

# THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

## INFORMATION FOR INSTITUTIONS REGARDING OFF-CAMPUS INSTRUCTION

### COMMISSION DEFINITIONS AND APPROVAL PROTOCOLS

The Commission requires that institutions seek approval from the Commission prior to initiating delivery of instruction to students at certain physical locations apart from the main campus. These physical locations include campuses, sites, and certain course locations. Institutions should study carefully the Commission's definitions of each of these categories and appropriate steps for seeking approval as they plan future off-campus growth. All approval processes culminate in formal review and action by the Commission.

To ensure that students off-campus have consistent access to Title IV federal student aid, institutions should work closely with their Financial Aid Offices to ensure that information about off-campus activity is consistently reported to the U.S. Department of Education ("USDE") and to The Higher Learning Commission ("the Commission" or "HLC"). The Commission does not approve campuses, sites or course locations retroactively; therefore it is very important for institutions and the students they serve that institutions are very careful to seek approval well before any students matriculate at a new or relocated campus or site. The Commission will work with all institutions following these definitions and protocols to ensure that the USDE has the approvals and information from the Commission the USDE needs.

(Please note that this information pertains solely to physical places at which the institution offers instruction. It does not pertain to distance delivery of instruction unless the delivery of instruction is provided to students at a physical location that meets any of the definitions noted below.)

### DEFINITIONS

#### **CAMPUS (also known as a branch campus)**

- A campus is geographically apart and independent of the main or home campus of the institution.
- A campus should have all or most of the following five attributes:

**Offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential;**

*Campuses offer at least one, but typically multiple, degree programs.*

**Is permanent in nature;**

*Campuses typically have a permanent physical structure. A hotel, another college's campus, or a short-term leased office space is not regarded by the Commission as a permanent location.*

**Has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization;**

*Campuses typically have a body of faculty associated with that facility. That body of faculty should have some responsibility for the oversight of curriculum at the facility. It may also have responsibility for development of curriculum there and/or shared responsibility for development of curriculum across the institution. Campuses typically have an administrator or administrative team on site that oversees operations at the facility.*

**Has academic resources and support services for students that include library, laboratories, business operations, admissions, advising, and registrar/records maintenance housed on this location;**

*Campuses typically provide academic resources, advising and other services to support students attending that facility. Campuses may also have their own accounts receivable, human resources, and other functions supporting the business and personnel at that facility.*

**Has its own budgetary and hiring authority;**

*Campuses typically have designated budget lines, which the campus administration has some input into creating. Campuses may have primary responsibility for their own hiring although such hiring may be subject to institution-wide policies and procedures.*

- How does your institution currently identify the location to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE)? Is it as a branch campus or as an additional location? If it is designated as a branch campus to USDE, it must be designated as a campus to the Commission.

**SITE**

- A site is a place where instruction is taking place and students can do one or more of the following: 1) complete 50% or more of the courses leading to a degree program; 2) complete a full degree program (degree site); or 3) complete 50% or more of the courses leading to a Title IV eligible certificate.
- A site also includes physical locations where students can complete a degree they began at another institution (known as a degree completion site) even if the degree completion program provides less than 50% of the courses leading to a degree program.
- There is no base or threshold number of students (e.g. 100 students) or distance (e.g. one mile) from the main campus necessary for a physical site to qualify as site under

this definition. A site may have five students or five hundred students and be five miles or five hundred miles from the main campus.

- A site typically does not have a full range of administrative and student services on site staffed by the facility's personnel but rather such administrative and student services may be provided from the home or other campus.
- A site may provide access to instruction *requiring* students to be present at a physical location that receives Interactive TV, video, or online teaching (these become a site when 50% or more of an online or other distance delivery program is available through these methods at that site).
- How does your institution currently identify the location to the USDE? Is it as an "additional location", which the USDE generally defines as a location at which more than 50% of a program is offered? (For more information, consult your institution's financial aid office or the USDE website at [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov).) If it is designated as an additional location to the USDE, it probably should be designated as a site or degree site to the Commission.

## **COURSE LOCATIONS**

- At a course location students can only complete less than 50% of a degree program.
- Course locations may include places where high school students receive college instruction through dual enrollment arrangements.
- Course locations do not include places that offer only non-credit courses.

(Note that Study Abroad sites are not to be reported to the Commission except that campuses, sites, and course locations outside the U.S. where foreign nationals receive instruction are to be reported to the Commission and require prior approval by the Commission.)

## **SEEKING COMMISSION APPROVAL**

### **CAMPUSES**

Institutions planning to establish a new campus or new branch must submit a change request to their assigned Commission staff liaison for processing and Commission approval at least three months before beginning to matriculate students at the campus. The change request should follow the format specified in Chapter Seven of the **Handbook of Accreditation**. All change requests to establish new campuses **MUST** include a detailed business plan for each campus. Institutions may submit an institution-wide business plan, but in such a situation they should include a separate section for the new campus. If Commission approval to open a new campus is based on review by staff or by an Evaluators' Panel, those affected institutions must have a focused evaluation visit to the new campus within six months of its approval.

Institutions will be asked to review their campus information in the Commission's database at the time of the Commission's Annual Institutional Data Update ("AIDU") but may not make non-editorial changes in that information; they must report any other changes to the Commission as directed in the Annual Update and may need to file a change request to make substantive changes in that information.

***Institutions moving or relocating a campus will need to seek approval as for a new campus.***

(SEE Commission Policy 3.2(d)3, CHANGES IN EDUCATIONAL SITES, subsection #1.)

## **SITES**

Institutions planning to establish a new site or move an existing site must seek Commission approval through one of the following review protocols:

**REGULAR REVIEW.** An institution submits a change request for one or more new or relocated sites or for program changes at already-approved sites to its staff liaison. The change request should follow the format specified in Chapter Seven of the **Handbook of Accreditation**. The institution should submit the change request at least three months (six months if it is a first off-campus site) before it plans to matriculate students at the site. The staff liaison will designate the specific review mechanism for the change request, which may be a staff review, evaluators' panel review or focused evaluation visit. An institution establishing any of its first three sites must either have a focused on-site evaluation visit and team recommendation before Commission approval or, subsequent to the approval, a site confirmation visit at the site within six months after the opening of the site if the review prior to approval is handled by the staff or an evaluators' panel. Typically an institution's request for its first site will be reviewed through a focused evaluation visit. The Institutional Actions Council will review and make approval decisions regarding requests for new sites that are submitted through the Regular Review process.

**STREAMLINED REVIEW.** Some institutions may have access to a Streamlined Review process. These institutions have been formally designated on the Statement of Affiliation Status as having such access. The Higher Learning Commission's Streamlined Review process enables such institutions to add new sites and modify existing sites using the MACRO (<http://macro.hlcommission.org>) web application.

An institution must file a formal request to receive this designation for review of future sites. To be eligible to apply for Streamlined Review, institutions must have the following attributes:

- three or more approved active off-campus sites ;
- tested experience in creating and managing multiple sites;
- a mission supporting the frequent opening or closing of degree sites over the course of two academic years;
- no stipulation on the institution's Statement of Affiliation Status restricting Commission approval of sites, nor can the institution's future development of off-campus sites be restricted by any state agency ; and

- good standing with the Commission (e.g., no significant HLC monitoring affecting site administration and no sanctions within the last five years).

The Commission will review all requests for Streamlined Review designation from eligible institutions through a focused evaluation on-site at the institution. Focused evaluation teams may recommend approval of the streamlined designation only if the institution demonstrates a “proven record of educational and administrative oversight of such sites and has the capacity to extend that oversight to other new sites.” The Institutional Actions Council will review and make approval decisions regarding recommendations for streamlined review designation. Every five years in an institution’s evaluation cycle with the Commission, it will review the continued appropriateness of the designation either as a part of the institution’s Comprehensive Evaluation or during its Multi-Site Evaluation.

An institution that has been approved for access to Streamlined Review will be provided by the Commission with a password to access MACRO. The Streamlined Review Process has the following features:

- up to a combination of 5 sites may be added or changed within a single MACRO submission; each “batch” submitted incurs a Staff Recommended Change charge (\$650 for AY 2008 – 2009) which will be billed to the institution.
- HLC staff will review the New Degree Site and other sections of the Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) to validate alignment of the request from the institution and review other information in the MACRO submission.
- if recommended for approval by the staff, the requests will be forwarded on approximately a monthly cycle to the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) for review and approval and to the Board for validation.
- requests that are NOT approved after Streamlined Review will be forwarded to the staff liaison, and the institution will need to follow the procedures for Regular Review, as explained above.

An institution should plan to file its request for approval of new or relocated sites at least 90 days before matriculating students at the site. The Institutional Actions Council reviews and approves all requests for new sites that are submitted through the Streamlined Review process.

***Institutions moving or relocating a site will need to seek approval as for a new site according to one of the processes noted above. |***

*Note that the U.S. Department of Education is currently reviewing the Commission’s approach to approval of sites (i.e., Additional Locations). Until that review is complete, the Commission will not accept further applications for Streamlined Review designation.*

Institutions will be asked to review their degree site information in the Commission’s database at the time of the Commission’s AIDU but may not make non-editorial changes in that information. If institutions have the designation for Streamlined Review, they may report changes in that information through the MACRO reporting mechanism. If the information provided is substantive (e.g., relocation of a site, etc.), Commission staff must review it and

recommend its approval to the Institutional Actions Committee. If institutions do not have the designation for Streamlined Review, they must report such information to their respective staff liaison who will inform them whether the change requires the filing of a formal change request. The Institutional Actions Council must review and decide whether to approve any substantive changes in institutions' sites regardless of whether the institution has sought approval for the change through the Streamlined or Regular Review Process.

(SEE Commission Policy 3.2(d)3, CHANGES IN EDUCATIONAL SITES, subsection #2 and 3.a.)

#### **SPECIAL NOTE ON NEW PROGRAMS**

***The Commission expects that institutions will be offering programs at sites that they already are approved to offer at the main or a branch campus or at another site. Institutions planning on initiating a program new to the institution at a new or existing site or campus must contact their staff liaison to determine whether that program may need approval.***

#### **COURSE LOCATIONS**

The Commission reviews and approves certain course locations:

- Five or more courses in states other than the state of the main campus;
- Five or more courses at an international location.

Institution submit a change request for one or more course locations as specified above to its staff liaison. The change request should follow the format specified in Chapter Seven of the **Handbook of Accreditation**. The institution should submit the change request at least three months before it plans to matriculate students at the course location, thus allowing sufficient time for Commission review and approval.

Institutions may open and close course locations in their home state without specific, prior approval from the Commission unless the institution has a Stipulation limiting such activity but **MUST** report the number of such operational locations on the AIDU.

(SEE Commission Policy 3.2(d)3, CHANGES IN EDUCATIONAL SITES, subsection #3.)

For more information about approval of off-campus instructional sites, please contact your institution's staff liaison or Mike Kane, Assistant Director for Quality Assurance at ext. 139.

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