

## ***CSC 2013-2017 HLC Reaffirmation Timeline Summary of Process***

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this summary is to record the process for CSC's HLC Accreditation Reaffirmation, our reflections on this process, and recommendations. These can be referenced in sharing our experience with other institutions, and in planning and preparation for future CSC HLC report cycles beginning with the 2021 HLC Year 4 Virtual Review.

### **SUMMARY OF PROCESS**

#### **2013 – 2014**

Held HLC - Planning & Processes Meetings (Fall 2013): Cross-function group (HLC Planning & Processes Task Force) met a few times to discuss beginning preparations. Attendees discussed contacting peer institutions that had piloted new HLC Assurance Argument system for Pathways to gain insight from their preparation experiences.

Two deans were tasked to meet with non-academic units and a unit assessment form was created for those units to begin documenting their assessment methods. A group was tasked for research and documenting identified CSC Affiliated Organizations.

Contacted Peer Institutions who were Pathways Pioneers Schools to discuss their accreditation process (Sept/Oct 2013) – Held phone interviews with representatives from Black Hills State, Metropolitan, and Pittsburgh State. The video conferencing session with Pittsburgh State included discussion of their experience and training on the new Assurance Argument system for a group of individuals from the initial HLC Planning & Processes Task Force.

HLC Planning & Processes Task Force members (Joel Hyer, Margaret Crouse, Terie Dawson, Malinda Linegar, Sherry Douglas, Susan Schaeffer, Joby Collins and others) created and presented an HLC Planning & Processes a template for an Executive Summary of 2017 HLC Accreditation Reaffirmation project March 24, 2014. The template included information on actions taken from fall 2013 through March 2014 with evaluation of actions taken. Identified next steps to be taken including attendance at HLC Conference, collection of a "few remaining" assessment reports, organization of all received documents into HLC criteria, and the initiation of drafting the Assurance Argument and final Quality Initiatives reports.

Annual HLC 2014 Conference: Designated faculty, administrators, and staff attended the 2014 Annual HLC Conference.

#### **2014-2015**

Formed HLC Organizing Team: During the summer of 2014 a small core HLC organizing group formed to begin discussing the process, timelines, and campus-wide involvement. This team was made up of the VPAA (Charles Snare), Dean with HLC responsibility (Joel Hyer), Librarian (Pam Newberg), Project Coordinator Academic Affairs (Joy Omelanuk)\*, and IR Director (Terie Dawson). During summer 2015, lead writer for Assurance Argument (Kathy Bahr) and researcher for the Assumed Practices document

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(Margaret Crouse) were added to the organizing team. The newly hired Director of Assessment joined the committee in fall 2015.

\*Project Coordinator for Academic Affairs later transitioned to Assessment & Accreditation Coordinator (AAC) position.

**Began Collecting Evidence in Earnest:** Along with the evidence document for CSC Affiliated Organizations and the first completed non-academic unit assessment forms, collection of potential evidence for the Assurance Argument report began and files were initially sent to Joel Hyer as dean with primary responsibilities for HLC reaffirmation. As lead writer, Kathy Bahr, began working on the project in spring 2015 reviewing the Assurance Argument Criterion and other reports due, and identifying additional evidence required which continued throughout the writing process.

**Naming, Organizing, & Storing Evidence Files at LLC:** Pam Newberg, librarian, was designated the “gatekeeper” for collected evidence files; she began working on file naming conventions, archival location, and file organization ultimately posted on an HLC SharePoint Site.

**Identified and shared CSC Organization Involvement – HLC Coordinating Team** identified those campus-wide to be involved in the reaffirmation process and created a visual graphic for communication purposes beginning fall 2015 along with a graphic chart summarizing the project timeline.

**Lead Assurance Argument Writer and Researcher contracted:** CSC contracted two recently retired CSC employees with a wealth of experience and institutional knowledge to take lead roles in the HLC reaffirmation process. These individuals with key roles had the time to focus on this project.

A retired CSC faculty member (Kathy Bahr) was contracted in the summer 2015 as the lead writer for the Assurance Argument who was retained throughout the remainder of the reaffirmation process through June 2017. Writer conferred with organizers and conference network; reviewed criteria, CSC document (meeting minutes, information from contacted pilot institutions, early evidence files, etc.) & processes spring 2015.

Knowing that she was to be contracted, Kathy began preparing for the role during her final AY 2014-2015. She conferred with organizers and conference network; reviewed criteria, CSC documents (i.e. meeting minutes, information from contacted pilot institutions, early evidence files, etc.) and processes during spring 2015. This individual had a previous background as a technical writer, a long tenure as CSC faculty, had served a year as CSC Interim Dean of Arts and Sciences.

A former CSC academic dean (Margaret Crouse) was contracted in the summer of 2015 to assist with research and preparation of the Assumed Practices document that supported preparation of the Assurance Argument, SARA, and Federal Compliance documents. This individual has also served CSC as full time faculty, and adjunct faculty since retiring.

**Assurance Argument Access and Role Assignments:** Early summer 2015 the HLC Coordinating Committee selected two system administrators with Terie Dawson as primary/lead and Joel Hyer as secondary. The Committee selected the remaining individuals and their roles to round out the permitted 15. Charles Snare (CSC liaison to HLC) notified HLC that Terie was the primary system administrator. Terie met the tutorial requirements, sent in the names of the initial participants and roles; HLC sent out emails to each

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individual with temporary passwords (June 5). The lead writer and evidence file gatekeeper began entering narrative and uploading selected, collected evidence files into the system once a process was decided; participants with reading privileges periodically reviewed draft narrative and the final report. The role of primary system administrator passed on to Joel Hyer after Terie left (Spring 2016) with Joy Omelanuk as secondary, eventually with Joy Omelanuk as primary A.A. System Administrator. Participants in the assurance argument system were rotated in-and-out as needed during the remainder of the process (including consultants) with the required 15 maximum ensured at the lock down.

Initial Assurance Argument Writing/Review Process Proposed: Joel Hyer (Dean/HLC responsibility) and lead AA writer met June 5, 2015 to discuss and propose a plan/timeline for the writing and review process for the Assurance Argument. They proposed to follow that of the Criteria 1 – 5, and it was suggested that President Rhine would write or at least sign the Introduction. Kathy proposed pdf files be used for certain documents instead of URLs so that evidence links could launch specific, related pages. Writer suggested that the photo for the Introduction page (only one allowed) support the CSC mission statement emphasizing a diverse student body, and student centered learning. These proposals presented at the HLC Organizing Team meeting June 8, 2015. Through experience with process during the following months, the writing/reviewing process began to change and evolve over time. Writing for criteria overlapped while waiting for required information and feedback from area experts.

Process/Timeline Created: The IR Director (Terie) and Project Coordinator (Joy) created an initial Process/Task timeline spreadsheet for work on the accreditation reaffirmation process working on the Assurance Argument report, Quality Initiatives report, Federal Compliance report, SARA document, and Assumed Practices document. The HLC Organizing Team used this for planning & tracking through December 2015. (*replaced in 2016*)

Federal Compliance Report (FCR) Committee Plan: The committee met in Fall 2015 and in December shared with the campus a document outlining their task/report timeline, and member responsibilities per report sections.

Initiated regular communication across organization – VPAA Update letter created and distributed monthly; campus-wide meeting updates; VPAA small group meetings; updates with Cabinet and Executive Council; information share with Faculty Senate, Student Senate, Dept. Chairs, NCSC Board of Directors, and web-posted CSC College Relations articles.

Attended 2015 HLC Conference in March 2015: A CSC group including faculty members, the VPAA, deans, and the lead Assurance Argument writer attended the HLC conference to gain knowledge about the Pathways procedure and report expectations. Made contact with a potential consultant for CSC.

Identifying and addressing early issues with the process: In addition to the writing/reviewing and timeline tracking issues mentioned previously, the writer identified difficulty with the evidence file naming conventions, with some evidence file titles not matching actual content, and missing evidence files. In attempting to locate some files they were discovered missing from their assumed storage areas as well as the evidence file SharePoint site.

HLC consultant Fall 2016 – Process & document review & campus visit- PLANNING. Dr. Jan Smith contacted about potential consultation and visit. CSC explained what was desired and Dr. Smith

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submitted proposal and quote. Assessment & Accreditation Coordinator (AAC) worked with Dr. Smith and appropriate CSC staff through process resulting in approved contract for service. AAC worked with Dr. Smith and HLC Organizing Team on process and document draft review. AAC worked with HLC Coordinating committee on scheduling on-site meetings for October.

### **2015-2016**

**Assumed Practices Committee Meetings:** The Assumed Practices meetings chaired by the Director of Assessment (Bob Adebayo) launched during fall 2017. The contracted researcher/writer, Margaret Crouse, for the Assumed Practices document was included and regularly report findings and provided status updates to this committee and to the HLC Coordinating Committee (formerly "Organizing" Committee).

**SARA Document Committee:** The SARA Committee meetings chaired by the Director of Assessment, Bob Adebayo, launched during fall 2017. Initial meetings and tasks involved determining the purpose of the document, if it was to be submitted and in collecting CSC data in support of the SARA Guidelines.

**FCR Committee Update and Leadership Change:** The committee provided a first draft of the report with identified data yet to be collected and narrative to be written. They continued their work to meet a set February 2017 final report deadline.

In May 2016, co-chair Sherry Douglas took over as the committee lead after the CSC departure of co-chair Terie Dawson who had initially led the committee.

**Quality Initiatives Report Committee:** The committee led by Dean Hyer worked on completing the report to meet the August 31, 2016 submission deadline. This is the first report to be submitted.

**Communication campus-wide held fall 2015 & continues through 2016:** VPAA Updates, Dr. Snare held a number of HLC meetings to provide overview of HLC Reaffirmation requirements and process to campus groups; overview presented during December all campus meeting. Summary handouts regarding HLC Assurance Argument, Federal Compliance, SARA, and Assumed Practices provided at the various meetings.

**Fall 2016 HLC Consultant October Campus Visit:** Dr. Jan Smith provided valuable insight and advice during group and individual meetings during her campus visit. This was based upon her experiences as an HLC peer reviewer and trainer for the new Assurance Argument System; her institution's experience as a pilot working with the new Assurance Argument Report and System, and her review of & discussions about the CSC process prior to her campus visit.

**Committee restructuring:** During Spring 2016, based on discussions with and recommendations from Dr. Smith during fall 2016 campus visit, the HLC Coordinating Committee added to its members all academic deans, and the AVP of Student Services. It also restructured the Assurance Argument Task Team identifying Criterion leads to focus on evidence & input gathering from area experts.

**Writing/Reviewing Assurance Argument:** Work continued gathering required data for narrative and evidence for Criteria 1-5 simultaneously from area experts. Information, data, and evidence files were submitted to lead writer for work on narrative. She input into the Assurance Argument System and sent

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the evidence files to the gate keeper for the evidence SharePoint site. The gatekeeper uploaded the selected evidence files to the Assurance Argument System for the writer to link to the narrative. Scheduled and unscheduled reviews of the Criteria narrative continued within the system and using exported pdf files. Review comments, missing information and questions were sent to the lead writer.

HLC Consultant SP 2016 Document Review & Campus Visit - PLANNING: The HLC Coordinating Committee decided to contract a second consultant to review the work that had progressed on the HLC related report documents, and to provide guidance moving forward. Director of Assessment, Bob Adebayo, and the AAC contacted Dr. Douglas Eder about potential consulting for CSC involving review of document/report drafts and advisement. AAC worked with Dr. Eder & HLC Coordinating Committee to arrive at an approved contract for services. Services included review of documents/reports drafts, providing feedback to questions, and an on-site visit for consultation.

CSC HLC Conference attendance, April 2016: Designated individuals including faculty, administration, HLC Coordinating Team members, and Federal Compliance report committee members attended the annual HLC conference in Chicago. Prior to trip, plans were made for attendance coverage at various topic sessions. Discussions among attendees were held during the trip, session notes were shared, and debriefing meetings were held afterwards at CSC to discuss needs for proceeding in process based on what was learned during conference.

HLC Consultant Review of Document Drafts (SP 2016): Following CSC attendance at HLC 2016 Conference, a document review schedule was finalized and followed in sending Dr. Eder document drafts and providing him access to the CSC Assurance Argument System for review. All document drafts were reviewed with feedback from Dr. Eder prior to his May campus visit. Question and answer exchanges took place and feedback was considered/issues addressed with continuation work on documentation.

Restructuring the Project/Task Timeline spreadsheet as an improved project management tool: Working together, the VPAA and AAC revised the Process/Task Timeline spreadsheet to identify HLC Accreditation Reaffirmation process tasks specifying scheduled and completion dates noting external and internal responsibilities. This project timeline was constantly updated and used for planning and tracking throughout the remainder of the reaffirmation process. It was a key reference for committee agendas and action item tracking that CSC can reference in future planning and training for the upcoming reporting cycle.

Change in FCR Committee leadership: The Federal Compliance Report Committee co-chair (Sherry Douglas, Assoc. VP of Student Services) took over the chair lead after Terie Dawson (IR Director) left CSC. The Federal Compliance Report Committee completed its 1<sup>st</sup> draft during spring 2016 with ongoing review and updates throughout the remainder of the year. The Assurance Argument lead writer, Assumed Practices researcher, and Federal Compliance Report Committee chair worked to make sure related information was being reported the same in all documents.

HLC Consultant Campus Visit May 2016: Dr. Eder met with various groups and individuals following a pre-planned meeting itinerary addressing the report documents and preparation for the peer reviewer on-site visit. He offered observations and experience-based suggestions, and fielded questions from

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attendees. Dr. Eder continued an informal relationship with CSC following the contract continuing to assist and follow our progress.

### **2016 – 2017**

Review, restructuring and adding committees & task teams AY16-17: During fall of AY 2016/2017, the Coordinating committee added to its members the CIO, new IR Director, and Interim Director of Assessment (replacing the former Director). Other committees and task teams were reviewed and some revised along with adding specific task teams.

Quality Initiatives Report submission to HLC (due August 31, 2016): Dean Hyer completed the final CSC Quality Initiatives Report draft, it was reviewed by designated CSC committees and individuals, finalized and submitted to HLC August 30, 2016 submission to HLC.

Pres. Rhine & VPAA submit the Quality Initiative Report to HLC August 30, 2016. CSC receives peer review acceptance of and positive comments regarding Quality Initiative Report Sept. 21, 2017. Pres. Rhine sent a campus-wide message congratulating those participating in the process & the Sept. VPAA Update included the results.

Committees review for AY16-17: Existing committees were reviewed with appropriate adjustments, and new committees and task teams were formed/launched such as the Campus-wide Assessment Committee, Professional Online Standards Committee, the HLC Virtual Resource Room Team, and the Communication & Logistics Task Team.

Regular communication across organization: CSC used various opportunities to communicate with the campus about the ongoing process. These included the monthly VPAA Update; communication and meetings with different committees, Executive Council, Cabinet, Faculty & Student Senate leadership, departments, the NSCS Board of Directors, and all CSC employees via members of the HLC Coordinating Committee and administration. College Relations articles were posted to the CSC website, and in *The Eagle* student paper by its staff.

Ongoing review, feedback and updates to documents: CSC used regularly scheduled opportunities such as committee, Cabinet, Executive Council, Department, and campus meetings as ongoing informational and work sessions for reviewing report drafts, identifying missing data, collecting data, identifying errors, etc. during the months leading up to the final report submissions. This was also done in campus-wide preparation for the peer review team campus visit in mid-April 2017.

CSC Web Site Freeze: Determined that there would be a CSC website freeze except for designated information that required updating. CSC website freeze initiated with process outlined for necessary web updates during the freeze period until May 1, 2017, reviewed and approved by Cabinet and Executive Council. This method was selected so that the website screenshot evidence pdf files matched what was on the web site as much as possible during the off-site and on-site review by the peer review team.

Public Notification for Comment: During October 2016, CSC (Alex H., Jon Hansen) posted notices inviting the Public to send comments to HLC about CSC for accreditation reaffirmation. Posted information was reported to HLC by deadline, and comments were sent to CSC prior to the April 2017 peer review team visit.

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**Student Opinion Survey:** In mid-January, HLC sent CSC the Student Survey Link & the February dates during which the survey was to be open to CSC students. CSC notified Students of the survey, dates and URL link. HLC sent CSC and the Peer Review Team the results prior to their campus visit.

**Prepared to demonstrate SARA Guidelines met:** The SARA Committee worked to write this document to its purpose reviewing ongoing updates on SARA. Mary Jo Carnot attended a Fall 2016 SARA Conference to gain more knowledge about SARA requirements in order to assist. The document was drafted, reviewed by designated groups such as Executive Council and Cabinet, and completed. It was ready for the HLC Peer Review should it have been requested. It will also assist the Online Professional Standards Committee moving forward.

**Prepared to demonstrate Assumed Practices Requirements met:** The Assumed Practices researcher/writer (Margaret Crouse) completed the document with appendices with input from committees, individuals and records across campus. She brought identified issues to the attention of the HLC Coordinating Committee and other appropriate individuals. The document went through final review, was cross-checked with information within the Federal Compliance and Assurance Argument reports.

**Proofreading & revisions/updated files June – November 2016 prior to CSC web freeze:** The Cabinet, Executive Council, and others proofread report drafts, and as many corrections and revisions were made as possible by October 31 for the November 1 web freeze. (Proofreading, review input and corrections/revisions continued into March prior to the report lock down.)

**Federal Compliance Report Submission:** Upon request of VPAA, the Assurance Argument System Administrator (Assessment & Accreditation Coordinator) uploaded report files provided by Federal Compliance Committee Chair to the Assurance Argument System on February 22, 2017. Coordinator confirmed with HLC Federal Compliance contact that report was uploaded and ready for submission at time of Assurance Argument Report March submission deadline.

**Assurance Argument Introduction Preparation:** The HLC Coordinating Committee discussed suggestions from our lead writer for Introduction content and photo based on HLC suggestions/restrictions, and discussions with our consultants. Ultimately, lead writer finalized the Introduction to make it one voice with the Assurance Argument Report showing a student example of what we presented in the Assurance Argument presenting evidence of CSC meeting our mission.

**Final Assurance Argument review:** Final reviews were made by our consultant Dr. Eder (2<sup>nd</sup> contract), the Cabinet and Executive Committees, the VPAA, the lead writer and researcher, evidence gatekeeper, and the Assessment & Accreditation Coordinator with final corrections & modifications made prior to the Assurance Argument System submittal.

**Assurance Argument Submission:** Upon request of VPAA, the Assurance Argument System Administrator (Assessment & Accreditation Coordinator) submitted the Assurance Argument Report within the HLC system (locked) on 3/24/2017. System Administrator ensured that only the 15 limit of participants were active in the system when it locked. The narrative and evidence files can be viewed by these participants while locked, but nothing can be done to the report.

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Archival/Backup Copies: For the President's office, the Assessment & Accreditation Coordinator and assessment part time staff printed and organized binders for the Assurance Argument and Federal Compliance Reports containing the printed reports with all linked evidence documents. The A&A Coordinator backed up organized report and evidence files to three flash drives, one for the President and two for the VPAA. The hard copies were delivered to the President's office April 6/2017. This was done not only for archival purposes, but to have a backup access to the documentations should unexpected system downtime prevent online access to the Assurance Argument System or the CSC network.

Plan & Coordinate for April 2017 HLC visitation: The Communications & Logistics Team first met in Sept. 2016 to begin preparing increased campus-wide communication throughout the AY 2016/2017 and preparation for the Peer Review Team campus visit.

HLC provided CSC information regarding the Peer Review Team including backgrounds and contact information. VPAA worked with Peer Review Team Chair to organize itinerary for CSC campus visit. VPAA communicated ongoing draft revisions of campus visit itinerary to campus with the final version distributed the 1<sup>st</sup> morning of the campus visit.

The HLC file gatekeeper (Pam Newberg) sent out an email campus-wide notifying that the final submitted Assurance Argument was posted to a SharePoint site accessible for review.

HLC campus visit (4/24/17-4/25/17): Alex Helmbrecht (CSC College Relations), a member of the Communications & Logistics Team, transported peer review team members from the Rapid City airport to Chadron April 23, 2017. Peer reviewers passed on an opportunity to an introductory meeting that afternoon preferring to get acquainted with each other before the initial site visit April 24. The campus visit on April 24 & 25 was conducted following an itinerary prepared the Peer Review Team with input from CSC HLC liaison Charles Snare, VPAA. All campus employees and students had an opportunity to visit with at least one member of the Peer Review Team during with open forums being well attended by a good cross-section of faculty, staff, and students.

### **RESULTS**

CSC met each of its report deadlines with successful results from the Peer Review Team and HLC. The institution received very positive reviews with its continued accreditation.

### **REFLECTION**

CSC realized that the reaffirmation process was an opportunity to identify what and how we were doing – what we were doing well, what were our weak points, and overall how we could improve going forward. The reaffirmation process evolved over time with additional knowledge, input from consultants, and trial-and-error.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS (Lessons Learned)**

- START EARLY
- Establish a core coordinating group
- Create a project plan and tracking method



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- Involve the entire campus & Board of Directors during the process, celebrating, and reflecting on the process/outcome
- Take advantage of institution's employees who are HLC peer reviewers
- Communicate to small groups and large groups with support of a variety of media and informational materials
- Seek outside consultation and feedback
- Evaluate and restructure as needed along the way
- Be open and honest when identifying strengths, weaknesses, and problematic areas requiring resolution or improvement during the preparation process. Address by resolving immediately that which can be, and work on a plan to resolve that which cannot be prior to the report deadline
- Be honest in reporting

### **APPENDIX**

Key process supporting documents used for campus-wide preparation and communication updated during the process as appropriate (sample revision dates shown):

- Organization Involvement Chart (*December 2015*)
- 2017 Reaffirmation Process Timeline Graphic (*August 2016*)
- AY 2016/2017 Final Committee Listing (*November 8, 2016*)
- Master Academic Plan 2014-2018 Brochure (*January 2016*)
- Campus-wide Communication Handouts Assurance Argument Criteria Overview, Assumed Practices Overview, & Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (*August 2015*)
- Federal Compliance Committee for Reaffirmation Plan/Task Assignments (*Fall 2015*)
- CSC Quality Initiative handout (*December 2015*)
- Campus Communication Preparing for the HLC Campus Visit and An HLC Campus Visit Primer for CSC Staff (*March 2017*)
- Itinerary for Peer Review Team Campus Visit (April 23, 2017)
- 2016/2017 Process Timeline and Tracking Spreadsheet (May 30, 2017)