



EXHIBIT "A"

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Item 4.1

PRESENT TO BOARD: MARCH 25, 2026

TO: SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE  
DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

FROM: FRED HAWKINS 

SUBJECT: HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION READY PRESENTATION

As we approach our Higher Learning Commission Comprehensive Evaluation on April 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Dr. Heston and Dr. Kuehnle will provide a brief presentation on what to expect during the site visit. The work underway reflects a collegewide effort from faculty and staff to administration. SFSC is on track and is well-positioned to demonstrate SFSC's ongoing commitment to quality, student success, and institutional integrity.

They will walk you through our readiness status, key areas of focus, and how the Board plays an important role in this process.

# Preparing Our Board for the HLC Site Visit

Understanding Accreditation, The Triad, and SFSC's Role



South Florida State College • April 2026

# What Is HLC?

**Mission:** Advance the common good through quality assurance of higher education — as the leader in equitable, transformative, and trusted accreditation in service of students and member institutions.

## HLC's 7 Guiding Values

### 1 Focus on Students

Students are at the center of all HLC activities

### 2 Model of Integrity

Integrity in governance and all activities

### 3 Institutional Mission

Emphasizes each institution's unique mission

### 4 Peer Review

Qualified, objective, evidence-based review

### 5 Civic Engagement

Promotes civil discourse and global perspectives

### 6 Partner in Innovation

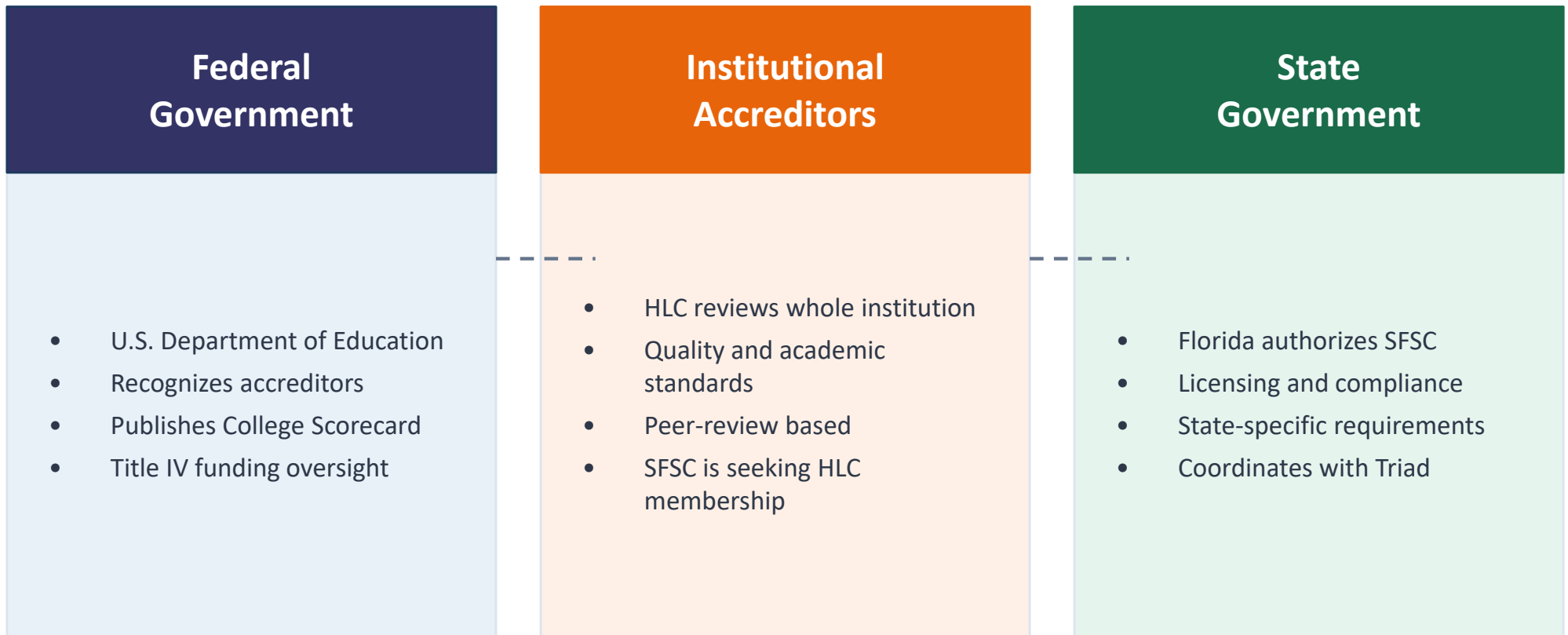
Continuous improvement and innovation

### 7 Shared Quality Assurance

Collaborates within the Triad for the public good

# The Accreditation Triad

Three independent entities share responsibility for higher education quality assurance in the United States.



*Independent but collaborative*

# What the Site Visit Means for SFSC

## What HLC Evaluates

- Mission alignment
- Academic quality and student outcomes
- Institutional integrity and governance
- Financial sustainability
- Faculty qualifications and oversight
- Transparency to students and the public
- Continuous improvement processes

## The DBOT's Role

- Governance independence from administration
- Demonstrate awareness of HLC criteria
- Affirm SFSC's mission-driven focus
- Speak to strategic oversight, not operations
- Speaks to consistency — visitors may ask individually
- Know the Assurance Argument exists as evidence

# Key Messages for Board Members

## ✓ What to Emphasize

- SFSC's mission is central to every decision we make as a Board.
- We are proud to be the only postsecondary institution in the service district.
- The Board maintains governance oversight while administration leads day-to-day operations.
- We review institutional data regularly to make data-informed decisions.
- We are committed to continuous improvement and quality assurance.

## ✗ What to Avoid

- Anything that blurs governance vs. management roles
- Specific operational details are deferred to leadership and staff
- Uncertainty about the purpose or process of accreditation
- Comments implying Board involvement in daily administrative decisions

# Site Visit: April 13–14, 2026

South Florida State College • Avon Park, Fla.

1

## **Review materials:**

The Assurance Argument is the primary evidence document located on the SFSC website, College tab, Accreditation, HLC

2

## **Know our identity:**

Florida's only postsecondary Institution, serving Highlands, Hardee, and DeSoto counties.

3

## **Governance confidence:**

Board independence and mission-driven oversight are what evaluators want to see from the DBOT.

4

## **Speak naturally:**

No need to memorize criteria, authentic, mission-aligned responses are most effective.

# Preparing Our Campus for the HLC Site Visit

What Has Been Done to Prepare • April 13–14, 2026



# Preparing Students – Social Media

**South Florida State College**  
Published by January 13

SFSC STUDENTS: Ever wonder why accreditation matters? Pete the Panther is on a mission to find out because an accreditor will be visiting SFSC on April 13 and 14, and they'll be talking with students, faculty, and staff to learn about the SFSC experience.

No pop quizzes. No trick questions. Just real conversations and surveys about your experience, and Pete's mission will prepare you for the visit throughout the next several weeks.

Let's get HLC ready together! ★

#ItsPossibleSFSC #college #accreditation #StudentExperience @preshawkins



**South Florida State College**  
Published by January 29


SFSC STUDENTS: You will be receiving a link to an anonymous survey on Monday, Feb. 2 via email. This survey is from the HLC, an accreditation organization that wants to know about your experience at South Florida State College. The survey will only take five minutes, and your opinion is very important to them and to SFSC.

Please take the five minutes to fill out the survey. It is very important to our accreditation. We appreciate your help.

#ItsPossibleSFSC #accreditation #survey #StudentExperience #StudentSuccess @preshawkins



# Preparing Students – Social Media



**South Florida State College** · Original audio

**SFSC STUDENTS:** Do you know where to apply for SFSC scholarships? ... See more

There are two ways to get there, but you can use the free application from AwardSpring to apply for SFSC scholarships.

Like Pete, you can go to [southflorida.edu](http://southflorida.edu) and click on Financial Aid and Scholarships under either Future Students or Current Students. Then, click on Scholarship Sources in the left-side navigation, and then AwardSpring in the first paragraph.

Or, you can go right to [southflorida.awardspring.com](http://southflorida.awardspring.com).

All of the available scholarships are funded by the South Florida State College Foundation, Inc. (@sfscfoundation) and once you are admitted to the College, you can apply and reapply for them each academic term. So, if you weren't awarded a scholarship this term, you are can try again next term.

Don't miss the opportunity to get money for your tuition!

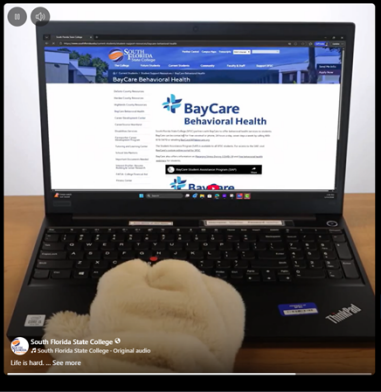
#ItsPossibleSFSC #financialaid #scholarships #scholarship #tuition #money @prethawkins

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Most relevant

**Dalmar Cobb**  
When is the cut off date for wellness program?

Comment as South Florida State Colle...



**South Florida State College** · Original audio

Life is hard. It shouldn't be hard to get help. At SFSC, it isn't. SFSC students have BayCare (BayCare available 24/7 for help. Pete can show you how to access the info for BayCare on the website. You can talk to someone in person, online, on the phone, or via email, and it's free for SFSC students.


Get the help you need. Don't wait.

#ItsPossibleSFSC #MentalHealth #MentalHealthMatters #support #StudentServices @prethawkins

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**South Florida State College** · Original audio

Do you want to plan ahead and see the courses that SFSC offers next term? ... See more

You can also see how many seats are left before you register.

Pete can show you where to go to find the online, interactive Course Schedule.

Here's what Pete does to find the course he wants:

1. At [southflorida.edu](http://southflorida.edu), click on Class Schedules under Current Students.
2. Click on the Online Course Searchable link.
3. Choose the term in the dropdown and click Continue.
4. You can either start typing the subject for the course you interested in, or scroll through all of the subjects to choose one and click on it.
5. Scroll to the bottom and click Search.

You will see a list of the courses offered and how many seats are still available in each course. You can click on one to read the syllabus, see what textbooks are required, find out what classroom it's in or if it is virtual, and if it has any prerequisites, among other details.




Now, you are ready to register! Let us know if you have any questions.

#ItsPossibleSFSC #Courses #CollegeCourses #College #Classes #CollegeClasses #ClassSchedule #Registration #Register @prethawkins

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# Preparing Employees – Social Media and Daily Connection

 **South Florida State College**  
Published by  February 10 · 

Why is accreditation important? 😊

Accreditation is more than a requirement; it's a public assurance of quality, integrity, and continuous improvement.

Accreditation by a recognized accrediting body confirms that an institution:

- ✓ Meets established standards of academic quality
- ✓ Uses evidence to guide decision-making and improvement
- ✓ Is accountable to students, the community, and the public
- ✓ Operates with integrity in governance, finances, and operations

Accreditation is also what allows:

- 🎓 Students to receive federal financial aid
- 📄 Credits to transfer more easily between institutions
- 🎓 Degrees and credentials to be recognized by employers and universities
- 🤝 The institution to take part in grants, partnerships, and statewide initiatives

In short, accreditation supports student success, institutional credibility, and public trust.

[#ItsPossibleSFSC](#) [#accreditation](#) [#StudentSuccess](#) [#grants](#) [#partnerships](#) [#UniversityTransfer](#)  
[@preshawkins](#)





## THE SFSC DAILY CONNECTION

THE EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER OF SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE



**Kelly's**  
BISTRO BY THE BAY

CHECK OUT OUR HOURS

HOME ATHLETICS CALENDAR PERFORMING ARTS SFSC FOUNDATION FACEBOOK YOUTUBE SUBMISSIONS PODCASTS

### Why Accreditation Matters

Posted on February 10, 2026

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SOUTH FLORIDA State College

### ARCHIVES

- [March 2026](#)
- [February 2026](#)
- [January 2026](#)
- [December 2025](#)
- [November 2025](#)
- [October 2025](#)
- [September 2025](#)
- [August 2025](#)
- [July 2025](#)
- [June 2025](#)
- [May 2025](#)
- [April 2025](#)

# Preparing Employees – Social Media and Daily Connection



South Florida State College

Published by February 17 at 10:10 AM

Our institution has a long history of accreditation and has been accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) for many years.

Following a change in Florida law, all public colleges and universities in the state were required to transition to a different institutional accreditor. As a result, our institution is now engaged in the accreditation process with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

While this transition has required significant planning, documentation, and collaboration, it also reflects the strength of our institution. Accreditation is not the work of a single office or committee; it depends on the daily efforts of faculty, staff, and administrators across the College.

We sincerely appreciate the time, expertise, and engagement contributed by colleagues throughout this process. Your work supports our mission, our students, and the long-term success of the institution.

Accreditation matters because it affirms who we are, how we serve students, and our shared commitment to quality and improvement.

[#accreditation](#) [#SACSCOC](#) [#HLC](#) [#StudentSuccess](#) @preshawkins



South Florida State College

Published by February 24 at 10:27 AM

What is an HLC Site Visit, really? 🤔

A Higher Learning Commission (HLC) site visit is a peer review—not an inspection and not a surprise visit. 🗨️

A small team of faculty and administrators from other accredited colleges and universities comes to campus to verify what the institution has already shared in its accreditation materials. 📄

The goal is to confirm that:

- ✓The information submitted is accurate
- ✓Institutional practices align with HLC requirements
- ✓Systems and processes are working as described

The visit typically lasts about a day and a half on campus, followed by additional time for the team to deliberate and prepare its report. Reviewers are peers who understand higher education and approach the visit as a professional, collegial process. 🌱

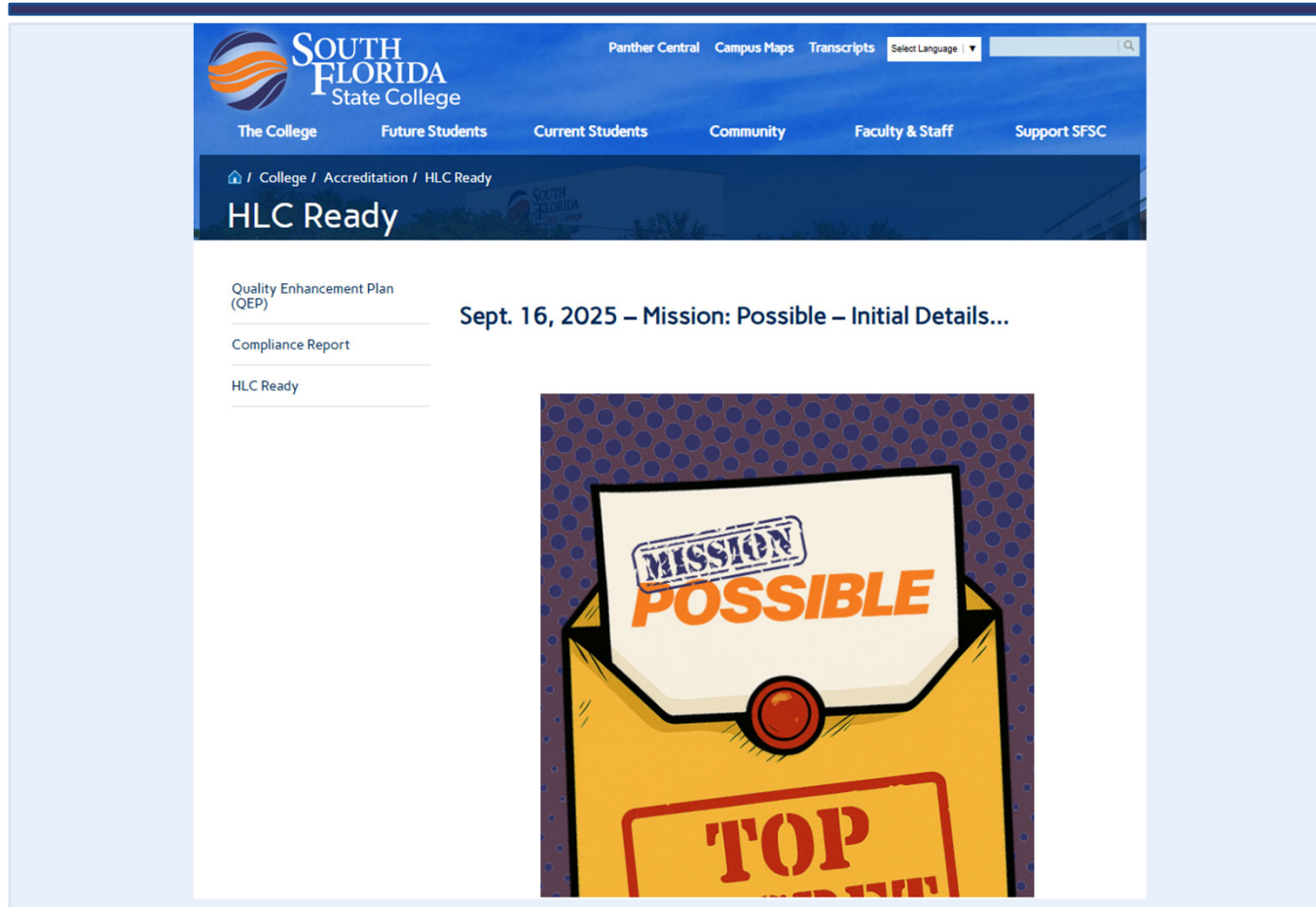
[#accreditation](#) [#ItsPossibleSFSC](#) [#college](#) [#HigherEd](#) [#education](#) [#Florida](#) @preshawkins



# Preparing Employees – Poster Project



# Preparing Employees - Website



**SOUTH FLORIDA State College**

Panther Central Campus Maps Transcripts Select Language

The College Future Students Current Students Community Faculty & Staff Support SFSC

Home / College / Accreditation / HLC Ready


## HLC Ready

Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)

Compliance Report

HLC Ready

### Sept. 16, 2025 – Mission: Possible – Initial Details...



## Preparing Employees – Game Show



Okwali, Carleigh

# Thank You

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Accreditation is not something we do for an outside agency, it is a reflective process that helps us be a better institution for our students and communities.

The conversations you have with the review team are an opportunity to tell the SFSC story — and it is a story worth telling.

*"The work you do everyday matters — this visit is a chance to share that."*

Questions? My door is always open as we move toward April 13–14.