2024
Resource Guide
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Who We Are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Contact HLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Board of Trustees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Institutional Actions Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>HLC Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mission, Vision and Guiding Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>HLC Initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Strategic Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Improvements to HLC Requirements and Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>HLC’s Credential Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>2023 Policy Changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Criteria for Accreditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Assumed Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Obligations of Membership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
42 Procedures
43 The Accreditation Relationship
46 Start Your Accreditation Journey
47 Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation
52 Federal Compliance
53 Substantive Change
56 Additional Locations and Branch Campuses
58 Institutional Update and Financial/Non-financial Indicators
59 Monitoring
60 Sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and Adverse Actions
62 Decision-Making Bodies and Processes

64 Accreditation Roles on Campus
65 Institutional Representatives
66 Accreditation Liaison Officer Role
67 Resources and Training

68 Peer Corps
69 Resources and Training for Current Peer Reviewers
71 Becoming a Peer Reviewer

72 Serving Students
73 The HLC Commitment
73 Student Resources

74 Programs and Events
75 HLC’s Academies
75 HLC’s Annual Conference
76 More Learning Opportunities

78 Resources
79 Institutional Examples
81 Publications
83 HLC’s Online Systems
84 Glossary of HLC Terminology

_hlcommission.org_ is published each year in time for the Annual Conference. The next issue will be published in April 2025. For the most current information from HLC, visit _hlcommission.org_.

**Higher Learning 2025**
_HLC Annual Conference_
April 5–8, 2025 | Chicago, IL

**Learn more about the conference on page 75**
Who We Are

Always responsive. Always personalized.

Sharon Ulmer, HLC Director of Accreditation Services
Contact HLC

Higher Learning Commission
230 South LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500
Chicago, Illinois 60604-1411
Phone: 800.621.7440 / 312.263.0456
Fax: 312.263.7462
hlc@hlcommission.org

Accreditation Services

• General Accreditation Information
  accreditation@hlcommission.org

• Mark of Accreditation Status
  info@hlcommission.org

• Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation
  pathways@hlcommission.org

• Request an Official Letter from HLC (for verification of accreditation status, program or location approval, etc.)
  hlcommission.org/letter-request

• Seeking Accreditation
  seekingaccreditation@hlcommission.org

• Submit Documents to HLC
  hlcommission.org/upload

• Substantive Change
  changerequest@hlcommission.org

Peer Review

• Diversity Initiative
  diversity@hlcommission.org

• General Peer Corps Information
  peerreview@hlcommission.org

• Questions Related to Review Assignments
  evaluations@hlcommission.org

Programs and Events

• Academies
  academy@hlcommission.org

• Annual Conference
  annualconference@hlcommission.org

• Other Learning Programs
  programming@hlcommission.org

Administration

• President’s Office
  president@hlcommission.org

• Institutional Dues
  dues@hlcommission.org

Online System and Website Support

• Assurance System
  hlcommission.org/assurance-help

• Canopy
  hlcommission.org/canopy-help

• SparQ
  hlcommission.org/sparq-help

• HLC website
  hlcommission.org

Follow HLC

linkedin.com/company/hlcommission
twitter.com/hlcommission
youtube.com/@higherlearningcommission

News From HLC

Email
Email is HLC’s primary means of communicating with member institutions. Please help ensure that email communications we send are delivered by adding these addresses to your approved sender lists:

• hlc@hlcommission.org
• accreditation@hlcommission.org
• inst-update@hlcommission.org
• peerreview@hlcommission.org
• evaluations@hlcommission.org

Communications regarding general announcements and HLC programs and events are also sent using these addresses:

• president@hlcommission.org
• programming@hlcommission.org
• academy@hlcommission.org
• annualconference@hlcommission.org

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

Leaflet
HLC’s newsletter, Leaflet, is published six times a year and is your source for the latest HLC updates, news and resources.
Subscribe at hlcommission.org/leaflet.
Board of Trustees

Chair
Dr. Jo Alice Blondin
President, Clark State College

Vice Chair
Mr. Richard Dunsworth
President, University of the Ozarks

Treasurer
Mr. Donald M. Elliman, Jr.
Chancellor, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

Mr. Michael Belter
Retired Budget Analyst Staff, American Electric Power Company

Dr. Rita Hartung Cheng
President Emerita, Professor of Accounting and Senior Fellow for Educational Policy, Northern Arizona University

Ms. Catherine (Katy) Crosby
Chief, Community Engagement & Institutional Accountability, National Community Reinvestment Coalition

Dr. Jacquelyn Elliott
President, Central Arizona College

Dr. Daniel Abebe
Vice Provost, University of Chicago

Dr. Joyce Ester
President, Normandale Community College

Dr. Noah Finkelstein
Professor of Physics, University of Colorado Boulder

Brig. Gen. Jack R. Fox
United States Army (retired)

Ms. Lisa John
Secretary, Chickasaw Nation Department of Culture and Humanities

Dr. J. Lee Johnson
Innovation and Planning Strategist, Mount Marty University

Dr. Paul C. Koch
Retired Provost & Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs and Professor Emeritus, St. Ambrose University

Dr. Joanne Li
Chancellor, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Dr. Robert Martin
President, Institute of American Indian Arts

Dr. Katricia Pierson
President, Crowder College

Dr. Bill Pink
President, Ferris State University

Dr. Henry L. Smith
Professor of Communication, Indiana Wesleyan University
## Institutional Actions Council

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casmir I. Agbaraji</td>
<td>Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Navajo Technical University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett Andrews</td>
<td>Dean, School of Business, Belhaven University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandra D. Arthur</td>
<td>Associate Vice President, Program Accreditation and Healthcare Initiatives, District Office, Cuyahoga Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christon George Arthur</td>
<td>Provost, Andrews University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt Ashcraft</td>
<td>Associate Vice Chancellor for Student and Employee Experience Research, Maricopa Community Colleges-Mesa Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine E. Austin</td>
<td>Director of Assessment and Accreditation, Arkansas Tech University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Austin</td>
<td>Executive Director of Special Projects, University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Babbitt</td>
<td>Chief of Staff, Office of the President, University of New Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Baehr</td>
<td>Special Assistant to the President, Coe College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter S. Barger</td>
<td>Associate Provost and Director, Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, Professor, Economics and Finance, North Central College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheri H. Barrett</td>
<td>Associate Professor, Baker University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah E. Beasley</td>
<td>Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students, Concord University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marius Boboc</td>
<td>Department Chair, Cleveland State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan W. Borcherding</td>
<td>Director of Research, Assessment, and Academic Programming, Concordia Seminary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan Roy Brandstater</td>
<td>President, Kettering College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Rose Brewer</td>
<td>Senior Contributing Faculty Member, Walden University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dale R. Brougher</td>
<td>Professor, University of Findlay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna Brown</td>
<td>President, Turtle Mountain Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kari Brown-Herbst</td>
<td>Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs, Laramie County Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly Burke, Ph.D.</td>
<td>Professor of Management, Dominican University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill Carlson</td>
<td>Director for Assessment and Accreditation, Santa Fe Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra L. Cassady</td>
<td>President and CEO, Rockhurst University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otto Chang</td>
<td>Paul E Shaffer Professor of Accounting, Purdue University Fort Wayne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah Clayborne</td>
<td>Dean of Students, Drake University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam L. Cloutier</td>
<td>Vice President of Academics, Glen Oaks Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin L. Cole</td>
<td>Professor of English, University of Sioux Falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis C. Coonrod</td>
<td>Assistant Vice Chancellor for Advancement (Retired), University of Missouri-Saint Louis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven M. Corey</td>
<td>President, The University of Olivet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel P. Corr</td>
<td>President, Arizona Western College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Ann Danielson</td>
<td>Professor, Communication Studies, Creighton University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caron L. Daugherty</td>
<td>President/CEO, Flint Hills Technical College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel A. Dosumu</td>
<td>Chancellor, University of New Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana Doyle</td>
<td>President Emerita, Arapahoe Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott W. Epstein</td>
<td>Executive Vice President for Quality and Effectiveness, Davenport University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Faltyn</td>
<td>President, Murray State College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eri Fujieda</td>
<td>Director of Institutional Planning, Assessment and Research, Winona State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie A. Furst-Bowe</td>
<td>Vice President (Retired), Arkansas Tech University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip Garber</td>
<td>Executive Director of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, Elgin Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Gersich</td>
<td>Professor of Business, McPherson College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita Gulstad</td>
<td>Provost, Central Methodist University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert S. Haas</td>
<td>Provost and Chief Strategy Officer, Marion Technical College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Hamilton</td>
<td>Executive Vice President, Sinte Gleska University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah L. Hardy</td>
<td>Vice President of Academic Affairs, Lakeland Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algerian Hart</td>
<td>Assistant to the President for Inclusive Engagement, Missouri State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antwione M. Haywood</td>
<td>Assistant Dean, Medical Student Affairs, Indiana University Bloomington</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Keldon Henley  
Chief of Staff and Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Ouachita Baptist University

Adrian Elizabeth Hinkle  
Academic Dean, Oral Roberts University

Julie Hixson-Wallace  
Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Accreditation and Professor, College of Pharmacy, Harding University

Bradford Hodson  
Executive Vice President, Missouri Southern State University

Pamela Humphrey  
Associate Dean for Arts, Sciences and Professional Studies, College of Saint Mary

Osaro O. Ighodaro  
Vice President, Student Affairs, Maricopa Community Colleges-South Mountain Community College

Bill Lamb  
Vice President, Academic Affairs (Retired), Kirkwood Community College

Mary Lamb  
Vice President and Special Assistant to the President, Midwestern University

Kim J Linduska  
Executive Vice President, Des Moines Area Community College

Vahid Lotfi  
Professor of Management Science, University of Michigan-Flint

David Neil Lowry  
Professor of Communication, Oklahoma Christian University

John Mago  
Professor, Anoka-Ramsey Community College

Christine M. Manion  
Vice President, Institutional Effectiveness, Milwaukee Area Technical College

Michelle Metzinger  
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of Saint Mary

Jennifer L. Miller  
Dean of Continuing, Graduate, and Online Education, Simpson College

Ravindra P. Misra  
Professor, Medical College of Wisconsin

Venita M. Mitchell  
Vice President of Student Engagement and Senior Student Experience Officer, Averett University

Pamela Jean Monaco  
President, Ocean County College

Kara N Monroe  
Provost, Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana

Luis Daniel Montes  
Professor and Chair, Department of Chemistry, University of Central Oklahoma

Mary Candace Moore  
Associate Provost, University of Indianapolis

Jan Murphy  
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Illinois State University

Cheryl Ann Murphy  
Professor, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Clyne Namuo  
President, Joliet Junior College

Joye H. Norris  
Professor of Education, Missouri State University

Andrew I Nwanne  
Vice President of Academic Affairs and Chief Academic Officer, Crowder College

Elizabeth Owolabi  
Professor of Research, Concordia University Chicago

Neil Pagano  
Associate Provost for Accreditation and Assessment, Columbia College Chicago

Matthew Pearcy  
Biological Residential Faculty, Maricopa Community Colleges-Glendale Community College

Lisa Perez-Miller  
Vice President, Students/Enrollment Management, Pratt Community College

Elaine A. Pontillo  
Professor, Global Leadership, Indiana Institute of Technology

Paul C. Pribbenow  
President, Augsburg University

Vaidehi Rajagopalan  
Professor Emeritus, Saint Charles Community College

Rex D. Ramsier  
Professor of Physics, University of Akron

Richard A Redner  
Professor of Mathematics, University of Tulsa

Amy Beth Rell  
Provost, College for Financial Planning, Inc.

Koreen Ressler  
Vice President of Operations, Sitting Bull College
Carlotta G. Reynolds  
Assistant Professor, Business, Oakland City University

Richard K Rieder  
Senior Advisor for Finance, Human Resources and Facilities, A. T. Still University of Health Sciences

Sharon K. Robbert  
Professor of Mathematics, Trinity Christian College

Patricia L. Rogers  
President, Lake Superior College

Shirley K. Rose  
Professor of English, Arizona State University

Kenneth G. Ruit  
Senior Associate Dean for Education, Medical Accreditation and Faculty Affairs, University of North Dakota

Malayappan Shridhar  
Professor Emeritus, University of Michigan-Dearborn

Judith Penrod Siminoe  
Vice President for University Affairs and Advisor to the President, St. Cloud State University

Jay K. Simmons  
Vice President for Institutional Advancement, Saint Paul School of Theology

Jim Simpson  
Professor (Retired), Maricopa Community Colleges-Scottsdale Community College

Randy L. Smith  
Executive Vice President for Business and Administrative Services, Oklahoma Baptist University

Marci Sortor  
Provost and Dean of the College, St. Olaf College

Nelson Edward Soto, Ph.D.  
President, Carlos Albizu University

Robert A Spohr  
Vice President for Academic Affairs, Montcalm Community College

Kristin Stehouwer  
Academic Vice President and Provost, Northwood University

Randall Jay Stiles  
Higher Education Consultant, Colorado College

Pamela Stinson  
Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs, Oklahoma State University-Oklahoma City

Kathryn Heltne Swanson  
Professor, English and Director of Writing, Augsburg University

Elizabeth V. Swenson  
Adjunct Professor of Psychology, John Carroll University

Thomas Templeton Taylor  
Professor of History, Wittenberg University

Robert C. Teahen, Ph.D.  
Associate Provost Emeritus and Doctoral Faculty, Ferris State University

Krystal H. Thrailkill  
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University of Arkansas Rich Mountain

Kelly A. Tzoumis  
Professor, DePaul University

Shashi Unnithan  
Dean of Instruction (Retired), Front Range Community College

Carleen M. Vande Zande  
Associate Vice Chancellor and Faculty Emerita, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

Devarajan Venugopal  
Vice Provost, Academic Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Reggies Wenyikia  
President, Ottawa University

Sue Wilcox  
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Rockhurst University

Alaric A. Williams  
Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, Minot State University

Michael Williford  
Associate Provost Emeritus, Ohio University

Public Members

Caprice Banks  
Talent Development Coordinator, DeKalb County School District

John Chikow  
President and CEO, JC & Associates

Larry Doyle  
Owner/President, Lighthouse Consulting Services

Steve Eikenberry  
Senior Vice President, First American Bank

Kathy Hannan  
National Managing Partner and Vice Chair (Retired), KPMG LLP

Christian Haskin  
Consultant, Indiana University Health - Learning Institute

Steven Kleinman  
Senior Manager (Retired), Training Services at UOP, A Honeywell Company

Peter LaBonte  
Director of Performance Excellence, Goodwill of Southeastern Wisconsin, Inc.

Mary Lloyd  
President, Executive Ventures

Tim Lorson  
Executive Director, Mardi Gras, Inc.

Andrew Loubert  
President/CEO, Community Reinvestment Solutions, Inc.

Katrina McCree  
Chief Community Impact Officer, Neighborhood Service Organization

Michael Schyman  
Chief Financial Officer, Aldridge Electric

Angelique Zerillo  
Principal Consultant, Sinter Design
Executive Leadership Team
Barbara Gellman-Danley
President
Sarah Byrne
Chief Human Resources Officer
Eric Martin
Executive Vice President
Marla Morgen
Vice President and General Counsel
Michael Seuring
Vice President and Chief Financial Officer
Mary Claire Millies
Executive Assistant to the President and Board Professional

Staff Liaisons
Tom Bordenkircher
Vice President of Accreditation Relations
Stephanie Bruzy
Vice President of Accreditation Relations
Andrew Lootens-White
Vice President of Accreditation Relations
John W. Marr, Jr.
Vice President of Accreditation Relations
Karen J. Solomon
Vice President and Chief Transformation Officer
Jamie Stanesa
Vice President of Accreditation Relations
Linnea Stenson
Vice President of Accreditation Relations
Anthea Sweeney
Vice President of Accreditation Relations

Business Development and Procurement
Eva Sitek
Director of Business Development and Procurement

Communications
Heather Berg
Vice President of Communications and Engagement
Judy Delvoye
Marketing Designer
Jessica Glowinski Garfield
Director of Communications

Sophia Holt-Wilson
Marketing and Social Media Writer
Laura Janota
Public Information Officer

Education, Training and Events
Destiny M. Quintero
Vice President of Education, Training and Events
Daniel Quijano
Education, Training and Events Manager

MEETINGS AND EVENTS
Renee Dew
Director of Meetings and Events
Doyle Hytchye
Meetings and Events Manager
Erin Gallagher
Associate Director of Meetings and Events

MEMBER EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Claire Berkley
Director of Member Education and Training
Babatunde Alokolaro
Associate Director of Member Training
Kimberly Davis
Associate Director of Member Education

Finance
Michael Seuring
Vice President and Chief Financial Officer
Ofelia Martinez
Senior Accountant
Susan Pyne-Torres
Director of Finance
Nicole Weatherspoon*
Finance Associate

HLC Credential Lab
Melanie Booth
Executive Director of the HLC Credential Lab

Human Resources and Operations
Sarah Byrne
Chief Human Resources Officer
Cheryl Rothwell
Human Resources and Operations Coordinator

*Not pictured
Legal and Regulatory Affairs

Marla Morgen
Vice President and General Counsel

Sarah Hallett
Manager of Legal and Regulatory Affairs

Robert Rucker
Associate General Counsel

Zach Waymer
Government Affairs Officer

Systems and Accreditation Services

Patricia Newton-Curran
Vice President of Systems and Accreditation Services

ACCREDITATION SERVICES

Vince Coraci
Director of Accreditation Processes

Stephanie Kramer
Director of Accreditation Systems

Sharon Ulmer
Director of Accreditation Services

Kathleen Bijak
Accreditation Processes Manager

Julia Goeke
Accreditation Processes Coordinator

Teagan Harris
Accreditation Processes Associate

Tamas Horvath
Associate Director of Substantive Change

Landon Lee
Accreditation Services Associate

Kerry Lofton
Accreditation Services Manager

Nicole Perez
Accreditation Systems Coordinator

Angela Sales
Accreditation Services Coordinator

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Jon Davenport
Chief Information Officer

Leverett Litz
Senior Systems Administrator

Will Mahoney
Associate Director of Information Technology

Frank Sparano
Senior Support Specialist

Larry Wood
Database and Reporting Analyst

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Hoa Khuong
Director of Institutional Research

PEER CORPS RELATIONS AND SERVICES

Allison Langford
Director of Peer Corps Relations and Services

Denise M. Clark
Peer Corps Relations and Services Manager

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Joan Mitchanis
Records Manager
Who We Are
Mission, Vision and Guiding Values

Higher education should be two things: trusted and evolving.
Mission

Advance the common good through quality assurance of higher education as the leader in equitable, transformative and trusted accreditation in the service of students and member institutions.

Vision

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

Guiding Values

HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation reflect a set of guiding values. HLC articulates these guiding values so as to offer a better understanding of the Criteria and the intentions that underlie them.

The responsibility for assuring the quality of an institution rests first with the institution itself. Institutional accreditation assesses the capacity of an institution to assure its own quality and expects it to produce evidence that it does so.

Many of the Criteria for Accreditation should be understood in this light. HLC expects an institution’s governing board to ensure quality through its governance structures, with appropriate degrees of involvement and delegation. HLC emphasizes planning because planning is critical to sustaining quality. Assessment of student learning and focus on persistence and completion are ways in which the institution improves and thus assures the quality of its teaching and learning.

HLC expects that institutions have the standards, the processes, and the will for quality assurance in depth and throughout their educational offerings.
1. Focus on student learning

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

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

2. Education as a public purpose

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

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

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

4. A culture of continuous improvement

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

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

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

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

5. Evidence-based institutional learning and self-presentation

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

6. Integrity, transparency, and ethical behavior or practice

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

7. Governance for the well-being of the institution

The well-being of an institution requires that its governing board place that well-being above the interests of its own members and the interests of any other entity. Because HLC accredits the educational institution itself, and not the state system, religious organization, corporation, medical center or other entity that may own it, it holds the governing board of an institution accountable for the key aspects of the institution’s operations. The governing board must have the independent authority for such accountability and must also hold itself independent of undue influence from individuals, be they donors, elected officials, supporters of athletics, shareholders, or others with personal or political interests. Governance of a quality institution of higher education will include a significant role for faculty, in particular with regard to currency and sufficiency of the curriculum, expectations for student performance, qualifications of the instructional staff, and adequacy of resources for instructional support.

8. Planning and management of resources to ensure institutional sustainability

HLC does not privilege wealth. 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.
Accreditation shouldn’t stifle innovation — it should provide the fuel.
Strategic Plan

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

Equity

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

Goals

1. **Demonstrate Equity in HLC’s Mission.** HLC will ensure that concepts of equity, diversity, access and inclusion are demonstrated in its mission and other foundational statements.

2. **Promote Equity Principles.** HLC will actively promote an understanding of and sensitivity to equity principles in its interactions with institutions and other stakeholders.

3. **Assess Policies and Procedures.** HLC will assess and address equity in relation to its operational policies and related procedures.

4. **Inform the Public.** HLC will provide information to the public regarding issues that are impacted by equity considerations, for example educational attainment and high-quality credentials.

Activities in 2023

HLC continues to monitor emerging state legislative efforts on topics such as DEI and academic freedom (“divisive concepts”) throughout the United States with an eye towards the intersection with HLC requirements.

As the project to evaluate and update, as necessary, the Criteria for Accreditation moves forward, HLC continues to view each Criterion through an equity lens.

HLC held a listening session at the 2023 Annual Conference regarding diversity, equity, access and inclusion and its role in the regular review of the Criteria for Accreditation.

In early May HLC staff participated in the “Courageous Conversation” protocol, aimed at providing a framework for explicitly addressing persistent racial disparities with intention.

HLC has published definitions of diversity, equity, access and inclusion in the November 2022 Leaflet.

HLC presented on Equity work and Consumer Protection at its 2022 Fall State Agencies meeting.

HLC planned 2023 Annual Conference sessions on diversity, equity, access and inclusion, including a listening session, a session on Consumer Protection and Peer Corps Updates and Training Sessions.
Vision

The Mission and Vision statements of HLC reflect the changing higher education and accreditation landscape. They also illustrate HLC’s critical role in the higher education ecosystem.

Goals

1. Focusing on students first as the most critical stakeholder in higher education and institutional accreditation.
2. Exemplifying a commitment to equity in HLC’s operations and policies, service to members, Criteria for Accreditation and all other standards.
3. Emphasizing the importance of outcomes that lead to student success in academics, the workforce, engaged citizenship and social responsibility as they relate to institutional mission.
4. Providing leadership and advocacy in higher education and accreditation at the state and federal levels.
5. Demonstrating HLC’s respect for the role of diversity and inclusion in higher education institutions and missions.
6. Exploring new business models which include an expansion of membership, including the wider higher education and postsecondary ecosystem.
7. Demonstrating agility in thought leadership to promote innovation.
8. Enhancing the value of higher education through accreditation and peer review.
10. Fostering collaboration and member development through timely and informed educational opportunities.
11. Expanding and refining the use of technology and other services for the benefit of members engaging in accreditation activities as well as HLC’s educational programs.
12. Continuously exploring new means and opportunities for achieving operational excellence in service to its membership.

Activities in 2023

By the end of the fiscal year, every member of HLC’s staff participated in some form of agile training. HLC staff members have started experimenting with agile and sharing best practices and lessons learned.

HLC is in the process of moving an updated Assurance System into Canopy for members to have a more efficient technology experience with HLC.

HLC launched the Credential Lab in September 2023 to help bring clarity and assure quality in the complex ecosystem of alternative postsecondary credentials.

HLC has reviewed the changing environment and re-aligned its Strategic Plan goals. This exercise provided clarity and will be continued annually to ensure HLC is being agile.

Outcomes

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

Building on this tradition, HLC will continue its dedication to Outcomes through EVOLVE by focusing on clarity, transparency, collaboration, innovation, and, most importantly, a heightened sensitivity to institutional context during institutional evaluations and in the delivery of programs to support members.

Goals

1. Develop Definitions and Evaluative Framework. Develop and implement standard definitions of learning outcomes/student success as well as an evaluative framework that links quality assurance and student success.
2. Support Alternative Ways of Measuring and Advancing Student Success. Provide support to institutions in exploring alternative ways of measuring and advancing student success appropriate to their institutional context.
3. Provide Resources to Support Equitable Outcomes for Students. Ensure all member institutions have access to resources and expertise at HLC that support equitable outcomes for students.
4. Develop Standard Expectations for Tracking Student Learning Outcomes. Develop and implement standard expectations of institutions’ tracking and improvement of student learning outcomes to assure academic quality.
Activities in 2023
HLC held focus groups with ALOs and peer reviewers regarding additional IPEDS data points that HLC intends to collect from IPEDS this spring to begin benchmarking student success data.

HLC is analyzing institutional-level data from the National Student Clearinghouse for the purpose of developing success measures and sector-appropriate benchmarks.

HLC provided a session at the 2023 Annual Conference regarding the ongoing research in defining and advancing student success and the work to develop multiple indicators for monitoring institutional performance.

Institutions participated in a survey regarding workforce development/credentials as a way to judge the interest in programming and resources to support members’ innovative alternative credential offerings.

WICHE, a state agency and an institution have been recruited to present on the interstate passport at HLC’s 2024 Annual Conference.

HLC has represented the interests of its membership at various state agency convenings and responded to a research request for the development of a white paper on transfer and accreditation.

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

Goals
1. **Research Key Leadership Issues.** Develop independently, and in collaboration with appropriate partner organizations, strategic research addressing key leadership issues, including student success and institutional effectiveness, that leverage HLC’s unique position within American higher education.

2. **Improve HLC Staff Professional Development Practices.** Review HLC’s professional development practices to ensure the currency of knowledge and skills needed for staff responsiveness in adapting policies and procedures to effectively serve member institutions in a dynamic higher education environment.

3. **Research Need for Leadership Development Program.** Conduct a feasibility study on offering a mid- and/or executive-level leadership development program for institutional leaders focused on leading in a time of transformation.

4. **Highlight Professional Contributions by HLC Staff.** Implement an annual process for highlighting professional contributions by HLC staff to underscore HLC’s commitment to thought leadership and advocacy.

5. **Create Regularized Plan for Improving Accreditation Processes.** In response to this period of transformative change, execute a regularized plan for improving selected HLC processes to ensure that HLC remains a leader in the field of accreditation and higher education in general.

Activities in 2023
HLC announced its creation of the Credential Lab, an innovation hub within HLC that supports institutions and learners in navigating the complex and growing ecosystem of alternative postsecondary credentials and that is designing a quality assurance approach for external credential content providers.

HLC is in the process of reviewing and updating the Criteria for Accreditation, including feedback from the membership from listening sessions at the 2024 Annual Conference.

HLC has revised its performance appraisal system to better align the process with EVOLVE priorities for all employees.

HLC continues to research the feasibility of two significant leadership-related actions: 1) Publishing new research, developed from HLC’s own database, for college leaders and 2) offering new leadership programming for college and university leaders.
Value

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

Goals

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

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

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

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

Activities in 2023

This fall has been full of just-in-time training for institutions, peer reviewers and other stakeholders regarding updates in substantive change, multi-location visits, prison education programs and more.

HLC hosted more than 3,300 attendees at its 2023 Annual Conference. More than 90% of attendees surveyed were satisfied with the overall conference experience.

HLC has surveyed the membership regarding an alternative credentials project as a new member benefit. Four focused group meetings were attended by more than 40 member institutions to discuss possible models of differential accreditation in the fall of 2022.

In an effort to further streamline HLC’s procedures, HLC moved substantive change panels and IAC virtual meetings into Canopy, sunsetting the HLC Portal in Sharepoint.

A new framework was created to guide the diversification of modalities for HLC programs and services. New and existing programs will be offered either online in a resource library, via a live webinar, at the annual conference or through formal education and training workshops and Academies.

A new fee schedule was adopted for elective programming with sensitivity to institutional resource constraints and reflective of the number of contact hours a participant is engaged in by program.

Engagement

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

Goals

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

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

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

4. Build National Awareness of HLC. Develop and execute a long-term strategy and business plan to build HLC’s brand nationally as a prominent and trusted institutional accreditor while remaining mindful of antitrust principles. Expand the understanding of HLC and its history as a leading quality assurance organization for the colleges and universities within its membership, dedicated to providing important validations for all higher education stakeholders.
5. **Build Relationships With Specialized Accreditors.** Enhance communications with specialized accreditors to better inform HLC’s evaluations. Build relationships with specialized accreditors and enhance awareness of synergies within the higher education ecosystem.

6. **Evaluate Core Component 1.C.** Examine how Core Component 1.C is being implemented by institutions and reviewed by peer reviewers by evaluating team reports and Assurance Arguments against a rubric, then analyzing results and reporting findings to HLC leaders. Demonstrate responsiveness, fairness and continuous improvement by taking into account feedback that improves the language of Core Component 1.C within HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation.

7. **Implement Recommendations From Core Component 1.C Evaluation.** Using findings from the evaluation of Core Component 1.C, provide additional training (webinars and conference sessions) for institutions and peer reviewers, and work toward adjusting the language in the Criteria for Accreditation as necessary. Potentially shift language related to Core Component 1.C during the next revision of the Criteria for Accreditation or earlier, based on feedback.

8. **Join Public Dialog on Civic Engagement.** Strive to participate in the public dialog about civic engagement by speaking at national conferences and writing thought papers.

**Activities in 2023**

HLC held its annual state partner meeting this fall. This year’s event provides an opportunity for state higher education officials to engage in discussions surrounding higher education and accreditation policies and processes.

HLC has broadened its outreach on Pell-eligible prison education programs (PEP) by offering a webinar for state departments of corrections. This event initiated an information exchange between HLC and these agencies as the industry moves forward with these programs.

HLC has advocated with the U.S. Department of Education on distance education, resulting in revised guidance regarding institutions’ reporting distance education activities to accreditors.

HLC, with C-RAC, provided comments to the U.S. Department of Education on “Financial Value Transparency and Gainful Employment (GE), Financial Responsibility, Administrative Capability, Certification Procedures, Ability to Benefit (ATB).”

HLC continues to highlight the institutions graduating from the Academies in Leaflet as an opportunity for institutional members to “tell their story.”

HLC participated in a robust conversation with NACIQI as part of its continued recognition by the U.S. Department of Education.

HLC continues to engage with the U.S. Department of Education on new Dear Colleague Letters and regulations that are being introduced. These engagements help clarify for the U.S. Department of Education some of the repercussions of the changes they are introducing.

HLC is holding follow up focus groups with K-12 groups on the Student Guide.

All institutional sessions selected for the Annual Conference 2024 program are an opportunity for institutional members to “tell their story” to conference participants.

Following the publication of “Postsecondary Education in Prison Programs and Accreditation,” HLC with representatives from the Vera Institute of Justice presented on the report at HLC’s 2023 Annual Conference.

HLC will deliver a presentation at the AAC&U Annual Conference examining the types of evidence institutions may provide on civic engagement.

**Next Steps**

In 2024, HLC will collect input from the membership regarding the trends they are seeing on campus. This information will help inform the next HLC Strategic Plan.
Criteria Revision

Under HLC policy, the Board of Trustees reviews the effectiveness of, and proposed refinement of, the Criteria for Accreditation every five years. Based on this schedule, the next iteration of HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation will be effective September 1, 2025.

At its retreat in November 2023, having reviewed the feedback from the membership, the Board renewed its commitment to HLC’s current Criteria for Accreditation and acknowledged the effectiveness of the Criteria in assuring academic quality in higher education.

However, the Board instructed staff to propose revisions that would clarify, simplify and streamline language, while preserving the Criteria’s inherent rigor. As a result of that charge, the Criteria revision proposes a combination of Criteria 3 and 4 and elimination of subcomponents as a level of information within the structure of the current Criteria for Accreditation.

HLC is taking care to preserve the distinctiveness of the concepts conveyed within Criteria 3 and 4 presently. Staff has also noted that several concepts within current subcomponents should be elevated to the level of a Core Component as a requirement, rather than a suggested example of evidence. Attention was also given to prioritizing concepts appropriately within each Core Component.

This proposed revision of the Criteria for Accreditation has been approved on first reading by the Board of Trustees. The membership is invited to provide feedback and comments on the proposed policies prior to the Board’s consideration on second reading at the June 2024 Board Meeting.

Questions? Contact criteria@hlcommission.org.

Student Success Outcomes

Ensuring quality education and advancing student success are central to HLC’s mission and the mission of all our member institutions.

Starting in 2024, HLC has launched a multi-phase project to improve our ability to track student success outcomes at our member institutions.

In the first phase, HLC will evaluate three educational outcome measures that institutions report to IPEDS: fall-to-fall retention rates of first-time students, graduation rates within 150% of normal time, and completion and transfer rate at eight years after entry.

The measures selected for evaluation in this phase are well defined by IPEDS and widely used by institutions, accreditors and governmental entities. HLC will obtain the data directly from the IPEDS Data Center.

In later phases, HLC will evaluate other student success outcomes, which may include post-college labor market and loan repayment outcomes.

We will work with institutions to identify these outcome measures and the appropriate data sources, such as the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard and others across the Triad.

The student success outcome measures will be used for several important purposes:

1. To identify concerns that require institutional attention or HLC follow-up. In phase 1, HLC will develop a procedure to evaluate institutional outcome data in accordance with appropriate benchmarks and to identify concerns that require additional attention or monitoring. We will pilot the benchmarks and procedure in spring 2024 and fully implement them in spring 2025.

2. To identify opportunities for HLC to support institutions. HLC will analyze the institutional outcome data and consider needs for new resources and programming on student success based on this data.

3. To increase transparency with students and other stakeholders. In phase 1, HLC will add a new section to each institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status that links to the institution’s profile on the

Find It Online

Criteria Revision
hlcommission.org/criteria

Student Success Outcomes
hlcommission.org/student-success
College Scorecard and College Navigator, as well as student achievement data that the institution publishes on its website (as reported to HLC in the Institutional Update).

HLC will keep institutions informed as we define benchmarks for IPEDS student success measures and develop future phases of this project.

Differential Accreditation

HLC has gathered a lot of feedback from conversations with representatives from different types of institutions, as well as active HLC peer reviewers, around two prevailing themes: allowances for “different expressions of accountability” and the need to showcase innovation and research within the accreditation process.

After collecting this feedback, HLC asked how it can do these things better and how can peer reviewers be trained to recognize the different expressions of accountability? HLC is looking for opportunities to shine an even brighter light on the unique and mission-centric work of member institutions in hopes of elevating the engagement of campus stakeholders in the work that leads to accreditation.

Convergence With Related HLC Projects

HLC used the findings and progress on these initiatives as a catalyst for future development and planning. HLC will conclude its work on differential accreditation and the input from this important exploration is informing changes in the aforementioned Criteria revision and the student success outcomes project.

Risk-Based Accreditation

In another way to utilize the feedback on differential accreditation, HLC is taking the opportunity to review our Pathways processes to find ways to lessen the burden for institutions and rely more on data reflecting quality improvement. As this project moves forward, HLC is considering adjustments to the Year 4 evaluation. More information about this will be coming in 2024.

HLC’s Credential Lab

HLC’s Credential Lab is an innovation hub that supports institutions and learners in navigating the complex and growing ecosystem of alternative postsecondary credentials. Our work is focused in two areas: designing a quality assurance system for credential content providers, and supporting institutions and providers to ensure quality learning experiences and outcomes.

The Challenges We’re Addressing

Learners need high-quality credentials that build skills, stack toward degrees, support mobility and provide on-ramps and off-ramps to further education and employment.

Colleges and universities need support and guidance in engaging in high quality external partnerships and transforming their institutional offerings to meet the needs of the 21st century learn-and-work ecosystem.

Employers, industries, and workforce development organizations need reliable information about credentials and education and training providers.

While there are an increasing number of alternative credentials and content providers emerging, there is also an overwhelming need to assure quality and to improve transparency for learners and employers.

Two Solutions

We are working with multiple teams of diverse and experienced stakeholders to design, test and offer the following solutions:

Quality Assurance: A voluntary quality assurance framework and process that will review and endorse short-term credential content providers that meet certain standards.

Credential Lab Innovation Center: Resources and programming for colleges, universities and other educational providers for developing high-quality alternative credential programs and fostering effective partnerships among institutions, providers, states, employers and industries.

Leadership Advisory Board

The Leadership Advisory Board contributes to the development of the Credential Lab mission, helps ensure alignment and service to the field, and shares feedback on and suggestions for specific services and offerings developed.

Find It Online

hlcommission.org/credential-lab
Policy

Your mission guides our approach.

Linnea Stenson, HLC Vice President of Accreditation Relations
2023 Policy Changes

In collaboration with our members, HLC regularly updates our policies to ensure they continue to support quality assurance and institutional improvement in our rapidly changing higher ed environment.

How HLC Makes Policy Changes

HLC’s Board of Trustees typically adopts changes to HLC policy and bylaws three times per year at its regularly scheduled meetings.

In most cases, the process for revising a policy or bylaw involves two readings by the Board that take place over the course of two meetings. A proposed change is considered for approval by the Board on first reading. If approved, HLC invites institutions, peer reviewers and others to submit comments on the proposal. At its next meeting, the Board considers these comments before determining whether to adopt the change on second reading. Adopted changes may be effective immediately or may have a later effective date.

If a policy change is required by federal regulation or other legal mandate, the Board may adopt it on a single reading without a public comment period.

Find It Online

All policies and bylaws: hlcommission.org/policies
Adopted changes: hlcommission.org/adopted-policies
Proposed changes: hlcommission.org/proposed-policies

Policy and Bylaw Changes

The following policy and bylaw changes were adopted in 2023. All changes are currently in effect.

Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation

Adopted November 2023

Revised the accreditation history requirements that would potentially qualify an institution to participate in HLC’s Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation.

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

Arbitration Requirements

Adopted June 2023

Amended the arbitration provision in HLC’s Obligations of Membership policy to align more closely with federal regulations. The scope of the provision is limited to disputes arising from adverse actions and only includes an “initial arbitration” requirement.

Revised policy: Obligations of Membership (CRRT.C.10.010)
**Bylaws**
*Adopted February 2023*

Revised HLC’s bylaws to standardize terminology, streamline and condense language, and clarify procedures and requirements.

**Criteria Revision Process**
*Adopted February 2023*

Allowed greater flexibility for staff to design appropriate methods for engaging member institutions and other stakeholders in the process of reviewing and revising the Criteria for Accreditation.

**Revised policy:**
Application and Regular Review of HLC Requirements and Institutional Accreditation Policies (PPAR.A.10.000)

---

**Distance Education**
*Adopted November 2023*

In alignment with guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, revised the requirements related to when an institution must seek approval from HLC for its distance education offerings. An institution must do so when it initially offers distance education and when it does any one of the following: (1) offers at least 50% of a program through distance education; (2) enrolls at least 50% of its students in at least one distance education course; (3) offers at least 50% of its courses through distance education. Once an institution has received HLC approval for one of these thresholds, additional approval for the other thresholds is not required.

**Revised policy:**
Substantive Change (INST.G.10.010)

---

**Faculty Qualifications**
*Adopted November 2023*

Revised the faculty qualifications provision in HLC’s Assumed Practices to emphasize that an institution is responsible for establishing and maintaining reasonable processes for determining that its instructors are qualified. An institution can deem instructors qualified based on a variety of factors, including, but not limited to, academic credentials, progress toward academic credentials, equivalent experience, or some combination thereof.

**Revised policy:**
Assumed Practices (CRRT.C.10.010)

---

**Fraud and Abuse**
*Adopted February 2023*

Clarified that allegations of fraud and abuse can be submitted to HLC by various external parties and that any allegations will be reviewed using the appropriate mechanism under HLC policy.

**Revised policy:**
Fraud and Abuse (FDCR.A.20.010)

---

**Heightened Cash Monitoring**
*Adopted February 2023*

Clarified that institutions placed on the Reimbursement or Heightened Cash Monitoring 2 (HCM2) payment methods by the Federal Student Aid Office of the U.S. Department of Education are required to submit a Provisional Plan to HLC for approval. Established a requirement for institutions to notify HLC when they are placed on the HCM2 or Reimbursement payment method.

**Revised policies:**
HLC Approval of Institutional Teach-Out Arrangements (FDCR.B.10.010)
Obligations of Membership (INST.B.30.020)

---

**Institutional Actions Council Authority**
*Adopted June 2023*

Clarified that the IAC has the authority to take action on all accreditation decisions for which exclusive authority is not retained by HLC’s Board.

**Revised policy:**
Institutional Actions Council (INST.D.20.010)

---

**Pell-Eligible Prison Education Programs**
*Adopted November 2023*

Established substantive change requirements for Pell-eligible prison education programs and additional locations where Pell-eligible prison education programs are offered. The requirements align with guidance from the U.S. Department of Education related to the reinstatement of Pell Grant eligibility for students enrolled in such programs.

**Revised policies:**
Substantive Change (INST.G.10.010)
Review of Substantive Change (INST.G.10.02)
Monitoring of Substantive Change (INST.G.20.030)
HLC Approval of Institutional Teach-Out Arrangements (FDCR.B.10.010)
Processes for Certain Changes of Control

Adopted June 2023

Aligned HLC policy with recent guidance from the U.S. Department of Education on Change of Control requirements in certain circumstances. Established a two-step process in which two approvals by HLC’s Board of Trustees are required to effectuate certain transactions.

Revised policies:
Change of Control, Structure or Organization (INST.G.20.010)
Processes for Seeking Approval of Change of Control, Structure or Organization (INST.G.20.020)
Monitoring Related to Change of Control, Structure or Organization (INST.G.20.030)
Substantive Change (INST.G.10.010)
Accredited Change of Control Status (INST.G.20.040)

Recruiting, Admissions and Related Enrollment Practices

Adopted February 2023

Aligned HLC policy with new federal regulations on recruitment. Clarified HLC’s expectations and specified that the policy applies to all aspects of an institution’s enrollment process, including financial aid.

Revised policy:
Recruiting, Admissions and Related Enrollment Practices (FDCR.A.20.020)

Responding to Emergencies and Institutional Disruptions

Adopted February 2023

Established that HLC may leverage its existing policies and, if available, flexibilities permitted by the U.S. Department of Education or other entities to allow institutions time to manage an emergency or severe disruption while maintaining a high level of academic quality. Institutions will be required to request accommodations, and HLC will make determinations on a case-by-case basis as to what accommodations are available and appropriate.

Adopted policy:
Responding to Emergencies and Severe Institutional Disruptions (INST.G.10.010)

Subscribe to the Leaflet!

Published every other month, the Leaflet is your source for all things HLC, including policy changes.

Stay up to date by subscribing at hlcommission.org/leaflet
The Criteria for Accreditation are the standards of quality by which HLC determines whether an institution merits accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. They are as follows:

**Criterion 1. Mission**

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

**Core Components**

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

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

1.C. The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.
   1. The institution encourages curricular or cocurricular activities that prepare students for informed citizenship and workplace success.
   2. The institution’s processes and activities demonstrate inclusive and equitable treatment of diverse populations.
   3. The institution fosters a climate of respect among all students, faculty, staff and administrators from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.
Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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

Core Components

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Core Components

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

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

Find It Online

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

1. The general education program is appropriate to the mission, educational offerings and degree levels of the institution. The institution articulates the purposes, content and intended learning outcomes of its undergraduate general education requirements.

2. The program of general education is grounded in a philosophy or framework developed by the institution or adopted from an established framework. It imparts broad knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and develops skills and attitudes that the institution believes every college-educated person should possess.

3. The education offered by the institution recognizes the human and cultural diversity and provides students with growth opportunities and lifelong skills to live and work in a multicultural world.

4. The faculty and students contribute to scholarship, creative work and the discovery of knowledge to the extent appropriate to their offerings and the institution’s mission.

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

1. The institution strives to ensure that the overall composition of its faculty and staff reflects human diversity as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

2. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out both the classroom and the non-classroom roles of faculty, including oversight of the curriculum and expectations for student performance, assessment of student learning, and establishment of academic credentials for instructional staff.

3. All instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual and consortial offerings.

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

5. The institution has processes and resources for assuring that instructors are current in their disciplines and adept in their teaching roles; it supports their professional development.

6. Instructors are accessible for student inquiry.

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

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

1. The institution provides student support services suited to the needs of its student populations.

2. The institution provides for learning support and preparatory instruction to address the academic needs of its students. It has a process for directing entering students to courses and programs for which the students are adequately prepared.

3. The institution provides academic advising suited to its offerings and the needs of its students.

4. The institution provides students and instructors the infrastructure and resources necessary to support effective teaching and learning (technological infrastructure, scientific laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites and museum collections, as appropriate to the institution’s offerings).

Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

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

Core Components

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

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews and acts upon the findings.

2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.

3. The institution has policies that ensure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It ensures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.

5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.

6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution ensures that the credentials it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission.

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

1. The institution has effective processes for assessment of student learning and for achievement of learning goals in academic and cocurricular offerings.

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

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

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

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence and completion that are ambitious, attainable and appropriate to its mission, student populations and educational offerings.

2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs.

3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.

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

Criterion 5. Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

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

Core Components

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

1. Shared governance at the institution engages its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students—through planning, policies and procedures.

2. The institution’s administration uses data to reach informed decisions in the best interests of the institution and its constituents.

3. The institution’s administration ensures that faculty and, when appropriate, staff and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy and processes through effective collaborative structures.

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

1. The institution has qualified and trained operational staff and infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.

2. The goals incorporated into the mission and any related statements are realistic in light of the institution’s organization, resources and opportunities.

3. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring its finances.

4. The institution’s fiscal allocations ensure that its educational purposes are achieved.
5.C. The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning and improvement.

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities, including, as applicable, its comprehensive research enterprise, associated institutes and affiliated centers.

2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning and budgeting.

3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.

4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity, including fluctuations in the institution’s sources of revenue and enrollment.

5. Institutional planning anticipates evolving external factors, such as technology advancements, demographic shifts, globalization, the economy and state support.

6. The institution implements its plans to systematically improve its operations and student outcomes.

Determining Whether an Institution Meets the Criteria

HLC reviews institutions against the Criteria and Core Components according to the evaluative framework described in HLC policy (INST.A.10.020):

Core Components. The institution meets the Core Component if:

1. 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

2. the Core Component is met with concerns, that is the institution demonstrates the characteristics expected by the Component, but performance in relation to some aspect of the Component must be improved.

The institution does not meet the Core Component if the institution fails to meet the Component in its entirety or is so deficient in the area covered by the Core Component that the Component is judged not to be met.

Criteria for Accreditation. The institution meets the Criterion if:

1. 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

2. the Criterion is met with concerns, that is the institution demonstrates the characteristics expected by the Criterion, but performance in relation to some Core Components of the Criterion must be improved.

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

The institution meets the Criterion only if all Core Components are met. The team’s judgment in applying this evaluative framework shall be exercised at the level of each Core Component and each Criterion for Accreditation. For purposes of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, findings of “met” and “met with concerns” both constitute compliance.

Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation

In evaluating the Criteria for Accreditation, HLC shall take into account varying institutional missions, models, and approaches within higher education. The distinctiveness of an institution’s mission may condition the strategies it adopts and the evidence it provides that meets each Core Component.

An institution must provide a narrative and supporting evidence that demonstrate it meets HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation. A team of peer reviewers evaluates the institution to validate its argument and determine if each Core Component of the Criteria is met.
HLC provides suggestions to assist institutions in thinking about possible sources of evidence in *Providing Evidence for the Criteria for Accreditation*, available at hlcommission.org/criteria.

**Identifying Evidence**
The evidence an institution provides to demonstrate that it complies with HLC’s Criteria should do the following:

- Substantiate the facts and arguments presented in its institutional narrative.
- Respond to the prior peer review team’s concerns and recommendations.
- Explain any nuances specific to the institution.
- Strengthen the institution’s overall record of compliance with HLC’s requirements.
- Affirm the institution’s overall academic quality and financial sustainability and integrity.

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

- **Clear evidence** is precise, explicit and tends to directly establish the point it is presented to support. Institutions should provide clear evidence of their compliance with each Core Component.
  
  *Example:* Clear evidence that a president was duly appointed by an institution’s board would be a board resolution or meeting minutes showing a motion and vote to hire the president.

- **Corroborating evidence** is supplementary to evidence already given and tends to strengthen or confirm it. This type of evidence can be useful in illustrating points made in the institution’s narrative, but it may not be persuasive to peer reviewers on its own.
  
  *Example:* Corroborating evidence that a president was duly appointed by an institution’s board would be a copy of the offer letter addressed to the president.

- **Circumstantial evidence** establishes a condition of surrounding circumstances, from which the principal fact may be inferred. This type of evidence is never sufficient on its own.
  
  *Example:* Circumstantial evidence that a president was duly appointed by an institution’s board would be a copy of a letter from the president to the chair of the board, accepting the presidential appointment.

Finally, institutions should remember the peer review team will base much of its recommendations on the evidence presented. To identify whether any gaps exist in their evidence, institutions should analyze each Core Component from the perspective of the peer review team. Peer reviewers will consider all materials presented and ask questions if they determine information is missing, but it is ultimately the institution’s responsibility to present evidence of its compliance with the Criteria.
Foundational to the Criteria and Core Components is a set of practices shared by institutions of higher education in the United States. Unlike the Criteria for Accreditation, these Assumed Practices are (1) generally matters to be determined as facts, rather than matters requiring professional judgment and (2) not expected to vary by institutional mission or context. Every institution is expected to be in compliance with all Assumed Practices at all times.

Because institutions are assumed to be adhering to the Assumed Practices on an ongoing basis, peer review teams will not review their compliance with these requirements except as follows:

1. When an institution is seeking HLC accreditation, and has not yet been granted initial accreditation by the Board of Trustees, the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with all the Assumed Practices as part of any reports to gain and maintain candidacy, and to gain initial accreditation.

2. When the Board of Trustees has placed an institution on the sanction of Probation and has cited the institution for being out of compliance with one or more Assumed Practices, the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with the cited Assumed Practices as part of its report to have Probation removed.

3. When the Board of Trustees has placed an institution under a Show-Cause Order, the institution must provide evidence of its compliance with all the Assumed Practices as part of its report to have the Show-Cause Order removed.

4. When an accredited institution’s compliance with one or more Criteria for Accreditation raises questions concerning its compliance with related Assumed Practices, the institution must be prepared to provide evidence that it is in compliance with such related Assumed Practices.

5. When otherwise required by HLC as circumstances warrant.

An institution determined not to be in compliance with any Assumed Practice, even if in compliance with all other HLC requirements, may be subject to monitoring, Probation, a Show-Cause Order, or an adverse action, as defined by HLC policy based on the gravity of the finding as measured by (a) in the case of Probation, the extent to which a substantial remediation period is necessary to address such non-compliance or; (b) in the case of a Show-Cause Order or adverse action, the extent to which the very existence of the finding suggests that the institution should not remain accredited.

A. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

1. The institution has a conflict of interest policy that ensures that the governing board and the senior administrative personnel act in the best interest of the institution.

2. The institution has ethics policies for faculty and staff regarding conflict of interest, nepotism, recruitment and admissions, financial aid, privacy of personal information, and contracting.

3. The institution provides its students, administrators, faculty, and staff with policies and procedures informing them of their rights and responsibilities within the institution.

4. The institution establishes and publicizes clear procedures for receiving complaints from students and other constituencies, responding to complaints in a timely manner, and analyzing complaints to improve its processes. The institution does not retaliate against those who raise complaints.
5. The institution makes readily available to students and to the general public clear and complete information including:

a. statements of mission, vision, and values
b. full descriptions of the requirements for its programs, including all pre-requisite courses
c. requirements for admission both to the institution and to particular programs or majors
d. its policies on acceptance of transfer credit, including how the institution applies such credit to its degree requirements. (Except for courses articulated through transfer policies or institutional agreements, the institution makes no promises to prospective students regarding the acceptance of credit awarded by examination, credit for prior learning, or credit for transfer until the institution has conducted an evaluation of such students’ credits in accordance with its transfer policies.)
e. all student costs, including tuition, fees, training, and incidentals; its financial aid policies, practices, and requirements; and its policy on refunds
f. policies regarding academic good standing, probation, and dismissal; residency or enrollment requirements (if any)
g. its relationship with any parent organization (corporation, hospital, or church, or other entity that owns the institution) and any external providers of its instruction.

6. The institution assures that all data it makes public are accurate and complete, including those reporting on student achievement of learning and student persistence, retention, and completion.

7. The institution portrays clearly and accurately to the public its current status with the Higher Learning Commission and with any other institutional, specialized, and professional accreditation agencies.

a. An institution offering programs that require specialized accreditation or recognition by a state licensing board or other entity in order for its students to be certified or to sit for the licensing examination in states where its students reside either has the appropriate accreditation and recognition or discloses publicly and clearly the consequences to the students of the lack thereof. The institution makes clear to students the distinction between institutional and specialized or program accreditation and the relationships between licensure and the various types of accreditation.

b. An institution offering programs eligible for specialized accreditation at multiple locations discloses the accreditation status and recognition of the program by state licensing boards at each location.

c. An institution that provides a program that prepares students for a licensure, certification, or other qualifying examination publicly discloses its pass rate on that examination, unless such information is not available to the institution.

8. The governing board and its executive committee, if it has one, include some “public” members. Public members have no significant administrative position or any ownership interest in any of the following: the institution itself; a company that does substantial business with the institution; a company or organization with which the institution has a substantial partnership; a parent, ultimate parent, affiliate, or subsidiary corporation; an investment group or firm substantially involved with one of the above organizations. All publicly-elected members or members appointed by publicly-elected individuals or bodies (governors, elected legislative bodies) are public members.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 all applicable laws, including laws related to authorization of educational activities and consumer protection wherever it does business.

11. The institution documents outsourcing of all services in written agreements, including agreements with parent or affiliated organizations.

12. The institution takes responsibility for the ethical and responsible behavior of its contractual partners in relation to actions taken on its behalf.

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.
B. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support

1. Programs, Courses, and Credits
   a. The institution conforms to commonly accepted minimum program length: 60 semester credits for associate’s degrees, 120 semester credits for bachelor’s degrees, and 30 semester credits beyond the bachelor’s for master’s degrees. Any variation from these minima must be explained and justified.
   b. The institution maintains structures or practices that ensure the coherence and quality of the programs for which it awards a degree. Typically institutions will require that at minimum 30 of the 120 credits earned for the bachelor’s degree and 15 of the 60 credits for the associate’s degree be credits earned at the institution itself, through arrangements with other accredited institutions, or through contractual relationships approved by HLC. Any variation from the typical minima must be explained and justified.
   c. The institution’s policy and practice assure that at least 50% of courses applied to a graduate program are courses designed for graduate work, rather than undergraduate courses credited toward a graduate degree. (Cf. Criterion 3.A.1 and 2.) (An institution may allow well-prepared advanced students to substitute its graduate courses for required or elective courses in an undergraduate degree program and then subsequently count those same courses as fulfilling graduate requirements in a related graduate program that the institution offers. In “4+1” or “2+3” programs, at least 50% of the credits allocated for the master’s degree – usually 15 of 30 – must be for courses designed for graduate work.)
   d. The institution adheres to policies on student academic load per term that reflect reasonable expectations for successful learning and course completion.
   e. Courses that carry academic credit toward college-level credentials have content and rigor appropriate to higher education.
   f. The institution has a process for ensuring that all courses transferred and applied toward degree requirements demonstrate equivalence with its own courses required for that degree or are of equivalent rigor.
   g. The institution has a clear policy on the maximum allowable credit for prior learning as a reasonable proportion of the credits required to complete the student’s program. Credit awarded for prior learning is documented, evaluated, and appropriate for the level of degree awarded. (Note that this requirement does not apply to courses transferred from other institutions.)
   h. The institution maintains a minimum requirement for general education for all of its undergraduate programs whether through a traditional practice of distributed curricula (15 semester credits for AAS degrees, 24 for AS or AA degrees, and 30 for bachelor’s degrees) or through integrated, embedded, interdisciplinary, or other accepted models that demonstrate a minimum requirement equivalent to the distributed model. Any variation is explained and justified.

2. Faculty Roles and Qualifications
   a. The institution establishes and maintains reasonable policies and procedures to determine that faculty are qualified. The factors that an institution considers as part of these policies and procedures could include, but are not limited to: the achievement of academic credentials, progress toward academic credentials, equivalent experience, or some combination thereof. The institution’s obligations in this regard extend to all instructors and all other entities to which it assigns the responsibility of instruction. HLC will maintain “Institutional Policies and Procedures for Determining Faculty Qualifications Guidelines” to further explain requirements for reasonable policies and procedures in accordance with this Assumed Practice.
   b. Faculty participate substantially in:
      i. oversight of the curriculum offered — its development, vetting and implementation; academic substance; currency; and relevance for internal and external constituencies;
      ii. assurance of consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in the expectations of student performance;
iii. establishment of the qualifications for instructors, including instructors provided by third parties;
iv. analysis of data and appropriate action on assessment of student learning and program completion.

3. Support Services
   a. Financial aid advising clearly and comprehensively reviews students’ eligibility for financial assistance and assists students in a full understanding of their debt and its consequences.
   b. The institution maintains timely and accurate transcript and records services.

C. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

1. Instructors (excluding for this requirement teaching assistants enrolled in a graduate program and supervised by faculty) have the authority for the assignment of any measures of student achievement. (This requirement allows for collective responsibility, as, for example, when a faculty committee has the authority to override a grade on appeal.)

2. The institution refrains from the transcription of credit from other institutions or providers that it will not apply to its own programs.

3. The institution has formal and current written agreements for managing any internships and clinical placements included in its programs.

4. A predominantly or solely single-purpose institution in fields that require licensure for practice is also accredited by or is actively in the process of applying to a relevant accreditor for each field, as sufficient for licensure, if such a recognized accreditor exists.

5. Instructors communicate course requirements to students in writing and in a timely manner.

6. Institutional data on assessment of student learning are accurate and address the full range of students who enroll.

7. Institutional data on student retention, persistence, and completion are accurate and address the full range of students who enroll.

D. Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

1. The institution is able to meet its current financial obligations.

2. The institution has a prepared budget for the current year and the capacity to compare it with budgets and actual results of previous years.

3. The institution has future financial projections addressing its long-term financial sustainability.

4. The institution maintains effective systems for collecting, analyzing, and using institutional information.

5. The institution undergoes an external audit by a certified public accountant or a public audit agency that reports financial statements on the institution separately from any other related entity or parent corporation. For private institutions the audit is annual; for public institutions it is at least every two years.

6. The institution’s administrative structure includes a chief executive officer, chief financial officer, and chief academic officer (titles may vary) with appropriate credentials and experience and sufficient focus on the institution to ensure appropriate leadership and oversight. (An institution may outsource its financial functions but must have the capacity to assure the effectiveness of that arrangement.)

7. The institution’s planning activities demonstrate careful and detailed consideration of student needs (including but not limited to the preservation of student records) and protocols to be followed in the event an orderly institutional closure becomes necessary.

---

**Find It Online**

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

---

2 Institutions under federal control are exempted provided that they have other reliable information to document the institution’s fiscal resources and management.
Obligations of Membership

Policy Number: INST.B.30.020

While seeking and holding membership with HLC, an institution voluntarily agrees to meet obligations set forth by HLC as follows:

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

2. The institution regularly reviews current HLC policies and procedures. It adheres to such policies and procedures in good faith.

3. The institution designates an Accreditation Liaison Officer in accordance with HLC requirements.

4. The institution is candid, transparent, and forthcoming in its dealings with HLC, including cooperating with all requests for information from HLC.

5. The institution notifies HLC of any condition or situation that has the potential to affect the institution’s status with HLC, such as a significant reduction in program offerings, potential institutional closure or serious legal investigation (including, but not limited to, conditions or situations included in HLC’s policy on special monitoring).

6. As further defined and explained in HLC policy, the institution informs HLC of its relationship with any related entity wherein institutional decision-making is controlled by that entity and of any changes in that relationship that may affect the institution’s compliance with HLC accreditation requirements.

7. The institution describes itself in identical terms to HLC and to any other recognized accreditor or regulatory body with which it holds or seeks membership with regard to purpose, operating authority, governance, programs, locations, degrees, diplomas, certificates, personnel, finances, and constituents.

8. The institution notifies HLC when it receives a pending or final adverse action from or has been placed on sanction by any other recognized accreditor; if a state has issued a pending or final action that affects the institution’s legal status or authority to grant degrees; if it is placed on, or removed from, a provisional certification for participation in Title IV by the U.S. Department of Education; or if it is placed on, or removed from, the Reimbursement payment method or the Heightened Cash Monitoring 2 payment method by the U.S. Department of Education.

9. The institution notifies its constituents when it receives a pending or final adverse action from or has been placed on sanction by any other recognized accreditor or if a state has issued a pending or final action that affects the institution’s legal status or authority to grant degrees.

10. The institution notifies applicable constituents whenever HLC has required it to submit a Provisional Plan for approval, and provides an accurate explanation as to the rationale for that Provisional Plan.

11. The institution accepts that HLC will, in the interest of transparency to the public, publish outcomes from its accreditation process in accordance with HLC policy.

12. The institution portrays its accreditation status with HLC clearly to the public, including the status of its branch campuses and related entities. The institution posts the electronic version of HLC’s Mark of Accreditation Status in at least one place on its website, linking users directly to the institution’s status on HLC’s website.

13. The institution provides its constituents and applicants with any Public Disclosure Notice or Public Statement it receives from HLC and accurately communicates the significance of, and underlying reasons for, such Public Disclosure Notice or Public Statement as required by HLC.

14. The institution maintains prominently on its website a telephone number that includes an option for both current students and the public to speak with a representative of the institution.
15. The institution ensures that any information submitted to HLC generally will not include unredacted personally identifiable information (PII). If the institution submits information with unredacted PII because it is necessary for evaluative purposes or otherwise, it will clearly identify the information as such, if applicable.

16. The institution submits timely payment of dues and fees in accordance with the published Dues and Fees Schedule and accepts the fact of surcharges for late payment.

17. Prior to taking legal action against HLC, the institution agrees to submit to initial arbitration any dispute it may raise regarding an adverse action as such term is defined in HLC policy and that it is not able to resolve through HLC’s processes.

18. The institution agrees that in the event it, or any third party, takes legal action against HLC related to any accreditation action or makes any legal inquiries of HLC related to the institution, the institution shall, to the extent allowed by law, be responsible for all expenses, including but not limited to attorneys’ fees, expert witness, and related fees, incurred by HLC in responding to such legal inquiries and/or defending the action.

Meeting Obligations of Membership

Institutions must remain in compliance with the Obligations of Membership at all times. The HLC President shall make a final determination as to whether an institution is in violation of the Obligations of Membership such that Administrative Probation should be imposed. HLC may make use of any reasonable means to determine whether the institution has violated an Obligation of Membership including, but not limited to, seeking written information from the institution or scheduling one or more peer reviewers or staff members to meet with one or more institutional representatives either on-campus or through other appropriate method.

Administrative Probation

HLC staff or peer reviewer(s) may recommend an institution for Administrative Probation. Such recommendation shall be made to the President in writing and information about such recommendation shall be provided to the institution for an institutional response. The institution shall have a minimum of 14 days to respond in writing to the recommendation. The HLC President shall then review the recommendation and the institution’s response and make the decision whether to impose Administrative Probation. If the institution’s response is unsatisfactory, the HLC President shall place the institution on Administrative Probation for a period not to exceed ninety days. The HLC President will notify the institution of the imposition of the Administrative Probation and the conditions for its removal in writing. During the ninety-day time period, the institution will be expected to remedy the situation that led to the imposition of Administrative Probation. At the end of the ninety-day period, the institution shall provide evidence that it has remedied the conditions leading to Administrative Probation to the President. Such evidence may be reviewed directly by HLC Staff, or peer reviewers as necessary to confirm the institution’s compliance. Upon such validation, the President shall remove Administrative Probation.

If an institution fails to remedy the situation that led to Administrative Probation by the end of the ninety-day period, the HLC President shall take a recommendation concerning the institution to a decision-making body. Depending on the nature and the severity of the circumstances, such recommendation may involve a change in the institution’s Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation at the time of its next comprehensive evaluation, removal from the Notification Program for Additional Locations, interim monitoring on the underlying issue that led to Administrative Probation, the application of a sanction, the issuance of a Show-Cause Order or the withdrawal of accreditation, in accordance with HLC policies and procedures.

Disclosure of Administrative Probation

Administrative probation is noted on an institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status along with the reason for the Administrative Probation until its removal.
Procedures

We focus on serving you, your students and your community.

Andrew Lootens-White, HLC Vice President of Accreditation Relations
The Accreditation Relationship

At HLC, we maintain active relationships with our member institutions. This involves frequent communication and regular reviews to support institutions in providing quality higher education.

Institutional Accreditation

HLC is an institutional accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to accredit degree-granting colleges and universities. Institutional accreditation validates the quality of an institution's academic programs, whether delivered in person, online or otherwise. Institutional accreditation also examines the quality of the institution as a whole, including the soundness of its governance and administration, adherence to mission, the sustainability of its finances, and the sufficiency of its resources.

HLC Requirements and Policies

We partner with our member institutions and other stakeholders to define policies for quality higher education. Our foundational requirements are described in several policies:

- Criteria for Accreditation (see page 30 or hlcommission.org/criteria)
- Assumed Practices (see page 36 or hlcommission.org/assumed-practices)
- Eligibility Requirements (see hlcommission.org/eligibility-requirements)
- Federal Compliance Requirements (see hlcommission.org/federal)
- Obligations of Membership (see page 40 or hlcommission.org/obligations)

Institutions meet these requirements to achieve and maintain accreditation with HLC. Institutions are also responsible for meeting expectations set forth in HLC’s other institutional policies, available at hlcommission.org/policies.

Begin Your Accreditation Journey

Degree-granting colleges and universities located within the United States may be eligible to seek accreditation with HLC. HLC offers two routes to achieving accreditation: the Eligibility Process and Candidacy, and an Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation.

For more information about these processes, see page 46.

Accreditation Cycles and Processes

Standard and Open Pathways

Through the Standard and Open Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation, accredited institutions complete periodic reviews on a 10-year cycle to ensure they continue to meet HLC requirements and pursue institutional improvement. On the Standard Pathway, institutions complete comprehensive evaluations in Years 4 and 10. Institutions on the Open Pathway complete a virtual Assurance Review in Year 4, a Quality Initiative project between Years 5 and 9, and a comprehensive evaluation in Year 10.

For details, see page 47.
**Institutional Update and Financial/Non-financial Indicators**
The Institutional Update is an annual survey on the organizational health of our accredited and candidate institutions. We review the data collected for specific risk indicators to identify if an institution may be at risk of not meeting HLC requirements. Those institutions undergo additional monitoring to ensure the concerns are addressed. For details, see page 58.

**Substantive Change**
Member institutions notify HLC or obtain prior HLC approval for certain types of substantive changes to their academic offerings or operations. Such changes may be related to academic programs, additional locations or branch campuses, distance education, or other topics. For details, see page 53.

**Multi-location Visits**
Accredited institutions with three or more active additional locations undergo a multi-location visit in Years 3 and 8 of their Pathway cycle. The visit confirms the institution’s continued effective oversight of its additional locations. For details, see page 56.

**Monitoring**
If HLC identifies an issue of concern at an accredited institution, the institution may need to complete additional monitoring. The monitoring may be in the form of a report to HLC or a visit to the institution by peer reviewers. For details, see page 59.

**Sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and Adverse Actions**
If an accredited institution is found to be out of compliance, or at risk of being out of compliance, with HLC requirements, it may be placed on Notice or Probation, or issued a Show-Cause Order. When that happens, the institution undergoes additional evaluations to demonstrate that it has addressed the issues identified. The institution remains accredited during this time. In some cases, the HLC Board of Trustees may withdraw or deny an institution’s candidacy or accreditation. These adverse actions are subject to appeal. For details, see page 60.

---

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

This chart shows a typical timeline of required activities for most accredited institutions.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Update</strong></td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes evaluation of financial and non-financial indicators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway Evaluation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance Review or comprehensive evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(with multi-campus visit, if applicable)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality Initiative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Pathway only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multi-location Visit</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only institutions with 3+ active additional locations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At any point during this cycle, institutions may undergo additional reviews as needed related to matters such as:

- Substantive change requests
- Change of Control, Structure or Organization applications
- Routine or special monitoring, including financial or non-financial indicator follow up
- Notice sanction

* Institutions seeking accreditation with HLC or institutions placed on Probation, issued a Show-Cause Order or subject to an adverse action do not follow the cycle shown here. See page 46 for information about seeking accreditation and page 60 for information about sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and adverse actions.
Decision-Making Processes
Each institutional review concludes with a multi-step decision-making process that prioritizes due process and transparency for institutions, their students and other stakeholders. HLC publishes actions taken by our decision-making bodies on our website.

For details, see page 62.

People

Institutional Representatives
HLC works with multiple individuals at our member institutions, including the primary executive leaders and those who lead or coordinate accreditation work on campus. See page 65 for more information about our institutional contacts.

HLC Staff Liaison
An institution’s assigned HLC staff liaison is their primary contact and support at HLC. The staff liaison explains HLC policies and procedures and coordinates with other HLC staff members to provide effective assistance and service to the institution. See page 67 for details about this role.

Peer Reviewers
HLC’s accreditation reviews are primarily conducted by dedicated, volunteer peer reviewers who are trained to evaluate how institutions apply our requirements on campus. These peers also provide guidance to help institutions continuously improve.

See page 68 for more information about our Peer Corps.

Decision-Making Bodies
Actions on HLC member institutions are taken by institutional representatives and members of the public who serve on our three decision-making bodies: the Institutional Actions Council, Board of Trustees and Appeals Body.

See page 62 for more information about decision-making bodies and processes. The members of each decision-making body are provided at:

- Board of Trustees: page 6 or hlcomission.org/board
- Institutional Actions Council: page 7 or hlcomission.org/iac
- Appeals Body: hlcomission.org/appeals-body

Status and Stipulations

Accreditation Status
An institution’s status with HLC can be found in multiple places:

- Mark of Accreditation Status, which is required to be displayed on each member institution’s website. The Mark is linked to the institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status on HLC’s website, and it will automatically update if the institution’s status with HLC changes. See hlcomission.org/mark for more information.

- HLC’s Directory of Institutions at hlcomission.org/directory. The Directory provides a Statement of Accreditation Status for each current and former HLC member institution, which describes certain aspects of the institution’s relationship with HLC.

- Institutional Status and Requirements Report, which is available for ALOs and CEOs to download in Canopy. The report includes a complete history of the institution’s relationship with HLC, the status of current or upcoming accreditation events, and the institution’s designated pathway and related events.

Verify Your Institution’s HLC Status
Institutions may request an official letter from HLC to verify their accredited status, HLC’s approval of a particular program or location, or other aspects of the institution’s accreditation. See hlcomission.org/letter-request.

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

Voluntary Withdrawal or Resignation
An institution may voluntarily withdraw from seeking membership with HLC, or may voluntarily resign its accreditation or candidacy at any time. An institution may take such actions for any reason, including ceasing operations, merging with another institution, or changing accreditors.

Dues and Fees
HLC bills member institutions for annual dues, as well as additional fees for some evaluation processes and other activities.

View the current dues and fees schedule at hlcomission.org/dues.
HLC membership offers many benefits, including a high standard of quality, personalized support, expert consultation, and engaging programs and events. We welcome colleges and universities that are interested in joining our community.

Two Routes to Accreditation

HLC offers two possible processes for institutions to seek accreditation, depending on an institution's accreditation standing and history. In both processes, institutions will be evaluated at multiple points to determine that they meet HLC’s quality standards and other requirements.

Eligibility Process and Candidacy

Most new member institutions achieve accreditation through this process, which includes a period of Candidacy prior to accreditation. During that time, the institution works to demonstrate that it meets HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and other requirements. The time frame for an institution to achieve initial accreditation through this process is typically 4–6 years, depending on institutional readiness. This includes a period of Candidacy that is 2–4 years.

For more information about the Eligibility Process and Candidacy, see hlcommission.org/eligibility.

Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation

An institution may be eligible for the accelerated process for initial accreditation if it meets certain requirements, including being currently accredited by and in good standing with either of the following:

- A historically regional accrediting agency.
- A state entity recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an institutional accreditor.

The institution also must not have been placed on sanction, been issued a show-cause order or experienced other similar negative action by its institutional accreditor for at least the past five years, and it must meet other requirements.

Institutions in this process do not serve a period of Candidacy and may be able to achieve HLC accreditation within approximately two years.

For more information about the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation, see hlcommission.org/accelerated.

Get Started

Connect With HLC

Contact Us. Pursuing accreditation is a serious commitment. We are here to help you understand our processes and make the best decision for your institution—reach out today at hlcommission.org/seeking-accreditation.

Subscribe. Sign up for our Leaflet newsletter at hlcommission.org/leaflet, or for notifications about programs and events at hlcommission.org/programs.

Get Involved. Attend HLC’s annual conference, which takes place every spring. The event features a pre-conference Seeking Accreditation Workshop for institutions interested in HLC membership. See hlcommission.org/conference for details.

Apply for HLC Membership

Once you’ve decided that HLC is the best fit for your institution, take the next step toward seeking accreditation. Complete our application at hlcommission.org/application.

Find It Online
hlcommission.org/seeking-accreditation
Pathways for Reaffirmation of Accreditation

The Standard and Open Pathways are the foundation of HLC’s accreditation model. The Pathways are 10-year cycles in which accredited institutions affirm the quality of their educational offerings and demonstrate their continuous improvement. Each Pathway provides the custom support our members need to fulfill their unique missions.

Standard Pathway

The Standard Pathway offers additional support for institutions, including those that are new to HLC or undergoing significant changes. This pathway involves comprehensive evaluations in Years 4 and 10 of the 10-year cycle.

Comprehensive Evaluations

The comprehensive evaluation includes the following components:

- Assurance Review
- Student Opinion Survey
- On-site visit by a team of HLC peer reviewers
- Multi-campus visit, if applicable
- Federal Compliance Review, if applicable

The institution submits an Assurance Filing, via HLC’s Assurance System, that demonstrates how it meets HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC requirements and describes its recent improvement efforts. In addition, if a previous evaluation identified an area needing improvement, the institution describes how it responded to those concerns.

Peer reviewers evaluate the Assurance Filing, visit campus and consider feedback from students, faculty and community members. The team makes recommendations to an HLC decision-making body regarding the institution’s accreditation.

Both comprehensive evaluations follow the same general process, but at the end of the Year 10 evaluation an HLC decision-making body determines whether the institution’s accreditation should be reaffirmed and whether the institution is eligible to choose its pathway for its next accreditation cycle.

Most Year 4 evaluations do not include the reaffirmation aspect, except in the case of institutions that are undergoing their first comprehensive evaluation following Initial Accreditation or following removal of Probation or a Show-Cause Order. In these cases, Reaffirmation of Accreditation is considered as part of the Year 4 comprehensive evaluation.

Pathway Expenses

HLC’s annual dues distribute the cost of maintaining accreditation evenly over each pathway cycle. Therefore, institutions do not pay a base fee for Standard Pathway comprehensive evaluations. Institutions will still be billed for expenses related to the peer review team’s on-site visit during the evaluations. Such expenses typically include travel, honoraria and facility expenses. If a multi-campus visit is required as part of the comprehensive evaluation, a visit fee will apply.

Institutional Resources

Q&A Webinars

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

Scheduled webinars are listed at hlcommission.org/calendar.
Procedures

Standard Pathway Virtual Seminars
Institutions on the Standard Pathway that are preparing for a comprehensive evaluation can attend a team-based seminar on addressing improvement in the Assurance Argument. At the seminars, a team from your institution will develop strategies to demonstrate improvement within the Criteria for Accreditation.

Scheduled seminars are listed at [hlcommission.org/calendar].

Sample Assurance Arguments
[hlcommission.org/assurance-samples]

Explore sample Assurance Filings submitted by institutions on the Standard Pathway. They will help you become familiar with the Assurance System and see how evidence may be organized and linked in the Assurance Argument.

Assurance System Training Resources
[hlcommission.org/assurance-system]

Learn how to use the Assurance System to create your Assurance Filing. These resources are applicable to both the Standard and Open Pathways.

Open Pathway

The Open Pathway is designed for institutions that have completed at least one pathway cycle and are otherwise eligible to choose their pathway. It supports the pursuit of innovative or strategic improvement projects, known as Quality Initiatives. Institutions undergo a virtual review in Year 4 and a comprehensive evaluation in Year 10.

Assurance Review

In Year 4, institutions complete a virtual Assurance Review to demonstrate how they are continuing to meet the Criteria for Accreditation. The review includes only an evaluation of the institution’s Assurance Filing and does not involve other components that occur during a comprehensive evaluation, such as a Student Opinion Survey or Federal Compliance Review.

The institution submits an Assurance Filing that demonstrates how it meets HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and describes its improvement efforts.

If a previous evaluation identified an area needing improvement, the institution also describes its response to those concerns.

A peer review team evaluates these materials and makes a recommendation to the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) regarding the institution’s compliance with HLC requirements. The IAC will take final action if monitoring is recommended by the team. If the institution is assigned a focused visit or placed on Notice, it will be moved to the Standard Pathway.

Year 4 Assurance Reviews do not typically include an on-site visit, unless requested by the peer review team.

HLC provides guidance for preparing institutional materials and conducting the Year 4 Assurance Review at [hlcommission.org/open].

Quality Initiative

Between Years 5 and 9, institutions design and implement a project to improve an aspect of their organization or to pursue a strategic initiative. Projects may begin and be completed during this period, or an institution may continue a project that is already in progress or achieve a key milestone in the course of a longer project.

An institution submits a proposal for its project, which is reviewed and approved by a panel of peer reviewers. At the end of the Quality Initiative period, the institution then submits a report on the project, documenting how it pursued the goals outlined in its proposal. A panel of peer reviewers evaluates the report and determines whether the institution has made a genuine effort to achieve the goals of the Quality Initiative. The Quality Initiative Report and the panel’s determination are evaluated by IAC in Year 10 of the cycle, at the same time as, but independently from, the institution’s comprehensive evaluation.

Demonstrating and Recognizing “Genuine Effort”

When evaluating an institution’s Quality Initiative Report, peer reviewers consider the following:

- **The project’s scope and significance.** This can be demonstrated by the project’s alignment with the institution’s mission, its connection to the campus’s strategic plans, or in relation to its relevance or timeliness for the institution.
- **The expressed purpose of the project.** This can be demonstrated by clearly set and explicit goals, the identification of important milestones, or the presence of effective processes to evaluate the outcomes.

Find It Online
[hlcommission.org/open]
• **Evidence of the institution’s commitment and capacity.** This can be demonstrated by the presence of key personnel and the appropriate allocation of resources.

• **The appropriateness of the project timeline.** This can be demonstrated, for example, by the timeline’s consistency with the project’s goals, alignment with the institution’s other priorities, and relation to existing constraints.

**Comprehensive Evaluation**

The Year 10 comprehensive evaluation includes the following components:

• Assurance Review
• Student Opinion Survey
• On-site visit by a team of HLC peer reviewers
• Federal Compliance Review
• Multi-campus visit, if applicable

The institution submits an Assurance Filing that demonstrates how it meets HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and other requirements and describes its recent improvement efforts. In addition, if a previous evaluation identified an area needing improvement, the Assurance Filing addresses the institution’s response to those concerns.

A team of peer reviewers evaluate the Assurance Filing, visit campus and consider feedback from students, faculty and community members. The team makes recommendations to an HLC decision-making body regarding the institution’s accreditation. The HLC decision-making body determines whether the institution’s accreditation should be reaffirmed and whether the institution is eligible to choose its pathway for its next accreditation cycle. For the latter, the decision-making body will consider the peer reviewer findings regarding the institution’s efforts to achieve the goals of its Quality Initiative.

**Pathway Expenses**

HLC’s annual dues distribute the cost of maintaining accreditation evenly over each Pathway cycle. Therefore, institutions do not pay base fees for Assurance Reviews, Quality Initiative Proposals and Reports, and comprehensive evaluations. Institutions will still be billed for expenses related to peer review team visits required as part of the comprehensive evaluation. Team expenses typically include travel, honoraria and facility expenses. If a multi-campus visit is required as part of the comprehensive evaluation, a visit fee will apply.

**Institutional Resources**

**Sample Assurance Arguments**

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

Explore sample Assurance Filings submitted by institutions on the Open Pathway. They will help you become familiar with the Assurance System and see how evidence may be organized and linked in the Assurance Argument.

**Assurance System Training Resources**

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

Learn how to use the Assurance System to create your Assurance Filing. These resources are applicable to both the Standard and Open Pathways.
Standard Pathway 10-Year Cycle

**Years 1-3**

**Prepare Assurance Filing**
- **Institution:** May contribute documents to Evidence File and begin writing Assurance Argument for mid-cycle comprehensive evaluation.

**Year 4**

**Mid-cycle 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.

**Years 10**

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

Institutions may choose any pathway at the time of reaffirmation, unless they meet one or more of the conditions that would require placement on the Standard Pathway.
## Open Pathway 10-Year Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Peer Review</th>
<th>HLC Decision Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Prepare Assurance Filing</td>
<td>May contribute documents to Evidence File and begin writing Assurance Argument for mid-cycle Assurance Review.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Comprehensive Evaluation for Reaffirmation</td>
<td>Submit comprehensive evaluation materials.</td>
<td>Conduct comprehensive evaluation (with visit).</td>
<td>Take action on comprehensive evaluation and Reaffirmation of Accreditation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

As a federally recognized accreditor, HLC is responsible for verifying that our member institutions are complying with certain federal regulations.

When Federal Compliance Is Reviewed

- Comprehensive evaluations for:
  - Reaffirmation of Accreditation (regardless of when the evaluation occurs)
  - Candidacy
  - Initial accreditation
  - Removal of Probation
- Show-Cause Evaluation Visits
- Advisory visits arising from questions of compliance with federal requirements
- As part of assigned monitoring or any other appropriate evaluation, as determined by HLC, to verify compliance with federal requirements

Areas Addressed

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

The Review Process

For comprehensive evaluations or sanction visits that include a Federal Compliance Review, HLC makes the Federal Compliance documents available in the Assurance System six months before the institution’s Assurance Filing lock date. We recommend that institutions begin compiling the necessary documentation at that point. The institution should upload its final Federal Compliance Filing to the system prior to its lock date.

When the institution’s Assurance Filing is locked and released to the peer review team, a Federal Compliance reviewer evaluates the materials in advance of the visit and refers any issues to the on-ground team for further exploration and confirmation.

While conducting the visit, the peer review team determines whether the preliminary findings made by the Federal Compliance reviewer accurately represent the institution’s compliance with all applicable requirements. The team may request additional documentation from the institution, if needed.

If the team has concerns about the institution’s compliance with federal requirements, they may recommend monitoring or other action in accordance with HLC policy. This recommendation would go to an HLC decision-making body for review and final action.

Find It Online

[hlcommission.org/federal-compliance](http://hlcommission.org/federal-compliance)
Substantive Change

HLC’s substantive change process ensures that our member institutions continue to offer high-quality education as they evolve and grow. To do so, institutions apply for approval or notify us when they make certain changes to their academic offerings or operations.

When to Apply for Approval or Notify HLC

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

• Academic programs, including new programs or changes to existing programs
• Access to HLC’s Notification Program for Additional Locations
• Branch campuses and additional locations
• Clock or credit hours
• Competency-based education programs (including direct assessment, credit-based or hybrid programs)
• Contractual arrangements
• Corporate control, structure or organization
• Correspondence education
• Distance education
• Length of term affecting allocation of credit
• Mission or student body
• Pell-eligible prison education programs
• Program content

Visit 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 changerequest@hlcommission.org.

Applications

Institutions submit applications for substantive changes that require prior approval. These applications are available at hlcommission.org/change. We update the applications annually in September. However, if an application form was accessed more than 90 days prior to filing, please check our website to ensure you have the latest version.

Most change requests are subject to a fee, which varies depending on the type of review an application requires. HLC’s fee schedule can be found online at hlcommission.org/dues. The fee schedule is updated annually, with the new or revised fees effective on September 1.

Screening Forms

Institutions can quickly and easily determine whether certain changes require notification or approval by using our free, online screening forms.

If prior approval is required, the screening form will provide instructions for submitting the change request to HLC.

If HLC notification is required, completing the screening form serves as the notification. The person who submitted the form will receive an email confirmation, which the institution should keep for its records.

New Degree Programs

hlcommission.org/degree-screening

Complete this form for any new degree program.

New Certificate Programs

hlcommission.org/certificate-screening

Complete this form for any new certificate or diploma program. Please also ensure that all existing certificate or diploma programs have been previously screened through the form.
Changes to Existing Academic Programs
hlcommission.org/existing-program-screening

Complete this form to declare any of the following changes to existing HLC-approved academic programs (certificate or degree):

- **Number of Clock or Credit Hours.** A change of 25% or more to the number of clock or credit hours required to complete a degree program or certificate program, either in a single change or as the sum total of aggregate changes since the institution’s most recent accreditation review (comprehensive evaluation, Assurance Review or Show-Cause Evaluation Visit).

- **Program Content.** A change of 25% or more to the content of a program, either in a single change or as the sum total of aggregate changes, since the most recent accreditation review (comprehensive evaluation, Assurance Review or Show-Cause Evaluation Visit).

  Program content changes include changes to a program’s curriculum (measured by clock or credit hours), learning objectives, competencies or required clinical experiences. This includes changes in the general education courses required for program completion, not merely the courses within a discipline, program or major.

- **Program Name or CIP Code Changes.** Only report changes to a program name or CIP code if the program is specifically listed in the institution’s General stipulation limiting the programs the institution offers. Otherwise, an institution does not need to report program name or CIP Code changes to HLC.

- **Method of Delivery.** A change in the method of delivery for a program.

- **Customized Pathways or Abbreviated or Modified Courses.** The development of customized pathways or abbreviated or modified courses or programs to accommodate a student’s existing knowledge (such as from employment or military service) and to close competency gaps between demonstrated prior knowledge and the full requirements of a particular course or program.

Pell-Eligible Prison Education Programs
hlcommission.org/pep-screening

HLC introduced new substantive change requirements for Pell-eligible prison education programs (PEPs) in 2023. See below for more information about these requirements. After your institution receives approval for its first PEP, complete this new screening form to report any of the following changes:

- New PEP(s) started at a previously approved location.
- New PEP(s) started at a third or subsequent PEP location.
- The introduction of a modality that differs from all the modalities HLC previously approved for any of the institution’s PEPs, regardless of location or program.

Notification Program for Additional Locations

An institution with access to the Notification Program for Additional Locations may open new additional locations after notifying HLC and receiving an acknowledgement that we have added the new additional location to our database. Information about program eligibility and applying to join the program is available at hlcommission.org/change.

Institutions that are in the Notification Program for Additional Locations may request new additional locations in the Location and Campus Update section of Canopy. HLC gives an institution’s Chief Executive Officer and Accreditation Liaison Officer access to the system by default, and institutions also may identify a Location Coordinator to manage information in the system. Canopy is available at canopy.hlcommission.org.

Pell-Eligible Prison Education Programs

In July 2023, the U.S. Department of Education reinstated Pell Grant eligibility for students enrolled in prison education programs that meet certain requirements, including approval of the program by the institution’s accreditor. See hlcommission.org/pep for HLC’s PEP requirements, procedure and other resources.

Contractual Arrangements
hlcommission.org/contractual-screening

Complete this form for each credit-bearing academic program (certificate or degree) that is offered through a contractual arrangement.
Substantive Change Requirements for Institutions on Sanction, Show-Cause Order or Provisional Certification Status

Institutions placed on a sanction or under a Show-Cause Order or those on a provisional certification status with the U.S. Department of Education, are subject to additional requirements:

- These institutions are required to apply for HLC approval prior to making the changes listed below while on a sanction or under a Show-Cause Order and for three years thereafter, or while on a provisional certification status.
  - Increasing or decreasing the number of credit or clock hours required for successful completion of a certificate program by 25% or more since the institution’s last accreditation review.
  - Changing the content of a program by 25% or more since the institution’s last accreditation review.
  - Changing a program’s method of delivery.
  - Developing customized pathways or abbreviated or modified courses or programs.
  - Initiating any contractual arrangement.
- These institutions are ineligible to participate in HLC’s Notification Program for Additional Locations.

Review Processes

Change requests are reviewed by HLC staff or peer reviewers in one of four processes, depending on the type and complexity of the change:

- **Desk Review**, conducted by HLC staff. Average timeframe is three months.
- **Change Panel**, conducted by a panel of two or more peer reviewers. Average timeframe is five months.
- **Change Visit**, conducted by a team of two or more peer reviewers and includes an on-site visit. Average timeframe is eight months.
- **Change of Control Evaluation**, conducted for applications for a Change of Control, Structure or Organization. This review can take a variety of forms depending on the nature of the request. See [hlcommission.org/control](http://hlcommission.org/control) for more information.

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.

For more information about substantive change review processes, see [hlcommission.org/change](http://hlcommission.org/change).

Expand your accreditation expertise

Learn more about HLC’s processes through live and recorded webinars. Dive deep into substantive change, federal compliance and other topics.

Explore our resource library at [hlcommission.org/alo-training](http://hlcommission.org/alo-training)
Additional Locations and Branch Campuses

Many HLC member institutions offer courses and programs at locations and branch campuses beyond their main campus, meeting their students where they are. HLC works with our members to ensure students have the same quality education and services no matter where they attend class.

Additional Locations

Changes to Additional Locations
Institutions apply for approval or notify HLC before opening new additional locations or relocating or closing existing locations. For more information about our requirements, see page 53 or hlcommission.org/change.

Additional Location Confirmation Visit
HLC peer reviewers evaluate each of an institution’s first three additional locations within six months after the location opens and enrolls students. The review is meant to confirm the institution implemented its plans for the location successfully.

Multi-location Visits
When an institution has three or more additional locations in operation, an HLC peer reviewer evaluates a sample of its locations in Years 3 and 8 of the institution’s Open or Standard Pathway 10-year cycle. The visit is meant to confirm the continuing effective oversight by the institution of its additional locations.

The peer reviewer conducting the visit may recommend monitoring if they identify any concerns at a location. Such recommendations will be reviewed and acted upon by an HLC decision-making body.

Branch Campuses

Changes to Branch Campuses
Institutions apply for HLC approval before opening, relocation or closing a branch campus. For more information about our requirements, see page 53 or hlcommission.org/change.

Campus Evaluation Visit
HLC peer reviewers evaluate each new branch campus within six months after it opens and enrolls students. The visit is meant to confirm the quality of the campus and its educational program, as well as the institution’s capacity to sustain that quality.

Multi-campus Visit
When an institution has one or more branch campuses, HLC peer reviewers will evaluate a sample of its campuses as part of certain comprehensive evaluations. The visit is meant to ensure (1) the quality of the institution’s extended operations and its educational offerings and (2) the capacity to sustain that quality.

Fees
Institutions pay a fee for substantive change review and visits to additional locations and branch campuses. See HLC’s Dues and Fees Schedule at hlcommission.org/dues.

Find It Online
hlcommission.org/locations
Reclassifying a Branch Campus as an Additional Location

If an institution decreases its operation at an approved branch campus to the point where it would be considered an additional location, the institution should 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. Include the exact name and street address of the branch campus in question. Submit this information as a single PDF file to changerequest@hlcommission.org.

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

Managing Branch Campus and Additional Location Records

Institutions can update HLC’s records about their existing additional locations, existing branch campuses and inactive locations and campuses in the Location and Campus Update section of Canopy. In addition, institutions that are in the Notification Program for Additional Locations may use this system to request new additional locations. HLC gives an institution’s Chief Executive Officer and Accreditation Liaison Officer access to the system by default, and institutions also may identify a Location Coordinator to manage information in the system. Canopy is available at canopy.hlcommission.org.
Institutional Update

Each year, member institutions provide data on their operations and offerings in the Institutional Update. HLC uses the data to assess institutional health and identify trends.

The Institutional Update opens in February or March. In preparation for it, HLC shares a guide in January that includes the Institutional Update questions, definitions of terms and answers to frequently asked questions. We also ask institutions to ensure we have the correct contact information 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.

How HLC Uses the Data

• To determine whether any financial and non-financial indicators suggest concerns that require follow-up.
• To update the information in our Directory of Institutions.
• To calculate HLC membership dues.
• To remain in compliance with federal requirements.
• To provide insight into the state of our membership in annual reports.

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 conditions occur.

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

1. Significant Enrollment Changes: Three-year increase or decrease in enrollment of 80% or more for small institutions or 40% or more for large institutions.

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

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

4. Minimal Full-time Faculty: The headcount of full-time faculty (not full-time equivalent) divided by the number of degree programs offered is less than one.

5. Student to Teacher Ratio: The number of undergraduate full-time equivalent students divided by the number of undergraduate full-time equivalent faculty is greater than or equal to 35.

Note: Does not apply to graduate-only institutions.
Routine Monitoring

Interim Report
HLC may assign an interim report to receive specific, important information from the institution, track how the institution is progressing with certain changes or challenges, or confirm that the institution’s stated plans have come to fruition. An interim report may be assigned as stand-alone monitoring, to be reviewed through staff analysis, or it may be embedded in a previously scheduled comprehensive evaluation or focused visit.

Focused Visit
A focused visit may be assigned to examine specific aspects of an institution in between the institution’s comprehensive evaluations. Peer reviewers evaluate specific developments or follow up on concerns identified during a previous review process.

Special Monitoring

Institutional Designations
When an institution is in financial distress or under governmental investigation, HLC may assign the institution a designation and ask the institution to provide regular reports to HLC on the situation. Designations allow HLC to respond quickly to developing situations at member institutions and to communicate to students and the public in a timely manner about situations that may affect an institution’s operations.

Special Monitoring Reports and Advisory Visits
When an urgent issue arises at an institution, HLC’s president may call for a special monitoring report or an advisory visit to the institution to investigate specific issues. Such issues may involve the institution’s governance, operations, finances or other concerns. See HLC’s Special Monitoring policy (INST.F.20.010) for a list of situations that might result in an advisory visit.

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

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

Fees
See HLC’s Dues and Fees Schedule at hlcommission.org/dues for costs associated with monitoring.

Find It Online
hlcommission.org/monitoring
Public Notifications

Institutions are obligated to promptly disclose any sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and adverse actions to the public. Once the institution has been notified of one of the above actions, the institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status in HLC’s Directory of Institutions and, if applicable, the Mark of Accreditation Status on the institution’s website are updated to reflect the change in status. HLC will also issue a Public Disclosure Notice.

Sanctions

An institution may be placed on a sanction of Notice or Probation when HLC determines the institution does not meet, or is at risk of not meeting, the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance requirements, or Assumed Practices. The imposition of a sanction is not subject to appeal. The institution remains accredited during the sanction period.

Notice

An institution is placed on Notice when it is at risk of not meeting HLC requirements. If the institution is on the Open Pathway, it will be placed on the Standard Pathway for the remainder of that accreditation cycle.

An institution is placed on Notice for no more than two years. In that time, the institution submits a Notice report providing evidence it is no longer at risk of failing to meet HLC requirements. The institution may be required to host a Notice Visit to demonstrate that the areas of concern have been improved.

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

Probation

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

The initial period for Probation is up to two years. Institutions on Probation undergo a comprehensive evaluation to provide evidence that the areas of concern have been ameliorated.

If the institution has addressed the areas of concern and meets all of the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance requirements and Assumed Practices, the HLC Board of Trustees may remove it from Probation. If the institution still does not meet all of the HLC requirements, the Board may take another action, including extending Probation, issuing a Show-Cause Order or withdrawing accreditation.

Find It Online
hlcommission.org/sanctions
Show-Cause Order

An institution is issued a Show-Cause Order when it is not meeting the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance requirements or Assumed Practices to such an extent that HLC requires the institution to demonstrate why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. The issuance of a Show-Cause Order is not subject to appeal. An institution issued a Show-Cause Order is removed from its Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation. It remains accredited during the Show-Cause period.

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

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

Withdrawal or Denial of Accreditation

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

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

Withdrawal or Denial of Candidacy

An institution may be denied candidacy, or its candidacy may be withdrawn, if it fails to meet one or more of the Eligibility Requirements, the Assumed Practices or Federal Compliance requirements, or the institution has not provided sufficient evidence that the Criteria for Accreditation can be met within the candidacy period.

Fees

For costs associated with sanctions, Show-Cause Orders and adverse actions, see HLC’s Dues and Fees Schedule at hlcommission.org/dues.
Decision-Making Bodies and Processes

Following most institutional reviews, peer reviewers or staff make recommendations to an HLC decision-making body, whose members review the case and make a final decision. HLC’s decision-making process is designed to prioritize due process and transparency for institutions and their students.

Decision-Making Bodies

Unless otherwise specified, the decision-making bodies are broadly representative of the colleges and universities accredited by HLC, with attention to institutional type, control, size and geographical distribution. All decision-making bodies abide by HLC’s conflict of interest policies.

Board of Trustees
The Board of Trustees is the governing body of HLC. It is made up of at least 16 and no more than 21 trustees. At least one of every seven trustees is a representative of the public, and the others are representatives of HLC member institutions or are otherwise involved in higher education. See the Board roster on page 6 or at hlcommission.org/board.

Cases that require final action by the Board include the following:

- Granting or denying an institution candidacy or initial accreditation.
- Withdrawing status from a candidate or accredited institution.
- Issuing or removing a sanction.
- Issuing or removing a Show-Cause Order.
- Approving or denying a Change of Control, Structure or Organization.

Institutional Actions Council
The Institutional Actions Council (IAC) is composed of approximately 125 members representing HLC member institutions and the public. Those members who represent institutions are also current members of the Peer Corps. See the IAC roster on page 7 or at hlcommission.org/iac.

The IAC has the authority to take action on accreditation decisions other than those for which the Board of Trustees retains exclusive authority. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Cases of reaffirmation of accreditation, including pathway placement.
- Standard Pathway comprehensive evaluations.
- Open Pathway Assurance Reviews.
- Biennial evaluations during Candidacy.
- Substantive change requests requiring review and approval by a decision-making body, not including applications for Change of Control, Structure or Organization.
- Recommendations for and resulting from interim monitoring.

Some cases heard by the IAC require action by the Board of Trustees. In these instances, the IAC submits a recommendation to the Board for consideration. The Board may either adopt the recommendation of the IAC as its action or may take another action provided by HLC policy.

Appeals Body
The Appeals Body is selected by the Board of Trustees to be available to serve on Appeal Panels (see the roster at hlcommission.org/appeals-body). Although many actions by the Board are considered final actions, an institution may appeal an adverse action of the Board prior to the action becoming final. In these instances, an Appeal Panel hears the case and has the authority to affirm, amend or remand the action of the Board.

Decision-Making Process and Related Processes

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. See hlcommission.org/policies.
Staff Actions
HLC staff may take certain types of institutional actions, as permitted by HLC policy. These actions could include, among others, adjusting the scope of certain previously assigned monitoring or changing the date of an upcoming review.

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

Institutional Response
Institutions are offered an opportunity to respond after each evaluation and at each stage of the decision-making process. Each decision-making body considers the institutional response as part of the full record of the case, along with the recommendation of the peer review team and, where applicable, the recommendations of other decision-making bodies.

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

- **IAC Meeting.** Meetings are held virtually with a committee of IAC members. Representatives from the institutions are not present at these meetings. The decisions of IAC meeting committees are final unless the Board of Trustees is required by policy to take final action.
- **IAC Hearing.** HLC policy requires that certain cases go to an IAC hearing rather than a meeting. Representatives from both the institution and peer review team, along with a committee of IAC members, attend these hearings. The IAC hearing committee will typically make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees for final action.

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

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

Board of Trustees
The Board conducts regular meetings three times per year to take action on institutional cases, to approve and adopt changes to HLC policy, and to conduct other regular business. The Board may also take institutional actions at other times during the year via special meetings or other means, such as electronic ballots, as necessary.

Board Committee Hearing
HLC will make a Board Committee Hearing available to a member institution prior to a decision by the Board to take most adverse actions or to conclude a Show-Cause Order process. The hearing is conducted by a subcommittee of the Board prior to the full Board taking action.

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

Appeals
Although many actions by the Board are final actions, an institution may appeal an adverse action of the Board of Trustees prior to the action becoming final. An Appeal Panel will hear the case and decide to affirm, amend or remand the adverse action to the Board. If the panel affirms or amends the action, the Board will review and act to implement the panel’s decision. If the panel remands the action to the Board for additional consideration, the Board will, after taking into account the panel’s explanation of its reasons for remanding the action, act to affirm, amend, or reverse its original adverse action.

Arbitration of Adverse Actions Following Appeal
A decision by an Appeal Panel concludes the decision-making process. Thereafter, an institution may initiate arbitration with HLC. The arbitration will be conducted by a single arbitrator who is mutually selected by the parties. The arbitrator may affirm or reverse the decision by the Appeal Panel. Following arbitration, the Board will act to implement the decision of the arbitrator. In accordance with federal requirements, HLC’s arbitration process is an initial process that is non-binding.

Find It Online
hlcommission.org/decision-making
Accreditation Roles on Campus

Achieving your mission isn’t easy.
We’ll be by your side at every step.
Institutional Representatives

Executive Roles
- Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- Chief Academic Officer
- Chief Financial Officer

HLC-Specific Roles (appointed by the CEO)
- **Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)**. Coordinates efforts to ensure their institution meets its obligations of HLC membership. Along with the CEO, one of the primary contacts between the institution and HLC. (See page 66 for more information about this role.)
- **Data Update Coordinator**. Ensures the accuracy and completion of the Institutional Update.
- **Location Coordinator (optional)**. Maintains the institution’s additional location and campus records in Canopy. (Note: the ALO and CEO may also manage these records.)
- **Primary Assurance System Coordinator**. Coordinates the development and submission of the institution’s materials for accreditation reviews conducted in the Assurance System.

Keep Your Contacts Up to Date in Canopy

When there are changes to your institution’s HLC contacts, be sure to submit that information in Canopy. This ensures that we send news related to your institution’s accreditation to the right people on campus.

ALOs, CEOs and Data Update Coordinators can make contact changes in the system. Just click “Update Contacts” from the homepage and complete the Contact Update Survey.

Log into Canopy at canopy.hlcommission.org.

Find It Online
hlcommission.org/relationship
Along with the institution's chief executive officer (CEO), the ALO is a primary contact point between HLC and your institution. You'll receive communications from HLC regarding policies, procedures and professional development opportunities, and are responsible for coordinating efforts to ensure your institution meets its obligations of HLC membership.

**Responsibilities**

**General Communications**

**With HLC**
- Receive all HLC communications regarding your institution’s accreditation, in addition to the CEO.
- Stay up to date on HLC policies and procedures.
- Comment on HLC proposed policies, procedures and issues affecting the accreditation relationship.
- Respond to HLC inquiries.

**On Campus**
- Share information with and answer questions about HLC policies and procedures from your institution's community.
- Maintain your institution's file of official documents and reports related to your accreditation relationship with HLC.

**Reporting Requirements**
- Provide oversight and direction for the institution’s Data Update Coordinator to facilitate sharing information in the Institutional Update.
- Notify HLC of certain actions taken by the U.S. Department of Education, state agencies or other recognized accreditors. (See [hlcommission.org/alo](http://hlcommission.org/alo) for details.)

**Substantive Change**
- Notify HLC of changes to your institution’s operations and offerings, following HLC’s substantive change policy and procedures.
- Provide oversight and direction for the timely submission of substantive change requests and reports required by HLC policy.

**Membership Dues and Fees**
- Ensure that your institution meets its financial obligations to HLC through the timely payment of dues and fees.

---

Spark institution-wide change.

Learn evidence-based strategies that support sustainable institutional improvement in the areas of assessment of student learning and student success with HLC’s Academies.

Apply to the Academies today! Learn more at [hlcommission.org/academies](http://hlcommission.org/academies)
Resources

HLC Staff Liaison
Each institution has an HLC staff liaison who is the go-to person for questions or individual guidance on your accreditation relationship.

A staff liaison’s responsibilities include:

- Advise institutions about HLC’s policies and procedures.
- Provide historical information about your institution’s relationship with HLC.
- Identify resources that may help your accreditation relationship.
- Facilitate accreditation processes.
- Manage expectations related to substantive change.
- Advise on your institution’s preparation for upcoming evaluations.
- Provide guidance regarding the transition to a new Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation.

- Coordinate the peer review and decision-making process.
- Work with HLC staff members to identify and prepare peer review teams for evaluations.
- Review reports and finalize documents to facilitate decision making by HLC’s decision-making bodies.

Canopy
Canopy is HLC’s online system for you to manage your institution’s accreditation relationship with HLC. Depending on your HLC role, you can view your institution profile, update the contacts on file with HLC, or manage your additional location and branch campus records.

Log into Canopy at canopy.hlcommission.org.

For more details about the system and training resources, see hlcommission.org/canopy.

Institutional Status and Requirements (ISR) Report
The ISR Report provides a summary of the institution’s accreditation relationship with HLC. ALOs and CEOs may download the ISR Report in Canopy.

The report includes a complete institutional history with HLC, the status of current or upcoming accreditation events, and information on the institution’s designated Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation and related events.

HLCommission.org
HLC’s website, at hlcommission.org, is your resource for the most up-to-date information on HLC’s policies, procedures and programming.

Training
See more of HLC’s programming and event opportunities on page 74.

ALO Orientation: An Introduction to the Role at HLC
Summer and Fall Sessions Offered Annually
This online orientation introduces the role and responsibilities of the Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO), including modules highlighting various responsibilities. The six-week, self-paced training modules include an overview of accreditation and peer review processes, specifics on managing substantive change activities on your campus, expectations of regular and mandatory data reporting to HLC, and staying current using HLC’s website. New ALOs are invited via email.

Preparing for an Upcoming Accreditation Activity
If you have a comprehensive evaluation or Assurance Review coming up, you may be eligible to participate in an HLC program that will help you get prepared. Eligible ALOs and key institutional representatives are invited via email for these events.

Webinars and Online Resource Library
HLC hosts live webinars on current relevant topics in accreditation throughout the year and also has pre-recorded webinars on the Criteria for Accreditation, Federal Compliance, teach-out requirements, and more. Upcoming and recorded webinars are available at hlcommission.org/alo-training.

Find It Online
hlcommission.org/alo-training
hlcommission.org/systems
Peer Corps

Trusted and tailored support. Always.

Allison Langford, HLC Director of Peer Corps Relations and Services
Resources and Training for Current Peer Reviewers

HLC relies on expert volunteers who play an essential role in assuring the quality of HLC’s member institutions. We provide resources and support to ensure reviewers are prepared and stay current on HLC policies and procedures.

Maintain Your Peer Reviewer Profile in Canopy

Keep your peer reviewer profile in Canopy up to date to help HLC staff assign you to reviews that fit your experience and expertise. The profile includes contact information, education history, retirement status, work experience and other expertise.

Review and update your profile at canopy.hlcommission.org.

Stay Connected With HLC: HLC shares training registration information via email. Please add HLC’s main email addresses to your approved senders list (see page 5) and ensure your contact information is correct in Canopy.

Online Team and Panel Resources

Need report templates or a refresher on guidelines? Visit hlcommission.org/team-resources for everything you may need during your peer review activities. Check this page before beginning a review to ensure you have the most current form or report template.

In-Person Training

Peer Review Updates and Training at the HLC Annual Conference
Get updates on HLC policies and procedures and best practices for conducting and leading evaluations. Special training sessions are offered for new and experienced team chairs, specialized Peer Corps reviewers, and substantive change reviewers and chairs.

New Peer Reviewer Training
Within the initial two-year term and before their first evaluation, reviewers participate in training on the application of HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC policies and the processes integral to evaluations.

Webinars

Training on Current Topics
HLC offers webinars throughout the year for certain peer reviewers to prepare for upcoming visits, refresh their knowledge and stay up to date on the latest in accreditation. Eligible reviewers are invited via email.

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

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

Criteria for Accreditation (Recorded)
These recorded webinars walk you through each of the HLC Criteria for Accreditation, discussing their content, context and intent.
Experience the benefits of serving as an HLC Peer Reviewer

“Being a part of the HLC community means continued professional growth, collaboration opportunities, and enriched professional relationships with colleagues and peers.”

— Purnima “Pam” Sharma, Vice President for Planning, Institutional Effectiveness, and Research, West Virginia Northern Community College (March 2023 Leaflet)

“I find there’s a multiplier effect to volunteering with HLC. Even though peer review work is very time consuming, there’s a return on investment in terms of learning from other peer reviewers, seeing how institutions are addressing the significant challenges in higher education, and being inspired with ways to help my institution better fulfill its mission.”

— Kristin Stehouwer, Academic Vice President and Provost, Northwood University (September 2023 Leaflet)

• GAIN INSIGHT FROM COLLEAGUES  • SERVE THE HIGHER ED COMMUNITY
• EXPAND YOUR NETWORK  • APPLY YOUR EXPERTISE IN NEW & ENGAGING WAYS
• DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF HLC’S ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Learn more at hlcommission.org/peer
Becoming a Peer Reviewer

Serving as a peer reviewer is an engaging, immersive experience. Grow your skills while giving back.

What You’ll Do

Our peer reviewers are trained to evaluate colleges and universities and provide guidance to help them continuously improve.

In the context of each institution’s mission, you’ll use HLC requirements to assess materials, conduct in-person and virtual evaluations, and write reports.

Here are some of the things you’ll do as a peer reviewer:
- Collaborate with a peer review team on evaluations, visits and panels.
- Research institutions and thoroughly read submitted materials.
- Engage with institutional representatives and communicate evaluation findings.
- Maintain confidentiality and avoid conflicts of interest with all assignments.

How to Apply

We seek new peer reviewers on an as-needed basis. If the application is not currently open, subscribe to Leaflet and our interest list to stay up to date.

We ask applicants to submit a letter of application (500 words maximum) describing their relevant experiences along with a resume or CV. In addition, each applicant should have two professional references who will be asked to assess the applicant based on traits we’re looking for.

Preference will be given to applicants who meet the diversity initiative or our areas of critical need, though meeting these criteria does not guarantee acceptance.

- The Peer Corps Diversity Initiative seeks to increase the number of peer reviewers who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of HLC’s member institutions.
- Critical needs areas reflect specific areas of expertise, specialties, types of institutions or Carnegie classifications where HLC is in need of more reviewers.

Who We’re Looking For

Wondering if the peer reviewer role is right for you? Generally, we’re looking for someone who:
- Listens attentively and communicates effectively.
- Can examine materials with an eye for detail.
- Gives constructive criticism tactfully and with care.
- Is patient, flexible and can take direction.
- Remains impartial and unbiased even in the face of conflicting opinions.
- Has at least five years of experience in higher ed.
- Has a master’s or other appropriate terminal degree; doctorate preferred. In certain circumstances, individuals with other recognized expertise, skills or experience may be eligible to serve.
- Is currently employed by an institution accredited by and in good standing with HLC.
- Primarily resides in the United States.

Find It Online

hlcommission.org/peer
hlcommission.org/diversity-initiative
Serving Students

Students have questions. We can help.
The HLC Commitment

Student voices and participation are vital to the work we do — and students are encouraged to be involved in the accreditation process.

HLC puts students first in its Mission, Vision and Guiding Values. HLC also welcomes student input and provides a variety of opportunities for students to be involved.

Campus Visits
hlcommission.org/campus-visits
Students may be invited by their institution to attend and speak on issues during an on-site visit by HLC peer reviewers.

Student Opinion Survey
hlcommission.org/student-survey
Students also have the chance to share their opinions in response to HLC’s Student Opinion Survey. The survey is sent to an institution’s entire student body in advance of a comprehensive evaluation and the results are considered by HLC peer reviewers as part of the evaluation.

Comments
hlcommission.org/comment
Students may submit comments about an institution to HLC at any time. All comments received are forwarded to the institution and HLC peer reviewers prior to the institution’s next comprehensive evaluation for review and consideration during the evaluation.

Complaints
hlcommission.org/complaints
Students can be an excellent source for identifying problems or issues at institutions. Students can file complaints using HLC’s complaint process whenever there are concerns regarding an institution’s ongoing ability to meet HLC requirements.

Student Resources

HLC has a number of resources that students can use to enhance their understanding about accreditation and the college journey.

Directory of Institutions
hlcommission.org/directory
Students can search the HLC Directory to learn if an institution is accredited. They also can find information in the directory regarding an institution’s accreditation status.

Student Guide
studentguide.hlcommission.org
HLC’s Ask the Right Questions: A Student Guide to Higher Education is a roadmap that students can use when making choices about college. With help from this resource, they learn about the accreditation process, what questions to ask on their journey, and gain access to other resources for help along the way.

FAQs
hlcommission.org/faq
When students have questions, HLC has answers to frequently asked questions on our website.
Programs and Events

Take your institution to a whole new level.

John Marr, HLC Vice President of Accreditation Relations
HLC’s Academies
Spark institution-wide change that leads to improved student outcomes with HLC’s Academies. Learn evidence-based strategies that support sustainable institutional improvement in the areas of assessment of student learning and student success.

Assessment Academy
Refine or develop a systematic approach to assessing student learning at the institutional and program levels. Get new ideas and techniques for influencing institutional culture, increasing capacity for assessment at your institution and using your data to improve student learning.

Student Success Academy
Move beyond initiative-based solutions and develop a student success plan that addresses systemic barriers to students achieving their goals. Engage in critical introspection to learn more about your student populations and the support mechanisms, infrastructure, and engagement needed to support their success.

Benefits
• In-person and virtual events that serve as team retreats, with dedicated time to connect and plan.
• Expert, tailored guidance from practitioners and scholars.
• Opportunities to connect, learn from and collaborate with peers across HLC’s membership.

HLC’s Annual Conference
The HLC Annual Conference brings the higher ed community together to share ideas and insights on the latest in the field. Learn from HLC staff and leading thinkers, researchers and advocates during this multi-day event and inspire your work on campus. Network with attendees from institutions of every classification and size from across the country.

The Future of the Conference
At HLC, we pride ourselves on continuous quality improvement. We ask for your feedback on your conference experience each year, and we’ve learned that many of you wish that the conference was held in a larger space and in different cities.

We appreciate the feedback and understand that we’ve outgrown the space in Chicago. As we continue to grow, providing an enjoyable conference experience for all attendees is a priority.

After evaluating several options regarding future conference locations, we’re announcing a big change on the horizon: the HLC Annual Conference will be moving!
In order to accommodate the size of our conference and increase accessibility for our geographically dispersed membership, we plan to rotate the location of the conference each year to cities with convention centers that fit our needs.

We are excited to share that the conference will be held in Phoenix in 2027 and in Denver in 2028. Stay tuned to see where the conference will go after that! Until then, we look forward to hosting you at the 2024, 2025, and 2026 conferences at our long-time conference home, the Hyatt Regency Chicago.

Find It Online
hlcommission.org/conference

More Learning Opportunities

Led by HLC staff and industry leaders, gain tools to propel your institution forward in knowledge and skill development programs for higher ed professionals.

Connect with peers to learn how they’re innovating and responding to changes in higher ed.

In addition to focused workshops on assessing student learning and student success, HLC offers programs on strategic planning, leadership, and program review as well as trusted guidance on accreditation procedures. Whether you join us virtually or in person, we’re always developing new opportunities that meet your needs.

Assessing General Education Virtual Workshop
Develop an action plan to improve your general education assessment processes in this collaborative virtual series. Gather a team from your institution to critically review the structure, philosophy, and perceptions of existing processes and learn best practices for assessment of student learning in gen ed programs.

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

Assessment of Student Learning
Program Assessment Virtual Workshop
This virtual workshop series will further your understanding of practical and meaningful assessment of student learning in academic programs. Through lectures, discussions, and structured activities, gain the practical knowledge and skills needed to lead the development and implementation of a program assessment plan in your academic discipline.

In 2025, the HLC Annual Conference will also get a new permanent name: Higher Learning. This encompasses HLC’s drive and the momentum of our member institutions to always be striving for higher standards and bigger goals.

Save the Date!
Higher Learning 2025
April 5–8 | Chicago
Effective Administrators Workshop
This workshop, typically offered in person at the HLC Annual Conference, will give you strategies for improving efficiency in key higher education administrator competencies. Take a deep dive into institutional effectiveness, planning and resource management with a blend of presentation, application and small group activities. This workshop is for new and rising administrators taking on formal and informal leadership roles to support your unit and institution.

Program Review Workshop
Define or develop your program review processes to have a meaningful impact on the quality of your educational offerings in this in-person team workshop. Develop a comprehensive program review plan with information gathered through plenaries, discussion sessions and peer consultations. Discuss strategies for communication and engagement on your campus for implementation of program review processes.

Student Success

Supporting Student Success Virtual Workshop
Examine common factors that affect student success in this interactive workshop. Engage in a series of activities to identify your institution’s current realities and discover areas of opportunity for improving student success within your sphere of influence.

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

Preparing for an Accreditation Activity

Invitation Only: Institutions with upcoming accreditation activities are invited via email

Collaborating on Quality Virtual Workshop
This team-based virtual workshop supports your preparations for an upcoming comprehensive evaluation. Topics covered during the virtual workshop include leveraging an effective steering committee, preparing the Assurance Argument, and strategies for engaging the wider campus. The workshop will assist teams in developing a plan for making the best use of the two years of preparation time ahead of their scheduled comprehensive evaluation. Institutions two years out from a comprehensive evaluation are invited via email.

Demonstrating Quality: An Assurance Argument Virtual Workshop
To help you craft the Assurance Argument, institutions with an upcoming Assurance Review scheduled as part of a Year 4 or Year 10 evaluation are invited via email to participate in this half-day team workshop. You’re invited to submit an excerpt of your draft Assurance Argument and meet with an experienced peer reviewer for individualized feedback.

Standard Pathway Virtual Seminar
Institutions on the Standard Pathway that are preparing for a comprehensive evaluation in the next two academic years can attend a team-based seminar on addressing improvement in the Assurance Argument. At the seminars, institutional teams develop strategies to demonstrate improvement within the Criteria for Accreditation.

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

Webinars
HLC hosts several webinars throughout the year for you to stay up to date or refresh your knowledge on your accreditation relationship with HLC and current happenings in higher ed. Be the first to know about all upcoming programs by subscribing to our email interest lists at hlcommission.org/programs.
Resources

Explore what's possible.

Vince Coraci, HLC Director of Accreditation Processes
Institutional Examples

Accreditation Processes

The institutions below have recently completed an HLC accreditation activity and are open to share their experience with you. 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 at the Accreditation Share Fair on April 14 at the 2024 HLC Annual Conference to share their experiences in person.

**STANDARD PATHWAY**

**Year 4 Comprehensive Evaluation**

**Franklin University**
Kelly Evans-Wilson, Executive Director, Accreditation and Authorization  
kelly.evans-wilson@franklin.edu  
937.313.3832  
franklin.edu/about-us/university-details/accreditation

**Lake Erie College**
Johnathan Tedesco, Dean of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and ALO  
jtedesco@lec.edu  
440.375.7352  
lec.edu/accreditation/

**Minot State University**
Daniel Ringrose, Professor  
daniel.ringrose@minotstateu.edu  
701.858.3037

**Year 10 Comprehensive Evaluation**

**Aultman College of Nursing and Health Sciences**
Brock Reiman, Vice President of Academic Affairs  
brock.reiman@aultmancollege.edu  
330.363.6164

**Capella University**
Curtis Brant, Dean, Institutional Effectiveness  
Curtis.Brant@Capella.edu  
612.977.4577

**Lincoln University**
Jennifer Benne, Dean, Graduate and Extended Studies  
bennej@lincolnzu.edu  
573.681.5125

**Rochester University**
J. Mark Manry, Vice Provost for Institutional Effectiveness  
mmanry@rochesteru.edu  
248.494.1295

**University of Wisconsin-Superior**
Shevaun Stocker, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Professor, Psychology Program  
sstocker@uwsuper.edu  
715.394.8423

**West Virginia Northern Community College**
Angela Hawk, Director of Assessment  
ahawk@wvncc.edu  
304.214.8858

**OPEN PATHWAY**

**Year 10 Comprehensive Evaluation**

**Bowling Green State University**
John Lommel, Director of Institutional Effectiveness  
jlommel@bgsu.edu  
419.372.7601  
bgsu.edu/institutional-effectiveness/institutional-effectiveness/hlc-accreditation.html

**Butler County Community College**
Jonathan Craig, Associate Dean  
jcraig3@butlercc.edu  
316.323.6264  
butlercc.edu/downloads/download/286/2023-hlc-report

**Cottey College**
Jill Compton, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs  
jcompton@cottey.edu  
417.667.6333

**Indiana University East**
TJ Rivard, Associate Vice Chancellor  
trivard@iuue.edu  
765.973.8243
Kalamazoo College
Danette Ifert Johnson, Provost
danette.johnson@kzoo.edu
269.337.7162

Moberly Area Community College
Todd Martin, Vice President for Instruction
toddmartin@macc.edu
660.263.4100
macc.edu/about-us/about-macc-accreditation/

Pittsburg State University
Janet Smith, Special Assistant to the Provost for HLC Accreditation
jsmith@pittstate.edu
620.235.4537

Southeast Community College Area
Shawna Herwick
Administrative Director, Accreditation and Planning
sherwick@southeast.edu
402.309.0555
southeast.edu/about/leadership-and-governance/accreditation.php

University of Oklahoma
Susannah Livingood, Associate Provost and Director, Institutional Research and Reporting
slivingood@ou.edu
405.397.0214
ou.edu/hlc2023

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Suzanne Boyd, Special Assistant to the Provost for Academic Affairs
sboyd@uwm.edu
414.708.6472

University of Wisconsin-Parkside
Theresa Castor, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
caster@uw.edu
uw.edu/explore/aboutuwp/hlc2023/

Western Wyoming Community College
Mark Rembacz, Associate Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness
mrembacz@westernwyoming.edu
307.382.1899

HLC Assessment Academy Projects

These recent graduates of HLC’s Assessment Academy are participating in the Academy Poster Gallery at the 2024 Annual Conference. If you are interested in participating in an Academy with your institution, contact the representatives below to learn about their experiences. HLC thanks the institutional representatives for their willingness to be listed in this resource.

Ashland University
Jared Rosenberger, Director of Institutional Assessment
jrosenb4@ashland.edu

Chicago State University
Jeremy Hughes, Associate Provost for Academic Innovation
jhughe23@csu.edu

Goldfarb School of Nursing at Barnes-Jewish College
Christopher Guelbert, Associate Professor
christopher.guelbert@barnesjewishcollege.edu

Iowa Valley Community College
Pete Drury, Associate Dean of Assessment and Distance Learning
Pete.Drury@iavalley.edu

Kansas City Kansas Community College
Cecelia Brewer, Dean of Academic Support and Assessment
cbrewer@kckcc.edu

Lorain County Community College
Jonathan Dryden, Provost
jdryden@lorainccc.edu

Rush University
David Katz, Vice Provost, Academic Affairs
david_katz@rush.edu

Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College
Gena Qualls, Dean of Institutional Advancement
gequalls@sagchip.org

Terra State Community College
Melissa Ramirez, Director of Institutional Effectiveness
mramirez01@terra.edu

University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville
Zachery Harber, Dean of Workforce Education
zach.harber@uaccb.edu
2023–24 White Papers

hlcommission.org/papers

Consumer Awareness: Curating Information About Higher Education
Written in collaboration with the Credential Engine and the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, this report looks at the current state of higher education information and identifies ways to help consumers navigate the information.

Survey on Alternative Credential Offerings and Quality Assurance Needs
This is a report on the findings from a survey of HLC’s membership on institutions’ current alternative credential programs and their needs related to those offerings.

Leadership Lessons Learned
HLC President Barbara Gellman-Danley shares her lessons learned as a higher education leader.

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

Trends in Higher Education 2024
HLC compiles and publishes an annual list of higher education trends. The trends inform HLC’s work to support its member institutions and provide insight into the future of postsecondary education.

Guidelines on Accreditation Requirements
hlcommission.org/guidelines

Determining Qualified Faculty (Updated!)
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 (Updated!)
Dual Credit Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviewers offers formal guidance on the evaluation of dual credit activity at member institutions. HLC defines dual credit courses as “courses taught to high school students for which the students receive both high school credit and college credit.” Dual credit programs are reviewed during an institution’s comprehensive evaluation, but also may be reviewed at other times if concerns about the programs arise.

School of Record
Institutions acting as a School of Record must be able to ensure academic integrity and transparency in the transcription of coursework taken abroad by students. They also must ensure appropriately trained personnel are evaluating such courses or programs and that the institution has established processes for evaluation that are applied in a consistent fashion. HLC’s guidelines highlight the Criteria and Assumed Practices relevant for these institutions.

Two-Year Institutions Seeking to Offer the Baccalaureate Degree
Before launching baccalaureate programs, two-year institutions must seek HLC approval through a substantive change request. HLC’s guidelines assist these institutions in an internal review of readiness. The guidelines also serve as a reference to peer reviewers who may be asked to evaluate the change requests.
Maintaining Institutional Autonomy
These guidelines are intended to provide member institutions that are not separately incorporated from a parent organization with a framework for how they can satisfy HLC’s expectation that the institution’s governing board is able to demonstrate sufficient autonomy.

Personally Identifiable Information Submitted to HLC
HLC has provided guidelines on personally identifiable information (PII), which is defined as any information about an individual that allows the individual to be specifically identified. This includes, but is not limited to: name, address, telephone number, birthday, email, social security number, bank information, etc. A document does not include PII if personal information is de-identified or is provided in the aggregate. When submitting information to HLC, if the information must be included for evaluative purposes, institutions should redact the PII where possible.

Leaflet Newsletter
hlcommission.org/leaflet

The Leaflet
The Leaflet is a snapshot of the work HLC does to fulfill our mission. Published six times a year, it keeps our membership informed about HLC, accreditation and the higher ed community. Subscribe to stay up-to-date on our policies, procedures, events, advocacy efforts, and much more.
HLC’s Online Systems

HLC’s online platforms allow institutional representatives and peer reviewers to easily manage accreditation records and evaluations, as well as engage and collaborate with their peers in the community.

**Canopy**

canopy.hlcommission.org

Canopy is the central location for institutional representatives to keep track of their accreditation relationship with HLC. Peer reviewers and Institutional Actions Council members also use the system to manage their service records and conduct reviews.

**System details and training resources:**
hlcommission.org/canopy

**User support:** hlcommission.org/canopy-help

**Assurance System**

assurance.hlcommission.org

The Assurance System is for the creation and review of materials for comprehensive evaluations and Assurance Reviews.

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

**System details and training resources:**
hlcommission.org/assurance-system

**User support:** hlcommission.org/assurance-help

**SparQ**

sparq.hlcommission.org

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

**User support:** hlcommission.org/sparq-help
Accreditation

academic program
Synonymous with HLC’s use of the term “educational program.”

Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation
One of the processes for seeking accreditation with HLC. To be eligible for the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation, an institution must meet certain requirements, including being currently accredited by a historically regional accrediting agency or a state entity recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an institutional accreditor of degree-granting institutions of higher education.

accreditation agency
A nongovernmental body established to administer accrediting procedures.

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

Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)
The individual appointed by the institution’s CEO to serve as the primary contact between the institution and HLC. The ALO communicates changes at the institution to HLC, responds to communications from HLC, and provides oversight for the currency, accuracy and timeliness of institutional information submitted to HLC, including the Institutional Update.

accreditation, specialized (also called programmatic accreditation)
Accreditation of units, schools or programs within a larger educational institution or for the sole program or area of concentration of an independent, specialized institution.

accredited institution
An institution accredited by HLC.

accredited status
Status that indicates an institution is accredited by HLC.

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

additional location (based on federal definition)
A physical facility that is geographically separate from the main campus of an institution and within the same ownership structure of the institution, where instruction takes place and it is possible for students to do one or more of the following:

- Complete 50% or more of the courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate or other recognized educational credential.
- Complete 50% or more of a degree completion program (even if the degree completion program provides less than 50% of the courses leading to the degree).

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

There is no threshold number of students necessary for a facility to qualify as an additional location.

There is no minimum distance from the campus necessary for a facility to qualify as an additional location.

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 an additional location when 50% or more of a distance delivery program is available through one or more of these modalities at that facility. Note: This requirement does not apply for locations in which there is a general computer

Find It Online
hlcommission.org/glossary
lab that students might use for distance delivery courses, except for additional locations that are correctional facilities.

A correctional facility where instruction takes place according to any of the 50% thresholds identified above is an additional location even if such instruction takes place primarily through distance education or correspondence courses at that location.

An additional location may have the status of open or closed.

An additional location that is open may have the status of active or inactive. An additional location has active status when students are enrolled at the location. Its status is inactive when students are not enrolled at the location. The status of an additional location can change between active and inactive without approval from HLC. However, a location may only be classified as inactive with no student enrollment at the location for a maximum of two consecutive years. At that point, HLC requires the institution to close the location.

**additional location confirmation visit**
A visit to an institution’s new additional location to confirm it is operating as described in the institution’s original substantive change request.

**administrative record**
A record of documents related to an institution’s accreditation relationship with HLC. HLC maintains an administrative record for each member institution, institution that was previously a member, and institution that is, or was, seeking membership. The administrative record includes:

- Narrative and related documentary materials submitted by an institution as part of an evaluation process. This could include, for example, the Institutional Update, a substantive change application, an Assurance Argument, or an institutional response.
- Materials prepared by HLC as part of an evaluation process. This could include, for example, a final team report, an Institutional Actions Council report, or a desk review.
- Action letters and other official correspondence related to evaluation activity. This could include, for example, an action letter indicating action taken by the Board of Trustees, an action letter indicating action taken by the Institutional Actions Council, a letter imposing a designation, or a letter transmitting a team report.

At HLC’s discretion, additional documents may also be included in the administrative record. This could include, for example, correspondence from other accreditors or governmental entities regarding the institution, or other correspondence with the institution.

**adverse action**
An action by HLC’s Board of Trustees that withdraws or denies accreditation or candidacy.

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

**Appeal Panel**
A group of five individuals selected from the Appeals Body by HLC’s president that hears an institution’s appeal to an adverse action by the Board of Trustees.

**Appeals Body**
A group of 15 individuals appointed by the Board of Trustees to hear institutional appeals to adverse actions by the Board of Trustees. One of HLC’s decision-making bodies.

**Assumed Practices**
A set of practices shared by institutions of higher education that is unlikely to vary by institutional mission or context. Institutions must meet the Assumed Practices to obtain accreditation with HLC.

**Assurance Argument**
A narrative in which the institution explains how it meets HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation, which is supported by linked documents in the Evidence File.

**Assurance Filing**
Created and submitted by the institution, the Assurance Filing includes the Assurance Argument with embedded links to documents in the Evidence File.

**Assurance Review**
The peer review evaluation of the Assurance Filing.

**Assurance System**
An online system used by institutions to provide an Assurance Argument and evidentiary materials and used by peer reviewers to complete the Assurance Review.

**best interest determination (based on federal definition; related to Pell-eligible prison education programs)**
A determination by the institution in collaboration with the oversight entity for a prison education program that the program is operating in the best interest of students, as defined in 34 CFR 668.241. Within two years of an institution initiating a Pell-eligible prison education program, HLC will examine the institution’s documentation describing the methodology by which such determination was made.
Board of Trustees
The governing body of HLC, made up of 16 to 21 representatives from HLC member institutions and the public. One of HLC’s decision-making bodies.

campus/branch campus (based on federal definition)
A physical facility that is geographically separate from and independent of the main campus of the institution and within the same ownership structure of the institution. HLC considers a location of an institution to be independent of the main campus if it 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 main campus or branch campus after the campus has been approved by HLC and within six months of matriculation to assure the quality of the campus and its programs in meeting the needs of the institution’s constituencies and to assure the capacity to sustain that quality.

candidacy
Pre-accreditation status offering membership with HLC.

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

candidate institution
An institution that holds candidacy status with HLC.

Change of Control, Structure or Organization
A transaction that affects, or may affect, corporate control, structure or governance at an accredited or candidate institution.

Change Panel
A panel of two or more peer reviewers that evaluates a substantive change application submitted by an institution.

Change Visit
An on-site visit by a peer review team in response to one or more substantive change applications submitted by an institution.

comprehensive evaluation
The process used to determine whether an institution meets or continues to meet the Criteria for Accreditation.

The comprehensive evaluation includes an Assurance Review, an on-site visit, a student survey and a multi-campus visit, if applicable. Comprehensive evaluations for candidacy, initial accreditation and Reaffirmation of Accreditation also include a Federal Compliance Review.

contractual arrangement
An arrangement in which the institution outsources some portion of its educational programs—that is, degrees or certificates offered for academic credit (including instruction, oversight of the curriculum, assurance of the consistency in the level and quality of instruction and in expectations of student performance and/or the establishment of the academic qualifications for instructional personnel)—to:
1. An unaccredited institution.
2. An institution that is not accredited by an accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.
3. A corporation or other entity.

Core Components
Subcategories of each Criterion for Accreditation that are reviewed in order to determine whether an institution meets each Criterion.

correctional facility
A federal, state or local penitentiary, prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, juvenile justice facility or other similar correctional institution.

correspondence education course (based on federal definition)
A course provided by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructors. Interaction between instructors and students in a correspondence course is limited, not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the students. If a course is part correspondence and part residential training, it is considered a correspondence education course. A correspondence education course is not distance education.

correspondence education program
An academic program in which 50% or more of the required courses may be taken as correspondence education courses.

1 Effective September 1, 2024, multi-campus visits will be conducted for institutions with one or more branch campuses as part of comprehensive evaluations for Candidacy, Initial Accreditation, and Reaffirmation of Accreditation.
course location
A physical facility that is geographically separate from the main campus of an institution and within the same ownership structure of the institution, where instruction takes place and where it is not possible for students to do either of the following:

- Complete 50% or more of the courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate or other recognized educational credential.
- Complete 50% or more of a degree completion program.

Criteria for Accreditation
The framework for determining an institution’s accreditation.

Data Update Coordinator
The individual appointed by the institution’s CEO to be responsible for the accuracy and completion of the Institutional Update. The coordinator serves as the contact between the institution and HLC regarding the Institutional Update and is responsible for the timely submission of the Institutional Update.

day
Used in HLC policy and procedure to refer to one calendar day, unless otherwise specified.

Desk Review
An evaluation conducted by an HLC official of a substantive change requested by the institution.

distance education (based on federal definition)
Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed below to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously.

The technologies that may be used to offer distance education include:

1. The internet;
2. One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite or wireless communications devices;
3. Audio conference; or
4. Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in items 1–3 above.

For purposes of this definition, an instructor is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by HLC.

distance education course
A course in which at least 75% of the instruction and interaction occurs using one or more of the technologies listed in the definition of distance education, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other.

distance education program
A certificate or degree program in which 50% or more of the courses may be taken as distance education courses.

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

educational offering
Synonymous with HLC’s use of the term “educational program.”

educational program (same as federal definition)
1. A legally authorized postsecondary program of organized instruction or study that:
   i. Leads to an academic, professional, or vocational degree, or certificate, or other recognized educational credential, or is a comprehensive transition and postsecondary program, as described in 34 CFR part 668, subpart O; and
   ii. May, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilize direct assessment of student learning, or recognize the direct assessment of student learning by others, if such assessment is consistent with the accreditation of the institution or program utilizing the results of the assessment and with the provisions of 34 CFR § 668.10.
2. HLC does not consider that an institution provides an educational program if the institution does not provide instruction itself (including a course of independent study) but merely gives credit for one or more of the following: Instruction provided by other institutions or schools; examinations or direct assessments provided by agencies or organizations; or other accomplishments such as “life experience.”

“Educational program” is synonymous with HLC’s use of the terms “academic offering(s),” “academic program(s)” and “educational offering(s).”

Eligibility Filing
Documentation submitted by an institution considering membership with HLC through the Eligibility Process that demonstrates its compliance with the Eligibility Requirements.
Eligibility Process
As one of the processes for seeking accreditation with HLC, the process by which HLC determines whether a non-member institution is ready to begin the Candidacy Program.

Eligibility Requirements
A set of requirements an institution must meet before it is granted candidacy and/or initial accreditation.

Evidence File
Documents that an institution provides in its Assurance Filing to support the claims and arguments made in the institution’s Assurance Argument.

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

Federal Compliance Requirements
Requirements that HLC is obliged to enforce as part of its recognition by the U.S. Department of Education.

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

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

Heightened Cash Monitoring 2 (HCM2)
A payment method used by the U.S. Department of Education’s office of Federal Student Aid to disburse Title IV financial aid funds to institutions. An institution placed on the HCM2 payment method disburses funds to students from institutional funds and submits a request for reimbursement to FSA. FSA reviews a sample of disbursements prior to disbursing funds. See 34 CFR 668.162 for more information.

Higher Learning Commission (HLC)
An institutional accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. HLC accredits degree-granting institutions of higher education in the United States.

HLC staff liaison
An HLC Vice President of Accreditation Relations who serves as a member institution’s primary contact, advises the institution about HLC’s policies and procedures and helps to coordinate the peer review and decision-making processes.

Initial Accreditation
An action by HLC’s Board of Trustees confirming that an institution meets all of the requirements necessary to be granted accreditation.

Institution Event Summary
A document created prior to each evaluation that includes contact information for the institution and peer review team members and other information pertinent to the evaluation.

Institutional Actions Council (IAC)
A group of experienced peer reviewers and representatives of the public appointed by HLC’s Board of Trustees and authorized to take action on, or make recommendations regarding, certain types of institutional reviews. One of HLC’s decision-making bodies.

institutional response
An institution’s written response to a recommendation from a peer review team, HLC staff member, or Institutional Actions Council committee.

Institutional Status and Requirements (ISR) Report
A resource available to an institution’s CEO or Accreditation Liaison Officer that includes the complete institutional history with HLC, information on the status of current and upcoming accreditation events, and information on the institution’s designated pathway and related events.

Institutional Update
An online report completed annually by member institutions regarding institutional health.

interim report
A report filed by an institution to provide updates to HLC on progress in addressing a serious issue at the institution, the resolution of which is relevant to the institution’s future compliance with, or improvement regarding, HLC requirements.

Location Coordinator
The individual appointed by the institution’s CEO to be responsible for maintaining the institution’s additional location and campus records in HLC’s online Canopy system. (Note: Institutions are not required to appoint a Location Coordinator; the ALO and CEO may also manage these records in Canopy.)

large institution
An institution with 1,000 students or more.

main campus (based on federal definition)
The primary physical facility that is within the same ownership structure of the institution and, to the extent applicable, at which the institution offers educational programs.
maintain accreditation
Actively participate, as an institution, in HLC’s accreditation processes to ensure the institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC requirements.

Mark of Accreditation Status
An image that reflects an institution’s current accreditation status and links to the institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status on HLC’s website. Each member institution is required to display the Mark on its website.

monitoring
A member institution may be subject to providing HLC updates for evaluation as part of its ongoing accreditation relationship. Monitoring consists of reviewing an institution’s progress in addressing an issue that is relevant to the institution’s compliance with, or improvement regarding, HLC requirements. HLC has two kinds of monitoring: routine and special.

multi-campus visit
A visit to a selection of an institution’s branch campuses that occurs as part of certain comprehensive evaluations, including those that are conducted when an institution applies for candidacy and initial accreditation and during Years 4 and 10 of the Standard Pathway and Year 10 of the Open Pathway.²

multi-location visit
A visit to a selection of additional locations of an institution with three or more active additional locations, occurring once every five years.

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

Notice
A sanction signifying that, based on an overall judgment, the institution is at risk of being out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation. An institution remains accredited while on Notice.

Notification Program for Additional Locations
A program for qualified institutions to open new additional locations after notifying HLC prior to initiating any new additional locations and receiving an acknowledgment that HLC has added the new additional location to its database.

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

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

Open Pathway
A pathway for maintaining accreditation with HLC that features a 10-year reaffirmation cycle where quality assurance and quality improvement are addressed separately.

oversight entity (based on federal definition; related to Pell-eligible prison education programs)
The entity responsible for overseeing a correctional facility at which a Pell-eligible prison education program is offered. The oversight entity would either be the Federal Bureau of Prisons or the appropriate state department of corrections or other entity that is responsible for overseeing correctional facilities.

Peer Corps
The group of faculty, administrators and public members from within HLC’s membership 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 volunteer Peer Corps.

Pell-eligible prison education program (also referred to as PEP)
A prison education program that meets all the requirements articulated in 34 CFR 668.236 for students enrolled in the program to be eligible to receive Pell Grants.

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

preliminary peer review
An evaluation by a peer review team of an institution in the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation. Determines whether the institution may proceed to a comprehensive evaluation for Initial Accreditation.

² Effective September 1, 2024, multi-campus visits will be conducted as part of comprehensive evaluations for Candidacy, Initial Accreditation, and Reaffirmation of Accreditation. Multi-campus visits will no longer take place during Year 4 Standard Pathway comprehensive evaluations that do not include Reaffirmation of Accreditation.
Primary Assurance System Coordinator
The individual appointed by the institution’s CEO to be responsible for the development and submission of institutional materials for evaluations conducted in HLC’s online Assurance System.

Probation
A sanction signifying that an institution no longer meets one or more of the Criteria for Accreditation. An institution remains accredited while on Probation.

Program Content Changes
Changes to a program’s curriculum (measured by clock or credit hours), learning objectives, competencies or required clinical experiences. This would include changes in the general education courses required for program completion and not merely the courses within the discipline, program or major.

Provisional Certification
A status assigned to an institution by the U.S. Department of Education’s office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) that is related to the institution’s eligibility to participate in Title IV financial aid programs. See 34 CFR 668.13(c) for more information.

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

Public Disclosure Notice (PDN)
A document issued by HLC when it imposes or removes a sanction or Show-Cause Order, assigns an institutional designation, denies an application for Change of Control, Structure or Organization, or takes an adverse action on an institution, including withdrawal of accreditation. A PDN is also posted when an institution voluntarily resigns its accreditation or candidacy with HLC. The PDN includes a history of the institution’s relationship with HLC, the nature of the action, and a brief analysis of the situation that prompted the action, as well as next steps in review and correction, if applicable. HLC may also, in its discretion, issue a public statement regarding an institution.

Public Statement
A document issued by HLC, in its discretion, regarding an institution. This could include, for example, to correct or confirm a media report, to respond to frequent inquiries from the public, to inform the public about a lawsuit, investigation or advisory visit, to inform the public of an application for Change of Control, Structure or Organization that has been approved, or to address other matters as determined appropriate by HLC.

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

Quality Initiative Proposal
A proposal submitted by an institution on the Open Pathway explaining the major improvement effort the institution will undertake as its Quality Initiative.

Quality Initiative Report
A report submitted by an institution on the Open Pathway upon completing its Quality Initiative that reflects on accomplishments, documents achievements and strategies, and defines new priorities and challenges.

Reaffirmation of Accreditation
An action by an HLC decision-making body confirming, based on evaluation, that an institution may retain its HLC accreditation. Among other reasons, an institution that has lost legal authority to operate as an institution of higher education cannot be reaffirmed.

Recognized Accreditor
An accreditor recognized by either the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

Regular and Substantive Interaction (Based on Federal Definition)
Institutions are expected to ensure regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors in their distance education and competency-based education offerings. An institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student’s completion of a course or competency.
1. Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and

2. Monitoring the student’s academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

Substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following:

1. Providing direct instruction;
2. Assessing or providing feedback on a student’s coursework;
3. Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
4. Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
5. Other instructional activities approved by HLC or the program’s accrediting agency.

Reimbursement Payment Method
A payment method used by the U.S. Department of Education’s office of Federal Student Aid to disburse Title IV financial aid funds to institutions. An institution placed on the Reimbursement Payment Method disburses funds to students from institutional funds and submits a request for reimbursement to FSA. FSA reviews all disbursements prior to disbursing funds. See 34 CFR 668.162 for more information.

related entity
An entity that has 50% or more ownership interest in the accredited entity or has 50% or more voting interest in the accredited entity’s board.

Show-Cause Order
An order by HLC’s Board of Trustees requiring an institution to show cause as to why its accredited status should not be removed. An institution remains accredited while under a Show-Cause Order.

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

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

small institution
An institution with fewer than 1,000 students.

Standard Pathway
A pathway for maintaining accreditation with HLC that features a 10-year reaffirmation cycle where quality assurance and quality improvement are integrated for comprehensive evaluations.

Statement of Accreditation Status (SAS)
A public summary of the relationship between a current or former member institution and HLC.

stipulations
Statements that describe certain aspects of an institution’s accreditation relationship with HLC, including approvals and/or limitations placed by HLC on an institution’s development of new activities or programs.

student opinion survey
An online survey conducted by HLC as part of comprehensive evaluations. The opinions and data gathered assist peer reviewers in developing questions for their meetings during the on-site visit.

teach out/teach-out arrangement (same as federal definition)
A process during which a program, institution or institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program engages in an orderly closure or when, following the closure of an institution or campus, another institution provides an opportunity for the students of the closed school to complete their program, regardless of their academic progress at the time of closure.

Teach-Out Agreement (based on federal definition)
A written agreement between institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students and a reasonable opportunity for students to complete their program of study if an institution, or an institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program offered, ceases to operate or plans to cease operations before all enrolled students have completed their program of study. May also refer to written agreements made between an institution subject to teach-out requirements and each institution identified in the Provisional Plan as a teach-out receiving institution. The Teach-Out Agreement is a formal, legal agreement with the teach-out receiving institution.

teach-out plan (same as federal definition)
A written plan developed by an institution that provides for the equitable treatment of students if an institution, or an institutional location that provides 100% of at least one program, ceases to operate or plans to cease operations before all enrolled students have completed their program of study. Synonymous with HLC’s use of the term “Provisional Plan.”
**teach-out receiving institution**
An institutional signatory to a teach-out agreement with an institution required to submit a Provisional Plan. The teach-out receiving institution agrees, at a minimum, by virtue of its participation in the teach out to accept all the credits earned by students affected by the closure, to count those credits toward a reasonably similar certificate or degree from their institution, and to award a certificate or degree to the students participating in the teach out in approximately the same amount of time the students would have needed to complete their studies.

**team chair**
The leader of a peer review team who manages team responsibilities and deadlines, facilitates communication with the institution, and supervises the development of the final report.

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

### Criteria for Accreditation

The following definitions explain how these terms are used within the Criteria for Accreditation. HLC’s intent is not to prescribe how institutions must use a particular word or phrase locally, but rather to offer a means to ensure a consistent reading of the meaning and expectations of the Criteria. This glossary is not part of the Criteria policy and will be updated as needed to respond to questions and feedback from institutions and peer reviewers.

**academic freedom (2.D.)**
The ability to engage differences of opinion, evaluate evidence and form one’s own grounded judgments about the relative value of competing perspectives. This definition implies not just freedom from constraint but also freedom for faculty, staff and students to work within a scholarly community to develop intellectual and personal qualities.

**academic offerings**
Synonymous with HLC’s use of the term “educational program.”

**appropriate to higher education (3.A.)**
Curricular and cocurricular programming of the quality and rigor for the degree level that prepares students to think critically and function successfully. It is distinctively different from K-12 education.

**autonomous (2.C.)**
The institution’s governing board acts independently of any other entity in determining the course of direction and policies for the institution.

**auxiliary (2.A.)**
Activities and services related to, but not intrinsic to, educational functions: dining services, student housing, faculty or staff housing, intercollegiate athletics, student stores, a Public Radio station, etc. In many institutions, “auxiliary” simultaneously denotes a segregated budget and dedicated revenues.

**capacity (1.A., 5.C.)**
An institution’s ability to effectively deliver its educational offerings. Determining capacity refers to an institution’s demonstrable ability to establish and maintain academic quality. Indicators of sufficient capacity may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Financial resources to support academic offerings at start-up and in the future.
- Evidence of planning that allocates necessary resources and shows ongoing development.
- Alignment of academic offerings with the institution’s mission and evidence of the institution’s long-term commitment.
- Evidence of new or revised policies and procedures that demonstrate commitment and sustainability.
- Qualified faculty and staff to serve students.
- Learning environments (whether classrooms, laboratories, studios or online infrastructure) with technological resources and equipment.
- Print and electronic media and support for the access and use of the technological resources across modalities.

**civic engagement (1.C.)**
Community service or any number of other efforts (by individuals or groups) intended to address issues of public or community concern.

**cocurricular (3.C., 4.B.)**
Learning activities, programs and experiences that reinforce the institution’s mission and values and complement the formal curriculum. Examples: Study abroad, student-faculty research experiences, service learning, professional clubs or organizations, athletics, honor societies, career services, etc.

**consortial arrangement (3.A., 3.C.)**
An arrangement in which an HLC-accredited institution develops an agreement with an institution or group of institutions, all of which are accredited by accreditors recognized by the U.S. Department of Education—that is, the consortial party(ies)—through which the consortial party(ies) agrees to provide some portion of one or more educational programs (i.e., degrees or certificates offered for academic credit) offered by the HLC-accredited institution.
control (2.B.)
The entity that is responsible for the fiscal and operational oversight of an institution and its programs. Control also includes the structure and organizational arrangements of an institution. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:
- The state board or agency that oversees a public university.
- The board of trustees that oversees a private, nonprofit college.
- The parent corporation of a private, for-profit college.
- The public board authorized by Congress to oversee an institution under federal control.
- Religious bodies and tribal councils.

dual credit (3.C., 4.A.)
Courses taught to high school students for which the students receive both high school credit and college credit. These courses or programs are offered under a variety of names; the Core Components that refer to “dual credit” apply to all of them as they involve the accredited institution’s responsibility for the quality of its offerings.

good practice (4.B., 4.C.)
Practice that is based in the use of processes, methods and measures that have been determined to be successful by empirical research, professional organizations and/or institutional peers.

informed citizenship (1.C.)
Having sufficient and reliable information about issues of public concern and having the knowledge and skills to make reasonable judgments and decisions about them.

operational staff (5.B.)
Personnel who support the academic enterprise, such as those who may work in the areas of finance, human resources, facilities, dining/catering, information technology, planning, security, student services, academic support, etc.

public (1.A.)
In phrases such as "makes available to the public" or "states publicly," this refers to people in general, including current and potential students. In phrases such as “the public good,” the Criteria refer to public, as opposed to private, good.

public information (1.A.)
Information on websites or other materials that are available freely to the public, without individuals having to specifically request access to them.

student outcomes (5.C.)
Education-specific results to measure against the objectives or standards for the educational offerings. Examples could be results from licensure or standardized exams, course and program persistence, graduation rates and workforce data.

superordinate entity (1.B.)
An entity situated hierarchically above the institution, which includes but is not limited to state boards, private owners, corporate parents, Tribal councils or religious denominations.

undue influence (2.C.)
Overreach, suspicious transactions and relationships that are exclusive (without oversight) that could yield influence over the institution’s governing board.

wherever and however delivered (Criterion 3, 5.B.)
All modes of delivery of academic offerings and all locations, modalities and venues, including but not limited to the main campus, additional locations, distance delivery, dual credit and contractual or consortial arrangements.

Academies

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

Academy cohort
A group of Academy institutions that complete the Academy together, including attending the same events.

Assessment Academy Project
A multi-faceted project focused on initiating, implementing and evaluating change related to assessment. 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 goals.

Academy team
Faculty, staff and administrators from an institution who conceptualize, design and implement the institution’s Assessment Academy Project or Student Success Plan.

Academy Team Lead
A member of the Academy team who serves as the main point of contact for HLC, the Mentor and the Scholar.

Assessment Academy
A four-year program of in-person and virtual events tailored for institutions interested in developing an ongoing commitment to assessing and improving student learning.
Consolidated Response
The combined feedback from an Academy team’s Mentor and a Scholar to the team’s postings in SparQ.

Event Facilitator
A Mentor selected to facilitate conversations and activities at various Academy events.

Impact Report
The Academy team’s culminating report, posted at the end of the Academy cycle, summarizing the trends that occurred throughout the project and detailing the outcomes.

Inventory (Student Success Academy)
A process of collecting and evaluating institutional data related to student populations, student success initiatives, institutional policies and procedures, or staff and faculty engagement in student success.

Letter of Agreement
A document signed by the institution’s president and HLC’s president at the beginning of the program, outlining the expectations of each party throughout the Academy experience.

Mentor
An experienced practitioner who has volunteered to guide certain Academy teams for the duration of their participation, facilitating team thinking and a project-based approach to addressing assessment or student success.

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

Mentor Response
Response provided by the Mentor regarding the progress of the Academy team’s project as communicated in the team’s postings 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 Webinar
A virtual event presented by HLC to prepare the institutional representatives heading the Academy effort to assemble and lead an effective Academy team.

Project Updates (Assessment Academy)
Posts to SparQ by Academy teams documenting the learning outcomes, accomplishments and results of their continuing work on the Academy Project.

Progress Update (Student Success Academy)
Posts to SparQ by Academy teams documenting discoveries gained from inventories which supports the team in better understanding the structures, policies, and processes that affect student success.

Results Forum (Assessment Academy)
A multi-day event at the end of the Academy cycle when teams evaluate the impact of their Academy Projects, showcase accomplishments, share best practices, and design strategies to sustain their progress.

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

Senior Scholar
An expert practitioner engaged by HLC to consult on the design of the curriculum and activities for all Academy components, and to offer additional guidance to Academy teams on Project/Progress Updates.

SparQ
The online tool for project management, resource sharing, and discussion. Academy teams can document progress, receive Mentor and Scholar feedback, share ideas and build a community.

Stewardship Forum (Student Success Academy)
A multi-day event at the end of the Academy cycle where teams share their accomplishments and findings, discuss promising practices and define strategies to sustain their student success efforts.

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

Student Success Plan (Student Success Academy)
A plan created by the Academy team to address gaps in the institution’s data, initiatives, infrastructure and engagement that will guide the institution in systematically improving student success.
Build Your Skills and Discover Innovative Solutions:  
HLC’s Upcoming Events

Led by HLC staff and field experts, our elective programs and events give you tools to propel your institution forward.

**ALO Orientation: An Introduction to the Role at HLC** (Virtual)

**Summer Session:** June 3–July 15, 2024  
**Fall Session:** September 30–November 8, 2024

The six-week, self-paced training modules include an overview of accreditation and peer review processes, specifics on managing substantive change activities on your campus, expectations of regular and mandatory data reporting to HLC, and staying current using HLC’s website. New ALOs are invited via email.

**Advancing Strategy** (Chicagoland)

**Summer Session:** June 17–18, 2024  
**Fall Session:** November 7–8, 2024

This team-based, in-person workshop helps cross-functional groups of administrators design processes and use tools to improve the effectiveness of strategic planning efforts. Teams will leave the workshop with tools and strategies they can use at their own institution to facilitate strategic planning and performance improvement.

**Program Review Workshop** (Chicagoland)

**June 20–21, 2024**

Define or develop your program review processes to have a meaningful impact on the quality of your educational offerings in this in-person team workshop. Develop a comprehensive program review plan with information gathered through plenaries, discussion sessions and peer consultations.

**Supporting Student Success** (Virtual)

**July 25–26, 2024**

Examine common factors that affect student success in this interactive workshop. Engage in a series of activities to identify your institution’s current realities and discover areas of opportunity for improving student success within your sphere of influence.

**Demonstrating Quality: An Assurance Argument Workshop** (Virtual, Invitation Only)

**October 23, 2024**

To help you craft the Assurance Argument, institutions with an upcoming Assurance Review scheduled as part of a Year 4 or Year 10 evaluation are invited via email to participate in this half-day team workshop. You’re invited to submit an excerpt of your draft Assurance Argument and meet with an experienced peer reviewer for individualized feedback.

**Program Assessment Workshop** (Virtual)

**November 12, 13, 19 and 20, 2024**

This virtual workshop series will further your understanding of practical and meaningful assessment of student learning in academic programs. Through lectures, discussions and structured activities, gain the practical knowledge and skills needed to lead the development and implementation of a program assessment plan in your academic discipline.

**Save the Date: 2025 HLC Annual Conference** (Chicago)

**April 5–8, 2025**

Find these upcoming learning opportunities and more at [hlcommission.org/programs](http://hlcommission.org/programs)