

# Multi-location Visits

## Information for Institutions and Peer Reviewers

### Background

Institutions with three or more active additional locations are required to undergo a multi-location visit in Year 3 and Year 8 of the Standard and Open Pathways. The visit is conducted by an HLC peer reviewer and involves a representative sample of the institution's additional locations. The purpose of the multi-location visit is to confirm the continuing effective oversight by the institution of its additional locations (see HLC policy [Monitoring of Substantive Change \[INST.G.10.030\]](#)). In some cases, institutions undergoing rapid expansion will host multi-location visits more frequently than the five-year intervals.

HLC policy regarding multi-location visits stems from U.S. Department of Education regulations on the recognition of accrediting agencies. Recognized accreditors are required to visit at reasonable intervals a representative sample of additional locations of institutions that operate at least three such locations ([34CFR §602.22](#)).

[HLC's Glossary](#) defines an additional location as:

A physical facility that is geographically separate from the main campus of an institution and within the same ownership structure of the institution, where instruction takes place and it is possible for students to do one or more of the following:

- Complete 50% or more of the courses in educational programs leading to a degree, certificate or other recognized educational credential.
- Complete 50% or more of a degree completion program (even if the degree completion program provides less than 50% of the courses leading to the degree).

An additional location may qualify as a branch campus under circumstances that meet the definition of a branch campus.

There is no threshold number of students necessary for a facility to qualify as an additional location.

There is no minimum distance from the campus necessary for a facility to qualify as an additional location.

An additional location typically does not have a full range of administrative and student services staffed by the facility's personnel. Such services may be provided from the main campus or another campus.

A facility may provide access to instruction requiring students to be present at a physical location that receives interactive TV, video or online teaching. It is an additional location when 50% or more of a distance delivery program is available through one or more of these modalities at that facility. Note: This requirement does not apply for locations in which there is a general computer lab that students might use for distance delivery courses, except for additional locations that are correctional facilities.

A correctional facility where instruction takes place according to any of the 50% thresholds identified above is an additional location even if such instruction takes place primarily through distance education or correspondence courses at that location.

An additional location may have the status of open or closed.

An additional location that is open may have the status of active or inactive. An additional location has active status when students are enrolled at the location. Its status is inactive when students are not

enrolled at the location. The status of an additional location can change between active and inactive without approval from HLC. However, a location may only be classified as inactive with no student enrollment at the location for a maximum of two consecutive years. At that point, HLC requires the institution to close the location.

## Additional Location Sampling Process

A multi-location visit to an institution will include a representative sample of the institution’s additional locations that is selected by HLC staff. A minimum of two locations will be evaluated as part of the multi-location visit. This enables HLC to determine whether the institution’s oversight is consistent across locations. The sample will be chosen based on the total number of active additional locations an institution has and the geographic distribution of its additional locations. HLC staff will also consider relevant characteristics of the additional locations, as well as the institution’s approach to instruction at additional locations, as described in the institution’s Institutional Update submissions, applications for additional locations or access to the Notification Program for Additional Locations, and other sources.

### Sampling Factors

#### 1. Total Number of Additional Locations

Figure 1 indicates the size of the sample based on the number of additional locations an institution has in operation. The total number of locations visited may be higher depending on other factors considered in selecting the sample.

#### 2. Geographic Distribution of Locations

HLC staff will map the additional locations that an institution operates and ascertain how best to develop a representative sample on the basis of geography. An institution with a national footprint of additional locations should anticipate that the multi-location visit will cover representative regions of the country and different states in each region. For institutions with additional locations in the same state, the sample may be based on the distance of the location from the main campus or the distribution of locations in urban or rural areas.

#### 3. Characteristics of Additional Locations

If an institution operates additional locations that serve specific student populations (e.g. high schools, correctional facilities, regional centers) or offer specific programs, HLC staff will try to ensure broad representation of such locations in the sample to be visited.

#### 4. Approach to Off-Campus Instruction

Some institutions, particularly those that operate many additional locations, plan off-campus instruction around certain models, such as a cohort delivery model. HLC staff will take such information into account in selecting the sample list. HLC staff may also consider student complaints, the Institutional Update, or other information about institutional locations in identifying the final samples.

Figure 1. Sample Size Based on Total Number of Active Additional Locations

Number of Active Additional Locations	Number of Locations To Be Visited
3–5	2
6–10	2–3
11–20	3–6
21–40	6–10
41–70	10–12
71–100	12 or more <i>Sample may be larger based on distribution of locations.</i>
More than 100	At least 15% of locations <i>Sample will likely be larger due to other factors considered.</i>

# Mechanics of the Visit

## Before the Visit

### Institutional Notification

HLC will notify an institution required to host a multi-location visit the summer before the academic year in which the visit will take place. The notification will include:

- A list of the representative sample of additional locations that will be evaluated.
- A request that the institution affirm all additional locations that will be evaluated will be active in the upcoming academic year, with students enrolled and present on-site.
- A request that the institution designate a Multi-location Visit Coordinator, who will serve as the primary contact throughout the process and will make logistical arrangements as requested by the peer reviewer. Typically, that person will be the coordinator of off-campus education, an administrator for one or more of the additional locations, or the Academic Dean.

### Confirmation of Additional Locations

The Multi-Location Visit Coordinator will be responsible for ensuring that all additional locations selected in the sample will be active with students enrolled at the time of the visit. If any of the additional locations will not be active, the coordinator should work with HLC to update the institution's additional location records. Once the records have been updated, HLC will reapply the sampling protocol and identify any new additional locations to be visited. Please note: Institutions may not modify the additional locations selected for the visit without prior HLC approval.

### Scheduling the Visit

HLC will assign one peer reviewer, specially trained to evaluate additional locations and branch campuses, to visit all additional locations selected for review. In rare instances, HLC may determine that additional peer reviewers are needed.

HLC will provide the peer reviewer's contact information to the institution's Multi-Location Visit Coordinator. The peer reviewer will contact the coordinator and arrange a mutually convenient date(s) to visit the additional locations within a timeframe identified by HLC. The institution should select dates and times when the additional locations are operational and students and

faculty members are available on-site. In some cases, that time may be an evening or weekend. The peer reviewer is responsible for making travel and hotel arrangements.

### Institutional Report

The institution must complete the [Multi-Location Visit Institutional Report](#) and submit it to HLC and the peer reviewer at least 30 days prior to the date that the first location will be visited. The report should address in some detail the planning process for developing and implementing new additional locations, curriculum and instructional design processes, instructional staffing and support, student support services, and evaluation and assessment. The institution may include brief evidentiary materials if they are necessary to support information included in the report.

HLC will send the peer reviewer the Institutional Status and Requirements Report for the institution, as well as materials from past evaluations that identified challenges at the institution related to their additional locations. The peer reviewer should review all the materials in preparation for the visit.

## During the Visit

The visit to each additional location is typically 4–5 hours in length, depending on the complexity of the location and the availability of students and faculty members.

The multi-location visit typically begins with a phone call or video conference meeting with the main campus administrators responsible for coordinating the educational programs at the main campus with similar activities at the additional location. Following that, the peer reviewer will hold in-person meetings with the location administrator, academic leaders (if there are such individuals), and some faculty and students.

The peer reviewer will meet with the following individuals and groups:

- The dean, director or administrator with overall responsibility for the management of the additional location.
- The individual(s) at the home campus who are responsible for quality control at the additional location and for ensuring consistency between the location's academic contents and that of the home campus.
- The dean, director or other person responsible for academic quality at the additional location.

- The dean, director or other person responsible for student services at the additional location.
- The individual(s) responsible for library services and other academic support resources.
- A few faculty members.
- A small group of students.

The peer reviewer will need to review the physical facilities and access to academic and support services, and tour classrooms, labs and library facilities, as well as computer or Internet access points. Ideally, the peer reviewer will be able to observe a portion of a class at the additional location during the visit.

### **Notification Program for Additional Locations: Special Considerations**

Some institutions in HLC's membership have been granted access to the Notification Program for Additional Locations. An institution with access to the Notification Program must demonstrate that it continues to meet the standards for the program, and the peer reviewer will determine whether access to the Notification Program continues to be appropriate.

Institutions may retain access to the Notification Program if the following conditions are met:

- The institution has at least three active additional locations.
- During the previous three years, the institution has not been subject to HLC monitoring for issues related to the quality of instruction at its additional locations and campuses, or to the oversight of its additional locations and campuses.
- During the previous three years, the institution has not been placed on Notice, Probation or issued a Show-Cause Order by HLC.
- The institution has no other HLC or other legal restrictions on additional locations and/or programs offered off campus.
- The institution has appropriate systems to ensure quality control of locations that include clearly identified academic controls; regular evaluation by the institution of its locations; a pattern of adequate faculty, facilities, resources and academic/support systems; financial stability; and long-range planning for future expansion.

More information about the [Notification Program](#) is available on HLC's website.

## **After the Visit**

### **Peer Reviewer Evaluation**

The peer reviewer documents their findings and recommendations using the [Multi-Location Visit Peer Review Report](#).

The peer reviewer should consider the pattern of evidence presented during the multi-location visit. In particular, the peer reviewer should determine whether each location demonstrated that it has sufficient fiscal and administrative capacity to provide quality academic programming. Was there adequate leadership on site? Could on-site administrators or personnel access necessary resources? Was there any evidence that problems identified by faculty or students are not addressed in a timely fashion? Were evaluation and assessment procedures robust, and did they inform planning processes?

If there is not sufficient evidence that the institution has appropriate oversight of the additional location(s), then the peer reviewer should contact the institution's HLC staff liaison to discuss the issues and determine whether a recommendation for monitoring is appropriate.

If there are some issues at the additional location(s) but they are not significant, then the reviewer can suggest opportunities for improvement that the institution can take into consideration without requiring HLC monitoring.

If the institution is in the Notification Program, the peer reviewer should also evaluate the institution against the Notification for Additional Locations Approval Form, included in the report template, to determine whether continued access to that program is appropriate. If there are concerns about oversight of off-campus instruction or the fiscal or administrative capacity at additional locations, it might be appropriate to deny continued access to the program and return the institution to regular review.

The peer reviewer must submit the report to HLC within 30 days after the last additional location is visited. The peer reviewer is not required to send the institution a draft report for corrections to errors of fact. In writing and submitting the report, the peer reviewer should:

- Respond to each question on the report template completely, providing specific facts or examples to explain and support the conclusions.
- Indicate on the report template whether monitoring is recommended and the nature and timing of that monitoring; explain the rationale for the

recommendation; and suggest further follow-up that the institution can take into consideration as applicable. Note that if monitoring is recommended for an institution in the Notification Program, the reviewer should also recommend that the institution be removed from the Notification Program.

### **Institutional Response**

HLC will send the institution a copy of the written evaluation approximately 14 days after the peer reviewer's report is received. If monitoring is recommended, the institution may submit a response to the written evaluation within 14 days. If monitoring is not recommended, the institution does not need to submit an institutional response. However, if the institution has concerns or corrections to the reviewer's report, it may send a letter to HLC identifying those concerns. HLC will append the letter to the final report in the institution's administrative record.

### **Decision Making**

If the peer reviewer recommends monitoring, the review materials—including the institutional report, peer reviewer report and, if applicable, institutional

response—will be sent to the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) for final action. If no monitoring is recommended, the IAC will accept the final report without an official action.

## **Records**

The written evaluation report and, if applicable, institutional response or letter, will be added to HLC's administrative record for the institution and will be shared with the next comprehensive evaluation team and other evaluation teams as deemed appropriate.

## **Institutional Fees**

Fees for the multi-location visit are outlined in HLC's Dues and Fees Schedule at [hlcommission.org/dues](https://hlcommission.org/dues).

### **Questions?**

Contact [accreditation@hlcommission.org](mailto:accreditation@hlcommission.org)