

Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation Process Overview

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Basic Information

The Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation features a reduced timeline to achieving accreditation while still assuring rigor and protection for student success. The process is only available to institutions that meet certain qualifications prior to and throughout the process. This includes being currently accredited by a historically regional accreditor or a state entity recognized by the USDE as an institutional accreditor, and being in good standing with that accreditor. Institutions that do not meet the qualifications for the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation may pursue accreditation through HLC's traditional [Eligibility Process](#).

An institution undertaking the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation must complete all of the steps in the process within the time frames prescribed; must adhere to HLC guidelines related to each step, including guidelines related to the submission of documents; and must receive a positive decision by HLC before moving to each next step.

Institutions participating in the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation do not hold any status with HLC until awarded initial accreditation.

An institution must adhere to HLC's guidelines regarding public statements about the fact that the institution is seeking accreditation.

Fees apply at a number of steps throughout the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation. A complete list of these fees can be found in the current [HLC Dues and Fees Schedule](#). Where applicable, fees must accompany the submission of materials or are due at the start of a step in the process. An institution will not be permitted to proceed in the process until the required fees are received.

If at any point in the process the institution misses a required deadline, voluntarily withdraws from the process, or fails to achieve the next step in the process, the institution must start from the beginning of the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation. As detailed in HLC policy, an institution that completes the process but is denied initial accreditation by the HLC Board of Trustees may reapply to participate in the accelerated process after taking steps to remedy the circumstances that led to the denial of initial accreditation, or may elect to pursue membership through HLC's traditional [Eligibility Process](#). The institution must generally wait one year before pursuing either process, unless the HLC Board has provided otherwise.

At various steps in the process, the institution will be asked to provide an institutional response to recommendations, as provided in HLC policy. Additionally, certain determinations within the process are subject to appeal, as provided in HLC policy.

The content in this document is supplemental to HLC policy. Institutions should familiarize themselves with applicable HLC policies as they proceed through the process. Institutions should also familiarize themselves with the [HLC Glossary](#). Many terms in this document are defined in HLC policy or the Glossary.

HLC will maintain all documents submitted by institutions in accordance with applicable HLC policies.

Maintaining Relationship With Current Accreditor

HLC expects institutions participating in the Accelerated Process for Seeking Initial Accreditation to adhere to all of their current institutional accrediting agency's requirements throughout the process of seeking accreditation with HLC.

This includes adhering to requirements regarding substantive change. Institutions must keep HLC informed about all substantive changes in process and anticipated while seeking accreditation with HLC so that HLC can track all such changes in the institution's records.

All substantive changes requiring approval should be timed so as to have final approval by the original accreditation agency prior to the award of Initial Accreditation by HLC. Significant changes undertaken and not made known to HLC in advance may result in cancellation of any scheduled aspect of the process and may require that the institution restart the accelerated process for initial accreditation.

Sharing Information About Seeking Accreditation With HLC

As applicable, the institution maintains responsibility for keeping entities such as state higher education agencies, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and, if applicable, other accreditors informed throughout the process.

To ensure that students and other stakeholders have a clear understanding of an institution's accreditation status, HLC requires that institutions follow guidelines

when publicly discussing their accreditation status and plans. After an institution that is participating in HLC's Accelerated Process for Seeking Accreditation has submitted its application to HLC, it may publicly disclose that it has done so and may indicate a general timeline for the process. The institution should refer others to [HLC's website](#) for a consistent description of the process and should not speculate as to the outcome. Institutions participating in HLC's Accelerated Process for Seeking Initial Accreditation are, by definition, concurrently accredited by another institutional accreditor and should be transparent about that accreditation status.

HLC may indicate publicly that an institution participating in the Accelerated Process for Seeking Accreditation has applied, but will generally not provide additional details about the institution's participation in the process unless the institution is no longer seeking accreditation with HLC or as otherwise consistent with HLC policy.

Questions

Questions about the process may be directed to seekingaccreditation@hlcommission.org. Institutions are encouraged to attend applicable programming, for example at HLC's [annual conference](#), before beginning the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation.

Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation

The Process at a Glance

The following chart summarizes the three main steps involved in the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation. Additional information regarding each of the tasks immediately follows the chart.

Step and Associated Activities	Time Frame
<p>1. Application</p> <p>An institution begins the accelerated process for initial accreditation by submitting an application along with required Accelerated Process Application Evidence to demonstrate that it meets the qualifications for the process and that it meets other specific HLC requirements.</p> <p>HLC staff assess the institution's application to determine whether the institution meets the qualifications for the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation and whether it can demonstrate that it has certain essential characteristics that would make it eligible for HLC membership. This includes the opportunity for interaction with HLC staff through a combination of email, phone, or video-enabled conversations as needed.</p> <p>This step culminates in a decision regarding whether the institution may proceed to the preliminary peer review.</p> <p><i>See page 5 for further details.</i></p>	<p>HLC staff will review the application and respond to the institution, typically within one month.</p>

Step and Associated Activities	Time Frame
<p>2. Preliminary Peer Review</p> <p>The preliminary peer review includes the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abbreviated Assurance Filing demonstrating that the institution has provided sufficient narrative and evidence regarding each of HLC's Criteria for Accreditation to proceed • Institutional Data Form • Compliance With Eligibility Requirements Form • Compliance With Assumed Practices Form <p>Peer reviewers preliminarily evaluate the narrative and evidence provided by the institution. There is no in-person visit or other interaction between the institution and peer reviewers.</p> <p>This step culminates in a decision regarding whether the institution may proceed to a comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation. If the institution continues, it is assigned an HLC staff liaison at the conclusion of this step.</p> <p><i>See page 6 for further details.</i></p>	<p>HLC anticipates that institutions will prepare and submit the required narrative and evidence within approximately three months following HLC's response to the institution's application (step 1).</p> <p>Institutions must submit these materials within no more than one year following HLC's response to the institution's application.</p> <p>Upon submission of materials required for the preliminary peer review, the peer review panel takes approximately one month to evaluate the materials and determine the institution's ability to continue with the process.</p>
<p>3. Comprehensive Evaluation for Initial Accreditation</p> <p>The institution submits its comprehensive evaluation materials and hosts an on-site visit by a peer review team. The evaluation includes the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Assurance Filing demonstrating the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and all Core Components • Institutional Data Form • Compliance With Eligibility Requirements Form • Compliance With Assumed Practices Form • Federal Compliance Filing • On-site visit, including if applicable, a Multi-Campus Visit • Student Opinion Survey • Institutional Actions Council (IAC) Hearing • HLC Board decision <p><i>See page 7 for further details.</i></p>	<p>Institutions should prepare for a comprehensive evaluation within approximately nine months after being informed by HLC that the institution may do so and must undergo the comprehensive evaluation within no more than one year from that time.</p> <p>Visit timing will be coordinated with the institution to proceed on as accelerated a timeline as the institution desires, and as is practical, inclusive of the timing for the necessary IAC Hearing and Board meeting where the Board will consider the institution for initial accreditation.</p>

The following sections provide more detailed information for the tasks summarized in the chart above.

1. Application

The Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation begins with an institution submitting an [application](#) and providing the required application fee. An institution's application will not be considered complete until the application fee is received. For institutions successful in proceeding through the preliminary peer review, this fee will be credited toward the institution's fee for the comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation. See HLC's [Dues and Fees Schedule](#) and the payment information on page 7 of this document for more information.

Accelerated Process Application Evidence

The institution's application will include documentation demonstrating that the institution meets the qualifications to participate in the accelerated process, as well as other specific HLC requirements. The Accelerated Process Application Evidence must be submitted through the application form as a single PDF file labeled with the file name: (name of institution) ApplicationEvidence.pdf. It should include the following:

1. All official communications between the institution and its current accreditor for the previous 12 months. This includes, but is not limited to: action letters, other official correspondence, reports submitted by the institution, evaluations and other analyses from the accreditor, etc.
2. To the extent not already provided in item 1, documentation showing that the institution, in its current form, is currently institutionally accredited by an accrediting agency that is recognized by the USDE and that is historically known as a regional accreditor, or by a state entity that is recognized by the USDE as an institutional accreditor of degree-granting institutions of higher education.
3. To the extent not already provided in item 1, (a) documentation showing that the institution, in its current form, has undergone one reaffirmation of accreditation with its current institutional accreditor or (b) if an institution has not, in its current form, undergone one reaffirmation of accreditation with its current institutional accreditor, documentation demonstrating other indicia of continuity and stability in the institution's accreditation history.

4. To the extent not already provided in item 1, documentation showing that the institution has not been placed on a sanction, show-cause order, or other similar negative action with its current institutional accreditor for at least the past five years, and its current institutional accreditor is not currently considering placing the institution on sanction, show-cause order or other similar negative action.
5. Documentation from Federal Student Aid indicating that the institution has demonstrated reasonable cause for changing its primary accrediting agency or for maintaining accreditation by multiple agencies and has the approval of FSA under federal regulations to seek accreditation with HLC.
6. A description explaining how the institution's decision to change its primary accrediting agency or to maintain accreditation by multiple agencies is voluntary. Information to be included as part of this explanation could include, but is not limited to, the institution's rationale for seeking accreditation with HLC, an analysis of any external factors that are affecting the institution's decision to seek accreditation with HLC, and a description of the institution's decision-making process for choosing to seek accreditation with HLC.
7. Completed [Substantial Presence Worksheet](#).
8. Documentation showing the incorporation of the institution within HLC's jurisdiction in accordance with HLC policy.
9. Documentation showing legal status to operate as an institution offering higher learning in at least one state, sovereign nation or jurisdiction within HLC's jurisdiction in accordance with HLC policy and, if applicable, evidence of state authorization in good standing to offer higher learning in any other location in which it is required by state law or regulation to be authorized. Disclosure of any state action to suspend, limit or terminate the corporate status or higher education authorization of the institution or any related entity within the previous five years.
10. List of all degree and certificate programs offered, including noting which programs are offered by distance or correspondence education.
11. Information about specific current enrollments in all degree and certificate programs shown by program, location and mode of delivery.

- 12.** Letter from the institution's governing board confirming its intention to seek accreditation with HLC and a copy of the minutes from the Board meeting in which the Board approved seeking accreditation. The institution must make clear whether it is seeking system accreditation for a multi-corporate structure involving multiple institutions or seeking accreditation for a single corporate structure involving only one institution. HLC will make the final decision on whether the requested scope of accreditation is appropriate.
- 13.** List of other current accreditation relationships, including status, and information regarding any other official interactions with other accreditors in the past five years.

After the institution submits the application and the application fee, HLC staff evaluate the institution's application and evidence to determine whether the institution meets the qualifications for the accelerated process and can demonstrate that it has certain essential characteristics that would make it eligible for HLC membership, as noted in HLC policy. Throughout this period, the institution has access to HLC staff for consultation through a combination of email, phone or video-enabled conversations as needed.

This step concludes with a decision on whether or not the institution may move to the next step, preliminary peer review. This decision is final.

2. Preliminary Peer Review

HLC anticipates that institutions will prepare and submit the required narrative and evidence for the preliminary peer review within approximately three months following HLC's response to the institution's application (step 1). An institution must submit these materials within no more than one year following HLC's response to the institution's application.

During the preliminary peer review, the institution is provided a site in HLC's online Assurance System, which is where the institution will provide:

- [Institutional Data Form](#)
- [Compliance With Eligibility Requirements Form](#)
- [Compliance With Assumed Practices Form](#)
- Assurance Argument with narrative focused only at the Criteria "summary" level (not the Core Component level, which occurs later) and evidentiary documents linked to the narrative for the Criteria

Details on submission requirements for the preliminary peer review can be found in the Required Materials and Submission Procedures on page 7.

A peer review panel evaluates the narrative and evidence provided by the institution. There is no in-person visit or other interaction among the institution and peer reviewers at this step. A fee applies at the beginning of this step; see [HLC's Dues and Fees Schedule](#) for more information.

Once the institution has submitted the materials required for the preliminary peer review, the peer review panel takes approximately four weeks to evaluate the materials and determine the institution's ability to continue with the process.

The preliminary peer review is focused on whether there is sufficient evidence such that the institution appears likely to meet HLC requirements and is sufficiently prepared to host a comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation. In some cases, peer reviewers may request additional information for relatively small issues or when an obviously missing item of information is needed.

The preliminary peer review concludes with a determination that either (1) authorizes the institution to move to the comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation; or (2) indicates that the institution may not move forward with the accelerated process for initial accreditation. This is a final decision and is not considered an appealable adverse action as detailed in HLC policies.

If the institution proceeds with the accelerated process for initial accreditation, HLC will assign the institution an HLC staff liaison at the conclusion of this step. The staff liaison serves as the primary contact for the institution henceforward and as a resource regarding HLC policies and procedures. In addition, the staff liaison also assists the institution through various logistical aspects of reviews, HLC's decision-making process and other HLC processes.

If it is determined that the institution may not move forward with the accelerated process, the institution may choose to proceed by initiating HLC's traditional [Eligibility Process](#).

3. Comprehensive Evaluation for Initial Accreditation

Institutions should prepare for and undergo a comprehensive evaluation within approximately nine months after being informed by HLC that the institution may do so, and must undergo the comprehensive evaluation within no more than one year from that time. Timing for the on-site evaluation will be coordinated with the institution to proceed on as accelerated a timeline as the institution desires, and as is practical, inclusive of the timing for the necessary IAC Hearing and the Board meeting where the Board will consider the institution for initial accreditation.

In a comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation, an institution must demonstrate evidence that it meets all of the Criteria for Accreditation, including all Core Components. An institution must also demonstrate evidence that it meets the Eligibility Requirements, Assumed Practices and Federal Compliance Requirements. Initial accreditation is achieved through submission of comprehensive evaluation materials, participating in HLC's [Student Opinion Survey](#) process, hosting an on-site evaluation by a peer review team to the institution's main campus and, if applicable, a selection of its branch campuses, participating in a hearing by the IAC and action by the HLC Board of Trustees. Each of these steps of the process is conducted in accordance with HLC policy. Regular fees, for example those related to comprehensive evaluations and IAC hearings, apply throughout this step. See HLC's [HLC Dues and Fees Schedule](#) for more information.

During the comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation, the institution will provide:

- Institutional Data Form
- Compliance With Eligibility Requirements Form
- Compliance With Assumed Practices Form
- Assurance Argument with narrative focused at Core Component level, and evidentiary documents linked to the narrative
- Federal Compliance Filing
- Multi-Campus Visit Report (if applicable)

Details on submission requirements for the comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation can be found in the Required Materials and Submission Procedures on this page. Additional information about the [comprehensive evaluation process](#) is available on HLC's website.

After the comprehensive evaluation, the peer review team's report and recommendation, along with the entire record, will be routed through HLC's decision-making process. This includes review by an IAC Hearing, where team and institutional representatives participate, and action by HLC's Board. As provided in HLC policy, the institution is afforded the opportunity to submit an institutional response following both the team report and the IAC Hearing.

Institutions participating in the Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation must meet all HLC requirements in order to be granted initial accreditation; this may include findings of "met" or "met with concerns" with respect to the Criteria for Accreditation.

If the Board grants initial accreditation, the institution becomes accredited by HLC. Such accreditation may, in the Board's discretion, be subject to interim monitoring, restrictions on institutional growth or substantive change, or other contingencies.

If the Board denies initial accreditation, the institution may reapply to participate in the accelerated process after taking steps to remedy the circumstances that led to the denial of initial accreditation, or may elect to pursue membership through HLC's traditional Eligibility Process. The institution must generally wait one year before pursuing either process, unless the Board has provided otherwise. Denial of accreditation by the Board is an adverse action that is subject to appeal as detailed in HLC's policies.

Required Materials and Submission Procedures

General Requirements and Information

- Except for the Assurance Argument and associated evidence file materials, HLC requires that all institutional materials be submitted electronically as PDF documents. Ensure that electronic documents are paginated, bookmarked and searchable with internal document links that allow for ease of movement across chapters, sections and subsections. Do not scan printed documents to create a PDF document, as this will result in a document that is large in file size and not text

searchable. Electronic documents should be prepared by an individual with expertise in using appropriate PDF software, such as Adobe Acrobat.

- Include internal document organizational strategies (such as headings or lists of linked documents) that make it easy for the reader to navigate within the electronic document.
- Unless instructed otherwise, avoid links to websites or other materials. Links to external materials should offer only supplemental information. **Reviewers are not required to pursue external links.**
- Only use graphics and pictures if they provide specific evidence. Optimize graphics and pictures to reduce the size of the document.
- Ensure that software settings are set to create clear text and graphics, yet not make the file size too large.
- Please review HLC's [guidelines regarding personally identifiable information \(PII\)](#) prior to submitting any materials to HLC.
- Submit only the requested documents. If documents are applicable to more than one item in a filing, submit them once and cross-reference appropriately.
- Do not apply password protection to PDF documents.
- It is the institution's responsibility to ensure that HLC has those documents necessary to provide a complete and accurate understanding of the institution's compliance with HLC's requirements. If the institution has relevant information that has not been specifically requested, it should contact HLC staff for instructions about the appropriateness of submitting the information.
- Documents will be submitted via HLC's website, a file-sharing link or through the Assurance System. Do not send any documents by email to HLC.
- The application fee should be submitted as detailed below. HLC will issue invoices for all other payments. Contact finance@hlcommission.org or 312.881.8119 for instructions on submitting a wire/ ACH payment or with other financial inquiries.

The application fee may be submitted by wire/ACH or mailed to:

Higher Learning Commission
P.O. Box 735331
Chicago, IL 60673-5331

General Notes on the Assurance System

HLC's online Assurance System allows institutions to assemble an Assurance Filing and provide any other required forms and materials. The Assurance Filing includes a narrative (Assurance Argument) and supporting evidentiary documents (Evidence File) in a framework built around the Criteria for Accreditation. Institutions use this system to demonstrate their compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and other HLC requirements. Narrative in the Assurance System should be evaluative in nature and substantiated with clear, specific evidence (versus general references to documents that may contain evidence).

Extensive training is available on HLC's website about using the [Assurance System](#) effectively, and HLC staff are available to assist institutions.

All materials for the preliminary peer review and the comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation are submitted through the Assurance System. All materials must be submitted to the Assurance System before the institution's lock date. For the preliminary peer review, the lock date will be the start date of the peer review panel's online review. For the comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation, the lock date will be four weeks in advance of the peer review team's on-site visit. After the lock date, the institution will may view, but will no longer be able to edit its Assurance Filing at that step of the process.

Peer reviewers will access all materials from the Assurance System.

The Assurance System allows for the institution to upload additional material requested by peer reviewers through an Addendum feature that is activated by the peer reviewers when needed.

The institution should not otherwise provide materials to peer reviewers, as peer reviewers are expected to work from the Assurance System in preparation for and throughout an evaluation.

Additional information about the Assurance System can be found in the [Assurance System Manual](#).

Required Materials for Preliminary Peer Review

The materials submitted for the preliminary peer review are as follows.

1. Institutional Data Form

- This form is completed by the institution to provide basic institutional data.
- Download the Institutional Data Form from the Forms Tab of the Assurance System.
- Complete and upload the form to the Forms Tab of the Assurance System. If including other materials to respond to the data requested by the form, combine all documents (including the form) into a single PDF file before uploading it to the Forms Tab. (Peer reviewers will be able to access the form through the Forms Tab. There is no need to provide a link to this document in the narrative of the Assurance Argument.)

2. Compliance With Eligibility Requirements Form

- This form is completed by the institution to provide information on its compliance with the Eligibility Requirements.
- Download the Compliance With Eligibility Requirements Form from the Forms Tab of the Assurance System.
- Complete and upload the form and supporting evidence to the Forms Tab of the Assurance System. (Peer reviewers will be able to access the form through the Forms Tab. There is no need to provide a link to this document in the narrative of the Assurance Argument.)

3. Compliance With Assumed Practices Form

- This form is completed by the institution to provide information on its compliance with the Assumed Practices.
- Download the Compliance With Assumed Practices Form from the Forms Tab of the Assurance System.
- Complete and upload the form and any supporting documentation to the Forms Tab of the Assurance System. (Peer reviewers will be able to access the form through the Forms Tab. There is no need to provide a link to this document in the narrative of the Assurance Argument.)

4. Assurance Filing (Introduction, Assurance Argument at the Summary Criteria level and associated Evidence File)

- An overview of institutional history and context is entered in the Introduction Tab of the Assurance System.
- For the preliminary peer review, institutions will provide narrative focused at the Criteria “summary” level (not the Core Component level, which occurs later).
- The word limit for the narrative for the preliminary peer review should be approximately 1,500 words or fewer per Criterion summary.
- Other than specific forms provided by HLC, documents in the Assurance System related to the Assurance Argument are managed through the Evidence File. Materials in the Evidence File must be linked to at least one section of the institutional narrative. Peer reviewers cannot view documents in the Evidence File that are not linked to the narrative.

Access to HLC’s Assurance System during the preliminary peer review not only provides an opportunity for the institution to demonstrate its readiness to host a comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation, but also allows the institution to become acquainted with the Assurance System and to start assembling narrative and evidentiary files for deeper evaluation to occur during the comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation, during which the institution will write fully to each Criterion’s Core Components. In this way, the institution may choose to simultaneously complete requirements for the preliminary peer review and begin drafting its fuller narrative as required for the comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation.

Although the institution may begin drafting narrative at the Core Component level during the preliminary peer review, peer reviewers will refrain from reviewing anything in the Assurance System at the Core Component level. Reviewers will only review and evaluate the institution’s responses to the five Criteria summaries at this stage.

Required Materials for Comprehensive Evaluation for Initial Accreditation

The materials submitted for the comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation are as follows.

1. Institutional Data Form

- This form is completed by the institution to provide basic institutional data.
- Download the Institutional Data Form from the Forms Tab of the Assurance System.
- If the institution chooses to use a previously completed Institutional Data Form, ensure that it is updated appropriately regarding any information that has changed since the original submission, as well as the time frames for which data is requested.
- Complete and upload the form to the Forms Tab of the Assurance System. If including other materials to respond to the data requested by the form, combine all documents (including the form) into a single PDF file before uploading it to the Forms Tab. (Peer reviewers will be able to access the form through the Forms Tab. There is no need to provide a link to this document in the narrative of the Assurance Argument.)

2. Compliance With Eligibility Requirements Form

- This form is completed by the institution to provide information on its compliance with the Eligibility Requirements.
- Download the Compliance With Eligibility Requirements Form from the Forms Tab of the Assurance System.
- When updating the Compliance With Eligibility Requirements Form, institutions should clearly identify for peer reviewers any items that have been updated since the preliminary peer review and, as needed, include information explaining how the institution continues to meet the Eligibility Requirements despite the noted changes.
- Upload the form in the Forms Tab of the Assurance System. (Peer reviewers will be able to access the form through the Forms Tab. There is no need to provide a link to this document in the narrative of the Assurance Argument.)

3. Compliance With Assumed Practices Form

- This form is completed by the institution to provide information on its compliance with the Assumed Practices.
- Download the Compliance With Assumed Practices Form from the Forms Tab of the Assurance System.
- When updating the Compliance With Assumed Practices Form, institutions should clearly identify for peer reviewers any items that have been updated in the document since the preliminary peer review and, as needed, include information explaining how the institution continues to meet the Assumed Practices despite the noted changes.
- Upload the form and any supporting documentation to the Forms Tab of the Assurance System. (Peer reviewers will be able to access the form through the Forms Tab. There is no need to provide a link to this document in the narrative of the Assurance Argument.)

4. **Assurance Filing (Introduction, Assurance Argument at the Core Component level and associated Evidence File)**

- When the preliminary peer review step is complete and HLC notifies the institution that it may proceed, the institution regains full access to its site in the Assurance System and any work it has already completed toward satisfying the requirements of the comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation.
- An overview of institutional history and context is entered (or updated) in the Introduction Tab of the Assurance System.
- At this step of the process, institutions will provide a full Assurance Filing, including detailed narrative—complete with linked evidence—regarding all Core Components.
- Because institutions write in detail to every Core Component for the comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation, institutions should focus their efforts on narrative and evidence in those sections, rather than the Criterion summaries. To this end, institutions are encouraged to revise the Criteria summaries that were written for the preliminary peer review so that they are brief and concise (often just a paragraph). This helps ensure that the focus shifts to the Core Components, which are the areas of focus during this step.

- The word limit for the entire Assurance Argument for the comprehensive evaluation is 40,000 words.
- Other than specific forms provided by HLC, documents in the Assurance System related to the Assurance Argument are managed through the Evidence File. Materials in the Evidence File must be linked to at least one section of the institutional narrative. Peer reviewers cannot view documents in the Evidence File that are not linked to the narrative.

5. Supplemental Materials:

- Include the following Supplemental Materials as hyperlinks in the Assurance Argument, as described in the [Assurance System Manual](#):
 - All current faculty and staff handbook(s)
 - All current student handbook(s)
 - All current institutional catalog(s) or course bulletin(s)
- Further, include audited financial statements for the two most recent fiscal periods as PDFs

in the Evidence File and provide a link within the Assurance Argument in the applicable Core Component section.

6. Federal Compliance Requirements

- Download the Federal Compliance Filing Form from HLC's website.
- Upload the completed Filing Form and related appendix, if required, to the Federal Compliance Tab of the Assurance System. (There is no need to provide a link to this document in the narrative of the Assurance Argument.)

7. Multi-Campus Report (if applicable)

- If the comprehensive evaluation includes a multi-campus visit, prepare a report that addresses each campus being reviewed. See the [Multi-Campus Visit procedure](#) for details on preparing the report.
- Upload the report to the Forms tab of the Assurance System. (There is no need to provide a link to the report in the narrative of the Assurance Argument.)

Related Policies and Documents

Policies

[Eligibility Requirements](#) (CRRT.A.10.010)

[Criteria for Accreditation](#) (CRRT.B.10.010)

[Assumed Practices](#) (CRRT.C.10.010)

[Obligations of Membership](#) (CRRT.D.10.010)

[Federal Compliance Requirements](#)

[Jurisdiction](#) (INST.B.10.010)

[Eligibility Process](#) (INST.B.20.010)

[Candidacy and Initial Accreditation](#) (INST.B.20.020)

[Accelerated Process for Initial Accreditation](#)
(INST.B.20.032)

[Dues and Fees](#) (INST.B.40.010)

[Denial or Withdrawal of Status](#) (INST.E.60.010)

[Reapplication Following a Denial or Withdrawal of Status](#) (INST.E.80.010)

[Appeals](#) (INST.E.90.010)

[Substantive Change](#) (INST.G.10.010)

Documents

[Substantial Presence](#) Form

[Institutional Data Form](#)

[Compliance With Eligibility Requirements Form](#)

[Compliance With Assumed Practices Form](#)

[Federal Compliance Overview and Filing Form](#)

[Dues and Fees Schedule](#)