



Glossary of Commission Terminology

This glossary provides brief, basic definitions of some of the terms used in the *Handbook of Accreditation*. Readers should refer to the appropriate sections of the *Handbook* for fuller discussion of the terms. The definitions apply to the work of The Higher Learning Commission.

Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) – Program for maintaining affiliation with The Higher Learning Commission based on the principles of continuous improvement.

accreditation association or commission – A nongovernmental body established to administer accrediting procedures.

accreditation, institutional – Accreditation that evaluates an entire educational organization and accredits it as a whole.

accreditation, national – A type of institutional accreditation primarily for religious colleges and universities, private trade and technical schools, private business colleges, and colleges focusing on health-related fields, as well as organizations offering programs primarily through distance delivery and home study.

accreditation, regional – A type of institutional accreditation provided by seven recognized accrediting commissions of the six regional accrediting associations.

Accreditation Review Council (ARC) – Commission decision-making body consisting of sixty or more experienced consultant-evaluators and public members who participate in the review processes of the Commission.

accreditation, specialized (also called **program accreditation**) – Accreditation of units, schools, or programs within a larger educational organization or for the sole program or area of concentration of an independent, specialized institution.

accredited status – Status that indicates that an educational organization meets the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation.

Annual Report on Organizational Information and Operational Indicators – Online report completed annually by affiliated organizations.

AQIP – See Academic Quality Improvement Program

Association – The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Board of Trustees – The governing body of the Commission, made up of fifteen to twenty-one members of the Commission and representatives of the public.

candidacy – Preaccreditation status, which does not carry membership in the Commission.

Commission – See The Higher Learning Commission

Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI) – The commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools that accredits elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools that do not award degrees, the Department of Defense Schools operated overseas for the children of American military and civilian personnel, and the Navajo Nation schools.

comprehensive visit – Team visit to an organization seeking accreditation or continuation of accreditation.

consultant-evaluators – Members of the Commission’s peer review corps who serve in the evaluation processes of the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality.

contingency report – Report required when pending changes may have a significant effect on an organization.

- Core Components** – Subcategories of the Criteria for Accreditation that are reviewed in order to determine whether an organization meets the Criteria.
- Criteria for Accreditation** – The framework for determining an organization’s accreditation.
- Eligibility Process** – The process by which the Commission determines whether a non-affiliated organization is ready to begin the candidacy process.
- Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet (EVSS)** – A document prepared for an educational organization undergoing evaluation that includes basic information about the visit or Evaluators Panel and identifies the team members.
- Evaluators Panel** – Panel made up of three peer reviewers to consider an organizational change request.
- Examples of Evidence** – Illustrative examples of the types of evidence an organization might present in addressing a Core Component of a Criterion for Accreditation.
- focused visit** – A team visit that occurs between comprehensive evaluations to examine specific aspects of an organization.
- The Higher Learning Commission** – The commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools that accredits degree-granting higher education organizations.
- Institutional Action Council (IAC)** – Decision-making body of the Commission made up of twenty experienced peer reviewers and six representatives of the public.
- legal authorization** – The official act of a state department of education or other recognized agency having official authority certifying that a school, institute, college, university, or specialized program of studies complies with minimum legal.
- monitoring report** – Report that signals that a situation at an organization should change.
- Obligations of Affiliation** – The responsibilities that organizations affiliated with the Commission are required to fulfill in order to retain their affiliation.
- Operational Indicators** – Data on an organization that form the basis of the organization’s Annual Report.
- Organizational Profile (OP)** – Demographic information, program information, student performance data, and information on campus sites and distributed education offerings that take the place of the Statement of Institutional Scope and Activity.
- PEAQ** – See Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality
- Peer Review Corps** – The group of professionals who serve in accreditation processes.
- Preliminary Information Form (PIF)** – Documentation of an organization’s ability to meet the Eligibility Requirements submitted by an organization considering affiliation with the Commission.
- probation** – A public status signifying that conditions at an accredited organization that jeopardize its ability to meet the Criteria for Accreditation.
- Professional Data Form** – Summary of basic information about the background and experience of a consultant-evaluator.
- Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ)** – The traditional program for maintaining accreditation with The Higher Learning Commission.
- progress report** – Report that provides specific information from an organization, monitors its progress in coping with changes or challenges, or gives evidence that institutional plans came to fruition as expected.
- Public Disclosure Notice** – A public notice that the Commission may prepare to explain a particular situation at an affiliated organization.
- self-study process** – A formal, comprehensive, institution-wide process of self-examination in preparation for a scheduled comprehensive evaluation.
- self-study report** – A document prepared by an organization that describes the process used to conduct the self-study, evaluates what it learned, and proposes what it intends to do with the knowledge. The report functions as the formal argument that the organization satisfies the Criteria for Accreditation.
- site visit** – A team visit to an off-campus site.
- staff liaison** – Commission staff member who serves as resource person for and liaison to an organization.
- Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS)** – An official document that summarizes the status of the organization with the Commission.
- team report** – Report that documents the findings and recommendation of the team that visited an organization on behalf of the Commission.