



THIRD-PARTY COMMENTS

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) seeks comments on an institution from third-party constituencies, such as students, alumni and community members, prior to any review process that involves evaluating whether an institution is in compliance with certain federal requirements. When such a review takes place, institutions are required to publicize the review and notify constituencies that they can send comments to HLC. The third-party comment process allows these institutional constituencies to provide the HLC evaluation team with their perspectives on the institution.

WHEN COMMENTS ARE REQUESTED

HLC collects third-party comments during every comprehensive evaluation or any other review process involving a [Federal Compliance Review](#), which confirms that the institution is in compliance with certain federal requirements. A Federal Compliance Review is conducted as part of the following evaluations:

- Comprehensive evaluations that take place during the cycle of each Pathway for Reaffirmation of Accreditation:
 - Standard Pathway: Year 4 and Year 10
 - AQIP Pathway: Year 8 and possibly Year 4 (if required by HLC or requested by the institution)
 - Open Pathway: Year 10
- Comprehensive evaluations for institutions applying for candidacy or initial accreditation
- Sanction visits for institutions on Probation or Show Cause
- Certain advisory visits

INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

REACHING CONSTITUENCIES

To decide how best to solicit third-party comments, the institution should first identify its constituencies. These groups should include students, parents, alumni, taxpayers, donors, community members and groups, and local businesses, and may include others.

The institution should then decide the most appropriate media to reach each of these constituencies. Institutional websites, social media, email blasts, local newspapers and alumni magazines are typically appropriate choices. The notice should reach all constituencies, but should not incur any unreasonable expense to the institution.

PUBLISHING THE NOTICE

Institutions should publish the notice at a time when it is most likely to reach the institution's key constituencies. This should be no later than two months prior to the on-site visit by HLC's peer review team. The notice should invite the public to send comments to HLC and provide HLC's contact information. It should also include the purpose and dates of the visit, as well as the institution's accreditation status with HLC. The notice should specify that comments must be submitted no later than four weeks before the start of the visit. See the sample notice on page 2.

Note: Institutions preparing for a comprehensive evaluation visit for candidacy should include HLC's prescribed language in making this announcement:

(Name of institution) currently holds no status with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

(Name of institution) has initiated the process of seeking candidate status with HLC. A team of peer reviewers representing HLC will conduct a comprehensive evaluation on (date) to determine whether (name of institution) should be awarded candidacy. The team's recommendation is subject to additional levels of HLC review and decision making. Therefore, no further information will be provided until HLC's Board of Trustees makes a final decision on the award of candidacy. The award of candidacy does not assure the eventual award of accreditation.

SUBMITTING NOTICES TO HLC

The institution is required to provide copies of the notices it publishes to HLC as part of its Federal Compliance Filing. The notices should be submitted at Appendix Y of the filing.

REPORT OF THIRD-PARTY COMMENTS

HLC will compile the comments and send them to the evaluation team and the institution three weeks prior to the visit. HLC will also review and forward comments received after the deadline and during the visit, as third-party comments are an important part of the comprehensive evaluation process.

HLC will ensure that commenters are aware that comments are typically forwarded to the institution and the evaluation team with identifying information intact. In some cases, HLC staff may redact the identifying information of the commenter or summarize the comment.

The evaluation team and the institution should review the comments prior to the visit. During the visit, the team will discuss any comments received with the institution and will follow up on comments as necessary. The team will remark on the third-party comment process in the appropriate section of the team report.

At no time will the third-party comment process be used to investigate or resolve issues between individuals and institutions. In some cases, information received through the comment process is more appropriate for the complaints process; in such

SAMPLE NOTICE

John Dewey College is seeking comments from the public about the college in preparation for its periodic evaluation by its regional accrediting agency. The college will host a visit on November 7–9, 2016, from a team of peer reviewers representing the Higher Learning Commission. The team will review the institution's ongoing ability to meet HLC's Criteria for Accreditation. John Dewey College has been accredited by HLC since 1967.

Comments must be in writing and must address substantive matters related to the quality of the institution or its academic programs.

Submit comments to HLC at hlcommission.org/comment or mail them to the address below. All comments must be received by October 10, 2016.

Public Comment on John Dewey College
Higher Learning Commission
230 South LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500
Chicago, IL 60604-1411

cases, the HLC staff will notify the commenter that his or her comment will be considered as a complaint.

TIMELINE

At least two months before the visit: The institution publishes the third-party comment notice. The notice should be published at a time when it is most likely to reach students and other key constituents.

Four weeks before the visit: Comments from third-party constituents and the institution's Federal Compliance Filing (including copies of its published notices) are due to HLC.

Three weeks before the visit: HLC sends comments to the institution and to the visiting team.

During the visit: The team and the institution should discuss any comments received or the process by which the institution solicited comments.