



CHANGE VISIT PROTOCOL FOR PEER REVIEWERS

A change visit team usually consists of two peer reviewers drawn from a set of reviewers designated for specific types of institutional changes. One individual is chosen for his or her expertise related to the nature of the change and the other from a list of reviewers trained to chair change visits. The role of the change visit team is to review and recommend approval or denial of substantive changes requested by institutions. This protocol and the Change Visit Report guide the change visit team to ensure consistency across visits and with HLC's policies.

Of the two individuals on a change visit team, the team chair is responsible for managing the visit and completing and submitting the Change Visit Report to HLC.

Operationally, the team chair schedules a conference call with the team for a discussion of the substantive change application and a conference call with a representative of the institution regarding the logistics of the visit on the dates selected by HLC and the institution. The campus visit is one-and-a-half days (Mondays and Tuesdays till mid-day), with teams arriving on Sunday and departing Tuesday afternoon.

The visit typically would include meetings between the change visit team and members of the senior administrative team (chief executive officer or chief academic officer), representatives at the college level (dean), department (chair), faculty, staff, students, and external groups if necessary. Variations to these meetings may occur depending upon the 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.

When the team has determined a recommendation, the chair completes the Change Visit Report, answering all applicable questions. The team chair must ensure that all parts of the report are completed as appropriate before submitting the report to HLC in accordance with the timeline noted in this protocol. A separate report must be completed for each change request in the visit. For example, two requests combined into one visit would need two separate reports.

OPTIONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

A change visit team must choose from among the following three options for recommendation:

- 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 three new programs and the panel judges 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.
- If approval or approval with modification is chosen, then the team must be sure that issues documented on the Change Visit Report are sufficiently settled to justify that recommendation. If there are still significant matters not settled (even after further information provided by the institution has been reviewed by the team), then neither form of approval should be chosen and the change should be denied.

MONITORING

While a change visit team can recommend that monitoring (a follow-up interim monitoring report) be attached 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 a monitoring report, then the change should be denied.

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 choose to recommend a monitoring report to come a year or

two later looking at the institution’s performance in that area.

In other circumstances, an institution may not be able to deliver on an aspect of the application until after the request has been approved. For instance, if the institution needs to hire faculty to execute a proposed program, the institution may not want (and cannot be expected) to hire someone until the program request is approved. In such cases, requiring the institution to follow-up with HLC confirming the hire of said individual(s) would be appropriate.

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.

CAUTIONS ABOUT CHANGE VISIT REPORTS

- Make sure the report is filled out adequately. The most frequent omissions occur with the “X” indicator in the rating columns and with narrative responses that are too short in “Evidence” for Items 6a-e of Part A.

Narrative responses are effective when they are evidence-based and evaluative, when they substantiate the team’s conclusions and recommendations, and when they are directly related to the elements being evaluated.

Also, complete Part A, Questions 4 and 5 only if the change request is about contractual/consortial arrangements or competency-based education, respectively. Otherwise, check “not applicable” and move to subsequent questions.

- Make sure the recommendations are consistent with the evidence. Teams have recommended full approval despite items that are deficient or not sufficiently settled. Teams, especially with the benefit of having the chance to secure information during the visit, should seek as much evidence as is relevant and needed to make judgment about the change request. However, teams should not be afraid to say no.
- Make sure the team reviews relevant outstanding monitoring, if any, on the Institutional Status and Requirements (ISR) report and comments from

the staff liaison on the Change Routing and Review Form (CRRF).

- Make sure to review documentation of required approvals. The panel should not accept an institution's claim that it has them or that it does not need them. It is not sufficient that approval has been requested. If questions arise about this matter, the team chair should contact the change staff at HLC.
- Make sure to ask for evidence that the team determines is missing. Do not assume that it doesn't exist. Get confirmation.
- When a request has multiple facets and not all of them merit approval, make sure the team recommends approval with modification limiting the request to only what merits approval. Do not recommend full approval with monitoring.
- Make sure when recommending monitoring to allow the institution time to respond effectively. Teams have recommended follow-up that was to be completed in such close proximity to the time of review that the institution could not respond effectively.
- Make sure the team writes stipulations or recommendations that are consistent with HLC policy. For example, for requests involving distance delivery, the team should not recommend approval with a limitation conflicting with HLC's distance delivery levels. Such limitations are permitted only in relation to the new degree levels or in response to outstanding monitoring.

PROCESS FOLLOWING THE VISIT

The team chair submits the report to the institution's HLC staff liaison for review within four weeks of the visit. The liaison has one week to reply to the team chair with any questions or concerns about the 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 chair has one week to make the acceptable corrections of errors of fact and submit the final report to HLC via finalreports@hlcommission.org.

Once HLC has the final report, the institution is notified and invited to submit an institutional response. HLC then submits the team report, the original change application and the institutional response to the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) for review and 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 normally begins with the institution's receipt of the team recommendation (if the institution does not contest the recommendation in its response) or with the IAC decision (if the institution contests the recommendation in its response). However, in some cases, the IAC may uphold the team's recommendation of denial but waive the six-month waiting period before re-application.

QUESTIONS?

Contact HLC at changerequests@hlcommission.org