



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Office of
Institutional Effectiveness

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

for Seeking, Maintaining, and Transferring Specialized
Program Accreditation

Office of Institutional Effectiveness

Mission Statement

The mission of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IE) is to provide strategic management of cross-collaborative projects and initiatives that support student success and institutional coherency. IE accomplishes its mission by facilitating the planning, implementation, monitoring, adjusting, and evaluation of strategic projects and initiatives that improve and demonstrate responsibility for the organization's overall performance.

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“The goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality.”

*U.S. Department of Education,
Office of Post-Secondary
Education
(<http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation>)*

Policies and Procedures

for Seeking, Maintaining, and Transferring Specialized Program Accreditation

Introduction

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IE) at Western Michigan University oversees the process for tracking and reporting specialized program accreditation endeavors. In compliance with HLC’s policies regarding [PATHWAYS FOR REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION AND FEDERAL COMPLIANCE](#) (see Appendix B), IE ensures that all academic programs requiring specialized accreditation for their students to sit for certification or licensing examinations secure and maintain accreditation in good standing with agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), or the Association of Specialized & Professional Accreditors (ASPA). Those that do not secure or maintain the requisite accreditation in good standing must disclose publicly and clearly the consequences to the students of the lack thereof. Approval by the provost and vice president for academic affairs must be secured prior to voluntarily withdrawing from accreditation or allowing it to expire.

IE serves as liaison between accredited programs and the Office of Academic Affairs, ensuring the provost remains current on program accreditation status as well as timelines and procedures for accreditation reviews. IE works with program directors/coordinators, department chairs/school directors, and college deans to provide institutional responses to accreditor requests and review of documentation prior to submission.

IE maintains a complete history of all accreditation, licensure, and certification documents pertaining to academic programs and the facilities that provide students with training and supervision related to their accredited academic programs. This repository is known as the WMU Accreditation Library. IE complies with accrediting agencies’ public release policies, which include specific language for posting accreditation decisions in print or electronic publication. IE does not share accreditation, certification, or licensure information with the university community or the general public. Non-administrative requests for access to accreditation, certification, or licensure documentation are directed back to the program in question, and are subject to the policies and practices of the program’s accreditor and overseeing department or college.

Procedures

The following procedures pertain exclusively to academic programs housed in the Division of Academic Affairs at Western Michigan University. They are arranged in a workflow or “process” format intended to operationalize procedures and provide guidance to first-time and seasoned directors/coordinators of accredited programs in identifying key points where they may need additional support.

Seeking Specialized Program Accreditation

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness provides assistance during the identification and “discovery” processes for proposed and existing programs to seek specialized program accreditation, especially for those programs whose graduates will sit for certification or licensure.

Initiating New Accreditation

Academic units intending to seek new accreditation for proposed or existing programs must contact the Office of Institutional Effectiveness **prior to applying to the accreditor**.

Process

NOTE: Academic unit must notify IE whenever site visitors or other accreditation representatives are expected to be on-campus

1. Academic unit contacts IE to discuss its intention to apply for new accreditation.
2. Academic unit schedules a meeting with the college dean; senior vice provost for academic affairs, budget and operations; and IE to discuss required costs, cost coverage, and to approve initiation of the process.
3. Academic unit provides IE with a timeline for the application process that includes initial submission dates, site visit scheduling, etc. – NOTE: if desired, IE is available to assist academic units in establishing process timelines.
4. Academic unit submits application for candidacy to IE for review **14 days prior to submission** to accreditor.
5. IE constitutes a review panel (e.g., ALO, assessment, IR, etc.) based on institution-level reporting; returns reviewed application for editing and submission.
6. Academic unit notifies IE when program has been granted candidacy status.
7. Academic unit prepares application materials for full accreditation (e.g., application form, self-study report, etc.), and submits to IE for review **30 days prior to submission** to accreditor.
8. IE constitutes a review panel (e.g., ALO, assessment, IR, etc.) based on institution-level reporting; returns reviewed application materials for editing and submission.
9. Academic unit obtains required signatures (i.e., WMU president, provost and vice president for academic affairs, etc.).
10. Academic unit schedules accreditation site visit; **visit must include:**
 - a. Administrative one-on-one with either the WMU president or the provost and vice president for academic affairs
 - b. Exit interview/summary to include WMU president; the provost and vice president for academic affairs; the senior vice provost for academic affairs, budget and operations; and IE’s associate director of integrated program review and accreditation
11. Academic unit schedules a site visit briefing to take place **two weeks prior to the site visit**; briefing must include the college dean; the provost and vice president for academic affairs; the senior vice provost for

academic affairs, budget and operations; and IE's associate director of integrated program review and accreditation.

12. Academic unit notifies IE when program has received the draft site visit report; unit works with IE to prepare responses to "errors of fact" and requests for clarification or additional information.
13. Academic unit submits response to accreditor and provides IE with a final copy for inclusion in the WMU Accreditation Library's electronic holdings.
14. Academic unit notifies IE when program has received the accreditor's final decision regarding accreditation.
15. Academic unit submits required documentation, listed below, to IE for inclusion in the WMU Accreditation Library's electronic holdings.

Required Documentation

Academic unit **must** submit to IE final electronic copies of the following documents:

1. Accreditor's handbook or guide describing policies and procedures for obtaining accreditation.
2. Completed application for candidacy.
3. Accreditor's official notice granting candidacy status.
4. Accreditor's requests for additional information, interim reports, or ad hoc reports.
5. WMU's (i.e., program-, department-, college-, or institution-level) responses to accreditor's requests.
6. Completed application for full accreditation.
7. Completed self-study report (including all appendices, attachments, charts, graphs, etc.) responding to the accreditor's standards and adhering to the accreditor's reporting specifications.
8. Draft site visitor(s) report allowing for correction of errors of fact, clarification of statements and evidence, and submission of requested information.
9. Completed response to site visit report.
10. Accreditor's final decision letter and report.

Transferring Accreditation from One Accreditor to Another

Under rare circumstances, programs may find it necessary to seek accreditation through a different accreditor. Examples include: a new accreditor that has more stringent standards or offers greater benefits to students; or, the current accreditor fails to provide the services for which it was contracted (e.g., delays in reaccreditation, etc.).

Process

1. Academic unit contacts IE with a request to transfer accreditation to another accreditor including an explanation for the transfer.
2. IE schedules a meeting with provost and vice president for academic affairs; senior vice provost for academic affairs, budget and operations; dean; chair/director; and program directors/coordinator to discuss request and required processes.

Required Documentation

In addition to the documents required for submission under Initiating New Accreditation, the academic unit **must** submit to IE final electronic copies of the following documents:

1. Official request for transferring accreditation, including all supporting materials.

Maintenance of Specialized Program Accreditation

In compliance with the Higher Learning Commission's Core Component 4.A.5, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness provides assistance during and between reaccreditation/reaffirmation cycles for accredited academic programs to ensure they remain in "good standing" with their accrediting bodies (see page 8 of the Appendix).

Academic programs preparing to initiate a new accreditation cycle must contact the Office of Institutional Effectiveness **at the beginning of the process**.

Process

NOTE: Academic unit must notify IE whenever site visitors or other accreditation representatives are expected to be on-campus

1. Academic unit prepares application materials for full accreditation (e.g., application form, self-study report, etc.), and submits to IE for review **30 days prior to submission** to accreditor.
2. IE constitutes a review panel (e.g., ALO, assessment, IR, etc.) based on institution-level reporting; returns reviewed application materials for editing and submission.
3. Academic unit obtains required signatures (i.e., WMU president, provost and vice president for academic affairs, etc.).
4. Academic unit schedules accreditation site visit; **visit must include:**
 - a. Administrative one-on-one with either the WMU president or the provost and vice president for academic affairs
 - b. Exit interview/summary to include WMU president; the provost and vice president for academic affairs; the senior vice provost for academic affairs, budget and operations; and IE's associate director of integrated program review and accreditation
5. Academic unit schedules a site visit briefing to take place **two weeks prior to the site visit**; briefing must include the college dean; the provost and vice president for academic affairs; the senior vice provost for academic affairs, budget and operations; and IE's associate director of integrated program review and accreditation.
6. Academic unit notifies IE when program has received the draft site visit report; unit works with IE to prepare responses to "errors of fact" and requests for clarification or additional information.
7. Academic unit submits response to accreditor and provides IE with a final copy for inclusion in the WMU Accreditation Library's electronic holdings.
8. Academic unit notifies IE when program has received the accreditor's final decision regarding accreditation.
9. Academic unit submits required documentation, listed below, to IE for inclusion in the WMU Accreditation Library's electronic holdings.

Required Documentation

Academic unit **must** submit to IE final electronic copies of the following documents:

Accredited programs seeking an extension on their reaccreditation cycle must first obtain written permission from the department chair/school director, college dean, and provost prior to submitting the request for extension to the accreditor.

1. Any approved extension request, and notice of accreditor acceptance or denial.
2. Any notice of pending changes to the accreditation process (e.g., updated standards, accreditor name change/merger, program's plans to change agencies, etc.)
3. Accreditor requests for additional information, annual reports, interim reports, or ad hoc reports (e.g., health emergency protocols, etc.).
4. WMU (i.e., program-, department-, college-, or institution-level) responses to accreditor requests for additional information.
5. Completed annual, interim, and ad hoc reports to accreditor.
6. Completed self-study report (including any application, all appendices, attachments, charts, graphs, etc.) responding to the accreditor's standards and adhering to the accreditor's reporting specifications.
7. Draft site visitor(s) report allowing for correction of errors of fact, clarification of statements and evidence, and submission of requested information.
8. Completed response to site visit report.
9. Accreditor final decision letter and report

Reimbursement of Accreditation Fees

Reimbursement of annual accreditation fees is not a guarantee, but rather a long-standing practice of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IE) to encourage compliance with HLC's requirement that all programs that can be accredited are accredited. Reimbursement of annual accreditation fees also serves as a "strategic initiative" to demonstrate institutional support to specialized accrediting bodies. All costs associated with specialized program accreditation continue to be the responsibility of the college overseeing the program.

IE is designated as a "service unit" under the university's Strategic Resource Management model. As such, it receives its annual operating budget as part of the UPA shared by service units under the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. Although IE's booked budget includes allocation of funds to reimburse for accreditation annual fees, there is no possibility for expansion of those funds. As a result, between July 2022 and June 2025, IE was only able to reimburse accredited programs 80% of their annual fees. With costs continuing to rise, however, IE must lower its reimbursement percentage in order to continue this practice.

Effective July 1, 2025, as the budget allows, IE will reimburse RUs for 50% of their annual maintenance of accreditation fees once the RU has paid the initial invoice and submitted a request to IE for reimbursement consideration. "Maintenance of accreditation fees" are limited to those fees published by the accreditor that are specifically identified as "annual fees." As the budget allows, IE also will reimburse 50% of separate membership fees in professional organizations that are associated with the accreditor when that membership is a specific requirement for maintaining accreditation.

IE will not reimburse the following:

- Late fees or other penalty costs
- Application fees for initiating a new accreditation cycle with an existing accreditor (as distinguished from seeking initial accreditation)
- Fees for submitting report documents (e.g., self-study, annual reports, interim reports, etc.) that are separate from the annual maintenance of accreditation fee
- Costs associated with site visits
- Costs for purchasing preparation or research materials from the accreditor
- Costs associated with travel to accreditor-sponsored conferences or training events
- Costs associated with hosting training events for accreditation processes

- Dues and or membership fees that are not a specific requirement for maintaining accreditation (e.g., faculty or student memberships, etc.)
- Fees paid for membership in professional organizations that provide additional specialized program recognition leading to post-graduation certification or licensure of students (as distinguished from accreditation)
- Accreditation fees and expenses for institutional service areas (e.g., Landscape Services, Sindecuse Health Center, etc.) outside the scope of Academic Affairs

To request reimbursement, RUs must email an electronic copy of the invoice(s), proof of payment (i.e., procard receipt, signed generic voucher), and a Fund 11 department number for processing the reimbursement. Departments are not required to provide copies of their monthly procard statements as proof of payment.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness is an administrative service unit of the Division of Academic Affairs. As such, the office is not authorized to reimburse institutional service areas for annual accreditation, licensure, or certification fees.

Process

1. Administrative unit receives accreditor invoice for annual fees; unit initiates payment from a fund 11 department
2. Unit's business manager emails request for reimbursement to IE that includes PDFs of the invoice and verification of payment from the fund 11 department (e.g., copy of the signed voucher, receipt from procurement card use, etc.)
3. IE issues reimbursement through the WMU online Journal Entry Spreadsheet (JES) system, and emails a PDF copy of the JES to the unit's business manager for verification of reimbursement

Policy Title: Criteria for Accreditation

Policy Number: CRRT.B.10.010

Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct – The institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

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

2.B.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.

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

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

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 Component 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.

5.A.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.

Policy Number Key

Section CRRT: Criteria and Requirements

Chapter B: Criteria for Accreditation

Part 10: General

Last Revised: June 2024, effective September 2025 First

Adopted: August 1992

APPENDIX A

HLC Policies Applicable to
Specialized Program
Accreditation

Revision History: August 1998, February 2002, February 2007, February 2003 (effective January 2005), February 2012 (effective January 2013), June 2013, June 2014, February 2019 (effective September 2020), June 2024 (effective September 2025)

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

Policy Title: Assumed Practices

Policy Number: CRRT.C.10.010

A. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct:

7. The institution portrays clearly and accurately to the public its current status with the Higher Learning Commission and with specialized, national, and professional accreditation agencies.”
 - a. An institution offering programs that require specialized accreditation or recognition by a state licensing board or other entity in order for its students to be certified or to sit for the licensing examination in states where its students reside either has the appropriate accreditation and recognition or discloses publicly and clearly the consequences to the students of the lack thereof. The institution makes clear to students the distinction between regional and specialized or program accreditation and the relationships between licensure and the various types of accreditation.
 - b. An institution offering programs eligible for specialized accreditation at multiple locations discloses the accreditation status and recognition of the program by state licensing boards at each location.
 - c. An institution that provides a program that prepares students for a licensure, certification, or other qualifying examination publicly discloses its pass rate on that examination, unless such information is not available to the institution.

Policy Number Key

Section CRRT: Criteria and Requirements

Chapter C: Assumed Practices

Part 10: General

Last Revised: June 2024, effective September 2025 First Adopted: February 2012 Revision History: June 2013, June 2014, June 2016, September 2017, November 2020, June 2021, February 2022, November 2023, June 2024 (effective September 2025)

Notes: Institutions that received HLC extensions to bring their dual credit faculty into compliance with Assumed Practice B.2. are responsible to do so before such extensions have expired. In all other respects, the current Assumed Practices apply to such institutions. 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 CRRT.B.10.020).

Policy Title: Obligations of Membership

Policy Number: CRRT.D.10.010

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.

Policy Number Key

Section CRRT: Criteria and Requirements

Chapter D: Obligations of Membership

Part 10: General

Last Revised: June 2023 First Adopted: January 1983 Revision History: Renumbered February 2010, February 2012, June 2013, February 2017, June 2019 (effective September 2020), June 2020, November 2020, February 2022, June 2022, November 2022, February 2023, June 2023

Notes: Policies combined November 2012 – 1.6, 2013 – 1.6(a), 1.6(b), 1.6(b)1. 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.B.30.020).

Policy Title: Standing With State and Other Accreditors

Policy Number: FDCR.A.10.090

An institution has a responsibility to remain in good standing with each state in which it is authorized or licensed as well as with any other recognized accreditor by which it is accredited or pre-accredited up to the point that it voluntarily withdraws from such relationships. An institution shall fairly represent to HLC and to the public its history and status with other recognized accreditors and with each state in which it is authorized or licensed. This obligation includes accurately disclosing when an action affecting its accreditation status has been taken by any other recognized accreditor.

An institution shall disclose to HLC any pending or final state actions that affect the institution's legal status or authority to grant degrees or offer programs. An institution shall also disclose to HLC any pending or final actions by a recognized accreditor to withdraw accredited or pre-accredited status or to impose a sanction, Show-Cause Order or adverse action. Such disclosure shall take place at the time of the action by the respective entity and on HLC's Institutional Update as well as in preparation for a comprehensive evaluation by HLC.

HLC Review. If another recognized accreditor or if a state has taken any of these actions, HLC will undertake a prompt review of the institution and the related action.

With regard to an applying institution, HLC, through its decision-making processes and subject to the limitations in the Eligibility Requirements, will carefully weigh these matters in reaching its own decision to grant candidacy or initial accreditation. If it chooses to grant candidacy or initial accreditation to an institution that has been subject to such an action by an accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, it will provide the Secretary of Education a written explanation of why that action is appropriate within thirty days of taking the action.

With regard to an accredited institution, HLC will determine whether additional review or HLC action, including sanction or withdrawal of accreditation, is appropriate. HLC may undertake its review in any way provided for in HLC policy.

Policy Number Key

Section FDCR: Policies Required by Federal Regulation

Chapter A: Federal Compliance

Part 10: General

Last Revised: February 2022

First Adopted: January 1983

Revision History: Policy 9.1 (Adopted January 1983, revised February 1996, effective June 1996, revised February 1998, revised June 2008); Policy 9.2 (Adopted February 1986, revised February 1996, effective July 1996, revised June 2001, revised June 2008); Policy 9.3 (Adopted February 1988, revised February 1996, revised February 1998); Policy 9.4 (Adopted February 1998, revised June 2008); combined, revised, and renumbered June 2012; revised June 2019, effective September 1, 2019; revised June 2021; revised February 2022

Notes: Former policy number 4.0(i). In February 2021, references to the Higher Learning Commission as “the Commission” were replaced with the term “HLC.”

Related Policies: CRRT.B.10.010 Criteria for Accreditation (Core Component 2.B)

Policy Title: Relations with Other Recognized Accrediting Agencies

Policy Number: COMM.C.10.020

Notification of Actions and Other Institutional Information. HLC will notify other recognized accreditors of accreditation actions taken by HLC’s Board of Trustees in accordance with the requirements set forth in the Notice of Accreditation Actions, Public Notices, and Public Statements policy.

Other Information Provided to Recognized Accreditors. If another recognized accreditor seeks written or other information about a current or previous member institution, or about an institution that has previously sought status with HLC, HLC may, in its discretion, forward that information to the other recognized accreditor after receiving a written request. HLC may, but is not required to, consult with or otherwise inform the member institution regarding the request.

Consideration for the Accreditation Decisions of and Information Provided by Other Recognized Accreditors. HLC will base its accreditation decisions on its own requirements, policies and procedures.

However, in determining whether an institution meets HLC requirements, HLC may consider the reports, action letters and information of other recognized accreditors previously or currently associated with the institution, with specific attention to any adverse, probationary or show-cause actions. HLC also requires that institutions disclose such information to HLC as required by the Obligations of Membership. HLC may request information directly from a recognized accreditor and include such information for review by an evaluation team considering an accrediting action.

In considering a substantive change HLC may request information from an institution regarding its other accreditations or may request it directly from the recognized accreditor and take it into account in the accrediting action.

If another accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education has denied or withdrawn accreditation or pre-accreditation or placed the institution on sanction, HLC, through its decision-making processes and subject to its requirements, will carefully weigh these matters in reaching its own decision to grant or reaffirm accredited or candidate status. If it chooses to grant or reaffirm accredited or candidate status to such an institution, it will provide the U.S. Secretary of Education a written explanation within thirty (30) days of taking action of why the issues that led to the action by the other accreditor did not preclude HLC from reaching its decision.

Concurrent Visits With Other Recognized Accreditors. If initiated by a member institution, HLC may conduct a visit concurrently with another recognized accreditor. While the teams of the participating agencies may coordinate their activities on campus, including information gathering, representatives of other recognized accreditors shall not participate in HLC team deliberations, and any production of a team report will be done separately by each accreditor.

Policy Number Key

Section COMM: HLC Obligations

Chapter C: Relationships with External Agencies

Part 10: General

Last Revised: February 2022

First Adopted: January 1983, February 1986, June 2000

Revision History: February 1996, February 1998, June 2001, February 2008, June 2008, February 2009, June 2012, April 2013, November 2020, February 2021, February 2022

Notes: Former policy number – 9.1. In February 2021, references to the Higher Learning Commission as “the Commission” were replaced with the term “HLC.”

Reference

Higher Learning Commission (2024, June 27). *HLC Policy Book*.

https://download.hlcommission.org/policy/HLCPolicyBook_POL.pdf