

# Distance Education

Substantive Change Application

Institution:       City, State:

Name of person completing this application:

Title:       Phone:       Email:

Date Submitted:

This completed form will constitute your request for approval of a substantive change. This form will be the basis for review of this application. The questions are designed to elicit brief, succinct, detailed information, rather than a narrative or references to extensive supporting documents. Do not attach other documents unless they are specifically requested in the questions and are germane to the request. Excluding attachments, the completed application form should be no more than 12–15 pages on a single classification of change. The total submission, including attachments, should not exceed 200 pages.  
  
If the person completing this application is not the CEO, CAO or the Accreditation Liaison Officer of the institution, it is understood that the person completing and submitting this application has consulted with and informed those individuals and has been authorized to submit this form on the institution's behalf.  
  
Please note: HLC plans to update its application forms annually, on or about September 1 of each year. However, if an application form was accessed more than 90 days prior to filing, please visit [hlcommission.org/change](https://www.hlcommission.org/change) to ensure that there have been no changes to the form in the intervening time.  
  
Submit the completed application as a single PDF file at [hlcommission.org/upload](https://www.hlcommission.org/upload). Select “Change Requests” from the list of submission options to ensure the application is sent to the correct HLC staff member.

## Part 1: General Questions

1. **Requested Change(s).** Concisely describe the change for which the institution is seeking approval.
2. **Does another characteristic of the change requested in this application also require prior HLC approval?** (Example: contractual arrangement, new academic program, new additional location, etc.)

No

Yes

If yes, please briefly explain the second type of substantive change requiring prior HLC approval and submit the relevant application form separately (or indicate the date on which it was submitted):

1. **Classification of Change Request.***Note: not every substantive change requires prior review and approval. Visit* [*hlcommission.org/change*](https://www.hlcommission.org/change) *to make certain that current HLC policy requires the institution to seek approval.*

**Approval to offer distance education courses and multiple programs, based on the following threshold(s). Select all that apply:**

**Students:** The institution plans toenroll at least 50% of its students in distance education.

The U.S. Department of Education considers a student “enrolled in distance education if the student enrolls in at least one course offered through distance education.” (See Dear Colleague Letter Gen-23-09, published May 18, 2023.)

**Courses:** The institution plans tooffer at least 50% of courses through distance education.

**Programs:** The institution plans tooffer at least 50% of an educational credential (degree or certificate) through distance education.

Note: If the institution is offering distance education for the first time as a new mode of instruction and such instruction is limited to courses, such that the other thresholds above are not implicated, do not complete this application. The institution should instead complete HLC’s [Survey on Distance-Delivered Courses](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/survey-on-distance-delivered-courses.html).

An institution submitting more than one change request should complete multiple applications, one for each type of change. Change requests may be related to the following topics:

• [New academic programs](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-academic-programs.html), including degree and certificate programs

• [New Pell-eligible prison education programs](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-pell-eligible-prison-education-programs.html) (also referred to as PEPs)

• [Changes to existing academic programs](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-clock-credit-hours-program-content-and-length-of-term.html) involving credit/clock hours, method of delivery

or length of term

• Opening or closing [additional locations or branch campuses](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-off-campus-activities.html)

• [Provisional Plans](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/provisional-plans-and-teach-outs.html) (with or without Teach-Out Agreements, as applicable)

• [Teach-Out Agreement](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/provisional-plans-and-teach-outs.html) if closing a campus or additional location that provides 100% of at least   
 one program

• Access to HLC’s [Notification Program for Additional Locations](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-off-campus-activities.html)

• Initiating or expanding [distance education offerings](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-distance-or-correspondence-education.html)

• Initiating or expanding [correspondence education offerings](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-distance-or-correspondence-education.html)

• Offering programs through [competency-based education](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-competency-based-education.html) (credit-based, direct assessment

or hybrid)

• Initiating or modifying [contractual arrangements](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-contractual-arrangements.html)

• Change in [mission](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-mission-or-student-body.html)

• Change in [student body](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-mission-or-student-body.html)

1. **Special conditions.** Indicate whether any of the conditions identified below fit the institution (Yes or No). If Yes, explain the situation in the space provided.
2. Is the institution, in its relations with other institutional or specialized accrediting agencies, currently under or recommended for a negative status or action (e.g., withdrawal, probation, sanction, warning, show-cause, etc.)?
3. Is the institution now undergoing or facing substantial monitoring, special review, or financial restrictions from the U.S. Dept. of Education or other federal or state government agencies?
4. Has the institution’s senior leadership or board membership experienced substantial resignations or removals in the past year?
5. Is the institution experiencing other pressures that might affect its ability to implement the proposal (e.g., a collective bargaining dispute or a significant lawsuit)?
6. **Internal Approvals.** Attach documentation of internal (faculty, board) approvals that the institution has obtained for the proposed change. **All required approvals must be obtained before submitting the application to HLC.** If no approval is required, attach evidence that approval is not needed (e.g. applicable regulation, statute, or correspondence).
7. **State Approvals.** Attach documentation of state approvals that the institution has obtained for the proposed change. **All required approvals must be obtained before submitting the application to HLC.** If no approval is required, attach evidence that approval is not needed (e.g. applicable regulation, statute, or correspondence).
8. **System Approvals.** If applicable, attach documentation of system approval that the institutions has obtained for the proposed change. **All required approvals must be obtained before submitting the application to HLC.** If no approval is required, attach evidence that approval is not needed (e.g. applicable regulation, statute, or correspondence). Check the box below if the institution is not part of a system.

Not Applicable

1. **Foreign Country Approval(s).** If applicable, attach documentation of foreign country approval(s) that the institution has obtained for the proposed change. Documentation must be written in or translated to English. **All required approvals must be obtained before submitting the application to HLC.** If no approval is required, attach evidence that approval is not needed. Check the box below if the proposed change is not related to offerings in a foreign country.

Not Applicable

1. **Specialized Accreditation.** Complete this section only if specialized accreditation is required for licensure or practice in program(s) covered by this change application.

The institution has already obtained the appropriate specialized accreditation. Attach a copy of the letter from the agency granting accreditation.

The institution has begun the process of seeking or plans to seek specialized accreditation. Specify the name of the agency and the timeline for completing the process in the space below. (If approval is a multi-stage process, the institution should contact the HLC staff liaison to discuss the timeline before submitting this change application form.)

The institution does not plan to seek specialized accreditation. Provide a rationale for not seeking this accreditation in the space below.

1. **Changes Requiring Visits.** This section is not for HLC-mandated visits such as additional location confirmation visits or campus evaluation visits.

Complete this section only if the institution is already aware that the proposed change will need to be reviewed through a visit. The institution may submit Part 1 of the change request application to begin the process of scheduling a Change Visit or adding the proposed change to an already scheduled visit. The full application must be submitted at a later date. (If the institution is unsure whether a visit is required, leave this section blank and submit the full change application. HLC will advise the institution based on the information provided.)

1. Select the type of visit the institution is requesting:

Request to schedule a Change Visit.

Change Visits typically are scheduled approximately four months from the date an institution submits its change request. The full change application and other required materials will be due to HLC and the peer review team eight weeks before the visit date. See [Change Visit: Required Materials and Submission Procedures](https://www.hlcommission.org/change-visit) for more information.

Request to embed a Change Visit into an already scheduled visit.

**Note:** Such requests must be submitted at least six months before the visit date. HLC staff will determine whether to embed a Change Visit based on peer reviewer availability and the complexity of the scheduled visit, among other factors. HLC may not be able to accommodate all requests.

Specify type of visit and date scheduled:

The institution’s full change application should be submitted along with other materials required for the already scheduled visit.

1. Provide URLs to the institution’s Faculty/Staff Handbook and Catalog below. If the URLs are not available, please provide PDF versions of these documents when submitting other required materials prior to the visit.

Faculty/Staff Handbook URL:

Catalog URL:

## Part 2: Topic-Specific Questions

Note: This form is for seeking HLC approval to offer distance education courses and multiple programs. For approval of distance education courses that comprise **up to 49%** of the institution’s curriculum, but which do not constitute a certificate or degree program, please complete HLC’s [Survey on Distance-Delivered Courses](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/survey-on-distance-delivered-courses.html).

### Section A. Characteristics of the Change Requested

1. Which of the following describe the institution’s planned distance education offerings? Select all that apply.

**Students:** The institution plans toenroll at least 50% of its students in at least one distance education course.

**Courses:** The institution plans tooffer at least 50% of courses through distance education.

**Programs:** The institution plans tooffer at least 50% of an educational credential (degree or certificate) through distance education.

1. Briefly describe the changes the institution is planning. For example, describe (1) how the institution intends to reach the threshold of 50% of students enrolled in distance education; (2) how it intends to reach the threshold of 50% of courses offered through distance education; and/or (3) the program(s) that the institution intends to offer 50% or more through distance education.
2. If applicable, include a list of all proposed certificate and degree programs planned in the initiation or expansion of distance education. For each degree program or certificate:
   1. Indicate the [*Classification of Instructional Programs* terminology](http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/) [2020 CIP codes, program name, and additional description (optional)]. CIP codes are established by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics.
   2. Specify the program level.
   3. Specify all modalities of delivery: (i) internet; (ii) one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite or wireless communications devices; (iii) audio conferencing; (iv) and/or other media used in conjunction with the technologies listed in items (i)–(iii).
   4. Identify date the offerings will be launched (MM/DD/YYYY).
3. Does the institution have any contractual arrangements in relationship to the intended distance education? (See [definition of contractual arrangement](http://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/contractual-arrangements.html).)

No

Yes

**Important:** If yes, complete the [Contractual Arrangement Screening Form](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/contractual-arrangements-screening-form.html) for each planned involvement to determine whether additional HLC approval is required.

* **If contractual approval is required:** Complete the full contractual application and submit it in conjunction with this application.
* **If approval is not required:** Attach the confirmation email from HLC to this application.

1. Does the institution have any consortial arrangements that support its intended delivery of distance education? (See [HLC’s Glossary](https://www.hlcommission.org/General/glossary.html) for a definition of consortial arrangement.)

No

Yes

If yes, please describe the consortial arrangement:

1. What organizational structures are in place to ensure effective oversight, implementation and management of the institution’s distance education offerings?
2. Does the institution have a separately identified organizational unit for providing or marketing the distance education offerings?

No

Yes

If yes, please explain how this separate unit coordinates with other academic and administrative units across the institution to ensure the consistency and quality of offerings.

### Section B. Institution’s History With Distance Education Offerings

1. Briefly describe the institution’s experience with distance education offerings.
2. What is the institution’s experience, if any, in collaborating with other institutions or organizations to provide distance education?
3. If approved for distance education, what future growth does the institution anticipate (e.g., in the next one to three years) and how does the institution plan to manage this growth?
4. Does the institution have a process in place to ascertain and secure state approval(s) as required?

Yes

No

If no, explain below:

### Section C. Institutional Planning for Distance Education Offerings

1. What impact might the proposed initiation or expansion of distance education offering(s) have on challenges identified as part of or subsequent to the institution’s last HLC review and how has the institution addressed the challenge(s)?
2. Briefly describe the planning process for the distance education request made in this application, including the involvement of the various constituencies in that process, the management of distance education offerings, and how the management of distance education fits into the institution’s organizational structure.
3. What controls are in place to ensure that the information presented to all the constituencies in advertising, brochures and other communications will be accurate?

### Section D. Curriculum and Instructional Design

1. How does the institution ensure good instructional design in its distance education offerings? How are the institution’s faculty and quality control mechanisms involved in the instructional design process?
2. What processes and procedures will the institution use for technology maintenance, upgrades, back up and remote services, and for communicating changes in software, hardware or technical systems to students and faculty?
3. How does the institution ensure that it provides convenient, reliable, and timely services to students or faculty needing technical assistance, and how does it communicate information about these services?
4. If the institution is planning partnerships or agreements with external organizations or institutions as identified in Questions 4 and 5, how will the institution ensure that students can use these services effectively?

### Section E. Institutional Staffing, Faculty, and Student Support

1. How does the institution staff its distance education offerings? How does this differ from the institution’s processes for staffing offerings through other modalities?
2. What is the institution’s process for selecting, training and orienting faculty for distance education? What special professional development, support or released time does the institution provide for faculty who teach distance education offerings?
3. How does the institution assure copyright compliance and keep distance education faculty aware of institutional policies on using others’ intellectual property?
4. How does the institution ensure that distance education students have access to necessary student and support services (e.g., institutional information, application for admission, registration, tutoring or academic support, advising, financial aid, tuition payment, career counseling and placement, library resources, complaint processes)? How does the institution provide them information about using these services, and how does it monitor and evaluate their use of these services?
5. What is the institution’s student identity verification protocol? Describe the institution's process for determining the effectiveness of the protocol described.
6. How does the institution ensure both regular and substantive interaction between faculty and students engaged in distance education? (See [HLC’s Glossary](https://www.hlcommission.org/General/glossary.html) for a definition of regular and substantive interaction.)
7. Describe in detail how the institution ensures faculty are proactively engaging students in teaching, learning and assessment activity consistent with academic content under discussion in their programs (including, for example, core ideas, important theories, current knowledge in the discipline, critical thinking, analytical skills, written and oral communication abilities). Describe the manner in which faculty respond to questions from students about academic content of the program.
8. How does the institution ensure substantive interaction occurs on a regularly scheduled and predictable basis appropriate for the education offerings? What are the responsibilities of faculty in that interaction? What are the responsibilities of students?

### Section F. Evaluation

1. Describe the process for monitoring, evaluating and improving the overall effectiveness and quality of the offerings.
2. Describe the process for assessing and improving student learning, including student persistence and completion, in the offerings.
3. How are the measures and techniques for distance education offerings equivalent to those for assessment and evaluation in face-to-face offerings? If there are differences, why are these differences appropriate?