Post Mortem: Lessons Learned During Preparation of an Assurance Argument

Insights from a Small, Private Not-for-Profit University

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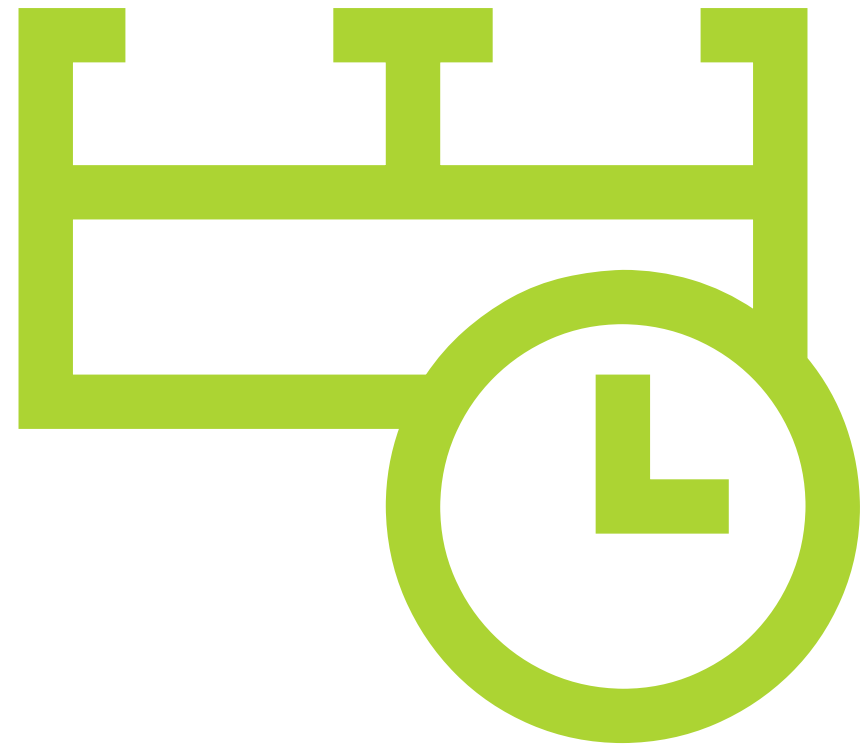
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Introduction

- **Objectives**
  - Overview steps a university or college could employ from initial notification of an HLC site visit to locking in the assurance argument in the HLC Assurance Argument Dashboard system
  - To share lessons learned, strategies, and best practices for preparing an Assurance Argument
- **Target Audience**: Administrators of colleges and universities preparing for an HLC site visit

Overview of Assurance Argument Preparation

- **Initial Steps**
  - Notification of HLC site visit
  - Formation: Creation of an Assurance Argument team
  - Timeline: Development of a comprehensive timeline

Communicating the HLC Notification of the Site Visit

- **Key Points**
  - Importance of timely communication
  - Engaging stakeholders early
  - Ensuring transparency and clarity
  - Use of various communication channels

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Creating an Effective Assurance Argument Team

- **Team Composition**
  - Project Manager and Co-Project Managers
  - Champions and Steering Committee Members
  - Team Members
    - Representation from diverse university areas such as:
    - Faculty, staff, advising, online IT support, admissions, athletics, tutoring, library, administration, career services, student life, financial aid, finance, marketing, advancement, and alumni
- **HLC Core Team**

Delegating Responsibilities

- **Approach**
  - Assign tasks based on team member strengths
  - Focus on interdependence, communication, accountability, respect, and entrepreneurship
- **Tools**
  - Use of Google Drive for collaboration
    - Ensure all know how to use Google
  - Tracking progress with shared documents

Developing an HLC Assurance Argument Timeline

- **Milestones**
  - Evidence
  - Narrative and Evidence
  - Almost Final Draft
- **Key Dates**: Milestones to be met at 13, 10, and 7 months before the site visit.
- **Each Milestone Reviewed by**
  - Project Manager, Co-Project Managers, President, and Cabinet
- **HLC Core Timeline**

Monthly Meetings

- **Purpose**
  - To monitor progress
  - Address challenges
  - Maintain momentum

Monthly Meetings

- **Best Practices**
  - Setting agendas
  - Keeping minutes/minutes available in the Google folder
  - Action items for follow-up
- [Agenda](#)
- [Meeting Minutes](#)

Training and Guidance for Writing

Training

- Attendance of an HLC writing workshop of a Assurance Argument
- Providing templates and examples
- Explementary arguments on the HLC website
- Review of past Assurance Argument

Guidance

- Specific tips for addressing each HLC criterion

Gathering Information and Evidence

- **Approach**
  - Collaborate with departments
  - Centralize evidence collection
  - Support provided by the C-Suite
- **Challenges**
  - Ensuring completeness, accuracy, and most up to date documentation

Editing and Refining the Argument

Process

- Multiple rounds of editing
  - Creation of one voice during the final editing stage

Focus

- Clarity, coherence, and alignment within criteria

Communicating with University Constituents

- **Strategy**
  - Regular updates to faculty, staff, and students
    - Faculty and staff meetings
  - Involving the entire community
    - Meet with all that may meet with the visiting team while on campus.

Communicating with University Constituents

- **Benefits**
  - Increased engagement
  - Gather information
  - Transparency and inclusivity

Overcoming Obstacles

Common Challenges

- Team disengagement
- Delays in gathering evidence

Solutions

- Re-engagement strategies
  - Trivia
  - Assistance from management
- Flexibility and problem-solving

Promoting University-Wide Engagement

- **Involvement**
  - Encouraging participation from all university area
  - Celebrating milestones
  - Consistent communication from the President and Provost voicing their support
- **Outcome**
  - Building a culture of collaboration

Final Review and Submission

Final Steps

Ensuring accuracy and completeness

Uploading to the HLC Assurance Argument Dashboard

- One individual upload evidence and a narrative

Tips:

Double-checking all submissions

Keeping a backup of the final argument

Conclusion

- **Recap**
  - Key lessons learned
- **Final Thoughts**
  - Importance of a systematic approach
- **Next Steps**
  - Preparing for future evaluations

Questions and Answers

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▶ **Thank You for Attending!**