



HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

RESOURCE

# ASSURANCE SYSTEM MANUAL

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# OVERVIEW OF THE ASSURANCE SYSTEM

The online Assurance System facilitates the creation, submission and review of materials for HLC comprehensive evaluations, Assurance Reviews, Systems Appraisals and Comprehensive Quality Reviews. The system has been developed to allow institutions to file their materials with no additional technology. It can be accessed using most major web browsers at [assurance.hlcommission.org](https://assurance.hlcommission.org).



**IMPORTANT:** For Mac users, the Assurance System works best with Chrome.

## INSTITUTIONAL TASKS

### USER ROLES

Access to the Assurance System for each institution is limited to 15 active individual accounts. There are three types of roles that may be assigned to users in the Assurance System. All three types will count toward the allowable total of 15 active users at any time.

**Note:** System Coordinators may inactivate and reactivate user accounts during the writing process in order to allow additional people to participate in the creation of the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio. Only active user accounts count toward the limit of 15 users.

### CONTRIBUTOR

A contributor has access to edit the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio and upload documents to the Evidence File, Federal Compliance and Forms tabs.

### SYSTEM COORDINATOR

There can be up to three active System Coordinators. It is recommended that each institution designate a minimum of two individuals in this role to assure access to the functions specific to System Coordinator duties. A System Coordinator has the same access as a contributor, but can also:

- Edit the Introduction page.
- Create additional users.
- Edit user information and modify user role assignments.
- Delete users and set users as inactive.
- Assign sections of the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio to individual users and set due dates.
- Lock the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio for early submission, if desired.



By keeping their writing teams small, institutions can provide all members access to the Assurance System and the work can be completed within the system. It is important to have one individual designated to be in charge with very clear delineation of what each person can and cannot do within the system.

## READ-ONLY USER

A read-only user has access to the Evidence File, Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio, Federal Compliance and Forms tabs, but cannot edit content or upload evidence. This user role may be a useful way to provide individuals outside of the writing team with access to the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio for internal review.

# GAINING ACCESS TO THE ASSURANCE SYSTEM

## ACCESS FOR SYSTEM COORDINATORS

- System Coordinators must view the training webinar for Assurance Reviews or Systems Portfolios at [hlcommission.org/assurance-system](http://hlcommission.org/assurance-system).
  - To activate the System Coordinator's account, send an email to [assuranceadmin@hlcommission.org](mailto:assuranceadmin@hlcommission.org) that includes:
    - Institution name
    - Name of System Coordinator
    - Email address of System Coordinator (must be an official institutional email address)
- HLC will send the System Coordinator an email with his or her login credentials.

## ACCESS FOR CONTRIBUTORS AND READ-ONLY USERS

Contributors and read-only users need to be entered manually by the System Coordinator (see Managing Users). The system will automatically generate an email to these new users with login information.



**IMPORTANT:** If a user doesn't receive the welcome email after being added to the Assurance System, take the following steps to troubleshoot the issue:

- Make sure that these messages are not going to the user's junk, spam or clutter folders.
- Ask the user's IT department to whitelist the sending email address, [hlcassurance@support.campuslabs.com](mailto:hlcassurance@support.campuslabs.com).
- Ask the user's IT department to verify that the email was never received by the institution's mail server. If that is the case, contact HLC at [assuranceadmin@hlcommission.org](mailto:assuranceadmin@hlcommission.org) for further troubleshooting.

## CHANGING AN ACCOUNT PASSWORD

When logging into the system for the first time, users will be prompted to change their password. Users may also change their password later on by clicking on the down arrow beside the username in the top right corner. If a user forgets his or her password, there is a link on the Assurance System homepage to reset it.

# MANAGING USERS (SYSTEM COORDINATORS ONLY)

## ADDING USERS

The designated System Coordinator will grant access to other users at the institution. To add an individual:

- Click on the Administration tab.
- Click on the New User option in the top right corner.
- Enter the email address of the individual.
- Click the Check button to check whether the person already has an account.
- If the person does not have an account, the system will ask for the first and last name of the individual.

6. Select the relevant assigned role of System Coordinator, Contributor or Read Only from the drop-down menu.
7. Click the Save button.
8. The system will generate an automatic email to the person entered in the system providing them with login information.

## MODIFYING THE ROLE OF A USER

System Coordinators may edit user information or change user role assignments at any time. To modify the role of a user:

1. Click on the Administration tab.
2. Click “Edit User” for the individual needing modification.
3. Use the drop-down menu to select the new role to assign to the user.
4. Click the Save button.



### IMPORTANT: ASSURANCE SYSTEM COORDINATOR CHANGE

Institutions should not update the role or status of their designated Assurance System Coordinator in the system. If the designated coordinator changes, email HLC at [assuranceadmin@hlcommission.org](mailto:assuranceadmin@hlcommission.org) with the new coordinator’s name, title and institutional email address. The request can be made by the institution’s current coordinator, Chief Executive Officer, Chief Academic Officer or Accreditation Liaison Officer.

## DELETING USERS AND CHANGING A USER’S STATUS TO INACTIVE

Users can be deleted from the system or have their status changed to inactive at any time. Deleted or inactive users do not count toward the allowable total of 15 users. Deleting a user will remove them from the system permanently, but inactive users can be reset to active. Institutions may inactivate and reactivate users in order to allow additional people to access the system.

To change the status of a user:

1. Click on the Administration tab.
2. Click “Edit User” for the individual needing modification.
3. Click “Delete User” to remove an individual from the system or uncheck the “User is Active” box to change a user’s status to inactive.
4. Click the Save button.

## NAVIGATING THE ASSURANCE SYSTEM

When first logging into the system, users will be taken to their Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio Dashboard, which shows the status of and provides links to each section of their institutional narrative.

To navigate within the system, click on any of the tabs along the top of the webpage. The tabs link to the different sections of the system, and may differ depending on a user’s role or their institution’s pathway or accreditation status:

- **Introduction**  
The System Coordinator can provide a brief summary of the institution in this section. Institutions on the AQIP Pathway will include their Category Introductions in this section as well. This section is visible to all users, but can only be edited by a System Coordinator.
- **Evidence File**  
This section is where users can see documents provided by HLC, upload their own documents and add links to certain resources for use in the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio. All users can view this section, but only System Coordinators and contributors may add, edit or delete evidence.
- **Assurance Argument**  
Institutions on the Standard or Open Pathways, or those in candidacy or on sanction, will have an Assurance Argument tab. This is where users can enter and review their Assurance Argument narrative. All user roles have access to this section.
- **Systems Portfolio**  
Institutions on the AQIP Pathway will have a Systems Portfolio tab. This is where users can enter

and review their Systems Portfolio narrative. All user roles have access to this section.

- **Criteria View**

Institutions on the AQIP Pathway will have a Criteria View tab. This is a read-only view of the Systems Portfolio Category responses cross-walked to the Core Components of the Criteria for Accreditation. This allows the institution to verify that it has provided evidence for all Criteria and Core Components.

- **Federal Compliance**

This tab will be visible if the institution is required to submit Federal Compliance documentation during its next review. When applicable, this tab and its associated contents become available approximately six months prior to the lock date.

- **Forms**

This tab will be visible if the institution is required to submit any forms during its next review. When applicable, this tab and its associated contents become available approximately six months prior to the lock date.

- **Addendum**

This tab will be displayed if the peer review team requests additional documents from the institution after the evaluation has begun. It allows the System Coordinator to upload the requested files while the rest of the tabs remained locked to editing. (Note: This tab will only be visible if it is activated by the team chair during the evaluation.)

- **Administration**

This tab is only visible to System Coordinators. It is where the coordinator can add new users or edit exiting user profiles.

- **Help**

This section provides a link to additional information about using the Assurance System and an online form for submitting questions to HLC. It is visible to all users.



**IMPORTANT:** A help mechanism is also incorporated throughout the system: a question mark (“?”) icon next to most functions designates where the user may click for additional information.

## CREATING THE INTRODUCTION

The introduction area of the site allows for a brief description of the institution. Institutions on the AQIP Pathway should provide their Institutional Overview and Category Introductions in this section (see the [Systems Portfolio and Appraisal Overview](#) for more information). This is the one place in the Assurance System that institutions may opt to include a photograph or image to personalize the page. Only a System Coordinator can edit the introduction, although all other system users may view this page. The text in the introduction does not count toward the total word count for the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio. However, it is recommended that this section be kept short as it is designed to provide a brief introduction only.



Institutions writing an Assurance Argument may consider inviting the institution’s president to write the introduction so he or she has a voice in the institution’s materials.

### ADDING TEXT

1. Click on the Introduction tab.
2. Click on the Edit button.
3. Type directly in the text box or copy and paste information from an external document.

If copying and pasting from an external document with extensive formatting, use the Paste as Text option to avoid formatting errors and then reformat as needed within the text box.

To eliminate formatting problems with text that has been copied and pasted from an external document, highlight the relevant text and click the Clear Formatting button.

4. The system allows for simple formatting using the buttons located at the top of the text box (See pages 12–13).

5. After the text has been added and/or formatted, click the Save button. Note: the system does not have an autosave feature, so be sure to save your work before leaving the page.
6. To resume adding text, click on the Edit button.

## ADDING AN IMAGE

Institutions are not required to include a photograph or image in the Introduction, but this is the only place in the system where an image may be added. The position of the image is fixed, and it will appear at the top right corner of the page.

To add an image:

1. Click on the Edit button.
2. Click the Select Image button.
3. Highlight the desired file on your computer and click the Open button. Note: The photograph or image must be .JPG or .JPEG format, and the file size must be less than 100KB. Any image larger than 200px x 200px will be sized to fit.
4. Click the Save button.

## MANAGING THE EVIDENCE FILE

The Evidence File houses documents that are referenced and linked to in the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio.

### TYPES OF EVIDENCE

There are three main categories of evidence in the Evidence File.

#### HLC Documents

Approximately six months before the institution's lock date, HLC will upload to the Evidence File material that may be used in the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio. This material will be saved in a folder called "HLC Documents." Documents in this folder cannot be deleted or modified.

To view documents in the HLC Documents folder:

1. Click on the HLC Documents folder.
2. Click on the file name within the folder.
3. Select "View File" and the file will open in a separate window.



**IMPORTANT:** The files in the HLC Documents folder are the only ones the peer review team will be able to access under the Evidence File tab when conducting their review. All other evidence must be linked to the institutional narrative—the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio—in order to be visible to the team.

### URL Sources

There are only six pieces of evidence that can be submitted as website URLs. These are:

- Course catalog
- Faculty handbook
- Staff handbook
- Student handbook
- Class schedules
- Faculty roster

### PDF Files

This is the main category of evidence within the Assurance System. Other than the six allowable URL sources, **all evidence must be uploaded as PDF files.**

- Before uploading PDF files, a file folder system will need to be created to organize the documents.
- Word, Excel, or other types of documents that the institution wishes to provide as evidence must be converted into PDF files.
- Websites that are not included in the allowable URL sources will need to be captured as PDF files. This is to ensure that the information is available to the review team in the event that the website is changed, and it allows for the evidence to be archived. (Most web browsers allow users to save webpages as PDF documents.)

## ADDING ALLOWABLE URL SOURCES

To add a URL source:

1. Click the Evidence File tab and scroll down to the URL Sources section.
2. Click the Edit button next to the piece of evidence you would like to add.
3. Type or paste in the relevant URL.
4. Click the Save button.
5. To ensure the correct link was added, click on the View button.
6. The URL may be changed at any time by clicking the Edit button.



**IMPORTANT:** Reviewers will not be able to view URL sources unless they are referenced in the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio narrative.

## CREATING FOLDERS

There is no limit on the number of folders and subfolders allowed. To create an institution's file folder system:

1. In the file manager, click the name of the folder under which you would like the new folder to appear.
2. Click on "New Folder" and type in a title for the folder.
3. Click the Save button. Folders will appear in alphabetical order. (Note: a newly created folder may initially appear at the bottom of the list. Click away from the Evidence File tab and back again to refresh the file manager display.)

### Managing Folders

- **Add a subfolder:** Select the parent folder before clicking "New Folder."
- **Rename a folder:** Select the folder and then click the Rename button.
- **Delete a folder:** Select the folder and click the Delete button.

## UPLOADING DOCUMENTS

There is no limit on the number of files that can be uploaded into the Assurance System, but there is a maximum individual file size of 50MB. Files greater than 50MB must be split into smaller files and uploaded separately. Note: HLC recommends keeping file sizes to 10MB or fewer, if possible, to minimize download times for the peer review team. If a web browser stalls while uploading a PDF, it is likely due to a large file size or slow internet connection.

To upload a PDF document:

1. Click on the folder name where the document(s) should be added.
2. Click the Browse button located in the right-hand sidebar of the file manager.
3. Locate the desired file, select it and click "Open." Multiple files may be added at once by holding down the Ctrl/Cmd key and selecting the desired files before clicking "Open."
4. Once a file is added, it will appear in the selected folder. Continue uploading files as necessary; they will appear in alphabetical order within each folder.
5. Once the evidence has been uploaded, view each file to ensure that the correct evidence has loaded properly. Click the file name and select "View File" from the toolbar that opens.

Files may be uploaded to the Evidence File at any point before the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio is locked for review. Once it has been locked, nothing new can be added to the Evidence File. During its evaluation, the peer review team may request additional documentation from the institution. In that case, the team chair will activate the Addendum tab in the system to allow the System Coordinator to upload the requested files (see Adding Documents to the Addendum Tab on page 17 for details). The Addendum tab is activated only if the team requests additional information and is not something that the institution can request.



There are numerous ways to organize documents in the Evidence File:

- By Criterion (for Assurance Arguments) or AQIP Pathway Category (for Systems Portfolios).
- By the organization of the institution. For example, the institution may create a folder for each major division of campus (e.g. Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, etc.) with subfolders to represent subdivisions under each area (e.g. under Academic Affairs subfolders included may be Academic Vice President, College of Arts & Sciences, College of Business, etc.).
- By major topics, such as planning, assessment, etc.

Library staff, especially an archivist, can provide valuable guidance in designing a folder system that works for the institution.

## MANAGING DOCUMENTS

The Evidence File includes a few additional tools for managing documents after they have been uploaded to the system. A file may be moved to a different folder by dragging and dropping the file name into the desired location. After dropping the file, a green banner will display at the top of the page indicating where the file was moved.

Clicking on a file's name will open a toolbar with the following additional options:

- **View References**  
This feature indicates where the file is referenced in the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio. If the file has not been referenced, it will show that no references currently exist.
- **View File**  
This feature will open the file in a separate browser window.
- **Replace**  
This will allow the user to replace a document with a newer version of the file. Any references to that evidence will be linked to the newer version of the file.

- **Rename**  
This feature changes the file name and can be performed at any time.
- **Delete**  
This will permanently delete the file from the Assurance System.

## CHECKING REFERENCES

All documents that an institution uploads to its Evidence File **must** be referenced in its Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio (see Writing the Institutional Narrative on page 10 for how to create those references). **This is extremely important:** reviewers can only access files that are linked in the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio. In addition, if an institution chooses to copy its Evidence File when it begins its next review cycle (see page 17), files that aren't linked in the narrative will not be included in the new version of the Evidence File.

The Evidence File displays at a glance whether all PDF files are referenced as sources for specific sections of the institutional narrative.

- If all files are referenced, the Evidence File displays a green check mark under the file manager.
- If one or more files are not referenced in the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio, an Unreferenced Files warning will appear and will indicate the number of files unreferenced. To view unreferenced files, click the View All button.

To permanently delete any unreferenced files, click "Select All," or select individual files, then click "Delete."

Click "Cancel" to exit the list of unreferenced files without deleting any documents.

Users can also check where individual files are referenced in the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio by clicking on the file name and selecting "View References" in the toolbar that opens.

**Note:** The Evidence File only checks if a document has been added to the source list for a section of the narrative. It does not indicate whether a source has been linked in the text of the narrative. Institutions should ensure that all the documents in each section's source list are linked in the narrative before locking the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio.

## TRACKING CHANGES TO THE EVIDENCE FILE

The Assurance System automatically keeps a log of all activity within the Evidence File. Click on the View Activity button above the file manager to see the name of the user who performed the activity, the date and time of the activity, and the action taken.

## TIPS FOR MANAGING THE EVIDENCE FILE

- Before uploading documents into the Evidence File, institutions should develop a file-naming convention. This will make it easier to find documents when linking files within the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio. Also, given that the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio has the potential to become a living document, a standard file-naming system will make it easier to update documents after the initial review has been completed.



Archivists or other librarians are oftentimes able to help develop a file naming convention that works best for an institution. One possibility is to include the office of origin, document title and date. Example: PRESIDENT\_University\_Strategic\_Plan\_2012.

- Consider adding a cover sheet to all files. Although HLC does not require these, it will give a uniform appearance to the documents and will provide a helpful orientation to the evidence for reviewers.
- Consider having just one person responsible for creating and uploading documents in order to keep the Evidence File organized and avoid duplication or accidental deletion of files.

## WRITING THE INSTITUTIONAL NARRATIVE

The institutional narrative differs depending on the institution's pathway designation. Institutions that are in candidacy, on sanction, or on the Standard and Open Pathways write Assurance Arguments, which are organized around HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components. Institutions on the AQIP Pathway write Systems Portfolios, which are organized around the AQIP Pathway Categories. Regardless of the type of narrative, the functionality of the Assurance System remains the same.

## USING THE DASHBOARD

The Assurance System will be preloaded with the Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components (for Assurance Arguments) or AQIP Pathway Categories and the related Subcategory questions (for Systems Portfolios). The narrative will be divided into sections by Core Component or Subcategory. The Dashboard view provides information on the state of the institution's narrative and can serve as a useful project management tool.

The Dashboard provides the following information about each section of the institutional narrative:

### Number/Title

These columns list the number and title of each section of the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio. Clicking on a section's title will open a page where the user can review or enter content.

### Status

The third column of the Dashboard displays a status indicator for each section. This is an internal indicator to be used by the institution to designate progress on the narrative. By default, each is set as Not Started. Other possible statuses include In Process, Ready for Review and Completed. At the top of the Dashboard is a legend that shows the meaning of each status icon. Hovering over an icon on the Dashboard also will show the meaning of the icon.

The status for any specific section can be changed by either a System Coordinator or a contributor within the Edit view:

1. Click on the title of the relevant section.
2. Click the Edit button.

3. Select the desired status from the Status drop-down menu.
4. Click the Save button.

### Due Date

This is an internal due date set by the System Coordinator and does not necessarily coincide with the due date of the entire Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio. When an item is overdue, an exclamation point will appear to the right of the due date. Note: it is not necessary to assign a due date if the System Coordinator prefers not to make use of this feature.

Only the System Coordinator has the ability to assign due dates. To set a due date:

1. Click on the title of the relevant section.
2. Click the Edit button.
3. Manually type the due date in the box located under Due Date, or click on the calendar and select the desired date.
4. Click the Save button.
5. To change the due date at any time, repeat the above steps and enter or select a different due date.

### Assigned User

The assigned user is the person at the institution responsible for creating the narrative for the assigned section. Multiple people can edit the narrative, but the assigned user has primary responsibility for their section. Other users can email the assigned user by clicking on his or her name in the Dashboard.

Only the System Coordinator has the ability to assign users. To assign a user to a section:

1. Click on the title of the relevant section.
2. Click the Edit button.
3. Select the assigned user from the drop-down list. All individuals granted access to the Assurance System appear on the list. If an individual's name does not appear, they first need to be given access to the Assurance System.
4. Click the Save button.
5. To change the assigned user at any time, repeat the above steps and select a different individual.

When the System Coordinator designates an assigned user, the user will be automatically sent an email with the assignment and the due date. Another email will be sent automatically if the System Coordinator changes the due date.

### Checked Out

This feature ensures that team members do not overwrite each other's work. If a user is editing a particular section, a purple checkbox icon will be displayed in the Checked Out column for that section in the Dashboard. Other users can see who has a section checked out by hovering over the checkbox icon.

System Coordinators can check in a section at any time. To check in a section that has been checked out:

1. Click on the title of the relevant section.
2. Click the Edit button.
3. Click the Check In button in the pop-up message that appears.

### Word Count

The Assurance Argument has a word count limit of 35,000 words for institutions on the Open Pathway and 40,000 words for institutions on the Standard Pathway, in candidacy or on sanction. The Systems Portfolio has a word count limit of 40,000 words.

The total running word count is displayed in the top right corner of the Dashboard. The last column of the Dashboard shows the word count for each section. (It is not necessary to equally distribute the recommended word allowance across all sections of the narrative.)

If the limit is exceeded, the word count will change to a red font but will not prevent users from adding more words to the Assurance System. Institutions should not exceed the word limit without checking first with their HLC staff liaison.

### Changing the Dashboard Display

The rows of the Dashboard may be sorted by number, due date, assigned user or word count. By default, the Dashboard is sorted by number in ascending order.

- To sort by due date, assigned user or word count in ascending order, click on the relevant column header.

- To sort in descending order, click again on the column header.
- To return to the original order, click on the Number column.

## NAVIGATING WITHIN THE ASSURANCE ARGUMENT OR SYSTEMS PORTFOLIO

- To open a Criterion or Category section, click on the title of the section on the Dashboard.
- Click on the purple arrows at the top left or right of the Criterion or Category section to move to the previous or next section of the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio.
- To exit a section of the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio, click on “Return to Dashboard.” (Note: a section must be checked in or closed before returning to the Dashboard view or navigating to any other tab.)

## ADDING TEXT

To add text to a section:

1. Click on the title of the relevant section and then select Edit. The item will be automatically checked out so that no one else can work on that section at the same time.
2. Type directly in the text box or copy and paste information from an external document.

If copying and pasting from an external document with extensive formatting, use the Paste as Text option to avoid formatting errors and then reformat as needed within the text box.

To eliminate formatting problems with text that has been copied and pasted from an external document, highlight the relevant text and click the Clear Formatting button.

3. The system allows for simple formatting using the buttons located at the top of the text box (see Editing Text).
4. After the text has been added and/or formatted, click the Save button. The system does not have an autosave feature, so be sure to save your work before leaving the page.

To exit the section, click on either “Check In” or “Close.” When selecting “Close,” the system will ask if the section should be checked back in. While the section is checked out, others may view the changes, but only the user who has checked the section out may edit it. To check in the section at a later date, return to the Edit view and select “Check In.”



Because the institutional narrative is so short, it is very noticeable if each section is written by a separate individual or team of individuals. Consider appointing an overall editor to ensure that the entire narrative is written in a consistent voice.

## EDITING TEXT

The Assurance System allows for a number of simple formatting options for the narrative. These options are located in a toolbar at the top of the text box in the Edit view for each section. Users can hover over the icons to see a short description of each tool. Most are similar to what a user would find in Word or similar software, but the system also offers the following unique options:

### INSERT OR DELETE A TABLE



1. Place the cursor at the point where the table should be added.
2. Click on the Table button.
3. Select Insert Table from the drop-down menu.
4. To adjust the format of the table, place the cursor at the desired point in the table and click on the Table button. Select Cell (to merge or split cells), Row (to insert or delete rows), or Column (to insert or delete columns).
5. To delete the table, place the cursor within the table, click on the Table button, and then select Delete.

## MAKE FULL SCREEN



1. Click the Full Screen button to show the text box in full screen mode.
2. Click the Full Screen button a second time to return to the regular view.

## PASTE AS PLAIN TEXT



This will remove any formatting from material that is pasted into the text box. This is useful when copying text with complex formatting beyond the capability of the Assurance System.

1. After copying text from its original source, place the cursor where the text should be pasted.
2. Click the Paste as Plain Text button.

## CLEAR FORMATTING



This will remove any problems with formatting that might occur with text that has been copied and pasted from an external source and allow needed reformatting.

1. Select the text you wish to clear of formatting.
2. Click the Clear Formatting button.

## REMOVE A LINK



This will remove a previously created link to a document in the Evidence File.

1. Select the text to unlink.
2. Click the Remove Link button.

## ADDING REFERENCES TO THE EVIDENCE FILE

There is a two-step process for incorporating the documents in the Evidence File into the institutional narrative: (1) add sources to sections of the narrative and (2) create hyperlinks to specific documents within the narrative text.

### Adding PDF File Sources to Sections

To reference PDF files in a section of the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio, they must first be uploaded into the Evidence File and then added as a source for that particular section. This will populate the Evidence Sources drop-down menu in the toolbar above the text box where the user enters the institutional narrative. PDF files must be listed in this field in order to link to them in the narrative.

**Note:** The following steps must be completed only for PDF documents in the Evidence File. The six types of web links that are allowed to be entered in the Evidence File are automatically listed in the URL Source List drop-down menu in the text toolbar, so there is no need to upload each link into each separate section.

To add a PDF file as a source for a particular section:

1. In the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio Dashboard, click on the title of the relevant section and then select “Edit.” The item will be automatically checked out and no one else can work on that section at the same time or overwrite the edits already being made.
2. In the Edit view, scroll down to the bottom of the page to the Evidence File Sources section. Click the Add Source button. This will display the file folders from the Evidence File.
3. Select the folder where the specific document is located. This will show all files in that folder.
4. Select the file to be referenced in the narrative for this section. (Note: only documents that have already been uploaded into the Evidence File will show up in the dialog box.)
5. The selected file will now be listed under Evidence File Sources.
6. Continue to add additional documents in this manner. (Documents may be added at any point in the preparation of the Assurance Argument.)

7. Click the Save button.
8. To exit the section, click either “Check In” or “Close.” When “Close” is selected, the system will ask whether the section should be checked back in. To check in the section at a later date, return to the Edit view and select “Check In.”

This process of adding PDF file sources will need to be completed for each section. While this process takes some time, it ensures that only relevant documents are available when the time comes to add evidence links in the narrative text.

The Evidence File Sources section includes a few additional tools for users to manage the sources that have been added to a section:

- **Add Page**

This function allows users to set a document to open to a specific page. The entire document will still be visible to reviewers, but the document will open to the specified page when it is linked to the narrative in this fashion. This feature is particularly helpful with longer documents where reviewers would need to scroll through an entire document. To have a source open to a specific page:

Click on “Add Page.”

Enter the desired page number and click the Done button.

To reference the same document but have reviewers open to additional specific pages, repeat the above steps.



**IMPORTANT:** Users have found that the functionality of these page-specific links is highly dependent on their web browser type, version and PDF viewer plugin. The Chrome browser tends to produce the desired result, but this may vary by version number. When adding this type of link to the institution’s narrative text, HLC recommends including a parenthetical note with the intended page number.

- **View**

After adding each document, click the View button to the right of the document name to ensure the correct document (and page, if applicable) has been referenced.

- **Delete**

To delete a document, click the Delete button to the right of a document name. Note: this only deletes the document from a specific section; it does not delete the document from the Evidence File.

### Linking Evidence Files to Text

After entering text and adding evidence sources to a section, those sources must be linked within the narrative in order to be accessible to peer reviewers:

1. Within Edit mode, highlight the word or phrase to be linked to a source or place the cursor at the desired location in the narrative to insert the document’s file name.
2. Click on the Evidence Sources button to link to a PDF file that has been added as a source for the section, or the URL Source List to link to an allowable URL. (Note: website addresses cannot simply be typed into the narrative, as they will not be active links. All websites not listed in the URL Source List drop-down menu will need to first be converted to a PDF file and uploaded to the Evidence File.)
3. Click on the relevant PDF file or URL source.
4. The source of evidence will now be an active link within the narrative.
5. To remove a linked source, highlight the link within the text and then click the Remove Link button.
6. Click the Save button.

### PREVIEWING THE NARRATIVE

The preview feature shows how the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio will appear to reviewers. To preview any section:

1. Within Edit mode, click the Preview button located in the top left corner.
2. Click on each document link to ensure all documents are linked correctly (active links show in underlined blue text). Each document will open in a separate window.

3. Click the Close Preview button to close the window.

### TRACKING ACTIVITY AND ACCESSING PREVIOUS VERSIONS OF THE NARRATIVE

It is possible to view a log of all activity within the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio and access previous versions of the narrative:

1. Within Edit mode of a specific section, click the View Activity button located in the top left corner.
2. This will display a list of all activity, including dates and users.
3. To access a copy of a previous version of the section, click “View Archived Version.” The archived version will open in a separate window.

It is not possible to restore an archived version as-is, but a user may copy and paste from a previous version. All evidence, however, will need to be relinked and the text will need to be reformatted.

4. To close the Activity Log, click on the X in the top right corner of the log.

### PRINTING THE NARRATIVE

A copy of the entire Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio, or a single section of the narrative, may be printed:

1. To print a copy of the entire narrative, enter the Dashboard view. To print a copy of a single section, click on the title of the specific section in the Dashboard view.
2. Click “Export/Print” located at the top right of the page.
3. Select either “Export to PDF” or “Export to Word” (this may take a moment to complete).
4. The narrative will open as either a PDF or Word document that can be printed or saved as needed. This file will not include the Evidence File documents.
5. Close the Generate Printable File window by clicking the X in the top right corner of the box or by clicking the Close button.

**Note:** The system only allows users to export a copy of the institutional narrative. Although users may download individual Evidence File documents, it is not possible to export a copy of the complete Evidence File.

## UPLOADING THE FEDERAL COMPLIANCE FILING

If Federal Compliance documentation is required as part of the review, a Federal Compliance tab will be visible in the Assurance System approximately six months prior to the lock date. The institution’s completed Federal Compliance Filing must be uploaded to the system before it is locked for review. Institutions unsure whether Federal Compliance is part of their upcoming review should contact their HLC staff liaison.

As in the Core Component sections of the Assurance Argument, System Coordinators may set a status, due date and assigned user to the Federal Compliance section. To complete these steps, follow the instructions provided for the Core Component sections on pages 10–11.

To upload the Federal Compliance Filing:

1. Click on the Federal Compliance tab and review the instructions for institutions. Follow the link provided to download the Federal Compliance Filing Form from HLC’s website.
2. Complete the form outside of the Assurance System. Save the form and any required appendices as a single PDF document. (Note: The file size limit in the system is 50MB. If the combined PDF is larger than 50MB, compress the file.)
3. Return to the Federal Compliance tab of the Assurance System and select Edit. The section will be automatically checked out so that no one else can work on that section at the same time.
4. Click the Choose File button and browse to the institution’s Federal Compliance Filing in the dialogue box that opens.
5. Select “Open.”

- To exit the tab, click on either “Check In” or “Close.” When selecting “Close,” the system will ask if the section should be checked back in. While the section is checked out, others may still view it, but only the user who has checked the section out may edit it. To check in the section at a later date, return to the Edit view and select “Check In.”



### IMPORTANT: FEDERAL COMPLIANCE FILINGS FOR AQIP PATHWAY CQRS

The Federal Compliance tab will not be available to institutions on the AQIP Pathway. Those institutions will upload their Federal Compliance Filing and appendices under the Forms tab.

## UPLOADING FORMS

If a Multi-campus Visit Report, a Quality Highlights Report or any other forms are required as part of the review, there will be a Forms tab visible in the Assurance System approximately six months prior to the lock date. All forms must be completed and uploaded to the system before it is locked for review. Institutions unsure whether any forms are required as part of their review should contact their HLC staff liaison.

To complete the required forms:

- Click on the Forms tab. Review the instructions listed for each form and click the Download Form button to access the most recent version of the form.
- Complete each form outside of the Assurance System and save it as a PDF document.
- Return to the Forms tab of the Assurance System. Click the Upload Document button and browse to the document in the dialogue box that opens.
- Select “Open.”
- Continue uploading documents as necessary to submit multiple forms.

## LOCKING THE ASSURANCE ARGUMENT OR SYSTEMS PORTFOLIO

### (SYSTEM COORDINATORS ONLY)

When the review of the institution’s Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio begins, the Introduction, Assurance Argument/Systems Portfolio, Evidence File, Federal Compliance and Forms tabs will be locked from further edits and the peer review team will be given access to them.

Lock dates are based on the date of the review, which is determined by HLC staff after consulting with the institution approximately two years prior to the review. For most non-sanction reviews that include a site visit (as is the case with a comprehensive evaluation), the lock date will be approximately four weeks prior to the date of the visit. The lock date for sanction reviews will be approximately eight weeks before the site visit. If no visit is required (as is the case with an Open Pathway Year 4 Assurance Review or AQIP Pathway Systems Appraisal), the lock date is the start of the online review itself. The institution’s lock date is displayed at the top left of the Dashboard.



**IMPORTANT:** If there is no upcoming review scheduled, it is possible that the lock date that appears in the system is a temporary date initially entered to allow an institution to gain access to the system. Until a review is scheduled, a “dummy” lock date of August 1 or September 1 of the academic year of the institution’s review will be displayed. If the lock date appears to be incorrect, contact the institution’s HLC staff liaison.

If an institution completes its Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio and uploads all required forms (if applicable) prior to the lock date, it may manually lock its materials. Only the System Coordinator may complete this task. Note: Once locked, the Introduction, Assurance Argument/Systems Portfolio,

Evidence File, Federal Compliance and Forms tabs can be viewed, but no further changes within the Assurance System will be allowed until the review period is over. Before locking the system early, ensure that the institutional narrative is complete, all documents and URL sources in the Evidence File have been referenced in the narrative, and all required forms have been uploaded to the system.

To lock the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio, the System Coordinator should:

1. Click on the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio tab to enter the Dashboard view.
2. Click the Lock for Review button located at the bottom right of the Dashboard.

If the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio is accidentally locked, contact HLC immediately. If this occurs prior to the lock date, the institution may still be able to make changes.

**Note:** If the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio is not locked by midnight on the designated lock date, HLC will lock the introduction, institutional narrative, Evidence File and Forms tab, and the institution will be unable to make any further changes.

## ADDING DOCUMENTS TO THE ADDENDUM TAB (SYSTEM COORDINATORS ONLY)

After the system has locked and the review has begun, institutions are no longer able to edit any text or upload files to the Evidence File or Forms tab. In the event that the team discovers that it needs additional information during the review, the team chair will activate an Addendum tab in the system. (Note: this tab will not be visible in the system unless it is activated by the team chair.) The System Coordinator will receive a notification from the system that the tab has been activated. The team chair will then communicate to the System Coordinator what specific additional materials are being requested by the team; only then should the

institution submit the evidence requested to the Addendum tab.

To upload files to the Addendum tab, the System Coordinator should:

1. Click on the Upload Files button.
2. Locate the desired file, select it and click “Open.”

## CREATING A NEW VERSION OF THE ASSURANCE ARGUMENT OR SYSTEMS PORTFOLIO (SYSTEM COORDINATORS ONLY)

Once the review and decision-making process (if applicable) have been completed, the System Coordinator will receive an email notification that full access to the Assurance System has been restored. This may be several months after the review date.

Follow the steps below to create a new version of the Evidence File and institutional narrative for the next review cycle. At this point, the institution may choose to copy its Evidence File and narrative to use as a starting point for its next review.

1. Log into the Assurance System.
2. Use the drop-down menu to select the items to copy to the new Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio. This is the only time that data from the previous submission can be copied over, so be sure to select the correct option. Options include:

- Copy argument or portfolio and Evidence File.
- Copy argument or portfolio only.
- Copy Evidence File only.
- Do not copy anything (and start from scratch).

**Note:** Documents provided in the Federal Compliance, Forms or Addendum tab during the institution’s review will not be copied over into a new version of the Evidence File.

3. Once the selection has been made, click the Save button.
4. A notification will appear on the screen, saying that the request is being processed and the System Coordinator will receive an email notification when that process is complete.
5. Any individuals accessing the Assurance System before the process is complete will see a message that the request is being processed. No changes can be made in the system at that time.



### **IMPORTANT: AQIP PATHWAY YEAR 7 SYSTEMS APPRAISALS**

Following a Year 7 Systems Appraisal, the institution will not be asked to create a new version of its Systems Portfolio. Instead, the institution will return to the Assurance System in Year 8 to submit its Quality Highlights Report, Federal Compliance Filing and any other required forms in preparation for its comprehensive evaluation. (The introduction, institutional narrative and Evidence File will remain locked to editing in Year 8.) The institution will be given full access to the Assurance System again after final action has been taken on the comprehensive evaluation.

# PEER REVIEWER TASKS

In addition to being used for the creation and submission of the Assurance Argument and Systems Portfolio, the Assurance System facilitates completion and submission of accreditation reviews by assigned peer reviewer teams. Many of the features are consistent with use of the Assurance System from the perspective of an institution, but there are some additional features specific to reviewers.

## REVIEWER ROLES

### REVIEWER

A reviewer has access to review and evaluate the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio, Federal Compliance Filing and required forms. Reviewers may also access, but not edit, the Review Context, Summary and Addendum tabs.

### TEAM CHAIR

The team chair has the same access as a reviewer, but can also:

- Edit the Review Context.
- Assign reviewers and due dates to the Criteria and Core Components (for Assurance Reviews and Comprehensive Quality Reviews) or Categories and Subcategories (for Systems Appraisals).
- Activate the Addendum tab for the institution to upload additional evidence.
- Edit the Summary tab.

### FEDERAL COMPLIANCE REVIEWER

A separate Federal Compliance reviewer is assigned to most evaluations that involve a Federal Compliance Review. This role has access to view all the sections of the site, but can only edit the Federal Compliance tab.

## LOGGING INTO THE SYSTEM

Peer reviewers will be added to the Assurance System after they have completed training in the Standard and Open Pathways or in the AQIP Pathway. They will receive an automated email with their username and password. Their username will be the complete,

preferred email address they provided to HLC (e.g., [jdoh@example.edu](mailto:jdoh@example.edu)). The Assurance System can be accessed at [assurance.hlcommission.org](https://assurance.hlcommission.org).

Reviewers who are also on the writing team for their institution's Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio will use their existing login credentials to access their institutional materials and active assigned reviews.



**IMPORTANT:** If a peer reviewer doesn't receive the welcome email after being added to the Assurance System, follow the steps outlined on page 4 to troubleshoot the issue.

## CHANGING AN ACCOUNT PASSWORD

When logging into the system for the first time, users will be prompted to change their password. Users may change their password later on by clicking on the down arrow beside their username in the top right corner. If a user forgets his or her password, there is a link on the Assurance System homepage to reset it.

## ACCESSING ACTIVE REVIEWS

1. After logging into the system, the reviewer will be taken to a Project List page that displays a list of their active reviews. Each review listed will include the name of the institution, the latest activity in the system, the type of review being conducted and the peer reviewer's role on the team. Click on an institution's name to access their review site.

**Note:** Reviews become active only after the institution's materials are locked in the system and HLC makes them available to the peer review team. Each team member will receive an automated email to alert them when the review becomes active. No review materials, including the historical documents provided by HLC, will be available through the Assurance System until the review becomes active. Therefore, a peer reviewer may be assigned to an upcoming institutional review that does not yet appear on his or her Project List. The review will be listed once it becomes active.

2. The review site will open to display the review dashboard, where the reviewer can access the institutional narrative and draft the team report. Navigate to other components of the review by using the tabs located across the top of the page.
3. Return to the Project List page by clicking the button in the top left corner of the screen.



**IMPORTANT:** Peer reviewers who are also on the writing team for their institution's Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio will see a link to their institution's Assurance System site in their Project List. When they are working in the system, a link will be displayed in the top left corner of the page that allows them to return to the Project List to switch between their reviews and institutional information.

## CONDUCTING A REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

The introduction provides a brief description of the institution. Institutions on the AQIP Pathway also provide their Institutional Overview and Category Introductions in this section, which peer reviewers conducting Systems Appraisals and CQRs should refer to when drafting their report.

**Note:** The introduction section is only available to view in the Assurance System. It is not included in the export of the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio.

### EVIDENCE FILE

The Evidence File contains pertinent documents uploaded by HLC, including all decisions made since the institution's last comprehensive evaluation and a copy of the team report from the last comprehensive evaluation. Other documents may also be added at HLC's discretion. Institutional documents are also stored in this section, but peer reviewers may only open and view files in the HLC Documents folder. The evidence uploaded by an institution must be accessed directly within the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio.

To access documents uploaded by HLC:

1. Click the Evidence File tab.
2. Click on the HLC Documents folder to view a list of files.
3. To view a document, click on the file name and select View File from the toolbar that opens at the top of the file manager.
4. The file will open in a separate window.

### REVIEW CONTEXT

The Review Context tab is displayed for comprehensive evaluations, Assurance Reviews and Biennial Evaluations. It provides information regarding the nature and content of the review, including draft review date and site visit date, if relevant, along with the scope of the review. The draft review date is the date that the completed report should be sent to the HLC staff liaison for review. Any other items that must be completed as part of the review will be listed under Scope of Review. This information is preloaded by HLC.

The Review Context is also where the team chair provides information regarding the institutional context, interactions with constituencies during the site visit, and additional documents reviewed during the site visit (beyond those contained in the Assurance System). To add information regarding these areas:

1. Click the Edit button located at the top right of the page.

2. Type directly in the relevant text box or copy and paste information from an external document.

If copying and pasting from an external document with extensive formatting, use the Paste as Text option to avoid formatting errors and then reformat as needed within the text box.

To eliminate formatting problems with text that has been copied and pasted from an external document, highlight the relevant text and click the Clear Formatting button.

3. The system allows for simple formatting using the buttons located at the top of the text box (see pages 12–13).
4. After text has been added and/or formatted, click the Save button. Please note: the system does not have an autosave feature, so be sure to save your work before leaving the page.
5. Click “Instructions” above each text box for a reminder of the information needed in that section. To hide the instructions, click “Close.”

Only the team chair can edit this section of the team report, but all other team members may view the contents of the Review Context.

## REVIEW, APPRAISAL AND CQR SECTIONS

Depending on the type of review they are conducting, peer reviewers may see different section titles in the Assurance System. Teams conducting an Assurance Review will see a “Review” tab; those conducting a Systems Appraisal will see an “Appraisal” tab; and teams conducting a Comprehensive Quality Review will see a “CQR” tab. All three have similar features and serve the same purpose. In these sections, reviewers can access the institution’s narrative, manage the review process and write the bulk of the team report. The features of these sections are similar to the Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio tab for institutions. The Dashboard view provides information on the state of the team report.

**Note:** Reviewers conducting a Comprehensive Quality Review (CQR) will see both an Appraisal and CQR tab in the Assurance System. The Appraisal tab is a read-only display of the institution’s last Systems Appraisal, which the team should review along with other

historical documents provided by HLC in the Evidence File. Team members will conduct most of their work in the CQR tab.

### Navigating the Dashboard

**Number/Title:** These columns list the number and title of each section of the team report. For Assurance Reviews, there is a section for each Core Component (mirroring the Assurance Argument). Comprehensive Quality Reviews and Systems Appraisals also have sections for each Core Component, as well as additional sections related to the AQIP Pathway Categories and continuous quality improvement expectations. Clicking on a section’s title will open a page where the reviewer can read the institution’s narrative related to that topic (if applicable) and enter content.

Once a section is selected, reviewers can page backward and forward through the remaining sections by clicking on the arrows at the top left and right of each page. To return to the Dashboard view at any point, click on “Return to Dashboard” at the top left of the page or click on the tab in the main menu.

**Reviewers/Due Dates:** The team chair assigns reviewers to each section in order for the review team to complete their report. The team chair can also assign a due date for internal use by the review team. Multiple reviewers can be assigned to any section. Peer reviewers will see a purple pencil icon in the far left-hand column for all sections assigned to them.

Other team members may access the institutional narrative and view the text entered by assigned reviewers, but they will not be able to edit a section of the report if they have not been assigned to that section. They can email the assigned reviewer by clicking on his or her name in the Dashboard.

Only the team chair can assign reviewers and due dates. To assign a reviewer to a section and set a due date:

1. Click on the Assign Reviewers button next to the section to be assigned.
2. Manually type the due date in the box located under Due Date, or click on the calendar and select the desired date.
3. Click on the plus button next to the name of the Available Reviewer to be assigned. This name will now be moved to the list of Assigned Reviewers.

4. Add additional reviewers at any point in the review process in the same manner.
5. Click the Save button.

To remove an assigned reviewer from a section:

1. In the Dashboard, hover your mouse over the reviewers assigned to the relevant section and click the Edit button that appears.
2. Click the minus button next to the name of the Assigned Reviewer in the dialogue box.
3. Click the Save button.

**Status:** The third column of the Dashboard displays a status indicator for each section. This is an internal indicator to be used by the team to designate progress on the review and is not required. By default, each is set as Not Started. Other possible statuses include In Process, Ready for Review and Completed. At the top of the Dashboard is a legend that shows the meaning of each status icon. Hovering over an icon on the Dashboard also will show the meaning of the icon.

The status of a section can be changed by the team chair or any reviewer assigned to that section. To change the status:

1. Click on the title of the relevant section.
2. Click the Edit button.
3. Select the desired status from the Status drop-down menu.
4. Click “Save” or “Check In.”

**Checked Out:** This feature ensures that team members do not overwrite each other’s work. If a reviewer is editing a particular section, a purple checkbox icon will be displayed in the Checked Out column for that section in the Dashboard. Other team members can see who has a section checked out by hovering over the checkbox icon.

Team chairs can check in a section at any time. To check in a section that has been checked out:

1. Click on the title of the relevant section.
2. Click the Edit button.
3. Click the Check In button in the pop-up message that appears.

**Rating:** The last column of the Dashboard is the Rating. In each Core Component row, for all types of reviews, the Dashboard displays the rating given to that section by the assigned reviewers. In Assurance Reviews and CQRs, the system uses those ratings to calculate an overall rating for each Criterion. These are displayed in the summary rows. For example, reviewers will be able to rate Core Components 1.A.–1.D. If all are rated as met, the rating of met will appear in the summary row for Criterion 1.

**Note:** Ratings may only be given for Core Components. Peer reviewers conducting Systems Appraisals and CQRs will not be asked to provide ratings for the sections of the team report that aren’t directly related to the Core Components.

### Reviewing the Institutional Narrative

The institutional narrative may be downloaded as a single PDF or Word document by clicking the Export/ Print button in the top right corner of the Dashboard. Reviewers may also view sections of the narrative that are related to specific Core Components or AQIP Pathway Categories by clicking on those sections in the Dashboard. A preview screen will appear first. The screen includes:

- The Core Component or Subcategory text.
- A list of the assigned reviewers.
- The rating assigned to the section.
- Placeholders for the review items (the team’s evidence and a place to describe interim monitoring, if applicable).
- Sections from the institution’s Assurance Argument or Systems Portfolio with links to all evidence.

A reviewer may scroll down to read the narrative and click on the links to open the evidence. Evidence will be submitted in both PDF files and URL links. A list of all sources used in the narrative for each section is located under Sources at the bottom of the page.



## IMPORTANT: CQR QUALITY HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

When reviewing the institutional narrative, peer reviewers conducting a CQR should also consider the institution's Quality Highlights Report. This report, available in the Forms tab, provides new information that was not available when the institution submitted its Systems Portfolio the year prior to the CQR. The report also addresses comments made in the Systems Appraisal and offers updates on the institution's strategic challenges.

Some sections of the Systems Appraisal and CQR Dashboards are not linked to the institutional narrative. These sections ask the team to provide feedback on broad topics, such as identifying the institution's main strategic challenges or assessing the institution's overall level of maturity. The preview screen will provide a description of the section, instructions for the team, a list of the assigned reviewers and a placeholder for the team's analysis.

### Writing the Review

Once the narrative has been read and the evidence reviewed, the reviewer is ready to begin drafting the report:

1. From the Dashboard, click on the title of the relevant section and then select Edit. The section will be automatically checked out so that no one else can work on that section at the same time.
2. Set the Status of the review so that others will know where the section is in the process.
3. Click the arrow next to Argument to view the institutional narrative while working on the review. To hide the narrative, click the arrow a second time.
4. Click the orange question mark icon above the top right corner of the text box to view instructions for completing the review. To hide the instructions, click the Close button.
5. Type the review directly in the Evidence text box or copy and paste it from an external document. If the external document has extensive formatting, use the Paste as Text option to avoid formatting errors.
6. The system allows for simple formatting using the buttons located at the top of the text box (see pages 12–13). To eliminate formatting problems with text that has been copied and pasted from an external document, highlight the relevant text and click the Clear Formatting button.
7. If applicable, click on the Rating box to select the rating from the drop-down menu. Note: Criteria summary sections and some sections of the Systems Appraisal and CQR will not have a ratings field.
8. If a Core Component section is rated as met with concerns or not met, the system will display instructions regarding interim monitoring and sanctions, as applicable. Enter the team's recommendation for any interim monitoring related to this Core Component in the Interim Monitoring text box. Leave the field blank if the Core Component is rated as met.
9. To preview new or edited text, click the Preview button in the top left corner. Click the Close Preview button to exit the preview mode.
10. After the text has been added and/or formatted, click the Save button. Note: the system does not have an autosave feature, so be sure to save your work before leaving the page.
11. To exit the section, click on either "Check In" or "Close." When selecting "Close," the system will ask if the section should be checked back in. While the section is checked out, others may still view it, but only the user who has checked the section out may edit it. To check in the section at a later date, return to the Edit view and select "Check In."

The team chair can view a log of all activity within each section and access previous versions of the team report. Within the Edit mode of a specific section, click the View Activity button located in the top left corner.

### Printing the Institutional Narrative and/or Team Report

Peer reviewers may download and print the entire, or individual sections of, the institutional narrative and/or the team report.

1. To print a copy of the entire narrative or report, click the Review, Appraisal or CQR tab. To print a

copy of a single section of the narrative or report, click on the title of the specific section from the Dashboard.

2. Click the Export/Print button located at the top right of the page.
3. Select the desired content and format from the drop-down menu. This will open the narrative or team report as either a PDF or Word document to be printed or saved as needed. The file will not include the institution's Evidence File documents.
4. Close the Generate Printable File window by clicking the X in the top right corner or by clicking the Close button.

### Requesting Additional Information From the Institution (Team Chairs Only)

If the team requires additional documentation from the institution, the team chair can activate an Addendum tab in the system where the institution can upload the necessary materials. This should be done infrequently and only in those instances where the team is unable to make a recommendation due to missing documentation.

To request additional documentation from the institution, the team chair should complete the following steps:

1. Click on the Review, Appraisal or CQR tab.
2. Click the Request Addendum button located in the top right area above the Dashboard. This will activate an Addendum tab that will be accessed by the institution and peer review team.
3. Send an email to the institution's System Coordinator detailing the additional documentation that the team needs. The institution will upload the new files to the Addendum tab, but will not be able to edit the narrative or Evidence File.

## FEDERAL COMPLIANCE

If the evaluation involves a Federal Compliance Review, a Federal Compliance tab will be available in the Assurance System. The Federal Compliance reviewer will enter a draft of the Federal Compliance Report here, and the team will finalize the report after the on-site visit.

Federal Compliance reviewers and team members can also access the institution's Federal Compliance documentation in this section. View the documentation in the web browser by clicking the file link under "Federal Compliance Filing Form." Download the documentation by clicking the Export/Print button and selecting "Export Argument to PDF."

To draft the report:

1. Click on the Federal Compliance tab and select "Edit (Check Out)."
2. Type the review directly in the Rationale text box. Follow the template provided in the text box.
3. The system allows for simple formatting using the buttons located at the top of the text box (see pages 12–13). To eliminate formatting problems with text that has been copied and pasted from an external document, highlight the relevant text and click the Clear Formatting button.
4. Click on the Rating box to select the rating from the drop-down menu.
5. Enter the team's recommendation for any interim monitoring related to Federal Compliance in the Interim Monitoring text box. Leave the field blank if Federal Compliance is rated as "Does not require monitoring."
6. To preview new or edited text, click the Preview button in the top left corner. Click the Close Preview button to exit the preview mode.
7. After the text has been added and/or formatted, click the Save button. Note: the system does not have an autosave feature, so be sure to save your work before leaving the page.
8. To exit the tab, click on either "Check In" or "Close." When selecting "Close," the system will ask if the section should be checked back in. While the section is checked out, others may still view it,

but only the user who has checked the section out may edit it. To check in the section at a later date, return to the Edit view and select “Check In.”

The team chair can view a log of all activity within the section and access previous versions of the report. Within the Edit mode, click the View Activity button located in the top left corner.



### FEDERAL COMPLIANCE REVIEWS FOR AQIP PATHWAY CQRs

The Federal Compliance tab will not be available for teams conducting AQIP Pathway CQRs. The institution’s Federal Compliance Filing will be available under the Forms tab. Follow the instructions provided in the Forms tab to ensure the team’s Federal Compliance report is submitted to HLC appropriately.

## FORMS

If the institution was required to complete any forms as part of its review, these can be found under the Forms tab. To review the completed forms:

1. Click the Forms tab.
2. Click the title of the document to be reviewed.
3. Complete the review using relevant HLC forms outside of the Assurance System.

The team chair should follow the instructions provided for each form to ensure that it is submitted to HLC appropriately.

## SUMMARY

All peer reviewers may view the Summary tab, but only the team chair has access to edit it. The summary section contains basic information about the review, including due dates for the fact check and final report, as well as a listing of all review team members, the Federal Compliance reviewer, the institutional president and System Coordinator, and the institution’s HLC staff liaison. The list of contacts is preloaded in the system by HLC. To send an email to anyone on the list, click on the relevant email address.

For Assurance Reviews and CQRs, the Summary tab also displays an overall rating for the Criteria, which the system automatically determines based on how

the team completes each Core Component section. The system lists which Core Components were found met with concerns and not met, as applicable. For Systems Appraisals, the Summary tab does not list an overall rating for the Criteria, but it does display the Core Components that the team rates as adequate or unclear. For all reviews, each Core Component listed links back to the original team narrative on that section for easy reference.

For evaluations that involve a Federal Compliance Review, the Summary tab will display a link to the Federal Compliance tab if the team found that this area requires monitoring.

Below the Criteria and Federal Compliance ratings, the team chair enters the team’s recommendations, if applicable, for interim monitoring, sanctions and pathways eligibility, as well as any additional concluding remarks. Each of these sections must be completed before the report can be finalized.

**Note:** Reviewers conducting a CQR will see additional Appraisal and CQR tabs in the Summary section. The Appraisal tab is a read-only display of the institution’s last Systems Appraisal summary, which the team should review along with other historical documents provided by HLC. The team chair will enter the team’s recommendations and concluding remarks under the CQR Summary tab.

### Interim Monitoring Recommendations

Based on the team’s Core Component ratings, the system provides context-sensitive instructions in the Interim Monitoring Required section regarding follow-up monitoring relative to the Criteria that may be required by HLC policy. The team may also recommend follow-up monitoring for any Federal Compliance concerns, as needed.

To add a recommendation for an interim report or focused visit:

1. Click the relevant Add button.
2. Enter a recommended report due date or visit date by typing it into the Due Date field or clicking the calendar icon and selecting the date from the calendar field that appears.
3. Enter a description of the report or visit’s focus in the text box.

4. To add another recommended report or visit, click the relevant “Add” button again and follow the same steps.
5. To remove a report or visit, click the red “Remove” link below the description text box.
6. Click the Save button at the bottom of the page.

### Overall Recommendations (Assurance Reviews and CQRs Only)

This section is where the team chair selects the team’s overall recommendations regarding sanctions and the institution’s pathway eligibility.

1. Select the team’s sanction recommendation from the options displayed in the drop-down menu. If applicable, the system will provide context-sensitive instructions regarding a sanction recommendation.
2. Select the team’s pathways recommendation from the options displayed in the drop-down menu. Click “Instructions” next to the Overall Recommendations section title to view more information about the options available.
3. Click the Save button at the bottom of the page.

### Conclusion

In this section, the team chair should provide overall, summative comments. If applicable, the chair should include a rationale for the team’s pathways recommendation. The Conclusion section is also the location to elaborate on any extraordinary circumstances such as a sanction recommendation or other unique situations. When finished, click the Save button.

### Finalizing the Report

Assigning a rating to each Core Component and Federal Compliance (if applicable) and finishing the sections of the Summary tab will activate the three buttons at the top of the Summary tab that allow the

team chair to finalize the report: “Draft to Liaison,” “Send Fact Check” and “Create Final Report.”

1. **Draft to Liaison.** Clicking this button will notify the institution’s HLC staff liaison to log into the system and review the team’s draft. The team chair will consult with the staff liaison and incorporate any changes into the report. The team chair may use this button multiple times during the revision process.
2. **Send Fact Check.** When the HLC staff liaison’s review of the report is complete, the team chair should click this button to send the draft report to the institution’s president and System Coordinator. The institution will have one week to send corrections of errors of fact to the team chair. The team has complete discretion in updating the report based on the information supplied by the institution.  
**Note:** The team chair can only send the draft to the institution once, so be sure the draft is complete before clicking this button.
3. **Create Final Report.** When the team has incorporated any changes recommended by the institution or HLC staff liaison, the team chair should click on this button to create the final report.

**Note:** Once the final report is submitted, the team will no longer have access to the review in the Assurance System.



**IMPORTANT:** The team chair should also be sure to submit the final versions of any additional forms, such as a multi-campus visit report or review of an embedded change request. Follow the instructions on each form to submit them to the appropriate person at HLC.

# ASSURANCE SYSTEM HELP

Institutional representatives and peer reviews can submit questions regarding HLC procedures and the Assurance System by following the link provided under the Help tab.

Numerous resources regarding HLC procedures and the Assurance System are also available on HLC's website:

- **Assurance System training resources:** [hlcommission.org/assurance-system](https://hlcommission.org/assurance-system)
- **Standard Pathway:** [hlcommission.org/standard](https://hlcommission.org/standard)
- **AQIP Pathway:** [hlcommission.org/aqip](https://hlcommission.org/aqip)
- **Open Pathway:** [hlcommission.org/open](https://hlcommission.org/open)
- **Candidacy Process:** [hlcommission.org/candidacy](https://hlcommission.org/candidacy)