



ACADEMIC AFFAIRS GUIDELINES

Section 2:	Academic Programs and Curriculum: Guidelines and Procedures	
Title:	Program Change Notifications for HLC Accreditation	
Number (Current Format)	Number (Prior Format)	Date Last Revised
2.21		05/2021
Reference:	AAC Guideline 1.2 – Authority to Offer an Existing Common Course Request AAC Guideline 1.11 – Common Course Guidelines AAC Guideline 2.1 – Curriculum and Program Definitions AAC Guideline 2.3 – Substantive Program Modifications	
Related Form(s):	AAC Form 1.4.A – Existing Courses Minor Modification Form AAC Form 1.4.B – Minor Course Modification Annual Report Summary Form AAC Form 1.6 – Revised Course Request Form: Common Course AAC Form 1.7 – Revised Course Request Form: Unique Course AAC Form 1.12 – Institutional Curriculum Requests Form AAC Form 2.2.A – Minor Program Modification Form AAC Form 2.2.B – Minor Program Modification Annual Report Summary Form AAC Form 2.3 – Substantive Program Modification Form AAC Form 2.3.A – Institutional Program Modification Summary Form	

Purpose of Guideline

These program change reporting guidelines are intended to ensure that institutions of higher education in the Board of Regents system meet federal regulations. As of July 1, 2020¹, federal regulations required updates to the Higher Learning Commission’s (HLC) policy on notification of change which has subsequently led to an update of screening requirements for new programs and certificates and to new notification and approval processes for changes to existing programs. Although each of the institutions are individually accredited through HLC and responsible for maintaining their own compliance, this guideline provides guidance to ensure institutions are able to effectively track changes required for timely and appropriate accreditation reporting and documentation.

Program Change Notifications

- 1. Definition of a Program.** For the purposes of change notifications to the HLC and this guideline, institutions shall follow the federal definition of a program in that a program “...leads to an academic, professional, or vocational degree, or certificate, or other recognized educational credential...” as described in 34 CFR part 668, subpart O. Curriculum and program definitions are formally outlined in AAC Guidelines 2.1.

¹ <https://www.hlcommission.org/About-HLC/new-federal-regulations-for-accreditors.html>

- 2. Definition of Content.** For the purposes of change notifications to the HLC and this guideline, content will be defined as referring to a “program’s curriculum, learning objectives, competencies, number of credits required, or required clinical experiences.”² Content is NOT:
- Change in course names
 - Change of assigned course materials such as books or readings
 - Change in length of semester
 - Change in schedule, assessment, pre-requisites, admission requirements, grading policies
 - Change in departments or course prefixes
- 3. Categories of Approval or Notification.** The HLC requires notification and/or approval for the following types of program changes:
- New degree programs
 - New certificate programs
 - New or renewed contractual arrangements for academic programming
 - Development of customized pathways or abbreviated or modified courses or programs commonly referred to as Prior Learning Assessment
 - Changes to existing degree programs to include:
 - Change in method of delivery of the program
 - Addition of location for delivery of a program if 50% or more of a program will be offered at the new location
 - Aggregate change of 25% or more of the clock hours, credit hours, and/or content of a program *since July 1, 2020 or the institution’s most recent accreditation review whichever is most recent.*
- 4. Aggregate Change.** Aggregate changes to existing degree programs are based on the total number of credits for the degree. Changes to the program are calculated based on course level changes, course additions/deletions, and/or credit hour modifications. Each accreditation review resets the baseline for calculating the 25% aggregate change (contact the institution’s Accreditation Liaison Officer to determine the date of the last accreditation review). Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:
- When an undergraduate degree program that consists of 120 credit hours makes a cumulative change of 30 credit hours (25% of 120 credit hours) since the previous accreditation review, the institution would need to report that change to HLC.
 - When a 36-hour graduate program would need to report and seek approval for changes reaching 9 credit hours (25% or 36 credit hours) of change, the institution would need to report that change to HLC.

² <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-11-01/html/2019-23129.htm>

5. Non-Reportable Change. Changes to existing programs that are **not** reportable include the following:

- Changes in program or course title (provided there is no change in content)
- Changes in department where program resides
- Changes in course prefix (provided there is no change in content)
- Changes to minors which are not considered as required for a program
- Additions or deletions to courses within a designated list of electives within a program (select 6 credits from the following list), provided the total credit hours for the program remain the same
- Changes to pre-requisites which only change the order in which courses are taken rather than courses required for the program

6. Reportable Change. Changes to existing programs that **are** reportable include the following:

- Changes (additions or deletions) to courses required in a major, degree, or certificate
- Changes (additions or deletions) to credit hours required in a major, degree, or certificate
- Changes in credit hours for a required course
- Changes to required clinical experiences
- Changes in content for a required course (significant change to content or learning outcomes required for the course)
- Changes in learning outcomes for general education goals which would subsequently affect all undergraduate degree programs

7. Examples of Change. Faculty make changes to existing courses and programs via SDBOR curricular processes using standardized forms. Institutions shall track changes made to existing programs via those forms for reporting and compliance with accreditation expectations. Below are examples of changes to existing programs that contribute to the 25% aggregate change (recognize that the percentage change will be dependent on the number of credits required for the degree so graduate programs and certificates with fewer credit hours will be impacted at a higher percentage than changes to undergraduate programs requiring 120 credit hours):

- A 3 hour course is added to or removed from a program's list of required courses. This would be a 3 hour change over 120 total credits for an undergraduate degree for a 2.5% change to the program.
- A 3 credit hour course is removed from a graduate program's list of required courses reducing the credit hour of the program from 35 to 32 credit hours. This is a 3 hour change over 35 credits or 9%.
- A reportable change is made to a 3 credit required course and then three years later another reportable change is made to that same course. If the institution has not undergone an accreditation review between course changes, the impact to the program is 3 credits for each change with an aggregate total of 6 credits.

- A 3 credit hour course is overhauled to include changes to a significant portion of the course description and/or learning outcomes. This is a 2.5% change of a 120 hour undergraduate program.
- Credit hours for a required course are reduced from 3 credits to 2 and the course description is changed to reflect the significant change in content. The credit hour change is 1 hour, but the content/course description is for the 2 credit hours remaining. The total impact for this change is 3 credit hours (2.5% change on 120 credit hour degree program).
- A 3 credit hour course is changed to a 2 credit hour didactic course with a 1 hour clinical or lab credit. Course descriptions change as a result. This is a 4 hour impact (reduction in credit for 1 hour, change to course description for 2 hours, addition of lab/clinical credit for 1 hour).
- A course is changed from one level to another (200 to 300) or is added to a dual listing (exists as 400 and becomes dual listed as 500), the change will equal the credit hours and the percentage of the program represented by the course. In the dual listing example, only the graduate program would be subject to the change since the course existed at the undergraduate level.
- A required course in a program is removed and replaced with a new course. If both courses were 3 credits, this results in a 3 hour impact.
- If a program requires a minor, changes in the credit hours for the minor from 20 credits to 15 credits results in a 5 credit hour impact or a 4% impact to a 120 credit undergraduate program.
- Any changes to System General Education Requirements (SGR) goals or learning outcomes passed by the board have the potential to impact reportable changes to all undergraduate programs across all BOR institutions.

Procedural Items

1. Each institution shall report program change notifications (submission of screening forms and substantive change documentation) for curricular items that are captured via the AAC forms referenced in Related Form(s) above.
2. Each Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) shall submit change notifications and/or screening forms to HLC within 30 days of implementation.

SOURCE:

AAC May 2021.