



COPLAC Membership Criteria

Revised: September 2025 Approved: January 2026

COPLAC Membership

The Council on Public Liberal Arts Colleges establishes membership through a set of criteria and a review process. Prospective member universities should be committed to the mission and values of COPLAC and to collaborative work that supports the public sector of higher education, representing access, affordability, and community engagement, while providing students with a holistic and integrative liberal arts and sciences undergraduate experience that prepares students for lifelong learning and civic engagement in a democratic society.

Historically, COPLAC conceived of membership in terms of one institution per state. That limitation is no longer appropriate for all states and provinces. The COPLAC Executive Committee and Board of Directors will consider reasonable arguments on this issue made by current members.

COPLAC institutions have typically been small to medium-sized, but there are no size criteria. In the past, the full-time equivalency students (FTES) for COPLAC institutions has ranged from 900 to 8500. More important than a specified student enrollment as a membership criterion is the candidate institution's demonstrated commitment to a student-centered liberal education such as that offered by the Association of American Colleges and Universities' LEAP initiative with its Essential Learning Outcomes.

Once designated a member of COPLAC, an institution has a commitment to participate in and engage with the organization. Lack of engagement over time may lead the Executive Committee to inquire about the institution's on-going commitment.

Membership Criteria

1. Institutions are public and accountable for the quality of their baccalaureate degrees; for U.S. members, accreditation by one of the regional accreditors is the standard
2. Institutions have a predominantly undergraduate student population
3. Institutions demonstrate a full-time faculty that in numbers and training are appropriate for a liberal arts and sciences institution.

4. Institutions demonstrate a commitment to access and inclusion and to serving students who reflect the populations of the state through student success initiatives and resources that promote retention, progression, and graduation (e.g., success coaching, tutoring, mentoring, supplemental instruction, bridge programs, and orientation), all with a view to promoting timely completion to support affordability.

5. Institutions demonstrate a strong commitment to preparing students for a life of active citizenship and public service.

6. Institutions demonstrate a sustained commitment to the liberal arts and sciences as a core educational enterprise beyond a strong general education program. Institutions may use the following indicators of commitment and may include others as appropriate for the institution:

- A mission statement that makes clear the institution's emphasis on the liberal arts and sciences and on liberal education
- An academic profile in which a significant proportion of all undergraduate degrees conferred in disciplines and interdisciplinary majors are typically characterized as liberal arts and sciences
- A designation by the state or a governing board as the public liberal arts and sciences institution in the state or system (this indicator should not be the sole rationale for sustained commitment to the liberal arts and sciences)
- A broad-based institutional commitment to the liberal arts and sciences evident among faculty, staff, students, and institutional leaders
- Faculty-student interaction that is deep and sustained and may be demonstrated by the percentage of classes taught by full-time faculty; average class size and student- faculty ratio; undergraduate research or service-learning activity; living-learning communities with faculty-in-residence or strong faculty participation
- Student learning outcomes assessment that focuses on learning in the liberal arts and sciences (such as that promoted in AAC&U's VALUE rubric projects)
- A vibrant campus life characterized by strong residential life and a lively co curriculum that fosters broad-based intellectual and artistic opportunities in which students are actively engaged
- A demonstrated institutional commitment to active and engaged student learning

Provisional Membership

Institutions with provisional membership are working toward satisfying the criteria for full membership, as stated above. Provisional members may attend COPLAC board meetings and conferences but are not eligible to vote on board decisions and should not be present when the vote on membership is taken.

Provisional membership may be maintained for up to two years and does not guarantee full membership. Provisional members are required to pay 50% of the annual membership dues each year. Upon acceptance as a full member, the remaining balance of the entry year's dues will be collected.