

HLC Self-Study Writing & Evidence Guide

Purpose of this Document:

Participating in the reaffirmation of accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is a vital process for UDM. It not only confirms our institutional commitment to excellence, integrity, and continuous improvement, but also ensures our eligibility for federal funding and the recognition of our academic credentials.

The Assurance Argument or Self-Study is the institution's opportunity to demonstrate how it fulfills the expectations of accreditation. It must make a compelling, well-supported case that the institution meets each Criterion for Accreditation as defined by the HLC. The narrative and the evidence work in tandem to show how institutional policies and practices align with HLC's expectations, with a particular emphasis on outcomes, effectiveness, and impact.

Key Dates:

- **Final draft report due:** February 1, 2026
- **Final report due:** September 1, 2026
- **HLC site visit:** November 16–17, 2026

This document provides step-by-step guidance on how to submit written narrative and documentation (evidence) to support the University's HLC Assurance Argument. These instructions apply to **any contributor submitting content via the designated Microsoft Form**.

You do **not** need to apply formatting (font, APA style, margins, spacing). However, you **must** follow the content, tone, and documentation guidelines to ensure consistency and compliance with HLC expectations.

Demonstrating Effectiveness and Continuous Improvement:

HLC has emphasized a shift from inputs (what processes and policies exist) to outputs and effectiveness (how those are implemented and their impact). Institutions must demonstrate not just the existence of processes or policies, but also how they are implemented, how effective they are in practice, and how assessment results are used to continuously improve them over time.

Areas to Highlight:

- Continuous improvement efforts that reflect intentional, mission-driven strategy
- Clear evidence that teams are “closing the loop”; that is, using data and analysis to inform decisions, make improvements, and document impact
- Processes that identify responsibility and accountability for outcomes across units
- Successes and challenges alike, particularly in the context of student success and retention

Writing Guidelines:

Voice and Style:

- Write in **third-person active voice**.
 - ☒ "The University implemented a new advising system."
 - ☒ "We implemented a new advising system."
- Be **clear** and **concise**.
- Factual, **evidence-based** points.
- Always identify **who** is responsible for actions by using titles of units, roles, or committees, not individual names, and avoid vague attributions.
 - ☒ "The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee approved the policy."
 - ☒ "Jane Smith approved the policy."
 - ☒ "The policy was approved."

Tone and Best Practices:

- Keep your writing focused, professional, and precise.
- ☒ **Avoid** anecdotes, filler, or unsubstantiated claims.
- ☒ Do not copy and paste HLC Criteria verbatim. Instead, respond to them clearly.
- Be confident but factual. It is okay to acknowledge areas of growth or past challenges.
- ☒ Do not exaggerate. Always match claims with documentation.
- ☒ Do not place "the" before University of Detroit Mercy (e.g., never write "the University of Detroit Mercy"). This applies even when starting a sentence.

Preparation:

- **Prioritize** examples and data from the **last 2–3 years**, unless referencing an older, ongoing improvement or past feedback.
- Draft your full narrative and identify all related evidence documents **in a separate document first**.
- Do **not** begin completing the Microsoft Form until your final narrative and evidence files are ready to submit.

What to Include in Your Narrative:

Max of 500 words per submission.

Every claim made in the narrative must be supported by clear and relevant evidence. Assertions without documentation will not be included in the final report. Be sure to consider **all locations where the University delivers instruction**, including all campuses, online, and off-campus sites, when describing programs, policies, or services.

- Factual statements tied to real processes, events, or decisions.
- Use **macro-to-micro** structure:
 - Begin with institutional-wide examples (e.g., policies, board minutes)
 - Support with departmental/unit-level examples when relevant.
- Make sure the document you cite actually contains the detail you're referencing.

⊗ Avoid:

- Statements like "we meet regularly" without documentation.
- Screenshots of invites or calendars as standalone evidence.
- Anecdotes or individual success stories not backed by data.

Submitting Evidence:

You **must** have at least **one piece of evidence** to support your narrative and submit a response. All evidence **must be saved as a PDF**.

If **submitting more than five** pieces of evidence, you must complete a second form. In the narrative box of the second form, indicate that it is an additional submission for extra evidence.

File Naming Conventions:

To ensure clarity and alignment with the Assurance Argument structure, all evidence files must follow this format:

Core Criterion – Descriptive Title.pdf

- **Core Criterion:** Include the full core criterion (1A, 1B, 3E etc.) followed by a dash.
- **Descriptive Title:** Use a short, specific title that clearly describes the document's content.
 - Add the college/school/campus name if the evidence is not university-wide.
 - Add a date only if the document itself is time-specific (e.g., meeting minutes). Use the format MM-DD-YY at the end of the file name.
- **✗ Do not use underscores (_)** in file names.

⊗ Avoid:

- Generic names (e.g., document1.pdf, meetingnotes.pdf, scan.pdf)
- File names that do not include a criterion number
- Files not saved as PDFs

Examples:

- 1A – Strategic Plan – School of Law.pdf
- 3B – Qualified Faculty Policy.pdf
- 4C – HLC Steering Committee Charges.pdf
- 2A – Board of Trustee Meeting Minutes 01-15-24.pdf

Citation Format:

Supporting documents must be referenced directly in the narrative using temporary in-text citations. These will later be converted into hyperlinks during final editing.

- Identify the words you would want hyperlinked to your evidence.
- Immediately following that text, include the full title of the evidence document in parentheses.
- The citation is temporary and will be removed once hyperlinks are applied.

Examples:

- During annual Federal Compliance Committee meetings, we discuss all federal changes as documented in the meeting minutes (2C – Federal Compliance Meeting Minutes 02-02-25).
- All eight colleges and schools have Mission Statements (1A – All College and School Mission Statements) that align with the University Mission Statement.
 - In the final version, “meeting minutes” and “Mission Statements” will be hyperlinked in the document and un-bolded.

Submitting Content via Microsoft Form:

Use the Microsoft Form, *2025-2026 HLC Self-Study Writing Form*, to officially submit your final narrative and upload supporting evidence documents. Please remember at least one piece of evidence is required to submit and your narrative has a max of 500 words.

Be prepared to upload your narrative and all evidence in one sitting

 [Click here to access the submission form](#)

The form will ask for:

- Your name, title and College/School/Department
- HLC Criterion
- HLC Core Component you are addressing
 - A separate form submission is required for each core component you address.
- What you are writing about? *A brief description (1–2 sentences) of what your section will cover. This is not about the evidence itself, but rather the main subject, policy, or process you're describing in your narrative. Indicate if the example is university-wide or specific to a college, school, or campus.*
- Narrative to be used in self-study: *Follow all formatting and linking instructions in this guide* (copy/paste into the form)
- In-text citations referencing evidence (as described above)
- Evidence files uploaded as PDF's
 - Document Title
 - Document Owner: *(Department, Title, or Office — e.g., Office of Academic Affairs, Registrar, College of Engineering & Science)*
 - Page/Section: *If you are referencing only an excerpt of the document, please note the specific page number(s) or section.*
 - Brief Description: *a 2-4 sentence summary for this document, describing what the document is, how it supports the criteria or core component, and why it is relevant to your topic.*
 - Weblink: *If this document is available online, please include the direct link to the webpage or file.*
 - If using a webpage as evidence, please print/save as a PDF to submit.

Helpful Links:

- HLC 2025 Criteria for Accreditation: [View Criteria](#)
- Microsoft Form for Submission: [Submit Here](#)
- HLC Guide to Providing Evidence (PDF): [Evidence Guide](#)

Criterion Co-Chairs

Please reach out to the appropriate co-chair(s) listed below based on the Criterion your submission supports:

- **Criterion 1: Mission**
Jocelyn Boryczka, *Dean, College of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences*; boryczjm@udmercy.edu
Joe Eisenhauer, *Dean, College of Business Administration*; eisenhjg@udmercy.edu
Charles Oduke, *Vice President for Mission Integration*; odukeca@udmercy.edu
- **Criterion 2: Integrity – Ethical and Responsible Conduct**
Kate Harger, *Dean of University Libraries*; hargerkj@udmercy.edu
Ahmed Radwan, *Dean, College of Health Professions*; aradwan1@udmercy.edu
- **Criterion 3: Teaching and Learning – Quality, Resources, and Support**
Karen Lee, *Associate Vice President for Academic Administration*; leekm@udmercy.edu
Noah Resnick, *Associate Dean, School of Architecture & Community Development*; resnicsn@udmercy.edu
Kathi R. Shepherd, *Assistant Dean, Educational Development and Assessment, School of Dentistry*; shephckr@udmercy.edu
- **Criterion 4: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources, and Planning**
Dennis Carlesso, *Vice President for University Advancement*; carlesdm@udmercy.edu
Tom Manceor, *Vice President for Finance & Administration*; tmanceor@udmercy.edu
Pamela Zarkowski, *Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs*; zarkowp1@udmercy.edu

Resource Team:

The Resource Team was formed to simplify communication and prevent duplicate requests for individuals who are involved in several criteria. This team serves as a central point of contact to ensure information is shared effectively and needs are met promptly. For questions or requests, please reach out to this group by using the email address below.

Shelley Wagon, *Executive Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness*
Monica Williams, *Dean of Students*
Amy Wisniewski, *Associate Vice President and University Registrar*

Please contact this group via the Team's Group Email: b063caf3.udmercy.edu@amer.teams.ms

HLC Accreditation Liaison Contact

Shelley Wagon

Executive Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness
Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Accreditation Liaison Officer

✉ wagnonsm@udmercy.edu

Questions?

Please reach out to your assigned Criterion Co-Chairs or the HLC Accreditation Liaison if you are unsure whether your submission meets the requirements.

Your contributions are essential in helping us tell our institutional story with clarity, accuracy, and strength. Thank you for your commitment!