

Multi-campus Visits

Policy Change Adopted on Second Reading

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) adopted this policy on second reading at its meeting on February 29, 2024.

Background

The adopted policy changes clarify and revise when HLC visits a sample of an institution’s branch campuses — known as a multi-campus visit — as part of a comprehensive evaluation. Specifically, HLC will conduct a multi-campus visit as part of comprehensive evaluations for:

- Candidacy
- Initial accreditation
- Reaffirmation of accreditation for institutions on the Standard or Open Pathway, regardless of whether the evaluation occurs in Year 4 or Year 10

HLC may, at its discretion, require a multi-campus visit as part of other comprehensive evaluations.

Conversely, pursuant to the proposed policy changes, HLC will not conduct a multi-campus visit as part of comprehensive evaluations other than those listed above, including those that:

- Do not include reaffirmation of accreditation for institutions on Standard or Open Pathway
- Occur while an institution is on the sanction of Probation
- Occur while an institution is under a Show-Cause Order

HLC circulated these policy changes to the membership and other interested parties after the Board’s November 2023 meeting. No comments were received warranting changes in language.

Implementation

These policy changes will be effective as of September 1, 2024.

Adopted Policy Change

Wording that was deleted or revised is shown as strikethrough (~~old wording~~); new language, whether through addition or revision, is shown in bold (**new wording**). Wording that was moved is shown with a double underline in its new location (moved to) and a double strikethrough in its previous location (~~moved from~~).

Policy Title: Candidacy and Initial Accreditation

Number: INST.B.20.020

...

Evaluations Related to Granting Candidacy and Initial Accreditation

Candidacy will be initiated through a comprehensive on-site evaluation and maintained through a subsequent on-site biennial evaluation no later than two years (2 years) after candidacy is granted to determine whether the institution continues to meet the Eligibility Requirements and Assumed Practices, and is making reasonable progress towards meeting the Criteria for Accreditation by the end of its candidacy. Following the biennial evaluation, the institution will have its comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation during the fourth year of candidacy in sufficient time for the Board to consider the outcome prior to the conclusion of the fourth year of candidacy. If, as a result of the initial accreditation visit, the Board acts to extend the institution's candidacy for a fifth year, the institution will undergo a new comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation during the fifth candidacy year in sufficient time for the Board to consider the outcome of the evaluation prior to the conclusion of the fifth candidacy year.

An institution applying for candidacy or initial accreditation shall undergo a comprehensive evaluation **with an Assurance Filing, Assurance Review and on-site visit. As detailed above, the institution will be required to demonstrate its compliance with HLC requirements according to the evaluative framework applicable to candidacy or initial accreditation.** ~~by HLC composed of the following elements:~~

- ~~● Assurance Filing;~~
- ~~● Assurance Review;~~
 - ~~○ analysis of the Assurance Filing and of information from any on-site visit by HLC peer reviewers culminating in a written report;~~
 - ~~○ an on-site visit by a team of HLC peer reviewers.~~

Assurance Filing. An institution hosting a comprehensive evaluation for candidacy or initial accreditation shall submit the following:

- ~~1. evidence of meeting the Eligibility Requirements;~~
- ~~2. evidence of meeting the Assumed Practices;~~
- ~~3. for candidacy, evidence that the institution can reasonably meet the Criteria for Accreditation within the period of candidacy;~~
- ~~4. for initial accreditation, evidence that the institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation, which may include findings of met with concerns;~~
- ~~5. evidence of meeting the Federal Compliance Requirements;~~
- ~~6. branch campus evaluation information, if applicable; and~~
- ~~7. any addenda requested by the team during the evaluation process.~~

In addition **to the Assurance Filing**, HLC shall supply information including, but not limited to, information from the Eligibility Process or accelerated process for initial accreditation in which the institution has engaged; official correspondence; public comments; previous evaluation team reports and action letters, if any; information from the institution's accreditation file regarding its standing with other recognized accreditors; and any other information HLC deems appropriate.

~~Assurance Review.~~ A team of peer reviewers, selected by HLC staff following HLC procedures, shall review an institution's Assurance Filing and related materials. The team shall then conduct an on-site visit to the institution's main campus, its branch campuses, and such other institutional locations as shall be determined by HLC based on its policies and procedures and to verify where appropriate evidence provided by the institution; for institutions that offer only distance or correspondence education, the team shall conduct its on-site visit to the institution's administrative offices but may include other institutional locations. The length of the visit shall be one and a half days, but HLC shall retain discretion to lengthen or shorten the visit or require that team members conduct additional on-site visits to the institution's facilities to examine specific issues.

Analysis and Written Report. HLC peer reviewers shall conduct an analysis of the information generated by the Assurance Review and shall prepare a detailed written report that outlines the team's findings related to the institution's meeting either the requirements for initial accreditation or for candidacy, including but not limited to, requirements related to assessment of student learning. The report

~~shall identify strengths and challenges or deficiencies for the institution, and shall make a recommendation related to granting initial accreditation or granting candidacy.~~

Recommendations Arising from Evaluations for Candidacy or Initial Accreditation. The team of HLC peer reviewers conducting a comprehensive evaluation for candidacy or initial accreditation shall in its written report make a recommendation for HLC action to complete the review. That recommendation shall be as follows:

For candidacy, the team shall recommend whether to grant or deny candidacy based on the requirements and evaluative framework detailed in this policy. The team shall not recommend monitoring but may identify discrete issues to be addressed by the institution by the time of its biennial evaluation.

For initial accreditation, the team shall recommend whether to grant or deny initial accreditation. If recommending that the Board grant initial accreditation, other than early initial accreditation, the team may recommend whether to require interim monitoring. If the institution holds candidacy status and the team recommends that the Board deny accreditation, the team will also recommend whether to extend candidacy if the institution continues to meet the requirements, and is within the time limits, for candidacy or to withdraw candidacy if the institution does not meet the requirements for candidacy.

These recommendations, along with the team's written report, shall be forwarded to the Institutional Actions Council and then the Board of Trustees for review and action.

The institution shall have the opportunity to provide a written response to the written report of a comprehensive evaluation following HLC policies for the provision of institutional responses.

...

Policy Number Key

Section INST: Institutional Processes

Chapter B: Requirements for Achieving and Maintaining Membership

Part 20: Becoming and Defining a Member Institution

Last Revised: February 2024

First Adopted: August 1992 and August 1987

Revision History: August 1996 (effective September 1996), February 1998, February 2003 (effective May 1, 2003), February 2007, February 2010, June 2011, February 2012 (effective January 2013), November 2013, November 2020, February 2021, June 2021, February 2022, February 2024 (effective September 2024)

Notes: Policies combined November 2012 – 1.1(a), 1.1(b), 1.1(b)1, 1.1(b)2, 1.4, 2013 – 1.1(b)1.3, 1.1(c), 1.1(c)1. In

February 2021, references to the Higher Learning Commission as “the Commission” were replaced with the term “HLC.”

Related Policies: COMM.A.10.020 Management of HLC Records and Information

Policy Title: Evaluative Activities Applicable to All Institutions

Number: INST.C.10.040

Assurance Review:

Assurance Reviews have the following components:

- Assurance Filing prepared by the institution;
- Review conducted by HLC peer reviewers appointed by HLC staff in accordance with team selection procedures; ~~s~~Such review shall include analysis of the Assurance Filing as well as of information from any on-site visit conducted to institutions on the Standard Pathway or to institutions on the Open Pathway in ~~Y~~**Year four 4** where specifically required and in ~~Y~~**Year ten 10**;
- Written report prepared by peer reviewers that outlines the team’s findings related to whether the institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation.
- All Assurance Reviews shall include attention to the institution's responsibility for assuring the quality of its academic offerings, regardless of location, modality and involvement of third parties.

Assurance Filing:

The Assurance Filing shall be housed on HLC’s web-based platform, known as the Assurance System, and composed of the following parts:

- 1.** Information submitted by the institution to document evidence of meeting, and of any institutional improvement related to, the Criteria for Accreditation, which shall consist of an Assurance Argument hyperlinking specific evidence contained in an Evidence File, and any addenda required by the evaluation team or HLC staff to the above information;
- 2.** Information to be supplied by HLC related to the institution’s accreditation relationship since its most recent comprehensive evaluation, including but not limited to: the institution’s recent

Institutional Updates, records related to prior HLC evaluations, official actions and official correspondence, any third-party comments received in anticipation of the evaluation, and the results of HLC-sponsored student surveys excluding Personally Identifiable Information (PII); and.

3. Other information HLC deems appropriate, including but not limited to, complaints requiring further review, and any information received by HLC from any other recognized accreditor or U.S. government or state higher education agency.

For comprehensive evaluations for reaffirmation of accreditation **for institutions on the Standard Pathway or Open Pathway**, the Assurance Filing shall also address the Federal Compliance Requirements. **An Assurance Filing shall also address the Federal Compliance Requirements as otherwise required by policy.**

For comprehensive evaluations for candidacy, initial accreditation, or that include reaffirmation of accreditation for institutions on the Standard Pathway or Open Pathway, the Assurance Filing shall also address and, if applicable, **the institution shall** complete, the requirements of a ~~M~~multi-C~~campus~~ ~~V~~visit.

Comprehensive Evaluation:

A comprehensive evaluation ~~shall~~ consists of the Assurance Review with an on-site visit to the institution's main campus and other institutional locations as determined by HLC based on HLC policies and procedures. For institutions that offer only distance or correspondence education, the team shall conduct its on-site visit to the institution's administrative offices but may include other institutional locations, if any, in the on-site visit.

HLC will establish general parameters for the direction of its visits but may lengthen or shorten any particular visit with advance notice to an institution or require that team members conduct additional on-site visits to the institution's facilities to examine specific issues.

In a comprehensive evaluation, the team's report will include any findings from, **if applicable, the any** on-site visit, the multi-campus **visit** evaluation, if applicable, and the review of compliance with Federal Compliance Requirements, if applicable.

Prior to any on-site visit **a comprehensive evaluation**, HLC will provide the peer review team with a record of the institutional indicators that have been submitted by the institution since the last on-site visit as well as its recent history of monitoring, if any **portions of the institution's administrative record in accordance with HLC procedures.**

In addition, HLC will forward to the team and the institution, any public comments received in anticipation of the institution's evaluation.

~~Other Visits. When HLC is conducting an Assurance Review for an institution in year 4 of the Open Pathway, an on-site visit will not be required; however, a team may call for an on-site visit to gather additional evidence not available electronically or to conduct further review of specific issues arising from the Assurance Review. In addition, if the team is considering recommending a sanction, the issuance of a Show-Cause Order or withdrawal of accreditation, it must call for an on-site visit to validate its findings prior to any such recommendation being made.~~

Multi-campus Evaluation **Visits.** When an institution that has one or more branch campuses undergoes a **certain** comprehensive evaluations, HLC will send one or more HLC peer reviewers to visit the institution's branch campuses. **The multi-campus visit will take place during a comprehensive evaluation for candidacy, a comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation, and a comprehensive evaluation that includes reaffirmation of accreditation.** The peer reviewer **who conducts the multi-campus visit** may, but is not required to, be a member of the comprehensive evaluation team. Such ~~branch~~ **multi-campus** visits may precede or follow HLC's comprehensive evaluation visit to the institution's main campus. HLC will determine the campuses to be included in the ~~branch~~ **multi-campus** visit, but the focus of the visit will be on branch campuses not recently visited by HLC. The peer reviewer visiting the branch campus will provide a summary of findings arising from the visit. This summary shall inform the comprehensive evaluation team regarding the quality of the institution's branch campuses.

~~Prior to any on-site visit, HLC will provide the peer review team with a record of the institutional indicators that have been submitted by the institution since the last on-site visit as well as its recent history of monitoring, if any.~~

~~In addition, HLC will forward to the team and the institution, any public comments received in anticipation of the institution's evaluation.~~

Other Visits. Information Regarding Year 4 Open Pathway Assurance Reviews

When HLC is conducting an Assurance Review for an institution in ~~Y~~Year 4 of the Open Pathway, an on-site visit will not **typically** be required; ~~h~~However, a team may call for an on-site visit to gather additional evidence not available electronically or to conduct further review of specific issues arising from the Assurance Review. In addition, if the team is considering recommending a sanction, the issuance of a Show-Cause Order or withdrawal of accreditation, it must call for an on-site visit to validate its findings prior to any such recommendation being made.

Institutional Responses to Recommendations

An institution shall have the opportunity to provide a written response to the team report for a comprehensive evaluation or Assurance Review following HLC policies for the provision of institutional responses. In all cases, an institution shall have at least 14 days to prepare and submit an institutional response to the team report prior to review and action through HLC’s decision-making processes.

Policy Number Key

Section INST: Institutional Processes

Chapter C: Process for Reaffirmation of Accreditation

Part 10: Requirements for Reaffirmation of Accreditation

Last Revised: February 2024

First Adopted:

Revision History: February 2014, June 2014, November 2018, February 2022, November 2022, February 2024 (effective September 2024)

Notes: Former policy number 1.3(d). In February 2021, references to the Higher Learning Commission as “the Commission” were replaced with the term “HLC.” Policy renumbered in June 2023 (former policy number INST.C.20.010).

Related Policies: INST.F.10.010 Routine Monitoring and Data Collection, COMM.A.10.030 Complaints and Other Information Regarding Member Institutions, COMM.C.10.020 Relations With Other Recognized Accrediting Agencies, COMM.C.10.030, Relations With the U.S. Government, State Higher Education Agencies and Other State Offices