for FY22 and FY23. Due to this, the Institution lost eligibility to participate in Title IV programs.
- While the Institution offered several ideas for creating possible revenue streams, the Institution does not have the resource base needed to execute its plans to move forward and cover the expenses currently facing the Institution, which include, but are not limited to, deferred maintenance, a legal judgment, payroll, and utilities.

The Institution does not meet Criterion Five, Core Component 5.C, “the institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution does not have a sufficient cash reserve or a well-defined enrollment management plan.
- The Institution has suspended new enrollment and ceased offering courses and programs until at least fall 2025, and there is no articulated plan for recruiting students back to the

- Institution or for hiring personnel to serve students thereafter.
- The Institution lacks the systematic and integrated planning to achieve the improvement necessary for a successful turnaround from its current state.
 - The lack of audited financial statements evidences the Institution's inability to engage in sufficient fiscal planning.

The Institution does not meet Assumed Practice D.1, "the institution is able to meet its current financial obligations," for the reasons noted above under Core Component 5.B.

The Institution does not meet Assumed Practice D.3, "the institution has future financial projections addressing its long-term financial sustainability," for the reasons noted above under Core Component 5.B and Core Component 5.C.

The Institution does not meet Assumed Practice D.5, "the institution undergoes an external audit by a certified public accountant or a public audit agency that reports financial statements on the institution separately from any other related entity or parent corporation. For private institutions the audit is annual; for public institutions it is at least every two years," for the reasons noted above under Core Component 5.B.

The Institution does not meet Eligibility Requirement #8, "[t]he institution has the financial base to support its operations and sustain them in the future. It demonstrates a record of responsible fiscal management, including appropriate debt levels," for the reasons noted above under Core Component 5.B and Core Component 5.C.

The Institution does not meet Eligibility Requirement #10, "[t]he institution employs faculty and other academic personnel appropriately qualified and sufficient in number to support its academic programs," for the reasons noted above under Core Components 3.C and 3.D.

The Institution does not meet Eligibility Requirement #12, "[t]he institution makes available to its students support services appropriate for its mission, such as advising, academic records, financial aid, and placement," for the reasons noted above under Core Component 3.D.

The Institution does not meet Eligibility Requirement #15, "[t]he institution has students enrolled in its degree programs," because the Institution ceased offering courses and enrolling students after its spring term was completed in May 2024, with this suspension to remain in place until at least fall 2025. During this period, the Institution will not have students enrolled in its degree programs and thus, will not be actively operating as an institution of higher education.

Institutional Disclosure Obligation: HLC policy¹ requires that an institution inform its constituencies, including Board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students, prospective students, and any other constituencies about the withdrawal of accreditation and how to contact HLC for further information. The policy also requires that an institution disclose that HLC withdrew the Institution's accreditation whenever it refers to its HLC accreditation.

The action letter dated July 2, 2024, previously required the Institution to notify its constituencies about the withdrawal of accreditation, including that it was not final and was subject to appeal.

¹ INST.E.60.010, Denial or Withdrawal of Status.

As the action is now final, at a minimum, the Institution must now also provide a copy of this action letter to its governing board, administration, and faculty and provide a copy of the enclosed Public Disclosure Notice to its currently enrolled students. Once disclosures have been made, the Institution must submit copies of its disclosure documents as a single .pdf file to www.hlcommission.org/upload (by selecting “Information about Institutional Disclosures”) no later than seven (7) business days following receipt of this action letter. HLC will retain this information as part of the Institution’s record.

HLC Disclosure Obligations: The Board action resulted in changes that are 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 comprehensive evaluation visit, is posted to the HLC website. In accordance with HLC policy,² information about this action is provided to members of the public and to other constituents in several ways. This action letter and the enclosed Public Disclosure Notice will be posted to HLC’s website not more than one business day after this letter is sent to the Institution. Additionally, a summary of Board actions will be sent to appropriate state and federal agencies and accrediting associations. This summary also will be published on HLC’s website. The summary will include this HLC action regarding the Institution.

Reapplication Following Withdrawal of Accreditation: In accordance with HLC policy INST.E.80.010, Reapplication Following a Denial or Withdrawal of Status, the Board will not consider an application for initial accreditation or candidacy from Institution until a period of at least two years has elapsed following the date the withdrawal action became effective.

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. John Marr.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Enc: Public Disclosure Notice

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Bacone College
Rebecca Truelove, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs, Bacone College
John Marr, Vice President of Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission
Marla Morgen, Vice President and General Counsel, Higher Learning Commission
Herman Bounds, Director, Accreditation Group, Office of Postsecondary Education, U.S.
Department of Education

² COMMA.10.010, Notice of Accreditation Actions, HLC Public Notices and Public Statements