

HLC Clarification on Faculty Qualifications

Exceptions for degree qualifications in General Education.

As a default, our degree standard per HLC states that all instructional staff should have earned:

- 1) a terminal degree, or a degree at least one level higher than the degree for which the course to be taught can be counted. (For example, a Master's degree is required to teach a course that counts toward the bachelor's degree); and
- 2) if it is a general education courses at the undergraduate level, the instructor must possess a doctorate or master's degree in the teaching discipline or master's degree with a concentration in the teaching discipline (a minimum of 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline).

HLC will and has allowed for exceptions in certain cases where the instructional staff do not possess the academic credentials described above and are teaching general education courses. In those exceptions, they can be appointed using "tested experience." For this to occur, the instructor must possess at least a bachelor's degree (very rare—Masters will be preferred) and must be determined by the hiring authority (Dean's Office in consultation with Provost Office) to be otherwise qualified by possessing substantial tested experience that is equal to the degree.

In these cases, tested experience refers to substantial certification/licensing, honors/awards, professional experience, and distinguished publication that would be equivalent to that person possessing the terminal degree in discipline—to be able to demonstrate that the student experience is transferrable as if the instructor had an academic degree relevant to the course. Although using tested experience in non-general education courses is standard, especially in professional fields, it should be rare in general education courses. Some exceptional cases could include:

- Related research experience in industry and/or the private sector that is equivalent to that course (e.g., an economic researcher at the US or state Bureau of Labor who does not have a degree in economics).
- Practical experience in the art, business, legal, or political sectors (e.g., a HS teacher with a Masters in Education who is the drama teacher and has extensive experience directing community theater or an award-winning poet with a Bachelors teaching an English course).
- Relevant clinical/scientific experience (e.g., a meteorologist with a Bachelors in the field and Masters in Communication who is also the chief meteorologist for a television station).
- Demonstrated competence or fluency in a language other than English and demonstrated ability to teach that language.

In these cases, permission to employ instructors in this category must begin with the department in which the courses are taught, are subject to approval of the relevant College, and the Office of the Provost. Per HLC, these decisions to hire instructors under this provision should be relatively rare, and made to provide students with the best possible learning experience and HLC with a strong argument for the decision.