



For Immediate Release

November 18, 2020

Contact: Blanca Jara
(708)656-8000, Ext. 2216
Blanca.Jara@Morton.edu

The Higher Learning Commission Extends Morton College's Fully Accredited-On Notice Status

(*Cicero, IL*) Morton College announced today after an extensive evaluation process the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board extended the College's accreditation status of '[Accredited-On Notice](#).' The institution remains fully accredited and meets all Criteria for Accreditation.

The designation of Notice indicates that the College is in compliance with all HLC accreditation standards, but with concerns, specifically noted in Core Components 2.A, 2.C, and 5.B of the Criteria for Accreditation.

The accreditation evaluation reports highlighted the substantive progress the College has made in recent years, including notable improvements in Board governance. By extending Notice, the HLC Board determined that the College would benefit from additional monitoring and a focused visit to confirm that progress is sustainable and the institution has ameliorated the findings that led to the extension of Notice.

"Morton College recognizes the continued value of the HLC's general accreditation processes for fostering continuous institutional improvement," said Dr. Stan Fields, President of Morton College. "Morton College is 100% committed to the accreditation process, and we look forward to working with the entire college community to strengthen our institution by resolving the HLC's concerns."

Morton College's Board of Trustees enacted a number of important reforms since the HLC put the College "On Notice:"

- The Board of Trustees collaborated with the administration in a comprehensive review of board policies. This, in turn, led to the Board's adoption of more explicit policies related to communication between the President, the Board of Trustees, and the District's varied constituencies, including vendors, and the College's employees.
- The Board of Trustees specifically addressed ongoing concerns of presidential turnover at Morton College. As a formal expression of the Board's support for sustainable reforms in its governing practices and to demonstrate a vote of confidence in the current President's leadership, the Board unanimously approved a four-year contract extension for the President.
- The Faculty and classified unions unanimously approved their respective new five-year collective bargaining agreements negotiated between the administration and both unions. At the August 2020 Board of Trustees meeting, the Board unanimously ratified both agreements. The Board also approved a MOU with the faculty union regarding the fall semester's instructional plan in response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. The MOU was the product of collegial discussions between the faculty and academic leadership and in deference to faculty prerogatives on instructional matters.
- The Board of Trustees supported the President's decision to eliminate long-standing no-bid, politically connected financial, marketing, and fundraising vendor contracts.
- The Board of Trustees endorsed the College's creation of the College Council - a campus-wide shared governance team comprised of members from all college employee groups, as well as student

representation. The College Council has been meeting regularly and has worked collaboratively for over two years.

- The Board of Trustees unanimously appointed Mr. Oscar Montiel to fill a vacancy on the Board. Mr. Montiel is well regarded in the college community and is recognized for his leadership in improving the lives of young people as Program Director of the Boys Club of Cicero.
- The Board of Trustees affirmed their commitment to professional development by unanimously approving a new board policy focused on expectations for new member orientation and ongoing training for all Board members in best practices for board governance. The policy also requires the Board to establish an annual calendar for formal board self-evaluation and evaluation of the college President.

“Morton College is committed to continuously improve and sustain best practices in governance,” said Fran Reitz, Chair of the Board of Trustees. “The Board of Trustees wishes to assure that the Board is on the right path forward and looks towards to providing further evidence of continued progress during the HLC’s visit in the Fall of 2021.”

Founded in 1895, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States. HLC accredits degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions in the North Central region, which includes 19 states. Recognized by both the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, the HLC accredits approximately one-third of U.S. regionally accredited public and private institutions.

The HLC continues to monitor progress and will visit Morton College in the Fall of 2021 to assess firsthand the continued progress the institution has made in the areas of Criterion Two-Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct, as well as Criterion Five- Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness.

About Morton College

Founded in 1924 to meet the educational demands in the growing communities of Berwyn, Cicero, Forest View, Lyons, McCook, Stickney and other near-western suburbs, Morton College is the second oldest community college in Illinois. Its mission is to enhance the quality of life of its diverse community through exemplary teaching and learning opportunities, community service, and life-long learning. Morton College is governed by a locally elected Board of Trustees, and is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. For more information on Morton College, visit www.morton.edu



**Public Disclosure Notice:
Morton College Status Continues
As “Accredited – On Notice”
Effective: November 5, 2020**

The Higher Learning Commission has extended the sanction of Notice for Morton College in Cicero, Illinois.

HLC took this action because the institution remains at risk of noncompliance with the Criteria for Accreditation¹ and meets the conditions for the extension of Notice set forth in HLC policy. The Board also extended the maximum period of the extension at its discretion based on HLC’s COVID-19 policy. The institution initially was placed on Notice November 2018.

While on Notice, the institution remains accredited and has the opportunity to remedy the issues that led to the sanction.

What This Means for Students

In most cases, other colleges and universities will continue to accept the institution’s credits in transfer or for admission to a higher degree program. All colleges and universities define their own transfer and admission policies. Students interested in pursuing a higher degree or transferring should contact the college or university they plan to attend so that they are knowledgeable about their admission and transfer policies.

Noted Criteria for Accreditation

HLC concluded that the College meets, but with concerns, the following:

- Criterion Two, Core Component 2.A, “The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it establishes and follows policies and processes for fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff”
- Criterion Two, Core Component 2.C, “the governing board of the institution is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and to assure its integrity”
- 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”

Next Steps

The College is required to provide evidence that it has addressed the issues that led to the sanction, no later than July 1, 2021 in preparation for HLC’s on-site evaluation no later than September 2021. In November 2021, the HLC Board of Trustees will determine whether the institution has demonstrated that it is in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and whether Notice can be removed.

About the Higher Learning Commission

The Higher Learning Commission accredits approximately 1,000 colleges and universities that have a home base in one of 19 states that stretch from West Virginia to Arizona. HLC is a private, nonprofit accrediting agency. It is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Questions? Contact info@hlcommission.org or call 312.263.0456.

Date of Action: November 5, 2020
Date of Posting: November 12, 2020

¹ These Core Components refer to HLC policy effective at the time of the institution’s initial placement on Notice. HLC’s Revised Criteria for Accreditation became effective on September 1, 2020. Since the Institution’s next review will take place after this date, the Institution must ensure that it appropriately addresses the underlying concerns cited in this Action Letter in the context of the Revised Criteria for Accreditation. HLC has published a Criteria for Accreditation Crosswalk, which is available on the HLC website, to assist institutions.



Why is Morton College on ‘Accredited-On Notice’ status?

The designation of Notice indicates that the College is in compliance with all HLC accreditation standards, but with concerns, specifically noted in Core Components 2.A, 2.C, and 5.B of the Criteria for Accreditation.

The accreditation evaluation reports highlighted the substantive progress the College has made in recent years, including notable improvements in board governance. By extending Notice, the HLC Board determined that the College would benefit from additional monitoring and a focused visit to confirm that progress is sustainable and the institution has ameliorated the findings that led to the extension of Notice.

Will Morton College lose its accreditation?

Institutions that have been placed on “Accredited-On Notice” status remain fully accredited.

Will I lose my financial aid?

No.

Institutions on sanction remain eligible for Title IV financial aid.

Will my credits transfer?

In most cases, other colleges and universities will continue to accept the institution’s credits in transfer or for admission to a higher degree program. All colleges and universities define their own transfer and admission policies. Students interested in pursuing a higher degree or transferring should contact the college or university they plan to attend so that they are knowledgeable about their admission and transfer policies.

Will Morton College’s status of Accredited On Notice appear on my transcript?

No.

Morton College’s status with the HLC will not be reflected on College transcripts.

What is Morton College doing about these sanctions?

Morton College's Board of Trustees enacted a number of important reforms since the HLC put the College "On Notice:"

- The Board of Trustees collaborated with the administration in a comprehensive review of board policies. This, in turn, led to the Board's adoption of more explicit policies related to communication between the President, the Board of Trustees, and the District's varied constituencies, including vendors, and the College's employees.
- The Board of Trustees specifically addressed ongoing concerns of presidential turnover at Morton College. As a formal expression of the Board's support for sustainable reforms in its governing practices

and to demonstrate a vote of confidence in the current President's leadership, the Board unanimously approved a four-year contract extension for the President.

- The Faculty and classified unions unanimously approved their respective new five-year collective bargaining agreements negotiated between the administration and both unions. At the August 2020 Board of Trustees meeting, the Board unanimously ratified both agreements. The Board also approved a MOU with the faculty union regarding the fall semester's instructional plan in response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. The MOU was the product of collegial discussions between the faculty and academic leadership and in deference to faculty prerogatives on instructional matters.
- The Board of Trustees supported the President's decision to eliminate long-standing no-bid, politically connected financial, marketing, and fundraising vendor contracts.
- The Board of Trustees endorsed the College's creation of the College Council - a campus-wide shared governance team comprised of members from all college employee groups, as well as student representation. The College Council has been meeting regularly and has worked collaboratively for over two years.
- The Board of Trustees unanimously appointed Mr. Oscar Montiel to fill a vacancy on the Board. Mr. Montiel is well regarded in the college community and is recognized for his leadership in improving the lives of young people as Program Director of the Boys Club of Cicero.
- The Board of Trustees affirmed their commitment to professional development by unanimously approving a new board policy focused on expectations for new member orientation and ongoing training for all Board members in best practices for board governance. The policy also requires the Board to establish an annual calendar for formal board self-evaluation and evaluation of the college President.

What is the Higher Learning Commission?

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States. HLC accredits degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions in the North Central region, which includes 19 states. Recognized by both the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, the HLC accredits approximately one-third of U.S. regionally accredited public and private institutions.

Why is accreditation important?

Accreditation is important for two principal reasons: – first, it allows schools to award federal financial aid and eases transfer of credits from one regionally accredited institution to another; and second, The HLC's peer review process makes sure an institution's academic programs are high quality. The process assures the public that the institution provides a quality education.

Who I can contact or where I can go for more information?

Please contact the Blanca Jara, Executive Director of Institutional Advancement via email at blanca.jara@morton.edu for more information about the College's accreditation status.