

HLC Substantive Change Fact Sheet
Academic Effectiveness
July 2021

Source: [Higher Learning Commission](#)

Description: In order to maintain accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission, institutions must apply for prior approval or notify the HLC of certain types of institutional changes (referred to as substantive change hereafter). This document serves as a quick guide for understanding the types of changes most likely to occur at UNC. Additional types of substantive change are described in the link posted above. This document reflects updates to HLC policy based on [new federal regulations](#) that went into effect on July 1, 2020.

The Assistant Provost for Academic Effectiveness, Kim Black, serves as UNC's HLC Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO). Questions about substantive change policies should be directed to her. **When prior approval is required, the HLC process may take up to nine months to complete.** Changes requiring prior approval may not be implemented until approval is granted, and they will not be retroactively approved. For this reason, it is critical that the ALO be informed of any potential substantive changes as early as possible. The ALO is responsible for managing all communications between the university and the HLC regarding substantive change and other accreditation topics.

Type of Change	Notes
New academic degree programs	<p>The HLC requires institutions to complete an <i>Academic Degree Program Inquiry Form</i> to determine whether prior approval is required. Note, this includes new majors and concentrations (specializations, tracks). Prior approval is typically required for new programs that are a significant departure from program's previously included in the institution's accreditation. Examples include new programs at a degree level or new discipline not previously offered by the institution, plans to acquire specialized accreditation, and plans to hire additional faculty with new expertise.</p> <p>Notify ALO as part of new program proposal process.</p>
New certificate programs	<p>The HLC requires institutions to complete a Certificate Program Screening Form for any new certificate program. Prior approval is required for any credit-bearing certificate in which 50% or more of the courses were developed for the program and not derived from courses in existing academic programs.</p> <p>Notify ALO as part of new program proposal process.</p>
<p>Changes to existing academic programs*</p> <p>*new requirement based on changes to federal regulations</p>	<p>The HLC requires notification of any of the following changes to existing HLC-approved academic programs: a change of 25% or more to the content of the program in a single change or in aggregate since the most recent accreditation review (June 2019 for UNC); a change in the method of delivery; development of customized pathways or abbreviated or modified courses to accommodate prior learning experience.</p> <p>Notify ALO when changes meeting one of the three categories occur.</p>

Type of Change	Notes
Cancellation or suspension of any academic program	<p>Prior approval may be required under certain circumstances. When prior approval is required, the institution must submit a provisional plan for teaching out students in the program.</p> <p>Notify ALO as early as possible in the program cancellation or suspension process.</p>
Opening or relocating an additional location	<p>Prior approval required. May also require a site visit from the HLC. The review period ranges from three to six months upon submission of application.</p> <p>Notify ALO prior to any contracts being finalized or students admitted.</p>
Closure of additional location	<p>Prior approval required in some circumstances. For locations that offer one or more full degree or certificate programs, institutions must submit a provisional plan for teaching out students at the location.</p> <p>Notify ALO as early as possible in the decision process.</p>
<p>Contractual Arrangements*</p> <p>*The HLC no longer requires notification or prior approval for consortial agreements between accredited institutions.</p>	<p>Arrangement in which the institution outsources some portion of its academic programs to an unaccredited institution or a corporation or other entity. Academic services may include instruction, oversight of the curriculum, assurance of consistency and quality of instruction, expectations for student performance, and/or establishment of academic qualifications for instructional personnel.</p> <p>The following contractual arrangements do not apply: contracts for goods and services such as food services and parking lot management; internships that do not include a formal instructional component; the contractual partner provides only books, supplies, equipment, or a platform for internet-based instruction; the contract provides only for the articulation or transfer of courses that are transcribed as transfer credit and not the outsourcing of courses carrying academic credit from the institution.</p> <p>The HLC requires institutions to complete a screening form for all contractual arrangements involving the outsourcing of academic programs. Prior approval is required when 25% or more of an academic program is outsourced to the other party. When 50% or more of an academic program is outsourced, such programs are not eligible for Title IV federal assistance. The HLC will only approve programs involving outsourcing of 50% or more of the program in rare and exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>Notify ALO as part of contracting process. The timeline for approval is 90 days upon receipt of a complete application.</p>