

Higher Learning Commission Faculty Qualifications Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What are the new guidelines?**

To be more in line with other accrediting bodies in the U.S., the HLC adopted a clarification to its Assumed Practice B.2., which focuses on faculty roles and qualifications. Their latest guidelines, which go into effect starting September 1, 2017, can be found on their [website](#).¹ In short, the revised guidelines state the following:

- Instructors must possess an academic degree relevant to what they are teaching and at least one level above the level at which they teach.
- Qualified faculty members are identified primarily by credentials, but other factors, including but not limited to equivalent experience, may be considered by the institution in determining whether a faculty member is qualified.
 - When faculty members are employed based on equivalent experience, the institution needs to define a minimum threshold of experience and an evaluation process that is used in the appointment process.
- Faculty teaching general education courses, or other non-occupational courses, should hold a master's degree or higher in the discipline or subfield.
 - If a faculty member holds a master's degree or higher in a discipline or subfield other than that in which he or she is teaching, that faculty member should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which they teach.

2. **When do the new guidelines go into effect?**

The revised assumed practice is effective starting September 1, 2017. We must be in compliance by that time. This means all faculty (full-time and part-time) must have the requisite qualifications to teach the courses they're teaching by then. We join all community colleges in the state as interpreting the deadline this way.

3. **How do the new guidelines affect me?**

Many of you are not affected at all and can continue to teach the courses you usually teach. Others of you may find yourselves needing to accrue additional graduate credits or other credentials to continue to teach the courses you usually teach by the time the guidelines go into effect.

4. **To what extent is Jackson College's Adjunct Certification Process related to these HLC revised guidelines?**

JC's Adjunct Certification process and the HLC revised guidelines are *completely separate*. The new guidelines apply equally to both Adjuncts and Master Adjuncts.

5. **What is Jackson College doing in response to these new guidelines?**

Over the Summer and Fall of 2016, a team of at least two people, including the Provost, deans, and the Director of Instructional Innovation, met with each lead faculty member to discuss the faculty qualifications needed for each of the courses we offer. We also have reviewed the academic transcripts and earned credentials of hundreds of JC's faculty members (full-time and part-time) so far to determine what courses they would be qualified to teach under the revised guidelines.

6. **What did/does the review of adjunct faculty qualifications involve?**

Discipline by discipline, the appropriate dean, lead faculty, and/or the Director of Instructional Innovation have met to review adjunct transcripts and qualifications. For some of the larger disciplines, multiple

¹ http://download.hlcommission.org/FacultyGuidelines_2016_OPB.pdf

meetings were necessary. Adjunct faculty are sent a letter indicating the results of their review. Please note that if you teach in multiple disciplines, you should receive separate letter(s) regarding your eligibility to continue to teach in each discipline.

7. I teach general education courses, and my master's degree is in a field other than the subject that I teach. My letter stated that I don't have the requisite 18 graduate credits to meet HLC's revised guidelines, but I would argue that I do. What can I do to make my case?

You are encouraged to compile supporting documentation for the credits that you think should count towards the 18 minimum. Supporting documentation usually includes course descriptions and syllabi and can also include textbooks. Contact Kate Thirolf at thirolfkathrynq@jccmi.edu to share these materials and make your case.

8. I teach general education courses and don't have the 18 graduate credits to keep teaching what I have been teaching. I have decided to go back to school to accrue additional graduate credits. Anything I should know as I start looking into coursework options?

There are two things you should be aware of:

- First, we have an agreement with Eastern Michigan University to offer discounted tuition for approved JC faculty (\$400/credit hour and no fees). Please contact Kate Thirolf for more information about this opportunity by emailing JCAAdjunctSupport@jccmi.edu. (Do not register for EMU's courses without getting approval first!)
- Also, every year adjunct faculty can receive up to \$500 of external professional development funding (as long as the budget allotment is available). This is a rare benefit that not many colleges provide to adjunct faculty. Apply early, as funds go fast and are not guaranteed. More details can be found on the [Adjunct Resources](#)² page of the JC website.

9. I teach general education courses and don't have the graduate credits to keep teaching what I'm teaching, but I cannot or do not want to go back to school to accrue additional graduate credits. What options are there for me?

Unfortunately, the short answer is there are not too many options after guidelines go into effect on September 1, 2017. If under the revised guidelines you will not be qualified to teach the courses you usually teach, the college cannot make any guarantees in terms of alternate assignments. You are strongly encouraged to accrue any additional graduate credits you might need.

10. How can I learn more information about the new guidelines and their potential impact on me?

In addition to the letter(s) sent to each faculty member about the outcome of their review(s), academic leadership will continue to send updates to faculty as we work through this process. Lead faculty, deans, and the Director of Instructional Innovation are available to help address your questions and concerns as well. Thank you for your patience, professionalism, and understanding throughout this time.

² <https://www.jccmi.edu/academic-deans/adjunct-resources/>