

2025

Resource Guide



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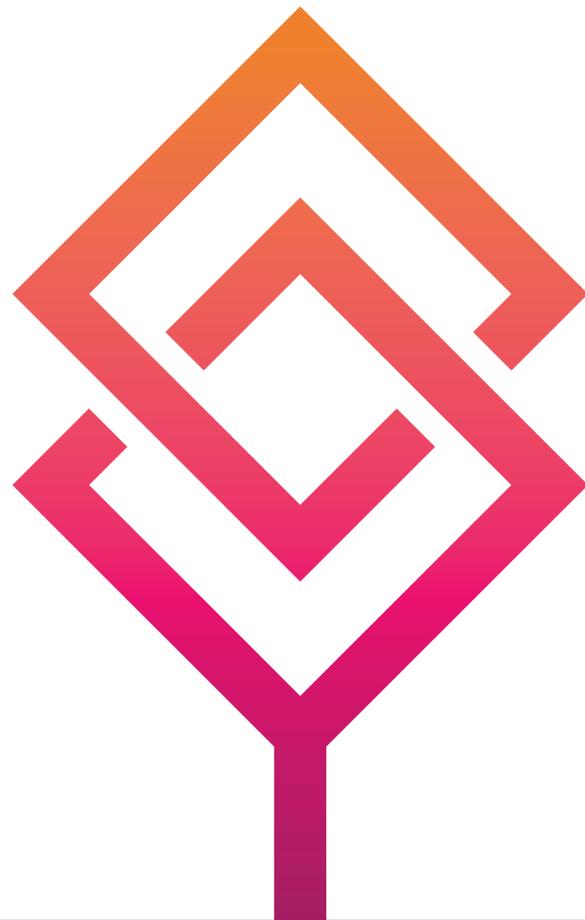
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HLC's Resource Guide is published each year in time for the Annual Conference. The next issue will be published in March 2026. For the most current information from HLC, visit hlcommission.org.

Higher Learning 2026

HLC Annual Conference

March 21–24, 2026 | Chicago, IL

Learn more about the conference on page 73.



Who We Are

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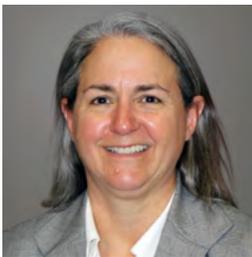


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“Our members’ commitment to continuous improvement inspires us at HLC to innovate as an organization and cultivate our individual skills and knowledge.

— Sarah Byrne, HLC Chief Human Resources Officer

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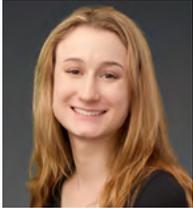
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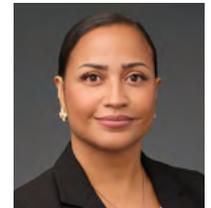
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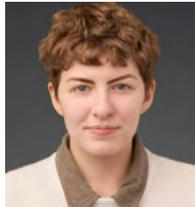
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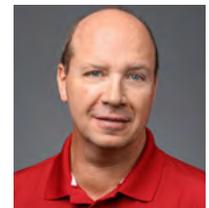
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**Higher Learning
Commission**



Mission, Vision and Guiding Values

Mission

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

Vision

HLC will be the champion of quality higher education by working proactively in support of students, institutions and their communities.

Find It Online

Mission and Vision:
hlcommission.org/about-hlc

Guiding Values:
hlcommission.org/guiding-values

Guiding Values

HLC's Criteria for Accreditation reflect a set of guiding values. HLC articulates these guiding values so as to offer a better understanding of the Criteria and the intentions that underlie them.

The responsibility for assuring the quality of an institution rests first with the institution itself, aligned with its mission. Institutional accreditation assesses the capacity of an institution to assure its own quality and expects it to produce evidence that it does so.

Many of the Criteria for Accreditation should be understood in this light. HLC expects an institution's governing board to ensure quality through its governance structures, with appropriate degrees of involvement and delegation. HLC emphasizes planning because planning is critical to sustaining quality. Assessment of student learning and focus on persistence and completion are ways in which the institution improves and thus assures the quality of its teaching and learning.

HLC expects that institutions have the standards, the processes and the will for quality assurance in depth and throughout their educational offerings.

HLC's Guiding Values

1. Focus on student learning
2. Education as a public purpose
3. Education for a diverse, technological, globally connected world
4. A culture of continuous improvement
5. Evidence-based institutional learning and self-presentation
6. Integrity, transparency, and ethical behavior or practice
7. Governance for the well-being of the institution
8. Planning and management of resources to ensure institutional sustainability
9. Mission-centered evaluation
10. Accreditation through peer review

I have spent nearly 30 years working for nonprofits and institutions of higher learning and HLC is unlike any other. Every staff member, trustee and member institution are guided by the same question: **“What is in the best interest of students?”**

— Mary Claire Millies, *HLC Executive Assistant to the President and Board Professional*



HLC Initiatives

Strategic Plan

In 2025, HLC will sunset the EVOLVE 2025 strategic plan and launch a new plan, North Star.

Here is a summary of activities achieved in 2024 for EVOLVE 2025 as well as a look to the areas of focus for HLC's North Star.

Equity

HLC views equity as a critical consideration in accreditation and quality assurance. An effective equity framework models fairness and access such that all learners have equitable access to higher education.

HLC continues to monitor emerging state legislative efforts throughout the United States with an eye toward the intersection and balance with HLC requirements. We work with the states on critical issues and respect the balance between the different roles of the Triad. For more information, see hlcommission.org/triad.

Vision

The Mission and Vision statements of HLC reflect the changing higher education and accreditation landscape. They also illustrate HLC's critical role in the higher education ecosystem.

The vision statement includes continuing work in the following areas:

1. Focusing on students first as the most critical stakeholder in higher education and institutional accreditation.
2. Exemplifying a commitment to equity in HLC's operations and policies, service to members, Criteria for Accreditation and all other standards.
3. Emphasizing the importance of outcomes that lead to student success in academics, the workforce, engaged citizenry and social responsibility as they relate to institutional mission.
4. Providing leadership and advocacy in higher education and accreditation at the state and federal levels.
5. Demonstrating HLC's respect for the role of diversity and inclusion in higher education institutions and missions.
6. Exploring new business models which include an expansion of membership, including the wider higher education and postsecondary ecosystem.
7. Demonstrating agility in thought leadership to promote innovation.
8. Enhancing the value of higher education through accreditation and peer review.
9. Promoting and displaying civil discourse and engagement.

10. Fostering collaboration and member development through timely and informed educational opportunities.
11. Expanding and refining the use of technology and other services for the benefit of members engaging in accreditation activities as well as HLC's educational programs.
12. Continuously exploring new means and opportunities for achieving operational excellence in service to its membership.

Outcomes

Outcomes demonstrate success and opportunity — for students and their institutions. HLC continues its dedication to Outcomes through EVOLVE by focusing on clarity, transparency, collaboration, innovation and, most importantly, a heightened sensitivity to institutional context during institutional evaluations and in the delivery of programs to support members.

HLC recently expanded our risk indicator process to evaluate institutional performance against benchmarks for certain student success outcomes in order to foster improvement. See page 58 or hlcommission.org/indicators for details.

HLC also recently adopted policy changes modifying the Open Pathway to give institutions that meet certain conditions the option to pursue a Quality Initiative focused on student success in Years 1–4 in lieu of the mid-cycle Assurance Review that typically occurs in Year 4. See page 48 or hlcommission.org/open for details.

HLC continues to provide support through the Student Success Academy as well as a number of workshops provided throughout the year and the annual conference.

Leadership

Leadership strengths are critically important to the success of HLC's member institutions, including boards and chief executive officers (CEOs). Goals center on the thought leadership role of HLC in higher education and review of traditional processes, all of which are currently undergoing an unprecedented level of public scrutiny. The enhancement of leadership at higher education institutions and education-related organizations must continue to be a priority to successfully restore public confidence in higher education.

HLC continues monitoring possible opportunities for future leadership programming. We are also committed to publishing research briefs using data and analytics gleaned from HLC member institutions. HLC will continue to seize opportunities afforded by findings and initiatives stemming from Credential Lab activities.

Value

HLC continues to strengthen our value to members, asserting the importance of quality assurance through accreditation. Going forward, we will also address accreditation's role regarding public perception about the value of higher education and its lifelong return on investment (ROI).

HLC also works for the protection of students via accreditation. HLC continues to help institutions communicate with the public about accreditation. We continue to work on new ways to communicate the value of accreditation to our audiences, particularly through video.

HLC continues to develop technology advancements such as moving Assurance Reviews and comprehensive

“At HLC, the strategic plan demonstrates the path forward. The strategic plan does not simply sit on the shelf, it drives our actions.

— Barbara Gellman-Danley, HLC President

evaluations into Canopy and generative artificial intelligence integration into HLC's work. These systems provide efficiencies that benefit members and peer reviewers alike.

There are ongoing efforts to meet the changing training needs of member institutions, such as the highly demanded program review workshop.

Engagement

As an active member of the higher education ecosystem, HLC seeks opportunities for engagement with member institutions and their students, governmental bodies, legislative leaders, policy makers, other commissions and associations, along with other stakeholders. Engagement includes outreach efforts, advocacy and civic engagement.

HLC continues its critical engagement with the Triad and other members of the higher education, regulatory and legislative community. We work earnestly to collect and be responsive to stakeholders' feedback, particularly that offered by our membership. HLC will build on its brand as a trusted and innovative accreditor.

North Star

HLC's next strategic plan will be called the North Star. Like the brightest light in the northern sky, HLC endeavors to be the north star for its membership by advancing quality improvement through accreditation.

Likewise, HLC wants to help members and students be bright stars unto themselves. We are a stabilizing force that strives to help you orient yourself and find your way.

North Star will be built on the trends that are central to the future of higher education. These include a timely need for change leadership expertise, as the evolving college and university cannot remain stagnant. The outcome of HLC's planning work will assist the nearly 1,000 diverse member institutions to adapt and show how students are educated for the many, yet unknown, careers that await them. This constellation of efforts will be the driving force of the HLC North Star plan.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/strategic-plan

Student Success Outcomes

Student success is a core element of quality assurance in higher ed. To ensure the quality of educational offerings, it is imperative for an institution to know its students — their educational intent, performance while enrolled, and experiences after ending their studies.

During 2025, HLC will increase our focus on this topic with new policies, procedures and research efforts.

Revised Criteria for Accreditation

Effective September 1, 2025

HLC's foundational expectations related to student success are set in the Criteria for Accreditation. The current Criteria require institutions to demonstrate improvement through goals and strategies that improve their retention, persistence and completion rates. In the revised Criteria for Accreditation, which will go into effect September 1, 2025, student success outcomes are addressed more comprehensively. Specifically, the revised Criteria include Core Component 3.G, Student Success Outcomes, which states:

The institution's student success outcomes demonstrate continuous improvement, taking into account the student populations it serves and benchmarks that reference peer institutions.

Student success outcomes include any measures demonstrating the rate at which an institution's students achieve or mark progress toward completion, educational intent or other goals that are relevant to the institution's mission.

The revised Core Component 3.G also sets the expectation that institutions will consider peer institutions in assessing and working to improve their student success outcomes. To identify its peers, an institution should consider colleges and universities that have similar missions, student bodies, or other characteristics, such that they provide meaningful comparisons by which the institution may judge its performance.

Student Success Risk Indicators

Launched March 2025

For many years, HLC has evaluated institutions annually for financial and non-financial risk indicators. This year, we expanded the risk indicator process to include student success indicators based on educational outcome measures that are well-defined and widely used by institutions, researchers and policy makers. Institutions will be required to participate in additional evaluative activities if they meet certain indicator conditions.

For additional details about this new process, see page 58 or hlcommission.org/indicators.

Student Success Quality Initiative

Launching in September 2025

HLC recently adopted policy changes modifying the Open Pathway to provide certain eligible institutions additional flexibility to focus more on student success improvements during their accreditation cycle. Specifically, institutions on the Open Pathway that meet

certain conditions will be given the option to pursue a Quality Initiative focused on student success in Years 1–4 in lieu of the mid-cycle Assurance Review that typically occurs in Year 4.

For details, see page 48 or hlcommission.org/open.

Ongoing Research

In addition to building student success into our processes, HLC is committed to learning more about how member institutions track and use student success outcomes data. In 2024, HLC launched our Evaluating Student Success Outcomes initiative to improve our ability to track student success outcomes at member institutions. We focused on educational outcome measures in the first year of this project, which led to the development of the student success indicator process described above. See hlcommission.org/student-success to stay informed about our ongoing research in this area.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/student-success





Policy

Recent Policy Changes

In collaboration with member institutions, HLC regularly updates our policies to ensure that our requirements continue to support quality assurance and institutional improvement in our rapidly changing higher ed environment.

How HLC Makes Policy Changes

HLC's Board of Trustees typically adopts changes to our policies and bylaws three times per year at its regularly scheduled meetings.

In most cases, the process for revising a policy or bylaw involves two readings by the Board that take place over the course of two meetings:

- 1. Meeting 1: Proposed Change Considered for Preliminary Approval.** A proposed change is considered for approval by the Board on first reading. If approved, HLC invites institutions, peer reviewers and others to submit comments on the proposal.
- 2. Meeting 2: Proposed Change Considered for Final Adoption.** At its next meeting, the Board considers any comments submitted before determining whether to adopt the change on second reading. Adopted changes may be effective immediately or may have a later effective date.

If a policy change is required by federal regulation or other legal mandate, the Board may adopt it on a single reading without a public comment period.



Find It Online

All policies and bylaws:
hlcommission.org/policies

Adopted changes:
hlcommission.org/adopted-policies

Proposed changes:
hlcommission.org/proposed-policies

Policy and Bylaw Changes

February 2024 – February 2025

All changes were effective immediately upon adoption unless otherwise indicated.

Composition of Executive Committee

Adopted July 2024

This change to HLC's bylaws expanded the membership of the Board's Executive Committee to include the immediate past chair of the Board. The Executive Committee also consists of the chair, vice chair, treasurer, and the chairs of the standing Board committees.

Revised Bylaw

- Article VIII: Committees of the Board

Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices

Adopted June 2024, effective September 1, 2025

Streamlined and clarified HLC expectations for institutions. The revised Criteria emphasize the importance of institutional mission and expand upon the concept that an institution is expected to demonstrate how it meets the Criteria through a mission-reflective lens.

Revised Policies

- Criteria for Accreditation (CRRT.B.10.010)
- Assumed Practices (CRRT.C.10.010)
- Evaluative Framework for the HLC Criteria (INST.A.10.020)

Eligibility Requirements

Adopted October 2024

Streamlined HLC's Eligibility Requirements and aligned them with the revised Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices.

Revised Policy

- Eligibility Requirements (CRRT.A.10.010)

Multi-campus Visits

Adopted February 2024, effective September 1, 2024

Revised when HLC visits a sample of an institution's branch campuses — a process known as a multi-campus visit — during a comprehensive evaluation. As of September 1, 2024, multi-campus visits take place during comprehensive evaluations for candidacy, initial

accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. They no longer occur during other comprehensive evaluations, including Standard Pathway Year 4 comprehensive evaluations that do not involve reaffirmation of accreditation.

Revised Policies

- Candidacy and Initial Accreditation (INST.B.20.020)
- Evaluative Activities Applicable to All Institutions (INST.C.10.040)

Open Pathway Evaluative Activities

Adopted February 2025, effective September 1, 2025

Established an option for eligible institutions on the Open Pathway to choose to complete a Quality Initiative, focused on student success, during Years 1–4 of their accreditation cycle in lieu of the mid-cycle Assurance Review in Year 4. The changes also clarified certain other practices related to the Standard and Open Pathways.

Revised Policy

- Pathways and Related Process Requirements (INST.C.10.005)

Sanctions and Reaffirmation of Accreditation

Adopted October 2024

Established standard time periods for Notice and Probation, as well as the general rule that an institution would have its accreditation reaffirmed when it is removed from Probation or a Show-Cause Order. The changes also clarified the standard for issuing a Show-Cause Order.

Revised Policies

- Substantive Requirements for Reaffirmation of Accreditation (INST.C.10.010)
- Process Requirements Leading to HLC Action Following Reviews of the Criteria for Accreditation (INST.C.10.030)
- Notice (INST.E.10.010)
- Probation (INST.E.20.010)
- Show-Cause (Procedural Order) (INST.E.30.010)

Special Monitoring

Adopted February 2025

Established special monitoring reports as a possible method for HLC to respond quickly to a developing situation at a member institution. The changes also clarified HLC's practices with respect to institutional designations and special monitoring generally.

Revised Policies

- Special Monitoring (INST.F.20.010)
- Staff Authority (COMM.B.10.020)

Staff Authority

Adopted February 2024

Clarified when HLC staff may take certain actions with respect to an institution and when staff may recommend certain actions to an HLC decision-making body. The changes also clarified when institutions have an opportunity to submit a response to a staff member's recommendation.

Revised Policies

- Routine Monitoring and Data Collection (INST.F.10.010)
- Staff Authority (COMM.B.10.020)

Student Success Outcomes: Data Collection and Indicator Follow-Up

Adopted February 2025

Allowed for an expansion of HLC's risk indicator process to include the evaluation of student success outcome measures, including using data reported to IPEDS.

Revised Policy

- Routine Monitoring and Data Collection (INST.F.10.010)

Deleted Policy

- Review of Student Outcome Data (FDCR.A.10.080)

Teach-Out Arrangements

Adopted February 2025

Clarified HLC's requirements regarding teach-out arrangements. The changes better align HLC's policies with regulatory requirements, while continuing to be focused on student needs.

Revised Policies

- HLC Approval of Institutional Teach-Out Arrangements (FDCR.B.10.010)
- Obligations of Membership (CRRT.D.10.010)
- Staff Authority (COMM.B.10.020)



“Our members understand that quality improvement is a journey, not a destination. They put their students first.”

— Eric V. Martin, HLC Executive Vice President



Eligibility Requirements

Policy number: CRRT.A.10.010

An institution must meet all Eligibility Requirements before it is granted candidate status or accredited status.

1. Jurisdiction of HLC

The institution falls within HLC's jurisdiction as defined in HLC's Bylaws (Article II). HLC extends accreditation and candidacy to higher education institutions that (1) are incorporated in or operating under federal authority within, the United States; and (2) have substantial presence, as defined in HLC policy, within the United States.

2. Legal Status

The institution is legally authorized to award degrees as an institution of higher education in at least one state or sovereign nation within HLC's jurisdiction. The institution is appropriately authorized in each jurisdiction in which it operates to award degrees, offer educational programs, or conduct activities as an institution of higher education.

3. Governing Board

The institution has a governing board that is free from undue external influence and that possesses and exercises legal powers necessary to govern the institution, including with respect to budget and authority for engaging and dismissing the Chief Executive Officer of the institution.

4. Stability

During the two years preceding its submission of the application to seek membership with HLC, and extending throughout the duration while seeking initial accreditation with HLC, the institution demonstrates a history of continuity and stability, including as to operations and control.

5. Mission Statement

The institution has a mission statement that is approved by its governing board and appropriate for a degree-granting institution of higher education. The institution's mission identifies the nature and purpose of the higher learning provided by the institution and the students for whom it is intended.

6. Educational Programs

The institution has educational programs that are appropriate for an institution of higher education.

In appropriate proportion, the institution's educational programs are degree-granting and involve coursework provided by the institution.

The institution clearly and publicly articulates the purposes, content and intended learning outcomes of its educational programs. It has strategies for assessment of student learning in place.

The institution:

- a. maintains a minimum requirement for general education for all of its undergraduate programs whether through a traditional practice of distributed curricula (15 semester credits for AAS degrees, 24 for AS or AA degrees, and 30 for bachelor's degrees) or through other accepted equivalent models. Any variation is explained and justified.
- b. has a program of general education for all of its undergraduate programs that is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework; and that imparts broad knowledge and skills to students.
- c. conforms to commonly accepted minimum program length: 60 semester credits for associate's degrees, 120 semester credits for bachelor's degrees, and 30 semester credits beyond the bachelor's for master's degrees. Any exception is explained and justified.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/eligibility-requirements

7. Information to the Public

The institution makes the following information public:

- a. Statements of mission, vision, and values;
- b. Full descriptions of the requirements for its educational programs;
- c. Requirements for admission both to the institution and to individual educational programs;
- d. Policies on acceptance of transfer credit and prior learning, including how credit is applied to educational program requirements;
- e. Clear and accurate information on all student costs, including tuition, fees, training and incidentals;
- f. Financial aid policies, including its policy on refunds;
- g. Policies regarding academic good standing, probation, and dismissal;
- h. Residency and enrollment requirements;
- i. Information about its relationship with any parent organization and any external providers of instruction; and
- j. Complaint procedures.

The institution portrays clearly and accurately to the public its legal authorization to award degrees, offer educational programs, or conduct activities as an institution of higher education within any jurisdictions in which it so operates; and its accreditation status with HLC and any other recognized accreditors. As applicable, the institution makes clear to students the distinction between the various types of accreditation; and the relationship between licensure and these various types of accreditation.

8. Financial Capacity

The institution has the financial base to support its operations and sustain them in the future. It demonstrates a record of responsible fiscal management.

The institution:

- a. has a prepared budget for the current year and the capacity to compare it with budgets and actual results of previous years; and
- b. undergoes external financial audit by a certified public accountant or a public audit agency that reports financial statements on the institution separately from any other related entity or parent corporation. For private institutions the audit is annual; for public institutions it is at least every two years. (Institutions under federal control are exempted provided that they have other reliable information to document the institution's fiscal resources and management.)

9. Administration

The institution has a Chief Executive Officer.

The institution has governance and administrative structures that enable it to carry out its operations.

10. Faculty and Other Academic Personnel

The institution employs faculty and other academic personnel who are appropriately qualified and sufficient in number to support its educational programs.

11. Learning Resources

The institution has learning resources necessary to support its students, such as research laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites, and museum collections.

12. Student Support Services

The institution has support services necessary to support its students, such as academic advising, academic records, financial aid, and career services.

13. Planning

The institution demonstrates that it engages in planning with regard to its current and future business and educational operations.

14. Policies and Procedures

The institution has appropriate policies and procedures for its students, administrators, faculty, and staff.

15. Current Activity

The institution has students enrolled in at least one degree program.

To be granted initial accreditation, an institution must have either graduated students from at least one degree program or, as further detailed in the Effective Date of Accreditation Actions policy, must be prepared to graduate students from at least one degree program within 30 days of the date on which initial accreditation is awarded.

16. Integrity of Business and Academic Operations

In general, within the two years prior to applying for membership and extending throughout the duration while seeking initial accreditation with HLC, the institution does not have a record of inappropriate, unethical, and untruthful dealings, including with its students, the public, or governmental entities. If any of

the above circumstances are present, they are explained and justified so as to meet this requirement.

The institution complies with all legal requirements (including authorization of educational programs) wherever it does business.

17. Consistency of Description Among Agencies

The institution describes itself consistently to all recognized accreditors and governmental entities with regard to matters such as its mission, educational programs, governance, and finances.

18. Accreditation Record

In general, within the two years prior to applying for membership and extending throughout the duration while seeking initial accreditation with HLC:

- a. The institution has not been subject to a sanction, Show-Cause Order, or other similar negative action with any recognized accreditor or state authorizing agency.
- b. The institution has not been subject to an adverse action (withdrawal, suspension, denial or termination) with any recognized accreditor or state authorizing agency.
- c. The institution has not voluntarily resigned its status with any recognized accreditor or state

authorizing agency while subject to (a.) or (b.) or while any circumstances that would give rise to (a.) or (b.) were pending.

- d. There are no pending circumstances that would give rise to (a.) or (b.).

If any of the above circumstances are present, their actual or anticipated resolution are explained and justified so as to meet this requirement.

If the institution offers educational programs that require accreditation by a recognized accreditor or recognition by a state licensing board or other entity in order for its students to be certified or to sit for licensing examinations in states where its students reside, it either has the appropriate accreditation, is in the process of seeking such accreditation, or discloses publicly and clearly the consequences of the lack thereof.

19. Good Faith and Planning to Achieve Accreditation

The institution's board has authorized the institution to seek membership with HLC. The institution has indicated its intention to abide by the Obligations of Membership.

The institution has a realistic plan for achieving accreditation with HLC within the timeframes set by HLC policy.



Robert Rucker, HLC Associate General Counsel



Revised Criteria for Accreditation

Policy number: CRRT.B.10.010

In June 2024, HLC's Board of Trustees adopted the following revised Criteria for Accreditation, which go into effect on September 1, 2025. The current Criteria remain in effect until that date.

The Criteria for Accreditation convey the standards of quality by which HLC determines whether an institution merits accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Recognition of the widely varying institutional missions across HLC's membership is essential to these Criteria as standards of quality.

Institutional Mission

Mission is foundational to an institution's curriculum, instructional activities and the success of its students. Mission further informs an institution's research and innovation pursuits, its community engagement activities and services, its role within the higher education ecosystem, its student body, and its decisions regarding operations and resource allocations. An institution's distinctive mission is the cornerstone around which the institution's effectiveness, integrity and commitment to continuous improvement are evaluated.

When demonstrating that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation, an institution has the opportunity to reflect on the significance of its distinctive mission as well as across the wider higher education landscape. Against these backdrops, the institution is able to speak to its current state, aspirations and plans for the future.

Specifically, the distinctiveness of an institution's mission may inform the strategies it adopts and the evidence it provides to demonstrate that it meets each Criterion and Core Component. In preparing for a review, an institution may provide evidence relevant to additional topics related to a Core Component beyond those specified in any HLC resource document. During the review process, peer reviewers will determine whether an institution meets the Criteria and Core Components on the basis of such evidence.

Criterion 1. Mission

The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 1.

1.A. Mission Alignment

The institution's educational programs, enrollment profile and scope of operations align with its publicly articulated mission.

1.B. Mission and Public Good

The institution's operation of the academic enterprise demonstrates its commitment to serving the public good.

1.C. Mission and Diversity of Society

The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 2.

2.A. Integrity

Actions taken by the institution's governing board, administration, faculty and staff demonstrate adherence to established policies and procedures.

2.B. Transparency

The institution presents itself accurately and completely to students and the public with respect to its educational programs and any claims it makes related to the educational experience.

2.C. Board Governance

In discharging its fiduciary duties, the institution's governing board is free from undue external influence and empowered to act in the best interests of the institution, including the students it serves.

2.D. Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

The institution supports academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of knowledge as integral to high-quality teaching, learning and research.

2.E. Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery and Application

The institution adheres to policies and procedures that ensure responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge.

Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning for Student Success

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 3.

3.A. Educational Programs

The institution maintains learning goals and outcomes that reflect a level of rigor commensurate with college-level work, including by program level and the content of each of its educational programs.

3.B. Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry

The institution's educational programs engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in practicing modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

3.C. Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff

The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

3.D. Support for Student Learning and Resources for Teaching

The institution provides student support services that address the needs of its student populations, as well as the teaching resources and infrastructure necessary for student success.

3.E. Assessment of Student Learning

The institution improves the quality of educational programs based on its assessment of student learning.

3.F. Program Review

The institution improves its curriculum based on periodic program review.

3.G. Student Success Outcomes

The institution's student success outcomes demonstrate continuous improvement, taking into account the student populations it serves and benchmarks that reference peer institutions.

Criterion 4. Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

As noted above in Institutional Mission, an institution's distinctive mission will inform how it demonstrates that it meets the following Core Components of Criterion 4.

4.A. Effective Administrative Structures

The institution's administrative structures are effective and facilitate collaborative processes such as shared governance; data-informed decision making; and engagement with internal and external constituencies as appropriate.

4.B. Resource Base and Sustainability

The institution's financial and personnel resources effectively support its current operations. The institution's financial management balances short-term needs with long-term commitments and ensures its ongoing sustainability.

4.C. Planning for Quality Improvement

The institution engages in systematic strategic planning for quality improvement. It relies on data, integrating its insights from enrollment forecasts, financial capacity, student learning assessment, institutional operations and the external environment.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/criteria

Determining Whether an Institution Meets the Criteria

HLC reviews institutions against the Criteria and Core Components according to the evaluative framework described in HLC policy (INST.A.10.020):

Core Components. The institution meets the Core Component if:

1. the Core Component is met without concerns, that is the institution meets or exceeds the expectations embodied in the Component, or to the extent opportunities for improvement exist, peer review or a decision-making body has determined that monitoring is not required; or
2. the Core Component is met with concerns, that is the institution demonstrates the characteristics expected by the Component, but performance in relation to some aspect of the Component must be improved.

The institution does not meet the Core Component if the institution fails to meet the Component in its entirety or is so deficient in the area covered by the Core Component that the Component is judged not to be met.

Criteria for Accreditation. The institution meets the Criterion if:

1. the Criterion is met without concerns, that is the institution meets or exceeds the expectations embodied in the Criterion, or to the extent opportunities for improvement exist, peer review or a decision-making body has determined that monitoring is not required; or
2. the Criterion is met with concerns, that is the institution demonstrates the characteristics expected by the Criterion, but performance in relation to some Core Components of the Criterion must be improved.

The Criterion is not met if the institution fails to meet the Criterion in its entirety or is so deficient in one or more Core Components of the Criterion that the Criterion is judged not to be met.

The institution meets the Criterion only if all Core Components are met. The team's judgment in applying this evaluative framework shall be exercised at the level of each Core Component and each Criterion for Accreditation. For purposes of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, findings of "met" and "met with concerns" both constitute compliance.

Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation

At various points in its accreditation relationship with HLC, an institution provides a narrative and supporting evidence that demonstrate it meets HLC's Criteria for Accreditation. A team of peer reviewers evaluates the institution to validate its argument and determine if each Core Component of the Criteria is met.

The evidence an institution provides to demonstrate that it complies with HLC's Criteria should do the following:

- Support the institution's argument that it has met the Criteria for Accreditation.
- Substantiate the facts presented in the institutional narrative.
- Respond to the concerns, recommendations and suggestions for improvement of prior peer reviewers.
- Explain any nuances specific to the institution.
- Strengthen the institution's overall record of compliance with HLC's requirements.
- Affirm the institution's overall academic quality, operational integrity and financial sustainability.

In addition to some common types of evidence that most institutions provide (e.g., financial documents, academic catalogs and personnel policies), an institution will also provide additional evidence that best demonstrates its compliance with the Criteria and Core Components according to its mission. Mission is the essential driver of the institution's curriculum, student outcomes, research, community engagement, operations and resources, and future goals.

HLC provides suggestions to assist institutions in identifying possible sources of evidence in *Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation*, available at hlcommission.org/criteria.





Revised Assumed Practices

Policy number: CRRT.C.10.010

In June 2024, HLC's Board of Trustees adopted the following revised Assumed Practices, which go into effect on September 1, 2025. The current Assumed Practices remain in effect until that date.

Foundational to the Criteria and Core Components is a set of practices shared by institutions of higher education in the United States. Unlike the Criteria for Accreditation, these Assumed Practices are (1) generally matters to be determined as facts, rather than matters requiring professional judgment and (2) not expected to vary by institutional mission. Every institution is expected to be in compliance with all Assumed Practices at all times.

Because institutions are assumed to be adhering to the Assumed Practices on an ongoing basis, peer review teams will not review their compliance with these requirements except as follows:

1. When an institution is seeking HLC accreditation and has not yet been granted initial accreditation by the Board of Trustees, the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with all the Assumed Practices as part of any reports to gain and maintain candidacy, and to gain initial accreditation.
2. When the Board of Trustees has placed an institution on the sanction of Probation and has cited the institution for being out of compliance with one or more Assumed Practices, the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with the cited Assumed Practices as part of its report to have Probation removed.
3. When the Board of Trustees has placed an institution under a Show-Cause Order, the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with all the Assumed Practices as part of its report to have the Show-Cause Order removed.
4. When an accredited institution's compliance with one or more Criteria for Accreditation raises questions concerning its compliance with related

Assumed Practices, the institution must be prepared to provide evidence that it is in compliance with such related Assumed Practices.

5. When otherwise required by HLC as circumstances warrant.

An institution determined not to be in compliance with any Assumed Practice, even if in compliance with all other HLC requirements, may be subject to monitoring, Probation, a Show-Cause Order, or an adverse action, as defined by HLC policy based on the gravity of the finding as measured by (a) in the case of Probation, the extent to which a substantial remediation period is necessary to address such non-compliance; or (b) in the case of a Show-Cause Order or adverse action, the extent to which the very existence of the finding suggests that the institution should not remain accredited.

A. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

1. The institution has a conflict of interest policy that ensures that the governing board and the senior administrative personnel act in the best interest of the institution.
2. The institution has ethics policies for faculty and staff regarding conflict of interest, nepotism, recruitment and admissions, financial aid, privacy of personal information, and contracting.
3. The institution provides its students, administrators, faculty, and staff with policies and procedures informing them of their rights and responsibilities within the institution.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/assumed-practices

4. The institution establishes and publicizes clear policies and procedures for receiving complaints from students and other constituencies, responding to complaints in a timely manner, and analyzing complaints to improve its processes. The institution does not retaliate against those who raise complaints.
5. The institution makes readily available to students and to the public clear and complete information including:
 - a. Statements of mission, vision, and values.
 - b. Requirements for admission both to the institution and to individual educational programs.
 - c. Its policies on acceptance of transfer credit and prior learning, including how credit is applied to educational program requirements. (Except for courses articulated through transfer policies or institutional agreements, the institution makes no promises to prospective students regarding the acceptance of credit awarded by examination, credit for prior learning, or credit for transfer until the institution has conducted an evaluation of such students' credits in accordance with its transfer policies.)
 - d. All student costs, including tuition, fees, training, and incidentals.
 - e. Its financial aid policies, including its policy on refunds.
 - f. Policies regarding academic good standing, probation, and dismissal.
 - g. Residency or enrollment requirements (if any).
 - h. Information about its relationship with any parent organization and any external providers of instruction.
6. The institution assures that all data it makes public are accurate and complete, including those reporting on student success outcomes.
7. The institution portrays clearly and accurately to the public its legal authorization to award degrees, offer educational programs or conduct activities as an institution of higher education within any jurisdictions in which it so operates; and its current status with HLC and with any other recognized accreditors. As applicable, the institution makes clear to students the distinction between the various types of accreditation and the relationship between licensure and the various types of accreditation.
8. An institution offering programs that require accreditation by a recognized accreditor or recognition by a state licensing board or other entity in order for its students to be certified or to sit for licensing examinations in states where its students reside either has the appropriate accreditation and recognition, is in the process of seeking such accreditation, or discloses publicly and clearly the consequences to the students of the lack thereof.
 - a. An institution offering programs eligible for specialized accreditation at multiple locations discloses the accreditation status and recognition of the program by state licensing boards at each location.
 - b. An institution that provides a program that prepares students for a licensure, certification, or other qualifying examination publicly discloses its pass rate on that examination, unless such information is not available to the institution.
9. The governing board includes some "public" members. Public members have no significant administrative position or any ownership interest in any of the following: the institution itself; a company that does substantial business with the institution; a company or organization with which the institution has a substantial partnership; a parent, ultimate parent, affiliate, or subsidiary corporation; an investment group or firm substantially involved with one of the above organizations. All publicly elected members or members appointed by publicly elected individuals or bodies (governors, elected legislative bodies) are considered public members.¹
10. The governing board has the authority to approve the annual budget and to hire, evaluate and dismiss the chief executive officer.¹
11. The governing board is trained and knowledgeable on all subject matter necessary to discharge its legal and fiduciary responsibilities, and to otherwise make informed decisions with respect to the institution's financial and academic policies and procedures.

¹ Institutions operating under federal control and authorized by Congress are exempt from these requirements. These institutions must have a public board that includes representation by individuals who do not have a current or previous employment or other relationship with the federal government or any military entity. This public board has a significant role in setting policy, reviewing the institution's finances, reviewing and approving major institutional priorities, and overseeing the academic programs of the institution.

12. The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the institution's administration and expects the institution's faculty to oversee academic matters.
 13. The institution remains in compliance at all times with all applicable laws, including laws related to research, authorization of educational activities, and consumer protection wherever it does business.
 14. The institution documents outsourcing of all services in written agreements, including agreements with parent or affiliated organizations.
 15. The institution takes responsibility for the ethical and responsible behavior of its contractual partners in relation to actions taken on its behalf.
- d. The institution adheres to policies on student academic load per term that reflect reasonable expectations for successful learning and course completion.
 - e. The institution has policies and procedures for ensuring that all courses transferred and applied toward educational program requirements demonstrate equivalence with its own courses required for that educational program or are of equivalent rigor.
 - f. The institution has a clear policy on the maximum allowable credit for prior learning as a reasonable proportion of the credits required to complete the student's program. Credit awarded for prior learning is documented, evaluated, and appropriate for the level of academic credential awarded. (Note that this requirement does not apply to courses transferred from other institutions.)
 - g. The institution maintains a minimum requirement for general education for all of its undergraduate programs whether through a traditional practice of distributed curricula (15 semester credits for AAS degrees, 24 for AS or AA degrees, and 30 for bachelor's degrees) or through other accepted equivalent models. Any variation is explained and justified.
 - h. If the institution makes any claims for student learning related to its cocurricular programs, it assesses such student learning and makes improvements.

B. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support

1. Programs, Courses, and Credits
 - a. The institution conforms to commonly accepted minimum program length: 60 semester credits for associate's degrees, 120 semester credits for bachelor's degrees, and 30 semester credits beyond the bachelor's for master's degrees. Any variation is explained and justified.
 - b. The institution maintains structures or practices that ensure the coherence and quality of the programs for which it awards an academic credential. Typically institutions will require that at minimum 30 of the 120 credits earned for the bachelor's degree and 15 of the 60 credits for the associate's degree be credits earned at the institution itself, through arrangements with other accredited institutions, or through contractual relationships approved by HLC. Any variation is explained and justified.
 - c. The institution's policy and practice assure that at least 50% of courses applied to a graduate program are courses designed for graduate work, rather than undergraduate courses credited toward a graduate degree. (Cf. Criterion 3.A.) (An institution may allow well-prepared advanced students to substitute its graduate courses for required or elective courses in an undergraduate degree program and then subsequently count those same courses as fulfilling graduate requirements in a related graduate program that the institution offers. In "4+1" or "2+3" programs, at least 50% of the credits allocated for the master's degree — usually 15 of 30 — must be for courses designed for graduate work.)
2. Faculty Roles and Qualifications
 - a. The institution establishes and maintains reasonable policies and procedures to determine that faculty are qualified. The factors that an institution considers as part of these policies and procedures could include, but are not limited to: the achievement of academic credentials, progress toward academic credentials, equivalent experience, or some combination thereof. The institution's obligations in this regard extend to all instructors and all other entities to which it assigns the responsibility of instruction. HLC will maintain "Institutional Policies and Procedures for Determining Faculty Qualifications Guidelines" to further explain requirements for reasonable policies and procedures in accordance with this Assumed Practice.

- b. Faculty participate substantially in:
 - i. oversight of the curriculum offered — its development, vetting and implementation; academic substance; currency; and relevance for internal and external constituencies;
 - ii. assurance of consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in the expectations of student performance;
 - iii. establishment of the qualifications for instructors, including instructors provided by third parties;
 - iv. analysis of data and appropriate action on assessment of student learning and program completion.
- 3. Support Services
 - a. Financial aid advising clearly and comprehensively reviews students' eligibility for financial assistance and assists students in a full understanding of their debt and its consequences.
 - b. The institution maintains timely and accurate transcript and records services.
- 4. The institution strives to ensure that the overall composition of its faculty and staff reflects diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

C. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

1. Instructors (excluding for this requirement teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty) have the authority for the assignment of any measures of student success outcomes. (This requirement allows for collective responsibility, as, for example, when a faculty committee has the authority to override a grade on appeal.)
2. The institution evaluates all academic credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning. The institution has clear policies for evaluating and accepting credits awarded by other education providers and may rely on credit evaluation undertaken by responsible third parties. The institution refrains from the transcription of credit from other institutions or providers that it will not apply to its own programs.
3. The institution has formal and current written agreements for managing any internships and clinical placements included in its programs.

4. Instructors communicate course requirements to students in writing and in a timely manner.
5. Institutional data on assessment of student learning are accurate and address the full range of students who enroll.
6. Institutional data on student success outcomes are accurate and address the full range of students who enroll.

D. Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

1. The institution is able to meet its current financial obligations.
2. The institution has a well-developed procedure for budgeting and monitoring its finances. It has a prepared budget for the current year and the capacity to compare it with budgets and actual results of previous years.
3. The institution has future financial projections addressing its long-term financial sustainability.
4. The institution maintains effective systems for collecting, analyzing, and using institutional information.
5. The institution undergoes an external audit by a certified public accountant or a public audit agency that reports financial statements on the institution separately from any other related entity or parent corporation. For private institutions the audit is annual; for public institutions it is at least every two years.²
6. The institution's administrative structure includes a chief executive officer, chief financial officer, and chief academic officer (titles may vary) with appropriate credentials and experience and sufficient focus on the institution to ensure appropriate leadership and oversight. (An institution may outsource its financial functions but must have the capacity to assure the effectiveness of that arrangement.)
7. The institution's planning activities demonstrate careful and detailed consideration of student needs (including but not limited to the preservation of student records) and protocols to be followed in the event an orderly institutional closure becomes necessary.

² Institutions under federal control are exempted provided that they have other reliable information to document the institution's fiscal resources and management.



Obligations of Membership

Policy number: CRRT.D.10.010

Proposed Changes to the Obligations of Membership

At its February 2025 meeting, HLC's Board of Trustees approved on first reading proposed changes to the Obligations of Membership. The changes would clarify the purpose and process for Administrative Probation. The Board will consider the changes for adoption in June 2025. If adopted, the changes would be effective immediately.

See the proposed changes at hlcommission.org/obligations.

While seeking and holding membership with HLC, an institution voluntarily agrees to meet obligations set forth by HLC as follows:

1. The institution participates in periodic evaluation through the structures and mechanisms set forth in HLC policies, submission of reports as requested by HLC, filing of the Institutional Update, and any other requirements set forth in its policies.
2. The institution regularly reviews current HLC policies and procedures. It adheres to such policies and procedures in good faith.
3. The institution designates an Accreditation Liaison Officer in accordance with HLC requirements.
4. The institution is candid, transparent, and forthcoming in its dealings with HLC, including cooperating with all requests for information from HLC.
5. The institution notifies HLC of any condition or situation that has the potential to affect the institution's status with HLC, such as a significant reduction in program offerings, potential institutional closure or serious legal investigation (including, but not limited to, conditions or situations included in HLC's policy on special monitoring).
6. As further defined and explained in HLC policy, the institution informs HLC of its relationship with any related entity wherein institutional decision-making is controlled by that entity and of any changes in that relationship that may affect the institution's compliance with HLC accreditation requirements.
7. The institution describes itself in identical terms to HLC and to any other recognized accreditor or regulatory body with which it holds or seeks membership with regard to purpose, operating authority, governance, programs, locations, degrees, diplomas, certificates, personnel, finances, and constituents.
8. The institution notifies HLC when it receives a pending or final adverse action from or has been placed on sanction by any other recognized accreditor; if a state has issued a pending or final action that affects the institution's legal status or authority to grant degrees; if it is placed on, or removed from, a provisional certification for participation in Title IV by the U.S. Department of Education; or if it is placed on, or removed from, the Reimbursement payment method or the Heightened Cash Monitoring 2 payment method by the U.S. Department of Education.
9. The institution notifies its constituents when it receives a pending or final adverse action from or has been placed on sanction by any other recognized accreditor or if a state has issued a pending or final action that affects the institution's legal status or authority to grant degrees.
10. Whenever the institution is required to submit a provisional plan, the institution notifies applicable stakeholders as to the rationale for that provisional plan and provides stakeholders with a summary of the provisional plan as applicable to them.
11. The institution accepts that HLC will, in the interest of transparency to the public, publish outcomes from its accreditation process in accordance with HLC policy.
12. The institution portrays its accreditation status with HLC clearly to the public, including the status of its branch campuses and related entities. The institution posts the electronic version of HLC's Mark of Accreditation Status in at least one place on its

website, linking users directly to the institution's status on HLC's website.

13. The institution provides its constituents and applicants with any Public Disclosure Notice or Public Statement it receives from HLC and accurately communicates the significance of, and underlying reasons for, such Public Disclosure Notice or Public Statement as required by HLC.
14. The institution maintains prominently on its website a telephone number that includes an option for both current students and the public to speak with a representative of the institution.
15. The institution ensures that any information submitted to HLC generally will not include unredacted personally identifiable information (PII). If the institution submits information with unredacted PII because it is necessary for evaluative purposes or otherwise, it will clearly identify the information as such, if applicable.
16. The institution submits timely payment of dues and fees in accordance with the published Dues and Fees Schedule and accepts the fact of surcharges for late payment.
17. Prior to taking legal action against HLC, the institution agrees to submit to initial arbitration any dispute it may raise regarding an adverse action as such term is defined in HLC policy and that it is not able to resolve through HLC's processes.
18. The institution agrees that in the event it, or any third party, takes legal action against HLC related to any accreditation action or makes any legal inquiries of HLC related to the institution, the institution shall, to the extent allowed by law, be responsible for all expenses, including but not limited to attorneys' fees, expert witness, and related fees, incurred by HLC in responding to such legal inquiries and/or defending the action.

Meeting Obligations of Membership

Institutions must remain in compliance with the Obligations of Membership at all times. The HLC President shall make a final determination as to whether an institution is in violation of the Obligations of Membership such that Administrative Probation should be imposed. HLC may make use of any reasonable means to determine whether the institution has violated an Obligation of Membership including, but not limited to, seeking written information from the institution or scheduling one or more peer reviewers or staff members to meet with one or more institutional representatives either on-campus or through other appropriate method.

Administrative Probation

HLC staff or peer reviewer(s) may recommend an institution for Administrative Probation. Such recommendation shall be made to the President in writing and information about such recommendation shall be provided to the institution for an institutional response. The institution shall have a minimum of 14 days to respond in writing to the recommendation. The HLC President shall then review the recommendation and the institution's response and make the decision whether to impose Administrative Probation. If the institution's response is unsatisfactory, the HLC President shall place the institution on Administrative Probation for a period not to exceed ninety days. The HLC President will notify the institution of the imposition of the Administrative Probation and the conditions for its removal in writing. During the ninety-day time period, the institution will be expected to remedy the situation that led to the imposition of Administrative Probation. At the end of the ninety-day period, the institution shall provide evidence that it has remedied the conditions leading to Administrative Probation to the President. Such evidence may be reviewed directly by HLC Staff, or peer reviewers as necessary to confirm the institution's compliance. Upon such validation, the President shall remove Administrative Probation.

If an institution fails to remedy the situation that led to Administrative Probation by the end of the ninety-day period, the HLC President shall take a recommendation concerning the institution to a decision-making body. Depending on the nature and the severity of the circumstances, such recommendation may involve a change in the institution's Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation at the time of its next comprehensive evaluation, removal from the Notification Program for Additional Locations, interim monitoring on the underlying issue that led to Administrative Probation, the application of a sanction, the issuance of a Show-Cause Order or the withdrawal of accreditation, in accordance with HLC policies and procedures.

Disclosure of Administrative Probation

Administrative probation is noted on an institution's Statement of Accreditation Status along with the reason for the Administrative Probation until its removal.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/obligations



Federal Compliance Requirements

As an institutional accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, HLC is responsible for verifying that member institutions comply with certain federal regulations.

Assignment of Credits, Program Length and Tuition

Policy number: FDCR.A.10.020

An institution shall be able to equate its learning experiences with semester or quarter credit hours using practices common to institutions of higher education, to justify the lengths of its programs in comparison to similar programs found in accredited institutions of higher education, and to justify any program-specific tuition in terms of program costs, program length, and program objectives. Institutions shall notify HLC of any significant changes in the relationships among credits, program length, and tuition.

Assignment of Credit Hours. The institution's assignment and award of credit hours shall conform to commonly accepted practices in higher education. Those institutions seeking, or participating in, Title IV federal financial aid, shall demonstrate that they have policies determining the credit hours awarded to courses and programs in keeping with commonly-accepted practices in higher education and with any federal definition of the credit hour, as may appear in federal regulations and that institutions also have procedures that result in an appropriate awarding of institutional credit in conformity with the policies established by the institution.

HLC Review. HLC shall review an institution's compliance with this policy in conjunction with a comprehensive evaluation for Candidacy, Initial Accreditation or Reaffirmation of Accreditation during HLC's assurance process. Institutions shall also produce evidence of compliance with this policy upon demand in accordance

with HLC policy. HLC may sample or use other techniques to review selected institutional programs to ensure that it has reviewed the reliability and accuracy of the institution's assignment of credit. HLC shall monitor, through its established monitoring processes, the resolution of any concerns related to an institution's compliance with this policy as identified during that evaluation and shall require that an institution remedy any deficiency in this regard by a date certain but not to exceed two years from the date of the action identifying the deficiency.

HLC Action for Systemic Noncompliance. In addition to taking appropriate action related to the institution's compliance with the Federal Compliance Requirements, HLC shall notify the Secretary of Education if, following any review process identified above or through any other mechanism, HLC finds systemic noncompliance with HLC's policies in this section regarding the awarding of academic credit.

HLC shall understand systemic noncompliance to mean that an institution lacks policies to determine the appropriate awarding of academic credit or that there is an awarding by an institution of institutional credit across multiple programs or divisions or affecting significant numbers of students not in conformity with the policies established by the institution or with commonly accepted practices in higher education.

Institutional Records of Student Complaints

Policy number: FDCR.A.10.030

An institution shall be able to demonstrate that it keeps an account of the student complaints it has received, including its processing of those complaints, and how that processing comports with the institution's policies and procedures on the handling of grievances or complaints. Upon request, an institution shall make



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hlcommission.org/federal-requirements

available to HLC evidence that, at regular intervals, it analyzes data related to student complaints received and identifies opportunities for institutional improvement.

Publication of Transfer Policies

Policy number: FDCR.A.10.040

Each institution shall determine its own policies and procedures for accepting transfer credits, including credits from accredited and non-accredited institutions, from foreign institutions, and from institutions which grant credit for experiential learning and for non-traditional adult learner programs in conformity with any expectations in HLC's Assumed Practices. An institution's periodic review of its transfer policies and procedures should include evaluation of their clarity to those who administer them, to the students who follow them, and to employers and other stakeholders. It should also include the consistency of their interpretation and application throughout the institution, as well as their responsiveness to new types of learning opportunities outside institutions of higher education.

An institution shall demonstrate that it has transfer policies that are publicly disclosed and that such policies include, at a minimum:

1. Any established criteria the institution uses regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution and any types of institutions or sources from which the institution will not accept credits;
2. A list of institutions with which the institution has established an articulation agreement; and
3. Written criteria used to evaluate and award credit for prior learning experience including, but not limited to, service in the armed forces, paid or unpaid employment, or other demonstrated competency or learning.

Institutional Practices for Verification of Student Identity and Protection of Student Privacy

Policy number: FDCR.A.10.050

Student Identity Verification

An institution offering distance education or correspondence education, as such terms may be defined in federal regulations shall have processes through which the institution establishes that the student who registers in the distance education or

correspondence education courses or programs is the same student who participates in and completes and receives the academic credit.

In verifying the identity of students who participate in class or coursework the institution may make use of a one or more methods, at the option of the institution, which may include but need not be limited to: (1) secure login and pass code; (2) proctored examinations; and (3) new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying the identity of students. Institutions must notify students at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional student charges associated with the verification of student identity such as separate fees charged by proctoring services, etc.

Student Privacy

All institutions must maintain procedures and processes for ensuring the protection of student privacy. Such procedures and processes, including any methods related to student identity verification must also implement reasonable and appropriate safeguards to protect student privacy.

HLC Review

HLC will review an institution's student identity verification protocols when an institution requests permission to add programs in distance delivery and correspondence as well as during a comprehensive evaluation that includes a Federal Compliance Review. HLC will also require that institutions submit information about student identity verification protocols on HLC's Institutional Update.

HLC will review all institutions' procedures and processes for ensuring the protection of student privacy during all comprehensive evaluations within the context of the Criteria for Accreditation.

Title IV Program Responsibilities

Policy number: FDCR.A.10.060

An institution shall demonstrate that it complies if required with the Title IV program responsibility requirements of the Higher Education Reauthorization Act as most recently amended. Therefore, institutions will make available for HLC review any documents it requests concerning the institution's program responsibilities under Title IV of the Act, including any results of financial or compliance audits and program reviews, audits reports by the Office of Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Education, and any other information related to its fulfillment of its Title IV responsibilities.

Default rate. An institution shall make reasonable efforts to ensure that its students do not take on excessive debt either through federal or private loans. An institution shall also demonstrate that it is appropriately fulfilling its Title IV responsibilities to manage its student loan program, to minimize student default on such loans, and to provide accurate information to the U.S. Department of Education when required in conjunction with its loan program. Therefore, an institution will make available to HLC information it requests about its participation in federal and private loan programs as well as its three-year Title IV default rates and any default reduction plans provided to the U.S. Department of Education.

Public Information

Policy number: FDCR.A.10.070

Required Information for Students and the Public

An institution demonstrates that it makes available to students and the public fair, accurate and complete information in catalogs, student handbooks, and other publications that include, at a minimum, information about the institution's calendar, grading, admissions, academic program requirements, tuition and fees, and refund policies.

Information About Student Achievement

An institution's website for students and the public shall include a webpage containing (or linking to) accurate information regarding student achievement. The institution must disclose data that address the broad variety of its student populations and programs, including at the undergraduate and graduate levels as applicable. This information must include, at a minimum, retention, completion, required state licensure exam pass data, and data about the institution's students after transfer or graduation (such as continuing education, job placement and earnings). The institution must also accurately disclose which student populations are excluded from the data.

The data may also include information appropriate for the mission of the institution and its goals for all students.

If an institution uses student job placement data in any marketing or recruitment content, it must also publicly disclose these data on its website along with information necessary to substantiate the truthfulness of its marketing and recruitment materials. All student achievement information must be presented in plain language with any technical terms defined and the institution's methodology for compiling the data included.

Advertising and Recruiting Materials and Other Public Information

An institution's public information including its advertising and recruiting materials shall evidence the same fairness and accuracy HLC expects in an institution's catalog and other documents for students.

Disclosure of Accreditation Status

If the institution chooses to reference its accreditation status in advertising and recruiting materials or other document or location, such as its website, that disclosure will accurately explain its status with HLC and the academic programs, locations and other institutional activities included in its accreditation. This obligation includes accurately disclosing when an action affecting its accreditation status has been taken by any other institutional or programmatic accrediting body. Institutions under HLC sanction or a Show-Cause Order shall comply with additional disclosure requirements pertaining to the applicable sanction or Show-Cause Order as described elsewhere in these policies and as required by HLC's Board of Trustees.

The institution will accompany any reference to accreditation status with information on how to contact HLC. It shall provide HLC's address and telephone number, or it may use HLC's website address in lieu of this information. Electronic materials shall use HLC's Mark of Accreditation Status. HLC reserves the right to issue a public statement or Public Disclosure Notice (PDN) correcting any incorrect or misleading information HLC determines that an institution has publicized about its accreditation status, recent actions by HLC or other information.

Public Opportunity to Comment

HLC will provide comment from third parties about an institution to such institution and the peer review team evaluating it at the time of a comprehensive evaluation based on its procedures.

Standing With State and Other Accreditors

Policy number: FDCR.A.10.080

An institution has a responsibility to remain in good standing with each state in which it is authorized or licensed as well as with any other recognized accreditor by which it is accredited or pre-accredited up to the point that it voluntarily withdraws from such relationships. An institution shall fairly represent to HLC and to the public its history and status with other recognized accreditors

and with each state in which it is authorized or licensed. This obligation includes accurately disclosing when an action affecting its accreditation status has been taken by any other recognized accreditor.

An institution shall disclose to HLC any pending or final state actions that affect the institution's legal status or authority to grant degrees or offer programs. An institution shall also disclose to HLC any pending or final actions by a recognized accreditor to withdraw accredited or pre-accredited status or to impose a sanction, Show-Cause Order or adverse action. Such disclosure shall take place at the time of the action by the respective entity and on HLC's Institutional Update as well as in preparation for a comprehensive evaluation by HLC.

HLC Review. If another recognized accreditor or if a state has taken any of these actions, HLC will undertake a prompt review of the institution and the related action.

With regard to an applying institution, HLC, through its decision-making processes and subject to the limitations in the Eligibility Requirements, will carefully weigh these matters in reaching its own decision to grant candidacy or initial accreditation. If it chooses to grant candidacy or initial accreditation to an institution that has been subject to such an action by an accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, it will provide the Secretary of Education a written explanation of why that action is appropriate within thirty days of taking the action.

With regard to an accredited institution, HLC will determine whether additional review or HLC action, including sanction or withdrawal of accreditation, is appropriate. HLC may undertake its review in any way provided for in HLC policy.

Fraud and Abuse

Policy number: FDCR.A.20.010

An institution shall not engage in fraud and abuse, as outlined in state and federal law and regulation, or in practices or procedures that are designed to, or have the tendency to, create a falsification, deceive, or deliberately mislead.

Allegations of fraud and abuse may be received by HLC from external sources, including but not limited to, the federal government, a state government, or through the institutional complaints process. If HLC receives an allegation of fraud and abuse, HLC will determine whether the alleged fraud and abuse would constitute a violation of one or more HLC requirements. In reviewing any allegation of fraud and abuse, HLC may consider the

nature of the allegation, whether the alleged fraud and abuse appears to meet HLC's understanding of fraud and abuse as outlined in this policy, other HLC policies, or in federal or state definitions of fraud and abuse, and whether the source of the allegation has provided any evidence of the alleged fraud and abuse.

HLC will review an allegation of fraud and abuse through an appropriate mechanism provided for in HLC policy and procedure based on the source and nature of the allegation. An institution that has been determined, through the appropriate review mechanism, to have engaged in fraud and abuse as outlined in this policy shall be considered to be in violation of HLC requirements, including those related to institutional integrity, and shall be subject to appropriate action, up to and including withdrawal of accreditation.

Evidence of fraud and abuse may also arise from any HLC evaluative activity. In such cases, an institution shall be considered to be in violation of HLC requirements, including those related to institutional integrity, and shall be subject to appropriate action, up to and including withdrawal of accreditation.

HLC shall report incidents of fraud and abuse to the U.S. Department of Education as outlined in its policy on the Relations with the U.S. Government, following the conclusion of HLC's review of the allegation or evaluative activity. HLC may also refer such allegations to appropriate state and federal agencies.

Recruiting, Admissions and Related Enrollment Practices

Policy number: FDCR.A.20.020

HLC is committed to promoting fundamental fairness and transparency in its institutions' dealings as pertains to all aspects of the enrollment process. For purposes of this policy this includes lead generation, recruiting activities, admissions processing through matriculation, and related practices such as financial aid determinations and administration. This expectation applies comprehensively to prospective students and, to the extent applicable, current students (referred to collectively in this policy as students). In addition to requirements set forth in other HLC policies, HLC has established the following expectations for member institutions:

1. The institution treats students ethically, respectfully and professionally in the marketing, recruiting, admissions and financial aid process so that students can make informed enrollment decisions about matters such as enrollment and financial aid without

being subjected to high-pressure tactics from the institution or a related contractor, including but not limited to:

- a. Falsely claiming that enrollment spots are limited or taking advantage of students' lack of understanding to pressure students to enroll;
 - b. Pressuring students to make an immediate financial aid decision;
 - c. Engaging in repeated unsolicited contact.
2. All institutional recruiting, admissions and financial aid personnel have appropriate education, job titles, and skills for their role and are overseen by the institution, which enforces a formal code of conduct for all such personnel; the institution also oversees any third-party contractors who provide recruiting, admissions and financial aid services and assures that any personnel who work with their students have similar education, skills and experience as personnel employed by the institution. The institution ensures consistent, accurate information and a high quality of service is provided. As applicable, the institution exercises oversight that ensures adherence to any regulations or other requirements governing recruiting activities in particular areas, such as, for example, athletics.
 3. The institution ensures that its recruiting, admissions and financial aid personnel accurately describe the nature of their role.
 4. The institution makes its policies related to consumer protection accessible and transparent. Information provided to students during any aspect of the enrollment process is accurate, complete and up-to-date and is provided to all students without any requirement that such students provide their contact information.
 5. The institution promptly honors any request from a student to remove that student's name from phone, email or other contact lists. Student information collected through any aspect of the institution's enrollment processes is maintained and protected as outlined in the institution's data privacy policy, which must be prominently posted on the institution's website.
 6. The institution complies with HLC expectations related to the publication of student achievement data as outlined elsewhere in HLC policy.
 7. Institutional recruiters, admissions officers, financial aid officers or appropriate third parties engaged in similar roles on the institution's behalf may answer questions about the student application process for admissions and financial aid, but in no case will such personnel complete applications for students without student permission or apply the signature of a student to an application.
 8. If an institution requires a student to sign an enrollment agreement, the enrollment agreement is limited to basic information about course of study, tuition and fees, and other related information. Any enrollment agreement shall not include language limiting a student's ability to: (1) file a complaint with an accreditor or state agency; (2) take legal action in the event that any dispute resolution processes agreed to by the institution and the student are unsuccessful in resolving the dispute to the satisfaction of the parties; or (3) seek to discharge a student loan through remedies available to borrowers under state or federal law. Students are provided sufficient time, as determined by the situation and any mandates in state law, to review any enrollment agreement and to consult with others as a part of that review process before being required to sign the document or lose an offer of admission and related financial assistance.
 9. Students have the right and responsibility to register for each academic term in which they are eligible to enroll. The institution does not automatically register any student in the next term without that student's affirmative consent to such registration or the opportunity for the student to cancel that registration before the student is assessed tuition or fees for that term.
 10. Prior to enrolling a student in a program or major, the institution ensures that the student has had sufficient time to review the institution's policies and procedures; to understand the amount of federal, state and institutional financial aid the student is eligible to receive; to learn how many credits previously earned, if any, will transfer and whether those transferred credits will be applied to requirements of the major or general education or the process; and to understand the timeline for evaluation of those credits.
 11. The institution shall not induce or pressure a student to enroll by a specific deadline outside of the regular process of scholarship monies, institutional discounting, fee waivers, financial aid, other assistance or institution-branded gifts of nominal value.
 12. In addition to a policy related to return of Title IV funds, the institution has a refund policy to assure

that students receive a refund where appropriate if they withdraw from an academic term or from an institution according to policies set forth by the institution.

13. The institution does not otherwise engage in aggressive or deceptive recruitment tactics or conduct, such as may be defined and prohibited by federal regulations. This prohibition includes, but is not limited to, the following institutional acts or omissions:
 - a. Obtaining students' contact information through websites that falsely claim to provide assistance with finding employment or obtaining government benefits;
 - b. Discouraging students from consulting with parties unrelated to the institution prior to finalizing their decisions or commitments;

- c. Failing to timely respond to students' requests for additional substantive information related to enrollment or loan obligations.

14. The institution shall not use threatening, abusive, or manipulative language to influence a student's decision.

In addition, HLC may otherwise look into an allegation of a violation of this policy or any other HLC requirement designed to promote consumer protection during an evaluation visit, through its complaint process, or through any other appropriate mechanism. An institution that is found to have engaged in violations outlined in this policy shall be considered to be out of compliance with HLC requirements related to institutional integrity and may be found to be in violation of other HLC standards as well, and may be subject to HLC sanctions or withdrawal of accreditation as outlined in those policies.



Accreditation Cycles and Processes

The Accreditation Relationship

HLC is a leading institutional accreditor of colleges and universities in the United States. Our member institutions benefit from our rigorous standards of quality, personalized support, expert consultation, and engaging programs and events. We maintain active relationships with our members to support them in providing quality higher education to their students.

Institutional Accreditation

HLC is an institutional accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to accredit degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States.

Institutional accreditation validates the quality of an institution's educational programs, whether delivered in person, online or otherwise. Institutional accreditation also examines the quality of the institution as a whole, including the soundness of its governance and administration, adherence to mission, the sustainability of its finances, and the sufficiency of its resources.

HLC Requirements and Policies

We partner with our member institutions and other stakeholders to define policies for quality higher education. Our foundational requirements are described in several policies:

- Criteria for Accreditation (see page 26 or hlcommission.org/criteria)
- Assumed Practices (see page 30 or hlcommission.org/assumed-practices)
- Eligibility Requirements (see page 23 or hlcommission.org/eligibility-requirements)
- Federal Compliance Requirements (see page 36 or hlcommission.org/federal-requirements)
- Obligations of Membership (see page 34 or hlcommission.org/obligations)

Institutions meet these requirements to achieve and maintain accreditation with HLC.

Member institutions also agree to comply with HLC's other accreditation policies, available at hlcommission.org/policies.

Achieving Initial Accreditation

Degree-granting colleges and universities located within the United States may be eligible to seek accreditation with HLC. We offer two routes to achieving accreditation: the Eligibility Process and Candidacy, and an Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation.

For more information about these processes, see page 46.

Accreditation Cycles and Processes

Standard and Open Pathways

Through the Standard and Open Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, accredited institutions complete periodic activities and reviews on a 10-year cycle to ensure they continue to meet HLC requirements and pursue institutional improvement.

For details, see page 47.

Institutional Update

The Institutional Update is an annual survey on the organizational health of accredited and candidate institutions.

For details, see page 57.

Risk Indicators

Each year, we review institutional data for specific risk indicators to identify if an institution may be at risk of not meeting HLC requirements. The institutional data includes financial and non-financial information

reported in the Institutional Update, as well as data on student success outcome measures. Institutions that meet certain risk indicator conditions undergo additional reviews to ensure the concerns are addressed.

For details, see page 58.

Substantive Change

Member institutions notify HLC or obtain prior HLC approval for certain types of substantive changes to their educational offerings or operations. Such changes may be related to educational programs; additional locations or branch campuses; distance education; Change of Control, Structure or Organization; or other topics.

For details, see page 53.

Multi-location Visits

Accredited institutions with three or more active additional locations undergo a multi-location visit in Years 3 and 8 of their accreditation cycle. The visit confirms the institution's continued effective oversight of its additional locations.

For details, see page 56.

Monitoring

If HLC identifies an issue of concern at an accredited institution, the institution may need to complete additional monitoring.

For details, see page 59.

HLC's processes are carefully designed to align with our policies and requirements while respecting the diversity of our member institutions and the students they serve. With a focus on quality assurance and continuous improvement, our processes are always evolving, keeping HLC in lockstep with the changing higher education landscape.

— Vince Coraci, HLC Director of Accreditation Processes

Sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and Adverse Actions

If an accredited institution is found to be out of compliance, or at risk of being out of compliance, with HLC requirements, it may be placed on sanction (Notice or Probation) or issued a Show-Cause Order. When that happens, the institution undergoes additional evaluations to demonstrate that it has addressed the issues identified. The institution remains accredited during this time.

In some cases, the HLC Board of Trustees may withdraw or deny an institution’s candidacy or accreditation. These adverse actions are subject to appeal.

For details, see page 60.

Decision-Making Processes

Following most institutional reviews, peer reviewers or staff make recommendations to an HLC decision-making body, whose members review the case and make a final decision. In some instances, HLC staff may take certain types of accreditation actions. Our decision-making process is designed to prioritize due process and transparency for institutions and their students.

For details, see page 61.

Snapshot of Accreditation Activities by Year for Standard and Open Pathway Institutions

A typical timeline of required activities for most accredited institutions.*

YEAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Institutional Update <i>Includes evaluation of financial and non-financial indicators</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pathway Evaluation <i>Assurance Review or comprehensive evaluation (with multi-campus visit, if applicable)</i>				✓						✓
Student Success Quality Initiative <i>Open Pathway only. Replaces Year 4 Assurance Review for eligible insitutions that choose this option</i>	←.....→									
Open Quality Initiative <i>Open Pathway only</i>					←.....→					
Multi-location Visit <i>Only institutions with 3+ active additional locations</i>			✓					✓		
<p>At any point, institutions may undergo additional reviews related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantive change requests, including Change of Control, Structure or Organization • Risk indicators • Routine or special monitoring • Notice sanction 										

* Institutions seeking accreditation with HLC or institutions placed on Probation, issued a Show-Cause Order or subject to an adverse action do not follow the cycle shown here. See page 46 for information about seeking accreditation and page 60 for information about sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and adverse actions.

Voluntary Resignation

An institution may voluntarily resign its accreditation or candidacy, or voluntarily withdraw from seeking membership with HLC, at any time. An institution may voluntarily resign for any reason, including ceasing operations, merging with another institution, or changing accreditors.

For details, see hlcommission.org/resignation.

People

Institutional Representatives

HLC works with multiple individuals at member institutions, including the primary executive leaders and those who lead or coordinate accreditation work on campus. See page 63 for more information about our institutional contacts.

HLC Staff Liaison

The assigned HLC staff liaison is the institution's primary contact and support at HLC. The staff liaison explains HLC policies and procedures and coordinates with other HLC staff members to provide effective assistance and service to the institution. See page 65 for details about this role.

Peer Reviewers

HLC's accreditation reviews are primarily conducted by volunteer peer reviewers who are trained to evaluate how institutions meet the requirements. These peers also provide guidance to help institutions continuously improve. See page 66 for more information about the Peer Corps.

Decision-Making Bodies

Most actions regarding HLC member institutions are taken by institutional representatives and members of the public who serve on the three decision-making bodies: the Institutional Actions Council, Board of Trustees and Appeals Body.

See page 61 for more information about decision-making bodies and processes. The members of each decision-making body are provided at:

- Board of Trustees: page 6 or hlcommission.org/board
- Institutional Actions Council: page 7 or hlcommission.org/iac
- Appeals Body: hlcommission.org/appeals-body

Status and Stipulations

Accreditation Status

An institution's status with HLC can be found in multiple places:

- Mark of Accreditation Status, which is required to be displayed on each member institution's website. The Mark is linked to the institution's Statement of Accreditation Status on HLC's website, and it will automatically update if the institution's status with HLC changes. See hlcommission.org/mark for more information.
- HLC's Directory of Institutions at hlcommission.org/directory provides a Statement of Accreditation Status for each current and former HLC member institution, which describes certain aspects of the institution's relationship with HLC.
- Institutional Status and Requirements Report, which is available for ALOs and CEOs to download in HLC's Canopy system. The report includes a complete history of the institution's relationship with HLC, the status of current or upcoming accreditation events, stipulations and the institution's designated pathway and related events.

Verify Your Institution's HLC Status

Institutions may request an official letter from HLC to verify their accredited status, HLC's approval of a particular program or location, or other aspects of the institution's accreditation. See hlcommission.org/letter-request.

Stipulations

Stipulations describe aspects of an institution's accreditation relationship with HLC, including certain approvals or limitations placed by HLC on an institution's development of new programs or other activities. An institution's stipulations are available in its Institutional Status and Requirements Report. See hlcommission.org/stipulations for more information.

Dues and Fees

HLC bills member institutions for annual dues, as well as additional fees for some evaluation processes and other activities.

View the current dues and fees schedule at hlcommission.org/dues.



Start Your Accreditation Journey

HLC membership offers many benefits, including a high standard of quality, consultation with expert staff and peer reviewers, and a wide range of programs and events. We welcome colleges and universities that are interested in joining our community.

Two Routes to Accreditation

HLC offers two possible processes for institutions to seek accreditation, depending on an institution's accreditation standing and history. In both processes, institutions will be evaluated at multiple points to determine that they meet HLC's quality standards and other requirements.

Eligibility Process and Candidacy

Most new member institutions achieve accreditation through this process, which includes a period of Candidacy prior to accreditation. During that time, the institution works to demonstrate that it meets HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and other requirements. The time frame for an institution to achieve initial accreditation through this process is typically 4–6 years, depending on institutional readiness. This includes a period of Candidacy that is 2–4 years.

For more information about the Eligibility Process and Candidacy, see hlcommission.org/eligibility.

Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation

An institution may be eligible for the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation if it meets certain requirements, including being currently accredited by and in good standing with either of the following:

- A historically regional accrediting agency.
- A state entity recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an institutional accreditor.

The institution also must not have been placed on sanction, been issued a show-cause order or experienced other similar negative action by its institutional accreditor for at least the past five years, and it must meet other requirements.

Institutions in this process do not serve a period of Candidacy and may be able to achieve HLC accreditation within approximately two years.

For more information about the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation, see hlcommission.org/accelerated.

Get Started

Connect With HLC

Contact Us. Pursuing accreditation is a serious commitment. We are here to help you understand our processes and make the best decision for your institution — reach out today at hlcommission.org/seeking-accreditation.

Subscribe. Sign up for our Leaflet newsletter or for updates about programs and events at hlcommission.org/subscribe.

Get Involved. Attend HLC's annual conference, which takes place every spring. The event features a pre-conference Seeking Accreditation Workshop for institutions interested in HLC membership. See hlcommission.org/conference for details.

Apply for HLC Membership

Once you've decided that HLC is the best fit for your institution, take the next step toward seeking accreditation. Complete the application at hlcommission.org/application.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/seeking-accreditation



Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation

The Standard and Open Pathways are 10-year cycles in which accredited institutions affirm the quality of their educational offerings and demonstrate their continuous improvement. Each Pathway provides custom support for members to fulfill their unique missions.

Standard Pathway

The Standard Pathway offers additional support for institutions, including those that are new to HLC or undergoing significant changes. This pathway involves comprehensive evaluations in Years 4 and 10 of the 10-year cycle.

Comprehensive Evaluations

The comprehensive evaluation includes the following components:

- Assurance Review
- Student Opinion Survey
- On-site visit by a team of HLC peer reviewers
- Multi-campus visit, if applicable
- Federal Compliance Review, if applicable

The institution submits an Assurance Filing that demonstrates how it meets HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC requirements and describes its recent improvement efforts. In addition, if a previous evaluation identified an area needing improvement, the institution describes how it responded to those concerns.

Peer reviewers evaluate the Assurance Filing, visit campus and consider feedback from students, faculty and community members. The team makes recommendations to an HLC decision-making body regarding the institution's accreditation.

Both comprehensive evaluations follow the same general process, but at the end of the Year 10 evaluation an HLC decision-making body determines whether the institution's accreditation should be reaffirmed and whether the institution is eligible to choose its pathway for its next accreditation cycle.

Most Year 4 evaluations do not include the reaffirmation aspect, except in the case of institutions that are undergoing their first comprehensive evaluation following Initial Accreditation or following removal of Probation or a Show-Cause Order. In these cases, Reaffirmation of Accreditation is considered as part of the Year 4 comprehensive evaluation.

Assurance Filings Moving to Canopy Starting in 2025

With the transition to HLC's revised Criteria for Accreditation in September 2025, HLC will also streamline the technology that supports comprehensive evaluations. The current stand-alone Assurance System will be sunset

during fall 2025, and institutions and peer reviewers will conduct their work for these reviews in Canopy.

For more information about this transition, see hlcommission.org/canopy.

Pathway Expenses

HLC's annual dues distribute the cost of maintaining accreditation evenly over each pathway cycle. Therefore, institutions do not pay a base fee for Standard Pathway comprehensive evaluations. Institutions will still be billed for expenses related to the peer review team's on-site visit during the evaluations. Such expenses typically include travel, honoraria and facility expenses. If a multi-campus visit is required as part of the comprehensive evaluation, a visit fee will apply.

Institutional Resources

Training Resources

hlcommission.org/training

Browse HLC's upcoming programs and events on preparing for accreditation activities, as well as our library of resources on the Criteria for Accreditation and other topics.

Canopy User Guide

hlcommission.org/canopy-user-guide

Learn how to navigate the system and create your Assurance Filing in Canopy.

Institutional Examples

See page 76 for Standard Pathway institutions that have recently completed a comprehensive evaluation and are open to share their experiences.

Sample Assurance Filings

hlcommission.org/assurance-samples

Explore sample Assurance Filings submitted by institutions on the Standard Pathway.

New samples coming in 2026: Please note, the current samples are written to the Criteria for Accreditation that went into effect in 2020. We will publish new samples written to the revised Criteria after the first evaluations conducted under the revised Criteria are complete.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/pathways

Open Pathway

The Open Pathway is designed primarily for institutions that have completed at least one pathway cycle and are otherwise eligible to choose their pathway. It supports the pursuit of innovative or strategic improvement projects, known as Quality Initiatives.

Institutions on the Open Pathway typically undergo a virtual Assurance Review in Year 4. Beginning in September 2025, certain eligible institutions may opt to complete a Quality Initiative project focused on student success during Years 1–4 in lieu of this review. All institutions on the Open Pathway complete a Quality Initiative on a topic of their choice during Years 5–9 and undergo a comprehensive evaluation in Year 10.

Mid-cycle Assurance Review

In Year 4, institutions typically complete a virtual Assurance Review to demonstrate how they are continuing to meet the Criteria for Accreditation. Beginning in September 2025, an institution that meets certain eligibility criteria may opt to complete a Quality Initiative focused on student success during Years 1–4 in lieu of the Assurance Review. See below for details about this option.

The Assurance Review includes only an evaluation of the institution's Assurance Filing and does not generally involve other components that occur during a comprehensive evaluation.

The institution submits an Assurance Filing that demonstrates how it meets HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and describes its improvement efforts. If a previous evaluation identified any areas needing improvement, the institution also describes its response to those concerns.

A peer review team evaluates these materials and makes a recommendation to the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) regarding the institution's compliance with HLC requirements. The IAC will take final action if monitoring is recommended by the team. If the institution is assigned a focused visit or placed on Notice, it will be moved to the Standard Pathway. If no monitoring is recommended by the team, HLC staff will take action to accept the team report.

Year 4 Assurance Reviews do not typically include an on-site visit, unless requested by the peer review team.

HLC provides guidance for preparing institutional materials and conducting the Year 4 Assurance Review at hlcommission.org/open.

Quality Initiative

As part of the Open Pathway cycle, institutions design and implement projects — referred to as Quality Initiatives — to improve aspects of their organization or to pursue strategic initiatives. Projects may be new initiatives at an institution, or an institution may continue a project

that is already in progress or achieve a key milestone in the course of a longer project. Depending on the circumstances, an institution may design its own Quality Initiative, choose from an HLC menu of Quality Initiative topics, or participate in an HLC Academy as its Quality Initiative.

Effective September 1, 2025, there are two types of Quality Initiatives:

- **Student Success Quality Initiative:** Eligible institutions may opt to complete a project focused on student success during Years 1–4 of their accreditation cycle in lieu of completing a mid-cycle Assurance Review in Year 4.
- **Open Quality Initiative:** All Open Pathway institutions complete a required Quality Initiative on a topic of their choosing during Years 5–9 of their accreditation cycle.

Eligibility for the Student Success Quality Initiative

An institution would be eligible to choose to complete a Student Success Quality Initiative, rather than participate in a mid-cycle Assurance Review, if it meets certain conditions, including the following:

1. The institution has not been placed on Notice by HLC within the past 10 years.
2. The institution is not assigned any monitoring following its comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation in Year 10 of its previous accreditation cycle.
3. The institution is deemed eligible to choose between the Standard Pathway and the Open Pathway and selects the Open Pathway.

An eligible institution would be able to choose the option to conduct a Student Success Quality Initiative at the same time that it selects its Pathway for its next accreditation cycle, following its Year 10 comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation.

Quality Initiative Proposal and Report Process

Both types of Quality Initiatives generally follow the same process. At the beginning of the Quality Initiative period, an institution submits a proposal for its project, which is reviewed and approved by a panel of peer reviewers.

At the end of the Quality Initiative period, the institution submits a report on the project, documenting how it pursued the goals outlined in its proposal. A panel of peer reviewers evaluates the report and determines whether the institution has made a genuine effort to achieve the goals of the Quality Initiative. In making that determination, peer reviewers will consider the following:

- **The project's scope and significance.** This can be demonstrated by the project's alignment with the institution's mission, its connection to the campus's strategic plans, or in relation to its relevance or timeliness for the institution.

- **The expressed purpose of the project.** This can be demonstrated by clearly set and explicit goals, the identification of important milestones, or the presence of effective processes to evaluate the outcomes.
- **Evidence of the institution's commitment and capacity.** This can be demonstrated by the presence of key personnel and the appropriate allocation of resources.
- **The appropriateness of the project timeline.** This can be demonstrated, for example, by the timeline's consistency with the project's goals, alignment with the institution's other priorities, and relation to existing constraints.

An HLC decision-making body will consider the Student Success Quality Initiative Report (if applicable) and Open Quality Initiative Report and associated panel determination(s) in Year 10 of the cycle, at the same time as, but independently from, its consideration of the institution's comprehensive evaluation. The decision-making body considers the Quality Initiative materials as part of determining the institution's pathway eligibility for its next accreditation cycle.

Comprehensive Evaluation

The Year 10 comprehensive evaluation includes the following components:

- Assurance Review
- Student Opinion Survey
- On-site visit by a team of HLC peer reviewers
- Federal Compliance Review
- Multi-campus visit, if applicable

The institution submits an Assurance Filing that demonstrates how it meets HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and other requirements and describes its recent improvement efforts. In addition, if a previous evaluation identified any areas needing improvement, the Assurance Filing addresses the institution's response to those concerns.

A team of peer reviewers evaluate the Assurance Filing, visit campus and consider feedback from students, faculty and community members. The team makes recommendations to an HLC decision-making body regarding the institution's accreditation. The HLC decision-making body determines whether the institution's accreditation should be reaffirmed and whether the institution is eligible to choose its pathway for its next accreditation cycle. For the latter, the decision-making body will consider the peer reviewer findings regarding the institution's efforts to achieve the goals of its Quality Initiative(s).

Assurance Filings Moving to Canopy Starting in 2025

With the transition to HLC's revised Criteria for Accreditation in September 2025, HLC will also streamline the technology that supports comprehensive evaluations and Assurance Reviews. The current stand-alone Assurance System will be sunset during fall 2025, and institutions and peer reviewers will conduct their work for these reviews in Canopy.

For more information about this transition, see hlcommission.org/canopy.

Pathway Expenses

HLC's annual dues distribute the cost of maintaining accreditation evenly over each Pathway cycle. Therefore, institutions do not pay base fees for Assurance Reviews, Quality Initiative Proposals and Reports, and comprehensive evaluations. Institutions will still be billed for the Year 4 Assurance Review team's honoraria, if applicable, and for expenses related to peer review team visits required as part of the comprehensive evaluation. Team expenses typically include travel, honoraria and facility expenses. If a multi-campus visit is required as part of the comprehensive evaluation, a visit fee will apply.

Institutional Resources

Training Resources

hlcommission.org/training

Browse HLC's upcoming programs and events on preparing for accreditation activities, as well as our library of resources on the Criteria for Accreditation and other topics.

Canopy User Guide

hlcommission.org/canopy-user-guide

Learn how to navigate the system and create your Assurance Filing in Canopy.

Institutional Examples

See page 76 for Open Pathway institutions that have recently completed a comprehensive evaluation, Assurance Review or Quality Initiative and are open to share their experiences.

Sample Assurance Filings

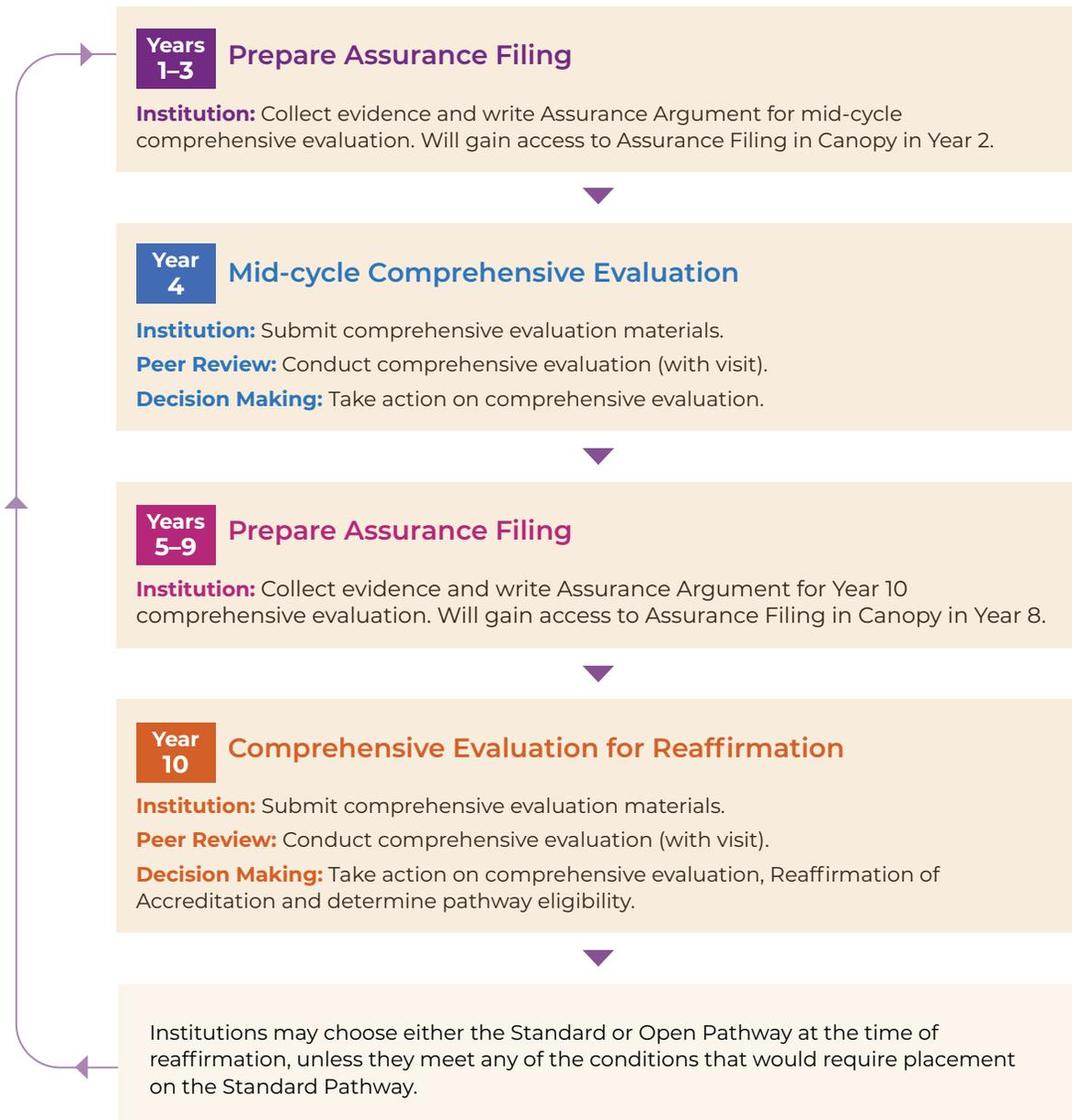
hlcommission.org/assurance-samples

Explore sample Assurance Filings submitted by institutions on the Open Pathway.

New samples coming in 2026: *Please note, the current samples are written to the Criteria for Accreditation that went into effect in 2020. We will publish new samples written to the revised Criteria after the first evaluations conducted under the revised Criteria are complete.*

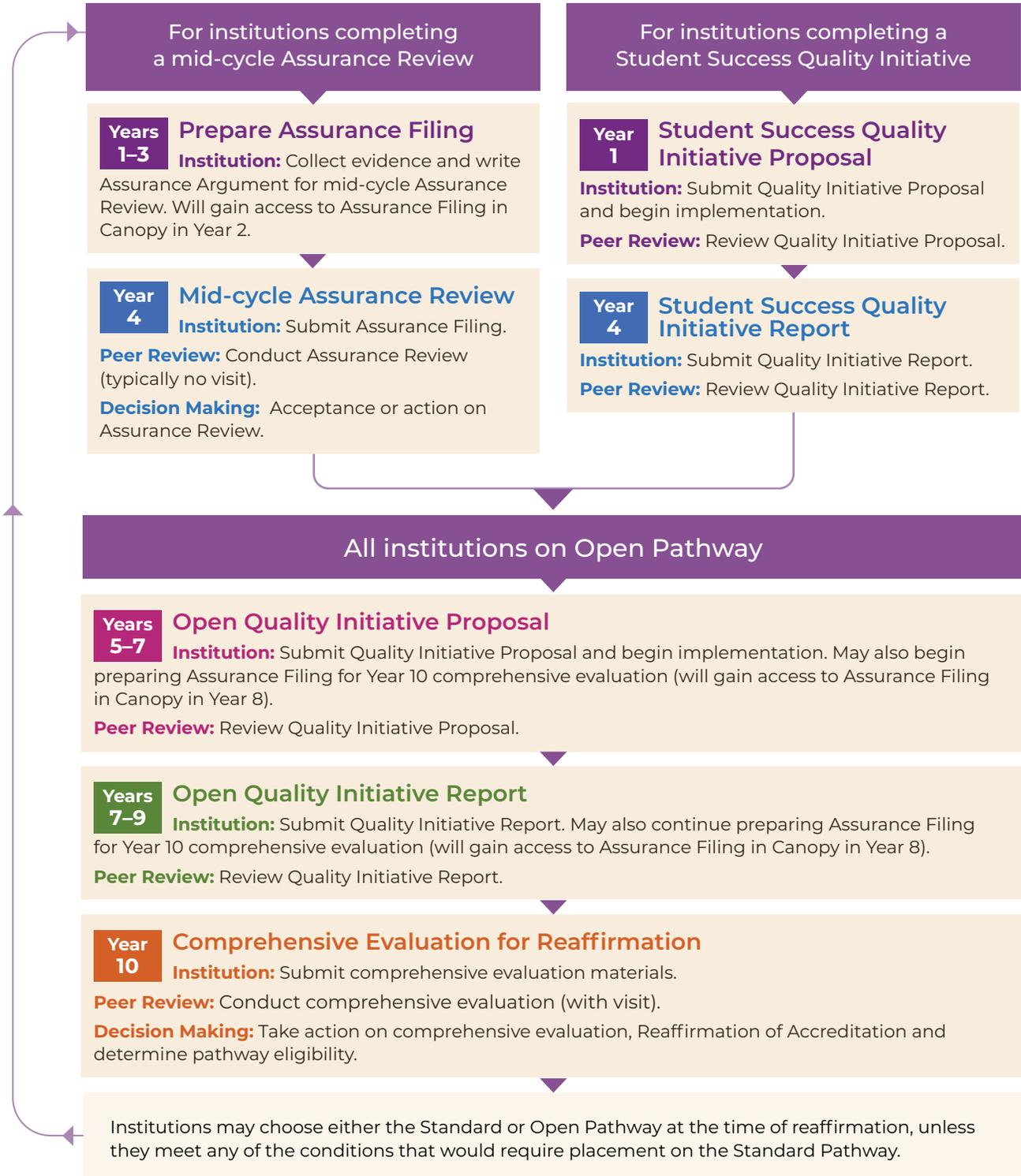


Standard Pathway 10-Year Cycle





Open Pathway 10-Year Cycle





Federal Compliance

As a federally recognized accreditor, HLC is responsible for verifying that our member institutions are complying with certain federal regulations.

When Federal Compliance Is Reviewed

- Comprehensive evaluations for:
 - Reaffirmation of Accreditation (regardless of when the evaluation occurs)
 - Candidacy
 - Initial accreditation
 - Probation
 - Show-Cause
- As required by HLC, special monitoring arising from questions of compliance with federal requirements
- As part of assigned monitoring or any other appropriate evaluation, as determined by HLC, to verify compliance with federal requirements

Areas Addressed

- Assignment of credits, program length and tuition
- Institutional records regarding student complaints
- Publication of transfer policies
- Practices for verification of student identity
- Protection of student privacy
- Publication of student achievement data
- Standing with state and other accreditors
- Recruiting, admissions and related enrollment practices
- Any concerns related to Title IV program responsibilities

Review Process

For comprehensive evaluations that include a Federal Compliance Review, the institution submits a Federal Compliance Filing as part of its Assurance Filing.

When the institution's Assurance Filing is locked and released to the peer review team, a dedicated Federal Compliance reviewer evaluates the materials in advance of the visit and refers any issues to the visit team for further exploration and confirmation.

While conducting the visit, the peer review team determines whether the preliminary findings made by the Federal Compliance reviewer accurately represent the institution's compliance with all applicable requirements. The team may request additional documentation from the institution, if needed.

If the team has concerns about the institution's compliance with federal requirements, they may recommend monitoring or other action in accordance with HLC policy. This recommendation would go to an HLC decision-making body for review and final action.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/federal-compliance



Substantive Change

HLC's substantive change process ensures that member institutions continue to offer high-quality education as they evolve and grow. To do so, institutions apply for approval or notify us when they make certain changes to their educational offerings or operations.

When to Apply for Approval or Notify HLC

Substantive changes in the following areas typically require HLC notification or prior approval:

- Access to HLC's Notification Program for Additional Locations
- Branch campuses and additional locations
- Certain changes to existing degree and certificate programs
- Clock or credit hours
- Competency-based education programs (including direct assessment, credit-based or hybrid programs)
- Contractual arrangements
- Corporate control, structure or organization
- Correspondence education
- Distance education
- Length of term affecting allocation of credit
- Mission or student body
- New degree and certificate programs, including reduced-credit bachelor's degree programs
- Pell-eligible prison education programs (PEPs)
- Program content
- Teach-out arrangements, including provisional plans and teach-out agreements

Visit hlcommission.org/change for a detailed list of changes that require notification or prior approval and HLC's procedures for each. For additional information, contact changerequest@hlcommission.org.

Applications

Institutions submit applications for substantive changes that require prior approval. These applications are available at hlcommission.org/change. We update

the applications annually in September. However, if an application form was accessed more than 90 days prior to filing, please check our website to ensure you have the latest version.

Most change requests are subject to a fee, which varies depending on the type of review an application requires. See HLC's fee schedule at hlcommission.org/dues. The fee schedule is updated annually, with the new or revised fees effective on September 1.

Screening Forms

Institutions can quickly and easily determine whether certain changes require notification or approval by using our free, online screening forms.

If prior approval is required, the screening form will provide instructions for submitting the change request to HLC.

If HLC notification is required, completing the screening form serves as the notification. The person who submitted the form will receive an email confirmation, which the institution should keep for its records.

New Degree Programs

hlcommission.org/degree-screening

Complete this form for any new degree program.

New Certificate Programs

hlcommission.org/certificate-screening

Complete this form for any new certificate or diploma program. Please also ensure that all existing certificate or diploma programs have been previously screened through the form.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/change

Changes to Existing Educational Programs

hlcommission.org/existing-program-screening

Complete this form to declare any of the following changes to existing HLC-approved educational programs (certificate or degree):

- **Number of Clock or Credit Hours.** A change of 25% or more to the number of clock or credit hours required to complete a degree program or certificate program, either in a single change or as the sum total of aggregate changes since the institution's most recent accreditation review (comprehensive evaluation or Assurance Review).
- **Program Content.** A change of 25% or more to the content of a program, either in a single change or as the sum total of aggregate changes, since the most recent accreditation review. (This does not include changes to program concentrations or specializations.)
- **Program Name or CIP Code Changes.** Only report changes to a program name or CIP code if the program is specifically listed in the institution's general stipulation limiting the programs the institution offers. Otherwise, an institution does not need to report program name or CIP code changes to HLC.
- **Method of Delivery.** A change in the method of delivery for a program.
- **Customized Pathways or Abbreviated or Modified Courses.** The development of customized pathways or abbreviated or modified courses or programs to accommodate a student's existing knowledge (such as from employment or military service) and to close competency gaps between demonstrated prior knowledge and the full requirements of a particular course or program.

Contractual Arrangements

hlcommission.org/contractual-screening

Complete this form for each credit-bearing degree or certificate program that is offered through a contractual arrangement.

Pell-Eligible Prison Education Programs

hlcommission.org/pep-screening

After your institution receives HLC approval for its first PEP, complete this screening form to report any of the following changes:

- New PEP(s) started at a previously approved location.
- New PEP(s) started at a third or subsequent PEP location.

- The introduction of a modality that differs from all the modalities HLC previously approved for any of the institution's PEPs, regardless of location or program.

Reduced-Credit Bachelor's Degree Programs

In September 2024, HLC began accepting applications for institutions to offer reduced-credit bachelor's degree programs. A reduced-credit bachelor's program requires less than the typical minimum program length of 120 semester hours specified in HLC's Assumed Practices. Institutions should apply for prior HLC approval when planning to offer any new bachelor's program in a reduced-credit format, or when planning to offer an existing bachelor's program in a new reduced-credit format.

For additional details, see hlcommission.org/reduced-credit.

Teach-Out Arrangements

In February 2025, HLC's Board of Trustees adopted policy changes to clarify HLC's requirements regarding teach-out arrangements. In conjunction with these policy revisions, HLC also provided new forms to simplify the process of applying for approval of provisional plans and teach-out agreements.

See hlcommission.org/teach-out for details.

Substantive Change Requirements for Institutions on (or recently on) a Sanction, Under Show-Cause Order or on Provisional Certification Status

Institutions placed on a sanction or under a Show-Cause Order or those on a provisional certification status with the U.S. Department of Education, are subject to additional requirements for the time in which they are on a sanction, under a Show-Cause Order or on Provisional Certification status, and for a time period after they are removed from a sanction or no longer under a Show-Cause Order:

- These institutions are required to apply for HLC approval prior to making the following changes below:
 - Increasing or decreasing the number of credit or clock hours required for successful completion of a certificate program by 25% or more since the institution's last accreditation review.

- Changing the content of a program by 25% or more since the institution's last accreditation review.
- Changing a program's method of delivery.
- Developing customized pathways or abbreviated or modified courses or programs.
- Initiating any contractual arrangement.
- These institutions are ineligible to participate in HLC's Notification Program for Additional Locations.

Review Processes

Change requests are reviewed by HLC staff or peer reviewers in one of four processes, depending on the type and complexity of the change:

- **Desk Review**, conducted by HLC staff members. Average timeframe is three months.
- **Change Panel**, conducted by a panel of two or more peer reviewers. Average timeframe is five months.

- **Change Visit**, conducted by a team of two or more peer reviewers and includes an on-site visit. Average timeframe is eight months.
- **Change of Control Evaluation**, conducted for applications for a Change of Control, Structure or Organization. This review can take a variety of forms depending on the nature of the request. See hlcommission.org/control for more information.

Recommendations from Desk Reviews, Change Panels and Change Visits are forwarded to the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) for final action. HLC's Board of Trustees takes final action on requests for approval of a change in an institution's control, structure or organization.

For more information about substantive change review processes, see hlcommission.org/change.





Additional Locations and Branch Campuses

Many HLC member institutions offer courses and programs at locations and branch campuses beyond their main campus, meeting their students where they are. HLC works with institutions to ensure students have the same quality education and services no matter where they attend class.

Additional Locations

Changes to Additional Locations

Institutions apply for approval or notify HLC before opening new additional locations or relocating or closing existing locations. For more information about our requirements, see page 53 or hlcommission.org/change.

Notification Program for Additional Locations

An institution with access to the Notification Program for Additional Locations may open new additional locations after notifying HLC and receiving an acknowledgement that we have added the new additional location to our database. Information about program eligibility and applying to join the program is available at hlcommission.org/notification-program.

Institutions that are in the Notification Program for Additional Locations may request new additional locations in the Location and Campus Update section of Canopy. HLC gives an institution's Chief Executive Officer and Accreditation Liaison Officer access to the system by default, and institutions also may identify a Location Coordinator to manage information in the system. Canopy is available at canopy.hlcommission.org.

Additional Location Confirmation Visit

HLC peer reviewers evaluate each of an institution's first three additional locations within six months after the location opens and enrolls students. The review is meant to confirm the institution implemented its plans for the location successfully.

Multi-location Visits

When an institution has three or more additional locations in operation, an HLC peer reviewer evaluates a sample of its locations in Years 3 and 8 of the institution's Open or Standard Pathway 10-year cycle. The visit is meant to confirm the continuing effective oversight by the institution of its additional locations.

The peer reviewer conducting the visit may recommend monitoring if they identify any concerns at a location.

Such recommendations will be reviewed and acted upon by an HLC decision-making body.

Branch Campuses

Changes to Branch Campuses

Institutions apply for HLC approval before opening, relocating or closing a branch campus. For more information about our requirements, see page 53 or hlcommission.org/change.

Campus Evaluation Visit

HLC peer reviewers evaluate each new branch campus within six months after it opens and enrolls students. The visit is meant to confirm the quality of the campus and its educational programs, as well as the institution's capacity to sustain that quality.

Multi-campus Visit

When an institution has one or more branch campuses, HLC peer reviewers will evaluate a sample of its campuses as part of certain comprehensive evaluations. The visit is meant to ensure (1) the quality of the institution's extended operations and its educational offerings and (2) the capacity to sustain that quality.

Fees

Institutions pay a fee for substantive change reviews and visits to additional locations and branch campuses. See HLC's Dues and Fees Schedule at hlcommission.org/dues.

Reclassifying a Branch Campus as an Additional Location

If an institution decreases its operation at an approved branch campus to the point where it would be considered an additional location, the institution should change its location classification accordingly. See hlcommission.org/branch-campus for instructions on how to submit this request.

Managing Branch Campus and Additional Location Records

Institutions can update HLC's records about their existing additional locations, existing branch campuses and inactive locations and campuses in the Location and Campus Update section of Canopy. In addition, institutions that are in the Notification Program for Additional Locations may use this system to request new additional locations. HLC gives an institution's Chief Executive Officer and Accreditation Liaison

Officer access to the system by default, and institutions also may identify a Location Coordinator to manage information in the system. Canopy is available at canopy.hlcommission.org.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/locations



Institutional Update

Each year, member institutions provide data on their operations and offerings in the Institutional Update. HLC uses the data to assess institutional health and identify trends.

Timeline and Preparation

The Institutional Update opens in late February or early March, and institutions typically have 4–5 weeks to submit their information. HLC aligns the Institutional Update deadline with the spring IPEDS deadline.

To help institutions prepare, HLC shares a guide in January that includes the Institutional Update questions, definitions of terms and answers to frequently asked questions.

We also ask institutions to ensure we have the correct contact information for the individuals who are responsible for preparing and submitting the Update. These individuals include the Chief Executive Officer, Accreditation Liaison Officer, Chief Financial Officer and Data Update Coordinator. Contact information for these individuals can be submitted at any time through the Contact Update Survey in Canopy.

How HLC Uses the Data

- To determine whether any financial and non-financial data suggest concerns that require follow-up through the risk indicators process or otherwise.
- To update the information in our Directory of Institutions.
- To calculate HLC membership dues.
- To remain in compliance with federal requirements.
- To provide insight into the state of our membership in annual reports.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/update



Risk Indicators

HLC evaluates institutional data each year to identify early indicators that an institution may be at risk of not meeting HLC requirements. This process allows us to follow up with institutions to address concerns as soon as possible.

Financial Indicators

HLC reviews the financial data submitted in the Institutional Update, which generate a Composite Financial Index (CFI) for each institution. HLC uses the following sources to calculate the CFI:

- For private institutions: Financial ratios provided by the U.S. Department of Education.
- For public institutions: Financial ratios provided in Strategic Financial Analysis for Higher Education: Identifying, Measuring & Reporting Financial Risks (Seventh Edition), by KPMG LLP; Prager, Sealy & Co., LLC; Attain LLC.

HLC identifies whether an institution requires additional review based on where its CFI falls in the following ranges, or zones:

Above the Zone

Private Institutions: 1.5 to 3.0

Public Institutions: 1.1 to 10.0

No additional review required.

In the Zone

Private Institutions: 1.0 to 1.4

Public Institutions: 0 to 1.0

Additional review may be required, depending on certain factors.

Below the Zone

Private Institutions: -1.0 to 0.9

Public Institutions: -4.0 to -0.1

Additional review required.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/indicators

Non-financial Indicators

HLC reviews data submitted in the Institutional Update for the following indicator conditions and requests responses from institutions when certain conditions are met.

Note: For these indicators, “small institutions” are those with fewer than 1,000 students, and “large institutions” are those with 1,000 students or more.

- **Significant Enrollment Changes:** Three-year increase or decrease in enrollment of 80% or more for small institutions or 40% or more for large institutions.
- **Degrees Awarded:** Three-year increase or decrease in degrees awarded of 75% or more for small institutions and 65% or more for large institutions.
- **Full-time Faculty Changes:** Three-year decrease in the headcount of full-time faculty (not full-time equivalent) of 75% or more for small institutions or 50% or more for large institutions.
- **Minimal Full-time Faculty:** The headcount of full-time faculty (not full-time equivalent) divided by the number of degree programs offered is less than one.
- **Student to Teacher Ratio:** The number of undergraduate full-time equivalent students divided by the number of undergraduate full-time equivalent faculty is greater than or equal to 35. **Note:** Does not apply to graduate-only institutions.

Student Success Indicators

In spring 2025, HLC expanded the risk indicator process to include student success indicators for institutions that enroll undergraduate students. HLC sets benchmarks for three student success outcome measures:

- First-year retention rate
- Graduation rate within 150% of normal time
- Completion and transfer rate at eight years after entry

To evaluate institutional performance, HLC assigns member institutions into three primary peer groups:

- Two-year institutions
- Four-year institutions
- Tribal institutions

For each primary peer group, HLC calculates the median value of each outcome measure. An individual institution's outcomes will be compared against the median of their peer group and categorized as one of the following:

- At or above the median
- Between the median and 25th percentile
- Between the 25th percentile and 5th percentile
- Within the lowest 5th percentile

Institutions may be required to complete additional follow-up if certain outcome measures are between the 25th and 5th percentile and/or within the lowest 5th percentile of their peer group. In assigning and reviewing any additional follow-up, HLC will consider other institutional characteristics, including the composition of an institution's entering undergraduate student class, control, enrollment size and geographic location.

Monitoring

HLC may assign monitoring to an institution if peer reviewers or staff identify concerns related to HLC requirements that require additional follow-up.

Routine Monitoring

Interim Report

HLC may assign an interim report to receive specific, important information from the institution, track how the institution is progressing with certain changes or challenges, or confirm that the institution's stated plans have come to fruition. An interim report may be assigned as stand-alone monitoring, to be reviewed through staff analysis, or it may be embedded in a scheduled evaluation.

Focused Visit

A focused visit generally occurs between comprehensive evaluations and examines an institution's ongoing compliance with specific HLC requirements. A focused visit is an evaluation of limited scope that reviews specific developments or follows up on concerns identified in a previous evaluation.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/monitoring

Special Monitoring

Institutional Designations

Institutional designations are used to inform the public when an institution is experiencing a significant financial issue or is under governmental investigation. Institutional designations allow HLC to respond quickly to developing situations at member institutions and to communicate to students and the public in a timely manner about situations that may affect an institution's operations.

Special Monitoring Reports and Advisory Visits

HLC's president may call for a special monitoring report or an advisory visit to investigate specific issues that raise concerns regarding the institution's ongoing compliance with HLC requirements. Such monitoring follows a separate review process and may result in further monitoring or other action as permitted by HLC policy.

Fees

See HLC's Dues and Fees Schedule at hlcommission.org/dues for costs associated with monitoring.



Sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and Adverse Actions

When an institution does not meet, or is at risk of not meeting, HLC requirements, the institution may be placed on sanction, issued a Show-Cause Order or be subject to an adverse action. In such circumstances, HLC ensures students and other community members are notified and works with the institution to communicate any next steps and implications for students.

Public Notifications

Institutions are obligated to promptly disclose any sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and adverse actions to the public. Once the institution has been notified of one of the above actions, the institution's Statement of Accreditation Status in HLC's Directory of Institutions and, if applicable, the Mark of Accreditation Status on the institution's website are updated to reflect the change in status. HLC will also issue a Public Disclosure Notice.

Sanctions

An institution may be placed on a sanction of Notice or Probation when HLC determines the institution does not meet, or is at risk of not meeting, HLC requirements. An institution on a sanction remains accredited during the period of the sanction. The imposition of a sanction is a final action and not subject to appeal.

Notice

An institution is placed on Notice when it is at risk of not meeting HLC requirements. An institution on Notice is placed on the Standard Pathway for the remainder of its accreditation cycle.

An institution is placed on Notice for no more than two years. In that time, the institution submits a Notice Report providing evidence it is no longer at risk of failing to meet HLC requirements. The institution may be required to host a Notice Visit to demonstrate that the areas of concern have been improved.

Probation

An institution may be placed on Probation when it no longer meets one or more HLC requirements, such that Probation is warranted as a period for the institution to remediate the areas of concern. An institution on Probation is removed from its Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

The initial period for Probation is up to two years. An institution on Probation undergoes a comprehensive evaluation for Probation to provide evidence that the areas of concern have been addressed and to demonstrate that the institution is otherwise in compliance with HLC requirements.

Show-Cause Order

An institution is issued a Show-Cause Order when it is not meeting HLC requirements. A Show-Cause Order is a procedural order, not a sanction. A Show-Cause Order requires the institution to promptly provide evidence, without a period of remediation, indicating that its accreditation should not be withdrawn. The issuance of a Show-Cause Order is a final action and not subject to appeal. An institution issued a Show-Cause Order is removed from its Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

The period for a Show-Cause Order shall not exceed one year. While under a Show-Cause Order, the institution undergoes a comprehensive evaluation for Show-Cause to demonstrate that it meets HLC requirements.

Adverse Actions

Adverse actions are decisions that:

- Withdraw accreditation.
- Deny accreditation to an institution seeking HLC accreditation, unless the Board denies an early application for initial accreditation and continues candidacy.
- Withdraw or deny candidacy.

HLC's Board of Trustees may withdraw an institution's accreditation if it does not meet one or more HLC requirements. The Board may deny or withdraw an institution's candidacy if it fails to meet one or more of the Eligibility Requirements, the Assumed Practices or Federal Compliance requirements, or the institution has not provided sufficient evidence that the Criteria for Accreditation can be met within the candidacy period. Adverse actions are subject to appeal by the institution.

Fees

For costs associated with sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and adverse actions, see HLC's Dues and Fees Schedule at hlcommission.org/dues.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/sanctions



Decision-Making Bodies and Processes

Following most institutional reviews, peer reviewers or staff make recommendations to an HLC decision-making body, whose members review the case and make a final decision. HLC's decision-making process is designed to prioritize due process and transparency for institutions and their students.

Decision-Making Bodies

HLC's decision-making bodies are broadly representative of the colleges and universities accredited by HLC, with attention to institutional type, control, size and geographical distribution. All decision-making bodies abide by HLC's conflict of interest policies.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is the governing body of HLC. It is made up of at least 16 and no more than 21 trustees. At least one of every seven trustees is a representative of the public, and the others are representatives of HLC member institutions or are otherwise involved in higher education. See the Board roster on page 6 or at hlcommission.org/board.

Cases that require final action by the Board include the following:

- Granting or denying an institution candidacy or initial accreditation.
- Withdrawing status from a candidate or accredited institution.
- Issuing or removing a sanction.
- Issuing or removing a Show-Cause Order.
- Approving or denying a Change of Control, Structure or Organization.

Institutional Actions Council

The Institutional Actions Council (IAC) is composed of approximately 125 members representing HLC member institutions and the public. Those members who represent institutions are also current members of the Peer Corps. See the IAC roster on page 7 or at hlcommission.org/iac.

The IAC has the authority to take action on accreditation decisions other than those which require action by the Board of Trustees. Cases that the IAC may take action on include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Cases of reaffirmation of accreditation, including pathway placement.
- Standard Pathway comprehensive evaluations.
- Open Pathway Assurance Reviews.

- Biennial evaluations during Candidacy.
- Substantive change requests requiring review and approval by a decision-making body, not including applications for Change of Control, Structure or Organization.
- Recommendations for and resulting from monitoring.

Some cases initially reviewed by the IAC require action by the Board of Trustees. In these instances, the IAC submits a recommendation to the Board for consideration. The Board may either adopt the recommendation of the IAC as its action or may take another action provided by HLC policy.

Appeals Body

The Appeals Body is selected by the Board of Trustees to be available to serve on Appeal Panels (see the roster at hlcommission.org/appeals-body). Although many actions by the Board are considered final actions, an institution may appeal an adverse action of the Board prior to the action becoming final. In these instances, an Appeal Panel hears the case and has the authority to affirm, amend or remand the action of the Board.

Decision-Making Process and Related Processes

Note: The decision-making processes for individual cases are dependent upon HLC policy. Please review HLC policies to determine how the process might change based on institutional circumstances. See hlcommission.org/policies.

Staff Actions

HLC staff may take certain types of institutional actions, as permitted by HLC policy. These actions could include, among others, adjusting the scope of certain previously assigned monitoring or changing the date of an upcoming review.

Actions Taken by Decision-Making Bodies

For evaluations that require action by an HLC decision-making body, the decision-making process begins once the evaluation concludes. In general, the process involves the following steps:

1. Peer reviewers or HLC staff develop a recommendation based on their evaluation of the institution.
2. The institution is given an opportunity to submit an institutional response to the recommendation.
3. The evaluation materials, including the recommendation and institutional response, are sent to the IAC or Board of Trustees for action. In some cases, the IAC may also conduct a review of the case before it is sent to the Board for final action.
4. HLC sends the institution an Action Letter communicating the action that was taken and publishes the action on our website.
5. If an adverse action is taken, the institution is given the opportunity to appeal.

Institutional Response

Institutions are offered an opportunity to respond after each evaluation and at each stage of the decision-making process. Each decision-making body considers the institutional response as part of the full record of the case, along with the recommendation of the peer review team and, where applicable, the recommendations of other decision-making bodies.

Institutional Actions Council

The IAC reviews cases in one of two settings: meetings or hearings. Each meeting and hearing is conducted by a committee of IAC members.

IAC Meeting. Meetings are held virtually approximately every six weeks. Representatives from the institutions are not present at these meetings. The decisions of IAC meeting committees are final unless the Board of Trustees is required by policy to take final action.

IAC Hearing. HLC policy requires that certain cases go to an IAC hearing rather than a meeting. The IAC hearing committee will typically conduct a review of the case and make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees for final action. Representatives from both the institution

and peer review team attend these hearings, which are timed to occur in advance of Board meetings.

Board of Trustees

The Board conducts regular meetings three times per year to take action on institutional cases, to approve and adopt changes to HLC policy, and to conduct other regular business. The Board may also take institutional actions at other times during the year via special meetings or other means, such as electronic ballots, as necessary.

Board Committee Hearing

HLC will make a Board Committee Hearing available to a member institution prior to a decision by the Board to take most adverse actions or to conclude a Show-Cause Order process. The hearing is conducted by a subcommittee of the Board prior to the full Board taking action.

Notification to the Institution and the Public

Approximately 14 days after a final action by the IAC or Board of Trustees, HLC sends the institutions an Action Letter that relays the final action.

Within 30 days of the date the action is taken, HLC also publishes the action on its website. In some instances, HLC may also make other notifications regarding actions.

Appeals

Although many actions by the Board are final actions, an institution may appeal an adverse action of the Board of Trustees prior to the action becoming final. An Appeal Panel will hear the case and decide to affirm, amend or remand the adverse action to the Board. If the panel affirms or amends the action, the Board will review and act to implement the panel's decision. If the panel remands the action to the Board for additional consideration, the Board will, after taking into account the panel's explanation of its reasons for remanding the action, act to affirm, amend or reverse its original adverse action.

Arbitration of Adverse Actions Following Appeal

A decision by an Appeal Panel concludes the decision-making process. Thereafter, an institution may initiate arbitration with HLC. The arbitration will be conducted by a single arbitrator who is mutually selected by the parties. The arbitrator may affirm or reverse the decision by the Appeal Panel. Following arbitration, the Board will act to implement the decision of the arbitrator. In accordance with federal requirements, an arbitration decision is binding. However, an institution may legally challenge an arbitration decision as permitted by applicable law.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/decision-making



Accreditation Roles on Campus

Institutional Representatives

Executive Roles

- Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- Chief Academic Officer
- Chief Financial Officer

- **Primary Filing Coordinator (new):** Coordinates the development and submission of Assurance Filings in Canopy. (This is a new role created in preparation for the launch of Assurance Filings in Canopy and the sunset of the stand-alone Assurance System.)

HLC-Specific Roles

(Appointed by the CEO)

- **Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO).** Coordinates efforts to ensure the institution meets its obligations of HLC membership. Along with the CEO, one of the primary contacts between the institution and HLC. (See page 64 for more information about this role.)
- **Data Update Coordinator.** Ensures the accuracy and completion of the Institutional Update.
- **Location Coordinator (optional).** Maintains the institution's additional location and campus records in Canopy. (Note: the ALO and CEO may also manage these records.)
- **Primary Assurance System Coordinator.** Coordinates the development and submission of the institution's materials for accreditation reviews conducted in the stand-alone Assurance System. (This role will be deactivated when the Assurance System is sunset by the end of 2025.)

Keep Your Contacts Up to Date in Canopy

When there are changes to your institution's HLC contacts, be sure to submit that information in Canopy. This ensures that we send news related to your institution's accreditation to the right people on campus.

ALOs, CEOs and Data Update Coordinators can make contact changes in the system. Just click "Update Contacts" from the homepage and complete the Contact Update Survey.

Log in to Canopy at canopy.hlcommission.org.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/roles

Accreditation Liaison Officer Role

Along with the institution's chief executive officer (CEO), the ALO is a primary contact point between HLC and your institution. You'll receive communications from HLC regarding policies, procedures and professional development opportunities, and are responsible for coordinating efforts to ensure your institution meets its obligations of HLC membership.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/alo

Responsibilities

General Communications

With HLC

- Serve as a recipient of HLC communications regarding the institution's accreditation, in addition to the CEO.
- Stay current with HLC policies and procedures.
- Provide comments to HLC as requested in our consideration of proposed policies, procedures and issues affecting the accreditation relationship.
- Facilitate responses to HLC inquiries, including complaints referred by HLC staff to the CEO.

On Campus

- Disseminate information and answer questions about HLC policies and procedures for all audiences within the institution.
- Maintain the institution's file of official documents and reports related to the institution's relationship with HLC.

Reporting Requirements

- Provide oversight and direction for the institution's Data Update Coordinator to ensure the accuracy of information submitted in the Institutional Update.
- Notify HLC if certain actions are taken by the U.S. Department of Education, state agencies or other recognized accreditors.

Substantive Change

- Notify HLC of changes to the institution's operations and educational offerings, as required by HLC's substantive change policy and procedures.
- Provide oversight and direction for the timely submission of substantive change requests and reports required by HLC policy.

Membership Dues and Fees

- Ensure that the institution meets its financial obligations to HLC through the timely payment of dues and fees.

“Quality and value for students are the reasons why we do this work.”

— Richard Dunsworth, *President, University of the Ozarks;*
HLC Board of Trustees Chair

Resources and Training

Resources

HLC Staff Liaison

Each institution has an HLC staff liaison who is the go-to person for questions or individual guidance on your accreditation relationship.

A staff liaison's responsibilities include:

- Advise institutions about HLC's policies and procedures.
 - Provide historical information about your institution's relationship with HLC.
 - Identify resources that may help your accreditation relationship.
 - Facilitate accreditation processes.
 - Manage expectations related to substantive change.
 - Advise on your institution's preparation for upcoming evaluations.
 - Provide guidance regarding the transition to a new Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation.
- Coordinate the peer review and decision-making process.
 - Work with HLC staff members to identify and prepare peer review teams for evaluations.
 - Review reports and finalize documents to facilitate decision making by HLC's decision-making bodies.

Canopy

Canopy is HLC's online system for you to manage your institution's accreditation relationship with HLC. Depending on your HLC role, you can view your institution profile, update the contacts on file with HLC, or manage your additional location and branch campus records. In 2025, Assurance Filings and comprehensive evaluations will also move to Canopy (read more on page 80).

Log into Canopy at canopy.hlcommission.org.

For more details about the system and training resources, see hlcommission.org/canopy.

Institutional Status and Requirements (ISR) Report

The ISR Report provides a summary of the institution's accreditation relationship with HLC. ALOs and CEOs can download the ISR Report in Canopy.

The report includes a complete institutional history with HLC, the status of current or upcoming accreditation

events, and information on the institution's designated Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation and related events.

HLCommission.org

HLC's website, at hlcommission.org, is your resource for the most up-to-date information on HLC's policies, procedures and programming.

Training

See more of HLC's programs and events on page 72.

ALO Orientation: An Introduction to the Role at HLC

Summer and Fall Sessions Offered Annually

Get the information you need to be successful as a new Accreditation Liaison Officer in HLC's six-week, self-paced orientation course. The course includes overviews of the accreditation and peer review processes as well as information on managing substantive change, required reporting to HLC, and resources available through the HLC website.

Preparing for an Upcoming Accreditation Activity

If you have a review coming up, you may be eligible to participate in an HLC program that will help you get prepared. Eligible ALOs and key institutional representatives are invited via email for these events. Read about HLC's accreditation-related workshops on page 75.

Webinars and Online Resource Library

HLC hosts live webinars on current relevant topics in accreditation throughout the year and also has pre-recorded webinars on the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance and more. Upcoming and recorded webinars are available at hlcommission.org/training.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/training

hlcommission.org/systems



Peer Corps

Resources and Training for Current Peer Reviewers

Maintain Your Peer Reviewer Profile in Canopy

Keep your Peer Reviewer Profile in Canopy up to date to help HLC staff assign you to reviews that fit your experience and expertise. The profile includes contact information, education history, retirement status, work experience and other expertise.

Peer reviewers also now have two options to report their availability in Canopy: a new, expedited Schedule Availability survey, or in the Peer Reviewer Profile. Learn about how to update your Peer Reviewer Profile and availability at hlcommission.org/canopy-user-guide.

Stay Connected With HLC: HLC shares training registration information via email. Please add HLC's main email addresses to your approved senders list (see page 5) and ensure your contact information is correct in Canopy.

New! Peer Reviewer Resources in Canopy

Quick access to resources you need as a peer reviewer are available at hlcommission.org/peer-review, including materials for teams and panels and training opportunities and resources for peer reviewers and institutions.

We've also added a dedicated resources page for peer reviewers in Canopy, where you can access additional training materials and past webinars on HLC policies and procedures that are specific to the Peer Corps.

Training

Revised Criteria for Accreditation

By fall 2025, all peer reviewers will be trained on evaluating institutions under the revised Criteria for Accreditation (see page 26). Peer reviewers may attend training in person at Higher Learning 2025 or virtually. The training session provides a high-level summary of the Criteria revisions, a discussion of the implications of the revisions for peer reviewer practice, and time for Q&A.

Peer Reviewer Updates and Training at Higher Learning

Refresh and enhance your peer review skills and get updates on accreditation processes at this daylong pre-conference program, open to all current peer reviewers. Special training sessions are offered for new and experienced team chairs, specialized reviewers, and substantive change reviewers and chairs.

New Peer Reviewer Training

Within the initial two-year term and before serving on their first evaluation team, reviewers participate

in training on the application of HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and other policies and the processes integral to evaluations.

Pathways Refresher Webinar for Peer Reviewers

HLC staff members review Standard and Open Pathway processes and procedures and provide updates on recent HLC policy changes for reviewers with upcoming visits.

Standards of Conduct Refresher Webinar

Get a refresher on the Standards of Conduct from HLC staff members and an experienced peer reviewer and explore practical applications for professionalism, conflict of interest and objectivity, document management, and more.

Pathways Refresher Webinar for Team Chairs

HLC staff members and an experienced peer reviewer offer a brief review of Standard and Open Pathway processes and alert chairs to recent changes in HLC policy.

Webinars on Current Topics

HLC offers webinars throughout the year for certain peer reviewers to prepare for upcoming visits, refresh their knowledge and stay up to date on the latest in accreditation. Eligible reviewers are invited via email.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/peer-review

Become a Peer Reviewer

Serving as a peer reviewer is an engaging, immersive experience. Gain insight from colleagues and develop a comprehensive understanding of HLC's accreditation to help your home institution.

What You'll Do

Our peer reviewers are trained to evaluate colleges and universities and provide advice and consultation to help them continuously improve.

In the context of each institution's mission, you'll use HLC requirements to assess materials, conduct in-person and virtual evaluations, and write reports.

Here are some of the things you'll do as a peer reviewer:

- Collaborate with a peer review team on evaluations, visits and panels.
- Research institutions and thoroughly read submitted materials.
- Engage with institutional representatives and communicate evaluation findings.
- Maintain confidentiality and avoid conflicts of interest with all assignments.

Who We're Looking For

Wondering if the peer reviewer role is right for you?

Generally, we're looking for someone who:

- Listens attentively and communicates effectively.
- Can examine materials with an eye for detail.
- Gives constructive criticism tactfully and with care.
- Is patient, flexible and can take direction.
- Has at least five years of experience in higher ed.
- Has a master's or other appropriate terminal degree; doctorate preferred. In certain circumstances,

individuals with other recognized expertise, skills or experience may be eligible to serve.

- Is currently employed by an institution accredited by and in good standing with HLC.
- Primarily resides in the United States.

How to Apply

We accept applications to join the Peer Corps each fall. To be notified about the application period, subscribe to the Leaflet newsletter at hlcommission.org/subscribe.

We ask applicants to submit a letter of application (500 words maximum) describing their relevant experiences along with a resume or CV.

In addition, each applicant should have two professional references who will be asked to assess the applicant based on traits we're looking for. Preference will be given to applicants who meet the diversity initiative or our areas of critical need.

- The Peer Corps Diversity Initiative seeks to increase the number of peer reviewers who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of HLC's member institutions.
- Critical need areas reflect specific areas of expertise, specialty, types of institutions or Carnegie classifications where HLC is in need of more reviewers.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/become-a-peer-reviewer



Serving Students

The HLC Commitment

Student voices and participation are vital to the work we do — and students are encouraged to be involved in the accreditation process.

HLC puts students first in its Mission, Vision and Guiding Values. HLC also welcomes student input and provides a variety of opportunities for students to be involved in the accreditation process.

Campus Visits

hlcommission.org/campus-visits

Students may be invited by their institution to attend and speak on issues during an on-site visit by HLC peer reviewers. They can also attend the open forums that are typically held at the institution during HLC's comprehensive evaluation.

Student Opinion Survey

hlcommission.org/student-survey

Students have the opportunity to share their opinions in response to HLC's Student Opinion Survey. The survey is sent to an institution's entire student body in advance of a comprehensive evaluation and the results are considered by HLC peer reviewers as part of the evaluation.

Comments

hlcommission.org/comment

Students may submit comments about an institution to HLC at any time. All comments received are forwarded to the institution and HLC peer reviewers approximately four weeks prior to the institution's next comprehensive evaluation for review and consideration during the evaluation.

Complaints

hlcommission.org/complaints

Students can file complaints regarding an institution using HLC's complaint process whenever there are concerns regarding an institution's ongoing ability to meet HLC requirements.

Student Resources

HLC has a number of resources that students can use to enhance their understanding about accreditation and the college journey.

Directory of Institutions

hlcommission.org/directory

Students can search the HLC Directory to learn if an institution is accredited. They can also find information about an institution's accreditation status, upcoming evaluations and history with HLC.

Student Guide

studentguide.hlcommission.org

HLC's Ask the Right Questions: A Student Guide to Higher Education helps students, parents and family members make choices about college. Students can use it to

learn about accreditation; key college processes such as admissions, financial aid and transfer; questions to ask on their higher ed journey; and other resources for help along the way.

How Accreditation Works for You

hlcommission.org/works

HLC provides general information about accreditation, describes our evaluation processes and answers frequently asked questions.

HLC partners with institutions to ensure students have access to the very best that higher education has to offer.



— Anthea Sweeney, HLC Vice President of Accreditation Relations



HLC's Credential Lab

HLC's Credential Lab is an innovation hub that supports institutions and learners in navigating the complex and growing ecosystem of alternative postsecondary credentials. Our work is focused in two areas: designing a quality assurance system for credential content providers, and supporting institutions and providers to ensure quality learning experiences and outcomes.

The Challenges We're Addressing

Learners need high-quality credentials that build skills, stack toward degrees, support mobility, and provide on-ramps and off-ramps to further education and employment.

Colleges and universities need support and guidance in engaging in high-quality external partnerships and transforming their institutional offerings to meet the needs of the 21st century learn-and-work ecosystem.

Employers, industries and workforce development organizations need reliable information about credentials and education and training providers. While there are an increasing number of alternative credentials and content

providers emerging, there is also an overwhelming need to assure quality and to improve transparency for learners and employers.

Two Solutions

We are working with multiple teams of diverse and experienced stakeholders to design, test and offer the following solutions:

Quality Assurance: A voluntary quality assurance framework and process that will review and endorse short-term credential content providers that meet certain standards.

Credential Lab Innovation Center: Resources and programming for colleges, universities and other educational providers for developing high-quality alternative credential programs and fostering effective partnerships among institutions, providers, states, employers and industries.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/credential-lab

Advisory Board and Design Teams

We are excited to be working with experts and leaders from across the higher ed industry to advance the work of the Credential Lab. See hlcommission.org/credential-lab for the members of our advisory board and design teams.

Leadership Advisory Board

The Leadership Advisory Board contributes to the development of the Credential Lab mission, helps ensure alignment and service to the field, and shares feedback on and suggestions for specific services and offerings developed.

Quality Assurance Design Team

The Quality Assurance Design Team is creating standards and processes for assuring the quality of credential content providers.

Innovation Center Design Team

The Innovation Center Design Team is developing resources for higher ed institutions to provide their students quality credentials.

“HLC’s Credential Lab represents an adaptive accreditor, recognizing the growing option of lifelong, responsive and workforce-centered education.

— Donald M. Elliman, Jr., *Chancellor, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus; HLC Board of Trustees Treasurer; Leadership Advisory Board Member for HLC’s Credential Lab*



Programs and Events

HLC's Academies

Designed and led by experienced practitioners, the Academies provide a framework and guidance for institutions to address leading areas of concern. Learn and implement evidence-based strategies that support sustainable institutional improvement.

Assessment Academy

In this four-year program, design and implement a customized project to improve student learning through assessment. Through in-person events, on-campus activities, online project updates and virtual consultations, get new ideas and techniques for influencing institutional culture, increasing capacity for assessment at your institution and using your data to improve student learning.

Student Success Academy

Through this two-year program, your team will create a plan to address gaps in data, initiatives, infrastructure and engagement that will guide your institution in systematically improving student success. With live webinars, on-campus inventories, in-person roundtable retreats and virtual consultations, you can methodically and holistically approach your student success challenges and opportunities. An optional third year can help your team further refine and implement your plan.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/academies

Benefits

- In-person and virtual events that serve as team retreats, with dedicated time to connect and plan.
- Expert, tailored guidance from practitioners and scholars.
- SparQ — HLC's platform for managing your Academy progress, where you can be inspired by new ideas and build a network of support.
- Webinars and virtual consultations providing program support and research findings on promising practices.
- Lasting connections across the HLC community.
- Documentation that can be used to demonstrate institutional improvement efforts.

Applying to the Academies

The Academies are open to all institutions accredited by HLC. Applications are accepted in the spring each year and each Academy cohort begins in the fall. For more information, including application criteria and timelines, visit hlcommission.org/academies.



Higher Learning: HLC's Annual Conference

The HLC Annual Conference brings the higher ed community together to share ideas and insights on the latest in the field. Learn from HLC staff members and leading thinkers, researchers and advocates during this multi-day event and inspire your work on campus. Connect with attendees from institutions of every classification and size from across the country.

 **Find It Online**
hlcommission.org/conference

Save the Date: Future Conferences

Last year, we announced that Higher Learning will be moving locations beginning in 2027 in order to accommodate the size of our conference and our geographically dispersed membership. Higher Learning will be held in Phoenix in 2027 and in Denver in 2028, and we plan to rotate the location of the conference each year to cities with convention centers that fit our needs.

Higher Learning 2026–2028

2026: March 21–24 | Chicago

2027: April 18–21 | Phoenix

2028: April 1–4 | Denver



More Learning Opportunities

HLC's programs and events can help you and your institution jump start initiatives, deepen accreditation knowledge, sharpen professional skills, improve processes and much more.

We offer virtual and in-person development programs on assessment, student success, strategic planning, leadership and program review, as well as guidance on accreditation procedures.

Whether you're new to your role, have an upcoming review or are developing innovative ways to improve your institution, we have a learning opportunity for you. Additionally, see our training resources for institutional representatives on page 65.

Assessment of Student Learning

Program Assessment Workshop

Next Offering: Spring 2026

Further your understanding of practical and meaningful assessment of student learning in your educational programs with guidance from experienced assessment professionals. You'll engage in activities around student learning outcomes, curriculum mapping, using data, performance indicators and more.

Assessing General Education Virtual Workshop

Next Offering: Spring 2026

In this collaborative workshop, develop an action plan to improve your general education assessment processes. Gather a team from your institution to critically review the structure, philosophy and perceptions of existing processes. Event leaders will help you understand your student learning outcomes and give you the tools to implement intentional assessment practices in your gen ed programs.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/programs

Each of our member institutions have unique needs, and we work to develop learning opportunities that resonate with all of them. It's very rewarding to see member institutions with different challenges and goals come out of the same program or event having met their objectives.

— Erin Gallagher, HLC Associate Director of Meetings

Advancing Strategy Workshop

Next Offering: Summer 2025

A collaborative strategic planning approach leads to continuous quality improvement throughout the institution. Gather a cross-functional group of administrators to design processes and use tools to improve the effectiveness of strategic planning efforts. Your team will leave the in-person workshop with strategies you can use at your own institution to facilitate planning and performance improvement.

Academic Program Review Workshop

Next Offering: Fall 2025

Develop an impactful academic program review process that's aligned with your institution's mission in this interactive, team-based workshop. Through plenaries, team discussions, peer consultations and structured conversations, draft or revise a program review plan that will help you better assess and improve the quality and effectiveness of your educational programs.

Student Success

Supporting Student Success Virtual Workshop

Next Offering: Summer 2025

Examine common factors that affect student success in this interactive workshop. Engage in a series of activities to identify your institution's current realities and discover areas of opportunity for improving student success within your sphere of influence.

Preparing for an Accreditation Activity

Invitation Only: Institutions with upcoming accreditation activities are invited via email.

Collaborating on Quality Virtual Workshop

Next Offering: Summer 2025

This team-based virtual workshop supports your institution's preparations for your upcoming comprehensive evaluation. Learn how to leverage an effective steering committee, prepare the Assurance Argument and equip your campus to engage in the visit.

Demonstrating Quality: An Assurance Argument Virtual Workshop

Next Offering: Spring 2025

Prepare for your upcoming comprehensive evaluation by getting guidance on your Assurance Argument. This half-day interactive workshop will give you the tools to finalize your draft Assurance Argument and Evidence File. Align team members involved with the accreditation process and ensure you're knowledgeable about the requirements for the review.

Webinars

HLC hosts several webinars throughout the year for you to stay up to date or refresh your knowledge on your accreditation relationship with HLC and current happenings in higher ed. Be the first to know about all upcoming programs and events by subscribing to our email interest lists at hlcommission.org/subscribe.





Resources

Institutional Examples

Accreditation Processes

The institutions below have recently completed an HLC accreditation activity and are open to share their experience with you. These are examples of how individual institutions have approached these activities and are not intended to be models of how to conduct the accreditation process. HLC thanks the institutional representatives for their willingness to be listed in this resource.

Standard Pathway

Year 4 Comprehensive Evaluation

Kirkwood Community College

Megan Thole, *Senior Director Institutional Planning*
megan.thole@kirkwood.edu | 319.398.7687

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

Caroline Geary, *Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Curricular Affairs*
gearyc@uwosh.edu

Year 10 Comprehensive Evaluation

Wilmington College

Laura Struve, *Professor of Literature, Accreditation Liaison Officer*
laura_struve@wilmington.edu | 937.527.9117

American InterContinental University System

Ruki Jayaraman, *Provost, Chief Academic Officer, Accreditation Liaison Officer*
rjayaraman@aiuniv.edu | 801.971.9393

Open Pathway

Year 4 Assurance Review

University of Arkansas – East Arkansas Community College

Jack Hill, *Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs*
jhill@eacc.edu | 870.633.4480 ext. 230

University of Michigan-Flint

Stephen Turner, *Accreditation Liaison Officer*
swturner@umich.edu | 810.766.6696

Indian Hills Community College

Jill Budde, *Vice President, Learning and Engagement*
jillbudde@indianhills.edu

Lewis University

William Chura, *Vice Provost of Research and Educational Effectiveness, Professor of Biology, Accreditation Liaison Officer*
churawi@lewisu.edu

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Kristi Kuntz, *Executive Associate Provost for Academic Programs and Policies*
kakuntz@illinois.edu

Year 10 Comprehensive Evaluation

Fort Hays State University

Angela Pool-Funai, *Assistant Provost for Academic Programs, Graduate Dean, Accreditation Liaison Officer*
aepoolfunai@fhsu.edu | 785.628.4236
<https://www.fhsu.edu/academic/provost/accreditation/>

Milwaukee School of Engineering

Jill Meyer, *Associate Vice President of Academic Success and Institutional Effectiveness*
meyerje@msoe.edu | 414.277.7365

Neosho County Community College

Sarah Robb, *Vice President for Student Learning*
sarah_robb@neosho.edu | 620.432.0302

Northeast Community College

Charlene Widener, *Vice President of Educational Services*
cwidener@northeast.edu | 402.844.7292

Sitting Bull College

Koreen Ressler, *Vice President*
koreen.ressler@sittingbull.edu | 701.226.5775

Southeast Community College Area

Shawna Herwick, *Director, Accreditation and Planning*
sherwick@southeast.edu | 402.309.0555

Southeast Technical College

Benjamin Valdez, *Vice President of Academic Affairs*
benjamin.valdez@southeasttech.edu

University of St. Thomas

Tonia Bock, *Associate Vice Provost for Accreditation, Assessment, and Curriculum*
tsbock@stthomas.edu

Quality Initiative

Augsburg University

Ben Denking, *Assistant Dean of Assessment and Academic Analytics*
denkinge@augsborg.edu | 651.468.5179

Cowley College

Deborah Phelps, *Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness*
debbie.phelps@cowley.edu | 620.330.7420
https://www.cowley.edu/_resources/assets/pdf/administration/accreditation/2024-quality-initiative.pdf

Goshen College

Justin Heinzekehr, *Director of Institutional Research and Assessment*
justinh@goshen.edu

Lansing Community College

Mark Kelland, *Professor, Accreditation Liaison Officer*
kellanm@lcc.edu | 517.483.1056
<https://www.lcc.edu/about/accreditation/reaccreditation.html>

Loyola University of Chicago

Rachel Shefner, *Associate Provost, Accreditation and Assessment*
rshefne@luc.edu | 773.508.8335

Ohio University

Loralyn Taylor, *Associate Provost, Accreditation Liaison Officer*
taylorl4@ohio.edu

San Juan College

Michael Ottinger, *Vice President for Learning*
ottingerm@sanjuancollege.edu | 505.566.3217

Southeastern Oklahoma State University

Susan Ronnenberg, *Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs—Undergraduate Studies*
sronnenberg@se.edu | 580.745.2032
<https://www.se.edu/hlc/>

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Elza Ibroscheva, *Associate Provost, Accreditation Liaison Officer*
eibrosc@siue.edu | 618.650.3639
<https://www.siue.edu/accreditation/hlc-quality-initiative.shtml>

Truman State University

Jonathan Vieker, *Assistant Vice President, Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment*
vieker@truman.edu | 660.785.4105
<https://advising.truman.edu/>

University of Arkansas-Fort Smith

Lisa Norris, *Director of Assessment and Accreditation*
lisa-marie.norris@uafs.edu | 479.788.7766
<https://uafs.edu/about/hlc/initiative.php>

University of Central Missouri

Josiah Nyangau, *Assistant Vice Provost, Assessment and Planning*
nyangau@ucmo.edu | 660.543.8855
<https://www.ucmo.edu/offices/assessment/index.php>

University of Indianapolis

Stephanie Kelly, *Associate Provost, Accreditation Liaison Officer*
spkelly@uindy.edu | 317.788.6099

University of Kansas

Jen Roberts, *Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies*
hcalo@ku.edu

HLC Assessment Academy Projects

These recent graduates of HLC's Assessment Academy are participating in the Academy Poster Gallery at the 2025 Annual Conference. If you are interested in participating in an Academy with your institution, contact the representatives below to learn about their experiences. HLC thanks the institutional representatives for their willingness to be listed in this resource.

College for Financial Planning, Inc.

Bethany Alden-Rivers, *Director, Academic Assessment*
bethany.aldenrivers@cffp.edu

Danville Area Community College

Wendy Brown, *Professor of Microbiology*
w.brown@dacc.edu

Divine Word College

Kimberly Burnett-Hackbarth, *College Registrar*
kburnetthackbarth@dwci.edu

Eastern Iowa Community College District

Megan Hills, *Director of Strategic Initiatives and Assessment*
mehills@eicc.edu

Metropolitan Community College-Kansas City

Tammie May, *MCC-Blue River Vice President of Instruction and Student Services*
tammie.may@mcckc.edu

Rock Valley College

Heather Snider, *Vice President of Academic Affairs / Chief Academic Officer*
h.snider@rockvalleycollege.edu

Publications

Latest Publications

Distinctive and Connected

Updated resource for HLC peer reviewers with considerations for evaluating Tribal Colleges and Universities

HLC is committed to promoting a solid understanding of the unique characteristics of Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and their contribution to higher education. We've developed a paper to provide peer reviewers with considerations that may be helpful regarding types of evidence to review to ensure that TCUs are meeting HLC's requirements.

As with any evaluation, the peer review team will need to understand the attributes of the institution and how HLC's requirements may be met in the unique history, mission, culture and circumstances of TCUs.

Trends in Higher Education 2025

HLC compiles and publishes an annual list of higher education trends. The trends inform HLC's work to support its member institutions and provide insight into the future of postsecondary education.

Leadership Lessons Learned

HLC President Barbara Gellman-Danley shares her lessons learned as a higher education leader.

Student Records Access for Success: Closed Schools, Transcript Holds and the Future of Learner Records

This white paper written in collaboration with the higher ed compacts illustrates the variety of activities to help students gain access to student records.

HLC Membership by the Numbers

HLC publishes aggregated data about its member institutions two times a year to demonstrate trends in higher education and within the HLC community.

Guidelines on Accreditation Requirements



Evaluating Reduced-Credit Bachelor's Degree Programs (New)

These guidelines assist institutions and peer reviewers in evaluating reduced-credit bachelor's degree programs in the context of HLC's Criteria for Accreditation. The guidelines apply to institutions initially seeking to offer, and then subsequently offering, a reduced-credit bachelor's degree program. Likewise, the guidance will inform peer reviewers evaluating an application from an institution that is seeking to offer a reduced-credit bachelor's degree program or evaluating an institution that is offering such programs.

Determining Faculty Qualifications

HLC's Determining Faculty Qualifications provides guidance to institutions and peer reviewers in evaluating institutional policies and procedures for determining faculty qualifications. The guidelines highlight the Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices that speak to the importance of institutions accredited by HLC employing qualified faculty for the varied and essential roles faculty members perform.

Dual Credit

These guidelines offer institutions and peer reviewers formal guidance on the evaluation of dual credit activity at member institutions. HLC defines dual credit courses as "courses taught to high school students for which the students receive both high school credit and college credit." Dual credit offerings are reviewed during an institution's comprehensive evaluation but may be reviewed at other times if concerns about the programs arise.

School of Record

Institutions acting as a School of Record must be able to ensure academic integrity and transparency in the transcription of coursework taken abroad by students. They also must ensure appropriately trained personnel are evaluating such courses or programs and that the institution has established processes for evaluation that are applied in a consistent fashion.

Two-Year Institutions Seeking to Offer the Baccalaureate Degree

Before launching baccalaureate programs, two-year institutions must seek HLC approval through a substantive change request. HLC's guidelines assist these institutions in an internal review of readiness. The guidelines also serve as a reference to peer reviewers who may be asked to evaluate the change requests.

Maintaining Institutional Autonomy

These guidelines are intended to provide member institutions that are not separately incorporated from a parent organization with a framework for how they can satisfy HLC's expectation that the institution's governing board is able to demonstrate sufficient autonomy.

Personally Identifiable Information Submitted to HLC

HLC has provided guidelines on personally identifiable information (PII), which is defined as any information about an individual that allows the individual to be specifically identified. This includes, but is not limited to: name, address, telephone number, birthday, email, Social Security number, bank information, etc. A document does not include PII if personal information is de-identified or is provided in the aggregate. When submitting information to HLC, if the information must be included for evaluative purposes, institutions should redact the PII where possible.

Leaflet

hlcommission.org/leaflet

The Leaflet is a snapshot of the work HLC does to fulfill our mission. Published six times a year, it keeps our membership informed about HLC, accreditation and the higher ed community. Subscribe to stay up to date on our policies, procedures, events, advocacy efforts and much more.



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/publications



HLC's Online Systems

HLC's online platforms allow institutional representatives and peer reviewers to easily manage accreditation records and evaluations, as well as engage and collaborate with their peers in the community.



canopy.hlcommission.org

Canopy is the central location for institutional representatives to keep track of their accreditation relationship with HLC. Peer reviewers and Institutional Actions Council members also use the system to manage their service records and conduct reviews.

New in 2025: Assurance Filings and Reviews are moving to Canopy! Going forward, institutions and peer reviewers will conduct their work for comprehensive evaluations and Assurance Reviews in Canopy, instead of the separate, stand-alone Assurance System.

System details and training resources:

hlcommission.org/canopy

User support: hlcommission.org/canopy-help



sparq.hlcommission.org

SparQ (pronounced "spark") is HLC's hub for collaborative learning. It is a tool for project management, resource sharing, discussion and discovery, where participants in HLC's programs and events can be inspired by new ideas and build a community.

User support: hlcommission.org/sparq-help

Assurance System

Will sunset in fall 2025

assurance.hlcommission.org

The Assurance System was designed for the creation and review of materials for comprehensive evaluations and Assurance Reviews. HLC is integrating this functionality into our Canopy system starting in March 2025. The stand-alone Assurance System will be sunset during fall 2025.

Details about the system and the transition to Canopy: hlcommission.org/assurance-system

User support: hlcommission.org/assurance-help

“There is a personal touch to the work that we do at HLC. We're a relatively small group of people that have the ability to make a positive impact on higher education in our communities.

— Frank Sparano, HLC Senior Support Specialist

Glossary of HLC Terminology

Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices

The following definitions explain how these terms are used within the current Criteria for Accreditation and the revised Criteria and Assumed Practices that go into effect on September 1, 2025. HLC's intent is not to prescribe how institutions must use a particular word or phrase locally, but rather to offer a means to ensure a consistent reading of the meaning and expectations of HLC requirements. This glossary is not part of policy and will be updated as needed to respond to questions and feedback from institutions and peer reviewers.

Current Criteria for Accreditation

academic freedom (2.D.)

The ability to engage differences of opinion, evaluate evidence and form one's own grounded judgments about the relative value of competing perspectives. This definition implies not just freedom from constraint but also freedom for faculty, staff and students to work within a scholarly community to develop intellectual and personal qualities.

academic offerings

Synonymous with HLC's use of the term "educational program."

appropriate to higher education (3.A.)

Curricular and cocurricular programming of the quality and rigor for the degree level that prepares students to think critically and function successfully. It is distinctly different from K-12 education.

autonomous (2.C.)

The institution's governing board acts independently of any other entity in determining the course of direction and policies for the institution.

auxiliary (2.A.)

Activities and services related to, but not intrinsic to, educational functions: dining services, student housing, faculty or staff housing, intercollegiate athletics, student stores, a Public Radio station, etc. In many institutions, "auxiliary" simultaneously denotes a segregated budget and dedicated revenues.

capacity (1.A., 5.C.)

An institution's ability to effectively deliver its educational offerings. Determining capacity refers to an institution's demonstrable ability to establish and maintain academic quality. Indicators of sufficient capacity may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Financial resources to support academic offerings at start-up and in the future.
- Evidence of planning that allocates necessary resources and shows ongoing development.
- Alignment of academic offerings with the institution's mission and evidence of the institution's long-term commitment.
- Evidence of new or revised policies and procedures that demonstrate commitment and sustainability.
- Qualified faculty and staff to serve students.
- Learning environments (whether classrooms, laboratories, studios or online infrastructure) with technological resources and equipment.
- Print and electronic media and support for the access and use of the technological resources across modalities.

civic engagement (1.C.)

Community service or any number of other efforts (by individuals or groups) intended to address issues of public or community concern.

cocurricular (3.C., 4.B.)

Learning activities, programs and experiences that reinforce the institution's mission and values and complement the formal curriculum. Examples: Study abroad, student-faculty research experiences, service learning, professional clubs or organizations, honor societies, etc.

consortial arrangement (3.A., 3.C.)

An arrangement in which an HLC-accredited institution develops an agreement with an institution or group of institutions, all of which are accredited by accreditors



Find It Online

hlcommission.org/glossary

recognized by the U.S. Department of Education—that is, the consortial party(ies)—through which the consortial party(ies) agrees to provide some portion of one or more educational programs (i.e., degrees or certificates offered for academic credit) offered by the HLC-accredited institution.

control (2.B.)

The entity that is responsible for the fiscal and operational oversight of an institution and its programs. Control also includes the structure and organizational arrangements of an institution. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The state board or agency that oversees a public university.
- The board of trustees that oversees a private, nonprofit college.
- The parent corporation of a private, for-profit college.
- The public board authorized by Congress to oversee an institution under federal control.
- Religious bodies and tribal councils.

good practice (4.B., 4.C.)

Practice that is based in the use of processes, methods and measures that have been determined to be successful by empirical research, professional organizations and/or institutional peers.

informed citizenship (1.C.)

Having sufficient and reliable information about issues of public concern and having the knowledge and skills to make reasonable judgments and decisions about them.

operational staff (5.B.)

Personnel who support the academic enterprise, such as those who may work in the areas of finance, human resources, facilities, dining/catering, information technology, planning, security, student services, academic support, etc.

public (1.A.)

In phrases such as “makes available to the public” or “states publicly,” this refers to people in general, including current and potential students. In phrases such as “the public good,” the Criteria refer to public, as opposed to private, good.

public information (1.A.)

Information on websites or other materials that are available freely to the public, without individuals having to specifically request access to them.

student outcomes (5.C.)

Education-specific results to measure against the objectives or standards for the educational offerings. Examples could be results from licensure or standardized exams, course and program persistence, graduation rates and workforce data.

superordinate entity (1.B.)

An entity situated hierarchically above the institution, which includes but is not limited to state boards, private owners, corporate parents, Tribal councils or religious denominations.

undue influence (2.C.)

Overreach, suspicious transactions and relationships that are exclusive (without oversight) that could yield influence over the institution’s governing board.

wherever and however delivered (Criterion 3, 5.B.)

All modes of delivery of academic offerings and all locations, modalities and venues, including but not limited to the main campus, additional locations, distance delivery, dual credit and contractual or consortial arrangements.

Revised Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices

academic credential (Assumed Practices B.1, B.2)

The degree, certificate, diploma or other validated recognition earned at the conclusion of an educational program.

academic freedom (2.D.)

The ability to engage differences of opinion, evaluate evidence and form one’s own grounded judgments about the relative value of competing perspectives. This definition implies not just freedom from constraint but also freedom for faculty, staff and students to work within a scholarly community to advance knowledge.

assessment of student learning (3.E.)

For student learning, a commitment to assessment means assessment at the program level that proceeds from clear goals, involves faculty during the process, and analyzes the assessment results; it also means that the institution improves its programs or ancillary services or other operations on the basis of those analyses as appropriate. Institutions committed to improvement review their programs regularly and seek external judgment, advice or benchmarks in their assessments.

benchmarks (3.G.)

Measures of success by which an institution assesses its performance. Benchmarks for student success outcomes are based upon the performance of peer institutions as informed by mission, student body and associated factors.

civic engagement (1.C.)

Community service or any number of other efforts (by individuals or groups) intended to address issues of public or community concern.

continuous improvement (3.G.)

Continuous improvement is the state of having an ongoing, systematic aspiration for improving quality. Institutions engaged in continuous improvement strive to improve by actively collecting performance data and acting on that information to enhance organizational performance.

program (3.A.)

Synonymous with HLC's use of the term "educational program."

public (1.A., 2.B)

In phrases such as "publicly articulated mission" or "presents itself accurately and completely to students and the public," this refers to people in general, including current and potential students. In phrases such as "the public good," the Criteria refer to public, as opposed to private, good.

reference peer institutions (3.G.)

Institutions identify colleges and universities that have similar missions, student bodies or other characteristics, such that they provide meaningful comparisons by which the institution may judge its performance.

undue external influence (2.C.)

Overreach by others, intrusions into, or improper influence over the institution's governing board that could result in board activity that is not in the best interests of the institution as stated in its mission.

Accreditation

academic program

Synonymous with HLC's use of the term "educational program."

Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation

One of the processes for seeking accreditation with HLC. To be eligible for the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation, an institution must meet certain requirements, including being currently accredited by a historically regional accrediting agency or a state entity recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an institutional accreditor of degree-granting institutions of higher education.

accreditation agency

A nongovernmental body established to administer accrediting procedures.

Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)

The individual appointed by the institution's CEO to serve as a primary contact between the institution and HLC. The ALO communicates changes at the institution to HLC, responds to communications from HLC, and provides oversight for the currency, accuracy and

timeliness of institutional information submitted to HLC, including the Institutional Update.

accreditation, institutional

Accreditation that evaluates an entire educational institution and accredits it as a whole.

accreditation, programmatic (also called specialized accreditation or professional accreditation)

Accreditation of units, schools or programs within a larger educational institution or for the sole program or area of concentration of an independent, specialized institution.

accredited institution

An institution accredited by HLC.

accredited status

Status that indicates an institution is accredited by HLC.

Action Letter

Official correspondence from HLC to an institution detailing an action taken by one of HLC's decision-making bodies regarding that institution.

additional location (Based on federal definition)

A physical facility that is geographically separate from the main campus of an institution, where instruction takes place and it is possible for students to do one or more of the following:

- Complete 50% or more of the courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate or other recognized educational credential.
- Complete 50% or more of a degree completion program (even if the degree completion program provides less than 50% of the courses leading to the degree).

Per the federal definition, an additional location must be within the same ownership structure of the institution.

An additional location may be at a facility that the institution does not own, such as an office building, high school, or on the campus of another institution.

An additional location may qualify as a branch campus under circumstances that meet the definition of a branch campus.

There is no threshold number of students necessary for a facility to qualify as an additional location.

There is no minimum distance from the campus necessary for a facility to qualify as an additional location.

An additional location typically does not have a full range of administrative and student services staffed by the facility's personnel. Such services may be provided from the main campus or another campus.

A facility may provide access to instruction requiring students to be present at a physical location that receives interactive TV, video or online teaching. It is an additional location when 50% or more of a distance delivery program is available through one or more of these

modalities at that facility. Note: This requirement does not apply for locations in which there is a general computer lab that students might use for distance delivery courses, except for additional locations that are correctional facilities.

A correctional facility where instruction takes place according to any of the 50% thresholds identified above is an additional location even if such instruction takes place primarily through distance education or correspondence courses at that location.

An additional location may have the status of open or closed.

An additional location that is open may have the status of active or inactive. An additional location has active status when students are enrolled at the location. Its status is inactive when students are not enrolled at the location. The status of an additional location can change between active and inactive without approval from HLC. However, a location may only be classified as inactive with no student enrollment at the location for a maximum of two consecutive years. At that point, HLC requires the institution to close the location.

additional location confirmation visit

A visit to an institution's new additional location to confirm it is operating as described in the institution's original substantive change request.

Administrative Probation

An accreditation status that indicates that an institution is no longer in compliance with one or more Obligations of Membership. Administrative probation is not a sanction.

administrative record

A record of documents related to an institution's accreditation relationship with HLC. HLC maintains an administrative record for each member institution, institution that was previously a member, and institution that is, or was, seeking membership. The administrative record includes:

- Narrative and related documentary materials submitted by an institution as part of an evaluation process. This could include, for example, the Institutional Update, a substantive change application, an Assurance Argument or an institutional response.
- Materials prepared by HLC as part of an evaluation process. This could include, for example, a final team report, an Institutional Actions Council report or a desk review.
- Action letters and other official correspondence related to evaluation activity. This could include, for example, an action letter indicating action taken by the Board of Trustees, an action letter indicating action taken by the Institutional Actions Council, a letter imposing a designation, or a letter transmitting a team report.

At HLC's discretion, additional documents may also be included in the administrative record. This could include, for example, correspondence from other accreditors or governmental entities regarding the institution, or other correspondence with the institution.

adverse action

An action by HLC's Board of Trustees that withdraws or denies accreditation or candidacy.

advisory visit

A visit conducted by HLC as part of special monitoring. An advisory visit is an on-site evaluation conducted by a team of peer reviewers to gather further information about situations that give rise to concerns about the institution's compliance with HLC requirements.

Appeal Panel

A group of five individuals selected from the Appeals Body by HLC's president that hears an institution's appeal to an adverse action by the Board of Trustees.

Appeals Body

A group of 15 individuals appointed by the Board of Trustees to hear institutional appeals to adverse actions by the Board of Trustees. One of HLC's decision-making bodies.

Assumed Practices

A set of practices shared by institutions of higher education that is unlikely to vary by institutional mission or context. Institutions must meet the Assumed Practices to obtain accreditation with HLC.

Assurance Argument

A narrative in which the institution explains how it meets HLC's Criteria for Accreditation, which is supported by linked documents in the Evidence File.

Assurance Filing

Created and submitted by the institution, the Assurance Filing includes the Assurance Argument with embedded links to documents in the Evidence File.

Assurance Review

The peer review evaluation of the Assurance Filing.

Assurance System

An online system used by institutions to provide an Assurance Argument and evidentiary materials and used by peer reviewers to complete the Assurance Review. This system will be sunset during fall 2025, and Assurance Arguments and Reviews will be integrated into HLC's Canopy system.

best interest determination (Based on federal definition; related to Pell-eligible prison education programs)

A determination by the institution in collaboration with the oversight entity for a prison education program that the program is operating in the best interest of

students, as defined in 34 CFR 668.241.¹ Within two years of an institution initiating a Pell-eligible prison education program, HLC will examine the institution's documentation describing the methodology by which such determination was made.

Board of Trustees

The governing body of HLC, made up of 16 to 21 representatives from HLC member institutions and the public. One of HLC's decision-making bodies.

branch campus (Based on federal definition)

A physical facility that is geographically separate from and independent of the main campus of the institution. HLC considers a location of an institution to be independent of the main campus if it has all four of the following attributes:

- It is permanent in nature.
- It offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate or other recognized educational credential.
- It has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization.
- It has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

Per the federal definition, a branch campus must be within the same ownership structure of the institution. A branch campus may be at a facility that the institution does not own.

campus evaluation visit

A visit to a new main campus or branch campus after the campus has been approved by HLC and within six months of matriculation to assure the quality of the campus and its programs in meeting the needs of the institution's constituencies and to assure the capacity to sustain that quality.

candidacy

Pre-accreditation status offering membership with HLC.

Candidacy Program

The steps an institution must follow to gain candidacy and then accreditation with HLC.

candidate institution

An institution that holds candidacy status with HLC.

Canopy

An online system for institutions and peer reviewers to manage their relationship with HLC.

Change of Control, Structure or Organization

A transaction that affects, or may affect, corporate control, structure or governance at an accredited or candidate institution.

Change Panel

A panel of two or more peer reviewers that evaluates a substantive change application submitted by an institution.

Change Visit

An on-site visit by a peer review team in response to one or more substantive change applications submitted by an institution.

comprehensive evaluation

The process used to determine whether an institution meets or continues to meet the Criteria for Accreditation. Comprehensive evaluations are conducted at various points in the accreditation relationship, including for candidacy, initial accreditation, reaffirmation of accreditation, in Year 4 of the Standard Pathway, and for institutions placed on Probation or issued a Show-Cause Order.

The comprehensive evaluation includes an Assurance Review, an on-site visit and a student opinion survey. Certain comprehensive evaluations may also include other components as applicable, including a Federal Compliance Review, multi-campus visit, or reviews to determine an institution's compliance with HLC's Assumed Practices or Eligibility Requirements.

contractual arrangement

An arrangement in which the institution outsources some portion of its educational programs—that is, degrees or certificates offered for academic credit (including instruction, oversight of the curriculum, assurance of the consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in expectations of student performance and/or the establishment of the academic qualifications for instructional personnel)—to:

1. An unaccredited institution.
2. An institution that is not accredited by an accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.
3. A corporation or other entity.

Core Components

Subcategories of each Criterion for Accreditation that are reviewed in order to determine whether an institution meets each Criterion.

correctional facility

A federal, state or local penitentiary, prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, juvenile justice facility or other similar correctional institution.

correspondence education course (Based on federal definition)

A course provided by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructors. Interaction between instructors and students in a correspondence course is limited, not regular and

¹ The Code of Federal Regulations is available online at ecfr.gov.

substantive, and is primarily initiated by the students. If a course is part correspondence and part residential training, it is considered a correspondence education course. A correspondence education course is not distance education.

correspondence education program

An academic program in which 50% or more of the required courses may be taken as correspondence education courses.

course location

A physical facility that is geographically separate from the main campus of an institution and within the same ownership structure of the institution, where instruction takes place and where it is not possible for students to do either of the following:

- Complete 50% or more of the courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate or other recognized educational credential.
- Complete 50% or more of a degree completion program.

A course location may be at a facility that the institution does not own, such as an office building, high school, or on the campus of another institution.

Criteria for Accreditation

The standards of quality by which HLC determines whether an institution merits accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation.

Data Update Coordinator

The individual appointed by the institution's CEO to be responsible for the accuracy and completion of the Institutional Update. The coordinator serves as the contact between the institution and HLC regarding the Institutional Update and is responsible for the timely submission of the Institutional Update.

day

Used in HLC policy and procedure to refer to one calendar day, unless otherwise specified.

Desk Review

An evaluation conducted by an HLC official of a substantive change requested by the institution.

distance education (Based on federal definition)

Education that uses one or more of the technologies below to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously.

The technologies that may be used to offer distance education include:

1. The internet;
2. One-way and two-way transmissions through

open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite or wireless communications devices;

3. Audio conference; or
4. Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in items 1–3 above.

For purposes of this definition, an instructor is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by HLC.

distance education course

A course in which at least 75% of the instruction and interaction occurs using one or more of the technologies listed in the definition of distance education, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other.

distance education program

A certificate or degree program in which 50% or more of the courses may be taken as distance education courses.

dual credit courses (also called concurrent enrollment or dual enrollment)

Courses taught to high school students for which the students receive both high school credit and college credit.

educational offering

Synonymous with HLC's use of the term "educational program."

educational program (Same as federal definition)

1. A legally authorized postsecondary program of organized instruction or study that:
 - i. Leads to an academic, professional, or vocational degree, or certificate, or other recognized educational credential, or is a comprehensive transition and postsecondary program, as described in 34 CFR part 668, subpart O; and
 - ii. May, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilize direct assessment of student learning, or recognize the direct assessment of student learning by others, if such assessment is consistent with the accreditation of the institution or program utilizing the results of the assessment and with the provisions of 34 CFR § 668.10.
2. HLC does not consider that an institution provides an educational program if the institution does not provide instruction itself (including a course of independent study) but merely gives credit for one or more of the following: Instruction provided by other institutions or schools; examinations or direct assessments provided by agencies or organizations; or other accomplishments such as "life experience."

"Educational program" is synonymous with HLC's use of the terms "academic offering(s)," "academic program(s)" and "educational offering(s)."

Eligibility Filing

Documentation submitted by an institution considering membership with HLC through the Eligibility Process that demonstrates its compliance with the Eligibility Requirements.

Eligibility Process

As one of the processes for seeking accreditation with HLC, the process by which HLC determines whether a non-member institution is ready to begin the Candidacy Program.

Eligibility Requirements

A set of requirements an institution must meet before it is granted candidacy and/or initial accreditation.

Evidence File

Documents that an institution provides in its Assurance Filing to support the claims and arguments made in the institution's Assurance Argument.

exit session

A meeting between the peer review team and the CEO of the institution at the conclusion of a visit.

Federal Compliance Requirements

Requirements that HLC is obliged to enforce as part of its recognition by the U.S. Department of Education.

financial indicators

Ranges, or zones, of Composite Financial Index (CFI) values identified by HLC to help determine whether a member institution is at risk of not meeting HLC requirements. As part of the risk indicator process related to financial indicators, HLC evaluates data provided by institutions in the Institutional Update against the financial indicators.

focused visit

A peer review visit that generally occurs between comprehensive evaluations to examine specific aspects of an institution as a form of routine monitoring. As part of a focused visit, an institution submits a focused visit report.

Heightened Cash Monitoring 2 (HCM2)

A payment method used by the U.S. Department of Education's office of Federal Student Aid to disburse Title IV financial aid funds to institutions. An institution placed on the HCM2 payment method disburses funds to students from institutional funds and submits a request for reimbursement to FSA. FSA reviews a sample of disbursements prior to disbursing funds. See 34 CFR 668.162 for more information.

Higher Learning Commission (HLC)

An institutional accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. HLC accredits degree-granting institutions of higher education in the United States.

HLC staff liaison

An HLC Vice President of Accreditation Relations who serves as a member institution's primary contact, advises the institution about HLC's policies and procedures and helps to coordinate the peer review and decision-making processes.

Initial Accreditation

An action by HLC's Board of Trustees confirming that an institution meets all of the requirements necessary to be granted accreditation. An institution may also be awarded accreditation via Early Initial Accreditation.

Institution Event Summary (IES)

A document created prior to each evaluation that includes contact information for the institution and peer review team members and other information pertinent to the evaluation.

Institutional Actions Council (IAC)

A group of experienced peer reviewers and representatives of the public appointed by HLC's Board of Trustees and authorized to take action on, or make recommendations regarding, certain types of institutional reviews. One of HLC's decision-making bodies.

institutional data

Data provided by institutions to HLC or other data that HLC has regarding institutions, including data available from public sources. HLC requires institutions to provide certain data annually, including financial information, headcount and enrollment information, and information related to student success outcomes, including student achievement.

institutional designation

A mechanism to inform the public that an institution is experiencing a significant financial issue or is being investigated by a governmental entity. HLC does not undertake any independent evaluation of the underlying circumstances giving rise to the institutional designation, as related to HLC requirements, in advance of assigning an institutional designation.

institutional response

An institution's written response to a recommendation from a peer review team, HLC staff member or Institutional Actions Council committee.

Institutional Status and Requirements (ISR) Report

A resource available to an institution's CEO or Accreditation Liaison Officer that includes the complete institutional history with HLC, information on the status of current and upcoming accreditation events, and information on the institution's designated pathway and related events.

Institutional Update

An online report completed annually by member institutions regarding institutional health.

interim report

A report filed by an institution as part of routine monitoring to provide updates to HLC on progress in addressing a serious issue at the institution, the resolution of which is relevant to the institution's future compliance with, or improvement regarding, HLC requirements.

Location Coordinator

The individual appointed by the institution's CEO to be responsible for maintaining the institution's additional location and campus records in HLC's online Canopy system. (Note: Institutions are not required to appoint a Location Coordinator; the ALO and CEO may also manage these records in Canopy.)

main campus (Based on federal definition)

The primary physical facility of the institution at which, to the extent applicable, the institution offers educational programs.

Per the federal definition, the main campus must be within the same ownership structure of the institution. The main campus may be at a facility that the institution does not own.

maintain accreditation

Actively participate, as an institution, in HLC's accreditation processes to ensure the institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC requirements.

Mark of Accreditation Status

An image that reflects an institution's current accreditation status and links to the institution's Statement of Accreditation Status on HLC's website. Each member institution is required to display the Mark on its website.

monitoring

A member institution may be subject to providing HLC updates for evaluation as part of its ongoing accreditation relationship. Monitoring consists of reviewing an institution's progress in addressing an issue that is relevant to the institution's compliance with, or improvement regarding, HLC requirements. HLC has two kinds of monitoring: routine and special.

multi-campus visit

A visit to a selection of an institution's branch campuses that occurs as part of comprehensive evaluations for Candidacy, Initial Accreditation and Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

multi-location visit

A visit to a selection of additional locations of an institution with three or more active additional locations, occurring once every five years.

non-financial indicators

Changes in an institution's enrollment, degrees awarded, faculty headcount and other non-financial characteristics

identified by HLC to help determine whether a member institution is at risk of not meeting HLC requirements. As part of the risk indicator process related to non-financial indicators, HLC evaluates data provided by institutions in the Institutional Update against the non-financial indicators.

Notice

A sanction signifying that, based on an overall judgment, the institution is at risk of being out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. An institution remains accredited while on Notice.

Notification Program for Additional Locations

A program for qualified institutions to open new additional locations after notifying HLC prior to initiating any new additional locations and receiving an acknowledgment that HLC has added the new additional location to its database.

Obligations of Membership

The responsibilities that HLC member institutions are required to fulfill in order to maintain their membership.

official action

An official HLC decision made by HLC staff, the Institutional Actions Council or HLC's Board of Trustees.

Open Pathway

A pathway for maintaining accreditation with HLC that features a 10-year reaffirmation cycle where quality assurance and quality improvement are addressed separately.

oversight entity (Based on federal definition; related to Pell-eligible prison education programs)

The entity responsible for overseeing a correctional facility at which a Pell-eligible prison education program is offered. The oversight entity would either be the Federal Bureau of Prisons or the appropriate state department of corrections or other entity that is responsible for overseeing correctional facilities.

Peer Corps

The group of faculty, administrators and public members from within HLC's membership who evaluate whether institutions are meeting HLC requirements and participate in HLC decision-making bodies.

peer review team

A group of peer reviewers conducting an evaluation on behalf of HLC.

peer reviewer

A member of HLC's volunteer Peer Corps.

Pell-eligible prison education program (also referred to as PEP)

A prison education program that meets all the requirements articulated in 34 CFR 668.236 for students enrolled in the program to be eligible to receive Pell Grants.

personally identifiable information (PII)

Information about an individual that allows the individual to be specifically identified. PII includes, but is not limited to: name, address, telephone number, birthday, email, Social Security number, bank information, etc.

preliminary peer review

An evaluation by a peer review team of an institution in the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation. Determines whether the institution may proceed to a comprehensive evaluation for Initial Accreditation.

Primary Assurance System Coordinator

The individual appointed by the institution's CEO to be responsible for the development and submission of institutional materials for evaluations conducted in HLC's online Assurance System.

Primary Filing Coordinator

The individual appointed by the institution's CEO to be responsible for the development and submission of Assurance Filings in Canopy.

Probation

A sanction signifying that an institution no longer meets one or more of the Criteria for Accreditation. An institution remains accredited while on Probation.

program content changes

Changes to a program's curriculum (measured by clock or credit hours), learning objectives, competencies or required clinical experiences. This would include changes in the general education courses required for program completion and not merely the courses within the discipline, program or major.

provisional certification

A status assigned to an institution by the U.S. Department of Education's office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) that is related to the institution's eligibility to participate in Title IV financial aid programs. See 34 CFR 668.13(c) for more information.

provisional plan (Based on federal definition of "teach-out plan")

Federal regulations define a teach-out plan as a written plan developed by an institution that provides for the equitable treatment of students if an institution, or an institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program, ceases to operate or plans to cease operations before all enrolled students have completed their program of study.

HLC uses the term provisional plan as synonymous with teach-out plan.

Under HLC policy, a provisional plan may be required in a variety of circumstances, not just when an institution is ceasing operations entirely or ceasing operations at a location that provides 100% of at least one program.

Under HLC policy, in some circumstances, a provisional plan must also include one or more teach-out agreements.

A provisional plan must include the required elements under HLC policy.

Public Disclosure Notice (PDN)

A document issued by HLC when it imposes or removes a sanction or Show-Cause Order, assigns an institutional designation, denies an application for Change of Control, Structure or Organization, or takes an adverse action regarding an institution, including withdrawal of accreditation. A PDN is also posted when an institution voluntarily resigns its accreditation or candidacy with HLC. The PDN includes a history of the institution's relationship with HLC, the nature of the action, and a brief analysis of the situation that prompted the action, as well as next steps in review and correction, if applicable. HLC may also, in its discretion, issue a public statement regarding an institution.

public statement

A document issued by HLC, in its discretion, regarding an institution. This could include, for example, to correct or confirm a media report, to respond to frequent inquiries from the public, to inform the public about a



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lawsuit, investigation or advisory visit, to inform the public of an application for Change of Control, Structure or Organization that has been approved, or to address other matters as determined appropriate by HLC.

Quality Initiative

A major quality improvement effort conducted by institutions on the Open Pathway that addresses a current concern or aspiration specific to the institution. There are two types of Quality Initiatives: a Student Success Quality Initiative and an Open Quality Initiative.

Quality Initiative Proposal

A proposal submitted by an institution on the Open Pathway explaining the major improvement effort the institution will undertake as its Quality Initiative.

Quality Initiative Report

A report submitted by an institution on the Open Pathway upon completing its Quality Initiative that reflects on accomplishments, documents achievements and strategies, and defines new priorities and challenges.

Reaffirmation of Accreditation

An action by an HLC decision-making body confirming, based on evaluation, that an institution may retain its HLC accreditation.

recognized accreditor

An accreditor recognized by either the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

regular and substantive interaction (Based on federal definition)

Institutions are expected to ensure regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors in their distance education and competency-based education offerings. An institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency:

1. Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and
2. Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

Substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following:

1. Providing direct instruction;

2. Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
3. Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
4. Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
5. Other instructional activities approved by HLC or the program's accrediting agency.

Reimbursement Payment Method

A payment method used by the U.S. Department of Education's office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) to disburse Title IV financial aid funds to institutions. An institution placed on the Reimbursement Payment Method disburses funds to students from institutional funds and submits a request for reimbursement to FSA. FSA reviews all disbursements prior to disbursing funds. See 34 CFR 668.162 for more information.

related entity

An entity that has 50% or more ownership interest in the accredited entity or has 50% or more voting interest in the accredited entity's board.

risk indicators

Metrics or benchmarks that HLC uses to evaluate institutional data for the purpose of helping to determine whether an institution is at risk of not meeting HLC requirements. HLC has three sets of risk indicators: financial, non-financial and student success.

Show-Cause Order

A public procedural order issued by HLC's Board of Trustees that attaches to an institution's accreditation status. A Show-Cause Order shifts the burden to the institution to promptly provide evidence, without a period of remediation, indicating that its accreditation should not be withdrawn. An institution remains accredited while under a Show-Cause Order.

special monitoring report

A report filed by an institution as part of special monitoring to gather further information about situations that give rise to concerns about the institution's compliance with HLC requirements.

Standard Pathway

A pathway for maintaining accreditation with HLC that features a 10-year reaffirmation cycle where quality assurance and quality improvement are integrated for comprehensive evaluations.

Statement of Accreditation Status (SAS)

A public summary of the relationship between a current or former member institution and HLC.

stipulations

Statements that describe certain aspects of an institution's accreditation relationship with HLC, including approvals

and/or limitations placed by HLC on an institution's development of new activities or programs.

student achievement

See "student success outcomes."

student opinion survey

An online survey conducted by HLC as part of comprehensive evaluations. The opinions and data gathered assist peer reviewers in developing questions for their meetings during the on-site visit.

student records

Documentation related to students previously or currently enrolled at an institution. Student records include, but are not limited to, transcripts and documentation of academic activities (for example, clinical logs, student teaching observations, etc.); billing, financial aid or other benefit records; medical or treatment records; and as applicable, other official documentation of a student's interactions with institutional operations or services.

student success indicators

Benchmarks for certain student success outcome measures identified by HLC to help determine whether a member institution is at risk of not meeting HLC requirements. The measures include: first-year retention rate, graduation rate within 150% of normal time, and completion and transfer rate at 8 years after entry to college. As part of the risk indicator process related to student success indicators, HLC uses data reported to IPEDS to evaluate institutional performance against the student success indicators.

student success outcomes

Metrics demonstrating the rate at which an institution's students achieve or mark progress toward completion, educational intent or other goals that are relevant to the institution's mission. These measures must include, at a minimum, measures related to aspects of student achievement, such as retention, completion, required state licensure exam pass data, and data about the institution's students after transfer or graduation (such as continuing education, job placement rates, and earnings). "Student achievement" is a term used by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). Institutions may also identify other student success outcomes relevant to their mission, such as outcomes related to student intent, civic engagement, quality of life or other topics.

teach out/teach-out arrangement (Based on federal definition)

Federal regulations define teach out as a process during which a program, institution or institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program engages



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in an orderly closure or when, following the closure of an institution or campus, another institution provides an opportunity for the students of the closed school to complete their program, regardless of their academic progress at the time of closure.

HLC uses the term teach-out arrangement to refer to all teach-out situations, whether or not such arrangements require the participation of institutions other than the institution that is planning to cease operations, or to close an additional location offering 100% of at least one program, or to discontinue an educational program before all students have had an opportunity to complete their studies.

teach-out agreement (Based on federal definition)

Federal regulations define a teach-out agreement as a written agreement between institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students and a reasonable opportunity for students to complete their program of study if an institution, or an institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program offered, ceases to operate or plans to cease operations before all enrolled students have completed their program of study.

HLC also uses the term teach-out agreement to refer to written agreements made between an institution subject to a provisional plan and each institution identified in the provisional plan as a teach-out receiving institution.

The teach-out agreement is a formal, legal agreement with the teach-out receiving institution.

A teach-out agreement must include the required elements under HLC policy.

teach-out plan

See “provisional plan.”

teach-out receiving institution

An institution that has entered into a teach-out agreement with an institution required to submit a provisional plan.

A teach-out receiving institution must meet certain requirements under HLC policy in order to be eligible to serve as a teach-out receiving institution.

team chair

The leader of a peer review team who manages team responsibilities and deadlines, facilitates communication with the institution, and supervises the development of the final report.

team report

A report submitted by the peer review team to HLC documenting its findings and recommendation following an evaluation.

transfer option

An arrangement between institutions to allow for students at an institution to transfer credits to another institution, sometimes under specially designed circumstances. A transfer option may be offered when an institution is required to submit a provisional plan. However, a transfer option is not a teach-out arrangement and does not include a teach-out agreement.

Academies

Academies

Multi-year, mentor-facilitated programs that help HLC-accredited institutions define, develop and implement comprehensive strategies for improvement.

Academy cohort

A group of Academy institutions that complete the Academy together, including attending the same events.

Academy Roundtable

A multi-day event at which Academy teams conduct focused, guided work on their strategic Academy goals.

Academy team

Faculty, staff and administrators from an institution who are the main participants in the Academy.

Academy Team Lead

A member of the Academy team who serves as the main point of contact for HLC staff members, Mentor and Scholar.

Assessment Academy

A four-year program of in-person and virtual events tailored for institutions to design and implement a customized project to improve student learning through assessment.

Assessment Academy Project

A multi-faceted project focused on initiating, implementing and evaluating change related to assessment. Academy teams can undertake one or more projects while in the Academy, but it is advisable for teams to focus on one project at a time.

Consolidated Response

The combined feedback from an Academy team’s Mentor and a Scholar to the team’s postings in SparQ.

event facilitator

An Academy Mentor selected to facilitate conversations and activities at various Academy events.

Impact Report

The Academy team’s culminating report, posted at the end of the Academy, summarizing what occurred throughout the project and detailing the outcomes.

Letter of Agreement

A document signed by the institution's president and HLC's president at the beginning of the program, outlining the expectations of each party throughout the Academy experience.

Mentor

An experienced practitioner who has volunteered to guide certain Academy teams for the duration of their participation, facilitating team thinking and a project-based approach to addressing assessment or student success.

Mentor Consultation

An Academy event, typically conducted virtually, in which the Mentor reviews the Academy team's progress and offers recommendations for the team's project development and sustainability.

Mentor Response

Response provided by the Mentor regarding the progress of the Academy team's project as communicated in the team's postings in SparQ.

Orientation Webinar

A virtual event presented by HLC to prepare the institutional representatives heading the Academy effort to assemble and lead an effective Academy team.

Populations Inventory (Student Success Academy)

An inventory of available data on the institution's student populations conducted together with a survey on perceptions at the institution of what student success means to the institution.

Progress Updates (Student Success Academy)

Posts to SparQ by Academy teams documenting discoveries gained from inventories which supports the team in better understanding the structures, policies and processes that affect student success.

Project Updates (Assessment Academy)

Posts to SparQ by Academy teams documenting the learning outcomes, accomplishments and results of their continuing work on the Academy Project.

Results Forum (Assessment Academy)

A multi-day event at the end of the Academy cycle when teams evaluate the impact of their Academy Projects, showcase accomplishments, share best practices and design strategies to sustain their progress.

Scholar

An expert on assessment of student learning and/or student success engaged by HLC to offer additional guidance to Academy teams on their postings in SparQ.



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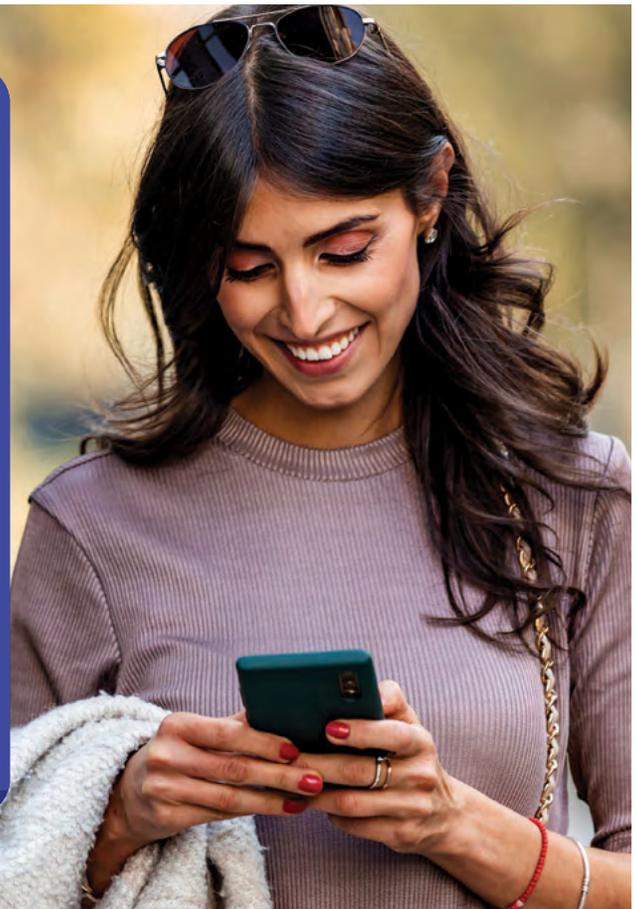
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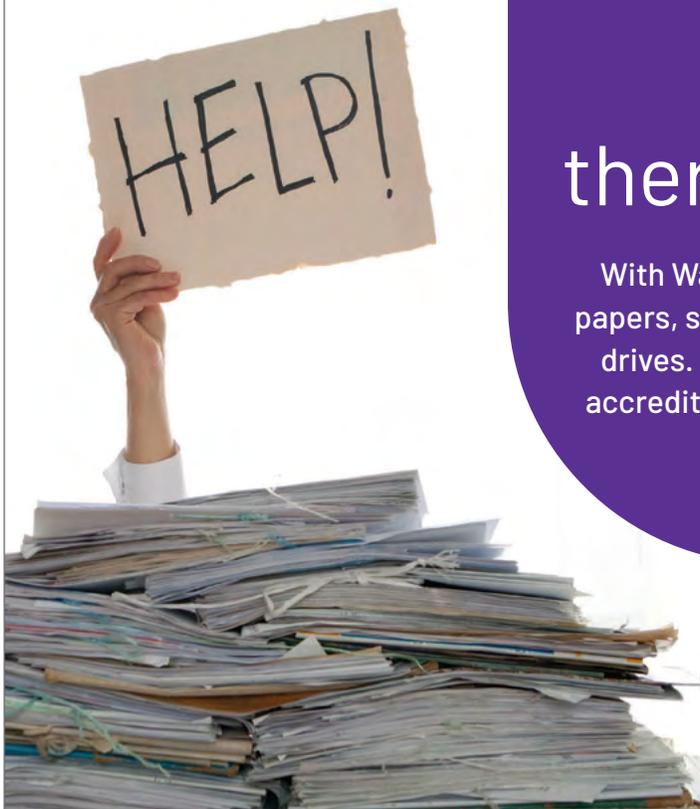
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