

July 2, 2024

BY CERTIFIED MAIL

Dr. Tyrone Jackson
President
Southeast Arkansas College
1900 Hazel Street
Pine Bluff, AR 71603-3900

Dear President Jackson:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Southeast Arkansas College (“the Institution”). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, June 27, 2024. 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 Institution has been placed on Probation because it is out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. The Institution meets Core Components 4.A and 4.B with concerns. The Institution does not meet Core Components 4.C, 5.A, and 5.C. The Institution is required to host a comprehensive evaluation for Probation no later than December 2025 to determine whether the Institution has ameliorated the findings that led to the imposition of the sanction.

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 sanction and how to contact HLC for further information. The policy also requires that an institution on sanction disclose this status whenever it refers to its HLC accreditation. HLC will monitor these disclosures to ensure they are accurate and in keeping with HLC policy. The Institution must submit drafts of its planned disclosures to these various audiences to its HLC Staff Liaison in advance of transmission and provide its Staff Liaison with a link to relevant information on its website. At a minimum, an institution must: i) provide a copy of this Action Letter to its governing board, administration, and faculty, ii) provide a copy of the enclosed Public Disclosure Notice to its currently enrolled students, and iii) prominently display the Mark of Accreditation Status where accreditation status is described on its website. 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

¹ INST.E.20.010, Probation.

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.

Provisional Plan: HLC policy also requires that the Institution file a Provisional Plan with HLC for review and approval by the Institutional Actions Council according to HLC’s substantive change procedures. This Provisional Plan must comport with HLC’s requirements for Provisional Plans.² The Institution must submit its Provisional Plan within 90 calendar days of this letter.

Substantive Change: HLC policy³ states that while an institution may file one or more applications for substantive change during the probationary period, such applications will be subject to strict scrutiny and are likely to be denied or deferred until after the probationary period. HLC policy also requires that an institution placed on Probation be subject to additional requirements for substantive change during the probationary period and for three (3) years following the removal of Probation.⁴

Notification Program: HLC policy⁵ states that an institution placed on Probation is ineligible for the Notification Program for Additional Locations for three (3) years following the removal of Probation, even if other requirements for the Notification Program are met.

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:

Southeast Arkansas College (“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 has newly-created interrelated processes for program review that will strengthen academic program review.
- The Institution has created a template for, and conducted a pilot of, a biennial program review process that will be conducted for each academic program in alternating years. The Institution needs additional time to demonstrate that the process is regularized and produces data used in institutional decision-making.

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 has formalized the processes for assessment, data analysis, and reporting timelines and expectations for assessment activities, but needs to operationalize these activities over a period of time to demonstrate their sustainability and effectiveness.

² FDCR.B.10.010, HLC Approval of Institutional Teach-Out Arrangements.

³ INST.E.20.010, Probation.

⁴ INST.F.20.040, Substantive Change.

⁵ INST.E.20.010, Probation.

- The Institution recently appointed a Program Evaluation and Assessment Committee to provide oversight and guidance for such activities, but the group has not yet functioned long enough to demonstrate its effectiveness.
- The Institution has recently implemented a new assessment process, but it has yet to be in place long enough to demonstrate that the assessment activities and resulting actions have improved students' learning. Sustained assessment cycles, data analysis, and documented action designed to improve student learning will allow the Institution to determine the effectiveness of these new assessment processes and to determine that they lead to improved student learning.

The Institution does not meet Criterion Four, Core Component 4.C, “the institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution has made strides in defining goals for student retention, persistence, and completion over the past few years and has started to share some data with faculty and staff, but the Institution must sustain these activities over time, which will take ongoing effort and cultural change.
- The Institution has begun including retention, persistence, and completion data in its recently instituted biennial program reviews, but the institution must now use this data effectively to make demonstrable improvements.

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 reasons:

- While the Institution has recently initiated some institutional committees to involve the Institution’s community, seek a broader audience, and become more transparent in its practices, the Institution’s use of data to reach informed decisions is in its infancy, and more time is needed to ensure these recent practices are sustained and effective.
- The Institution has a recently developed enrollment management plan, which the Institution must now use to make informed decisions in planning and budgeting processes.
- The Institution’s resources, structures, and processes are not yet a part of the Institution’s culture for planning and budgeting. This results in a lack of consistency that leads to reactive decisions, rather than proactively planning and allocating revenues for future challenges and opportunities.

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:

- Systematic and integrated planning is still an area of development for the Institution and is not yet at a level of maturity to demonstrate effective alignment of operations and institutional goals and objectives.
- The Institution’s strategic plan does not reflect systematic goals that are integrated into a defined planning process. Rather, the Institution’ strategic plan is a set of

initiatives categorized into “key initiatives” which appear to be individual, discrete actions the institution has committed to complete.

- The Institution does not sufficiently measure milestones or benchmarks to evaluate progress in achieving objectives. The Institution does not have a practical, systematic, well-deployed approach in place for data and information selection, collection, alignment, and tracking to support overall organizational performance.

The Board of Trustees of the Higher Learning Commission has determined based on the preceding findings and evidence in the record that the Institution has demonstrated that it is not in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and should therefore be placed on Probation.

Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

Assurance Filing: The Board required that the Institution submit an Assurance Filing at least eight weeks prior to the comprehensive evaluation for Probation providing evidence that the Institution has ameliorated the findings of noncompliance identified in this action that resulted in the imposition of Probation and the findings of Met with Concerns, and providing evidence that the Institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation and Federal Compliance Requirements.

Comprehensive Evaluation: The Institution will host a comprehensive evaluation for Probation no later than December 2025 to enable a team of peer reviewers to determine whether the Institution has ameliorated the findings of noncompliance that led to the imposition of Probation and whether the Institution otherwise meets the Criteria for Accreditation, and to make a recommendation about whether the Board should remove Probation or take other action.

Board Review: The Board will review the documents associated with the comprehensive evaluation for Probation at its June 2026 meeting to determine whether Probation shall be removed, or if the Institution has not provided sufficient evidence of amelioration as noted above, whether other action should be taken, up to and including withdrawal of accreditation.

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.

In accordance with HLC policy,⁶ 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.

⁶ COMMA.10.010, Notice of Accreditation Actions, HLC Public Notices and Public Statements

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. Andrew Lootens-White.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Gellman-Danley".

Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Enc: Public Disclosure Notice

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Southeast Arkansas College
Stacy Pfluger, Provost, Southeast Arkansas College
Evaluation Team Chair
IAC Hearing Committee Chair
Andrew Lootens-White, Vice President of Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission
Marla Morgen, Vice President and General Counsel, Higher Learning Commission
Ken Warden, Commissioner, Arkansas Division of Higher Education
Herman Bounds, Director, Accreditation Group, Office of Postsecondary Education, U.S. Department of Education