



REVISED ACCELERATED INITIAL ACCREDITATION Proposed Policy Change on First Reading

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) approved this policy on first reading at a scheduled special meeting on December 3, 2021.

Background

HLC's Accelerated Initial Accreditation policy, as initially adopted in June 2021, is based on the notion that certain degree-granting institutions that otherwise meet HLC's qualifications for membership within HLC's expanded jurisdiction with a proven record of quality assurance by other accreditors could be accredited by HLC following a rigorous evaluation process, but without serving a period of candidacy.

At the time, HLC limited the availability of the accelerated initial accreditation process to institutions that were, among other things, accredited by other historically regional accreditors. HLC piloted the policy in this way based on the known similarity between HLC's quality assurance standards and those of the other historically regional accreditors. HLC also indicated that it would continue to evaluate the policy throughout implementation, including the threshold qualifications for institutions to be eligible for the accelerated process.

The changes proposed in this resolution are based on this continued evaluation of the policy and, if adopted, would expand the accelerated accreditation process to be available to institutions from an additional accreditor recognition by the U.S. Department of Education such as a state entity.

Without revisions, the current accelerated initial accreditation policy excludes such institutions from consideration for any path other than HLC's traditional Eligibility process. HLC anticipates that continued agility in this area will be needed, including review of which other recognized institutional accreditors may be appropriate to include within the accelerated process.

Comments Invited

HLC invites comments on these changes before the Board takes final action at its meeting on February 24– 25, 2022. Comments can be sent to policycomments@hlcommission.org. Comments are due by February 7, 2022.

Proposed 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**).

Policy Title: Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation

Number: INST.B.20.032

In some instances, institutions that meet the qualifications listed below may be eligible to apply for initial accreditation through an accelerated process.

The accelerated process is distinct from HLC's other processes for seeking accreditation. An institution participating in an accelerated process does not participate in the Eligibility Process. The institution does not hold candidacy status, and thus does not hold any status with HLC, prior to being granted initial accreditation.

Qualifications to Apply for Initial Accreditation Through the Accelerated Process

An institution must meet the following qualifications in order to apply for initial accreditation through the accelerated process:

1. The institution, in its current form, is currently institutionally accredited by (a) an accrediting agency that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and that is historically known as a regional accreditor or (b) **by a state entity that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an institutional accreditor of degree-granting institutions of higher education;**
2. The institution, in its current form, has (a) been accredited by its current institutional ~~accrediting agency~~ **accreditor** for at least the past ten (10) years or (b) has undergone a reaffirmation of accreditation review with its current institutional ~~accrediting agency~~ **accreditor** in the past two (2) years that did not result in a sanction or other similar negative action; and
3. The institution, in its current form, has not been placed on a sanction, show-cause order, or other similar negative action with its current institutional ~~accrediting agency~~ **accreditor** for at least the past ten (10) years.

Notwithstanding any institution's ability to meet the above qualifications, nothing in HLC policy nor federal regulations requires HLC to consider any non-member institution for initial accreditation, whether through the Accelerated Process or through the Eligibility Process.

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