




The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA®
Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost

MEMORANDUM

TO: Deans, Directors, and Chairs

FROM: André-Denis Wright 
Senior Vice President and Provost

DATE: August 23, 2023

SUBJECT: Required Qualifications for Instructional Faculty

OU's accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), requires institutions to ensure that all personnel responsible for instruction and curriculum development are appropriately qualified. This requirement **applies to everyone whose primary responsibility is teaching**, whether instructor of record or not, and regardless of type of faculty appointment. This includes part-time, adjunct, dual credit, temporary, and/or non-tenure-track faculty. **Graduate assistants are exempt from this policy provided they are enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty.** 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 either 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.

Please note these are minimum requirements for HLC. They do not supersede more stringent requirements from OU's Graduate College or external agencies. They are not intended to discourage interdisciplinary courses and programs; departments should use their best judgment in determining whether an instructor's credentials are appropriate to the course content.

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

instructor 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 an instructor's 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) may monitor course instructor assignments. IRR will contact departments if any additional information is needed about the qualifications of faculty teaching their courses.

A copy of the HLC instructional 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).