

# 2023 Resource Guide

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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 April 2024. For the most current information from HLC, visit [hlcommission.org](http://hlcommission.org).

### **2024 Annual Conference**

***Higher Ground: The Future of Higher Education***

April 13–16, 2024 | Chicago, IL

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- Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation  
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- Request an Official Letter From HLC (for verification of accreditation status, program or location approval, etc.)  
[hlcommission.org/letter-request](https://hlcommission.org/letter-request)
- Seeking Accreditation  
[seekingaccreditation@hlcommission.org](mailto:seekingaccreditation@hlcommission.org)
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- Substantive Change  
[changerequests@hlcommission.org](mailto:changerequests@hlcommission.org)

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- General Peer Corps Information  
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- Questions Related to Review Assignments  
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- Annual Conference  
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- Workshops and other offerings  
[programming@hlcommission.org](mailto:programming@hlcommission.org)

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Email is HLC's primary means of communicating with member institutions. Institutions are asked to help ensure that email communications sent from HLC are delivered.

HLC primarily uses the following email addresses to share news and information about accreditation requirements with member institutions and peer reviewers. Institutions are asked to add these addresses to their approved sender lists:

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- [evaluations@hlcommission.org](mailto:evaluations@hlcommission.org)

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- [programming@hlcommission.org](mailto:programming@hlcommission.org)
- [academy@hlcommission.org](mailto:academy@hlcommission.org)
- [annualconference@hlcommission.org](mailto:annualconference@hlcommission.org)

Finally, please be sure that the institution's HLC staff liaison's email address is also on the approved sender list. Each liaison's email address is their first initial, last name@hlcommission.org (example: John Smith would be [jsmith@hlcommission.org](mailto:jsmith@hlcommission.org)).

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HLC's newsletter, Leaflet, provides updates, news and resources regarding HLC, accreditation and higher education. It is published six times a year.

Subscribe at [hlcommission.org/leaflet](https://hlcommission.org/leaflet).



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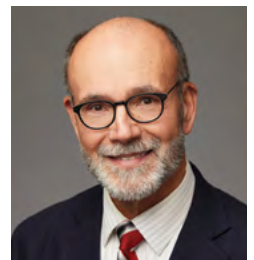
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Explore what's *possible*.  
See what's *next*.



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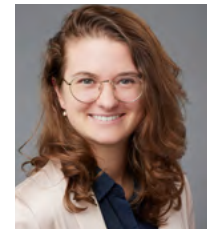
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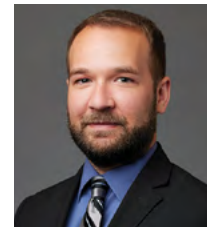
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**Higher Learning  
Commission**

# Mission, Vision and Guiding Values



Eric Martin, HLC Executive Vice President

# Mission Statement

*Effective April 2021. Reviewed annually at the June Board of Trustees meeting.*

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 Statement

*Effective April 2021. Reviewed annually at the June Board of Trustees meeting.*

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

# 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. 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.

# 1 Focus on student learning

For the purpose of accreditation, the Higher Learning Commission regards the teaching mission of any institution as primary. Institutions will have other missions, such as research, health care and public service, and these other missions may have a shaping and highly valuable effect on the education that the institution provides. In the accreditation process, these missions should be recognized and considered in relation to the teaching mission.

A focus on student learning encompasses every aspect of students' experience at an institution: how they are recruited and admitted; costs they are charged and how they are supported by financial aid; how well they are informed and guided before and through their work at the institution; the breadth, depth, currency and relevance of the learning they are offered; their education through cocurricular offerings; the effectiveness of their programs; and what happens to them after they leave the institution.

# 2 Education as a public purpose

Every educational institution serves a public purpose. Public or state-supported institutions make that assumption readily. Not-for-profit institutions receive their tax-exempt status on the basis of an assumption that they serve a public purpose. And although it may appear that a for-profit institution does not require a public purpose, because education is a public good its provision serves a public purpose and entails societal obligations. Furthermore, the provision of higher education requires a more complex standard of care than, for instance, the provision of dry cleaning services. What the students buy, with money, time and effort, is not merely a good, like a credential, but experiences that have the potential to transform lives, or to harm them. What institutions do constitutes a solemn responsibility for which they should hold themselves accountable.

# 3 Education for a diverse, technological, globally connected world

A contemporary education must recognize contemporary circumstances: the diversity of U.S. society, the diversity of the world in which students

live, and the centrality of technology and the global dynamic to life in the 21st century. More than ever, students should be prepared for lifelong learning and for the likelihood that no job or occupation will last a lifetime. Even for the most technical qualification, students need the civic learning and broader intellectual capabilities that underlie success in the workforce. HLC distinguishes higher education in part on the basis of its reach beyond narrow vocational training to a broader intellectual and social context.

# 4 A culture of continuous improvement

Continuous improvement is the alternative to stagnation. Minimum standards are necessary but far from sufficient to achieve acceptable quality in higher education, and the strongest institutions will stay strong through ongoing aspiration. HLC includes improvement as one of two major strands in all its pathways, the other being assurance that member institutions meet the Criteria and other HLC requirements.

A process of assessment is essential to continuous improvement, and therefore a commitment to assessment should be deeply embedded in an institution's activities. Assessment applies not only to student learning and educational outcomes but to an institution's approach to improvement of institutional effectiveness.

For student learning, a commitment to assessment would mean assessment at the program level that proceeds from clear goals, involves faculty at all points in the process, and analyzes the assessment results; it would also mean that the institution improves its programs or ancillary services or other operations on the basis of those analyses. Institutions committed to improvement review their programs regularly and seek external judgment, advice or benchmarks in their assessments. Because in recent years the issues of persistence and completion have become central to public concern about higher education, the current Criteria direct attention to them as possible indicators of quality and foci for improvement, without prescribing either the measures or outcomes.

Innovation is an aspect of improvement and essential in a time of rapid change and challenge; through its Criteria and processes HLC seeks to support innovation for improvement in all facets of institutional practice.



## 5 Evidence-based institutional learning and self-presentation

Assessment and the processes an institution learns from should be well grounded in evidence. Statements of belief and intention have important roles in an institution's presentation of itself, but for the quality-assurance function of accreditation, evidence is critical. Institutions should be able to select evidence based on their particular purposes and circumstances. At the same time, many of the Assumed Practices within the Criteria require certain specified evidence.

## 6 Integrity, transparency, and ethical behavior or practice

HLC understands integrity broadly, including wholeness and coherence at one end of the spectrum and ethical behavior at the other. Integrity means doing what the mission calls for and not doing what it does not call for; governance systems that are freely, independently and rigorously focused on the welfare of the institution and its students; scrupulous avoidance of misleading statements or practices; full disclosure of information to students before students make any commitment to the institution, even a commitment to receive more information; and clear, explicit requirements for ethical practice by all members of the institutional community in all its activities.

## 7 Governance for the well-being of the institution

The well-being of an institution requires that its governing board place that well-being above the interests of its own members and the interests of any other entity. Because HLC accredits the educational institution itself, and not the state system, religious organization, corporation, medical center or other entity that may own it, it holds the governing board of an institution accountable for the key aspects of the institution's operations. The governing board must have the independent authority for such accountability and must also hold itself independent of undue influence from individuals, be they donors, elected officials, supporters of athletics, shareholders, or others with personal or political interests.

Governance of a quality institution of higher education will include a significant role for faculty, in particular with regard to currency and sufficiency of the curriculum, expectations for student performance, qualifications of the instructional staff, and adequacy of resources for instructional support.

## 8 Planning and management of resources to ensure institutional sustainability

HLC does not privilege wealth. However, students do expect that an institution will be in operation for the duration of their degree programs. Therefore, HLC is obliged to seek information regarding an institution's sustainability and, to that end, wise management of its resources. HLC also watches for signs that an institution's financial challenges are eroding the quality of its programs to the point of endangering the institution's ability to meet the Criteria. Careful mid- and long-range planning must undergird an institution's budgetary and financial decisions.

## 9 Mission-centered evaluation

HLC understands and values deeply the diversity of its institutions, which begins from the diversity of their missions. Accordingly, mission in some degree governs each of the Criteria. HLC holds many expectations for all institutions regardless of mission, but it expects that differences in mission will shape wide differences in how the expectations are addressed and met.

## 10 Accreditation through peer review

Peer review is the defining characteristic of accreditation and essential for a judgment-based process in a highly complex field. But self-regulation can be met with public skepticism. Therefore, peer review for accreditation must (1) be collegial, in the sense of absolute openness in the relationship between an institution and the peer reviewers assigned to it as well as between the institution and HLC; (2) be firm in maintaining high standards, not mistaking leniency for kindness or inclusiveness; and (3) be cognizant of the dual role of peer reviewers in both assuring and advancing institutional quality.

# ▶ EVOLVE 2025





# EVOLVE 2025

HLC’s strategic plan identifies the guiding framework and action steps that the organization will pursue through 2025. It is organized around six strategic directions, referred to as **EVOLVE: Equity, Vision, Outcomes, Leadership, Value and Engagement.**

## Equity

The role of equity in accreditation and quality assurance is critical; the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the inequities existing in and endemic to higher education. To that end, an equity framework should permeate not only all levels of institutions (e.g., students, staff, faculty and governing boards) but also their accreditors (e.g., the Peer Corps and review process). These goals focus on HLC’s commitment to modeling fairness, quality and access for all learners and institutions; they also emphasize the importance of all students having equitable access to higher education.

### Goals

1. **Demonstrate Equity in HLC’s Mission.** HLC will ensure that concepts of equity, diversity, access and inclusion are demonstrated in its mission and other foundational statements.
2. **Promote Equity Principles.** HLC will actively promote an understanding of and sensitivity to equity principles in its interactions with institutions and other stakeholders.

3. **Assess Policies and Procedures.** HLC will assess and address equity in relation to its operational policies and related procedures.
4. **Inform the Public.** HLC will provide information to the public regarding issues that are impacted by equity considerations, for example educational attainment and high-quality credentials.

### Activities in 2022–23

- To actively promote an understanding of and sensitivity to equity principles, HLC has evaluated its internal Principles of Operation, which inform staff interaction, to ensure they are written to embrace principles of diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion.
- HLC has drafted definitions of diversity, equity, access and inclusion. They were shared with the membership in the November 2022 Leaflet. See [hlcommission.org/equity-definitions](https://hlcommission.org/equity-definitions).
- HLC has maintained support for the open access agenda as part of its 2022 advocacy agenda.
- HLC published a thought paper from the Peer Corps Committee on Diversity regarding the equity practices on member campuses related to student access and student success.

# 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.

## Goals

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.

## Activities in 2022–23

- In June 2022, HLC's agile training of staff members began. By the end of the fiscal year, every member of HLC's staff will have participated in some form of agile training.
- The annual conference presented a cornucopia of opportunities for fostering collaboration and member development. Through listening sessions, informational sessions and various workshops, HLC provided education opportunities and reach across the membership.
- HLC continues to expand and improve Canopy, its new online system for institutions and peer reviewers.
- With a focus on students, HLC has published its Student Guide, informing students about higher education through the lens of accreditation. See [studentguide.hlcommission.org](https://studentguide.hlcommission.org).
- HLC has initiated exploration of an alternative credentials project.

# Outcomes

Outcomes demonstrate success and opportunity—for students and their institutions. HLC has traditionally underscored its commitment to quality improvement around outcomes through criteria that call for evidence-based institutional commitment to goals, infrastructure, support services, strategies, assessment, and evaluation to support student learning and student success. Building on this tradition, HLC will continue 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.

## Goals

1. **Develop Definitions and Evaluative Framework.** Develop and implement standard definitions of learning outcomes/student success as well as an evaluative framework that links quality assurance and student success.
2. **Support Alternative Ways of Measuring and Advancing Student Success.** Provide support to institutions in exploring alternative ways of measuring and advancing student success appropriate to their institutional context.
3. **Provide Resources to Support Equitable Outcomes for Students.** Ensure all member institutions have access to resources and expertise at HLC that support equitable outcomes for students.

4. **Develop Standard Expectations for Tracking Student Learning Outcomes.** Develop and implement standard expectations of institutions' tracking and improvement of student learning outcomes to assure academic quality.

### Activities in 2022–23

- HLC has secured 86% of member institutions' permission to analyze student success data previously submitted to the National Student Clearinghouse. This institutional-level data augments aggregate data for the purpose of developing success measures and sector appropriate benchmarks.
- HLC shared a report on the findings and recommendations of the Assessment Task Force to HLC's Board of Trustees and will begin implementing action plan items.
- The Stakeholders' Roundtable, an external advisory committee on workforce needs, convened and made recommendations on HLC's role in evaluating the quality of alternative credentials.
- HLC is planning to hold discussions and provide resources that encourage institutions to increase the number of credits accepted in transfer.
- HLC is developing an improved communication plan for connecting institutions to HLC resources.
- HLC has shared with the membership its framework for providing professional development and institutional advancement opportunities in both virtual and in-person elective programming.

## Leadership

Leadership strengths are critically important to the success of HLC's member institutions, including boards and chief executive officers (CEOs). This also applies to the goals of HLC's Board of Trustees and HLC leaders. Goals include the thought leadership role of HLC in higher education and all related processes: accreditation, student borrowing, student success, equity, state support etc., all of which are currently undergoing an unprecedented level of public scrutiny. The enhancement of leadership at education-related institutions and organizations must become an organizational priority to successfully restore public confidence in higher education.

### Goals

1. **Research Key Leadership Issues.** Develop independently, and in collaboration with appropriate partner organizations, strategic research addressing key leadership issues, including student success and institutional effectiveness, that leverage HLC's unique position within American higher education.
2. **Improve HLC Staff Professional Development Practices.** Review HLC's professional development practices to ensure the currency of knowledge and skills needed for staff responsiveness in adapting policies and procedures to effectively serve member institutions in a dynamic higher education environment.
3. **Research Need for Leadership Development Program.** Conduct a feasibility study on offering a mid- and/or executive-level leadership development program for institutional leaders focused on leading in a time of transformation.
4. **Highlight Professional Contributions by HLC Staff.** Implement an annual process for highlighting professional contributions by HLC staff to underscore HLC's commitment to thought leadership and advocacy.
5. **Create Regularized Plan for Improving Accreditation Processes.** In response to this period of transformative change, execute a regularized plan for improving selected HLC processes to ensure that HLC remains a leader in the field of accreditation and higher education in general.

### Activities in 2022–23

- HLC is monitoring new resources on leadership within the higher education ecosystem.
- HLC is auditing staff member professional development to see how HLC has tied the work goals of staff members to the EVOLVE plan.
- HLC continues exploring ways to capitalize on its process improvement and its commitment to a culture of continuous improvement, with list of changes made over the summer documented in the September 2022 issue of Leaflet.
- HLC has begun its process for reviewing and updating the Criteria for Accreditation.

# Value

HLC will continue to strengthen its value to members, ensuring the importance of accreditation and quality assurance. It will also address HLC's role in impacting public perception about the value of higher education and its lifelong return on investment (ROI).

## Goals

### 1. **Evaluate HLC Policies and Processes.**

Reconcile and address gaps between the diversity of HLC member institutions and existing HLC policies and processes intended to serve them.

### 2. **Increase Value of HLC Membership.**

Foster an infrastructure and ethos that serves member institutions by strengthening ongoing efforts to increase value of membership. HLC seeks to improve member benefits by providing cost-conscious support, self-service features linked to HLC processes, and consistent, clear and timely responses in all interactions with member institutions.

### 3. **Improve Understanding of Student Success.**

Foster a more complete understanding of student success (particularly from a learner perspective) to focus all stakeholders on the workforce, civic, social and other benefits of higher education.

### 4. **Increase Awareness of Role of Accreditation.**

Reinforce the value of higher education by upholding, safeguarding and promoting widespread understanding about the role of accreditation in measuring quality and encouraging institutional improvement.

## Activities in 2022–23

- A report on the findings from the 2021 Membership Survey was submitted to the Board at the February meeting and a public-facing report on this subject was published in the May 2022 Leaflet.
- The Differential Accreditation Presidential Advisory Committee completed its fourth meeting that included several specific options for advancing differential accreditation, thus paving the way for development and implementation of a pilot.
- HLC transitioned its ALO training to be offered through SparQ. Two ALO training “classes” have been completed.
- A listening session was held at the 2022 Annual Conference to collect member feedback on ways HLC could provide greater value to members.

- HLC collaborated with the Vera Institute for Justice to publish “Postsecondary Education in Prison Programs and Accreditation – General Considerations for Peer Reviewers and Accreditors.” (See [hlc.commission.org/papers](https://hlc.commission.org/papers))
- HLC reviewed and updated its substantive change materials as well as its procedures on Provisional Plans and teach outs.
- HLC updated its website to incorporate more top-tier menus providing visual cues to help members find information.

# Engagement

As an active member of the higher education ecosystem, HLC will seek opportunities for engagement with member institutions, governmental bodies, students and other stakeholders. Engagement includes outreach efforts, advocacy and civic engagement.

## Goals

### 1. **Collaborate With Higher Education Stakeholders.**

Expand and strengthen collaboration with the Triad (state agencies, federal government and accreditors), K-12, associations and the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) to more strategically support improved equity in access and attainment in HLC's region.

### 2. **Spotlight HLC Member Stories and Perspectives.**

Invite the membership to include HLC as one avenue for telling their stories. Reinforce HLC's commitment to advancing quality by augmenting the voice of HLC's membership in publications and celebrating institutional exemplars.

### 3. **Increase Collaboration With the Triad.**

Complete one or more collaborative projects with states and the U.S. Department of Education. Coordinate a coalition of representatives from states, the U.S. Department of Education and institutional accreditors to execute a project recommended in the 2019 thought paper “Relationship to the Triad & Beyond,” while demonstrating sensitivity to topical issues revealed by COVID-19.

### 4. **Build National Awareness of HLC.**

Develop and execute a long-term strategy and business plan to build HLC's brand nationally as a prominent and trusted institutional accreditor while remaining mindful of antitrust principles. Expand the understanding of HLC and its history as a leading

quality assurance organization for the colleges and universities within its membership, dedicated to providing important validations for all higher education stakeholders.

5. **Build Relationships With Specialized Accreditors.** Enhance communications with specialized accreditors to better inform HLC's evaluations. Build relationships with specialized accreditors and enhance awareness of synergies within the higher education ecosystem.
6. **Evaluate Core Component 1.C.** Examine how Core Component 1.C is being implemented by institutions and reviewed by peer reviewers by evaluating team reports and Assurance Arguments against a rubric, then analyzing results and reporting findings to HLC leaders. Demonstrate responsiveness, fairness and continuous improvement by taking into account feedback that improves the language of Core Component 1.C within HLC's Criteria for Accreditation.
7. **Implement Recommendations From Core Component 1.C Evaluation.** Using findings from the evaluation of Core Component 1.C, provide additional training (webinars and conference sessions) for institutions and peer reviewers, and work toward adjusting the language in the Criteria for Accreditation as necessary. Potentially shift language related to Core Component 1.C during the next revision of the Criteria for Accreditation or earlier, based on feedback.
8. **Join Public Dialog on Civic Engagement.** Strive to participate in the public dialog about civic engagement by speaking at national conferences and writing thought papers.

## Activities in 2022–23

- HLC engaged with K-12 in convenings on the Student Guide.
- HLC has made proactive outreach efforts with Chicago Denver Participation Division of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid (largest representation within HLC's membership) to exchange information about various regulations, institutional relationships and policy interpretation.
- HLC is working with both the Midwestern and New England state compacts on transcript practices related to teach outs and institutional holds.
- HLC is currently undergoing the process for recognition by the U.S. Department of Education, which occurs every five years. Public comments submitted by member institutions and other stakeholders during the recognition process will identify improvement opportunities for HLC.
- HLC communicates with the U.S. Department of Education (both Office of Post-Secondary Education and Federal Student Aid) regularly regarding unintended consequences of certain regulations, as well as proactively to raise issues on behalf of the HLC membership.
- HLC has developed a peer review program session examining the types of evidence institutions may provide on civic engagement.
- HLC staff members have spoken at multiple national conferences on civic engagement.
- Three focus groups were held with Accreditation Liaison Officers in November 2022 to gain input on the themes, guidance and definition of HLC's pilot project on Differential Accreditation.
- HLC has invited members to "tell their story" in the Leaflet newsletter by highlighting colleges and universities that have recently graduated from HLC's Student Success Academy.
- HLC hosted a State Agencies Meeting in November 2022 with more than 30 representatives from state agencies, regional compacts and the federal government.



# EVOLVE 2025

# ► Policy



Anthea Sweeney, HLC Vice President of Legal and Regulatory Affairs



# 2022 Policy and Bylaw Changes

Higher education is rapidly changing, and HLC's policies need to reflect those changes. Therefore, HLC reviews its policies and procedures regularly to evaluate their responsiveness to the higher education environment, their effectiveness in providing quality assurance and their usefulness in enhancing institutional and educational improvement.

## Policy Revision Process

HLC's Board of Trustees typically approves and adopts changes to HLC policy 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. A proposed change may be approved by the Board on first reading and then shared with HLC members, peer reviewers and other constituents for a comment period of at least 60 days. At its next meeting, the Board considers these comments before determining whether to adopt the change on second reading.

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.

## Policy and Bylaw Changes

The following policy and bylaw changes were adopted in 2022. All changes are currently in effect.



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/policies](https://hlcommission.org/policies)

[hlcommission.org/adopted-policies](https://hlcommission.org/adopted-policies)

[hlcommission.org/proposed-policies](https://hlcommission.org/proposed-policies)

### Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation *Adopted February 2022*

So long as an institution meets all other qualifications articulated in the policy, the adopted changes permit an institution that, in its current form, is institutionally accredited 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 to be considered for accelerated initial accreditation, in addition to institutions that are, in their current form, institutionally accredited by an accreditor that is historically known as a regional accreditor. Additionally, the changes clarified that nothing in HLC policy nor federal regulations requires HLC to consider any non-member institution for initial accreditation.

**Revised policy:** Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation (INST.B.20.032)

### Board of Trustees Nominations Process *Adopted June 2022*

The bylaw changes modified the process for nominating trustees to serve on HLC's Board of Trustees. Under the previous process, a Nominating Committee comprised of individuals from member institutions provided a pool of nominees to a committee of Board members, who developed a slate of nominees to stand for election. The adopted changes simplified the process such that the Board committee serves as the nominating committee.

**Revised bylaws:** Membership of the Board of Trustees (Article V), Election of the Board of Trustees (Article VI)

### Board of Trustees Term Length *Adopted February 2022*

The bylaw changes extended the total possible term length for trustees from eight years to up to 12 years. The

change also simplified the criteria and process for when a trustee may serve additional terms beyond their initial four-year term.

**Revised bylaws:** Membership of the Board of Trustees (Article V), HLC Officers (Article VIII)

### Clarification Regarding “Days”

*Adopted November 2022*

The policy change implemented consistent use of the term “days” in HLC policies to signify calendar days. In instances where a different use is required, these instances are stated in the applicable policy as “business days.”

**Revised policies:** Change of Control, Structure or Organization (INST.B.20.040), Obligations of Membership (INST.B.30.020), Evaluative Activities Applicable to All Institutions (INST.C.20.010), Board of Trustees (INST.D.10.010), Notice (INSTE.10.010), Probation (INSTE.20.010), Show-Cause (Procedural Order) (INSTE.30.010), Special Monitoring (INST.F.20.010), Processes for Seeking Approval of Change of Control (INST.F.20.070), Complaints and Other Information Regarding Member Institutions (COMMA.10.030)

### Corporate Formalities *Adopted June 2022*

The bylaw changes formalized the role of Treasurer as a corporate officer, provided that HLC’s president may appoint other employees to serve as a corporate officer, and clarified language related to election, resignation and removal of officers.

**Revised bylaws:** HLC Officers (Article VIII), Committees of the Board of Trustees (Article X)

### Decision-Making Options Related to the Assumed Practices and Federal Compliance Requirements

*Adopted February 2022*

The policy changes clarified the decision-making options available when an institution is out of compliance with any Assumed Practice or Federal Compliance Requirement but otherwise in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation.

**Revised policies:** Assumed Practices (CRRT.B.10.020), Federal Compliance Requirements (FDCR.A.10.010), Notice (INSTE.10.010), Probation (INSTE.20.010), Show-Cause (Procedural Order) (INSTE.30.010), Denial or Withdrawal of Status (INSTE.60.010), Routine Monitoring and Data Collection (INST.F.10.010)

### External Consultation *Adopted February 2022*

The policy changes consolidated existing policies that allow HLC to exercise its discretion in seeking assistance from external experts, where appropriate, to advance the work of its staff members, peer reviewers and members

of HLC decision-making bodies without such external experts participating in any evaluative process.

**Revised policies:** External Consultation (COMM.B.10.030)

### Grounds for Certain Adverse Actions

*Adopted June 2022*

The policy changes standardized the grounds for denial or withdrawal of candidacy and withdrawal of accreditation. The changes also established that certain additional Board procedures are not applicable in situations where the Board withdraws candidacy or withdraws accreditation because an institution has ceased to operate as an institution of higher education or has lost its legal authorization to operate as an institution of higher education and grant degrees in HLC’s jurisdiction.

**Revised policies:** Denial or Withdrawal of Status (INSTE.60.010), Additional Board Procedures (INSTE.70.010)

### Institutional Practices for Verification of Student Identity and Protection of Student Privacy *Adopted June 2022*

The policy change clarified that institutions’ obligations to use processes that protect student privacy go beyond student identity verification in distance and correspondence education offerings. The change aligned HLC policy more closely with federal regulations.

**Revised policies:** Institutional Practices for Verification of Student Identity and Protection of Student Privacy (FDCR.A.10.050)

### Processes for Reaffirmation of Accreditation *Adopted February 2022*

The policy changes reorganized, consolidated and clarified policies related to processes for Reaffirmation of Accreditation and the Standard and Open Pathways. The changes also revised the meaning of Reaffirmation of Accreditation and extended the maximum timeframe for reaffirmation.

**Revised policies:** Substantive Requirements for Reaffirmation of Accreditation (INST.C.10.010), Pathways and Related Process Requirements (INST.C.10.005), Process Requirements Leading to HLC Action Following Reviews of the Criteria for Accreditation (INST.C.10.030), Evaluative Activities Applicable to All Institutions (INST.C.20.010)

### Public Member Representation on the Institutional Actions Council

*Adopted June 2022*

The policy changes clarified that, per federal regulations, every HLC decision-making body, including individual committees of the Institutional Actions Council (IAC), must have one public member for every seven committee members.

**Revised policies:** Institutional Actions Council (INST.D.20.010), Institutional Actions Council Process (INST.D.40.010)

### **Publication of Policies on Transfer of Credit** *Adopted June 2022*

Federal regulations provide that an institution's policies related to transfer of credit must disclose certain information. Further, an institution is required to make these policies publicly available. The policy change ensured that HLC explicitly articulates the minimum requirements imposed by federal regulation are required to be included in an institution's policies related to transfer of credit.

**Revised policy:** Publications of Transfer Policies (FDCR.A.10.040)

### **Recognized Accreditors** *Adopted February 2022*

The policy changes standardized the use of the phrase "recognized accreditor" to refer to those accreditors "recognized by either the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation."

**Revised policies:** Eligibility Requirements (CRRT.A.10.010), Assumed Practices (CRRT.B.10.020), Standing With State and Other Accreditors (FDCR.A.10.090), HLC Approval of Institutional Teach Out Arrangements (FDCR.B.10.010), Candidacy and Initial Accreditation (INST.B.20.010), Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation (INST.B.20.032), Change of Control, Structure or Organization (INST.B.20.040), Voluntary Resignation of Accreditation or Candidacy (INST.B.30.010), Obligations of Membership (INST.B.30.020), Board of Trustees (INST.D.10.010), Institutional Actions Council Processes (INST.D.40.010), Notice of Accreditation Actions, HLC Public Notices and Public Statements (COMM.A.10.010), Relations With Other Recognized Accreditors (COMM.C.10.020)

### **Rules Regarding Prior Peer Reviewer Evaluation and Decision-Making Activity** *Adopted November 2022*

HLC's policies include requirements indicating when peer reviewers may be assigned to an evaluation of an institution after having previously participated in an evaluation or HLC Academy activity involving the same institution. The policy changes set similar requirements for members of the Institutional Actions Council (IAC). The changes also indicated when peer reviewers and IAC members may be assigned to an evaluation or decision-making activity regarding an institution after having previously participated in an IAC decision-making activity involving the same institution.

**Revised policies:** Institutional Actions Council (INST.D.20.010), Peer Corps Members on HLC Evaluation Activities (PEER.A.10.050)

### **Special Monitoring** *Adopted November 2022*

The policy changes provided HLC's president more flexibility in designing protocols that capitalize on a variety of existing mechanisms to gather information, evaluate evidence and make appropriate decisions that serve the interest of students and the public. Additional changes clarified triggering circumstances, explained Advisory Visits and detailed the impact of designations on certain types of substantive-change activity.

**Revised policy:** Special Monitoring (INST.F.20.010)

### **Student Achievement and Other Data Reporting** *Adopted June 2022*

The policy changes identified what data must be disclosed by all institutions; conformed language in policy with instructions appearing in HLC's Federal Compliance and Institutional Update materials; and reinforced HLC's expectations that underperforming institutions will develop effective strategies to continuously improve.

**Revised policies:** Public Information (FDCR.A.10.070), Routine Monitoring and Data Collection (INST.F.10.010).

### **Substantive Change Policy and Review Processes** *Adopted June 2022*

The policy changes articulated the purpose of HLC's substantive change review and approval process and clarified procedures related to desk reviews and approval of substantive change requests by HLC staff. The changes also specified substantive change requirements for institutions under a provisional certification with the U.S. Department of Education, and added a requirement in the Obligations of Membership regarding institutions notifying HLC when they are placed under or removed from a provisional certification status.

**Revised policies:** Obligations of Membership (INST.B.30.020), Substantive Change (INST.F.20.040), Review of Substantive Change (INST.F.20.050)

## **Upcoming Revisions to the Criteria for Accreditation**

Per policy, HLC is required to evaluate its Criteria for Accreditation every five years. The current Criteria went into effect in September 2020, and HLC staff have started the next evaluation process, with the goal of identifying Criteria revisions that would go into effect in September 2025. We will be sharing preliminary changes for feedback later this year. Member input is a vital part of this process, and we look forward to working with institutions and peer reviewers to evaluate the Criteria.



# Criteria for Accreditation

Policy Number: CRRT.B.10.010

The Criteria for Accreditation are the standards of quality by which HLC determines whether an institution merits accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. They are as follows:

## Criterion 1. Mission

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

### Core Components

**1.A.** The institution's mission is articulated publicly and operationalized throughout the institution.

1. The mission was developed through a process suited to the context of the institution.
2. The mission and related statements are current and reference the institution's emphasis on the various aspects of its mission, such as instruction, scholarship, research, application of research, creative works, clinical service, public service, economic development and religious or cultural purpose.
3. The mission and related statements identify the nature, scope and intended constituents of the higher education offerings and services the institution provides.
4. The institution's academic offerings, student support services and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.
5. The institution clearly articulates its mission through public information, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans or institutional priorities.

**1.B.** The institution's mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.

1. The institution's actions and decisions demonstrate that its educational role is to serve the public, not solely the institution or any superordinate entity.
2. The institution's educational responsibilities take primacy over other purposes, such as generating financial returns for investors, contributing to a related or parent organization, or supporting external interests.
3. The institution engages with its external constituencies and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.

**1.C.** 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.

1. The institution encourages curricular or cocurricular activities that prepare students for informed citizenship and workplace success.
2. The institution's processes and activities demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations.
3. The institution fosters a climate of respect among all students, faculty, staff and administrators from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/criteria](http://hlcommission.org/criteria)

## Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### Core Components

**2.A.** The institution establishes and follows policies and processes to ensure fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff.

1. The institution develops and the governing board adopts the mission.
2. The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, human resources and auxiliary functions.

**2.B.** The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public.

1. The institution ensures the accuracy of any representations it makes regarding academic offerings, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, governance structure and accreditation relationships.
2. The institution ensures evidence is available to support any claims it makes regarding its contributions to the educational experience through research, community engagement, experiential learning, religious or spiritual purpose and economic development.

**2.C.** The governing board of the institution is autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution in compliance with board policies and to ensure the institution's integrity.

1. The governing board is trained and knowledgeable so that it makes informed decisions with respect to the institution's financial and academic policies and practices; the board meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
2. The governing board's deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.
3. The governing board reviews the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution's internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.
4. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties.

5. 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.

**2.D.** The institution is committed to academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.

**2.E.** The institution's policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, staff and students.

1. Institutions supporting basic and applied research maintain professional standards and provide oversight ensuring regulatory compliance, ethical behavior and fiscal accountability.
2. The institution provides effective support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff and students.
3. The institution provides students guidance in the ethics of research and use of information resources.
4. The institution enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

## Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support

The institution provides quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

### Core Components

**3.A.** The rigor of the institution's academic offerings is appropriate to higher education.

1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of student performance appropriate to the credential awarded.
2. The institution articulates and differentiates learning goals for its undergraduate, graduate, post-baccalaureate, post-graduate and certificate programs.
3. The institution's program quality and learning goals are consistent across all modes of delivery and all locations (on the main campus, at additional locations, by distance delivery, as dual credit, through contractual or consortial arrangements, or any other modality).

**3.B.** The institution offers programs that engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in mastering modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings and degree levels of the institution. The institution articulates the purposes, content and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements.
2. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.
3. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity and provides students with growth opportunities and lifelong skills to live and work in a multicultural world.
4. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their offerings and the institution's mission.

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

1. The institution strives to ensure that the overall composition of its faculty and staff reflects human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.
2. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance, assessment of student learning, and establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff.
3. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual and consortial offerings.
4. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.
5. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.

6. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.

7. Staff members providing student support services, such as tutoring, financial aid advising, academic advising and cocurricular activities are appropriately qualified, trained and supported in their professional development.

**3.D.** The institution provides support for student learning and resources for effective teaching.

1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.
2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.
3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its offerings and the needs of its students.
4. The institution provides to students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites and museum collections, as appropriate to the institution's offerings).

## Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

### Core Components

**4.A.** The institution ensures the quality of its educational offerings.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews and acts upon the findings.
2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.
3. The institution has policies that ensure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.

4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It ensures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.
5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution ensures that the credentials it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission.

**4.B.** The institution engages in ongoing assessment of student learning as part of its commitment to the educational outcomes of its students.

1. The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and cocurricular offerings.
2. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
3. The institution's processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty, instructional and other relevant staff members.

**4.C.** The institution pursues educational improvement through goals and strategies that improve retention, persistence and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence and completion that are ambitious, attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.

4. The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

## Criterion 5. Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

The institution's resources, structures, processes and planning are sufficient to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational offerings, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

### Core Components

**5.A.** Through its administrative structures and collaborative processes, the institution's leadership demonstrates that it is effective and enables the institution to fulfill its mission.

1. Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.
2. The institution's administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.
3. The institution's administration ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.

**5.B.** The institution's resource base supports its educational offerings and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

1. The institution has qualified and trained operational staff and infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
2. The goals incorporated into the mission and any related statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources and opportunities.

3. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring its finances.
4. The institution's fiscal allocations ensure that its educational purposes are achieved.

**5.C.** The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement.

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities, including, as applicable, its comprehensive research enterprise, associated institutes and affiliated centers.
2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning and budgeting.
3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity, including fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue and enrollment.
5. Institutional planning anticipates evolving external factors, such as technology advancements, demographic shifts, globalization, the economy and state support.
6. The institution implements its plans to systematically improve its operations and student outcomes.

## 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:

- a. 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
- b. 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:

- a. 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
- b. 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

An institution must provide 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.

HLC provides suggestions to assist institutions in thinking about possible sources of evidence in *Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation*, available at [hlcommission.org/criteria](https://hlcommission.org/criteria).

### Identifying Evidence

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

- Substantiate the facts and arguments presented in its institutional narrative.
- Respond to the prior peer review team's concerns and recommendations.
- 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 and financial sustainability and integrity.

HLC encourages institutions to provide thorough evidence and ensure that the sources selected are relevant and persuasive. To identify compelling evidence, it may be helpful to consider three categories of evidence: clear, corroborating and circumstantial.

- **Clear evidence** is precise, explicit and tends to directly establish the point it is presented to support. Institutions should provide clear evidence of their compliance with each Core Component.

**Example:** Clear evidence that a president was duly appointed by an institution's board would be a board resolution or meeting minutes showing a motion and vote to hire the president.

- **Corroborating evidence** is supplementary to evidence already given and tends to strengthen or confirm it. This type of evidence can be useful in illustrating points made in the institution's narrative, but it may not be persuasive to peer reviewers on its own.

**Example:** Corroborating evidence that a president was duly appointed by an institution's board would be a copy of the offer letter addressed to the president.

- **Circumstantial evidence** establishes a condition of surrounding circumstances, from which the principal fact may be inferred. This type of evidence is never sufficient on its own.

**Example:** Circumstantial evidence that a president was duly appointed by an institution's board would be a copy of a letter from the president to the chair of the board, accepting the presidential appointment.

Finally, institutions should remember the peer review team will base much of its recommendations on the evidence presented. To identify whether any gaps exist in their evidence, institutions should analyze each Core Component from the perspective of the peer review team. Peer reviewers will consider all materials presented and ask questions if they determine information is missing, but it is ultimately the institution's responsibility to present evidence of their compliance with the Criteria.

Accreditation shouldn't  
stifle innovation —  
it should *provide the fuel.*



# Assumed Practices

Policy Number: CRRT.B.10.020

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 or context. 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.
4. The institution establishes and publicizes clear 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 general public clear and complete information including:
  - a. statements of mission, vision, and values



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/assumed-practices](https://hlcommission.org/assumed-practices)

- b. full descriptions of the requirements for its programs, including all pre-requisite courses
  - c. requirements for admission both to the institution and to particular programs or majors
  - d. its policies on acceptance of transfer credit, including how the institution applies such credit to its degree 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.)
  - e. all student costs, including tuition, fees, training, and incidentals; its financial aid policies, practices, and requirements; and its policy on refunds
  - f. policies regarding academic good standing, probation, and dismissal; residency or enrollment requirements (if any)
  - g. a full list of its instructors and their academic credentials
  - h. its relationship with any parent organization (corporation, hospital, or church, or other entity that owns the institution) and any external providers of its instruction.
6. The institution assures that all data it makes public are accurate and complete, including those reporting on student achievement of learning and student persistence, retention, and completion.
7. The institution portrays clearly and accurately to the public its current status with the Higher Learning Commission and with any other institutional, specialized, and professional accreditation agencies.
- a. An institution offering programs that require specialized accreditation or recognition by a state licensing board or other entity in order for its students to be certified or to sit for the licensing examination in states where its students reside either has the appropriate accreditation and recognition or discloses publicly and clearly the consequences to the students of the lack thereof. The institution makes clear to students the distinction between institutional and specialized or program accreditation and the relationships between licensure and the various types of accreditation.
  - b. 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.
  - c. 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.
8. The governing board and its executive committee, if it has one, include 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 public members.<sup>1</sup>
9. The governing board has the authority to approve the annual budget and to engage and dismiss the chief executive officer.<sup>1</sup>
10. The institution remains in compliance at all times with all applicable laws, including laws related to authorization of educational activities and consumer protection wherever it does business.
11. The institution documents outsourcing of all services in written agreements, including agreements with parent or affiliated organizations.
12. The institution takes responsibility for the ethical and responsible behavior of its contractual partners in relation to actions taken on its behalf.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## 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 from these minima must be explained and justified.
- b. The institution maintains structures or practices that ensure the coherence and quality of the programs for which it awards a degree. 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 from the typical minima must be 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.1 and 2.) (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.)
- d. The institution adheres to policies on student academic load per term that reflect reasonable expectations for successful learning and course completion.
- e. Courses that carry academic credit toward college-level credentials have content and rigor appropriate to higher education.
- f. The institution has a process for ensuring that all courses transferred and applied toward degree requirements demonstrate equivalence with its own courses required for that degree or are of equivalent rigor.

- g. 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 degree awarded. (Note that this requirement does not apply to courses transferred from other institutions.)
- h. 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 integrated, embedded, interdisciplinary, or other accepted models that demonstrate a minimum requirement equivalent to the distributed model. Any variation is explained and justified.

### 2. Faculty Roles and Qualifications

- a. Qualified faculty members are identified primarily by credentials, but other factors, including but not limited to equivalent experience, may be considered by the institution in determining whether a faculty member is qualified. Instructors (excluding for this requirement teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty) possess an academic degree relevant to what they are teaching and at least one level above the level at which they teach, except in programs for terminal degrees or when equivalent experience is established. In terminal degree programs, faculty members possess the same level of degree. When faculty members are employed based on equivalent experience, the institution defines a minimum threshold of experience and an evaluation process that is used in the appointment process. Faculty teaching general education courses, or other non-occupational courses, hold a master's degree or higher in the discipline or subfield. If a faculty member holds a master's degree or higher in a discipline or subfield other than that in which they are teaching, that faculty member should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which they teach.
- b. Instructors teaching in graduate programs should hold the terminal degree determined by the discipline and have a record of research, scholarship or achievement appropriate for the graduate program.

- c. Instructors teaching at the doctoral level have a record of recognized scholarship, creative endeavor, or achievement in practice commensurate with doctoral expectations.
- d. Faculty participate substantially in:
  - i. oversight of the curriculum—its development 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 academic qualifications for instructional personnel;
  - 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.

## 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 grades. (This requirement allows for collective responsibility, as when a faculty committee has the authority to override a grade on appeal.)
2. 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. A predominantly or solely single-purpose institution in fields that require licensure for practice is also accredited by or is actively in the

process of applying to a relevant accreditor for each field, as sufficient for licensure, if such a recognized accreditor exists.

5. Instructors communicate course requirements to students in writing and in a timely manner.
6. Institutional data on assessment of student learning are accurate and address the full range of students who enroll.
7. Institutional data on student retention, persistence, and completion 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 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.<sup>2</sup>
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.

<sup>2</sup> 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: INST.B.30.020

**Note:** The policy includes changes considered on second reading (item #8) and first reading (item #17) by HLC's Board of Trustees in February 2023. Proposed deletions are in strikethrough (~~old wording~~) and proposed new language is in bold (**new wording**). The Board will consider the changes to item #17 on second reading in June 2023. The final policy is available at [hlcommission.org/obligations](http://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; or 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 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. The institution notifies applicable constituents whenever HLC has required it to submit a Provisional Plan for approval, and provides an accurate explanation as to the rationale for that Provisional Plan.
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 accept binding arbitration regarding actions by HLC, including an submit to initial arbitration any dispute it may raise regarding an~~ adverse actions, **as such term is defined in HLC policy** ~~that the institution disputes and that it is not able to resolve through HLC's processes. The institution agrees to grant immunity to HLC from claims of civil liability related to decisions made by HLC in the course of its work of accrediting institutions provided that HLC was acting in good faith and within the scope of its responsibilities.~~
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](https://hlcommission.org/obligations)

# ► Procedures



John Marr, HLC Vice President of Accreditation Relations



# Overview of the Accreditation Relationship

HLC is an institutional accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation to accredit degree-granting colleges and universities. Institutional accreditation validates the quality of an institution's academic programs at all degree levels, whether delivered on-site, online or otherwise. Institutional accreditation also examines the quality of the institution beyond its academic offerings and evaluates 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 maintains an active relationship with its member institutions, with frequent communication and regular reviews to ensure quality higher education.

## HLC Requirements

HLC's foundational requirements for its member institutions are described in several policies:

- Criteria for Accreditation  
(see page 28 or [hlcommission.org/criteria](https://hlcommission.org/criteria))
- Assumed Practices  
(see page 34 or [hlcommission.org/assumed-practices](https://hlcommission.org/assumed-practices))
- Eligibility Requirements  
(see [hlcommission.org/eligibility-requirements](https://hlcommission.org/eligibility-requirements))
- Federal Compliance Requirements  
(see [hlcommission.org/federal](https://hlcommission.org/federal))
- Obligations of Membership  
(see page 38 or [hlcommission.org/obligations](https://hlcommission.org/obligations))

Institutions must meet these requirements in order to achieve and maintain accreditation with HLC. Institutions are also responsible for staying informed about and in compliance with HLC's other institutional policies, available at [hlcommission.org/policies](https://hlcommission.org/policies).

## Seeking Accreditation

Degree-granting colleges and universities located within the United States may be eligible to seek accreditation with HLC. HLC offers two routes to achieving accreditation: the Eligibility Process and Candidacy, and an Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation, which is available for institutions that meet certain criteria, including being accredited by a historically regional accrediting agency or 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. Institutions that achieve candidate status become unaccredited members of HLC until they are granted initial accreditation.

For more information about these processes, see page 49.



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/relationship](https://hlcommission.org/relationship)

## Maintaining Accreditation

HLC relies on member institutions' adherence to its expectations and frequently reviews such adherence to ensure quality higher education. HLC also regularly communicates any changes in its expectations. HLC's relationship with an institution may come under review at any time as the institution's circumstances change.

### Required Evaluations

#### Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation

Through HLC's Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, accredited institutions complete periodic reviews on a 10-year cycle to ensure they continue to meet the Criteria for Accreditation and HLC requirements and pursue institutional improvement. There are two pathways: Standard and Open. In the Standard Pathway, institutions are required to undergo comprehensive evaluations in Years 4 and 10. In the Open Pathway, institutions undergo an Assurance Review in Year 4, a comprehensive evaluation in Year 10, and conduct a Quality Initiative between Years 5 and 9.

For details, see page 50.

#### Institutional Update

The Institutional Update is an annual survey on the organizational health of HLC's member institutions.

For details, see page 61.

#### Financial and Non-Financial Indicators

HLC reviews financial and non-financial data from the Institutional Update for specific risk indicators and conducts follow-up with institutions when certain indicators occur. The purpose of this process is to identify institutions that may be at risk of not meeting components of the Criteria for Accreditation or other HLC requirements.

For details, see page 61.

#### Substantive Change

Member institutions are required to notify HLC or obtain prior HLC approval for certain types of substantive changes to their academic offerings or operations. Changes that may require notification or approval may be related to academic programs, additional locations, branch campuses, contractual

## Snapshot of Accreditation Activities for Standard and Open Pathway Institutions

This chart shows 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>				●						●
Quality Initiative <i>Open Pathway only</i>					●—————●					
Multi-location Visit <i>Only institutions with 3+ active additional locations</i>			●					●		
	At any point during this cycle, institutions may undergo additional reviews as needed related to matters such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substantive change requests</li> <li>• Change of Control, Structure or Organization applications</li> <li>• Routine or special monitoring, including financial or non-financial indicator follow up</li> <li>• Notice sanction</li> </ul>									

\* **Note:** 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 49 for information about seeking accreditation and page 63 for information about sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and adverse actions.

arrangements, distance or correspondence education, or other topics.

For details, see page 56.

### Multi-location Visits

Accredited institutions with three or more active additional locations are required to undergo a multi-location visit in Years 3 and 8 of their Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation cycle. The visit confirms the institution's continued effective oversight of its additional locations. (An institution's additional locations and branch campuses are also reviewed through HLC's substantive change and comprehensive evaluation processes.)

For details, see page 59.

### Monitoring

Additional monitoring of an accredited institution may be required if a peer review team or panel determines that an institution is in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, but there is a concern regarding the Criteria for Accreditation or other HLC requirements that requires additional HLC follow-up. This routine monitoring may take the form of a required interim (or embedded) report or focused visit.

The HLC president may also assign special monitoring to an institution, including an institutional designation or advisory visit, as described in policy.

For details, see page 62.

### Sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and Adverse Actions

Under certain circumstances, an accredited institution may be found to be at risk of being out of compliance or out of compliance with HLC requirements. The institution may be placed on a sanction, including Notice or Probation, or issued a Show-Cause Order, as appropriate under policy. In such cases, the institution is required to undergo additional evaluations to demonstrate that it has addressed the issues identified and is in compliance with HLC requirements. The institution remains accredited while it is on sanction or under a Show-Cause Order.

In some cases, the HLC Board may take an adverse action, such as withdrawing accreditation from an accredited institution or, in the case of a candidate institution, denying candidacy, withdrawing candidacy status, or denying initial accreditation. Adverse actions are appealable.

For details, see page 63.

## Stipulations

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

There are six categories of stipulations:

1. **Accreditation:** provides detailed information regarding a voluntary resignation of HLC accreditation or candidacy, withdrawal of accreditation or candidacy, or Change of Control, Organization or Structure transaction
2. **Competency-Based Education:** lists the direct assessment and credit-based competency-based education programs that the institution is approved to offer
3. **Distance and Correspondence Education:** provides the level of approval an institution has to offer distance and correspondence education courses and programs
4. **General:** lists the institution's approved degree program levels and, if applicable, program limitations
5. **Additional Locations:** indicates whether an institution has been approved to participate in HLC's Notification Program for Additional Locations and, if so, at what level
6. **Status:** for institutions on sanction or Show-Cause, references public information about those statuses

## Accreditation Personnel

### Institutional Representatives

- **Chief Executive Officer (CEO).** The CEO is the principal administrative official responsible for the direction of all affairs and operations of the institution. This individual is the primary contact between the institution and HLC. The CEO is also responsible for appointing other individuals to serve as Accreditation Liaison Officer, Data Update Coordinator and Assurance System Coordinator.
- **Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO).** The ALO is appointed by the institution's CEO and serves as a primary contact point, along with the CEO, between the institution and HLC about HLC policies, practices and other matters related to accreditation. See page 46 for more information about the ALO role.

- **Chief Academic Officer (CAO).** The CAO is the senior academic administrator at the institution. HLC asks institutions to provide the CAO's contact information in the Institutional Update.
- **Chief Financial Officer (CFO).** The CFO is the principal administrative official responsible for the finances of the institution. This individual is responsible for providing institutional financial data for the Institutional Update.
- **Data Update Coordinator.** The Data Update Coordinator is 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.
- **Location Coordinator.** The Location Coordinator is 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.)
- **Primary Assurance System Coordinator.** The Primary Assurance System Coordinator is 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.

### HLC Staff Liaison

HLC assigns a staff liaison to each member institution. This staff liaison serves as the primary resource person at HLC to that institution. The staff liaison explains HLC policies and procedures and draws on the skills of other staff members to provide effective assistance and service to colleges and universities.

### Peer Reviewers

HLC relies on a cadre of carefully selected and trained professionals who serve HLC in its accreditation processes. This group of approximately 1,600 individuals is called the Peer Corps. These volunteers share their knowledge of and direct experience with higher education, their dedication to educational excellence, and their commitment to the principles underlying voluntary accreditation as reflected in HLC policy.

### Decision-Making Bodies

Actions on HLC member institutions are taken by decision-making bodies comprised of institutional representatives and public members. The decision-making bodies are the Institutional Actions Council (IAC), Board of Trustees and Appeals Body.

See page 65 for more information about decision-making bodies and processes. For the Board of Trustees roster, see page 6. For the IAC roster, see page 7.

For the Appeals Body roster, see [hlcommission.org/appeals-body](http://hlcommission.org/appeals-body).

### Dues and Fees

HLC bills member institutions for annual dues; payment is due on receipt of the bill and is not refundable. HLC also bills institutions additional fees for some evaluation processes and other activities.

View the current dues and fees schedule at [hlcommission.org/dues](http://hlcommission.org/dues).

### Records of Accreditation Status

#### HLC Directory of Institutions and Statement of Accreditation Status

The accreditation status of HLC's current and former member institutions is available in the Directory of Institutions at [hlcommission.org/directory](http://hlcommission.org/directory). The directory provides a Statement of Accreditation Status for each member institution that provides the following information:

- The institution's accreditation status.
- A schedule of upcoming or in-progress reviews.
- Certain information regarding the institution's recent history with HLC for up to the last 15 years.
- The date of the institution's most recent reaffirmation of accreditation and the date of the institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation.
- Certain Action Letters related to the institution.
- A brief profile of the institution, including the number of degree and certificate programs it offers and its campuses and additional locations.
- If applicable, a Public Disclosure Notice or other public statement explaining particular actions (see HLC Notification of Institutional Actions on page 45).

## Mark of Accreditation Status

As part of HLC's Obligations of Membership, HLC member institutions are required to display the Mark of Accreditation Status on their website to communicate their status with HLC to their students and other stakeholders. 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.

For more information, see [hlcommission.org/mark](https://hlcommission.org/mark).

## HLC Notifications of Institutional Actions

HLC publishes a summary of institutional actions taken by the Institutional Actions Council and Board of Trustees within 30 days of taking such action. These actions are available at [hlcommission.org/recent-actions](https://hlcommission.org/recent-actions).

For actions taken by the Board of Trustees involving denial or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation, placing an institution on sanction or issuing a Show-Cause Order, extending a sanction or Show-Cause Order, or removing a sanction or Show-Cause Order, HLC posts information in its Directory of Institutions within one business day of the institution being notified of such action.

HLC also publishes Public Disclosure Notices (PDNs) in cases of imposition, extension or removal of sanction or Show-Cause Order, assigning an institutional designation, notice of voluntary resignation of accreditation or candidacy, denial or withdrawal of accreditation or candidacy, or denial of an application for Change of Control, Structure or Organization.

## Institutional Status and Requirements Report

An institution's CEO or Accreditation Liaison Officer may download an Institutional Status and Requirements Report in HLC's online Canopy system to review and manage information regarding the institution's accreditation relationship. The report includes a complete history of the institution's relationship with HLC, information on the status of current or upcoming accreditation events, and information on the institution's designated pathway and related events.

## Official Letters From HLC

Representatives from accredited institutions may request an official letter from HLC to verify the institution's accredited status, document HLC's approval of a particular program or location, or provide other information confirming aspects of the institution's scope of accreditation.

To request a letter, visit [hlcommission.org/letter-request](https://hlcommission.org/letter-request).

## Voluntary Withdrawal or Resignation

### Voluntary Withdrawal of Application for Candidacy or Accreditation

An institution may voluntarily withdraw from seeking membership with HLC at any time, including after it has submitted its application for candidacy or accreditation and before a decision on the application is made.

### Voluntary Resignation of Accreditation or Candidacy Status

An institution may voluntarily resign its accreditation or candidacy at any time, including during the candidacy process. Institutions may choose to resign their accreditation or candidacy for any reason, including closing and ceasing operations, merging with another institution, or changing accreditors.

For more information, see [hlcommission.org/relationship](https://hlcommission.org/relationship).

### Reapplication for HLC Membership

Institutions that withdraw their application for candidacy or accreditation, resign their status or have their status denied or withdrawn by HLC must begin the process of seeking accreditation again. Depending on the circumstances, specific waiting periods may apply.

## Denial or Withdrawal of Candidacy or Accreditation

If an institution is found to be out of compliance with HLC requirements, as required by policy, HLC may deny or withdraw the institution's candidacy or accreditation. Such denial or withdrawal is considered an adverse action, and is subject to appeal by the institution.

For more information about adverse actions, see page 64.



# Accreditation Liaison Officer Role

HLC asks each member institution to identify an Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO). Along with the institution's chief executive officer (CEO), the ALO is a primary contact point between HLC and the institution. They receive communications from HLC regarding policies, procedures and professional development opportunities, and are responsible for coordinating efforts to ensure their institution meets its obligations of HLC membership.

## 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 its 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 of certain actions taken by the U.S. Department of Education, state agencies or other recognized accreditors. (See [hlcommission.org/alo](https://hlcommission.org/alo) for details.)

### Substantive Change

- Notify HLC of changes to the institution's operations and academic 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.

## Resources

### ALO Training

HLC offers an online orientation for new ALOs to learn more about their role and expectations and processes for HLC accreditation, as well as webinars and annual conference programming to keep current with HLC policies and processes. See [hlcommission.org/alo-training](https://hlcommission.org/alo-training) for upcoming offerings and online resources.

### Canopy

Canopy is HLC's online system for institutions to manage their accreditation records. ALOs can view their institution profile, update the institutional contacts on file with HLC, and manage their additional location and branch campus records.

Log into Canopy at [canopy.hlcommission.org](https://canopy.hlcommission.org).

For more details about the system and training resources, see [hlcommission.org/canopy](https://hlcommission.org/canopy).

### Institutional Status and Requirements (ISR) Report

The ISR Report is a resource to allow ALOs or CEOs to review information regarding the institution's



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/alo](https://hlcommission.org/alo)

accreditation relationship with HLC. ALOs and CEOs may download their institution's ISR Report in Canopy.

Features of the report include complete institutional history with HLC, information on the status of current or upcoming accreditation events, and information on the institution's designated Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation and related events.

### **HLCCommission.org**

HLC's website, at [hlcommission.org](https://hlcommission.org), provides in-depth information regarding HLC's policies, procedures and programs and events. See page 81 for links to key pages of the website.

### **HLC Staff Liaison**

HLC assigns each member institution a vice president of accreditation relations, also known as a staff liaison, who serves as the institution's primary contact. ALOs should contact their institution's staff liaison with questions related to the institution's status with HLC and any accreditation process. Staff liaisons are available by email or phone and are available to visit with institutions to discuss more substantive issues related to accreditation.

A staff liaison's responsibilities include the following:

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



We're constantly  
improving  
*to better serve*  
you and your  
students.



# Peer Corps

HLC relies upon the service of peer reviewers for its accrediting activities. Members of the Peer Corps play various roles in all stages of the accreditation process. These volunteers generously share their knowledge and experience to assure and advance institutional quality. The Peer Corps consists of approximately 1,600 faculty, administrators and staff who are currently employed by or recently retired from colleges and universities in the United States.

## Reminders for Current Peer Reviewers

### Peer Reviewer Profiles

All peer reviewers are required to maintain an up-to-date professional profile in Canopy, HLC's online system for peer reviewers to manage their records. The profile includes contact information, education history, work experience and other expertise. It is used by HLC staff members to set review teams and communicate with peer reviewers. Review and update your profile at [canopy.hlcommission.org](http://canopy.hlcommission.org).

**Please Note:** HLC shares training registration information via email. To ensure you receive these notifications, add HLC's main email addresses to your approved senders list (see page 5) and keep your contact information up-to-date in Canopy.

### Online Team Resources

HLC provides peer review guidelines and report templates on its website at [hlcommission.org/team-resources](http://hlcommission.org/team-resources). Information is organized by the type of review. Peer reviewers should always check this page before beginning a review to ensure they have the most current form or report template.

### Peer Reviewer Training

HLC provides in-person training for new peer reviewers as well as webinars throughout the year for reviewers assigned to upcoming evaluations. For upcoming offerings and recordings of past webinars, visit [hlcommission.org/reviewer-training](http://hlcommission.org/reviewer-training).

## Becoming a Peer Reviewer

Serving as a peer reviewer is an engaging, immersive professional development opportunity that allows individuals to gain insight and knowledge from their colleagues in higher education. Peer Corps members also develop a comprehensive understanding of HLC's accreditation requirements, which can help their home institution with the accreditation process.

HLC periodically accepts applications for new peer reviewers depending upon its needs in the Peer Corps. Those who meet the minimum qualifications and fill any of the areas of need identified within the Corps are encouraged to apply during the next application period.

### Minimum Qualifications

- At least five years of experience in higher education.
- Typically 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.
- Currently employed by an institution accredited by and in good standing with HLC.

### Application Process

Applicants complete an online application and submit a letter describing relevant experience, a curriculum vitae or resume, and the names and contact information for two professional references. Additional details are available at [hlcommission.org/peer](http://hlcommission.org/peer).



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/peer-review](http://hlcommission.org/peer-review)





# Seeking Accreditation

HLC welcomes applications for membership from eligible colleges and universities. Institutions may seek accreditation with HLC through one of two routes: the Eligibility Process and Candidacy or the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation. Both options require institutions to demonstrate that they meet HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC requirements in order to achieve accreditation.

## Eligibility Process and Candidacy

Most new HLC member institutions achieve accreditation through the Eligibility Process and Candidacy. A college or university is eligible to apply for HLC membership through this process if it meets certain requirements, including being incorporated in, or operating under federal authority in, the United States; and has a substantial presence, as defined in HLC policy, in the United States.

Through the Eligibility Process, an institution is asked to demonstrate that it is eligible to be accredited by HLC and that it is in compliance with HLC's Eligibility Requirements. If HLC determines that the institution meets these requirements, the institution may pursue Candidacy with HLC. If the institution continues in the process, it works during Candidacy to demonstrate compliance with HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC requirements. The Candidacy period is typically four years, but the institution may apply to seek Early Initial Accreditation.

For more information about the Eligibility Process and Candidacy, see [hlcommission.org/eligibility](https://hlcommission.org/eligibility).

## Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation

An institution may be eligible to seek accreditation with HLC through the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation if it meets 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. The institution must also have no history of being placed on sanction, show-cause order or other similar negative action by its institutional accreditor for at least the past 10 years, and must meet other requirements.

The process allows an institution to apply for initial accreditation with HLC on an accelerated timeline, without serving a period of Candidacy. An institution submits an application for HLC membership to demonstrate its eligibility for HLC accreditation and the accelerated process. If HLC determines that the institution meets these requirements, the institution then undergoes a preliminary peer review to evaluate whether it is eligible to proceed to a comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation. If the institution continues in the process, it will undergo a comprehensive evaluation to demonstrate that it meets the Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC requirements.

For more information about the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation, see [hlcommission.org/accelerated](https://hlcommission.org/accelerated).



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/seeking-accreditation](https://hlcommission.org/seeking-accreditation)



# Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation

Through HLC's Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, accredited institutions complete periodic reviews on a 10-year cycle to ensure they continue to meet the Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC requirements and pursue institutional improvement. These reviews take place concurrently with HLC's regular oversight activities, such as the Institutional Update, substantive change requests, institutional monitoring and other processes. There are currently two primary pathways: Standard and Open.

## Standard Pathway

The Standard Pathway follows a 10-year cycle. Quality assurance and institutional improvement are integrated into comprehensive evaluations conducted during the cycle, as well as through interim monitoring as required.

**Note:** HLC's annual dues are set to distribute the cost of maintaining accreditation evenly over each pathway cycle. In this system, no base fees are associated for Standard Pathway comprehensive evaluations. Institutions will still be billed for expenses related to peer review team visits required as part of these evaluations. 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.

## Comprehensive Evaluations

Comprehensive evaluations are conducted twice in the Standard Pathway, once in Year 4 and again in Year 10. The comprehensive evaluation includes an Assurance Review, a Student Opinion Survey, an on-site visit by a team of HLC peer reviewers, and a multi-campus visit, if applicable. A Federal Compliance Review also is required during the Year 10 evaluation and any Year 4 evaluation involving Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

The institution submits an Assurance Filing that demonstrates the institution is in compliance with HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and other requirements and has demonstrated institutional improvement efforts. In addition, if a previous

evaluation identified an area needing improvement, the Assurance Filing should specifically address the institution's response to those concerns.

Both comprehensive evaluations follow the same general process, but the Year 10 evaluation leads to actions by an HLC decision-making body regarding the reaffirmation of the institution's accreditation and its pathway eligibility.

Most Year 4 evaluations do not include such action, but instead determine if follow-up monitoring is necessary. An exception to this rule is made in the case of institutions that are undergoing their first comprehensive evaluation following Initial Accreditation or removal of Probation or a Show-Cause Order. In these cases, Reaffirmation of Accreditation will be considered as part of the Year 4 comprehensive evaluation. If reaffirmation is granted, the institution moves to Year 5 of the Standard Pathway cycle (a change of pathway is not an outcome of a Year 4 review).

## Institutional Resources

### Q&A Webinar

During these one-hour webinars, participants may ask questions about any topic related to the Standard Pathway, including the Assurance System, embedded improvement, monitoring, and so forth. This is not a formal presentation and attendees are encouraged to participate fully in an open exchange. Representatives from all institutions on the Standard Pathway are welcome. Scheduled webinars will be listed at [hlcommission.org/calendar](http://hlcommission.org/calendar).

### Standard Pathway Seminars

Institutions that are within two years of a comprehensive evaluation are invited to attend a two-day, virtual seminar on addressing improvement in the Assurance Argument. At the seminar, institutional



## Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/standard](http://hlcommission.org/standard)

teams develop strategies to demonstrate improvement within the Criteria for Accreditation. Scheduled seminars will be listed at [hlcommission.org/calendar](https://hlcommission.org/calendar).

### Sample Assurance Arguments

[hlcommission.org/assurance-samples](https://hlcommission.org/assurance-samples)

Institutions can access demonstration sites that present new Assurance Filings written to the Criteria for Accreditation that went into effect September 1, 2020. They are intended to help institutions become familiar with the Assurance System and provide examples of how evidence may be organized and linked in the Assurance Argument.

### Assurance System Training Resources

[hlcommission.org/assurance-system](https://hlcommission.org/assurance-system)

This webpage provides a general overview of accessing and using the Assurance System, as well as links to the user manual and frequently asked questions. These resources are applicable to both the Standard and Open Pathways.

## Open Pathway

The Open Pathway follows a 10-year cycle, with an Assurance Review in Year 4 and a comprehensive evaluation in Year 10. The Open Pathway also includes a separate improvement component, the Quality Initiative, that affords institutions the opportunity to pursue improvement projects that meet their current needs and aspirations.

**Note:** HLC's annual dues are set to distribute the cost of maintaining accreditation evenly over each Pathway cycle. In this system, no base fees are associated for Assurance Reviews, Quality Initiative Proposals and Reports, and comprehensive evaluations. Institutions will still be billed 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.

## Assurance Review

In Year 4, institutions complete Assurance Reviews to ensure they are continuing to meet the Criteria for Accreditation. The institution submits an Assurance Filing that demonstrates the institution is in compliance with the Criteria and has pursued institutional improvement efforts. 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 and whether monitoring should be required. 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.

Year 4 Assurance Reviews do not typically include an on-site visit, unless requested by the peer review team. In addition, institutions are not required to complete a Student Opinion Survey or Federal Compliance Review.

**Note:** HLC provides guidance for preparing institutional materials and conducting the Year 4 Assurance Review at [hlcommission.org/open](https://hlcommission.org/open).

## Quality Initiative

Between Years 5 and 9, institutions undertake a Quality Initiative. The Quality Initiative is an independent project, separate from other review processes. Projects may begin and be completed during this period, or an institution may continue a project that is already in progress or achieve a key milestone in the course of a longer project.

Institutions submit a formal proposal for the project, which is reviewed and approved by a panel of peer reviewers. At the end of the Quality Initiative period, institutions then submit a formal report on the results of the project. 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.

### Demonstrating and Recognizing “Genuine Effort”

The criteria that peer reviewers use to evaluate an institution's Quality Initiative project include the following:

- An evaluation of the project's scope and significance (for example, as demonstrated by its 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).



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/open](https://hlcommission.org/open)

- A clear expression of the purpose of the project (for example, as 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 (for example, by the presence of key personnel and the appropriate allocation of resources).
- An appropriate timeline that is consistent with the project’s goals, aligned with the institution’s other priorities, and reasonable within existing constraints.

The Quality Initiative Report documents how the institution has pursued its activities, allocated its resources, and collected sufficient evidence to demonstrate its effort to accomplish the goals outlined in its Quality Initiative proposal. Peer reviewers evaluate the report in relation to the institution’s proposal to determine if the objectives in the proposal were achieved. A positive evaluation of the institution’s efforts will be designated as “genuine effort,” which conveys HLC’s recognition of the project’s value in relation to the effort made to improve operations or outcomes at an institution. The Quality Initiative Report is evaluated by IAC in Year 10 of the cycle, at the same time as, but independently from, the comprehensive evaluation.

### Comprehensive Evaluation

In Year 10, institutions on the Open Pathway undergo a comprehensive evaluation that results in actions taken by an HLC decision-making body regarding the reaffirmation of the institution’s accreditation and

its pathway eligibility. The comprehensive evaluation includes an Assurance Review, a review of Federal Compliance requirements, a Student Opinion Survey and an on-site visit by a team of HLC peer reviewers. The evaluation may also include a multi-campus visit, if applicable.

During the decision-making process, the panel report from the evaluation of the institution’s Quality Initiative Report will be sent to the IAC along with the documentation from the comprehensive evaluation. The IAC may use the report to help determine the institution’s eligibility to choose its pathway.

### Institutional Resources

#### Sample Assurance Arguments

[hlcommission.org/assurance-samples](http://hlcommission.org/assurance-samples)

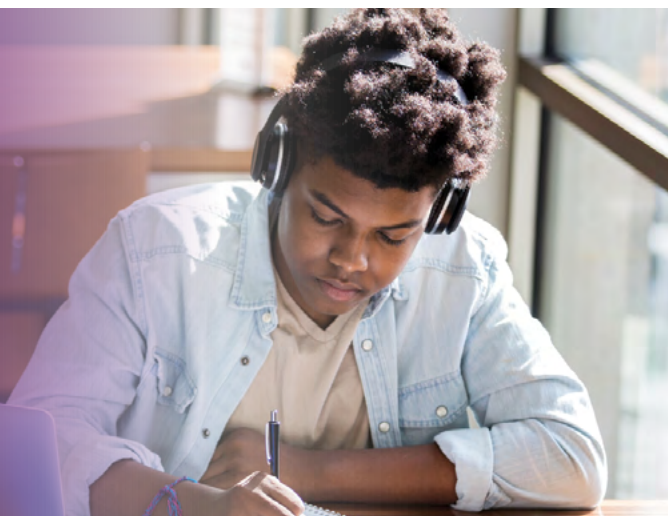
Institutions can access demonstration sites that present new Assurance Filings written to the Criteria for Accreditation that went into effect September 1, 2020. They are intended to help institutions become familiar with the Assurance System and provide examples of how evidence may be organized and linked in the Assurance Argument.

#### Assurance System Training Resources

[hlcommission.org/assurance-system](http://hlcommission.org/assurance-system)

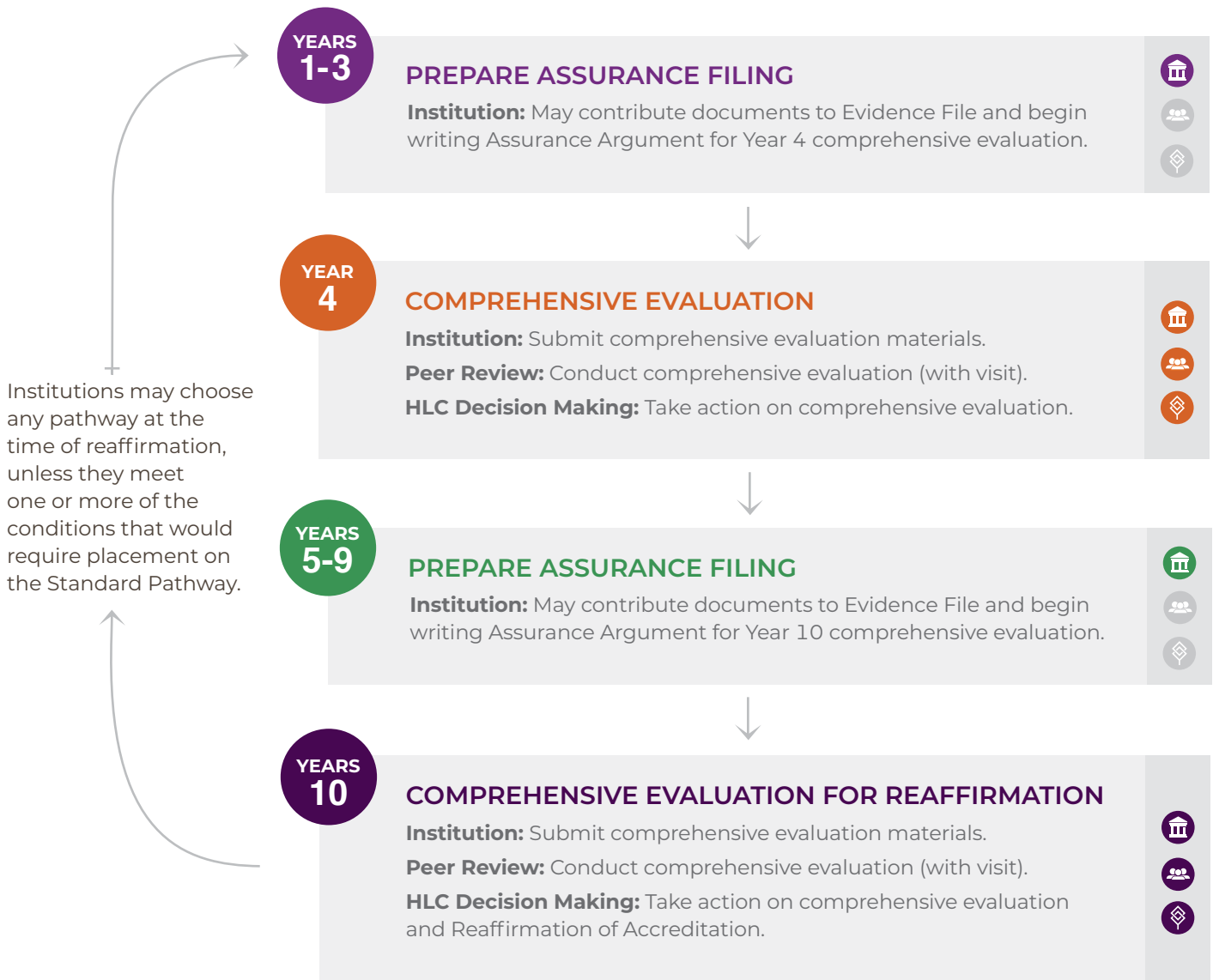
This webpage provides a general overview of accessing and using the Assurance System, as well as links to the user manual and frequently asked questions. These resources are applicable to both the Standard and Open Pathways.

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# Standard Pathway Cycle








# Open Pathway Cycle

**YEARS 1-3**

## PREPARE ASSURANCE FILING




**Institution:** May contribute documents to Evidence File and begin writing Assurance Argument for Year 4 Assurance Review.

**YEAR 4**

## ASSURANCE REVIEW




**Institution:** Submit Assurance Filing (Assurance Argument and Evidence File).  
**Peer Review:** Conduct Assurance Review (no visit).  
**HLC Decision Making:** Acceptance of or action on Assurance Review.

**YEARS 5-7**

## QUALITY INITIATIVE PROPOSAL

**Institution:** Submit Quality Initiative Proposal. May also begin preparing Assurance Filing for Year 10 comprehensive evaluation.  
**Peer Review:** Review Quality Initiative Proposal.

**YEARS 7-9**

## QUALITY INITIATIVE REPORT

**Institution:** Submit Quality Initiative Report. May also continue preparing Assuring Filing for Year 10 comprehensive evaluation.  
**Peer Review:** Review Quality Initiative Report.





**YEARS 10**

## COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION FOR REAFFIRMATION

**Institution:** Submit comprehensive evaluation materials.  
**Peer Review:** Conduct comprehensive evaluation (with visit).  
**HLC Decision Making:** Take action on comprehensive evaluation and Reaffirmation of Accreditation.





Institutions may choose any pathway at the time of reaffirmation, unless they meet one or more of the conditions that would require placement on the Standard Pathway.



# Federal Compliance

As a federally recognized accreditor, HLC is required to assure that its member institutions are complying with the expectations of specific federal regulations. Compliance with these requirements by both institutions and HLC is necessary to ensure that institutions accredited by HLC are eligible for federal financial aid.

## When Federal Compliance Is Reviewed

HLC reviews an institution's compliance with federal requirements at multiple points in the accreditation relationship. Federal Compliance Reviews are conducted as part of the following evaluations:

- Comprehensive evaluations for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, regardless of when they occur.
- Comprehensive evaluations for institutions applying for candidacy or initial accreditation.
- Sanction visits for institutions on Probation (except if Probation is extended) and Show Cause.
- Advisory visits arising from questions of compliance with one or more federal requirements or as part of any other appropriate evaluation as warranted by HLC to verify such compliance.

HLC may also require an institution to submit documentation related to one or more federal requirements, without an on-site evaluation necessarily occurring, whether as part of routine monitoring or under HLC's policy on Special Monitoring.

## Areas Addressed

The following areas are addressed in the Federal Compliance Process:

- Assignment of credits, program length and tuition
- Institutional mechanisms for handling student complaints
- Publication of transfer policies
- Practices for verification of student identity
- Protection of student privacy
- Publication of student outcome data
- Standing with state and other accreditors
- Recruiting, admissions and related enrollment practices

## Federal Compliance Process

Institutions must submit their Federal Compliance Filing in the Assurance System before their on-site visit by a team of HLC peer reviewers. HLC will make the Federal Compliance documents available in the system six months before the institution's lock date, and HLC recommends that institutions begin compiling the necessary documentation at that point. These materials should be uploaded to the Assurance System prior to the institution's lock date.

When the institution's Assurance Filing is locked and released to the peer review team, a Federal Compliance reviewer evaluates the materials in advance of the visit and refers any issues to the on-ground 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 and requests additional documentation from the institution, if needed. If the team has concerns about the institution's compliance with federal requirements, they may recommend follow-up 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](https://hlcommission.org/federal-compliance)



# Substantive Change

Change in higher education is constant and necessary to improve educational quality. HLC has outlined specific conditions under which an institution needs to notify HLC or obtain prior approval before implementing changes.

## Types of Change

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

- Academic programs, including new programs or changes to existing programs
- Access to HLC's Notification Program for Additional Locations
- Branch campuses and additional locations
- 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
- Program content

Visit [hlcommission.org/change](https://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 [changerequests@hlcommission.org](mailto:changerequests@hlcommission.org).

## Applications

HLC provides applications for changes that require prior HLC approval. These applications are available at [hlcommission.org/change](https://hlcommission.org/change). HLC updates the applications annually, on or about September 1. However, if an application form was accessed more than 90 days prior to filing, institutions are encouraged to check HLC's website to ensure that there have been no changes to the application in the intervening time.

Most change requests are subject to a fee. HLC's fee schedule can be found online at [hlcommission.org/dues](https://hlcommission.org/dues). The fee schedule is updated annually, with the new or revised fees effective on September 1.

## Screening Forms

HLC provides free screening forms on its website to help institutions determine whether certain types of planned changes require HLC notification or prior approval. Where available, HLC strongly encourages institutions to complete the applicable screening form prior to submitting an application for a related type of change.

If prior approval is required, the screening form will provide instructions for submitting the change request to HLC. If HLC notification is required, completion of the screening form fulfills that requirement. The form will send the user an email indicating that this notification requirement is fulfilled. Institutions should keep such messages for their records.

**Please note:** There is no fee associated with submitting information through the screening forms.

## New Degree Programs

[hlcommission.org/degree-screening](https://hlcommission.org/degree-screening)

Institutions should complete this form for any new degree program.



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/change](https://hlcommission.org/change)



## Certificate Programs

[hlcommission.org/certificate-screening](https://hlcommission.org/certificate-screening)

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

## Changes to Existing Academic Programs

[hlcommission.org/existing-program-screening](https://hlcommission.org/existing-program-screening)

Institutions should complete this form to declare any of the following changes to existing HLC-approved academic 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 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, Assurance Review or Show-Cause Evaluation Visit).

- **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.

Program content changes include 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.

- **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](https://hlcommission.org/contractual-screening)

Institutions should complete the screening form for each credit-bearing academic program (certificate or degree) that is offered through a contractual arrangement.

## Notification Program for Additional Locations and Canopy

An institution with access to the Notification Program for Additional Locations is able to open new additional locations as defined in the institution's Institutional Status and Requirements Report after notifying HLC prior to initiating any new additional locations and receiving an acknowledgement that HLC has added the new additional location to its database. Information about program eligibility and applying to join the program is available at [hlcommission.org/change](https://hlcommission.org/change).

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](https://canopy.hlcommission.org).

## Requirements for Institutions on Sanction, Show-Cause Order or 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:

- These institutions are required to apply for HLC approval prior to making the changes listed below while on a sanction or under a Show-Cause Order and for three years thereafter, or while on a provisional certification status.
  - 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

If prior HLC approval is required for a proposed change, HLC will determine the appropriate process for review: Desk Review, Change Panel or Change Visit. Institutions requesting approval of a Change in Control, Structure or Organization will undergo a Change of Control Evaluation, which can take a variety of forms depending on the nature of the request.

Recommendations from Desk Reviews, Change Panels and Change Visits are forwarded to the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) for final action. If a change request is denied, an institution may choose to resubmit the change application, addressing issues raised by the IAC, no sooner than six months after the decision unless the waiting period is waived by the IAC. HLC's Board of Trustees takes final action on requests for approval of a change in an institution's control, structure or organization.

### Desk Review

A Desk Review consists of a review conducted by HLC staff. If staff recommends that the request be approved, it is sent to the IAC for final action. If staff recommends denial, the institution is given an opportunity to review the recommendation prior to its consideration by the decision-making body. The average timeframe for this review is approximately three months.

### Change Panel

A Change Panel is made up of two or more peer reviewers who review substantive change applications. The average timeframe for this review is six months. The Change Panel may seek additional information from the institution if such information is being sought to explain or clarify the materials provided by the institution in its application for change. The panel may recommend that the change be approved, approved with modification or denied. The panel may also recommend monitoring. The institution is given an opportunity to review the recommendation and provide an institutional response prior to consideration of the recommendation by the IAC. Alternatively, the panel may recommend that the change be further evaluated by an on-site evaluation team, either through a Change Visit or during a previously scheduled focused visit or comprehensive evaluation.

### Change Visit

A Change Visit involves a team of two or more HLC peer reviewers who review an institution's change application and conduct an on-site visit. The average timeframe for this review is nine months. The visit date is set for three months or more after the receipt of the change application. The peer review team may recommend that the change be approved, approved with modifications or denied. The team may also recommend monitoring. The institution is given an opportunity to review the recommendation and provide an institutional response prior to consideration of the recommendation by the IAC.

In some instances, an institution's HLC staff liaison will embed the review of a change request into an upcoming comprehensive evaluation or a previously scheduled Change Visit. Decision making for the embedded review will occur in conjunction with the associated visit. A request to embed the review of a change application into a comprehensive evaluation must be submitted at least six months in advance of the comprehensive evaluation visit.

### Review of Change of Control, Structure or Organization

An institution may be required to receive HLC approval prior to undergoing a transaction that affects, or may affect, how corporate control, structure or governance occurs at the institution. Such change requests follow a separate process and require different types of documentation. The fee schedule for Change of Control, Structure or Organization requests is also different from other change requests. The final action for these requests is made by HLC's Board of Trustees rather than the IAC. Institutions considering this type of change should contact their HLC staff liaison as early in the process as possible. More information is available at [hlcommission.org/control](http://hlcommission.org/control).



# Off-Campus Activities

New locations for institutions are established through HLC's substantive change process. Once approved and established, these locations are monitored through peer review visits and are subject to a decision-making process depending on the location type.

**Note:** See HLC's Dues and Fees Schedule at [hlcommission.org/dues](https://hlcommission.org/dues) for costs associated with reviews of branch campuses and additional locations.

## Follow-Up Reviews of Approved Off-Campus Activities

After a new additional location or campus has been approved by HLC through its substantive change process, HLC conducts a follow-up review—known as an additional location confirmation visit or campus evaluation visit—within six months of the matriculation of students and the initiation of instruction at the location or campus. Both types of reviews involve an on-site visit by HLC peer reviewers.

### Additional Location Confirmation Visit

An additional location confirmation visit is conducted for each of the first three active additional locations opened by an institution. The visit is meant to confirm the accuracy of the information provided to HLC concerning the quality and oversight of the education at the additional location when HLC originally approved it. Further monitoring of an institution's additional locations through HLC's established monitoring processes may be recommended. Such recommendations will be reviewed and acted upon by an HLC decision-making body.

### Campus Evaluation Visit

A campus evaluation visit is conducted for each new main campus or branch campus opened by an institution. The visit is meant to (1) assure the quality of the campus and its educational programs in meeting the needs of its defined constituencies and (2) assure the institution's capacity to sustain that quality. Further monitoring of a campus or closure of a campus may be recommended. Such recommendations will be reviewed and acted upon by an HLC decision-making body.

## Ongoing Reviews

HLC also evaluates an institution's off-campus activities at various points during the Standard and Open Pathway cycles. These reviews are known as multi-location and multi-campus visits.

### Multi-location Visits

If an institution has at least three active additional locations, HLC will conduct on-site visits of a representative sample of the additional locations in Years 3 and 8 for institutions in the Open or Standard Pathways. The visit is made by one HLC peer reviewer and is meant to confirm the continuing effective oversight by the institution of its additional locations. Further monitoring of an institution's additional locations through HLC's established monitoring processes may be recommended. Such recommendations will be reviewed and acted upon by an HLC decision-making body.

### Multi-campus Visit

A multi-campus visit is included as part of the comprehensive evaluation for institutions with one or more branch campuses. Members of the peer review team conducting the comprehensive evaluation will visit a sampling of the institution's branch campuses to ensure (1) the quality of the institution's extended operations and its educational offerings in meeting the needs of its defined constituencies and (2) the capacity to sustain that quality. Further monitoring of an institution's branch campuses through HLC's established monitoring processes may be recommended. Such recommendations will be reviewed and acted upon by an HLC decision-making body.



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/locations](https://hlcommission.org/locations)

## 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 contact HLC to change its location classification. To do so, the institution should submit a letter explaining why the location no longer meets the branch campus definition and confirming that it has all the elements of the additional location definition. The letter should also include the exact name and street address of the branch campus in question.

Submit this information as a single PDF file to [changerequests@hlcommission.org](mailto:changerequests@hlcommission.org).

**Note:** Once a branch campus has been reclassified as an additional location, the action cannot be reversed. In the event that the institution wishes to reclassify that location to a branch campus, it will have to reapply for the branch campus designation and host a campus evaluation visit upon approval.

## 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](http://canopy.hlcommission.org).

**Note:** Some types of changes to branch campuses or additional locations may require approval by HLC through its substantive change process. See [hlcommission.org/change](http://hlcommission.org/change).



Higher education should  
always be two things:  
*trusted and evolving.*



# Institutional Update and Financial/ Non-Financial Indicators

## Institutional Update

HLC requires member institutions to provide annual updates on organizational health through the Institutional Update. It is held each year in late February or early March.

In preparation for the Institutional Update, HLC shares a guide in January that includes the Institutional Update questions, definitions of terms and answers to frequently asked questions. HLC also asks institutions to ensure that HLC has the correct contact information on file in its online Canopy system 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.

The information provided to HLC through the Institutional Update serves multiple purposes:

- Certain financial and non-financial indicators of organizational health are reviewed to determine whether there are any trends that suggest the need for HLC follow-up.
- Some information is used to update the Statement of Accreditation Status posted on HLC's website.
- Some information is collected and monitored in compliance with federal requirements.
- Student enrollment and instructional location data are used to calculate HLC membership dues.

**Note:** Some changes to information in the Institutional Update may require review through HLC's policies and procedures on substantive change. This may be the case for changes to the institution's active additional locations or branch campuses or to its contractual arrangements.

## Financial Indicators

HLC reviews the financial data submitted in the Institutional Update to determine whether an institution operates with integrity in its financial functions (see Criterion 2, Core Component 2.A.).

The financial data submitted in the Institutional Update generate a Composite Financial Index (CFI). For private institutions, HLC uses the financial ratios provided by the U.S. Department of Education, and for public institutions, HLC relies on the financial ratios

recommended in *Strategic Financial Analysis for Higher Education: Identifying, Measuring & Reporting Financial Risks (Seventh Edition)*, by KPMG LLP; Prager, Sealy & Co., LLC; Attain LLC.

## Non-financial Indicators

HLC reviews non-financial data submitted in the Institutional Update for the following indicator conditions and requests responses from institutions when certain indicator conditions occur.

**Note:** "Small institutions" are those with fewer than 1,000 students while "large institutions" are those with 1,000 students or more.

1. **Significant Enrollment Changes:** Three-year increase or decrease in enrollment of 80% or more for small institutions or 40% or more for large institutions.
2. **Degrees Awarded:** Three-year increase or decrease in degrees awarded of 75% or more for small institutions and 65% or more for large institutions.
3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **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.



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/update](https://hlcommission.org/update)

[hlcommission.org/indicators](https://hlcommission.org/indicators)



# Monitoring

Beyond regular institutional reviews, additional monitoring of an accredited institution may be required if a peer review team or panel determines that an institution is in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, but there is a concern regarding the Criteria for Accreditation or other HLC requirements that requires additional HLC follow-up. This routine monitoring may take the form of a required interim report or focused visit.

The HLC president may also assign special monitoring to an institution, including an institutional designation, special monitoring report or advisory visit, as described in policy.

**Note:** See HLC's Dues and Fees Schedule at [hlcommission.org/dues](http://hlcommission.org/dues) for costs associated with monitoring.

## Routine Monitoring

### Interim Report

HLC may require an interim report when its goal is to receive specific, important information from the institution, track how the institution is progressing in coping with certain changes or challenges, or receive evidence that the institution's stated plans have come to fruition. HLC may require an institution to submit the interim report so that it can be reviewed through staff analysis, or HLC may embed the report in a previously scheduled comprehensive evaluation or focused visit.

### Focused Visit

Focused visits occur between comprehensive evaluations and examine specific aspects of an institution. A focused visit is an evaluation of limited scope that reviews specific developments and changes or follows up on concerns identified by a previous evaluation process.

## Special Monitoring

### Institutional Designations

Institutional designations are used to indicate when an institution is in financial distress or under governmental investigation. They 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 an institution to investigate urgent issues concerning the institution's governance, operations, finances or other concerns. See HLC's Special Monitoring policy (INST.F.20.010) for a list of situations that might result in an advisory visit.

An advisory visit is conducted by a team of HLC peer reviewers, who may be accompanied by the institution's HLC staff liaison or other HLC staff member.

The special monitoring report or team report is not reviewed through HLC's regular review processes. The HLC president will propose an action in response to the report, which may include a recommendation to HLC's decision-making bodies for possible further action, which could include further monitoring, a sanction or other actions within HLC policy and procedures. The institution will have an opportunity to submit a response to the president's proposed action.



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/monitoring](http://hlcommission.org/monitoring)



# Sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and Adverse Actions

Under certain circumstances, a member institution may be found to be at risk of being out of compliance or out of compliance with HLC requirements. In such cases, the institution may be placed on sanction, including Notice or Probation, or issued a Show-Cause Order, as applicable under HLC policy. The institution is then required to undergo additional evaluations to demonstrate that it has addressed the identified concern and is in compliance with HLC requirements. The institution remains accredited while it is on sanction or under a Show-Cause Order.

If an institution is found to be out of compliance with HLC requirements, HLC may also deny or withdraw the institution's candidacy or accreditation.

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 is updated to reflect the sanction.

HLC's Board of Trustees has sole decision-making authority whether to impose or remove a sanction, issue or remove a Show-Cause Order, or take an adverse action.

**Note:** For costs associated with sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and adverse actions, see HLC's Dues and Fees Schedule at [hlcommission.org/dues](https://hlcommission.org/dues).

## Sanctions

An institution may be placed on a sanction, either Notice or Probation, when HLC determines the institution does not meet, or is at risk of not meeting, the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance requirements, or Assumed Practices. Institutions on sanction maintain their accredited status during the period on 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 the Criteria for Accreditation. All institutions on Notice are placed on the Standard Pathway for the remainder of that 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 the Criteria for Accreditation. The institution may be required to host a Notice Visit to demonstrate that the areas of concern have been improved.

If the institution is no longer at risk of failing to meet the Criteria for Accreditation, the HLC Board of Trustees may remove it from Notice. If the institution is still at risk, or if the institution is no longer meeting the Criteria for Accreditation, another action may be taken in accordance with HLC policies, including extending Notice, placing on Probation, issuing a Show-Cause Order or withdrawing accreditation.

### Probation

An institution may be placed on Probation when it no longer meets one or more of the Criteria for Accreditation, Assumed Practices or Federal Compliance requirements. An institution on Probation is removed from its Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

The initial period for Probation is up to two years. Institutions on Probation undergo a comprehensive evaluation, which requires an Assurance Filing, Federal Compliance Filing and on-site visit, to provide evidence that the areas of concern have been ameliorated.

If the institution has addressed the areas of concern and meets all of the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance requirements and Assumed Practices, the HLC Board of Trustees may remove it from Probation. Following removal of Probation, the institution will be placed on the Standard Pathway. The institution will have a comprehensive evaluation to reaffirm accreditation no longer than four years after the removal of Probation, although the Board may set the reaffirmation date earlier.

If the institution still does not meet all of the HLC requirements, the Board may take another action, including extending Probation, issuing a Show-Cause Order or withdrawing accreditation.

## Show-Cause Order

An institution is issued a Show-Cause Order when it is not meeting the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance requirements or Assumed Practices to such an extent that HLC requires the institution to demonstrate why 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.

An institution issued a Show-Cause Order has no more than one year to demonstrate that it should maintain its accreditation. The institution submits a Show-Cause Report and hosts a Show-Cause Evaluation Visit to demonstrate that it meets all of the Criteria for Accreditation, all Federal Compliance requirements and all Assumed Practices.

Prior to the HLC Board of Trustees taking action on the Show-Cause Visit, HLC will make a Board Committee Hearing available to the institution.

If the HLC Board of Trustees determines the institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance requirements and Assumed Practices, it may remove the institution from Show-Cause. An institution removed from Show-Cause may be subject to sanctions or monitoring. If the institution has not demonstrated that it should maintain its accreditation, HLC may withdraw accreditation.



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/sanctions](https://hlcommission.org/sanctions)

## Adverse Actions

HLC has a limited number of adverse actions under its policies. Adverse actions are defined as decisions that:

- Withdraw or deny accreditation, unless the Board denies an early application for accreditation and continues candidacy.
- Withdraw or deny candidacy.

Per HLC's Appeals policy (INST.E.90.010), adverse actions are subject to appeal by the institution.

### Withdrawal or Denial of Accreditation

An institution's accreditation may be withdrawn if it does not meet one or more of the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance requirements, Assumed Practices, Eligibility Requirements or Obligations of Membership. Accreditation may also be withdrawn from an institution if it no longer operates as an educational institution or if its legal authorization to operate and grant degrees is terminated.

When the Board acts to withdraw an institution's accreditation, the institution remains accredited until the effective date of withdrawal. This date will not be before the conclusion of the current academic term inclusive of the institution's issuance of degrees immediately following such term.

An institution seeking accreditation with HLC may be denied accreditation if it is unable to meet one or more of the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance requirements, Assumed Practices, or Eligibility Requirements, or if it fails to meet the Obligations of Membership at any time during its candidacy period, if applicable.

### Withdrawal or Denial of Candidacy

An institution may be denied candidacy, or its candidacy may be withdrawn, 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.





# Decision-Making Bodies and Processes

Actions on HLC member institutions and institutions applying for membership with HLC are taken by decision-making bodies comprised of institutional representatives and public members. HLC's decision-making process ensures due process through multiple opportunities for institutions to respond to findings or recommendations, as well as transparency with the timely publication of all final actions.

## Decision-Making Bodies

Unless otherwise specified, the 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. Member institutions elect trustees to a four-year term, with an option to extend for subsequent two-year terms, for a total of no more than 12 years of service altogether (see the Board roster on page 6). One of every seven trustees is a representative of the public, and the others are broadly representative of HLC member institutions.

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 withdrawing 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. The Board of Trustees appoints and authorizes IAC members to serve four-year terms (see the IAC roster on page 7). Those members who represent institutions are also current members of the Peer Corps. Biographical information about IAC members is available upon request.

The IAC has the authority to act on the following cases:

- Substantive change cases
- Recommendations following interim monitoring
- Year 4 Standard and Open Pathway reviews
- Biennial evaluations
- Cases of reaffirmation of accreditation, including pathway placement

Some cases heard 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](https://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 Appeals Panel hears the case and has the authority to affirm, amend or remand the action of the Board.

## Decision-Making Process

**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.

The decision-making process begins once an evaluation concludes. A peer review report that includes a recommendation is submitted to an HLC decision-making body. Unless a case is required by policy to go directly to the Board of Trustees for consideration and action, most cases are sent to the IAC for final action or for a secondary review prior to action being taken by the Board of Trustees.

## 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.

## Institutional Actions Council

Each year the IAC reviews more than 1,000 cases in two settings:

- **IAC Meeting.** Meetings are held via webinar with a committee of IAC members. 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. Representatives from both the institution and peer review team, along with a committee of IAC members, are physically present at these hearings. The IAC hearing committee will make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees for final action.

A committee of IAC members is selected for each meeting and hearing; it is responsible for reading the entire record related to each case. Approximately every six weeks, IAC committees review cases in a meeting format. Hearings are timed to occur in advance of Board meetings.

An action taken by the IAC is a final action unless the case requires review by the Board of Trustees. If the case requires action by the Board, the IAC includes a recommendation with the report sent on to the Board of Trustees for final action.



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/decision-making](http://hlcommission.org/decision-making)

## 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 deny initial accreditation to an institution that has candidacy status, except where HLC is denying an application for early initial accreditation prior to the end of the four-year term of candidacy with a possible extension for a fifth year for good cause; to withdraw candidacy; to withdraw accreditation; 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.

## Action Letter

Approximately 14 days after a final action by the IAC or Board of Trustees, an Action Letter is sent to the institution. The Action Letter relays the final action to the institution.

## Appeals

An institution may appeal an adverse action of the Board of Trustees prior to the action becoming final by filing a written request to appeal following HLC's appeals procedures. 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.

New resource from HLC

# A Student Guide to Higher Education



 [studentguide.hlcommission.org](http://studentguide.hlcommission.org)

## *Helping students*

- Ask the right questions
- Define goals
- Find resources

### **The Guide has information on**

- Costs and finances
- Academic programs
- Campus life
- *And much more!*

### **The Guide is for everyone**

- Students
- Parents and families
- Military Veterans
- Adults returning to school

**Go to the Guide!** [studentguide.hlcommission.org](http://studentguide.hlcommission.org)

Higher  
Learning  
Commission 

# Programs and Events



Destiny M. Quintero, HLC Vice President of Education, Training and Events

# HLC's Academies

HLC's Academies are multi-year, mentor-facilitated programs that seek to help HLC-accredited institutions to define, develop and implement comprehensive strategies for institutional improvement.

Designed and led by experienced practitioners, the Academies provide a framework and guidance for an institution to address areas of concern and create a plan for improvement within the context of its mission, vision and goals. The programs are adaptive to the needs of the wide range of institutional types served by HLC and allow higher education professionals to connect with mentors and peers to share insights and promising practices.

## Assessment Academy

The Assessment Academy is tailored to help institutions develop an ongoing commitment to assessing and improving student learning. The Academy offers each institution personalized guidance in developing, documenting and implementing a systematic approach to institutional assessment. Institutions participating in the Assessment Academy are presented with new ideas and techniques for influencing institutional culture, increasing capacity to assess student learning and using assessment data to improve student learning.

## Student Success Academy

The Student Success Academy is designed for institutions seeking to establish sustainable structures that support students' achievement of their higher education goals. The Academy offers a structured program for institutions to understand their resources and priorities and the realities of their student populations. Working toward the development of a Student Success Plan, participating institutions will learn how to create campuswide engagement in supporting student success and embed student success

into the values and practices of the institution in order to help students, especially underserved populations, achieve their potential.

## Academy Features and Benefits

Throughout the multi-year Academy experience, institutions receive access to:

- Guidance from experienced Academy scholars and mentors on project development and progress.
- Facilitated, focused teamwork, workshop-style events.
- SparQ—an online platform for project management, resource sharing, discussion and discovery, where participants can be inspired by new ideas and build a community of shared learning.
- Opportunities to network and share insights with institutions from across the HLC membership.

## Applying to the Academies

The Academies are open to all institutions accredited by HLC. For more information, including application criteria and timelines, visit [hlcommission.org/academies](https://hlcommission.org/academies).



**Find It Online**

[hlcommission.org/academies](https://hlcommission.org/academies)



# Conference and Professional Development Events

HLC has continued to evaluate member needs and interests surrounding virtual and in-person programming and, as a result, has developed a new framework to strengthen the value of membership. With the new framework, HLC seeks to expand and diversify the way higher education professionals can access information, resources, and support for quality improvement. This includes updated formats for recurring programming and a growing library of on-demand trainings and resources. Explore current offerings below.

## Annual Conference

HLC's annual conference is one of the largest events of its kind in higher education, providing opportunities for members of the higher education community to learn information and promising practices from fellow practitioners and HLC staff. Attendees can also engage with featured speakers who are leading thinkers, researchers and advocates in the field.

### 2024 Annual Conference *Higher Ground: The Future of Higher Education*

**April 13–16, 2024 | Chicago**

The 2024 Annual Conference will explore the innovative ways higher education institutions continue to adapt and evolve in the changing landscape of the field, and the value that institutions provide to students and communities.

## Workshops and Seminars

HLC offers intensive, hands-on learning opportunities for higher education professionals, including

administrators, faculty and staff at HLC member or non-member institutions. Under the guidance of expert practitioners, participants develop and advance their practice as well as the quality of their institution.

Visit [hlcommission.org/workshops](https://hlcommission.org/workshops) to see the latest programs and sign up to be notified about scheduled events.

### Assessment of Student Learning Program Assessment Virtual Workshop

This interactive workshop is an opportunity for individuals to further their understanding of practical and meaningful assessment of student learning in academic programs. Through lecture, discussion and structured activities, participants gain the practical knowledge and skills to lead the development and implementation of a program assessment plan in their academic discipline. This workshop is designed for individual department chairs, academic program coordinators and faculty in programs without discipline-specific accreditation to inform program assessment practices.

Take your  
institution  
to a *whole*  
*new level.*



## **Assessing General Education Virtual Seminar Series**

In this seminar series, teams of faculty and staff members develop action plans to improve their general education assessment processes. Participants learn best practices for assessment of student learning in general education programs from experienced practitioners and critically review the structure, philosophy and perceptions of their institutions' existing practices.

## **Optimizing Cocurricular Assessment Virtual Workshop**

The seminar is intended for institutional representatives with fundamental assessment knowledge seeking to establish, integrate, and/or revitalize cocurricular assessment at their institution. The interactive format will provide perspectives, resources, and engagement opportunities to support effective cocurricular assessment and resulting application.

## **Strategy and Leadership**

### **Advancing Strategy Workshop**

A collaborative strategic planning approach leads to continuous quality improvement throughout the institution. This team-based, virtual workshop helps cross-functional groups of administrators design processes and use tools to improve the effectiveness of strategic planning efforts. Teams will leave the virtual workshop with tools and strategies they can use at their own institution to facilitate strategic planning and performance improvement

### **Effective Administrators Workshop**

This workshop offers strategies for improving efficiency in key higher education administrator competencies; including institutional effectiveness, planning and resource management. Designed for new and rising administrators taking on formal and informal leadership roles to support their unit and institution, the workshop offers a blend of presentation, application and small group activities.

## **Institutional Effectiveness Virtual Speaker Series**

This series spotlights emerging topics and trends in institutional effectiveness. The webinars will feature industry experts and institutional leaders, offering both the national and local perspective on strategies and promising practices in institutional effectiveness. Participants will gain exposure to information and resources that can aid in managing, analyzing and using institutional data.

## **Student Success**

### **Supporting Student Success Workshop**

In this hands-on workshop, attendees will examine common factors that affect student success. Facilitators will lead a series of activities to help attendees identify their institution's current realities and discover areas of opportunity for improving student success within their particular sphere of influence.

### **Designing Initiatives for Student Success Workshop**

This workshop supports intensive, focused planning around improving student success on campus. Participants will engage in activities to identify data and information gaps around who the institution serves and the success of its students. Teams will work to create and implement a strategy to help students achieve their educational goals.

## **Preparing for a Comprehensive Evaluation**

### **Collaborating on Quality**

This new team-based virtual workshop aims to support an institution's preparations for an upcoming comprehensive evaluation.

### **Standard Pathway Seminar**

Institutions on the Standard Pathway that are preparing for a comprehensive evaluation in the next two academic years can attend a virtual seminar on addressing improvement in the Assurance Argument. Invitations are sent to the Accreditation Liaison Officer, Assurance System Coordinator and Chief Academic Officer of eligible institutions. At the seminars, institutional teams develop strategies to demonstrate improvement within the Criteria for Accreditation.

### **Standard Pathway Q&A**

HLC invites institutions preparing for an upcoming Year 4 or Year 10 comprehensive evaluation to participate in an interactive webinar on the Standard Pathway. Hosted by HLC staff members, this webinar will allow participants an opportunity to ask questions about any topic related to the Standard Pathway, including the Assurance System, embedded improvement, monitoring, or other topics.



### **Find It Online**

[hlcommission.org/conference](https://hlcommission.org/conference)

[hlcommission.org/workshops](https://hlcommission.org/workshops)



# Accreditation Liaison Officer Resources and Training

To support the success of its institutions, HLC provides opportunities for training designed for Accreditation Liaison Officers (ALOs). Throughout the year, ALOs have access to an online orientation for new ALOs, webinars, and other events.

## ALO Orientation: An Introduction to the Role

### Fall and Summer Sessions Offered Annually

This six-week, self-paced orientation to the ALO role features a series of modules covering institutional accreditation and peer review, such as managing substantive change activities on your campus, communicating effectively with HLC, and executing regular data reporting to HLC. The orientation is hosted through SparQ, HLC's online platform for collaborative learning, resource sharing, discussion and discovery.

## Webinars and Online Resource Library

HLC offers live webinars on current relevant topics in accreditation and provides free access to pre-recorded webinars on the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance, teach-out requirements, and more. Upcoming and recorded webinars are available at [hlcommission.org/alo-training](https://hlcommission.org/alo-training).



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/alo-training](https://hlcommission.org/alo-training)

Training  
focused  
on *you*.







# Peer Reviewer Resources and Training

HLC provides training for new peer reviewers as well as webinars and resources for reviewers and team chairs to stay up-to-date on HLC's policies and procedures related to the accreditation process.

## In-Person Training

### Standard and Open Pathways Training for Peer Reviewers

This program provides an intensive training for new peer reviewers serving in the Peer Corps. By the end of the program, participants know how to review an institution's Assurance Argument, identify evidence, write solid evidence statements and work successfully with the team and chair to meet important deadlines in the process.

### Peer Review Updates and Training at the HLC Annual Conference

Current members of the Peer Corps receive specialized training from HLC staff on updates to HLC's policies and procedures as well as good practices for conducting and leading evaluations. Special training sessions will be offered for new team chairs, presidents, new Institutional Actions Council members, and substantive change reviewers and chairs.

## Webinars

### Pathways Refresher for Peer Reviewers

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

### Pathways Refresher for Team Chairs

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

### Criteria for Accreditation (Recorded)

These recorded webinars walk participants through each of the HLC Criteria for Accreditation, discussing their content, context and intent.



### Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/reviewer-training](https://hlcommission.org/reviewer-training)

In-person  
*and* virtual  
events.



# Resources



Patricia Newton-Curran, HLC Vice President of Systems and Accreditation Services

# Institutional Examples

## Accreditation Processes

The institutions listed below have agreed to share their recent experiences going through HLC evaluation processes. These are examples of how individual institutions have approached these processes 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. Representatives from these institutions also will be in attendance at the Accreditation Share Fair at the 2023 HLC Annual Conference March 25–28 to share their experiences in person.

### STANDARD PATHWAY

#### YEAR 4 COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION

##### Adams State University

###### Charles Nicholas Saenz

*Professor of History and Special Assistant to the President*  
[cnsaenz@adams.edu](mailto:cnsaenz@adams.edu) | 847.910.7078

##### College of DuPage

###### Faon Crystal

*Director Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes*  
[crystalf@cod.edu](mailto:crystalf@cod.edu) | 630.942.2266

##### University of Advancing Technology

###### Dave Bolman

*Provost*  
[dbolman@uat.edu](mailto:dbolman@uat.edu) | 602.383.8228

#### YEAR 10 COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION

##### Denver Seminary

###### David Hionides

*Director of Institutional Research  
and Educational Systems*  
[David.Hionides@denverseminary.edu](mailto:David.Hionides@denverseminary.edu)

##### National Louis University

###### Joe Levy

*Executive Director of Assessment and Accreditation*  
[jlevy2@nl.edu](mailto:jlevy2@nl.edu) | 312.261.3358  
<https://nl.edu/academics/higher-learning-commission-reaffirmation/>

## OPEN PATHWAY

### QUALITY INITIATIVE

#### **Southeast Community College Area**

**Shawna Herwick**

*Director of Accreditation, Assessment, and Planning*

[sherwick@southeast.edu](mailto:sherwick@southeast.edu) | 402.309.0555

<https://www.southeast.edu/quality-initiative/>

### YEAR 4 ASSURANCE REVIEW

#### **DePaul University**

**Caryn Chaden**

*Associate Provost for Student Success & Accreditation*

[cchaden@depaul.edu](mailto:cchaden@depaul.edu)

#### **University of Saint Francis**

**Carole Splendore**

*Director of Assessment and Accreditation*

[csplendore@sf.edu](mailto:csplendore@sf.edu) | 260.399.7700 ext. 8401

<https://accreditation.sf.edu/institutional-accreditation/>

#### **University of Minnesota Duluth**

**Jennifer Mencl**

*Associate Vice Chancellor, ALO*

[jmencl@d.umn.edu](mailto:jmencl@d.umn.edu)

### YEAR 10 COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION

#### **Adler University**

**Erika Bachner**

*Executive Assistant to the VP*

[ebachner@adler.edu](mailto:ebachner@adler.edu)

#### **Cornell College**

**Angie Bauman Power**

*Director of Institutional Effectiveness*

[ABaumanPower@cornellcollege.edu](mailto:ABaumanPower@cornellcollege.edu)

**Ilene Crawford**

*Provost/Vice President for Academic & Student Affairs*

[ICrawford@cornellcollege.edu](mailto:ICrawford@cornellcollege.edu)

#### **Henderson State University**

**Wrenette Tedder**

*Director of Assessment and Accreditation*

[tedderw@hsu.edu](mailto:tedderw@hsu.edu) | 870.230.5270

#### **Kalamazoo College**

**Danette Ifert Johnson**

*Provost*

[danette.johnson@kzoo.edu](mailto:danette.johnson@kzoo.edu)

#### **Mount Mary University**

**Karen Friedlen**

*Vice President for Academic Affairs*

[friedlek@mtmary.edu](mailto:friedlek@mtmary.edu)

## INTERIM REPORT

### **Chamberlain University**

**Chad O'Lynn**

*Accreditation Liaison Officer, Director of Assessment and Research Administration*

[colynn@chamberlain.edu](mailto:colynn@chamberlain.edu) | 503.319.7277

### FOCUSED VISIT

#### **St. Cloud Technical and Community College**

**Ken Matthews**

*Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness, Assessment, & Research*

[Kenneth.matthews@sctcc.edu](mailto:Kenneth.matthews@sctcc.edu)

### MULTI-LOCATION VISIT

#### **Black River Technical College**

**Sissy Gray**

*Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness*

[sissy.gray@blackrivertech.edu](mailto:sissy.gray@blackrivertech.edu)

#### **Milwaukee Area Technical College**

**Christine Manion**

*Vice President, Institutional Effectiveness*

[manionc@matc.edu](mailto:manionc@matc.edu)

## CHANGE OF CONTROL, STRUCTURE OR ORGANIZATION

### **Minnesota North College**

**Michael Raich**

*President*

[michael.raich@minnesotanorth.edu](mailto:michael.raich@minnesotanorth.edu) | 218.403.9220

### REMOVAL OF PROBATION

#### **Kansas City Kansas Community College**

**Jerry Pope**

*Vice President of Academic Affairs*

[jpope@kckcc.edu](mailto:jpope@kckcc.edu) | 913.288.7100

### SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE REQUEST

#### **Des Moines University – Osteopathic Medical Center**

*Type of change request: New main campus and new program*

**Amy Morris**

*Assistant Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness*

[amy.morris@dmu.edu](mailto:amy.morris@dmu.edu)

#### **John Carroll University**

*Type of change request: New program*

**Robert Todd Bruce**

*Assistant Provost for Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment*

[rbruce@jcu.edu](mailto:rbruce@jcu.edu)

### **Sisseton Wahpeton College**

**Lane Azure**

*President*

[lazure@swcollege.edu](mailto:lazure@swcollege.edu) | 605.742.1125

### **University of Arkansas at Monticello**

*Type of change request: New master's program*

**Daniel Boice**

*ALO and Library Director*

[boice@uamont.edu](mailto:boice@uamont.edu) | 870.460.1480

### **University of Wisconsin River Falls**

*Type of change request: New doctoral program*

**David Rask Behling**

*HLC Accreditation Coordinator, ALO*

[david.behling@uwrf.edu](mailto:david.behling@uwrf.edu) | 715.642.0109

<https://www.uwrf.edu/Montessori-EdD/>

## **HLC Academy Projects**

The institutions listed below have agreed to share their recent experiences going through HLC's Academies. HLC thanks the institutional representatives for their willingness to be listed in this resource. More information about each institution's Academy project also will be available at the Academy Poster Fair at the 2023 HLC Annual Conference.

### **Crowder College**

**Keith Zoromski**

*Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs*

[keithzoromski@crowder.edu](mailto:keithzoromski@crowder.edu)

### **East Central College**

**Susan Henderson**

*Director Assessment and Accreditation - Academic Affairs*

[shenderson@maryville.edu](mailto:shenderson@maryville.edu)

### **Jackson College**

**Christie Hughes**

*Associate Professor*

[hugheschristil@jccmi.edu](mailto:hugheschristil@jccmi.edu)

### **Southern State Community College**

**Jeff Montgomery**

*Dean of Technical Studies*

[jmontgo@sscc.edu](mailto:jmontgo@sscc.edu)

### **Belmont College**

**Jesse Gipko**

*Dean of Academic Affairs*

[jgipko@belmontcollege.edu](mailto:jgipko@belmontcollege.edu)

### **Eastern New Mexico University**

**Todd DeKay**

*Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness*

[todd.dekay@roswell.enmu.edu](mailto:todd.dekay@roswell.enmu.edu)

### **Hastings College**

**Jonas Prida**

*Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs*

[jonas.prida@hastings.edu](mailto:jonas.prida@hastings.edu)

### **Institute for Clinical Social Work**

**John Ridings**

*Faculty Institutional Researcher, IRB Chair*

[jridings@icsw.edu](mailto:jridings@icsw.edu)

### **Good Samaritan College of Nursing and Health Science**

**Terri Pullen**

*Dean, Institutional Effectiveness College Compliance Officer,*

*Title IX Coordinator*

[terri\\_pullen@trihealth.com](mailto:terri_pullen@trihealth.com)

### **Carl Albert State College**

**Kelly Kellogg**

*Institutional Effectiveness Officer/Assessment Outcome*

*Specialist*

[krkellogg@carlalbert.edu](mailto:krkellogg@carlalbert.edu)

### **College of Saint Scholastica**

**Aileen Beard**

*Dean of Sciences*

[rsandefe@css.edu](mailto:rsandefe@css.edu)

### **DeVry University**

**Andrea Dominguez**

*Dean, Colleges and Curriculum*

[adominguez@devry.edu](mailto:adominguez@devry.edu)





# Publications

## 2022–23 White Papers

[hlcommission.org/papers](https://hlcommission.org/papers)

### Growing With Data: A Partnership With the National Student Clearinghouse

HLC presents the findings from the first phase of its data partnership with the National Student Clearinghouse, in which the Clearinghouse provided HLC with student outcome metrics reported by HLC member institutions in aggregate for use as existing HLC benchmarks.

### HLC Membership by the Numbers

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

### Postsecondary Education in Prison Programs and Accreditation—General Considerations for Peer Reviewers and Accreditors

HLC collaborated with the Vera Institute of Justice on this guidebook for accreditors and their peer reviewers, providing insight into the unique context and goals of postsecondary education in correctional facilities.

### The Role of Equity in Quality Assurance

The HLC Peer Corps Committee on Diversity provides recommendations to HLC on the role of equity in quality assurance: how institutions demonstrate alignment to standards and their stated mission and goals, measure and assess the commitment, and show progress and continuous improvement.

### Trends in Higher Education

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.

## Guidelines on Accreditation Requirements

[hlcommission.org/guidelines](https://hlcommission.org/guidelines)

### Determining Qualified Faculty

HLC's *Determining Qualified Faculty* provides guidance to institutions and peer reviewers in evaluating the qualifications of faculty, including full-time, part-time, adjunct, temporary and/or non-tenure-track faculty. 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

*Dual Credit Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviewers* offers 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 programs are reviewed during an institution's comprehensive evaluation, but also 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. HLC's guidelines highlight the Criteria and Assumed Practices relevant for these institutions.

## 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.

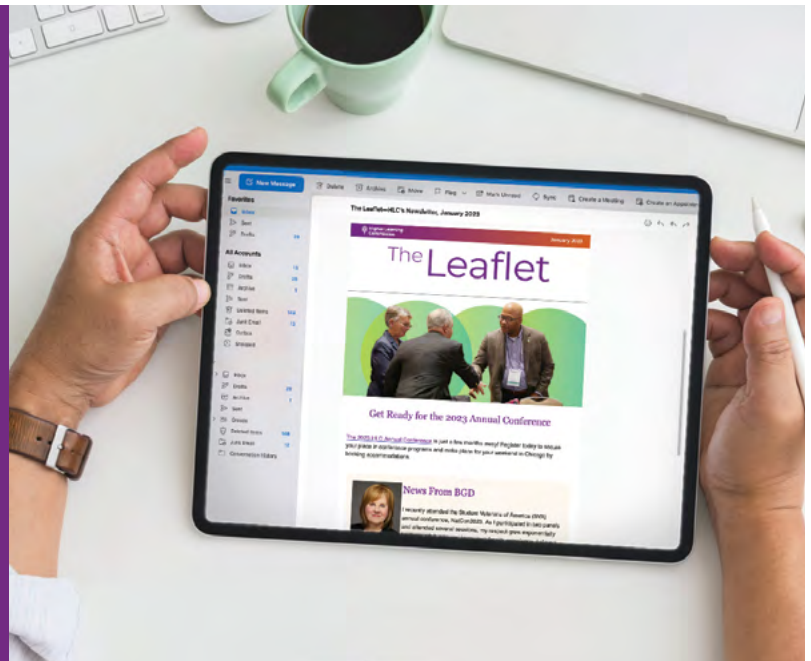
## Personally Identifiable Information Submitted to HLC

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 Newsletter

[hlcommission.org/leaflet](https://hlcommission.org/leaflet)

The Leaflet is a snapshot of the work HLC does to fulfill its mission. Published six times a year, it provides updates, news and resources regarding HLC, accreditation and the higher education industry. This includes information on proposed and adopted policies, new or updated procedures, professional development and training opportunities, profiles on members of the HLC community, information about HLC's outreach and advocacy efforts, and much more.





# HLC's Online Systems

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

## Canopy

[canopy.hlcommission.org](http://canopy.hlcommission.org)

Canopy is the central location for HLC member institutions and peer reviewers to view and update their records with HLC.

Institutional representatives use the system to keep track of their accreditation relationship, manage information about branch campuses, additional locations and other institutional records, and complete the annual Institutional Update.

Peer reviewers and Institutional Actions Council members use Canopy to manage their profile information and respond to invitations to serve on a team, panel or committee. Peer reviewers also use the system to complete virtual panel reviews, and IAC members access materials for meetings and hearings.

### **System details and training resources:**

[hlcommission.org/canopy](http://hlcommission.org/canopy)

**User support:** [hlcommission.org/canopy-help](http://hlcommission.org/canopy-help)

## Assurance System

[assurance.hlcommission.org](http://assurance.hlcommission.org)

The Assurance System facilitates the creation, submission and review of materials for comprehensive evaluations and Assurance Reviews.

Institutional representatives use the system to prepare their Assurance Filing, which demonstrates the institution's compliance with HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and other requirements. HLC peer reviewers evaluate Assurance Filings and submit their reports and recommendations in the system.

### **System details and training resources:**

[hlcommission.org/assurance-system](http://hlcommission.org/assurance-system)

**User support:** [hlcommission.org/assurance-help](http://hlcommission.org/assurance-help)

## SparQ

[sparq.hlcommission.org](http://sparq.hlcommission.org)

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

**User support:** [hlcommission.org/sparq-help](http://hlcommission.org/sparq-help)



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# Quick Links

## HLC Policies

All policies

[hlcommission.org/policies](https://hlcommission.org/policies)

Proposed Policy Changes

[hlcommission.org/proposed-policies](https://hlcommission.org/proposed-policies)

Adopted Policy Changes

[hlcommission.org/adopted-policies](https://hlcommission.org/adopted-policies)

## HLC Requirements

Eligibility Requirements

[hlcommission.org/eligibility-requirements](https://hlcommission.org/eligibility-requirements)

Criteria for Accreditation

[hlcommission.org/criteria](https://hlcommission.org/criteria)

Assumed Practices

[hlcommission.org/assumed-practices](https://hlcommission.org/assumed-practices)

Federal Compliance Requirements

[hlcommission.org/federal](https://hlcommission.org/federal)

Obligations of Membership

[hlcommission.org/obligations](https://hlcommission.org/obligations)

## Accreditation Status

Directory of Institutions (search to find an institution's Statement of Accreditation Status)

[hlcommission.org/directory](https://hlcommission.org/directory)

Request a Letter From HLC To

Verify Accreditation Status

[hlcommission.org/letter-request](https://hlcommission.org/letter-request)

## Accreditation Resources

Accreditation Liaison Officer Role

[hlcommission.org/alo](https://hlcommission.org/alo)

Accreditation Liaison Officer Training Resources

[hlcommission.org/alo-training](https://hlcommission.org/alo-training)

Comprehensive Evaluation

[hlcommission.org/comprehensive](https://hlcommission.org/comprehensive)

Dues and Fees Schedule

[hlcommission.org/dues](https://hlcommission.org/dues)

Federal Compliance

[hlcommission.org/federal-compliance](https://hlcommission.org/federal-compliance)

Financial and Non-financial Indicators

[hlcommission.org/indicators](https://hlcommission.org/indicators)

Focused Visit

[hlcommission.org/focused-visit](https://hlcommission.org/focused-visit)

Institutional Update

[hlcommission.org/update](https://hlcommission.org/update)

Interim Report

[hlcommission.org/interim-report](https://hlcommission.org/interim-report)

Monitoring

[hlcommission.org/monitoring](https://hlcommission.org/monitoring)

Off-Campus Activities

[hlcommission.org/locations](https://hlcommission.org/locations)

Open Pathway

[hlcommission.org/open](https://hlcommission.org/open)

Sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and Adverse Actions

[hlcommission.org/sanctions](https://hlcommission.org/sanctions)

Seeking Accreditation

[hlcommission.org/seeking-accreditation](https://hlcommission.org/seeking-accreditation)

Standard Pathway

[hlcommission.org/standard](https://hlcommission.org/standard)

Substantive Change

[hlcommission.org/change](https://hlcommission.org/change)

## Online Systems

Assurance System

[assurance.hlcommission.org](https://assurance.hlcommission.org)

Assurance System Details and User Support

[hlcommission.org/assurance-system](https://hlcommission.org/assurance-system)

Canopy

[canopy.hlcommission.org](https://canopy.hlcommission.org)

Canopy Details and User Support

[hlcommission.org/canopy](https://hlcommission.org/canopy)

Online Bill Payment

[epay.hlcommission.org](https://epay.hlcommission.org)

## Peer Review

Become a Peer Reviewer  
[hlcommission.org/peer](https://hlcommission.org/peer)

Peer Reviewer Training Resources  
[hlcommission.org/reviewer-training](https://hlcommission.org/reviewer-training)

Team and Panel Report Templates and Guidelines  
[hlcommission.org/team-resources](https://hlcommission.org/team-resources)

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Assurance System  
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Assurance System Details and User Support  
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Canopy  
[canopy.hlcommission.org](https://canopy.hlcommission.org)

Canopy Details and User Support  
[hlcommission.org/canopy](https://hlcommission.org/canopy)

SAP Concur  
[concur.com](https://concur.com)

## Decision Making

Decision-Making Bodies and Processes  
[hlcommission.org/decision-making](https://hlcommission.org/decision-making)

Recent Institutional Actions  
[hlcommission.org/actions](https://hlcommission.org/actions)

## News and Reports

EVOLVE 2025 Strategic Plan  
[hlcommission.org/strategic-plan](https://hlcommission.org/strategic-plan)

Guidelines on Accreditation Requirements  
[hlcommission.org/guidelines](https://hlcommission.org/guidelines)

Leaflet  
[hlcommission.org/leaflet](https://hlcommission.org/leaflet)

White Papers  
[hlcommission.org/papers](https://hlcommission.org/papers)

## Education and Training

Academies  
[hlcommission.org/academies](https://hlcommission.org/academies)

Accreditation Liaison Officer Training Resources  
[hlcommission.org/alo-training](https://hlcommission.org/alo-training)

Annual Conference  
[hlcommission.org/conference](https://hlcommission.org/conference)

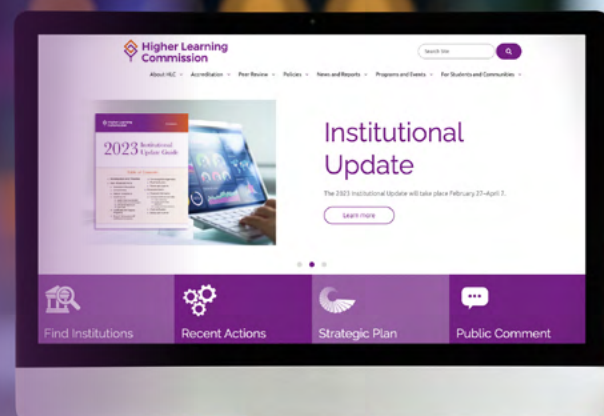
Calendar of Events  
[hlcommission.org/calendar](https://hlcommission.org/calendar)

Peer Reviewer Training Resources  
[hlcommission.org/reviewer-training](https://hlcommission.org/reviewer-training)

SparQ  
[sparq.hlcommission.org](https://sparq.hlcommission.org)

Workshops and Seminars  
[hlcommission.org/workshops](https://hlcommission.org/workshops)

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need us,  
we're there.





# Glossary of HLC Terminology

This glossary offers definitions for words and phrases that are commonly used in HLC's policies, procedures and communications.

## Accreditation

### **academic program**

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

### **accreditation agency**

A nongovernmental body established to administer accrediting procedures.

### **accreditation, institutional**

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

### **Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)**

The individual appointed by the institution's CEO to serve as the 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, specialized (also called program 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 facility that is geographically apart from the main campus, 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 percent of the courses leading to the degree).

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

There is no base or threshold number of students or distance from the campus necessary for a facility to qualify as an additional location under this definition.

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 considered 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.

An additional location has active status when students are enrolled. Its status is inactive when students are not enrolled. The status can change between active and inactive without approval from HLC. However, a location may only be classified as inactive with no student enrollment for a maximum of two consecutive years. At that point, HLC will require 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.

### **adverse action**

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

### **administrative record**

A record of documents related to an institution's accreditation relationship with HLC. HLC will maintain an administrative record for each member institution, institution that was



## Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/glossary](https://hlcommission.org/glossary)

previously a member, and institution that is, or was, seeking membership. The administrative record includes the following:

- 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.

#### **advisory visit**

In response to rapidly changing dynamics at an institution, HLC may send a team of peer reviewers to visit the institution. HLC determines the scope of the team's inquiry and informs the institution.

#### **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.

#### **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 Argument Improvement Plan Feedback**

In the academic year preceding the comprehensive evaluation, institutions on the Standard Pathway may submit an improvement plan for feedback. The institution's HLC staff liaison provides comments intended to clarify expectations regarding the issues to be addressed within the Assurance Argument.

#### **Assurance Filing**

Created and submitted by the institution, the 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.

#### **Board of Trustees**

The governing body of HLC, made up of 15 to 21 representatives from HLC member institutions and the public.

#### **campus/branch campus (Same as federal definition)**

An additional location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus of the institution. HLC considers a location of an institution to be independent of the main campus if the location 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.

#### **campus evaluation visit**

A visit to a new campus or branch 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 with HLC.

#### **candidate institution**

An institution that holds candidacy status 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. The comprehensive evaluation includes an Assurance Review, an on-site visit, a student survey and a multi-campus visit, if applicable. Comprehensive evaluations for candidacy,

initial accreditation and Reaffirmation of Accreditation also include a Federal Compliance Review.

### **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.

#### **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 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 facility that is geographically apart from the main campus 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.

### **Criteria for Accreditation**

The framework for determining an institution's 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 listed 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**

An academic program offered in whole or in part through distance education, regardless of whether a face-to-face, on-ground or residential option is also available.

#### **dual credit courses**

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

#### **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.

- 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)” and “academic program(s).”

### **Eligibility Filing**

Documentation submitted by an institution considering membership with HLC that demonstrates that it meets the Eligibility Requirements.

### **Eligibility Process**

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.

### **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**

Financial data provided by an institution through the Institutional Update that allow HLC to determine if the institution is operating with integrity in its financial functions.

### **focused visit**

A team visit that occurs between comprehensive evaluations to examine specific aspects of an institution as a form of special monitoring.

### **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.

### **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)**

HLC’s decision-making body made up of experienced peer reviewers and representatives of the public.

### **institutional response**

An institution’s written response to a peer review team or Institutional Actions Council recommendation.

### **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 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, the Criteria for Accreditation.

### **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.)

### **large institution**

An institution with 1,000 students or more.

### **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.

### **multi-campus visit**

A visit to a selection of an institution’s branch campuses that occurs as part of comprehensive evaluations that are conducted when an institution applies for candidacy and initial accreditation and during Years 4 and 10 of the Standard Pathway and Year 10 of the Open Pathway.

### **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**

Data provided by an institution through the Institutional Update that help HLC determine if the institution may be at risk of not meeting components of the Criteria for Accreditation.

**Notice**

A sanction signifying an institution is pursuing a course of action that could result in its being unable to meet one or more of the Criteria for Accreditation.

**Notification Program for Additional Locations**

A program for qualified institutions to open new additional locations as defined in the institution's Statement of Accreditation Status 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.

**official action**

An official HLC decision made by the 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.

**Obligations of Membership**

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

**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 Peer Corps.

**personally identifiable information (PII)**

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

**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.

**Probation**

A sanction signifying that an institution no longer meets one or more of the Criteria for Accreditation. While on probation, an institution remains accredited.

**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 Plan**

A plan that details the arrangements an institution makes for students when it intends to cease operating as an educational institution or when it undergoes other circumstances that require a Teach-Out Agreement. Whether the institution is closing entirely or closing campus(es) or additional location(s), if it has students pursuing academic programs who will not conclude their programs prior to the closure date, then the Provisional Plan will need to include arrangements for teaching out of those students so that they can complete their academic programs. If the institution is prepared to stay open or keep the branch campus(es) or additional location(s) open and if it will continue to have sufficient resources, it may teach out those students that are within one year of graduation and assist other students in transferring to other institutions. If it does not have sufficient resources to accommodate current students through graduation or transfer, it must enlist the assistance of one or more other accredited institutions to serve as a teach-out receiving institution through a Teach-Out Agreement.

**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 on 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.

**Quality Initiative**

A major quality improvement effort conducted by institutions between Years 5 and 9 of the Open Pathway that addresses a current concern or aspiration specific to the institution.

**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. An institution that has lost legal authority to operate as an institution of higher education cannot be reaffirmed.

**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.

**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.

**Show-Cause Order**

An order by HLC's Board of Trustees requiring an institution to show cause as to why its accredited status should not be removed.

**significant enrollment growth**

A three-year increase of 80% or more in enrollment for small institutions or 40% or more for large institutions.

**significant enrollment decrease**

A three-year decrease of 80% or more in enrollment for small institutions or 40% or more for large institutions.

**small institution**

An institution with fewer than 1,000 students.

**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**

Conditions placed on an institution's development of new activities or programs.

**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.

**teach out/teach-out arrangement (Same as federal definition)**

A process during which a program, institution or institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program engages 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.

**Teach-Out Agreement (Based on federal definition)**

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. May also refer to written agreements made between an institution subject to teach-out requirements 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.

**teach-out plan (Same as federal definition)**

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. Synonymous with HLC's use of the term "Provisional Plan."

**teach-out receiving institution**

An institutional signatory to a teach-out agreement with an institution required to submit a Provisional Plan. The teach-out receiving institution agrees, at a minimum, by virtue of its participation in the teach out to accept all the credits earned by students affected by the closure, to count those credits toward a reasonably similar certificate or degree from their institution, and to award a certificate or degree to the students participating in the teach out in approximately the same amount of time the students would have needed to complete their studies.

**team chair**

The leader of a peer review team, who handles communication with the institution and HLC on behalf of the team.



## team report

A report submitted by the peer review team to HLC documenting its findings and recommendation following an evaluation.

## Criteria for Accreditation

The following definitions explain how these terms are used within the Criteria for Accreditation. 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 the Criteria. This glossary is not part of the Criteria policy and will be updated as needed to respond to questions and feedback from institutions and peer reviewers.

### 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, athletics, honor societies, career services, 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 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.

### dual credit (3.C., 4.A.)

Courses taught to high school students for which the students receive both high school credit and college credit. These courses or programs are offered under a variety of names; the Core Components that refer to "dual credit" apply to all of them as they involve the accredited institution's responsibility for the quality of its offerings.

### 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.

## HLC’s Academies

**Academies**

Multi-year, mentor-facilitated programs that help HLC-accredited institutions define, develop and implement comprehensive strategies for institutional improvement. See also Academies.

**Academy cohort**

Institutions taking part in an Academy are grouped together in cohorts that complete the Academy experience together.

**Academy mentors**

A group of trained individuals with expertise in Academy topics, who facilitate team thinking throughout the Academy experience.

**Academy Project**

A multi-faceted project focused on initiating, implementing and evaluating change related to assessment or student success. Academy teams can undertake one or more projects

while participating, but it is advisable for teams to focus on one project at a time.

**Academy Roundtable**

A multi-day event at which Academy teams conduct focused, guided work on their strategic Academy Projects and goals.

**Academy team**

Faculty, staff and administrators from an institution who conceptualize, design and implement the institution’s Academy Project.

**Academy team lead**

A member of the Academy team who serves as the main point of contact for the Member Education and Training staff, Mentor and Scholar.

**Assessment Academy**

A four-year program of in-person and virtual events tailored for institutions interested in developing an ongoing commitment to assessing and improving student learning.

**Consolidated Response**

The combined feedback from an Academy team’s Mentor and a Scholar to the team’s Project Update in SparQ.

**Event Facilitator**

A 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 cycle, summarizing the trends that occurred throughout the project and detailing the outcomes.

**Inventory (Student Success Academy)**

A process of collecting and evaluating institutional data related to student populations, student success initiatives, institutional policies and procedures, or staff and faculty engagement in student success.

**Letter of Agreement**

A document signed by the institution’s president and HLC’s president outlining the expectations of each party throughout the Academy experience.

**Mentor**

An experienced practitioner in assessing student learning and/or student success who is assigned to guide particular Academy teams for the duration of their participation in the Academy. The role of the Mentor is to facilitate team thinking and a project-based approach to addressing assessment or student success. The Academy team’s Mentor is responsible for completing the Response to each Project Update.

**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 Project Update in SparQ.

**Midpoint Roundtable (Assessment Academy)**

A multi-day event where Academy teams reflect on and evaluate their progress, refine their Academy Projects, and receive in-person mentoring.

**Orientation**

An event presented by HLC to prepare the institutional representatives heading the Academy effort to assemble and lead an effective Academy team.

**Project Updates**

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**

A subject-matter expert on the topic of assessment of student learning and/or student success contracted by HLC to offer additional guidance to Academy teams on their Project Updates.

**Senior Scholar**

A subject-matter expert contracted by HLC to consult on the design of the curriculum and activities for all Academy components and to offer additional comments on Project Updates.

**SparQ**

The online tool for project management, resource sharing, discussion and discovery. Academy teams document progress, receive Mentor and Scholar feedback, share new ideas and build a community of shared learning.

**Stewardship Forum (Student Success Academy)**

A multi-day event at the end of the Academy cycle where teams share their accomplishments and findings, compare practices and benchmarks, and define strategies to sustain their student success efforts.

**Student Success Academy**

A multi-year program designed to aid institutions in the development of a comprehensive Student Success Plan that creates campus-wide engagement in supporting student success and establishes sustainable structures that support students' achievement of their higher education goals.

**Student Success Plan**

A draft plan created by the Academy team to address gaps in the institution's data, initiatives, infrastructure and engagement that will guide the institution in systematically improving student success.

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