

**TOPIC:                   DEGREE AUTHORIZATION ACT – HIGHER LEARNING  
COMMISSION ACCREDITATION PROCESS CHANGES**

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**I.     BACKGROUND**

The Commission has statutory responsibility for the administration of Title 23, Article 2 of the Colorado Revised Statutes, commonly referred to as the Degree Authorization Act. Commission policies and procedures have been developed to include an application process for any degree granting institutions wishing to begin operation in Colorado.

The policies rely on the accreditation status of the applicant institution for authorization purposes. New institutions are granted preliminary state authorization for a time period of six months. Within that period the institution shall satisfactorily complete preliminary information as required by the regional or other appropriate, United States Department of Education-approved accrediting association. Until the institution demonstrates the potential for successful accreditation, documented by the accrediting agency, it shall not accept students, offer instruction, award credits toward a degree, or award a degree. Upon receipt of documentation, the institution may be granted Category II status and may begin to enroll students and award degrees as long as timely progress is made towards full accreditation.

**II.    INFORMATION**

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges (HLC) is the regional accrediting organization that some new institutions choose to work with upon receiving preliminary authorization to operate. The HLC has concerns that their eligibility process has been misunderstood or misrepresented by Department of Higher Education staff. The attached document clarifies their eligibility process and the requirements necessary for affiliation and accreditation.

Staff has relied on notification from HLC to determine if the institution applying for Category II authorization has made reasonable and timely progress toward accreditation. In the past, reasonable and timely progress toward accreditation has been demonstrated with documentation from the regional accrediting association that the institution has been determined to hold the potential for accreditation and is actively pursuing accreditation within the established timetable. The attached clarifications may require changes to the Degree Authorization Act policy so that other alternatives exist for institutions wishing to demonstrate potential for successful accreditation. If DHE staff is to take on the responsibility of substantive evaluation of a school for Category II authorization, it will be necessary to seek statutory authority to assess a sufficient application fee to cover the cost of contracting out such evaluation.

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY**

23-1-121 C.R.S.; 23-2-101 C.R.S