Change Visit

Information for Institutions and Peer Reviewers

When an institution submits a substantive change application to the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), staff triage the request and determine the appropriate process for review: a Desk Review, Change Panel or Change Visit. A Change Visit is assigned to review substantive changes that are a significant departure from an institution's current offerings and require reviewers with specific expertise that matches the nature of the request. The visit is conducted by HLC peer reviewers, who evaluate the request and make a recommendation for approval or denial to an HLC decision-making body. This protocol and the Change Visit Report guide the team to ensure consistency across visits and with HLC's policiesThese guidelines and examples are not intended to be determinative or conclusive evidence of ongoing compliance with HLC requirements.

Setting the Visit Date and Peer Review Team

When HLC staff determines that a change request will be reviewed through a Change Visit, the institution is notified via email and asked to send three sets of possible visit dates. Each set of dates should be a Monday and Tuesday. Two set of dates should be no sooner than two months from the date of the email, and the third set should be no sooner than three months from the date of the email. Dates should be emailed to changerequest@hlcommission.org.

HLC staff confirms receipt of the dates and starts selecting peer reviewers with expertise and training appropriate for the review. The team usually consists of two peer reviewers, one chair and one team member. If more than one request is considered during a visit, HLC staff may opt to assign additional reviewers to the team. They are selected from peer reviewers who have completed additional training for the specified substantive change request.

The peer reviewers are invited and asked their availability for the three possible visit dates. The actual date of the visit is only determined once all the reviewers confirm their availability and agree

on the date. When the team members accept the assignment in Canopy, they also confirm they have no conflicts of interest that would prevent them from evaluating the institution.

Once the team and the dates are set, HLC will email the visit details to the institution with the team information. The institution should carefully examine the information and immediately report any conflicts of interest with the proposed team members.

Preparing for the Visit

Institutional Materials

The institution should provide the following documents to the reviewers and HLC no later than four weeks before the visit:

- Complete change application
- Organizational catalog
- Staff and faculty handbook

The institution should send the documents via email to the peer reviewers. For HLC's records, the institution should upload the same materials at hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Visit Materials" from the list of submission options.

Planning Visit Logistics

The team chair is responsible for managing the visit and will schedule a conference call with an institutional representative regarding the logistics of the visit. This call should cover the following topics:

- Developing a preliminary schedule of campus appointments and meetings.
- Making local lodging arrangements.
- Travel planning (nearest airport, transportation between hotel and campus, etc.).

Institutions can make recommendations for lodging and transportation, but the team makes the final selection and arrangements about where they will stay.

Expenses and Reimbursement

HLC will reimburse team members directly for all expenses incurred relative to the Change Visit and issue each team member an honorarium.

The institution should not pay for a team member's expenses directly. The institution will receive two invoices for the visit: the first invoice is for the base visit fee and the second invoice covers the expenses incurred by the reviewers.

During the Visit

Change Visits are 1 ½ days (Mondays and Tuesdays till mid-day), with teams arriving on Sunday and departing Tuesday afternoon. The visit typically includes meetings between the Change Visit team and the following individuals:

- Members of the senior administrative team (chief executive officer or chief academic officer)
- Representatives at the institutional level (dean) and department level (chair)
- Faculty and staff
- Students
- External groups (if necessary)

Variations to these meetings may occur depending upon the type of change request and the nature and size of the institution. In some cases, meetings with the board chair or board members may be necessary. Meetings with individuals in charge of planning, curricular design, resources, assessment and evaluation, and other elements relevant to the application may also be requested.

The visit will end with a closing session that includes the Change Visit team and institutional representatives. The team will not give any indication of its recommendation in the closing session.

Sample Agenda

DAY 1
- 8:30-9:30: **Opening session**
- 9:30–10:00 a.m.: **Program support and strategic plan**
- 10:15–10:45 a.m.: **Recruitment of faculty, salary structure, teaching loads**
- 11:15 a.m.–12:15 p.m.: **Lunch with representative pre-nursing students**
- 12:30–1:15 p.m.: **Faculty of pre-nursing students**
- 1:30–2:30 p.m.: **Representatives from clinical sites**
- 3:00–3:45 p.m.: **Enrollment management and budget**
- 4:00–5:00 p.m.: **Campus tour**

DAY 2
- 8:30–9:15 a.m.: **Faculty development**
- 9:30–10:15 a.m.: **Meeting with the president**
- 10:20–10:50 a.m.: **Closing session**

After the Visit

Team Report

When the team reaches a consensus on a recommendation, the team chair completes the Change Visit Report, answering all applicable questions. A separate report is completed for each change request in the visit. For example, two requests combined into one visit would have two separate reports.

Possible Team Recommendations

A Change Visit team must choose from among the following three recommendation options:

- Approve request
- Approve modified request
- Deny request

These options are chosen with the following understandings:

- A recommendation for approval with modification means that the team recommends an approval different from that sought by the institution. For example, if an institution has proposed two new related programs on the same application and the team determines that only one of them meets HLC's requirements, a recommendation for approval of that single program represents a recommendation of approval with modification.

  Note: Some substantive change requests, such as those for distance and correspondence education, have limited options for modification due to the nature of the approval.

- While a Change Visit team can recommend that monitoring (a follow-up interim report) beattached to a recommendation for approval or for approval with modification, it should occur rarely. Recommended monitoring demonstrates to HLC a lack of confidence in the institution's capacity for or commitment to proper implementation of the proposed change. If there is such a lack of confidence, especially if the team thinks the recommendation should entail an interim report, then the change should be denied. Substantive change applications can be resubmitted by the institutions after a waiting period of six months. In the institutional response for a denied request the institution can request the six-month waiting time to be waived so the institution can resubmit as soon as feasible.

- On rare occasion, monitoring may be directed at developments that cannot be known until later. For example, a reasonably sound but inexperienced institution proposes to initiate and expand distance education to the highest level of approval, which is for courses and programs. If the team is uncertain about the institution's capacity to adequately provide technical support to students who will enroll in online courses and programs, the team may recommend an interim report due a year or two later looking at the institution's performance in that area.

- Under no circumstances may a team recommend approval or approval with modification while pointing out issues that must be resolved before the change can go forward.

Review of the Draft Report

The chair submits the report to the institution's HLC staff liaison for review within four weeks of the visit. The staff liaison has one week to reply to the team chair with any questions or concerns aboutthe report. Once the staff liaison confirms the report is complete and acceptable, the chair will send the report to the institution for corrections of errors of fact, giving the institution two weeks to respond to the team chair.

After the institution responds, the team chair has one week to make the acceptable corrections of errors of fact and finalize the report.

Report Submission

Submit the report to HLC at hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Final Reports" from the list of submission options to ensure the report is sent to the correct HLC staff member.

Decision Making

Institutional Response

Once HLC has the final report, the institution is notified and invited to submit an institutional response before the case is sent to the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) for final action. The institutional response is due within two weeks of the date HLC provides the final report to the institution.

HLC recommends filing an institutional response even if the team recommends approval. The institution should support its case and demonstrate its commitment to the requested change. If the

team recommends denial of the requested change, the institutional response is an opportunity for the institution to provide additional information concerning the issues the review team identified in its report, in order to strengthen its case for possible approval by IAC.

Institutional Actions Council

Following the institutional response period, HLC submits the team report, the original change application and, if applicable, the institutional response to IAC for review and final action.

The IAC may uphold or change the recommendation of the team. If the team recommends denial of a request and that recommendation is upheld by the IAC, the institution must wait at least six months to submit a new application. The six-month waiting period begins with the institution's receipt of the team recommendation. However, in some cases,

the IAC may uphold the team's recommendation of denial but waive the six-month waiting period before re-application. Institutions can request that the waiting period is waived in their response if the final decision is a denial of the substantive change request.

The institution will receive an Action Letter within two weeks after the IAC meeting. The final action will also be posted on HLC's website within 30 days after the IAC meeting.

Questions?

Contact
changerequest@hlcommission.org