

September 18, 2023

Dr. Janell Oberlander, President
Gillette Community College District
300 West Sinclair
Gillette, WY 82718

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear President Oberlander,

Thank you for participating in an Eligibility interview on August 30, 2023 to discuss the intention of Gillette Community College District (Gillette College or the "Institution") to pursue membership with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

The information provided by Gillette College in its Preliminary Evidence and our further conversation during the interview was helpful for HLC to continue to assess the Institution's readiness to proceed with the process of seeking accreditation with HLC, including the submission of an Eligibility Filing.

As discussed, HLC generally encourages Gillette College to continue to work towards expanding, formalizing, standardizing, and documenting its independent operations and infrastructure, as aligned with HLC requirements. This will involve, among other things, continuing to establish and formalize processes and structures, including but not limited to items noted later in this letter. The list highlights some specific areas for development, as related to the Eligibility Requirements, and as discussed during the interview or otherwise noted upon review of the Preliminary Evidence.

Please keep in mind that the Eligibility Requirements are precursors to the Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC requirements, such as the Assumed Practices. Because the Eligibility Filing will only be reviewed to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to warrant an onsite visit to evaluate Gillette College for Candidacy status, and because compliance with the Eligibility Requirements and Assumed Practices is a pre-requisite to gaining Candidacy status, the Institution should use the time prior to submitting its Eligibility Filing to focus on these issues.

Of course, all determinations as to whether Gillette College has met HLC requirements as required at each stage of the process of seeking accreditation will be made by HLC peer reviewers and decision-making bodies through HLC's evaluative and decision-making processes. As such, this list is simply intended to provide additional guidance and information to the Institution at this time. It is not intended to be exhaustive or evaluative.

Primary Issues for Consideration

**Educational Programs (Eligibility Requirement #6)
Planning (Eligibility Requirement #13)**

As Gillette College assumes more oversight of the curriculum it offers, the Institution should work to clarify the extent to which the Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) either contribute to or are the same as the General Education program. Because institutions often use differing terminology related to ILOs and General Education outcomes (sometimes interchangeably, sometimes to differentiate that one contributes to the other), clarifying the terminology and scope will ensure consistent understanding and implementation.

During the Eligibility interview, institutional representatives mentioned the possibility of offering bachelors programs in the future. As a reminder, HLC expects institutions seeking accreditation to refrain from making certain changes from the time at which it submits an Eligibility Filing until after the institution is awarded Candidacy and has access to HLC's substantive change process. Institutional representatives indicated that any such bachelors programs were several years into the future, presumably during or after the Candidacy period. In the meantime, the Institution is encouraged to make general mention of these curricular possibilities in its HLC-related materials, where appropriate, as these goals help portray a fuller picture of the Institution's aspirations and future. Such information also helps demonstrate that the Institution is aware of and sensitive to the changing needs of its constituencies, participates in long-term planning, and is otherwise engaged in continuous improvement.

As Gillette College continues to develop and rely on its own internal processes and lessens its connections over time with the Northern Wyoming Community College District, of which it is currently a part, it will understandably have noteworthy milestones from its own strategic and other planning processes. These will be important to include in materials so as to document the institution's increasing independent functioning and how it accordingly meets HLC requirements.

Learning Resources (Eligibility Requirement #11)

Student Support Services (Eligibility Requirement #12)

As Gillette College assumes responsibility from the Northern Wyoming Community College District for student support services and for resources related to teaching and learning, it will have an opportunity to fine-tune those services and resources to match its own student profile and the unique needs associated with its students. Institutional representatives noted during the Eligibility interview that the Institution is aware of a gap in these areas and that the affiliated Gillette College Foundation has identified opportunities, for example, that could support new efforts to strengthen career advising and placement. As Gillette College identifies the unique needs of its students, it is encouraged to continue to develop plans and funding sources to address those needs.

Given the important role that the Gillette College Foundation serves in support of the College, the Institution is encouraged to generally provide more detailed information about the Foundation's purpose, funding sources and expenditures, relationship to the Institution, and overall function.

Policies and Procedures (Eligibility Requirement #14)

As faculty governance structures and institutional processes are finalized, Gillette College is encouraged to include updated documentation about those functions in appropriate places for its stakeholders, such as faculty manual, the institution's website, etc. Similarly, the Institution

should work to ensure that information typically found in a “student handbook” publication is easily identifiable and organized for students and the public, particularly as more of this information becomes adapted for Gillette College as the shift from the Northern Wyoming Community College District continues.

Next Steps

Seeking accreditation requires significant forethought and development on the part of institutions. As detailed in HLC's [Seeking Accreditation procedures](#), the Institution has until two years from the date of this letter to submit its Letter of Intent to Submit Eligibility Filing. Thereafter, the Institution has another year from the date of its Letter of Intent to Submit Eligibility Filing to submit its Eligibility Filing.

Please note that HLC has recently revised its documentation regarding the Eligibility Process, including the specific formatting and evidence requirements for the Eligibility Filing. This information is available at the link above. As with all institutions, HLC encourages the Institution to consider the timeline carefully and plan accordingly.

As you know, the HLC Dues and Fees schedule will require a payment at the Letter of Intent to Submit Eligibility Filing step of the process. HLC will invoice the Institution for this amount when the Letter of Intent to Submit Eligibility Filing is received.

Additionally, as the Institution continues through the process of seeking accreditation with HLC, we recommend that the Institution continue to explore best practices at other accredited institutions and, to the extent the Institution desires, participate in HLC workshops and programs focusing on various aspects of the Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC processes and requirements.

HLC staff is available to answer any questions that the Institution may have as it determines whether to submit a Letter of Intent to Submit Eligibility Filing. Please feel free to contact the following individuals as needed:

- Kerry Lofton, Accreditation Services Manager, klofton@hlcommission.org (process questions)
- Andrew Lootens-White, Vice President of Accreditation Relations, alootenswhite@hlcommission.org

Thank you again for your interest in accreditation.

Sincerely,

Higher Learning Commission

CC: Andrew Lootens-White, Vice President of Accreditation Relations
Marla Morgen, Vice President and General Counsel