

## Academic Policy – Credentials and Qualifications for Faculty/Instructional Personnel at the University of Nebraska Omaha (Aligned with HLC Guidelines)

### **POLICY CONTENTS**

**Scope**  
**Policy Statement**  
**Reason for Policy**  
**Procedures**  
**Definitions**  
**Additional Contacts**  
**Forms**  
**Related Information**  
**History**  
**Footnotes/Additional Clarifying Information**

### Scope

This policy pertains to the minimum credentials and qualifications for all faculty and instructional personnel at UNO. All UNO employees authorized to extend offers of employment to, and/or specify teaching assignments for, faculty and instructional personnel, including part-time, dual enrollment, and graduate teaching assistants, need to be aware of and abide by this policy. Those individuals who are serving on search committees for faculty and instructional personnel also need to acknowledge and work within the parameters of this policy.

### Policy Statement

The following guidelines apply to all faculty members whose primary responsibility is teaching, including part-time, adjunct, dual-credit, temporary and/or non-tenure track. *See footnote to this document for additional clarification with respect to HLC expectations related to current faculty members.*

With respect to all faculty/instructional personnel:

- Qualified faculty 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.
- Instructors (excluding for this requirement teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty) possess an academic degree relevant to what they are teaching, and at least one level above the level at which they teach, except in programs for the terminal degree or when equivalent experience is established. In terminal degree programs, faculty members possess the same level of degree.
- Faculty teaching in graduate programs should hold the terminal degree determined by the discipline and have a record of research, scholarship, or achievement appropriate for the graduate program. Faculty guiding doctoral education should have a record of scholarship and preparation to teach at the doctoral level. Research and scholarship should be appropriate to the program and degree offered.

- When faculty members are employed based on equivalent experience, the institution defines a minimum threshold of experience and an evaluation process that is used in the appointment process.

*Note: Minimum thresholds, tested experience criteria, and evaluation processes are outlined in the UNO Undergraduate Faculty Credential Form and the UNO Graduate Faculty Credential Form. These forms are customized for each academic department/school.*

With respect to those teaching in the General Education Program:

- Faculty teaching general education courses, or other non-occupational courses hold a master's degree or higher in the discipline or sub-field. 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 individual should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which they teach.

With respect to those teaching in the Dual Enrollment Program:

- Faculty/instructional personnel teaching dual credit courses should hold the same minimal qualifications as required by the institution of its own faculty (as outlined in the preceding bullets). *See footnote to this document for additional clarification with respect to dual enrollment instructors.*

## Reason for Policy

This policy ensures that UNO students receive instruction from faculty/instructors prepared to deliver an education which meets the prevailing standards for higher education in the United States. This policy also reflects UNO's compliance with those requirements and expectations of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the regional post-secondary accrediting body with authority to grant institutional accreditation (as required by the US Department of Education to qualify for participation in the federal financial aid program).

## Procedures

Faculty and instructional personnel hiring procedures include use of the UNO Undergraduate Faculty Credential Form and the UNO Graduate Faculty Credential Form, both of which speak to minimum thresholds and tested experience criteria for any and all variations regarding equivalent experience.

## Definitions

Terminology:

- Academic Subfields – Refers to a component of the discipline in which the instruction is delivered. The focus is on the courses being taught and the general appropriateness of faculty qualifications with reference to such courses. The key consideration is whether a degree in the field or a focus in the specialization held by a faculty member appropriately matches the courses the faculty member would teach in accordance with the conventions of the academic field.
- Adjunct Faculty – Equivalent to Part-time Faculty/Instructors
- Credentials – Refers to the degrees that faculty have earned that establish their credibility as content experts and thus their competence to teach that content in the classroom. An attestation of qualifications or competence issued to an individual by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party with authority to do so; for example, an academic degree or diploma issued by an accredited college or university is a credential.
- Dual Credit - Refers to courses taught to high school students at the high school for which the students receive both high school and college credit. These courses or programs are offered under a variety of names: HLC's Criteria on Dual Credit apply to all of them, as they involve the accredited institution's responsibility for the quality of its offerings. According to the National Association of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP): "Dual Enrollment (sometimes referred to as concurrent enrollment, dual credit, or college in high school) provides high school students the opportunity to take college-bearing courses taught by college-approved high school teachers."

- Dual Enrollment – See ‘Dual Credit’
- Faculty – All faculty members and instructional personnel who are assigned as instructor of record, including part-time, adjunct, dual credit, temporary, tenure-track, and non-tenure track. This includes any staff members who may teach a course as well. *See page 1 for graduate assistant exclusion information.*
- Tested Experience – This is a model outlining those criteria by which experience equivalent to credentials, may be considered as a substitute. It is customized for each academic department/school.
  - May substitute for an earned credential or portions thereof;
  - Is intended to include a breadth and depth of experience outside of the classroom in real-world situations relevant to the discipline in which the faculty member would be teaching (typically not based exclusively on years of teaching experience, although other experiential factors may be considered on a case-by-case basis);
  - Entails a specified institutional process with well-defined policies, procedures, and documentation that demonstrate when such experience is sufficient to determine that the faculty member personnel has the expertise necessary to teach students in that discipline;
  - Tested experience qualifications should be established for specific disciplines and programs, and could include skill sets, types of certifications or additional credentials, and experiences; and
  - The faculty hiring qualifications related to tested experience should be reviewed and approved through the faculty governance process at the institution.

## Additional Contacts

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Contact</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Email</b>
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## Forms

UNO Undergraduate Faculty Credential Form (includes tested experience criteria)  
 UNO Graduate Faculty Credential Form (includes tested experience criteria)

## Related Information

This policy is designed to align with the following:

- HLC’s “Assumed Practices B.2.” (Policy Changes Adopted June 26, 2015) and
- “Determining Qualified Faculty Through HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices: Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviewers”, March 2016.

## History

This policy reflects clarification of assumed practices, in alignment with HLC guidelines.

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## Additional Clarifying Information

**Clarification with respect to HLC Expectations per Current Faculty Members** – The following clarification is from the Higher Learning Commission’s document, “Determining Qualified Faculty through HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices: Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviewers, March 2016, page 7.

*“HLC requirements related to qualified faculty, including recent revisions to Assumed Practice B. 2., are in no way a mandate from HLC to terminate or no longer renew contracts with current faculty members. HLC expects that institutions will work with faculty who are otherwise performing well to ensure that they meet HLC’s requirements (whether through credentials or tested experience or a combination thereof). HLC also expects that institutions will honor existing contracts with individual faculty or collective bargaining units until such time as institutions have had an opportunity under the contract to renegotiate provisions that relate to faculty credentials if such revisions to the contract are necessary for the institution to meet HLC requirements. HLC recognizes that in many cases such renegotiation or revision may not be able to take place until the contract expires or at the contract’s next renewal date.”*

**Clarification per Dual Enrollment Instructor Qualifications** – The following clarification is from the Higher Learning Commission’s document, “Determining Qualified Faculty through HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices: Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviewers,” March 2106, page 5.

*“This requirement is not intended to discount or in any way diminish the experience that the high school teacher brings into a dual credit classroom. Such experience alone, however lengthy or respected, is not a substitute for the content knowledge needed for college credit.*

*HLC recognizes that many high school teachers possess tested experience beyond their years in the classroom that may account for content knowledge for the dual credit courses they may teach. These teachers may have gained relevant experiences while working in other sectors or through professional development or other relevant experience that now informs their teaching. They may be active in professional organizations and learned societies through presentations and publications on topics relevant to the dual credit courses they may teach. In combination with other credentials and/or tested experience, they may be able to provide direct evidence of their students’ achievement on college-level tests that reflects a level of teaching and learning akin to a college classroom. However, evidence of students’ achievement, on its own, is not sufficient to demonstrate minimal qualification.*

*HLC also recognizes that dual credit faculty members who have obtained a Master of Education degree but not a master’s degree in a discipline such as English, Communications, History, Mathematics, etc., may have academic preparation to satisfy HLC’s expectations. In this context, the curricula of graduate degrees in the field of Education, when inclusive of graduate-level content in the discipline and methods courses that are specifically for the teaching of that discipline, satisfy HLC’s dual credit faculty expectation. In other words, the attainment of a Master of Education degree does not demonstrate a qualification to teach dual credit courses in a particular discipline unless it is demonstrated that the content of that faculty member’s Master of Education degree is sufficiently related to the discipline of the dual credit course.*

*Accredited institutions should monitor closely the earned credentials along with the tested experience of dual credit faculty with the understanding that allowances for tested experience may occur.”*