

# 2022 ASSURANCE ARGUMENT

Executive Summary

Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C®) is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and has continuously been accredited as one entity since 1971. (Each campus was individually accredited in years prior.)

During its last HLC reaffirmation of accreditation (2017-2018), the College participated in the AQIP Pathway process and was permitted to choose between two new pathways: Open or Standard. Administration chose the 10-Year Open Pathway, available only to well-performing institutions, which provides mechanisms for continuous improvement.

During the current accreditation cycle, Tri-C must periodically review and document its continuous improvement efforts and adherence to the HLC's five Criteria for Accreditation. The first such report is the Four-Year Assurance Filing, due in June 2022. This narrative document with linked evidence demonstrates the College's performance according to established HLC criteria and core components.

This executive summary provides a high-level overview of the five criteria and their embedded core components, along with specific examples of our responses. The full report with linked evidence is available through the Board portal.

## **Overview: Criteria for Accreditation**

The [Criteria for Accreditation](#) are measurements of quality that determine whether the College merits accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation based on evaluation tools used and reports submitted during the accreditation cycle.

The five criteria address vital components of higher learning institution operations:

### **Criterion 1. Mission**

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

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

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### **Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support**

The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

### **Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement**

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

### **Criterion 5. Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning**

The institution's resources, structures and processes are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Within each criterion are several core components to which the College must respond. Supporting evidence is also provided to demonstrate that Tri-C has met or exceeded the expected outcomes. Evidence comes in many forms — including, but not limited to: policies and procedures, meeting

minutes, approved budgets and institutional data.

## Highlights and Examples From Assurance Argument

### Criterion 1

**Core Component (1.B.3): The institution engages with its external constituencies and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.**

Engagement with external constituencies allows faculty, staff and students to make connections that strengthen the community and the College, facilitate service-learning opportunities and support retention and completion efforts.

The College also supports external constituencies and programs through the establishment of advisory committees [\[3354:30-01.1 \(E.\)\]](#) in which staff and faculty collaborate with community, business and government leaders to ensure curriculum is current, relevant and of economic value to the community and local employers.

Each year, Tri-C recognizes outstanding advisory committees for their work and contributions toward ensuring student success. Members of the Business Advisory Committee and IT Center of Excellence Committee were honored at the [2021 Advisory Committee, Community Champion and Outstanding Alumni Awards](#) virtual ceremony.

Tri-C has expanded the traditional community college concept of access to create an intentional approach for supporting new students and increasing community engagement. The College's [Institute for Community Engagement and Development](#) oversees three components of the College's effort to meet individuals in their communities and respond to their needs:

- [Access Centers](#) — A collaboration with community partners in Tri-C-branded locations to deliver college resources, college preparation, training and education in underserved neighborhoods. Current partners include [Esperanza Inc.](#), [MetroHealth Medical Center](#), [Olivet Housing and Community Development Corp.](#) and [Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority](#).
- [Central Community Partners](#) — Partners who invite the College to bring resources, college preparation and training and education into a community-based setting for the short and/or intermediate term.
- [Community Training and Job Hubs](#) — Partnerships with local businesses that connect individuals to training, education and workforce opportunities in their industry.

Under the Institute's infrastructure, these three initiatives share best practices, expand knowledge of learning in underserved communities through research, and create a comprehensive pipeline to campus-based resources and learning.

The [Tri-C Council for Community Access and Development](#) is a group of notable corporate, nonprofit and civic leaders and representatives from diverse industry sectors who assist the College in responding to the educational and workforce access needs of economically challenged communities throughout Northeast Ohio.

New partnerships are established based on alignment with the College mission, student interest and industry demand. Potential partners are vetted for their level of commitment to Tri-C and its students, for alignment with the College's mission, and for their ability to fulfill their obligations.

The [Office of Government Relations and Community Affairs](#) works directly with elected officials and their staff to determine their needs and share how the College can support them and their constituents.

The office also delivers a quarterly electronic newsletter highlighting College events and programs of interest, tracking the readership and open rates of each. The February 2021 edition, [Moving Forward in the Age of COVID-19](#), was read by 450 constituents with an open rate of 37% — exceeding the industry average of 19.5%. Recipients may also send comments by replying within the email.

Constituent relationships are built and maintained through regular communication and activities such as outreach events, surveys, advisory committee participation, Foundation events, community partnership participation and credit and noncredit course offerings.

Many of these relationships are formalized in written articulation agreements and/or memorandums of understanding that detail the expectations of each party.

## Criterion 2

**Core Component (2.C.1): The governing board is trained and knowledgeable so that it makes informed decisions with respect to the institution’s financial and academic policies and practices; the board meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.**

Per the Cuyahoga Community College District Board of Trustees Bylaws [[3354:1-10-01](#)], the Board comprises nine trustees who, in collaboration with the College president, are charged with fulfilling the goals set forth in the College’s mission statement. The College president also serves as Board Secretary. The Board has the authority to act as the governing body in all College policy matters requiring attention or action. Only the trustees have voting power.

Three trustees are appointed to the Board by the governor; the remainder are appointed by the Cuyahoga County executive. Each is appointed for a five-year term or the remainder of a vacated term. Upon appointment, Board members receive information regarding their role and responsibilities as well as an overview of the institution, its mission and its culture. New trustees are also paired with an experienced Board mentor who provides guidance and instruction.

Trustees are expected to attend an [annual Board retreat](#) and to participate in various state and national conferences and seminars as their schedules allow. Further training and development are provided at the annual [Association of Community College Trustees Leadership Congress](#).

Per College policy [3354:1-10-03](#), the Board includes six standing committees:

- Executive Committee
- Community Affairs Committee
- Access, Learning and Success Committee
- Management Committee
- Investment Committee
- Audit Committee

Each committee includes three Board members, an executive vice president and other appropriate staff. Committees meet seven times a year and receive reports from relevant programs across the College, which are then shared in regular reports to the full Board. Board committees also consider action items

related to financial and academic policies and practices in order to fulfill the Board's legal and fiduciary responsibilities.

### Criterion 3

**Core Component (3.B.1): The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings and degree levels of the institution. The institution articulates the purpose content and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements.**

Tri-C offers accessible and affordable educational programs focused on university transfer, technical skill acquisition, workforce preparation and lifelong learning. All five degree types require a subset of approved general education courses — known as the [Ohio Transfer 36 \(OT36\)](#) — which are guaranteed to transfer to a four-year public college or university.

- Associate of Arts: 36 gen ed credits focused on arts/humanities and social/behavioral sciences
- Associate of Science: 39 gen ed credits focused on math and physical/natural sciences
- Associate of Applied Science/Business or Associate of Technical Studies: 15 gen ed credits, with remainder focused on career-specific knowledge and skills

See [Degree and Certificate Program Requirements](#) for additional information.

Tri-C's Essential Learning Outcomes (Civic responsibility, Critical/creative thinking, Cultural sensitivity, Information literacy, Oral communication, Written communication and Quantitative reasoning) align with the College's mission, vision and values. ELOs are published in the [College Catalog](#), on a [dedicated ELO webpage](#) and within [course outlines](#) and syllabi. Many technical courses also align with at least one ELO, ensuring that all Tri-C graduates achieve these outcomes. Overall, almost 70% of all non-trade courses currently map to at least one ELO.

Results of the [2018 Community College Survey of Student Engagement \(CCSSE\)](#) show that Tri-C students are successfully engaging with the ELOs.

- **Oral communication:** 74% indicated that they sometimes, often or very often were required to give a presentation as part of their coursework.
- **Written communication:** 80% indicated that they sometimes, often or very often had to prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before submitting it.
- **Critical thinking:** 98% indicated that Tri-C coursework emphasized the need to analyze basic elements of an idea, experience or theory some, quite a bit or very much.
- **New ideas:** 96% indicated that Tri-C coursework had caused them to form a new idea or gain greater understanding.
- **Making judgments:** 90% indicated that Tri-C coursework emphasized making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments or methods some, quite a bit or very much.
- **Applying theories:** 90% indicated that Tri-C coursework involved applying theories or concepts to practical problems in new situations some, quite a bit or very much.

## Criterion 4

### **Core Component (4.B.1): The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and co-curricular offerings.**

Tri-C's Committee on Learning Outcomes Assessment (CLOA) created a [standard assessment process, standardized rubrics and guides](#) and a three-year assessment cycle for the College's Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs). Assessment results are published annually on a [dedicated website](#). This process is currently undergoing a procedural revision, expanding the collection and assessment of artifacts to include all courses mapped to at least one ELO.

The [Align it All initiative](#) strives to increase faculty participation in the assessment of ELOs and provide sufficient data to effectively assess student learning. Presently, assignments from randomly selected course sections are collected for ELO assessment on a three-year cycle. With Align it All, faculty teaching course sections aligned with certain ELOs must align and collect a specific assignment for assessment. This method was piloted with the Cultural Sensitivity ELO in Fall 2021. At the midpoint of the semester, more courses had produced aligned assignments than had done so during the entire previous assessment cycle for that ELO.

CLOA is also piloting a [standard global assessment for the Quantitative Reasoning ELO](#). Both approaches will be evaluated and used to guide all future assessment levels at the College.

In fall 2017, CLOA began working to establish a three-year assessment plan for all applied degree programs. As part of this effort, program faculty developed standard rubrics for each program outcome, performed regular assessments and used data to make informed decisions regarding adjustments to improve student learning.

In fall 2020, recognizing that program assessment data was not being shared with College administration in a meaningful way, CLOA members developed an annual survey to collect this data from each program. Currently, 62% of all Tri-C programs have reported their latest assessment data (see [Compiled Program Assessment Results](#)). Health career graduates' [certification/licensure exam pass rates](#) are one example of assessment data that is critical to evaluating program success.

When Tri-C was accepted into the HLC Assessment Academy in fall 2017, faculty and administrators determined that the team project would focus on course-level outcomes assessment. Not only did this focus area align with faculty interests and commitment, it also provided an opportunity to close the loop between assessment, curriculum and teaching — an area HLC feedback had previously identified as needing improvement.

The Academy project focused on the Top 10 disciplines with highest enrollment, providing opportunities for faculty development, dialogue with counterparts and, most importantly, curricular and teaching improvements based on assessment results. Eight assessment teams collected artifacts in Fall 2018 and Spring 2019, encompassing 10,970 students in the first semester alone. The project resulted in a standardized process for course-level assessment, including individualized training packets tailored to specific disciplines. See [HLC Assessment Academy Report](#), [HLC Course-level Assessment Manual](#), [HLC Course-level Assessment Info Guide for Artifact Collection](#) and [ENG-1010 Course-level Rubric](#).

Before 2017, most data collected for cocurricular assessment related to student satisfaction and/or participation. CLOA has since partnered with campus Student Life directors to create an outcomes-based model for cocurricular assessment, resulting in a protocol wherein outcomes are written for all Student Life events. These outcomes are mapped to ELOs where appropriate. Prior to each event, a focused assessment is defined to measure associated outcomes. (See [Learning Activity Reflection](#) and

[Engagement Activity Reflection](#) grading rubrics.)

This outcomes-based approach to cocurricular events has been successful and is now applied to individual events, student clubs and other Student Life programming. As a part of this new approach, the College's Student Life directors have created a [four-year cycle for assessing various clubs and cocurricular activities cycle](#) on their campuses.

## Criterion 5

**Core Component (5.A.1): Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.**

The special competence and interests of each constituency are recognized and provided for within the Collegewide participatory governance policy [[3354:1-30-05](#)] and shared governance structure (see Appendix L of the [AAUP Agreement](#)).

Tri-C's eight standing governance committees function in an environment of mutual respect, good faith and common institutional interest and are committed to gathering information, deliberating issues in light of that information and reaching reasoned recommendations.

- Committee on Curriculum and Degree Requirements (CADRE)
- Committee on Learning Outcomes Assessment (CLOA)
- Committee on Enrollment Management
- Committee on Technology
- Committee on Planning and Institutional Effectiveness
- Committee on Human Resources and Policy
- Committee on Governance Monitoring
- Committee on Safety

These committees — made up of faculty, staff, students, administrators and union representatives — meet regularly to discuss annual charges, identified by the provost and each committee's administrative chair and approved by the College president. (See [CADRE AY 21-22 Membership and Charges](#) as an example.) Administration takes committee recommendations under advisement and is responsible and accountable for their implementation.

Additionally, numerous cross-functional contract committees exist to address topics such as faculty evaluation and academic calendar scheduling. These committees provide opportunities for faculty and administration to plan for and address Collegewide academic issues on an ongoing basis or as needed.

In support of this shared governance model, the College president holds a monthly meeting of the President's Council, made up of faculty senate officers and executive management. Agenda items generally include updates and discussions on academic issues, human resources or information technology issues and, most recently, pandemic planning. See [Dec. 15, 2021 agenda](#) as an example.

Students are represented in shared governance discussions through participation on governance committees and by the board student scholar, who serves as an ex-officio member of the full board. The board student scholar is selected annually by the Joint Student Council in accordance with College policy [3354:1-30-04](#).

## Next Steps Toward Reaffirmation of Accreditation

1. Once the 2022 Assurance Argument receives Board approval, the Office of Learning and Engagement will submit the report and evidence by the June deadline. HLC will assign a team of experienced peer reviewers to read and analyze the report and evidence. They will determine if Tri-C has *met* or *not met* each criterion and core component and submit those recommendations to the HLC's Institutional Actions Committee. The committee will further review and act on these recommendations. Results should be communicated by October 2022.
2. Tri-C will engage in a comprehensive, Collegewide continuous improvement project during academic years 2023 through 2027.
3. In AY 27-28, the College will submit a final assurance argument and host a team of HLC peer reviewers, who will submit recommendations to the Institutional Actions Committee for action.