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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 2020. For the most current information from HLC, visit hlcommission.org.

2020 HLC Annual Conference
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:accreditation@hlcommission.org">accreditation@hlcommission.org</a></td>
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<td><a href="mailto:peerreview@hlcommission.org">peerreview@hlcommission.org</a></td>
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The Higher Learning Commission’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 the 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 its 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 the Federal 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, HLC 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. Students do expect, however, 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.
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 broadly understood within the institution and guides its operations

1. The mission statement is developed through a process suited to the nature and culture of the institution and is adopted by the governing board.

2. The institution's academic programs, student support services, and enrollment profile are consistent with its stated mission.

3. The institution's planning and budgeting priorities align with and support the mission. (This sub-component may be addressed by reference to the response to Criterion 5.C.1.)

1.B. The mission is articulated publicly.

1. The institution clearly articulates its mission through one or more public documents, such as statements of purpose, vision, values, goals, plans, or institutional priorities.

2. The mission document or documents are current and explain the extent of 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 document or documents identify the nature, scope, and intended constituents of the higher education programs and services the institution provides.

1.C. The institution understands the relationship between its mission and the diversity of society.

1. The institution addresses its role in a multicultural society.

2. The institution’s processes and activities reflect attention to human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

1.D. The institution’s mission demonstrates commitment to the public good.

1. Actions and decisions reflect an understanding that in its educational role the institution serves the public, not solely the institution, and thus entails a public obligation.

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 identified external constituencies and communities of interest and responds to their needs as its mission and capacity allow.

Find It Online
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 operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it establishes and follows policies and processes for fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff.
2.B. The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public with regard to its programs, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control, and accreditation relationships.
2.C. The governing board of the institution is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and to assure its integrity.
   1. The governing board’s deliberations reflect priorities to preserve and enhance the institution.
   2. The governing board reviews and considers the reasonable and relevant interests of the institution’s internal and external constituencies during its decision-making deliberations.
   3. The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests, or other external parties when such influence would not be in the best interest of the institution.

2.D. The institution is committed to freedom of expression and 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, students and staff.
   1. The institution provides effective oversight and support services to ensure the integrity of research and scholarly practice conducted by its faculty, staff, and students.
   2. Students are offered guidance in the ethical use of information resources.
   3. The institution has and enforces policies on academic honesty and integrity.

CRITERION 3 / TEACHING AND LEARNING: QUALITY, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT
The institution provides high quality education, wherever and however its offerings are delivered.

Core Components
3.A. The institution’s degree programs are appropriate to higher education.

Revised Criteria Effective September 1, 2020
HLC’s Board of Trustees adopted revisions to the Criteria for Accreditation at its February 2019 meeting, to go into effect on September 1, 2020. The revisions were based on an internal analysis of team reports and interim monitoring and feedback from institutions and peer reviewers. An alpha and beta version of the revisions were shared with HLC membership for feedback prior to the Board’s action.

The revised Criteria are available at hlcommission.org/criteria.
1. Courses and programs are current and require levels of performance by students appropriate to the degree or certificate 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 demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs.

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings, and degree levels of the institution.

2. The institution articulates the purposes, content, and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements. 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. Every degree program offered by the institution engages students in collecting, analyzing, and communicating information; in mastering modes of inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

4. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity of the world in which students live and work.

5. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work, and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their programs 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 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; establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff; involvement in assessment of student learning.

2. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortial programs.

3. Instructors are evaluated regularly in accordance with established institutional policies and procedures.

4. 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.

5. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.

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

3.D. The institution provides support for student learning and 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 programs 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, museum collections, as appropriate to the institution’s offerings).
5. The institution provides to students guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.

3.E. The institution fulfills the claims it makes for an enriched educational environment.

1. Co-curricular programs are suited to the institution’s mission and contribute to the educational experience of its students.

2. The institution demonstrates any claims it makes about contributions to its students’ educational experience by virtue of aspects of its mission, such as research, community engagement, service learning, religious or spiritual purpose, and economic development.

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 demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.

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 assure 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 assures 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.

4.B. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.

2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.

3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.

4. The institution’s processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

4.C. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to 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 but 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 / RESOURCES, PLANNING, AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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

Core Components

5.A. The institution's resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

1. The institution has the fiscal and human resources and physical and technological infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.

2. The institution's resource allocation process ensures that its educational purposes are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations to other areas or disbursement of revenue to a superordinate entity.

3. The goals incorporated into mission statements or elaborations of mission statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources, and opportunities.

4. The institution's staff in all areas are appropriately qualified and trained.

5. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring expense.

5.B. The institution's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.

1. The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; it provides oversight of the institution's financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.

2. The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students—in the institution's governance.

3. Administration, faculty, staff, and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.

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

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities.

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. Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue, such as enrollment, the economy, and state support.

5. Institutional planning anticipates emerging factors, such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.

5.C. The institution works systematically to improve its performance.

1. The institution develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations.

2. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts.
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):

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, and peer review or a decision-making body has determined that monitoring is required to assure that the institution ameliorates the concerns.

The institution does not meet the Core Component if the institution fails to meet the Component in its entirety or is so deficient in one or more aspects of the Component that the Component is judged not to be met.

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, and peer review or a decision-making body has determined that monitoring is required to assure that the institution ameliorates the concerns.

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 institution must be judged to meet all five Criteria for Accreditation to merit accreditation. For purposes of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, findings of “met” and “met with concerns” both constitute compliance.

The Commission will grant or reaffirm accreditation (with or without conditions or sanctions), deny accreditation, or withdraw accreditation based on the outcome of this evaluation.

CRITERIA TERMINOLOGY

There are a few words and phrases in the Criteria that require additional clarification—seemingly simple language that, in practice, may be used in different ways by different member institutions. This glossary explains how these words are used within the Criteria. Its 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.

Note: HLC developed an expanded glossary for the revised Criteria going into effect September 2020. See hlccommission.org/criteria for details.

AUXILIARY

Auxiliary denotes 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.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Assessment and evaluation are used as ordinary language synonyms. When a narrower referent is intended, the terms are modified, as in “assessment of student learning” or “evaluation of academic services.”

CONTROL

Control as used in the Criteria refers to the institution’s status as a public, private not-for-profit, or private for-profit institution, and in the latter instances, to the institution’s ownership and the board’s power to direct its affairs.

DUAL CREDIT

Dual credit refers to 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 Criteria on “dual credit” apply to all of them as they involve the accredited institution’s responsibility for the quality of its offerings.
FACULTY AND INSTRUCTORS
Faculty and instructors refer to all those an institution employs or assigns to teach students. Faculty is used to refer to the group rather than to each individual instructional staff member, typically to distinguish faculty from administration.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES
Goals and outcomes are used inconsistently by member institutions in the context of assessment of student learning, to the extent that one institution’s goal may be another’s outcome and vice versa. When they use either term, the Criteria indicate through context whether the term refers to the learning intended or to how much students actually learn.

PUBLIC
Public in phrases such as “makes available to the public” or “states publicly” 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. The modifier public as used to describe governing board members is defined within the statement requiring such members.

WHEREVER AND HOWEVER DELIVERED
Wherever and however delivered is intended to encompass all modes of delivery 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.
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 provides clear information regarding its procedures for receiving complaints and grievances from students and other constituencies, responds to them in a timely manner, and analyzes them to improve its processes.

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
   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. policies on acceptance of transfer credit, including how credit is applied to 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 an evaluation has been conducted.)
   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 specialized, national, 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 regional 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.¹

9. The governing board has the authority to approve the annual budget and to engage and dismiss the chief executive officer.¹

10. The institution remains in compliance at all times with state laws including laws related to authorization of educational activities and consumer protection wherever it does business and state law applies.

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.

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 the Commission. 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

¹ 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.
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 he or she is 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:

   a. oversight of the curriculum—its development and implementation, academic substance, currency, and relevance for internal and external constituencies;

   b. assurance of consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in the expectations of student performance;

   c. establishment of the academic qualifications for instructional personnel;

   d. 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 recognized specialized accrediting agency for each field, if such agency 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.²

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.)

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² Institutions under federal control are exempted provided that they have other reliable information to document the institution’s fiscal resources and management.
The Obligations of Affiliation below include changes that will be considering on second reading by HLC’s Board of Trustees in June 2019. Policy wording to be deleted or revised is shown as strikethrough (old wording); new policy language, whether through addition or revision, is shown in bold (new wording).

While seeking and holding affiliation with the Commission, an institution voluntarily agrees to meet obligations set forth by the Commission as follows:

1. The institution participates in periodic evaluation through the structures and mechanisms set forth in Commission policies, submission of reports as requested by the Commission, filing of the Institutional Update, and any other requirements set forth in its policies.

2. The institution is candid, transparent, and forthcoming in its dealings with the Commission, including in its responses to any special inquiries or requests for information from the Commission. The institution agrees not to enter into any agreement that limits the nature or scope of its communications with the Commission or requires that a third party review and approve those communications prior to their transmission to the Commission.

3. The institution notifies the Commission of any condition or situation that has the potential to affect the institution’s status with the Commission, such as a significant unanticipated reduction in program offerings or serious legal investigation. (A fuller list of such conditions or situations is included in the Commission’s policy on special monitoring.)

4. The institution informs the Commission 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 Commission accreditation requirements. (Definitions and process requirements are contained in the Commission’s policy on institutions with related entities.)

5. The institution describes itself in identical terms to the Commission and to any other institutional accrediting body with which it holds or seeks affiliation with regard to purpose, governance, programs, locations, degrees, diplomas, certificates, personnel, finances, and constituents.

6. The institution notifies the Commission when it receives an adverse action from or has been placed on sanction by any other accrediting agency or if a state has issued a pending or final action that affects the institution’s legal status or authority to grant degrees.

7. The institution assures its employees and students that it will consider fairly all complaints and third-party comments and not engage in retaliatory action against any who have submitted such information.

8. The institution accepts that the Commission will, in the interest of transparency to the public, publish outcomes from its accreditation process.

9. The institution portrays its accreditation status with the Commission clearly to the public, including the status of its branch campuses and related entities. The institution posts the electronic version of the Commission’s Mark of Affiliation in at least one place on its Web site, linking users directly to the institution’s status on the Commission’s Web site.

10. The institution communicates to its constituencies and applicants any Public Disclosure Notice it receives from the Higher Learning Commission.
11. The institution maintains prominently on its Web site a telephone number that includes an option for both current students and the public to speak with a representative of the institution.

12. To the extent possible, the institution ensures that any information submitted to the Commission for evaluative purposes or otherwise (for example, institutional documents or information on forms) will not include unredacted personally identifiable information (PII). If the institution submits information with unredacted PII, it will clearly identify the information as such.

13. The institution submits timely payment of dues and fees and accepts the fact of surcharges for late payment.

14. The institution agrees to accept binding arbitration in the event of an action by the Commission's Board of Trustees that the institution disputes and is not able to resolve through the Commission’s processes. This agreement follows procedures developed and published by the Commission. The institution also agrees to grant immunity to the Commission from claims of civil liability related to judgments made by the Commission or its agents in the course of its work of accrediting institutions provided that it was acting in good faith and within the scope of its responsibilities.

15. The institution agrees that in the event it, or any third party with which the institution has a current or former contractual relationship, takes legal action against the Higher Learning Commission related to any accreditation action, and the institution or third party withdraws from that action or loses its case, to the extent allowed by state and tribal law the institution shall be responsible for all expenses, including but not limited to attorney, expert witness, and related fees, incurred by the Commission in defending the action.

MEETING OBLIGATIONS OF AFFILIATION

Institutions must remain in compliance with the Obligations of Affiliation at all times. The Commission shall determine when an institution is in violation of the Obligations of Affiliation. Commission staff, may at its discretion, make use of any means to determine whether the institution has violated an Obligation of Affiliation including, but not limited to, seeking written information from the institution or scheduling a peer reviewer or staff member to meet with one or more institutional representatives either on-campus or through other appropriate method.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROBATION

An institution that is determined by Commission staff or peer reviewers to have not met the Obligations of Affiliation shall be placed on Administrative Probation by the Commission's President for a period not to exceed ninety days. During this time the institution will be expected to remedy the situation that led to the imposition of Administrative Probation. The Commission President will notify the institution of the imposition of the Administrative Probation and the conditions for its removal.

If an institution fails to remedy the situation that led to Administrative Probation by the end of the ninety-day period, the Commission President shall take a recommendation concerning the institution to the Commission's Board of Trustees. That recommendation may be for the application of a sanction or the withdrawal of accreditation, in accordance with Commission 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.
HLC’S 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN: AN UPDATE

Focusing on VISTA—Value to Members, Innovation, Student Success, Thought Leadership and Advocacy—HLC’s strategic planning initiative has resulted in the following highlights. For more information, visit hlccommission.org/strategic-plan.

VALUE TO MEMBERS
To bring Value to Members, HLC gathered extensive feedback from institutions and peer reviewers on the alpha and beta versions of the revised Criteria for Accreditation. The final revisions, adopted by the Board of Trustees in February 2019, address many of the concerns raised by institutions and peer reviewers throughout this two-year process.

HLC expanded the information on its website about institutional change requirements and processes to make it easier for institutions to identify when a planned change requires HLC approval or notification. Based on feedback from the Innovation Zone initiative, HLC staff have also started sending institutions status updates on their pending change requests. HLC has expanded its workshop offerings, with two new events that will be held in March 2019; one on effective strategic planning to create continuous quality improvement and the other on professional development for administrators.

Finally, HLC worked to improve its technology to support members. HLC continued work to replace the database that feeds HLC’s web directory of institutions and the Institutional Status and Requirements Report, and developed a new collaboration technology, called SparQ, that will be central to institution’s working within the Academies.

INNOVATION
HLC’s think tank, Partners for Transformation, explored ways to unbundle higher education’s current structure, work with the triad on fostering innovation and promote student-focused accreditation.

HLC’s Innovation Zone initiative identified opportunities for HLC and its members to be more supportive of innovation. The group developed two proposals: (1) a “flipped” substantive change process that would allow institutions to launch new programs faster, and (2) a process for HLC to work with institutions to test innovations in higher education, with permission and potential regulatory relief from the U.S. Department of Education.

See page 59 for more information about the work being done by these two groups.

STUDENT SUCCESS
HLC’s Student Success Data groups continued their work to test variables that affect student success and to define key terms such as persistence, retention and completion.

The Defining Student Success Data group published a series of three papers on the student success agenda, a model of accreditation focused on student success, and a proposed glossary of common terms. The Testing Student Success Data group published a research paper that looks at accounting for various student goals within the context of personal circumstances. See page 59 for more information about these thought papers.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP
HLC President Barbara Gellman-Danley continues to provide thought leadership by participating in national conversations on leadership, governance and the value of accreditation. In addition, HLC has sought to engage its membership in the work being done by the Partners for Transformation and Student Success initiative groups, sharing their thought papers and welcoming feedback from institutional representatives and peer reviewers.

ADVOCACY
HLC President Barbara Gellman-Danley was selected to represent regional accreditors with the start of the U.S. Department of Education’s negotiated rulemaking on higher education issues process in January 2019. The main committee, Accreditation and Innovation, will consider requirements of accreditors for oversight of their members, how the Department recognizes accreditors, clarification of responsibilities in the regulatory triad, arrangements between institutions of higher education and other educational providers and teach-outs. HLC welcomes
the opportunity to help develop new policies that could strengthen institutions.

HLC staff also had many conversations with representatives at the Department to help develop a streamlined Federal Compliance process. The new process, effective September 1, 2019, cuts out redundancies related to areas that are already reviewed as part of the Criteria for Accreditation and highlights the areas where information is required only for Federal Compliance.

**HLC POLICIES**

HLC’s policies can be found at [hlcommission.org/policies](http://hlcommission.org/policies). The policies are reviewed regularly by the Board of Trustees. HLC recognizes that higher education is rapidly changing and that its policy needs to reflect those changes. Therefore, HLC commits to review 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.

The following changes were adopted in 2018 (all changes were effective immediately):

**AQIP PATHWAY (NOVEMBER 2018)**

The policy changes removed references to the AQIP Pathway and its associated processes, in accordance with the plan to phase out the AQIP Pathway over the next two academic years.


**Note:** Policies related to AQIP Pathway evaluations conducted during the transition will remain in effect for the institution under review until it moves to another pathway. Once the transition occurs, policies applicable to that pathway will apply, in addition to all other HLC policies then in effect. Policies related to the AQIP Pathway are available in Appendix B of HLC’s Policy Book.

**BOARD MEETING PUBLIC SESSION (NOVEMBER 2018)**

This change to HLC’s bylaws eliminated the public session at meetings of the HLC Board of Trustees. (The alternative mechanisms by which the public is involved in the accreditation process were not changed.)

Revised bylaw: Regular Meetings of the Board (Article VII, Section 1)

**CHANGE OF CONTROL, STRUCTURE OR ORGANIZATION (NOVEMBER 2018)**

The policy change removed the requirement that pre-acquisitions letters issued by the U.S. Department of Education be made available prior to the Board taking action on an institution seeking approval for a change of control, structure or organization.

Revised policy: Processes for Seeking Approval of Change of Control (INST.E.20.070)

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**Student Protection Policy Effective September 1, 2019**

November 2017 meeting, HLC’s Board of Trustees adopted a policy on recruiting, admissions and related practices. The new policy goes into effect on September 1, 2019, and sets an expectation for appropriate and honest interactions between institutions and prospective or current students. See [hlcommission.org/adopted-policies](http://hlcommission.org/adopted-policies) for the policy language.
EVALUATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR THE HLC CRITERIA (NOVEMBER 2018)
The policy changes detail the conditions that would warrant a finding that an institution's compliance with the Criteria is “met” or “met with concerns.”
Revised policy: Evaluative Framework for the HLC Criteria (INST.A.10.020)

NOTICE (NOVEMBER 2018)
The policy change modified the decision-making process following a Notice Visit by adding a secondary review by the Institutional Actions Council.
Revised policy: Notice (INST.E.10.010)

PEER REVIEWER ASSIGNMENTS (JUNE 2018)
The policy changes codified current practices regarding assigning peer reviewers to teams, panels or other evaluative groups when their institution is on sanction with HLC or when they have previously evaluated the institution that is coming under review.
Revised policies: Standards of Conduct (PEER.A.10.040), Peer Corps Members on HLC Evaluation Activities (PEER.A.10.050)

SHOW-CAUSE (JUNE 2018)
The policy change specified certain conditions under which the Board may consider shortening the Show-Cause period. It also adds a requirement that an institution on Show-Cause submit a provisional plan for teaching out its students.
Revised policy: Show-Cause (Procedural Order) (INST.E.30.010)

DUES AND FEES
HLC’s dues and fees schedule can be found at hlcommission.org/dues. Invoices for dues are sent to member institutions in July of each year, following Board action to approve changes to the dues and fees. Payment is due on receipt of the bill and is not refundable.

PUBLIC INFORMATION
MARK OF AFFILIATION
As part of HLC’s Obligations of Affiliation, each institution is required to display the Mark of Affiliation on its website with coding provided by HLC. The Mark of Affiliation reflects the institution’s current accreditation status and links visitors to the institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status on the HLC website. An institution’s domain name must be registered with HLC to enable the functionality of the interactive Mark of Affiliation. Requests for a Mark of Affiliation guidelines, as well as notification of domain changes, can be directed to info@hlcommission.org.

USE OF HLC LOGOS AND IMAGES
The HLC logos, including the leaf, are reserved for HLC-produced materials. HLC logos and images are not allowed on materials or websites presented by affiliated institutions. This also prohibits use of the logo in social media posts, email signatures and other digital reproductions not originating from HLC.

For catalogs, brochures, advertisements and other promotional material, member institutions are encouraged to use this statement: “(Institution name) is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (www.hlcommission.org), a regional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.”

For candidate institutions, status should be stated as: “(Institution name) is a candidate for accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission (www.hlcommission.org), a regional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.”

PUBLICATION OF ACTIONS AND ACCREDITED STATUS
When an institution reports an HLC action regarding Reaffirmation of Accreditation, it may state that its accredited status has been continued or reaffirmed. If it wishes to disclose additional information, such as the scheduled year of the next comprehensive evaluation, it should also disclose other details, including any interim reports or monitoring required as part of the action. Accredited status is not for a specific period of time; it is a continuing relationship between the institution and HLC that is subject to reconsideration periodically or when necessary. Phrases such as “accreditation has been continued for a 10-year period” should not be used.

In keeping with federal requirements, when a college or university makes a reference to its affiliation with HLC, it includes HLC’s website address and telephone number. HLC urges the careful placement of this information so as not to confuse the public to contact HLC as contrasted with how to contact the institution itself. Should an affiliated institution be under a sanction by HLC, the specific policies on that sanction dictate when and how it
must be disclosed when the institution makes reference to its affiliation status with HLC.

An institution that is unaffiliated should make no reference to affiliation with HLC until it has been granted accredited status or candidate status.

**PUBLIC DISCLOSURE NOTICES AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS**

HLC publishes a Public Disclosure Notice following a sanction or an adverse action taken on an affiliated institution. The notice, published in the institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status in HLC’s online Directory of Institutions, includes a summary of the nature of the action and a brief analysis of the situation that prompted the action, as well as Board-mandated steps toward correction. The Directory of Institutions is available at [hlcommission.org/directory](http://hlcommission.org/directory).

Additionally, Public Statements may be issued and posted by HLC when circumstances at an institution trigger inquiries to HLC, or when clarification is needed regarding HLC’s involvement with a highly visible issue at a member institution.

**INSTITUTIONAL STATUS AND REQUIREMENTS REPORT**

The Institutional Status and Requirements (ISR) Report is a resource to allow CEOs or Accreditation Liaison Officers (ALOs) to review information regarding the institution’s accreditation relationship with HLC. This report is intended to inform the institution only and is not available to the public. The report may only be requested by the CEO or ALO of the institution by using the request form at [hlcommission.org/isr-request](http://hlcommission.org/isr-request).

Features of the ISR 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 and related events.
PATHWAYS FOR REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION

Through HLC’s Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, accredited institutions complete reviews to ensure they continue to meet the Criteria for Accreditation and pursue institutional improvement. These reviews occur in addition to regular monitoring that takes place through HLC’s Institutional Update, substantive change requests, interim monitoring and other processes. There are currently two primary pathways: Standard and Open. HLC began the process of phasing out the AQIP Pathway in 2018.

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.

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. Beginning in the 2019–20 academic year, most Year 4 comprehensive evaluations will no longer include a review of Federal Compliance Requirements. A Federal Compliance Review will only be 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 has pursued institutional improvement efforts. If a previous evaluation identified an area of the institution as needing improvement, the Assurance Argument and Evidence File 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 an action regarding the reaffirmation of the institution’s accreditation and a determination regarding 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. 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. Upcoming webinars are listed at hlcommission.org/calendar.

Standard Pathway Seminars
Institutions that are within two years of a comprehensive evaluation are invited to attend a one-day, in-person seminar on addressing improvement in the Assurance Argument. At the seminar, institutional teams develop strategies to demonstrate improvement within the
Criteria for Accreditation. Attendees receive assistance in formulating improvement plans and feedback on plans that have been drafted. Upcoming seminars are listed at hlcommission.org/calendar.

**HLC Staff Liaison Improvement Plan Review**

HLC staff liaisons are available to review and provide feedback on an institution’s improvement plan during the academic year preceding the comprehensive evaluation. The staff liaison’s comments are intended to clarify expectations regarding the issues to be addressed within the Assurance Argument. For instance, an institution’s HLC staff liaison may point out an area of concern the institution had missed in formulating its plan.

**Sample Assurance Arguments**

hlcommission.org/assurance-samples

Institutions can access demonstration sites that present full Assurance Filings, with Assurance Arguments and Evidence Files. 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

This webpage provides a general overview of accessing and using the Assurance System, as well as links to the user manual, training webinar and frequently asked questions.
## STANDARD PATHWAY

### YEARS 1-3

**PREPARE ASSURANCE FILING**

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

### YEAR 4

**COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION**

**Institution:** Submit comprehensive evaluation materials.

**Peer Review:** Conduct comprehensive evaluation (with visit).

**HLC Decision Making:** Take action on comprehensive evaluation.

### YEARS 5-9

**PREPARE ASSURANCE FILING**

**Institution:** May contribute documents to Evidence File and begin writing Assurance Argument for Year 10 comprehensive evaluation.

### YEAR 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.
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.

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 on whether the institution is eligible to continue on the Open Pathway if monitoring is required. Year 4 Assurance Reviews do not typically include an on-site visit, unless requested by the peer review team.

Note: HLC provides guidance for preparing institutional materials and conducting the Assurance Review at hlcommission.org/open.

QUALITY INITIATIVE
Between Years 5 and 9, institutions on the Open Pathway undertake a Quality Initiative. The Quality Initiative may be designed to begin and be completed during this time, or an institution may continue a project that is already in progress or achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative.

Institutions submit a 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 report on the results of the project. Peer reviewers evaluate the report and determine whether the institution has made a genuine effort to achieve the goals of the Quality Initiative. In Year 10, this recommendation is sent to the Institutional Actions Council along with the results of the institution’s Reaffirmation of Accreditation in order to determine its continued eligibility to choose its pathway. Quality Initiative samples are available at qi.hlcommission.org.

Demonstrating and Recognizing “Genuine Effort”
Quality Initiatives are formalized by a peer review evaluation of the institution’s proposal and report. The proposal guidelines establish the criteria for peer reviewers in evaluating the institution’s project. These include:

1. An evaluation of the project’s scope and significance (for example, as demonstrated by its alignment with the institution’s mission; or its connection to the campus’s Strategic Plans; or in relation to its relevance or timeliness for the institution);

2. A clear expression of the purpose of the project (for example, as demonstrated by clearly set and explicit goals; the identification of important milestones; the presence of effective processes to evaluate the outcomes);

3. Evidence of the institution’s commitment and capacity (for example, by the presence of key personnel and the appropriate allocation of resources);

4. 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, whether or not those objectives were actually realized. 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 quality at an institution.

COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION
In Year 10, institutions on the Open Pathway undergo a comprehensive evaluation that results in an action regarding the reaffirmation of the institution’s accreditation and a determination regarding 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.
INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES
Sample Quality Initiative Proposals
qi.hlcommission.org
The sample proposals provided on this website illustrate the wide range of projects that can be used as Quality Initiatives and demonstrate the information and level of detail that HLC’s peer reviewers need when evaluating submitted proposals.

Sample Assurance Arguments
hlcommission.org/assurance-samples
Institutions can access demonstration sites that present full Assurance Filings, with Assurance Arguments and Evidence Files. 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
This webpage provides a general overview of accessing and using the Assurance System, as well as links to the user manual, training webinar and frequently asked questions.
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.

### OPEN PATHWAY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</table>
| 1-3   | **Prepare Assurance Filing**  
  *Institution:* May contribute documents to Evidence File and begin writing Assurance Argument for Year 4 Assurance Review. |
| 4     | **Assurance Review**  
  *Peer Review:* Conduct Assurance Review (no visit).  
  *HLC Decision Making:* Acceptance of or action on Assurance Review. |
| 5-7   | **Quality Initiative Proposal**  
  *Institution:* Submit Quality Initiative Proposal no later than August 31 of Year 7. May also begin preparing Assurance Filing for Year 10 comprehensive evaluation.  
  *Peer Review:* Review Quality Initiative Proposal. |
| 7-9   | **Quality Initiative Report**  
  *Institution:* Submit Quality Initiative Report no later than August 31 of Year 9. May also continue preparing Assuring Filing for Year 10 comprehensive evaluation.  
  *Peer Review:* Review Quality Initiative Report. |
| 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. |
AQIP PATHWAY TRANSITION

During an evaluation of the pathways in 2017, HLC noted a sharp decrease in the number of institutions choosing to participate in the AQIP Pathway. While HLC and its Board of Trustees are fully committed to continuous quality improvement efforts, this decline has signaled that HLC must rethink the way it supports such efforts. Therefore, HLC has begun the process of phasing out the AQIP Pathway and transitioning current AQIP institutions to other pathways.

Institutions will transition off the AQIP Pathway during the 2018–19 and 2019–20 academic years, and HLC will work with institutions to make that process as smooth as possible. The timing will depend on where an institution is in the AQIP Pathway cycle. In June 2018, HLC provided personalized transition maps to institutions on the AQIP Pathway.

To allow institutions to focus on their transition to a different pathway, HLC will be making the following changes to the AQIP Pathway requirements and supporting systems:

ANNUAL ACTION PROJECT

Action Project Updates are no longer required. The Action Project Network and Action Project Directory Archive, which hosted Action Project information, were taken offline in January 2019. Institutions that transition to the Open Pathway are encouraged to consider expanding their Action Project to use as a Quality Initiative.

STRATEGY FORUMS

HLC will no longer offer Strategy Forums. HLC is developing new resources to support continuous quality improvement for all institutions in HLC’s region.

SYSTEMS PORTFOLIOS AND APPRAISALS

Year 3 and Year 7 Systems Appraisals will continue as scheduled in 2018–19. Institutions with an appraisal currently scheduled for later years will transition in 2018–19.

In the appraisal process, institutions complete Systems Portfolios to demonstrate that the Criteria for Accreditation are being met. The institution provides evidence on how it plans, implements, reports and utilizes data for the AQIP Pathway Categories and also includes evidence related to the Criteria for Accreditation. A peer review team conducts a Systems Appraisal to evaluate these materials and recommends whether the institution should continue in the cycle and whether any monitoring is required.

COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION AND COMPREHENSIVE QUALITY REVIEW

Year 8 comprehensive evaluations will continue as scheduled in 2018–19 and 2019–20. Year 4 Comprehensive Quality Reviews also will occur as scheduled in 2018–19. If a Year 4 Comprehensive Quality Review is assigned following a Systems Appraisal in 2018–19, the institution will complete that review before transitioning out of the AQIP Pathway.

In both types of reviews, institutions are evaluated to ensure they are meeting the Criteria for Accreditation, pursuing institutional improvement and complying with certain requirements set by the U.S. Department of Education. The reviews include a student opinion survey, an on-site visit by a team of HLC peer reviewers, and a multi-campus visit, if applicable. The Year 8 comprehensive evaluation also leads to an action regarding the reaffirmation of the institution’s accreditation.

INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

Sample Systems Portfolio
hlcommission.org/assurance-samples

Institutions may access a read-only Systems Portfolio in the Assurance System to familiarize themselves with the system.

Assurance System Training Resources
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, training webinar and frequently asked questions.
As a federally recognized accrediting agency, HLC is required to assure that all of its member institutions are meeting their Title IV program responsibilities as well as 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:

1. Comprehensive evaluations for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, regardless of when they occur.
2. Comprehensive evaluations for institutions applying for candidacy or initial accreditation.
3. Sanction visits for institutions on Probation (except if Probation is extended) and Show Cause.
4. Advisory visits arising from questions of compliance with one or more federal requirements.

HLC may also require an institution to submit documentation related to one or more federal requirements, without an on-site evaluation necessarily occurring, under HLC’s policy on Special Monitoring.

AREAS ADDRESSED IN FEDERAL COMPLIANCE

Based on feedback from the membership and the Peer Corps and many conversations with representatives from the U.S. Department of Education, HLC has significantly streamlined the Federal Compliance process. Effective September 1, 2019, the new process cuts out redundancies related to areas that are already reviewed as part of the Criteria for Accreditation and highlights the areas where information is required only for Federal Compliance. While the institutional filing is significantly shorter, the Federal Compliance requirements have not changed. Rather, HLC’s manner of examining them has changed.

Starting with visits in September 2019, the following areas will be addressed in the Federal Compliance Process:

1. Assignment of Credits, Program Length and Tuition, Assignment of Credit Hours and Clock Hours
2. Institutional Records of Student Complaints
3. Publication of Transfer Policies
4. Practices for Verification of Student Identity
5. Title IV Program Responsibilities
6. Publication of Student Outcome Data
7. Standing With State and Other Accrediting Agencies

FEDERAL COMPLIANCE PROCESS

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

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. This recommendation would go to an HLC decision-making body for review and final action.

**ASSURANCE SYSTEM INTEGRATION**

In addition to updating the process for September 2019, HLC aspires to integrate Federal Compliance into the Assurance System during the 2019–20 academic year. HLC will provide more information about these changes as they are made available to institutions and peer reviewers. Full technological integration may occur later than September 2019, requiring institutions and peer reviewers to submit their documentation via previously established methods. Instructions for submitting materials will be provided in the Assurance System.
INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

As a federally recognized accrediting agency, HLC is required to assure that all of its member institutions are meeting their Title IV program responsibilities as well as 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.

TYPES OF CHANGE

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

- Academic programs, including competency-based education programs
- Access to HLC’s Notification Program for Additional Locations
- Branch campuses and additional locations
- Clock or credit hours
- Consortial arrangements
- Contractual arrangements
- Corporate control, structure or organization
- Distance delivery
- Length of term affecting allocation of credit
- Mission or student body

Visit [hlcommission.org/change](http://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.

HLC provides applications for changes that require prior HLC approval. These applications are available at [hlcommission.org/change](http://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 form in the intervening time.

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

REVIEW PROCESSES

HLC will determine the appropriate process for review of an institution’s proposed change: desk review, Change Panel or Change Visit. Institutions requesting approval of a change in control, structure or organization will undergo a Fact-Finding Review, 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 three HLC peer reviewers who review institutional 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 institution is given an opportunity to review the recommendation and provide an institutional response prior to consideration of the recommendation by the decision-making body. 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 institution is given an opportunity to review the recommendation and provide an institutional response prior to consideration of the recommendation by the decision-making body.

In some instances, the HLC staff liaison will embed the review of a change request into an upcoming comprehensive evaluation. Decision making for the embedded change visit 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 GOVERNANCE
An institution must 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 a different type of documentation and fee schedule than other change requests. The final action for these requests is also 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 hlccommission.org/control.

CERTIFICATE PROGRAM SCREENING FORM AND APPLICATION
In 2018, HLC introduced a new online screening form and application for certificate programs. Going forward, institutions should start with the screening form to initiate all new certificate program change requests. The form will help institutions determine whether prior HLC approval for a program is required.

If prior approval is required, the screening form will provide instructions for submitting the change request to HLC. In most cases, this will involve submitting the Certificate Program Application, but the institution may be asked to submit additional or different applications depending on specific elements of the program. For example, an institution may need to apply for approval of a contractual or consortial arrangement related to the program. If an institution is offering a competency-based education (CBE) certificate program, it may be required to submit a CBE program application instead of the certificate application.

If approval of the program is not required, the form will send the user an email indicating that the institution’s HLC accreditation already encompasses its offering of the program. Institutions should keep such messages for their records.

Links to the screening form and application are available at hlccommission.org/academic-programs.

LOCATION AND CAMPUS UPDATE SYSTEM
Institutions use the Location and Campus Update System to update HLC’s records about their existing additional locations and existing branch campuses. 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 Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) access to the system by default, and institutions also may identify a Location Coordinator to manage information in the system. The Location and Campus Update System is available at lcu.hlcommission.org.
Off-Campus Activities

New locations for institutions are established through HLC’s Institutional 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.

Definitions

Campus or Branch Campus (Same as the Federal Definition)

A location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus. 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.

Additional Location

A place, geographically separate from any main or branch campus, where instruction takes place and students can do one or more of the following:

- Complete 50 percent or more of the courses leading to a degree program.
- Complete 50 percent or more of the courses leading to a Title IV eligible certificate.
- Complete 50 percent 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).

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 percent 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

HLC will conduct an on-site visit to each of the first three active additional locations begun by an institution within six months of matriculation of students and the initiation of instruction at the additional location. The visit will be conducted by HLC peer reviewers and will 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**

An on-site evaluation of a new campus or branch campus must be conducted within six months of matriculation of students and initiation of instruction. These visits are conducted after HLC has approved a new campus through the substantive change process. If an institution is expanding into a previously approved campus from an active additional location with enrolled students and multiple degree programs, a campus evaluation visit may be conducted both to approve the campus and to assure its quality and its capacity to sustain that quality.

**MULTI-LOCATION VISIT**

If an institution has more than three active off-campus additional locations, HLC will conduct on-site visits of a representative sample of the additional locations in Years 3 and 8 for institutions on the Open or Standard Pathways. The visit is made by HLC peer reviewers 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.

**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.

**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.

**Please 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.
INSTITUTIONAL UPDATE

HLC requires each member and candidate institutions to provide annual updates on organizational health through the Institutional Update. It is held each year from late February to late 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 Accreditation Liaison Officers to complete the Contact Update Survey in order to ensure that HLC has the correct contact information on file 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 institutional change. This may be the case for changes to the institution’s active additional locations or branch campuses or to its contractual or consortial 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. **Enrollment Changes**
   - Three-year increase or decrease of 80 percent or more in enrollment for small institutions or 40 percent or more for large institutions.

2. **Degrees Awarded**
   - Three-year increase or decrease of 75 percent or more in degrees awarded for small institutions and 65 percent or more for large institutions.

3. **Full-time Faculty Changes**
   - Three-year decrease of 75 percent or more for small institutions or 50 percent or more for large institutions in the headcount of full-time faculty (not full-time equivalent).

4. **Student Default Rates**
   - Three-year student loan default rate of 30 percent or more for 2-year institutions or 25 percent or more for other institutions.
5. **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.

6. **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.*

7. **Weak Graduation/Persistence Rates Compared to Peers**
   The number of full-time equivalent undergraduate students divided by undergraduate degrees awarded places the institution in the bottom five percent of the institution’s peers. Peer groups are either 2-year small or large undergraduate institutions or 4-year small or large undergraduate institutions. *Note: Does not apply to graduate-only institutions.*
HLC relies on frequent contact with affiliated institutions to ensure quality higher education. Between comprehensive evaluations, institutions maintain an ongoing accreditation status by notifying HLC of substantive change, filing required reports, and hosting any necessary visits. HLC also may require an interim report or focused visit in circumstances where HLC has concluded that it should review the institution’s progress in addressing a concern.

**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 plans came to fruition.

Institutions are notified of a required interim report either through staff action or an action by an HLC decision-making body. The Action Letter will identify the due date, the related Core Components and the areas of focus. This information is also included in the institution’s Institutional Status and Requirements (ISR) Report. 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. The staff analysis or peer review team will ascertain whether the institution has satisfactorily addressed the monitoring issue(s). If the analysis shows that the institution has not satisfactorily addressed the monitoring issue, additional monitoring will be required.

**FOCUSED VISIT**

Focused visits occur between comprehensive evaluations and examine specific aspects of an institution. A focused visit reviews specific developments or follows up on concerns identified by a previous evaluation process and is not primarily concerned with determining whether an institution fulfills the Criteria for Accreditation.

Institutions are notified of a required focused visit either through staff action or an action by an HLC decision-making body. The Action Letter will identify the time period for the visit, the related Core Components and the areas of focus. This information is also included in the institution’s ISR Report. HLC will work with the institution to set the date for the on-site visit, which will be conducted by a team of two peer reviewers. Institutions are required to submit a Focused Visit Report demonstrating the institution's progress in addressing the areas of focus, with supporting evidence and documentation. The team's role is to evaluate the areas specified as the focus of the visit and to provide HLC with a report on developments related to those areas. Recommendations from the team go to the Institutional Actions Council for final action.
DEcision making bodies comprised of institutional representatives and public members take actions on HLC-affiliated institutions. 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 representative of HLC’s member institutions, with attention to institutional type, control, size and geographical distribution. All decision-making bodies abide by HLC’s conflict of interest policies. HLC’s three decision-making bodies are:

Institutional Actions Council
The IAC is composed of approximately 140 members representing HLC member institutions and the public. Members are appointed by the Board of Trustees to serve four-year terms (see the IAC roster on page 7). The IAC has the authority to act on substantive change cases, recommendations following interim monitoring, mid-cycle pathway reviews, biennial evaluations and cases of Reaffirmation of Accreditation, including pathway placement. Some cases heard by the IAC require Board action. 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.

Board of Trustees
The Board is made up of at least 15 and no more than 21 members representing institutions and the public. Trustees are elected by HLC member institutions to serve four-year terms (see the Board roster on page 6).

Cases that require final action by the Board include granting or denying an institution candidacy or initial accreditation; issuing or withdrawing a sanction; withdrawing status from an accredited institution; issuing or removing a Show-Cause Order; initiating a reconsideration process; approving or denying a Change of Control, Structure or Organization; and moving an institution from accredited to candidate status.

APPEALS BODY
The Appeals Body is selected by the Board of Trustees to be available to serve on Appeals Panels. Although many actions by the Board are considered final actions, in some cases an institution may appeal an adverse action of the Board. In these instances, an Appeals Panel hears the case and has the authority to affirm, amend or reverse the action of the Board. The Appeals Panel may also send the action back to the Board with specific instructions on how to proceed in further consideration. Action decided by the Panel is a final action and must be recognized and implemented by HLC.

Decision-making process
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.

Each year the IAC reviews more than 1,000 cases in two settings. The first setting is called a meeting, which is held via webinar with a committee of IAC members. Cases that do not require Board action are heard in meetings. 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.

The second type of setting is a hearing. An institution may request, or HLC policy may require, 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 to be responsible for reading the entire record related to each case. Approximately every six weeks, IAC committees review cases in a meeting format. Hearings are always timed to occur in advance of Board meetings.

An action taken by the IAC is considered 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 to the Board of Trustees for final action.

The Board meets in person three times a year to take action on institutional cases, as well as to conduct other HLC business. The Board may also take institutional actions at other times during the year, via teleconference or mail ballots, as necessary.

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. Adverse actions are defined as those that (1) withdraw or deny accreditation, except in denial of accreditation where the Board denies an early application for accreditation and continues candidate for accreditation status or extends it to a fifth year, (2) withdraw or deny candidacy, or (3) move the institution from accredited to candidate status.

Please 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.

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.

Approximately two weeks 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.

TRANSPARENCY IN HLC ACTIONS
HLC seeks to clearly and openly communicate the actions of its decision-making bodies to its member institutions and the public. HLC publishes a full list of actions taken by the IAC and Board on its website within 30 days of action. HLC also provides an online Directory of Institutions that includes the following information about current and former affiliated institutions:

- A 15-year history of reviews conducted by HLC and the actions that resulted.
- The Action Letter from the last comprehensive evaluation. This practice began in 2013.
- A Public Disclosure Notice, if applicable, explaining particular actions regarding sanctions; initial accreditation or candidacy; denial of change of control, structure or organization; or other issues.
HLC relies upon the work 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 currently consists of approximately 1,800 faculty, administrators and staff who are currently employed or recently retired from an HLC-accredited institution.

REMINDERS FOR CURRENT PEER REVIEWERS

PEER REVIEWER PROFILES
All peer reviewers are required to maintain an up-to-date profile in HLC’s online Peer Reviewer Data Update System (PRDUS). The profile includes contact information, education history, work experience and other expertise. It is used by HLC staff members to select review teams and communicate with peer reviewers. Review and update your profile at prdus.hlcommission.org. (Note: When making changes to your profile, be sure to click “Submission Page” at the bottom of the left-hand menu. Follow the prompts to finalize and submit your changes to HLC.)

Please Note
HLC shares training registration information via email. To ensure you receive these notifications, keep your contact information up-to-date in PRDUS and whitelist HLC’s main email addresses (see page 5).

ONLINE TEAM RESOURCES
HLC provides peer review guidelines and report templates on its website at 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 EVALUATIONS
In an effort to provide feedback to peer reviewers about their volunteer service, HLC collects information on reviewer performance after comprehensive evaluations. After final action is taken on a comprehensive evaluation, each member of the review team receives an email with links to evaluate their fellow team members. Reviewers will receive a numerical average of their scores. The evaluation is intended to provide reviewers with feedback about their performance on the key skills and attributes necessary for excellent peer review; it is meant to be constructive, not punitive. These evaluations also help HLC determine how to develop and refine its Peer Corps training and annual conference programs.

WEBINARS FOR TEAM CHAIRS
HLC provides one-hour, live webinars for team chairs to connect with HLC in preparation for leading an evaluation team. The program includes a presentation by an HLC staff liaison on updates to policies and procedures, as well as tips from experienced peer reviewers on preparing for a visit and avoiding common pitfalls. Each session ends with a question-and-answer period in which team chairs can ask the presenters brief questions. Team chairs with upcoming comprehensive evaluations or Assurance Reviews will receive invitations by email to register for these webinars.

Webinar dates are listed at hlcommission.org/calendar. Contact peerreview@hlcommission.org for more information.

Find It Online
hlcommission.org/peer-review
APPLYING TO THE PEER CORPS
HLC seeks experienced, detailed-oriented academics and administrators to serve in its Peer Corps. 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.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS
At least five years of experience in higher education.
Master’s or other appropriate terminal degree; doctorate preferred.
Currently employed by or recently retired (within two years) from an institution accredited by and in good standing with HLC.

CURRENT AREAS OF NEED IN THE CORPS
Peer review teams are most effective when the reviewers reflect the characteristics of the institutions they evaluate. In order to ensure its ability to form teams that represent the full range of its member institutions, HLC is currently seeking Peer Corps applicants of the following types:

- Chief financial officers, budget directors and those in related roles
- Faculty and administrators from medical schools, especially academic M.D.s, and from private, not-for-profit institutions
- Student affairs and senior enrollment management officers
- Academics and administrators from the following racial and ethnic groups:
  - American Indian or Alaska Native
  - Asian and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
  - Black or African-American
  - Hispanic or Latino

APPLICATION PROCESS
HLC accepts Peer Corps applications from mid-January through mid-April each year. Applicants are asked to complete an online application and submit a letter describing their relevant experience, a curriculum vitae or resume, and the names and contact information for two professional references. Additional details and the application are available at hlcommission.org/peer. Contact peerreview@hlcommission.org for more information.
HLC’s Academies are multi-year, mentor-facilitated programs aimed at assisting 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 developing customized projects focused on leading areas of concern in higher education. The programs are adaptive to the needs of the wide range of institutional types served by HLC and support improvement within the context of an institution’s mission, vision and goals.

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 that aims to help institutions design an integrated approach to student learning and student success—one that is sensitive to each institution’s resources and priorities and to the realities of its student populations. Participating institutions learn how to engage multiple stakeholders in supporting student success in the development and implementation of a comprehensive student success plan.

ASSESSMENT ACADEMY
The Assessment Academy is tailored for institutions interested in developing an ongoing commitment to assessing and improving student learning. The Academy offers each institution personalized guidance in developing, documenting and implementing a systematic assessment plan. 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.

APPLYING TO THE ACADEMIES
The Academies are open to all institutions accredited by HLC. For more information about the Academies, including application criteria and timelines, visit hlcommission.org/academies.
ANNUAL CONFERENCE
hlcommission.org/conference
HLC’s annual conference is one of the largest events of its kind in higher education, with approximately 4,000 administrators and faculty members attending each year. The five days of programming cover a broad range of topics, including HLC policies and guidelines, institutional experiences with accreditation processes and best practices, assessment of student learning, quality improvement, institutional effectiveness, professional development and more.

2020 ANNUAL CONFERENCE: LEAD THE EVOLUTION
The 2020 HLC Annual Conference will be held April 17–21 in Chicago. The event will focus on leadership in higher education in the 21st century. Conference presentations will highlight opportunities for accreditors and schools to be on the forefront of change in the higher education sector in order to serve the students of the future. The Call for Proposals for the 2020 conference opens in spring 2019.

WORKSHOPS
hlcommission.org/workshops
HLC’s workshops offer intensive, hands-on learning opportunities for administrators, faculty and staff members at HLC-accredited and candidate institutions. Under the guidance of expert practitioners, participants learn, develop and advance their practice as well as the quality of their institution.

2019–20 WORKSHOP OFFERINGS
HLC offers programs for individual participants and for team of colleagues.

Accreditation Processes And Roles
Accreditation Workshop
one-day event / offered at the annual conference: April 2020

Standard Pathway Seminar
one-day event / offered once a year: TBD

Assessment of Student Learning
Emerging Leaders in Assessment Workshop
two-day event / next offering: Fall 2019

Assessing General Education Workshop
three-day event / offered once a year: Fall 2019

Strategic Assessment Workshop
three-day event / next offering: Spring 2020

Strategy
Advancing Strategy Workshop
three-day event / next offering: Summer 2020

Effective Administrators Workshop
one-day event / next offering: Summer 2019

STUDENT SUCCESS
Supporting Student Success Workshop
one-day event / next offering: Spring 2020

HLC continues to create new professional development events with input from members. For more information, visit hlcommission.org/workshops.

Stay Connected
Follow HLC on Twitter and LinkedIn for the latest news and conversation on HLC events.

Twitter
@hlcommission

LinkedIn
linkedin.com/company/hlcommission
CRITERIA GUIDELINES

DETERMINING QUALIFIED FACULTY
hlcommission.org/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
hlcommission.org/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
hlcommission.org/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. School of Record Guidelines highlights the Criteria and Assumed Practices relevant for these institutions.

SHARED SERVICES ARRANGEMENTS
hlcommission.org/shared-services
HLC’s Shared Services Arrangements: Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviewers provides guidance to institutions and peer reviewers in evaluating shared services arrangements involving institutions accredited by HLC. These guidelines explain the Criteria for Accreditation that will be primarily considered when shared services arrangements are evaluated.

TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS SEEKING TO OFFER THE BACCALAUREATE DEGREE
hlcommission.org/baccalaureate
Before launching baccalaureate programs, two-year institutions must seek HLC approval through a substantive change request. As more two-year institutions seek to offer baccalaureate degrees, HLC has developed guidelines, Two-Year Institutions Seeking to Offer the Baccalaureate Degree: Considerations of Readiness, to 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.

REPORTS

INNOVATION AS THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMPENDIUM OF PAPERS FROM HLC’S PARTNERS FOR TRANSFORMATION
hlcommission.org/partners
HLC’s Partners for Transformation, created in 2017, is a blue-ribbon panel tasked with offering innovative ideas on accreditation of colleges and universities. This group of higher education thought leaders is conceptualizing 21st-century accrediting practices that assure quality in higher education and ultimately better benefit students in today’s world.

The group has published a compendium of thought papers on the following topics:
1. Student-Focused Accrediting Agencies
2. Revolution of Post-secondary Education: The Unbundling
3. Relationship to the Triad and Beyond

STUDENT SUCCESS DATA
hlcommission.org/student-success
Two joint initiatives launched by HLC with funding from Lumina Foundation are designed to test variables that
affect student success and to define key terms such as persistence, retention and completion. One group of diverse member institutions has conducted research to test variables on a variety of student bodies. A sister group comprised of representatives from institutions, national higher education organizations, state agencies and national data organizations has been working to identify ways in which HLC may contribute to the student success conversation.

The groups have published a series of papers:

1. Defining Student Success Data: Recommendations for Changing the Conversation
   This paper calls for a new focus in the student success agenda, away from the buzzword of "completion" and toward the needs of students of today.

2. Defining Student Success Data: Recommendations on Differentiation for Disaggregation
   This paper explores the opportunities of student success as being central to accreditation, encourages institutions to be accountable for the students they accept and offers a new heuristic model for looking at data and creating a narrative around the institution’s progress toward student success.

3. Defining Student Success Data: Recommendations for a Glossary of Terms
   This paper explores the terms we use to describe student success and measure related data, then proposes definitions of key terms related to student success, such as retention, persistence and completion.

4. Testing Student Success Data
   This paper describes the findings from the group’s research on variables that affect student success in a variety of student bodies.

INNOVATION ZONE
hlcommission.org/innovation-zone
HLC’s Innovation Zone initiative, based on HLC’s strategic plan and supported by the Lumina Foundation, is comprised of 10 representatives from institutions in HLC’s region. The participants identified opportunities for HLC and its members to be more supportive of innovation. The group developed two proposals:

1. Continuous Improvement of the Substantive Change Process
   This paper proposes a “flipped” substantive change process that would allow institutions to launch new programs faster.

2. A Space to Innovate
   This paper proposes a process for HLC to work with institutions to test innovations in higher education, with permission and potential regulatory relief from the U.S. Department of Education.
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 2019 HLC Annual Conference on April 7 to share their experiences in person.

STANDARD PATHWAY
Comprehensive Evaluation
Antioch University
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit
Highest Degree: Doctoral
Headcount: 3,005
Contact: Iris Weisman, Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs
Email: iweisman@antioch.edu
Phone: 937.769.1890

Arkansas State University
Control: Public
Highest Degree: Doctoral
Headcount: 13,137
Contact: Summer DeProw, Interim Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Email: sdeprow@astate.edu
Phone: 870.680.4311

Bellevue University
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit
Highest Degree: Doctoral
Headcount: 8,655
Contact: Peter Heineman, Director, Institutional Accreditation
Email: heineman@bellevue.edu
Phone: 402.557.7146

Mid-America Christian University
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit
Highest Degree: Master’s
Headcount: 2,028
Contact: Sharon Lease, Vice-President for Academic Affairs
Email: sharon.lease@macu.edu
Phone: 405.692.3190

Missouri Valley College
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit
Highest Degree: Master’s
Headcount: 1,351
Contact: Diane Bartholomew, Vice President of Academic Affairs
Email: bartholomewd@moval.edu
Phone: 660.831.4146

OPEN PATHWAY
Comprehensive Evaluation
A. T. Still University of Health Sciences
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit
Highest Degree: Doctoral
Headcount: 3,723
Contact: Norine Eitel, Assistant to the President
Email: neitel@atsu.edu
Phone: 660.626.2391

Missouri Baptist University
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit
Highest Degree: Doctoral
Headcount: 2,799
Contact: Timothy Delicath, Director for Institutional Effectiveness and Research
Email: timothy.delicath@mobap.edu
Phone: 314.485.8438

Ohio Dominican University
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit
Highest Degree: Master’s
Headcount: 1,614
Contact: Linda Wolf, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Email: wolfl2@ohiodominican.edu  
Phone: 614.251.4730

Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science  
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit  
Highest Degree: Doctoral  
Headcount: 2,145

Contact: Nancy L. Parsley, Acting Provost  
Email: nancy.parsley@rosalindfranklin.edu  
Phone: 847.578.8401

Tulsa Community College  
Control: Public  
Highest Degree: Associate’s  
Headcount: 14,413

Contact: Paula Settoon, Dean of Libraries and Knowledge Management  
Email: paula.settoon@tulsacc.edu  
Phone: 918.595.7461

University of Northwestern – St. Paul  
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit  
Highest Degree: Master’s  
Headcount: 2,020

Contact: Cheryl Norman, Director of Quality Improvement and Assessment  
Email: crnorman@unwsp.edu  
Phone: 651.631.5247

Viterbo University  
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit  
Highest Degree: Doctoral  
Headcount: 2,790

Contact: Tracy Stewart, Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Email: tmstewart2@gmail.com  
Phone: 608.796.3081

Youngstown State University  
Control: Public  
Highest Degree: Doctoral  
Headcount: 11,375

Contact: Kevin Ball, Associate Provost, Academic Programs and Planning  
Email: keball@ysu.edu  
Phone: 330.941.1560

Year 4 Assurance Review  
Institute of American Indian and Alaska Native Culture and Arts Development  
Control: Tribal  
Highest Degree: Master’s  
Headcount: 379

Contact: William Sayre, Director, Institutional Research  
Email: bsayre@iaia.edu  
Phone: 505.424.2364

Northeast Community College  
Control: Public  
Highest Degree: Associate’s  
Headcount: 2,693

Contact: John Blaylock, Vice President of Educational Services  
Email: johnb@northeast.edu  
Phone: 402.844.7292

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Sample Quality Initiative Proposals  
qi.hlcommission.org

HLC provides sample Quality Initiative Proposals that illustrate the wide range of projects that can be used as Quality Initiatives and demonstrate the information and level of detail that peer reviewers need when evaluating proposals.
Sitting Bull College
Control: Tribal
Highest Degree: Master’s
Headcount: 311
Contact: Koreen Ressler, Vice President of Operations
Email: koreen.ressler@sittingbull.edu
Phone: 701.854.8001

**AQIP PATHWAY**

**Comprehensive Evaluation**

Cuyahoga Community College
Control: Public
Highest Degree: Associate’s
Headcount: 23,900
Contact: Lindsay English, Vice President, Learning and Engagement
Email: lindsay.english@tri-c.edu
Phone: 216.987.3610

Johnson County Community College
Control: Public
Highest Degree: Associate’s
Headcount: 11,415
Contact: John Clayton, Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness
Email: claytonj@jccc.edu
Phone: 913.469.2755

University of Rio Grande/Rio Grande Community College
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit
Highest Degree: Master’s
Headcount: 1,812
Contact: David Lawrence, Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness
Email: lawrence@rio.edu
Phone: 740.245.7032

**SAMPLE ASSURANCE ARGUMENTS**

HLC provides demonstration sites that present full Assurance Filings, with Assurance Arguments and Evidence Files. 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.

The demonstration sites are available at [hlcommission.org/assurance-samples](http://hlcommission.org/assurance-samples).

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**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 2019 HLC Annual Conference.

**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING**

Heidelberg University
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit
Highest Degree: Master’s
Headcount: 1,193
Contact: Vicki Ohl, Associate Vice President for Academic Administration, Honors, and Faculty Support
Email: vohl@heidelberg.edu
Phone: 419.448.2086

Lake Michigan College
Control: Public
Highest Degree: Bachelor’s
Headcount: 2,629
Contact: Dana Jenkins, Director of Nursing/Program Chair; Student Learning Committee Co-Chair
Email: DJenkins@lakemichigancollege.edu
Phone: 269.927.8100, ext. 5232

Maricopa Community Colleges – Gateway Community College
Control: Public
Highest Degree: Associate’s
Headcount: 5,087
Contact: Cathleen Hernandez, Associate Vice President Institutional Effectiveness
Email: hernandez@gatewaycc.edu
Phone: 602.286.8028

Rasmussen College
Control: Private, For-Profit
Highest Degree: Bachelor’s
Headcount: 15,266
Contact: Matthew Segaard, Assistant Vice President – Institutional Research and Assessment
Email: matthews@rasmussen.edu
Phone: 952.806.3913
Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit
Highest Degree: Doctoral
Headcount: 2,145
Contact: Nancy L. Parsley, Acting Provost
Email: nancy.parsley@rosalindfranklin.edu
Phone: 847.578.8401

Turtle Mountain Community College
Control: Tribal
Highest Degree: Bachelor’s
Headcount: 511
Contact: Erik Kornkven, English Faculty
Email: ekornkven@tm.edu
Phone: 701.477.7862, ext. 2093

PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION IMPROVEMENT
Cameron University
Control: Public
Highest Degree: Master’s
Headcount: 4,524
Contact: Margery Kingsley, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs Office of Teaching and Learning
Email: margeryk@cameron.edu
Phone: 580.581.2331

DeVry University
Control: Private, For-Profit
Highest Degree: Master’s
Headcount: 28,238
Contact: Keith Weroush, Associate National Dean for Institutional Effectiveness
Email: kwerosh@devry.edu
Phone: 630.353.7018

Fontbonne University
Control: Private, Not-for-Profit
Highest Degree: Master’s
Headcount: 1,375
Contact: Amy Simons, Director of Student Success and Engagement
Email: asimons@fontbonne.edu
Phone: 314.889.4780

Gateway Technical College
Control: Public
Highest Degree: Associate’s
Headcount: 5,614
Contact: John Thibodeau, Assistant Provost/Vice President Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success
Email: thibodeauj@gtc.edu

Marshall University
Control: Public
Highest Degree: Doctoral
Headcount: 12,311
Contact: Sherri Smith, Associate Vice President Academic Affairs
Email: smithsc@marshall.edu
Phone: 304.696.2809

Mitchell Technical Institute
Control: Public
Highest Degree: Associate’s
Headcount: 1,005
Contact: Marla Smith, Accreditation and Institutional Effectiveness Director
Email: marla.smith@mitchelltech.edu
Phone: 605.995.7157

Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute
Control: Tribal
Highest Degree: Associate’s
Headcount: 366
Contact: Edward Hummingbird, Director of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning
Email: edward.hummingbird@bie.edu
Phone: 505.922.6506

University of Michigan-Flint
Control: Public
Highest Degree: Doctoral
Headcount: 7,836
Contact: Christine Waters, Professor of Art and Chair, Department of Art and Art History
Email: cwaters@umich.edu
Phone: 810.766.6679

University of Missouri-Kansas City
Control: Public
Highest Degree: Doctoral
Headcount: 16,372
Contact: Cynthia Pemberton, Deputy Provost and Professor, Counseling and Educational Psychology
Email: pembertonc@umkc.edu
Phone: 816.235.6435
ONLINE HLC RESOURCES

HLC POLICIES
All Policies
hlcommission.org/policies
Proposed Policies
hlcommission.org/proposed-policies
Adopted Policy Amendments
hlcommission.org/adopted-policies
Assumed Practices
hlcommission.org/assumed-practices
Criteria for Accreditation
hlcommission.org/criteria
Obligations of Affiliation
hlcommission.org/obligations

ACCREDITATION STATUS
Directory of Institutions (search to find an institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status)
hlcommission.org/directory
Request an Institutional Status and Requirements (ISR) Report
hlcommission.org/isr-request
Request a Letter From HLC to Verify Accreditation Status
hlcommission.org/letter-request

ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES
Accreditation Liaison Officer Role
hlcommission.org/alo
AQIP Pathway Transition
hlcommission.org/aqip
Comprehensive Evaluation
hlcommission.org/comprehensive
Dues and Fees Schedule
hlcommission.org/dues

Federal Compliance
hlcommission.org/federal-compliance
Financial and Non-financial Indicators
hlcommission.org/indicators
Focused Visit
hlcommission.org/focused-visit
Institutional Change
hlcommission.org/change
Institutional Update
hlcommission.org/update
Interim Report
hlcommission.org/interim-report
Off-Campus Activities
hlcommission.org/locations
Open Pathway
hlcommission.org/open
Standard Pathway
hlcommission.org/standard

ONLINE SYSTEMS
Assurance System
assurance.hlcommission.org
Training and User Support Resources
hlcommission.org/assurance-system
Institutional Update
inst-update.hlcommission.org
Location and Campus Update
lcu.hlcommission.org
Online Bill Payment
epay.hlcommission.org

PEER REVIEW
Peer Reviewer Application
hlcommission.org/peer
Team Report Templates and Guidelines
hlcommission.org/team-resources
ONLINE SYSTEMS
Assurance System
assurance.hlcommission.org
Training and User Support Resources
hlcommission.org/assurance-system
HLC Portal
hlportal.org
Peer Reviewer Data Update System (PRDUS)
prdus.hlcommission.org

DECISION MAKING
Recent Institutional Actions
hlcommission.org/actions
Decision-Making Bodies and Processes
hlcommission.org/decision-making

HLC PROGRAMS AND EVENTS
Academies
hlcommission.org/academies
SparQ
Sparq.hlcommission.org
Annual Conference
hlcommission.org/conference
Calendar of Events
hlcommission.org/calendar
Standard Pathway Seminars
hlcommission.org/standard-resources
Workshops
hlcommission.org/workshops
GLOSSARY OF HLC TERMINOLOGY

ABOUT ACCREDITATION

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, national
A type of institutional accreditation primarily for religious colleges and universities, private trade and technical schools, private business colleges, and colleges focusing on health-related fields, as well as institutions offering programs primarily through distance delivery and home study.

accreditation, regional
A type of institutional accreditation provided by accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

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 status
Status that indicates an institution meets HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation.

maintain accreditation
Actively participate, as an institution, in HLC’s accreditation processes to ensure the institution meets 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.

Obligations of Affiliation
The responsibilities that institutions affiliated with HLC are required to fulfill in order to maintain their affiliation.

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.

Public Disclosure Notice (PDN)
A document HLC may post to explain to the public a particular situation at an affiliated institution.

Reaffirmation of Accreditation
An action by an HLC decision-making body confirming an institution meets all of the requirements necessary to keep its accredited status with HLC.

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.

Statement of Accreditation Status (SAS)
A public summary of the relationship between the institution and HLC that identifies the nature of the institution, the conditions of affiliation, and the degree levels included in accreditation.

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

ABOUT HLC

Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)
An individual identified by the chief executive officer of the institution to be second in the line of communication (behind the CEO) with HLC regarding policies, practices and other accreditation matters.

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.

Board of Trustees
The governing body of HLC, made up of 15 to 21 representatives from HLC member institutions and the public.
Core Components
Subcategories of each Criterion for Accreditation that are reviewed in order to determine whether an institution meets each Criterion.

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.

Higher Learning Commission (HLC)
One of six regional accreditors in the United States, HLC accredits degree-granting institutions in a 19-state region.

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 affiliated institutions regarding institutional health.

staff liaison
One of HLC’s Vice Presidents for Accreditation Relations who serves as a resource for affiliated institutions.

ELIGIBILITY AND CANDIDACY

candidacy
Preaccreditation status offering affiliation, not membership, with HLC.

Candidate for Accreditation
An institution with the preaccredited candidacy status that has met HLC’s Eligibility Requirements and shows evidence that it is making progress toward meeting all the Criteria for Accreditation.

Candidacy Program
The steps an institution must follow to gain candidacy with HLC.

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

Eligibility Process
The process by which HLC determines whether a non-affiliated institution is ready to begin the Candidacy Program.

Eligibility Requirements
A set of requirements an institution must meet before it is granted candidacy.

Initial Accreditation
An accreditation status for institutions in their first years of accreditation. Institutions in candidacy must undergo a comprehensive evaluation to ensure they meet the Assumed Practices and the Criteria for Accreditation in full to move to Initial Accreditation.

ACCREDITATION PROCESS

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.

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 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 or Systems Portfolio and evidentiary materials and used by peer reviewers to complete the Assurance Review or Comprehensive Quality Review.

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.

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

**Evaluation Summary Sheet**
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.

**Evidence File**
Documents used in the Assurance Filing that support the institution's Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio.

**Federal Compliance Requirements**
Requirements that HLC is obliged to enforce as part of its recognition by the U.S. Department of Education. This includes assuring its members are meeting their Title IV program responsibilities and complying with other expectations.

**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.

**interim report**
A report filed by an institution between comprehensive evaluations 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.

**multi-campus visit**
A visit to a selection of an institution’s additional campuses that occurs as part of the comprehensive evaluation.

**multi-location visit**
A visit to a selection of off-campus 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 though the Institutional Update that help HLC determine if the institution may be at risk of not meeting components of the Criteria for Accreditation.

**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.

**OPEN PATHWAY**

**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.

**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.

**STANDARD PATHWAY**

**Assurance Argument Improvement Plan Feedback**
In the academic year preceding the comprehensive evaluation, institutions on the Standard Pathway receive an invitation from HLC to submit an improvement plan for feedback. The institution’s staff liaison provides comments intended to clarify expectations regarding the issues to be addressed within the Assurance Argument.

**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.

*See also Programs and Events.*
INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

additional location
A place, geographically separate from any main or branch campus, where instruction takes place and students can do one or more of the following:

- Complete 50 percent or more of the courses leading to a degree program.
- Complete 50 percent or more of the courses leading to a Title IV eligible certificate.
- Complete 50 percent 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).

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 percent 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 change request.

campus/branch campus
A location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus. 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.

change of control
A transaction that affects, or may affect, corporate control, structure or governance at an accredited or candidate institution.

Change Panel
A panel of three 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.

consortial arrangement
An arrangement in which an HLC-accredited institution develops an agreement with an institution or group of institutions—that is, the consortial party(ies)—through which the consortial party(ies) agree 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.

Consortial Arrangement Screening Form
An online form used by institutions to initiate the process of adding or updating consortial arrangements.

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.

Contractual Arrangement Screening Form
An online form used by institutions to initiate the process of adding or updating contractual arrangements.

correspondence education
Education provided through one or more courses 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 instructor.

Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Correspondence courses are typically self-paced. Correspondence education is not distance education.

desk review
An evaluation conducted by an HLC official of a change requested by the institution.

distance-delivered courses
Courses in which at least 75 percent of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other.

distance-delivered programs
Certificate or degree programs in which 50 percent or more of the required courses may be taken as distance-delivered courses.

distance education
Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed below to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may 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 conferencing.
4. Video cassettes, DVDs and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed above.

Location and Campus Update System
An online system used by institutions to update existing locations and branch campuses. Institutions in the Notification Program may also use it to request new additional locations.

Notification Program for Additional Locations
A program for qualified institutions to request approval for opening new additional locations through an expedited process.

PEER REVIEW
exit session
A meeting between the peer review team and the CEO of the institution at the conclusion of a visit.

Peer Corps
The group of faculty, administrators and public members from within HLC’s 19-state region who evaluate whether institutions are meeting the Criteria for Accreditation 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 who may also serve as a member of HLC decision-making bodies.

Peer Reviewer Data Update System (PRDUS)
The online system used by the Peer Corps that provides peer reviewers an avenue to update contact information, view scheduled visits and update availability.

team chair
The leader of a peer review team, who handles contacting 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.
DECISION MAKING

Action Letter
Official correspondence from HLC to an institution detailing an action taken by one of HLC’s decision-making bodies regarding that institution.

adverse action
An action by HLC’s Board of Trustees that withdraws or denies accreditation (except in denial of early initial accreditation where the institution continues candidate status), withdraws or denies candidacy, or moves the institution from accredited to candidate status.

Appeals Body
A group of 15 Institutional Actions Council members appointed by the Board of Trustees.

Appeals 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.

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.

official action
An official HLC decision made by the HLC staff, the Institutional Actions Council or HLC’s Board of Trustees.

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

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

annual conference
A multi-day event featuring numerous presentations focused on accreditation and higher learning topics.

Standard Pathway Q&A Webinars
Webinars providing the opportunity to ask questions about any topic related to the Standard Pathway, including the Assurance System, embedded improvement, monitoring, and so forth.

Standard Pathway Seminars
Seminars on addressing improvement in the Assurance Argument that provide institutions on the Standard Pathway with assistance in formulating improvement plans and feedback on plans that have been drafted.

workshops
Events ranging from one to three days that provide intensive, hands-on learning opportunities for individual professionals and teams of colleagues from HLC-accredited or candidate institutions.

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 either Academy topic, 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 Quality Services staff, Primary 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 Primary Mentor and a Scholar to the team’s Project Update in SparQ.

Data Discovery
A mentor-led event in the Persistence and Completion Academy at which the institution studies its current data sets and the structures currently in place to assure campus-wide engagement in data analysis and planning.

Event Facilitator
A Primary 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 Consultation
An Academy event, typically conducted virtually, in which the Primary Mentor reviews the Academy team’s progress and offers recommendations for the team’s project development and sustainability.

Mentor Response
Response provided by the Primary 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 Workshop or Webinar
An event presented by HLC to prepare the institutional representatives heading the Academy effort to assemble and lead an effective Academy team.

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

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 Project, 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 three-year program of in-person and virtual events designed for institutions seeking to establish sustainable structures that support students’ achievement of their higher education goals.