MEMORANDUM

TO: Deans, Directors, and Chairs

FROM: Jill Irvine
Interim Senior Vice President and Provost

DATE: August 31, 2020

SUBJECT: Required Qualifications for Course Instructors

OU’s accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), requires institutions to ensure every class section is taught by appropriately qualified personnel. While this memo uses the term “faculty” qualifications for brevity, the requirement applies to everyone listed as instructor on a course, whether instructor of record or not, and regardless of status as regular faculty, adjunct faculty, or staff. The only exemptions to this policy are Graduate Assistants and those teaching developmental courses. In summary, the HLC guidelines state:

1. Those teaching undergraduate courses should have a master’s degree at minimum.

2. Those teaching General Education courses (or any course designed for non-majors) should have both a master’s degree (or higher) in the subject matter being taught or a master’s degree in a different field plus a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the subject area.

3. Those teaching graduate courses should hold the terminal degree for the discipline and have a record of research, scholarship, or achievement appropriate to the discipline.

These requirements are not intended to discourage interdisciplinary courses and programs; departments should use their best judgment in determining whether faculty credentials are appropriate to the course content.

While academic credentials are preferred by the HLC, they understand the need for alternative methods of establishing faculty qualifications. They therefore allow institutions to use “tested experience” in place of degrees when necessary. To use the tested experience option for establishing faculty qualifications:

- The experience must be “tested” – defined as “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” – and it must be equivalent to the degree that would otherwise be required.

- Departments must be able to provide documentation that summarizes the relevant experience and indicates the methods used by the department to establish its equivalency to a degree.
To ensure compliance with these requirements, the Office of Institutional Research & Reporting (IRR) monitors course instructor assignments. IRR will contact departments if any additional information is needed about the qualifications of any non-regular faculty listed on departmental courses.

A copy of the HLC faculty qualification guidelines is available at http://bit.ly/2xsoEOT. Any questions or concerns about this policy should be addressed to Susannah Livingood (slivingood@ou.edu).