



## ACCELERATED PROCESS FOR INITIAL ACCREDITATION

### Policy Change Adopted on Second Reading

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The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) adopted this policy on second reading at its meeting on February 25, 2022.

#### Background

HLC’s Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation policy, as initially adopted in June 2021, is based on the notion that certain degree-granting institutions that otherwise meet HLC’s qualifications for membership within HLC’s expanded jurisdiction with a proven record of quality assurance by other accreditors could be accredited by HLC following a rigorous evaluation process, but without serving a period of candidacy.

At the time, HLC limited the availability of the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation to institutions that were, among other things, accredited by other historically regional accreditors. HLC piloted the policy in this way based on the known similarity between HLC’s quality assurance standards and those of the other historically regional accreditors. HLC also indicated that it would continue to evaluate the policy throughout implementation, including the threshold qualifications for institutions to be eligible for the accelerated process.

The adopted policy change is based on this continued evaluation of the policy. The revision expands the accelerated process to be available to institutions accredited by a state entity that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an institutional accreditor of degree-granting institutions. Additionally, the changes clarify that nothing in HLC policy nor federal regulations requires HLC to consider any non-member institution for initial accreditation.

HLC circulated these policy changes to the membership and other interested parties after the Board’s December 2021 meeting. No comments were received warranting changes in language.

## Implementation

This policy is effective immediately.

## Adopted Policy

Wording that was deleted or revised is shown as strikethrough (~~old wording~~); new language, whether through addition or revision, is shown in bold (**new wording**). These revisions have been made on HLC's website at [hlcommission.org/policies](https://hlcommission.org/policies).

Policy Title: Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation

Number: INST.B.20.032

In some instances, institutions that meet the qualifications listed below may be eligible to apply for initial accreditation through an accelerated process.

The accelerated process is distinct from HLC's other processes for seeking accreditation. An institution participating in an accelerated process does not participate in the Eligibility Process. The institution does not hold candidacy status, and thus does not hold any status with HLC, prior to being granted initial accreditation.

### Qualifications to Apply for Initial Accreditation Through the Accelerated Process

An institution must meet the following qualifications in order to apply for initial accreditation through the accelerated process:

1. The institution, in its current form, is currently institutionally accredited by (a) an accreditor that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and that is historically known as a regional accreditor or (b) **by a state entity that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an institutional accreditor of degree-granting institutions of higher education;**
2. The institution, in its current form, has (a) been accredited by its current institutional **accreditor** ~~accrediting agency~~ for at least the past ten (10) years or (b) has undergone a reaffirmation of accreditation review with its current institutional accreditor in the past two (2) years that did not result in a sanction or other similar negative action; and
3. The institution, in its current form, has not been placed on a sanction, show-cause order, or other similar negative action with its current institutional accreditor for at least the past ten (10) years.

**Notwithstanding any institution's ability to meet the above qualifications, nothing in HLC policy nor federal regulations requires HLC to consider any non-member institution for initial accreditation, whether through the Accelerated Process or through the Eligibility Process.**

#### Application for Initial Accreditation Through the Accelerated Process

An institution that meets the qualifications above may apply for initial accreditation through the accelerated process. As part of the application process, an institution will be required to demonstrate through a peer review process that it meets the qualifications for participating in the accelerated process, and that it otherwise preliminarily meets HLC's requirements, including the Eligibility Requirements. Peer reviewers participating in the initial phases of the accelerated process may be Eligibility Reviewers chosen by the Board of Trustees, or other peer reviewers.

As part of the application process, HLC may also require that the institution participate in educational activities designed to familiarize the institution with HLC requirements, policies and procedures.

#### Comprehensive Evaluation for Initial Accreditation Through the Accelerated Process

If peer reviewers determine that the institution is eligible to proceed with the accelerated process, the institution will participate in a comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation. This process will include the institution completing an Assurance Argument and undergoing an on-site visit by peer reviewers. The institution will be required to demonstrate, as detailed below, that it meets HLC's Eligibility Requirements, Assumed Practices, Criteria for Accreditation, and Federal Compliance requirements.

#### Decision Making for Initial Accreditation Through the Accelerated Process

Consistent with HLC policies, only the Board of Trustees may grant initial accreditation, including following an accelerated process. An institution participating in the accelerated process will also participate in an Institutional Actions Council (IAC) hearing prior to Board action. Prior to being granted initial accreditation following the accelerated process, the institution does not hold any status with HLC.

#### Evaluative Framework for Initial Accreditation Through the Accelerated Process

The requirements for granting initial accreditation following the accelerated process are as follows:

1. The institution meets each of the Eligibility Requirements.
2. The institution meets each of the Assumed Practices.
3. The institution meets or meets with concerns the Criteria for Accreditation.
4. The institution meets the Federal Compliance Requirements.

If the Board of Trustees grants initial accreditation following the accelerated process, the Board may, in its discretion, grant such initial accreditation subject to interim monitoring, restrictions on institutional growth or substantive change, or other contingencies.

If the Board of Trustees denies initial accreditation following the accelerated process, the institution may choose to re-apply to participate in the accelerated process. Prior to re-applying, the institution must take steps to remedy the underlying circumstances that led to the denial of initial accreditation. Alternatively, an institution may also choose to proceed with applying for status with HLC through the Eligibility Process. If the Board of Trustees does not grant initial accreditation following the accelerated process, the Board of Trustees will inform the institution as to the earliest date it will consider any new application for initial accreditation through the accelerated process, subject to timeframes in HLC policies.

Denial of initial accreditation following an accelerated initial accreditation policy is an adverse action that is subject to appeal.

#### Policy Number Key

*Section INST: Institutional Processes*

*Chapter B: Requirements for Achieving and Maintaining Membership*

*Part 20: Becoming and Defining a Member Institution*

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*Last Revised: February 2022*

*First Adopted: June 2021*

*Revision History: February 2022*

*Notes:*

*Related Policies:*