



**HANDBOOK OF  
ACCREDITATION**



# The Western Association of Schools and Colleges

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The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)\* is one of the six regional accrediting associations in the United States. WASC was formed on July 1, 1962, to evaluate and accredit schools, colleges, and universities in California, Hawaii, the territories of Guam, American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. WASC functions through a board of directors and three accrediting commissions: the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, and the Accrediting Commission for Schools. The board of directors consists of nine members, each accrediting commission electing three members.

Each commission, with the involvement of all participating institutions, develops its own standards, procedures, and fiscal policies, under the authority and subject to the approval of the WASC board of directors. The accreditation actions of each commission are certified by the board of directors of WASC. Accreditation ceases whenever an institution fails to pay its annual fees, requests in writing that its accreditation be terminated, or when the Commission formally acts to terminate accreditation.

This Handbook of Accreditation covers Standards of Accreditation, and Policies and Practices for the Accrediting Commission of Senior Colleges and Universities.

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\* The WASC Constitution and a list of accredited institutions can be found on the WASC web site at [www.wascweb.org](http://www.wascweb.org). An annual published directory is available from each Commission or from WASC, 985 Atlantic Avenue, #100, Alameda, CA 94501. For a list of regional accrediting associations and related bodies, see pages 118–119.

# HANDBOOK OF ACCREDITATION

## Standards

Addressing Core Commitments to  
Institutional Capacity and  
Educational Effectiveness

## Institutional Review Process

## Policies and Practices

Accrediting Commission for  
Senior Colleges and Universities

Western Association of Schools and Colleges

**January 2001**

985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100  
Alameda, CA 94501  
510.748.9001  
[www.wascweb.org](http://www.wascweb.org)



# Preface



## Preface

This *Handbook of Accreditation* is the culmination of years of active exploration and experimentation within the WASC region involving hundreds of representatives of the higher education community and the public. Rather than revising the 1988 Standards of Accreditation, which served the region well for more than a decade, the question was asked broadly: “What model of accreditation would best serve the region and the public for the year 2000 and beyond?” This approach opened significant new dimensions of learning for all involved in the process, and encouraged the conscious development of new approaches to, and models of accreditation.

Beginning in 1995, with the reports of the Task Force on the Purposes of Accreditation and the Task Force on Assessment, the Accrediting Commission developed a series of principles to guide the process of inquiry and change. In *An Invitation to Dialogue*, published in 1998, the Commission articulated six key principles of change. It committed itself to creating a new model of accreditation that would reduce unnecessary burden to institutions, function to the extent possible on institutional evidence, give central focus to educational effectiveness and student learning, and work with institutions collaboratively so the evaluative process could be aligned with the institution’s context and areas of needed development.

With design principles established, the Commission embarked on a series of experimental visits to develop new approaches to both institutional self study and team visits. The collaboration of institutions in accepting the challenge of exploring new approaches before new standards and procedures had been developed was a significant benefit to this process. Throughout this period the Commission held a number of concept development sessions with representatives from throughout the region and nationally to develop new approaches to the accreditation review process. Extensive dialogue was also conducted with the Accreditation Liaison Officers from all institutions. This process of reflection and development was supported by substantial grants from The James A. Irvine Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

In 1999, building upon and continuing this work, the Commission published *Invitation to Dialogue II*, which laid out the framework for a complete systems change in the WASC accreditation process. Discussed extensively within the region, the Commission then adopted the framework of *Dialogue II* as the basis for developing new standards and redesigning the entire institutional review process. Two Standards drafting committees were convened over 1999–2000, and the drafts of their work were distributed throughout the region and discussed in regional meetings, the WASC Annual Meeting, and in public hearings at Commission meetings. The *Handbook* was formally adopted by the Commission in November, 2000.

This *Handbook* represents both the culmination of these efforts and the beginning of a new process of accreditation within the WASC region. The Commission intends to assess implementation of the *Handbook* and revise the Standards and the Institutional Review Process as needed, consistent with its own efforts to focus on the goals established for the accreditation process in these background documents and in this *Handbook*.

The source documents for this *Handbook* may be found on the Commission web site ([www.wascweb.org](http://www.wascweb.org).) In addition, material in this *Handbook* is intended to be supplemented with extensive additional information on the web site. The Commission is grateful to all who participated in these activities and for the remarkable spirit of creativity and cooperation engendered by this process.





# User's Guide

## USER'S GUIDE TO THE HANDBOOK OF ACCREDITATION

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This *Handbook of Accreditation* is intended to serve a variety of readers: representatives of institutions accredited by the Commission or those seeking review; chairs and members of evaluation teams; those interested in establishing good practices in higher education and in the process of evaluation; and the general public interested in or affected by higher education. In addition, the *Handbook* has been designed to serve several purposes: identify the Core Commitments and accreditation standards expected to be addressed in the accreditation review process; guide institutions through institutional review; and assist evaluation teams with the purposes and processes of each stage of review. As a result, it is expected that sections of this *Handbook* may be copied and distributed to different groups at an institution, and each major section is designed to stand alone as well as fit within the integrated *Handbook*. The *Handbook* is purposely not copyrighted so it may be widely copied and distributed. It is the Commission's goal that through wide dissemination and application, the standards and processes developed in this new model of accreditation may inform and contribute to the development of improved institutional practices and reviews throughout the WASC region.

This *Handbook* is part of a broader and more comprehensive system of support provided by the Accrediting Commission to institutions, evaluators, and members of the public. Supplemental Guides have been developed for specific activities, such as Substantive Change, or to assist chairs and members of evaluation teams, and those guides are separately available. Additional information supplementing the material found in this *Handbook* may also be found at the web site of the Commission: [www.wascweb.org](http://www.wascweb.org).

The Commission welcomes suggestions for improvement of the material found in this *Handbook* and ways to make this document, and the accreditation process itself, more useful and usable to institutions and members of the public. Please send all comments and suggestions to the WASC office or through the WASC website.

# User's Guide

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A brief history of the last five years of design work that led the Commission to work collaboratively with a wide range of institutional representatives to revise the Standards and design a new framework for accreditation, organized around two Core Commitments to institutional capacity and educational effectiveness is captured here.

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I



# Introduction

# INTRODUCTION

## Creating a New Model of Accreditation

### The Changing Context for Institutional Accreditation

Accreditation stands as a distinctive American innovation to assure quality in higher education. It was founded more than 100 years ago on the principle of peer review, meaning that those within the academy are best able to evaluate the quality of higher education institutions. In the past decades, however, both institutions and the challenges of defining and evaluating quality have become significantly more complex and come under increasing scrutiny. Some of the changes that affect our ability to define and evaluate quality in the accrediting process include:

- ☞ Increasing diversity of institutional types, with significant changes occurring within traditional institutions; the development of single-purpose institutions in a wide range of disciplines; and the expansion of profit-centered enterprises into higher education
- ☞ Development and growth of online and distributed learning within traditional institutions and the development of institutions wholly or primarily organized to provide educational services in a distributed environment
- ☞ Increased scale and complexity of institutions, where the majority of students served in higher education attend large, complex, multipurpose universities. The focus of accreditation review grows more critical at these institutions, but traditional frameworks of accreditation have become more cumbersome and less effective at these institutions
- ☞ A shift toward effectiveness and performance indicators beyond inputs and resources as the organizing basis for defining and evaluating quality
- ☞ Higher expectations for the performance of graduates, leading to calls for increased attention to evidence of student learning.
- ☞ A burgeoning focus on the diversity of learners and learning needs in American higher education, along with the increased globalization of curricula, programs, and student populations
- ☞ Higher mobility of students between institutions, changing patterns of institutional attendance, and the de-institutionalization of learning settings leading to a decline in institutional impact and control over the educational experience and curricula of students
- ☞ Concern over the rising costs of higher education and recognition that higher education is a major factor in economic growth and productivity, resulting in an emphasis on the need for greater efficiency and effectiveness in institutional performance
- ☞ The increased impact and workload caused by federal regulations that affect accreditation processes and all institutions of higher education

## Principles For the Redesign of the WASC Accreditation Process

The confluence of these forces of change has led the Senior College Commission of WASC to assess the capacity and effectiveness of its processes to serve the higher education community and the public as well as it has done in the past. It is clear that a single approach, characterized as “one size fits all,” no longer is functional or appropriate.

In 1998 the Commission adopted two Core Commitments and six principles to govern the redesign of the WASC accreditation process. The Core Commitments (described more fully on page 5) are to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness. The following principles continue to remain relevant and provide solid foundation for the new model of accreditation outlined in this *Handbook of Accreditation*, and they serve as the basis for interpreting how the Core Commitments, new accreditation standards, and redesigned institutional review process will be implemented.

**Principle 1:** Significant changes are needed to make the content and process of accreditation more relevant both to institutions and to the public.

**Principle 2:** The WASC process needs to demonstrably add value and be cost effective.

**Principle 3:** Greater emphasis is needed on evidence of educational effectiveness and student learning.

**Principle 4:** The accreditation process needs to shift from an “in/out of compliance” stance on every issue to a recognition that many aspects of quality are best addressed on a continuum basis.

**Principle 5:** More efficient means are needed to establish that institutions meet basic resource and integrity standards.

**Principle 6:** WASC needs to maintain a posture of experimentation in the years ahead, leading to the institutionalization of a more adaptive and responsive process of accreditation.

## Commission Values for Implementing the New Handbook

The Commission is mindful that the codification of new standards and procedures could lead to early rigidification of emergent and dynamic principles for institutional review and evaluation. We have much to learn in the application of the Core Commitments, new Accreditation Standards, and redesigned institutional review process. There is no single approach that is warranted for all institutions, nor an “orthodoxy” of how all institutions are to respond to this new model of accreditation and definition of “educational effectiveness.” As a result, the Commission has adopted a set of values to inform its own conduct in implementing the new *Handbook* and the conduct of evaluation teams and institutions going through the accreditation process. These key values include the following Commission commitments to institutions that, to the extent possible and appropriate, the Commission will:

- ☞ recognize the diversity of institutions and institutional missions
- ☞ acknowledge that all institutions are located at different places on a continuum of development and adapt the review process appropriately
- ☞ maintain flexibility and adaptability, emphasizing collaboration between institutions and WASC
- ☞ affirm the centrality of educational effectiveness, including student learning, as a common activity of all candidate and accredited institutions (while educational effectiveness may not be the only value for a WASC-accredited institution, its examination and improvement is a core WASC value)

- ☞ focus on institutional purposes and results, not on specific structures or methods for their accomplishments
- ☞ support multiple models of institutional presentation and demonstration of meeting Commission Core Commitments and Standards
- ☞ rely heavily on existing institutional evidence and sampling of institutional exhibits and processes, including as appropriate, student work
- ☞ promote the development and evaluation by institutions of quantitative and qualitative evidence that is used to improve institutional and educational effectiveness

The Commission has also adopted a Code of Good Practice and Ethical Conduct for its relations with institutions in the institutional evaluation and decision making process. This Code is found in the *Handbook* on page 9.

## The New Framework for Accreditation

In response to the changing context of higher education, and to reflect the principles adopted by the Commission for accreditation in the WASC region, the Commission has developed a new framework for accreditation. The elements of this new framework align under the core principles called “Core Commitments” to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness which are embodied significantly by revised Accreditation Standards and a three-stage, sequential institutional review process. Each element is described in the following sections of the *Handbook*. Together these components represent a holistic system and process of review that enable WASC to work collaboratively with institutions in a spirit of ongoing experimentation and mutual learning as defined by the Commission values stated above.

Higher education exists in the United States as a public trust and a public good. It is linked to the improvement of individuals, groups, and society as a whole. It provides the basis for conserving and transmitting the values of society and for reflecting on and identifying needed areas of change. Through research, scholarship and creative activity, institutions of higher education also promote the value of discovery and learning. In offering educational programs, institutions prepare their graduates for productive and meaningful lives as citizens and members of society.

The accrediting process functions to promote and sustain this special role for higher education, while providing assurance to the public that institutions of higher education continue to warrant public trust and support. Accreditation evaluation of institutional resources, structures, practices, and results serves an important role for the higher education community and the public in this context. Yet accreditation is not well understood and is too often considered reactive to external minimal standards.

## Developing a New Posture of Engagement with Institutions

Under the new framework for accreditation, qualifying institutions are able to consciously and deliberately collaborate with WASC to develop new approaches that are designed to serve institutional priorities in tandem with accreditation requirements. Such an approach opens up tremendous opportunities for creativity and renewal. At the same time, however, experimentation creates risk. Not all the ground rules are known in advance, or are even knowable. We all will need to learn together in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration, sharing the results of these processes to create opportunities for organizational learning.

The implementation of the new model may not initially be as effective as desired, especially in the first round. We believe, however, that accreditation needs to change, and that the kinds of changes needed require an openness to experimentation. We need to consider how the new Standards may accomplish the principles set forth in this *Handbook*. Our goal is a simplified, more usable, and effective process that can be better understood by the many consumers of accreditation.

We also believe that the spirit of experimentation should be embedded in the WASC of the future, leading to a more adaptive and responsive model of accreditation. Such a model would recognize and respond more effectively to the diversity of institutional missions reflected within the region, and reflect the awareness that there is an ebb and flow within each institution that may suggest different approaches each time an accreditation review is scheduled.

## Organizing Around Core Commitments

The concept of Core Commitments is intended to move accreditation from a reactive process of something done to an institution, to a proactive commitment of an institution which WASC reviews and validates. Framing accreditation as a commitment makes the act of accreditation more connected to the public accountability role legitimately held by accreditation, and puts the institutional commitment front and center. Given the wide range of institutions currently served by WASC and the likelihood that even newer institutional forms will emerge, there is need for a framing device to enable the Commission to apply the Standards of Accreditation flexibly as means, not ends.

Thus, to become and remain accredited, each institution is expected to demonstrate that it is committed to developing and sustaining Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness.

### Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity:

The institution functions with clear purposes, high levels of institutional integrity, fiscal stability, and organizational structures to fulfill its purposes.

The Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity enables the institution to consider resource issues from a holistic perspective, and to consider capacity as an institutional attribute beyond minimum compliance and a review of assets. Looking at itself through a “lens” of institutional capacity enables the institution to reexamine what it *is* in terms of its capacity to fulfill its aspirations, and to integrate and synthesize findings and recommendations for improvement gained through its self review under Commission Standards. While the Standards provide an opportunity to review institutional performance within a defined area, the framework of institutional capacity allows an institution to explore cross-cutting issues such as whether resources, structures and processes are aligned with the institution’s mission and priorities, and whether there is good evidence of effectiveness in their actual deployment. An important dimension of institutional capacity reflected in the Institutional Review cycle is the institution’s potential to define and sustain educational effectiveness.

### Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness:

The institution evidences clear and appropriate educational objectives and design at the institutional and program level. The institution employs processes of review, including the collection and use of data, that assure delivery of programs and learner accomplishments at a level of performance appropriate for the degree or certificate awarded.

The Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness provides an opportunity for the institution to explore holistically its approaches to educational effectiveness and assess whether institutional systems, such as course and program design, faculty support, and program review are effectively linked to evidence of student learning and are consistent with the educational goals and academic standards of the institution. By design, elements of educational effectiveness were incorporated into all four Commission Standards, so that institutions would explore the relationships between capacity and educational quality and effectiveness. The Accreditation Standards identify key elements of educational effectiveness. Many institutions have found valuable the framing of educational effectiveness presented in *Invitation to Dialogue II*, a document prepared to assist the region in developing the framework for accreditation described in this *Handbook*. The framing is repeated here to provide one possible set of lenses for institutions to review the broader issue of educational effectiveness and for applying the Standards for Accreditation.

## Focusing on Educational Effectiveness

- ❧ **Articulating a Collective Vision of Educational Attainment.** Centers on the degree to which the institution sets goals and obtains results for student learning at both the institutional and program levels that are:
  - clearly stated and widely understood;
  - appropriate for the type and level of the degree or credential offered; and
  - adequately assessed to ascertain mastery of these levels.
  
- ❧ **Organizing for Learning.** Centers on the alignment of appropriate institutional assets and characteristics with the goal of producing high levels of student learning, consistent with the mission of the institution, including:
  - curriculum, pedagogy, and method of delivery;
  - faculty recruitment, development, scholarship in support of improved teaching and learning, rewards, and incentives;



- organizational structures and processes;
- information resources and planning capacity;
- student services and co-curricular activities; and
- resources and facilities.

☞ **Becoming a Learning Organization.** Centers on the degree to which the institution has developed systems—to assess its own performance and to use information to improve student learning over time—that:

- are systematic and regular;
- reinforce a climate of inquiry throughout the institution;
- reflect the input of stakeholders and an awareness of the distinctive characteristics of its students;
- identify key dimensions of performance that include student learning; and
- are based on standards of evidence that prominently feature educational results.

## WASC as a Learning Organization

WASC is interested in gathering feedback on the application of this *Handbook*, and will develop multiple approaches for soliciting information for continual improvement. A survey form can be found in the Appendices and on the WASC website. The Commission, with an expectation of revision and refinement as WASC itself becomes a learning organization, will be continuously reviewing the implementation of the Standards and the Institutional Review Process as institutions deepen their engagement. Let us hear from you.

## PURPOSES OF WASC ACCREDITATION

Voluntary, non-governmental, institutional accreditation as practiced by the WASC and the other regional commissions is a unique characteristic of American education. In many other countries the maintenance of educational standards is a governmental function. No institution in the United States is required to seek accreditation, however, because of the recognized benefits, most of the eligible institutions in this and other regions have sought to become accredited.

The WASC accreditation process aids institutions in developing and sustaining effective educational programs and assures the educational community, the general public, and other organizations that an accredited institution has met high standards of quality and effectiveness.

The Commission accredits institutions, not individual programs. Therefore, in addition to assessing the academic quality and educational effectiveness of institutions, the Commission emphasizes institutional structures, processes, and resources.

The accreditation process is aimed at:

1. Assuring the educational community, the general public, and other organizations and agencies that an accredited institution has demonstrated it meets the Commission's Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has been successfully reviewed under Commission Standards;
2. Promoting deep institutional engagement with issues of educational effectiveness and student learning, and developing and sharing good practices in assessing and improving the teaching and learning process;
3. Developing and applying Standards to review and improve educational quality and institutional performance, and validating these Standards and revising them through ongoing research and feedback;
4. Promoting within institutions a culture of evidence where indicators of performance are regularly developed and data collected to inform institutional decision making, planning, and improvement;
5. Developing systems of institutional review and evaluation that are adaptive to institutional context and purposes, that build on institutional evidence and support rigorous reviews, and reduce the burden and cost of accreditation; and
6. Promoting the active interchange of ideas among public and independent institutions that furthers the principles of improved institutional performance, educational effectiveness, and the process of peer review.

# CODE OF COMMISSION GOOD PRACTICE AND ETHICAL CONDUCT

In carrying out its functions, the Commission has established a code of good practice, both for its relations with the institutions it serves and with regard to its internal organization and procedures.

Every institution desiring recognition by the Commission is expected to demonstrate that it meets the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness and abide by the Standards and Policies of the Commission, as stated in this *Handbook* and as may be developed in the future. As knowledge increases and the needs of society change, institutions are continually evolving in order to serve their students and community better. Consequently, the Commission continually reviews the role and validity of its Standards and engages in widespread consultation with accredited institutions in the region in order to incorporate their suggestions and receive their approval. Consistent research findings demonstrate that accreditation serves all types of institutions for institutional improvement.

The effectiveness of self-regulatory accreditation, however, depends upon the institution's acceptance of specific responsibilities, including compliance with all of the Standards and abiding by the Commission's Policies, Procedures, and Decisions. There must be institutional involvement in the commitment to the accreditation process. The process assumes that each institution has the responsibility to participate in the peer review process and to accept an honest and forthright assessment of institutional strengths and weaknesses. As a consequence, an acceptable Institutional Presentation and peer evaluation are required to obtain and retain accreditation. Only in this way will the validity and vitality of the accreditation process be ensured.

In its relations with the institutions it serves, the Commission is committed to:

1. Appraise institutions in terms of their own stated purposes within the context of Commission Standards. Interpret the Standards in ways that are relevant to the character of the particular institution, respecting institutional integrity and diversity.
2. Emphasize the value and importance of institutional self evaluation and the development of appropriate evidence to support the accreditation review process.
3. Assist and stimulate improvement in the educational effectiveness of the institution, including the review and improvement of student learning.
4. Conduct evaluation visits by experienced and qualified peers under conditions that, insofar as reasonably possible, ensure impartial and objective judgment, avoiding conflict of interest.
5. Provide the institution a reasonable period of time to comply with the Commission's request for information and documents, and protect the confidentiality of those Commission files pertaining to institutions.
6. Attempt to include on evaluation teams representation from institutions of similar purposes and academic programs.
7. Provide institutions an opportunity to object, for cause, to individual members assigned to the team designated to review the institution, with special concern for possible conflict of interest.
8. Arrange during the accreditation review process for interviews with administration, faculty, students, and trustees, and include a publicized opportunity for open hearings.

9. Include in the notification to the institution the reasons for a sanction. The institution will be provided opportunity to respond in writing to the team report with errors of fact before it is finalized, to respond in writing to the final team report regarding issues of substance, and to appear before the Commission during the comprehensive review cycle when the report is considered. The Commission staff will notify the institution in writing as soon as reasonably possible regarding Commission decisions. The institution may formally appeal Commission actions as described in Section IV, Commission Decisions on Institutions.
10. Provide opportunity for institutional representatives and the general public to attend portions of Commission meetings devoted to policies and other non-confidential matters. See Policy on Public Access to the Commission, (Section V, p. 107).
11. Encourage the institution to engage in widespread discussion and serious consideration of the Commission action and issues highlighted by the Commission in its action letter to the institution.
12. Request a written response from an institution or refer a matter to the next evaluation team when the Commission's attention is drawn to the possibility that an institution may be in violation of Commission Standards or Policies. If a written report is requested and the response is not deemed adequate, the staff may request supplemental information or schedule a fact-finding visit to the institution in question. The institution will bear the expense of such a visit.
13. Make an initial visit for Candidacy or Accreditation to an institution at the request of the chief executive officer and governing board chair of the institution.
14. Revisit an institution at periodic intervals specified in the Institutional Review Process and only after due notice to the institution.
15. Permit withdrawal of a request for Initial Candidacy or Initial Accreditation at any time (even after evaluation) prior to final action by the Commission. This privilege does not apply to other types of visits.
16. Terminate Accreditation or Candidacy only after advance written notice.
17. Provide institutions due process in the accrediting decisions made by the Commission. This includes affording institutions a reasonable period of time to comply with requests for information and documents; notifying institutions in writing of any action and its rationale; and providing means by which institutions may formally appeal Commission actions as described in Section IV, Commission Decisions.
18. Encourage continuing communication between the Commission and institutions through the liaison officer position in each institution. See Policy on Accreditation Liaison Officer, (Section V, p. 64).
19. Maintain and implement a conflict of interest policy for visiting teams, members of the Commission, and Commission staff to assure fairness and avoid bias.
20. Provide formal means by which institutions and others can comment on the effectiveness of the accreditation review process, Standards, and Policies, and conduct ongoing and regular reviews to make necessary changes.

## THE STATUS OF ACCREDITATION

The status of accreditation indicates that an institution has fulfilled the requirements for accreditation established by this *Handbook*. This means that the institution has:

1. Demonstrated that it meets the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness;
2. Conducted a self review under the Accreditation Standards, developed and presented indicators of institutional performance, and identified areas for needed improvement to serve as the evidentiary basis for completing successfully the three-stage process of institutional review;
3. Developed an approved Institutional Proposal for Accreditation Review, and been evaluated by teams of external evaluators in the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Review Processes;
4. Demonstrated to the Commission that it meets or exceeds the expectations of the Accreditation Standards; and
5. Committed itself to institutional improvement, periodic self-evaluation, and continuing compliance with Commission Standards, Policies, Procedures and Decisions.

Accreditation is attained by the process of evaluation of an entire institution and continues until formally withdrawn. It is subject, however, to periodic review and to conditions as determined by the Commission. Every accredited institution files an annual report, is visited at least every ten years, and undergoes a comprehensive self review and evaluation at least every ten years. Initial accreditation, as a matter of Commission policy, requires institutional self review and peer evaluation no more than five years after the date of the Commission action granting such status. Neither Accreditation nor Candidacy is retroactive.

As a voluntary, nongovernmental agency, the Commission does not have the responsibility to exercise the regulatory control of state and federal governments, or to apply their mandates regarding collective bargaining, affirmative action, health and safety regulations, and the like. Furthermore, the Commission does not enforce the standards of specialized accrediting agencies, the American Association of University Professors, or other nongovernmental organizations, although institutions may wish to review the publications of such other agencies as part of the self-review process. The Commission has its own Standards and expects that institutions and teams will apply them with integrity, imagination, and an attitude of humane concern for students and the public interest.

The Accreditation Standards apply to all institutions in the region. For those seeking Candidacy and Initial Accreditation, the Standards must be met at least at a minimum level. For institutions seeking Reaffirmation of Accreditation, the Standards must be met at higher levels. The Standards define normative expectations and characteristics of excellence, and provide a framework for institutional self review. Depending upon the state of development of the institution, some components of the Standards may be viewed as of greater or lesser priority.



II



# The Standards

# WASC STANDARDS

STANDARD 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

STANDARD 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions

STANDARD 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability

STANDARD 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement

# Organization of the Standards

## Accreditation Standards

In order to address the two Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, the Commission has defined Standards for Accreditation. These Standards are intended to serve several purposes:

- ☞ To guide institutions in self review as a basis for assessing institutional performance and to identify needed areas of improvement;
- ☞ To provide a framework for Institutional Presentations to the Commission and review teams;
- ☞ To serve as the basis for evaluation teams in the Institutional Review Process — for the Preparatory Review in addressing the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity and for the Educational Effectiveness Review in addressing the Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness;
- ☞ To provide a foundation for Commission actions and the basis for required institutional follow-up to such actions; and
- ☞ To assist those involved in the accrediting process, in higher education generally and members of the public, in defining institutional quality and educational effectiveness, and in promoting the development and sharing of practices leading to the improvement of quality.

## Format of the Standards

WASC accreditation is framed around two Core Commitments—Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness—that are made by each institution and validated by the Commission. The concept of Core Commitments is intended to emphasize the strong commitment of our institutions to quality and integrity, a commitment that WASC reviews and validates. Given the wide range of institutions currently served by WASC and the likelihood that new institutional forms will emerge, the Commission’s intent is to apply Standards for Accreditation that are rigorous, holistic in scope, and flexible in application.

Each Standard is constructed with the following four interrelated elements.

## The Standard

While specific content areas are distinguished within each of the four Standards, each is intended to be an integrated topic, framed to emphasize holistic organizational performance. To emphasize the holistic manner in which the contents of each Standard are viewed and applied, judgments will be made, to the extent possible, at the level of the Standard itself. Each of the four Standards begins with a “statement of the Standard,” defining the basis for judgment. Within each Standard are also sub-areas defining topical areas essential to the Standard itself.

## Criteria for Review

Within each sub-area are Criteria for Review, intended to identify key areas for review of each Standard. Criteria for Review are meant to support basic decisions about accreditation and thus enable the Commission to render an effective judgment of the performance of an institution.

## Guidelines

The Commission has identified in the Guidelines expected forms or methods of demonstrating performance related to certain Criteria for Review. In many of these cases institutions have requested specific interpretation of the Commission's meaning and, in others, the Commission has found through its extensive interactions with institutions and evaluation teams, the need to identify the normative way institutions would be able to address the Criterion for Review referenced by the Guideline. By design, the Commission has not developed a Guideline for each Criterion for Review; nor, in many instances, are the Guidelines intended to address the full scope of a particular Criterion.

Where Guidelines are identified, the Commission is attempting to assist institutions with further interpretation of the Criteria for Review and provide intended ways institutions can demonstrate they have addressed them. Thus, a substantial core of full time faculty would be commonly expected as part of an institution's demonstration that it has addressed Criterion 3.2 under Standard 3. The Commission also remains committed to the value, stated on page 4, that it is concerned with demonstrated results rather than wishing to prescribe the specific form of an institutional practice. If an institution chooses not to employ the practices described in a particular Guideline, the institution is responsible to show that it has addressed the intent of the Criterion in an equally effective way.

## Questions for Institutional Engagement

The primary purpose of an accreditation review is to draw institutions into inquiry about institutional performance and to stimulate deep engagement with issues of educational effectiveness. The Questions for Institutional Engagement are intended to help institutions explore a constellation of issues that arise from the Standard and its Criteria for Review. These are purposefully framed as questions in order to suggest areas considered by the Commission as important for further inquiry and to further illuminate topical areas within the broader Standard. The Questions are not intended to be prescriptive requirements for each area, but to lead an institution to an exploration of its performance within the context of its purpose and distinctive character. As such, institutions will likely emphasize some of these Questions more than others when evidence of Capacity under each Standard is assembled. An institution is invited to review the Questions and to identify areas that deserve further in-depth exploration and engagement in the process of preparing its Institutional Proposal for the accreditation review.

# Standard 1

## Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

➤ INSTITUTIONAL PURPOSES

➤ INTEGRITY

**The institution defines its purposes and establishes educational objectives aligned with its purposes and character. It has a clear and conscious sense of its essential values and character, its distinctive elements, its place in the higher education community, and its relationship to society at large. Through its purposes and educational objectives, the institution dedicates itself to higher learning, the search for truth, and the dissemination of knowledge. The institution functions with integrity and autonomy.**

### Institutional Purposes

#### Criteria for Review

1.1. The institution's formally approved statements of purpose and operational practices are appropriate for an institution of higher education and clearly define its essential values and character.

{ GUIDELINES: The institution has a published mission statement that clearly describes its purposes. The institution's purposes fall within recognized academic areas and/or disciplines, or are subject to peer review within the framework of generally recognized academic disciplines or areas of practice.

1.2. Educational objectives are clearly recognized throughout the institution and are consistent with stated purposes. The institution has developed indicators and evidence to ascertain the level of achievement of its purposes and educational objectives.

{ GUIDELINE: The institution has published educational objectives that are consistent with its purposes.

1.3. The institution's leadership creates and sustains a leadership system at all levels that is marked by high performance, appropriate responsibility, and accountability.

#### Questions for Institutional Engagement

1. To what extent are institutional purposes broadly understood by members of the institutional community and communicated clearly and consistently to external constituencies?
2. How does the institution ensure that its institutional purposes and educational objectives are regularly reviewed and modified?
3. To what extent has the institution developed and begun to use indicators and sources of evidence to determine whether its educational objectives have been achieved?
4. In what ways does the institution ensure that its educational objectives are actively used as guides for decision-making, resource allocation, and action?
5. How does the institution ensure that its educational objectives and experiences are appropriate for its students, given their particular backgrounds and their intended objectives?

# Integrity

## Criteria for Review

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| 1.4. The institution publicly states its commitment to academic freedom for faculty, staff, and students, and acts accordingly. This commitment affirms that those in the academy are free to share their convictions and responsible conclusions with their colleagues and students in their teaching and in their writing.  | { GUIDELINES: The institution has published or has readily-available policies on academic freedom. For those institutions that strive to instill specific beliefs and world views, policies clearly state conditions, and ensure these conditions are consistent with academic freedom. Due process procedures are disseminated, demonstrating that faculty and students are protected in their quest for truth.   |
| 1.5. Consistent with its purposes and character, the institution demonstrates an appropriate response to the increasing diversity in society through its policies, its educational and co-curricular programs, and its administrative and organizational practices.   | { GUIDELINE: The institution has demonstrated institutional commitment to the principles enunciated in the WASC Statement on Diversity.  |
| 1.6. Even when supported by or affiliated with political, corporate, or religious organizations, the institution has education as its primary purpose and operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy.  | { GUIDELINE: The institution has no history of interference in substantive decisions or educational functions by political, religious, corporate, or other external bodies outside the institution's own governance arrangements.  |
| 1.7. The institution truthfully represents its academic goals, programs, and services to students and to the larger public; demonstrates that its academic programs can be completed in a timely fashion; and treats students fairly and equitably through established policies and procedures addressing student conduct, grievances, human subjects in research, and refunds. | { GUIDELINES: The institution has published or readily-available policies on student grievances and complaints, refunds, etc. and has no history of adverse findings against it with respect to violation of these policies. Records of student complaints are maintained for a six-year period. The institution clearly defines and distinguishes between the different types of credits it offers and between degree and non-degree credit, and accurately identifies the type and meaning of the credit awarded in its transcripts. |
| 1.8. The institution exhibits integrity in its operations as demonstrated by the implementation of appropriate policies, sound business practices, timely and fair responses to complaints and grievances, and regular evaluation of its performance in these areas.  | { GUIDELINE: The institution has published or readily-available grievance procedures for faculty, staff, and students. Its finances are regularly audited by external agencies   |
| 1.9. The institution is committed to honest and open communication with the Accrediting Commission, to undertaking the accreditation review process with seriousness and candor, and to abiding by Commission policies and procedures, including all substantive change policies.   |  |

## Questions for Institutional Engagement

1. In what ways does the institution assure itself that it promotes and upholds sound ethical practices and respect for humanity through its teaching, scholarship, and service, as well as its administrative practices?

2. To what extent are policies regarding academic freedom widely understood and to what extent do they support a climate of academic inquiry and engagement for all members of the institutional community?
3. How does the institution ensure that issues of diversity are appropriately engaged and that a climate of respect for a diversity of backgrounds, ideas and perspectives is fostered among its members?
4. How does the institution assure that student grievances and complaints are addressed promptly, appropriately, and equitably?
5. How does the institution assure itself that it has adequate administrative controls in financial, administrative and auxiliary functions (including budgeting, fundraising, athletics, student support services), and external relations with business, government, and foundations? How effective are conflict of interest policies?

**See related Policies regarding:** Complaints Against Accredited and Candidate Institutions; Contracts with Unaccredited Organizations; Disclosure of Accrediting Documents and Commission Actions; Diversity; Honorary Degrees; and Substantive Change.

## Standard 2

### Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions

- TEACHING AND LEARNING
- SCHOLARSHIP AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY
- SUPPORT FOR STUDENT LEARNING

**The institution achieves its institutional purposes and attains its educational objectives through the core functions of teaching and learning, scholarship and creative activity, and support for student learning. It demonstrates that these core functions are performed effectively and that they support one another in the institution's efforts to attain educational effectiveness.**

#### Teaching and Learning

##### Criteria for Review

- 2.1. The institution's educational programs are appropriate in content, standards, and nomenclature for the degree level awarded, regardless of mode of delivery, and are staffed by sufficient numbers of faculty qualified for the type and level of curriculum offered.
- GUIDELINES:** The content, length, and standards of the institution's academic programs conform to recognized disciplinary or professional standards and are subject to peer review.
- 2.2. All degrees—undergraduate and graduate—awarded by the institution are clearly defined in terms of entry-level requirements and in terms of levels of student achievement necessary for graduation that represent more than simply an accumulation of courses or credits.
- GUIDELINE:** Competencies required for graduation are reflected in course syllabi for both General Education and the major.
- ❖ Baccalaureate programs engage students in an integrated course of study of sufficient breadth and depth to prepare them for work, citizenship, and a fulfilling life. These programs also ensure the development of core learning abilities and competencies including, but not limited to, college-level written and oral communication; college-level quantitative skills; information literacy; and the habit of critical analysis of data and argument. In addition, baccalaureate programs actively foster an understanding of diversity; civic responsibility; the ability to work with others; and the capability to engage in lifelong learning. Baccalaureate programs also ensure breadth for all students in the areas of cultural and aesthetic, social and political, as well as scientific and technical knowledge expected of educated persons in this society. Finally, students are required to engage in an in-depth, focused, and sustained program of study as part of their baccalaureate programs.
- GUIDELINE:** The institution has a program of General Education that is integrated throughout the curriculum, including at the upper division level, consisting of a minimum of 45 semester credit hours (or the equivalent), together with significant study in depth in a given area of knowledge (typically described in terms of a major).

❖ Graduate programs are consistent with the purpose and character of their institutions; are in keeping with the expectations of their respective disciplines and professions; and are described through nomenclature that is appropriate to the several levels of graduate and professional degrees offered. Graduate curricula are visibly structured to include active involvement with the literature of the field and ongoing student engagement in research and/or appropriate high-level professional practice and training experiences. Additionally, admission criteria to graduate programs normally include a baccalaureate degree in an appropriate undergraduate program.

{ GUIDELINE: The institution employs at least one full-time faculty member for each graduate degree program offered.

2.3. The institution's expectations for learning and student attainment are clearly reflected in its academic programs and policies. These include the organization and content of the institution's curricula; admissions and graduation policies; the organization and delivery of advisement; the use of its library and information resources; and (where applicable) experience in the wider learning environment provided by the campus and/or co-curriculum.

{ GUIDELINE: The use of information and learning resources beyond textbooks is evidenced in syllabi throughout the undergraduate and graduate curriculum.

2.4. The institution's expectations for learning and student attainment are developed and widely shared among its members (including faculty, students, staff, and where appropriate, external stakeholders). The institution's faculty takes collective responsibility for establishing, reviewing, fostering, and demonstrating the attainment of these expectations.

2.5. The institution's academic programs actively involve students in learning, challenge them to achieve high expectations, and provide them with appropriate and ongoing feedback about their performance and how it can be improved.

2.6. The institution demonstrates that its graduates consistently achieve its stated levels of attainment and ensures that its expectations for student learning are embedded in the standards faculty use to evaluate student work.

2.7. In order to improve program currency and effectiveness, all programs offered by the institution are subject to review, including analyses of the achievement of the program's learning objectives and outcomes. Where appropriate, evidence from external constituencies such as employers and professional societies is included in such reviews.

{ GUIDELINE: The institution incorporates in its assessment of educational objectives results with respect to student achievement, including program completion, license examination, and placement rates results.

## Questions for Institutional Engagement

1. In what ways does the institution ensure that the degrees it offers remain rigorous and aligned with its core purposes?
2. How does the institution ensure that its programs can be completed in a timely manner, are configured to meet student needs, and lead to retention and graduation rates appropriate to the type of institution and student population?
3. To what extent does the institution provide an environment that is actively conducive to study and learning, where library, information resources, and co-curricular programs actively support student learning?
4. How does the institution connect its curriculum and services to its defined communities, through such initiatives as development of available field settings, service learning, or similar opportunities for practical engagement?
5. How effectively does the institution review and modify its courses and programs to reflect new knowledge and changes in the needs of society?
6. In what ways does the institution encourage and disseminate innovations in teaching and learning, and discuss their implications for curriculum and pedagogy?
7. How does the institution's leadership create and sustain an institutional climate that actively fosters effective teaching and learning?
8. To what extent does the institution ensure that students develop expected core learning abilities and competencies before they graduate?

## Scholarship and Creative Activity

### Criteria for Review

- 2.8. The institution actively values and promotes scholarship, curricular and instructional innovation, and creative activity, as well as their dissemination at levels and of the kinds appropriate to the institution's purposes and character.
- 2.9. The institution recognizes and promotes appropriate linkages among scholarship, teaching, student learning and service.

## Questions for Institutional Engagement

1. In what ways do the institution's policies and administrative procedures encourage and support scholarship, instructional innovation and creative activity (e.g., policies on faculty workload and reward, research, funding, professional development programs, etc.), as well as learning about pedagogy and learning theory?
2. To what extent are scholarship, research, and creative activity linked to the improvement of teaching and learning?

3. How effectively does the institution engage students directly in scholarship and creative activity, consonant with the institution’s purpose and character?
4. In what ways does the institution seek to foster among its students a research-oriented culture of inquiry—especially at the graduate level—that is consonant with its character and purposes?

## Support for Student Learning

### Criteria for Review

2.10. Regardless of mode of program delivery, the institution regularly identifies the characteristics of its students and assesses their needs, experiences, and levels of satisfaction. This information is used to help shape a learning-centered environment and to actively promote student success.

{ GUIDELINE: The institution's policy on grading and student evaluation is clearly stated, and provides opportunity for appeal as needed; and periodic analyses of grades and evaluation procedures are conducted to assess the rigor and impact of these policies.

2.11. Consistent with its purposes, the institution develops and implements co-curricular programs that are integrated with its academic goals and programs, and supports student professional and personal development.

2.12. The institution ensures that all students understand the requirements of their academic programs and receive timely, useful, and regular information and advising about relevant academic requirements.

{ GUIDELINE: Recruiting and admission practices, academic calendars, publications, and advertising are accurate, current, disclosing, and are readily available to support student needs.

2.13. Student support services—including financial aid, registration, advising, career counseling, computer labs, and library and information services—are designed to meet the needs of the specific types of students the institution serves and the curricula it offers.

2.14. Institutions that serve transfer students assume an obligation to provide clear and accurate information about transfer requirements, ensure equitable treatment for such students with respect to academic policies, and ensure that such students are not unduly disadvantaged by transfer requirements.

### Questions for Institutional Engagement

1. How effectively has advising or mentoring helped students benefit from available educational opportunities and resources?
2. How does the institution ensure that the organization and delivery of its services to students is appropriately aligned with its educational objectives and its particular approach to teaching and learning?

3. In what ways does the institution promote and provide an intellectually rich campus environment in which students are encouraged to explore and express a diversity of ideas and opinions?
4. How does the institution identify the special needs of transfer students, assess their performance and retention in the institution, and determine that institutional educational objectives are met even if coursework is taken in other institutions? How does it similarly take steps to ensure that its credits are transferable to other institutions?
5. To what extent does the institution regularly collect and analyze retention and attrition data for the student body as a whole as well as for major subgroups (such as by age, ethnicity, or gender), and explore the implications of the data to be assured that the institution is being responsive to the needs of all of its students?
6. In what ways does the institution gather, analyze, and use information about the needs and preferences of students and the values they place on programs and services? Is this information effectively used to create an overall climate conducive to student and institutional learning?

**See related Policies regarding:** Collegiate Athletics; Credit for Prior Experiential Learning; International Students; Study Abroad; and Transfer and Award of Academic Credit.

## Standard 3

# Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability

- FACULTY AND STAFF
- FISCAL, PHYSICAL AND INFORMATION RESOURCES
- ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

**The institution sustains its operations and supports the achievement of its educational objectives through its investment in human, physical, fiscal, and information resources and through an appropriate and effective set of organizational and decision-making structures. These key resources and organizational structures promote the achievement of institutional purposes and educational objectives and create a high quality environment for learning.**

### Faculty and Staff

#### Criteria for Review

- 3.1. The institution employs personnel sufficient in number and professional qualifications to maintain its operations and to support its academic programs, consistent with its institutional and educational objectives.
- 3.2. The institution demonstrates that it employs a faculty with substantial and continuing commitment to the institution sufficient in number, professional qualifications, and diversity to achieve its educational objectives, to establish and oversee academic policies, and to ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic programs wherever and however delivered.
- 3.3. Faculty and staff recruitment, workload, incentive, and evaluation practices are aligned with institutional purposes and educational objectives. Evaluation processes are systematic, include appropriate peer review, and, for instructional faculty and other teaching staff, involve consideration of evidence of teaching effectiveness, including student evaluations of instruction.
- 3.4. The institution maintains appropriate and sufficiently supported faculty development activities designed to improve teaching and learning consistent with its educational objectives and institutional purposes.

**GUIDELINE:** The institution has an instructional staffing plan that includes a sufficient number of full-time faculty with appropriate backgrounds by discipline and degree levels.

## Questions for Institutional Engagement

1. How effectively do the institution's workload policies and practices balance appropriate expectations for faculty scholarship and creative activity, teaching assignments, and other uses of faculty time?
2. In what ways does the institution ensure that part-time faculty are oriented, supported, and integrated appropriately into the academic life of the institution?
3. How does the institution ensure that it recruits, supports, and continues to develop its non-academic staff in a manner that encourages their effectiveness and actively furthers institutional purposes?

## Fiscal, Physical, and Information Resources

### Criteria for Review

- 3.5. Fiscal and physical resources are effectively aligned with institutional purposes and educational objectives, and are sufficiently developed to support and maintain the level and kind of educational programs offered both now and for the foreseeable future.
- 3.6. The institution holds, or provides access to, information resources sufficient in scope, quality, currency, and kind to support its academic offerings and the scholarship of its members. For on-campus students and students enrolled at a distance, physical and information resources, services, and information technology facilities are sufficient in scope and kind to support and maintain the level and kind of education offered. These resources, services and facilities are consistent with the institution's purposes, and are appropriate, sufficient, and sustainable.
- 3.7. The institution's information technology resources are sufficiently coordinated and supported to fulfill its educational purposes and to provide key academic and administrative functions.

{ **GUIDELINE:** The institution has a history of financial stability, appropriate independent audits, and realistic plans to eliminate any accumulated deficits and to build sufficient reserves to support long-term viability.

## Questions for Institutional Engagement

1. How effectively does the institution demonstrate that it is able to maintain fiscal and physical equilibrium through its array of fiscal policies and strategies and through the regular appraisal and renewal of its physical assets? In what ways does an institution align its fiscal, physical, and human resources to fulfill its mission, priorities, and educational objectives?
2. How does the institution ensure that its learning environment and any associated physical facilities are safe and accessible?
3. How does the institution assess the continuing adequacy of its fiscal, physical, and information resources and plan for the future to ensure that they are appropriately renewed and (if necessary) altered in size and character?

4. In what ways does the institution engage its faculty and other members of its community in the process of determining and deploying its fiscal, physical, and information assets?
5. How does the institution ensure that its members develop the critical information literacy skills needed to locate, evaluate, and responsibly use information? How does it utilize the special skills of information professionals to support teaching, learning, and information technology planning?
6. To what extent do the institution's resources, services, and information technology respond to faculty needs with respect to scholarly activity and curricular development?

## Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes

### Criteria for Review

- 3.8. The institution's organizational structures and decision-making processes are clear, consistent with its purposes, and sufficient to support effective decision making.
- 3.9. The institution has an independent governing board or similar authority that, consistent with its legal and fiduciary authority, exercises appropriate oversight over institutional integrity, policies, and ongoing operations, including hiring and evaluating the chief executive officer.
- 3.10. The institution has a chief executive whose full-time responsibility is to the institution, together with a cadre of administrators qualified and able to provide effective educational leadership and management at all levels.
- 3.11. The institution's faculty exercises effective academic leadership and acts consistently to ensure both academic quality and the appropriate maintenance of the institution's educational purposes and character.

{ GUIDELINE: The institution has an organization chart that clearly depicts positions, associated responsibilities, and lines of authority.

### Questions for Institutional Engagement

1. In what ways does the institution ensure that its organizational structures and decision processes remain appropriately aligned with its size, complexity, character, institutional purposes, and service to students?
2. How does the institution ensure that its established organizational structures and decision-making processes are being followed and respected? How does it evaluate the effectiveness of these processes and ensure that the resulting information is used to improve them?
3. How does the institution assure continuity of leadership through its processes for selecting and evaluating its chief executive and other top administrators? How does it ensure that its leadership remains credible and communicates effectively with members of the institution's community?

4. How does the institution encourage and support the active exercise of leadership and responsibility at all levels—including supporting faculty to discharge their distinctive leadership roles?
5. How does the institution interpret and put into practice shared governance through appropriate faculty participation in planning and decision-making in pursuit of the institution's purpose and character?
6. How does the institution define the role of students in campus decision-making and how is that role exercised?

**See related Policies regarding:** Collective Bargaining; and Institutional Units in a System.

## Standard 4

# Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement

- STRATEGIC THINKING AND PLANNING
- COMMITMENT TO LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

**The institution conducts sustained, evidence-based, and participatory discussions about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives. These activities inform both institutional planning and systematic evaluations of educational effectiveness. The results of institutional inquiry, research, and data collection are used to establish priorities at different levels of the institution, and to revise institutional purposes, structures, and approaches to teaching, learning, and scholarly work.**

### Strategic Thinking and Planning

#### Criteria for Review

- 4.1. The institution periodically engages its multiple constituencies in institutional reflection and planning processes which assess its strategic position; articulate priorities; examine the alignment of its purposes, core functions and resources; and define the future direction of the institution. The institution monitors the effectiveness of the implementation of its plans and revises them as appropriate.
- 4.2. Planning processes at the institution define and, to the extent possible, align academic, personnel, fiscal, physical, and technological needs with the strategic objectives and priorities of the institution.
- 4.3. Planning processes are informed by appropriately defined and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data, and include consideration of evidence of educational effectiveness, including student learning.

**GUIDELINES:** A clear charge to planning bodies with a regular schedule and the existence of an understandable and coherent plan for assessing the attainment of educational objectives must be developed. Evidence of the ways the results of planning and evaluation are linked to decision-making is demonstrable.

#### Questions for Institutional Engagement

1. How effectively does planning and evaluation occur within the institution at multiple levels and across units? To what extent do planning efforts lead to priorities and clear institutional implementation activities?
2. How well do planning, evaluation, and institutional research activities fit together, and to what extent are they aligned with the institution's purposes and character?
3. How does the institution ensure that the information it collects and maintains about itself is current, accurate, and of the right kinds? How effectively does it assess its capacity to analyze this information and use the results of such assessments for improvements?

## Commitment to Learning and Improvement

### Criteria for Review

- 4.4. The institution employs a deliberate set of quality assurance processes at each level of institutional functioning, including new curriculum and program approval processes, periodic program review, ongoing evaluation, and data collection. These processes involve assessments of effectiveness, track results over time, and use the results of these assessments to revise and improve structures and processes, curricula, and pedagogy.
- 4.5. Institutional research addresses strategic data needs, is disseminated in a timely manner, and is incorporated in institutional review and decision-making processes. Included among the priorities of the institutional research function is the identification of indicators and the collection of appropriate data to support the assessment of student learning consistent with the institution's purposes and educational objectives. Periodic reviews of institutional research and data collection are conducted to develop more effective indicators of performance and to assure the suitability and usefulness of data.
- 4.6. Leadership at all levels is committed to improvement based on the results of the processes of inquiry, evaluation and assessment used throughout the institution. The faculty take responsibility for evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process and use the results for improvement. Assessments of the campus environment in support of academic and co-curricular objectives are also undertaken and used, and are incorporated into institutional planning.
- 4.7. The institution, with significant faculty involvement, engages in ongoing inquiry into the processes of teaching and learning, as well as into the conditions and practices that promote the kinds and levels of learning intended by the institution. The outcomes of such inquiries are applied to the design of curricula, the design and practice of pedagogy, and to the improvement of evaluation means and methodology.
- 4.8. Appropriate stakeholders, including alumni, employers, practitioners, and others defined by the institution, are involved in the assessment of the effectiveness of educational programs.

{ GUIDELINES: The institution exhibits existence of clear institutional research capacities with appropriate reporting lines and support appropriate to the institution's size and scope. Institutional research or equivalent databases are developed that are sufficient to meet all external reporting needs (e.g. IPEDS), and there are appropriate ways to access or disseminate this information through publications, reports, or widely-accessible databases.

{ GUIDELINE: The institution has clear, well established policies and practices for gathering and analyzing information that leads to a culture of evidence and improvement.

## Questions for Institutional Engagement

1. How are stakeholders involved in the assessment of the effectiveness of educational programs? How is their feedback disseminated and used to inform improvement?
2. In what ways does the institution review the effectiveness of its quality assurance processes to assure its alignment with institutional priorities and educational objectives?
3. To what extent does the institution explore assumptions that shape the design and organization of its educational objectives and programs, and generate new approaches to teaching and learning?
4. In what ways does the institution identify effective approaches to assessing teaching and learning within the institution and at other institutions. How does it incorporate these practices to increase the institutional capacity to engage issues of educational effectiveness?
5. To what extent does the institution have a collective vision of educational attainment that is clearly stated and widely understood?
6. In what ways does the institution reinforce a culture of evidence throughout the organization?





# The Institutional Review Process

# GUIDE TO THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW PROCESS

## Introduction

In order to realize the goals of the new WASC accreditation process, the Commission has revised its approaches to institutional review. The staged, sequential model of review described in this section is built on more than 30 experimental visits and extensive study of institutional review processes from around the world. This new model is intended to provide institutions with a cycle of review more connected to each institution's context and stage of development, more aligned with institutional priorities and future directions, and more focused on educational effectiveness.

A substantial institutional investment is required to prepare for any external accreditation review. In their preparations, all institutions must commit significant time, money and energy to responding to the needs of the external agency. Historically, an institution starts fresh with each new self study, requiring considerable effort each time a review cycle occurs. Through this new model, the Commission is committed to a system of review that promotes the development of internal institutional indicators and then builds, to the extent possible, on existing institutional evidence. The review cycle relies on portfolios that can be retained and updated for subsequent reviews, and it promotes serious institutional inquiry and engagement with issues of consequence. By this process the Commission intends to align the cost of accreditation more with institutional improvement than external reporting, and to implement processes that will add value to institutional functioning and promote educational effectiveness. The Commission encourages institutions to assess their costs for the review process in relation to the benefits received and to communicate with the Commission ways of obtaining further efficiencies and improving the effectiveness of the review process.

The Commission is also committed to a review process that gives institutions as much notice as possible at each stage about the focus and scope of review. The Core Commitments define the broad outcomes of the accreditation process, with Accreditation Standards defining the scope of review. In the course of any institutional review and visit process, however, equal weight cannot be given to each possible area and topic identified within the Accreditation Standards. The flexibility afforded through this new model of review enables institutions to work with the Commission to refine the review process more appropriately to each institution's history and context. As well, in an effort to build the capacity of an institution to work more effectively within a culture of evidence and to give emphasis to educational effectiveness, the staged, sequential review process is intended to establish the scope of each review. The review process provides feedback to the institution at each stage that is consequential and useful for institutional accountability and improvement.

As this new model of review is implemented, the Commission is committed to sharing good practices and formats used by institutions so that the entire region can learn together and improve the review process continually. The intended outcomes of this process are to assist institutions and team members as they navigate the staged, sequential review process, to develop more effective evidence of institutional capacity and educational effectiveness, and to identify and promote useful ways of evaluating and improving student learning.

## Overview of the Accreditation Review Cycle

The new WASC accreditation review process consists of three key elements, described in detail in this section. The Commission has attempted to develop a holistic *system* of review, rather than a single event, that reinforces the key values and principles of WASC, and that brings value to institutions and the public. The system of review has a clear *focus* (on effectiveness, both institutional and educational), an integrated *organization* (around the two Core Commitments, supported by the four Accreditation

Standards) and a staged, sequential *structure and cycle* that permits adaptation and responsiveness to institutional context and priorities.

The new accreditation review process involves an Institutional Presentation developed in three stages, integrated and sequenced to support and promote institutional development and effectiveness: Stage 1: The

Institutional Proposal; Stage 2: the Preparatory Review; and Stage 3: The Educational Effectiveness Review. The cycle of review is intended to be a maximum of ten years, providing institutions a three-year period to complete the process of self review and external evaluation, followed by an extended period of time for sustaining initiatives and recommendations resulting from this process.

This section of the *Handbook* is designed to give guidance to institutions and review teams about the purposes, structure, and format of the Institutional Presentation for each stage and the process of review to be conducted. Further information and support is provided through Commission workshops, the WASC website, and additional resource guides that are to be developed.

FOCUS:	INSTITUTIONAL & EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS
ORGANIZATION:	TWO CORE COMMITMENTS SUPPORTED BY FOUR ACCREDITATION STANDARDS
STRUCTURE & CYCLE:	ADAPTIVE AND RESPONSIVE TO INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT & PRIORITIES

## Institutional Self Review and External Evaluation

The heart of accreditation lies in the institutional self review. To be done effectively and with integrity, the review requires the conscious and public commitment of the institution’s leadership to openness, candor, and serious engagement, and an evident intention to use the results of the self review to improve institutional capacity and educational effectiveness. The WASC accreditation process represents a shift from attempting to review all aspects of institutional functions in a compliance mode to a review and validation of effective ongoing internal systems of quality review and improvement. External evaluation under this new approach can only be successful when built on an effective internal institutional process of evaluation, reflection, and plans for further action. In addition, the new sequential system of review developed by the Commission is designed to move away from long discursive reports to evidence-based *Institutional Presentations* comprised of focused portfolios of data and exhibits, supported by reflective and analytical essays. (Note: The Institutional Presentation is comprised of the materials prepared for the three stages of review: the Proposal, the Preparatory Review, and the Educational Effectiveness Review.)

It is the conscious goal of the Commission in establishing this new system of review to promote the development of more effective internal systems of data collection and analysis, described by WASC as a “culture of evidence.” Institutional Presentations under this new system are to be different from traditional self studies by taking the institution’s review of key indicators of its own capacity and educational effectiveness as the central focus of review, as well as including authentic source documents that relate the institution to the Standards. The scope, length and focus of Institutional Presentations are intended to be much different from traditional comprehensive self studies. Institutional Presentations are themselves demonstrations of the institution’s ability to generate and analyze indicators of performance aligned with the institution’s own priorities and educational objectives, and the institution’s ability to engage thoughtfully and extensively with issues of educational effectiveness and student learning.

The role of WASC evaluation teams at each stage of the review process is to work with the institution’s own evidence and exhibits, determine if they accurately and fairly describe the institution, and within the context of Commission Standards, determine if the institution demonstrates it has effectively addressed the two Core Commitments: that the institution has sufficient capacity and systems of quality assurance and improvement to demonstrate educational effectiveness at the time of review and are

likely to be sustained. Through the process of working with institutions to review and approve their Proposals for the accreditation process, the Commission also is adopting a stance weighted toward collaboration and institutional improvement except in those cases where the context of the institution's history or relationship with the Commission warrants a stricter compliance role.

## Outcomes of the Accreditation Review Process

The Commission has identified outcomes it considers important for the accreditation review process that serve both institutions and the purposes of accreditation. The outcomes also provide a model for institutions since each institution is expected to identify in its Proposal specific outcomes for its accreditation self-review. It is expected that the staged sequential Institutional Presentation of the Institutional Proposal, Preparatory Review and Educational Effectiveness Review will lead to the following outcomes.

For the institution:

1. The development of and more effective use of indicators of institutional performance and educational effectiveness to support institutional planning and decision making;
2. Greater clarity about the institution's educational objectives and criteria for defining and evaluating those objectives;
3. Improvement of the institution's capacity for self review and of its systems of quality assurance;
4. A deeper understanding of student learning, the development of more varied and effective methods of assessing learning, and the use of the results of this process to improve programs and institutional practices; and
5. Systematic engagement of the faculty with issues of assessing and improving teaching and learning processes within the institution, and with aligning support systems for faculty more effectively toward this end.

To fulfill the purposes of accreditation:

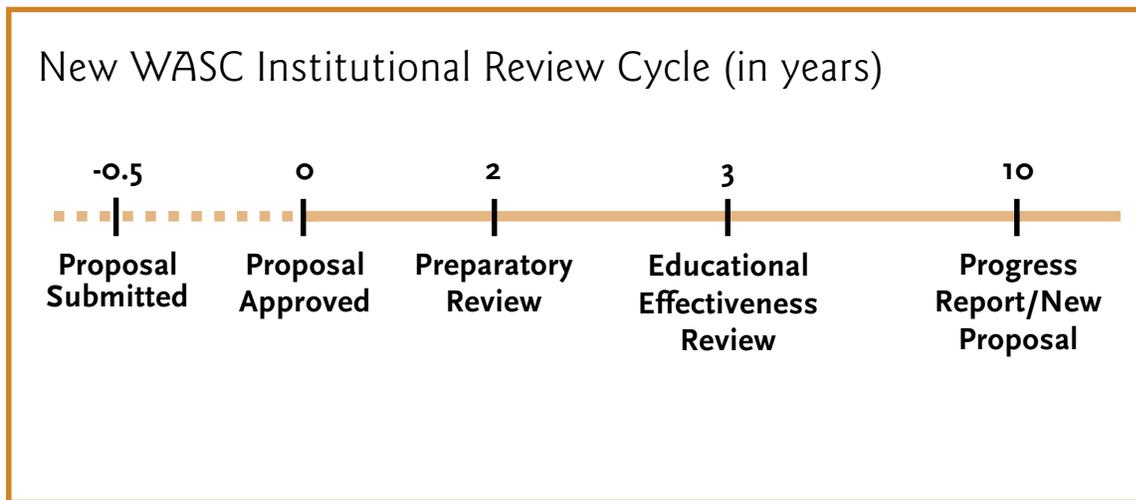
6. Validation of the institution's presentation of evidence, both to assess compliance with Accreditation Standards and to provide a basis for institutional improvement; and
7. Demonstration of the institution's fulfillment of the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness.

# THE WASC INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW PROCESS

In order to obtain accreditation or remain accredited, each institution is required to demonstrate that it fulfills the two Core Commitments of the Accrediting Commission:

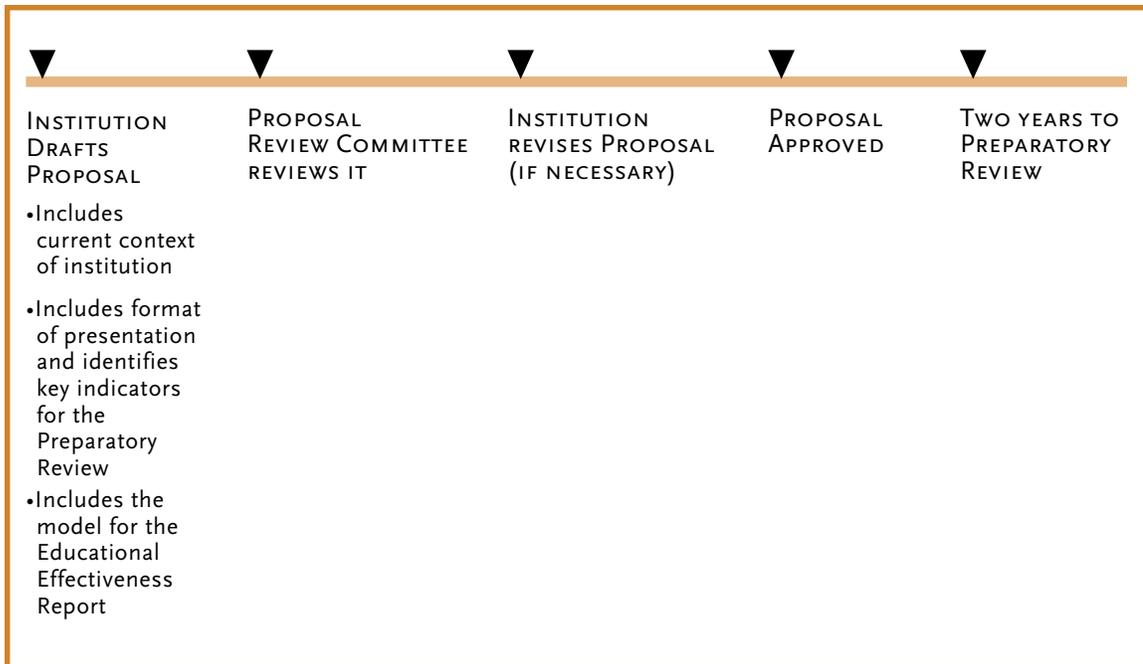
- I. Commitment to Institutional Capacity: The institution functions with clear purposes, high levels of institutional integrity, fiscal stability, and organizational structures to fulfill its purposes.
- II. Commitment to Educational Effectiveness: The institution evidences clear and appropriate educational objectives and design at the institutional and program level, and employs processes of review, including the collection and use of data, that assure delivery of programs and learner accomplishments at a level of performance appropriate for the degree or certificate awarded.

Demonstration of these Core Commitments occurs through a staged and sequential accreditation review process that results in an Institutional Presentation comprised of a Proposal, a Preparatory Review, and an Educational Effectiveness Review. This three-staged cycle applies to all institutions, regardless of where they are in the accreditation process. In the case of institutions considered for Initial Candidacy or Initial Accreditation, primary focus will be placed on institutional performance to meet the expectations of the Standards. For those institutions that have a history of Commission sanctions, greater emphasis will be placed on reviewing responses to previous Commission decisions and the identified Standards.



## Stage I. The Institutional Proposal

**Purposes:** The Institutional Proposal is the first element of the Institutional Presentation and the first stage in the accreditation review cycle. Its purpose is to guide the entire accreditation review process. Once the Proposal is approved, it becomes part of the total body of institutional material that supports the review during its subsequent two stages. As such, the Proposal will be shared with each subsequent review team and with the Commission. The Proposal enables the review process to be anchored in each institution's distinctive context and its intended goals for the accreditation process. The staged review process is also intended to make meaningful contributions to each institution's own internal planning and review mechanisms, as well as to reduce the burden associated with having to do work unrelated to



institutional priorities. Commission interests are assured by the fact that each Proposal is reviewed by a peer committee charged with the responsibility of applying Commission criteria to each Proposal and its alignment with the Core Commitments and Accreditation Standards. Once approved, the Proposal may be further refined or modified during the accreditation process by mutual consent or by the Commission following the Preparatory Review. It provides both the institution and the Commission with a foundation for carrying out the accreditation process within a written and approved framework.

In sum, the Institutional Proposal enables the institution to:

1. Establish the context for its next accreditation review cycle by describing the institution's most important features, and the most important issues that it wishes to address;
2. Define specific goals and outcomes for the accreditation review in light of issues arising from the institution's own planning and development processes and emerging from the institution's examination of itself under the new accreditation Standards, as well as specific issues raised by the Commission as a result of the last institutional review;
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of its data gathering and analysis systems;
4. Identify how the institution will present basic data and Reflective Essays on Institutional Capacity for the Preparatory Review;
5. Explore educational effectiveness and support institutional improvement by identifying the institutional strategy to be used for the Educational Effectiveness Review; and
6. Propose the timing and relationship between the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews (normally 12 to 18 months).

**Timing:** Submitted two-and-a-half years prior to the Preparatory Review in order to be finalized two years prior to the Preparatory Review. Formal date of submission established by the Commission.

**Format and Required Elements:** Institutional Proposals are to include the following elements:

## THE PROPOSAL INCLUDES:

- Statement of Institutional Context
- Description of expected outcomes
- Description of how constituencies were involved
- Description of how the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews will be staged
- For the Preparatory Review, a brief description of how evidence will be presented, including the proposed format of presentation and identification of key indicators in the Institutional Portfolio
- For the Educational Effectiveness Review, a description of the proposed model, special emphases, and ways the institution will address student learning
- An Institutional Stipulation Statement

1. A Statement of Institutional Context that briefly describes the institution's background, its current context, a brief and basic presentation of its major strengths and challenges, and a synopsis of responses to issues raised by the Commission action letter and, where relevant, issues identified by the Substantive Change or Interim Report Committees. This Statement should also connect the context for the accreditation review to the institution's vision and strategic plan.
2. A description of the expected outcomes of the Accreditation Review Process. As the Commission has attempted to model this process on page 36, expected outcomes for the institution should be more than a statement of activities or identification of topics for review. The institution is expected to identify specific outcomes that it seeks to achieve through the accreditation review process and particular processes, policies, or procedures (e.g. planning, program review, establishing academic standards, faculty development, etc.) that it intends to improve through the process.
3. A description of how representatives of the institution's constituencies were involved in the development and internal approval of the Proposal and how they will be involved subsequently in the review process. It is expected that key institutional leadership, especially the faculty leadership, have been involved in the design of the proposal, the format of review, the selection of special themes, the method of inquiry, and the most significant indicators that will be developed as evidence.
4. A description of how the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews will be staged and timed to address institutional goals and to demonstrate the institution's fulfillment of the two Core Commitments.
5. For the Preparatory Review, a brief description how the institution intends to present evidence to demonstrate compliance with Commission Standards including the proposed format of presentation and types of key indicators that will be included in the Institutional Portfolio. This statement should also include commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's data gathering and analysis systems, and the steps to be taken to develop institutional evidence to support both the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews.

6. For the Educational Effectiveness Review, a brief description of the format to be used by the institution to engage issues of Educational Effectiveness (see p. 45), the special emphases being proposed in light of the format selected, the methods to be used to engage these issues, and the ways in which the institution will address issues of student learning. This statement should also identify the key evidentiary indicators the institution will develop and/or apply to support its Educational Effectiveness Review.
7. A prescribed set of Basic Descriptive Data presented in standard form that address a range of common institutional characteristics including enrollments, listings of the institution's academic programs, numbers of faculty and staff employed, and available fiscal, physical, and information resources. All data should be presented in the form of five-year historical trends. These Data Tables will be available on the WASC website ([wascweb.org](http://wascweb.org)) for downloading.
8. A list of all degree programs where 50 percent or more of the program is offered off-site (more than 25 miles from the home campus) or by distance learning.
9. An Institutional Stipulation Statement signed by the Chief Executive Officer that establishes:
  - a. That the institution is using the review process to demonstrate its fulfillment of the two Core Commitments, that it will engage in the process with seriousness, that data presented are accurate and fairly present the institution.
  - b. That the institution has published and publicly available policies in force as identified by the Commission (See Appendix 1, p. 126). Such policies will be available for review on request throughout the period of accreditation.
  - c. That the institution will abide by procedures adopted by the Commission to meet United States Department of Education (USDE) procedural requirements (See Section VI).
  - d. That the institution will submit all regularly required data, and any data specifically requested by the Commission during the period of Accreditation (or Candidacy).
  - e. That the institution has reviewed its off-campus programs and degree programs offered by distance learning to ensure that they have been approved by the WASC substantive change process.

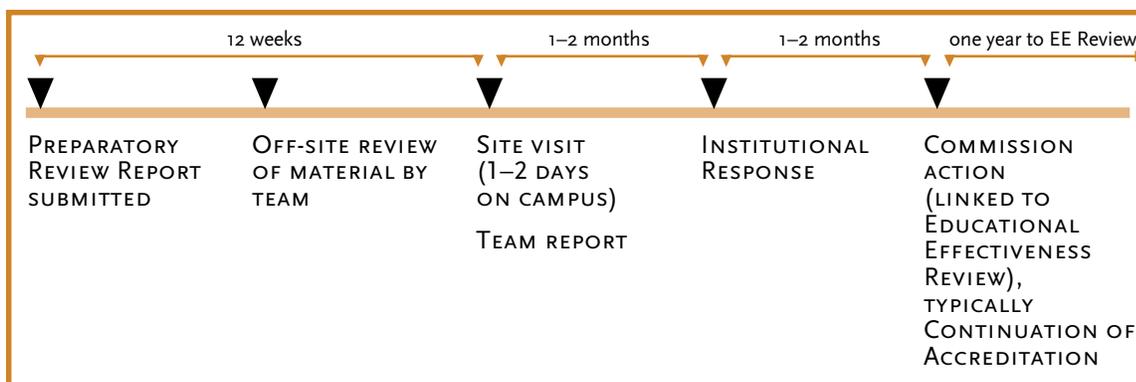
Exclusive of data displays and stipulations, the Institutional Proposal should not exceed ten pages in length.

**Proposal Review Process:** Following submission, the Institutional Proposal is first reviewed by Commission staff and may be commented on with requested revisions prior to submission to the Proposal Review Committee (PRC). The PRC is authorized to approve proposals which it believes assure that an institution will be able to effectively demonstrate that it fulfills the two Core Commitments required for accreditation. In cases where the PRC has doubts that the Proposal will result in a review process that is capable of doing so, the Committee may request further information from the institution and/or may require revision and re-submission of the Proposal itself. At the conclusion of the review process, Commission staff will inform the institution that its Proposal has been accepted and that it can proceed with the review. Working with Commission staff, the institution is responsible for preparing a final copy of the Proposal for use by evaluation teams and the Commission.

## Stage 2. The Preparatory Review

**Purposes:** The Preparatory Review is designed to enable the Commission to determine whether an institution fulfills the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity: *The institution functions with clear purposes, high levels of institutional integrity, fiscal stability, and organizational structures and processes to fulfill its purposes.* In keeping with the Commission’s goals of focusing institutional efforts in the accreditation process on issues of importance, building a culture of evidence, reducing the burden of the accreditation review and enhancing the strategic value of the process, the Preparatory Review is intended to be a focused review which includes a site visit with clearly defined purposes and procedures. These are to:

1. Audit and verify the information provided in the Institutional Presentation, and to assure that the data presented fairly and accurately portray the state of the institution at the time of review.
2. Evaluate key institutional resources, structures, and processes in the light of the Commission’s Standards to assure that the institution operates at or above threshold levels acceptable for accreditation (or candidacy) and, where appropriate, to identify any capacity-related issues that need to be carried forward in the Educational Effectiveness Review.
3. Assess the institution’s preparedness to undertake the Educational Effectiveness Review as proposed, and to assist the institution in refining its focus and plan for that review.



**Timing:** The Preparatory Review occurs on dates established by the Commission approximately two years after finalization of the Institutional Proposal. Institutions that have previously been given dates for the next reaffirmation review should expect the Preparatory Review to occur at that time.

**Who Is Involved in Preparation:** It is expected that key institutional constituencies, including faculty leadership, are involved in the design of the Institutional Presentation, the selection of indicators, and especially in the drafting and review of the analytical essays. Much of the evidentiary portion of the Institutional Presentation is designed to be prepared from existing evidence by administrative staff under the guidance of the institution’s design. The entire presentation is to be reviewed by the constituencies of the institution—including faculty and staff leadership and governing bodies as appropriate.

**The Preparatory Review Report:** To support the Preparatory Review, each institution is responsible to develop a Preparatory Review Report. The Report is intended to be primarily evidentiary, consisting of a carefully-chosen set of exhibits (the Institutional Portfolio) that support the institution’s claim that it meets the Core Commitment to Capacity, supported by limited text essays that explain or reflect on the Portfolio’s contents. To the extent possible, the exhibits included in the Institutional Portfolio should be drawn from existing documents and data rather than being prepared especially for the review team.

The Portfolio is also intended to be “standing,” i.e., it should be able to be used in succeeding reviews to avoid duplication of effort and additional institutional costs.

The following structure is suggested for the Preparatory Review Report:

1. An Introduction that describes the contents of the Institutional Presentation as a whole, together with any changes in context that may have arisen since approval of the Proposal.
2. The Institutional Portfolio, which includes:
  - a. An updated set of Basic Descriptive Data originally submitted with the Proposal;
  - b. A set of prescribed exhibits and data displays including lists of institutional policies required by the Commission (stipulated by the CEO and subject to audit on site—See Appendix 1), together with more detailed breakdowns of student body characteristics; enrollments and degrees granted for the institution’s academic programs; more detailed data on faculty and staff, and on fiscal, physical, and information resources; a table listing current assessment activities; and a set of standard statistics on educational operations. Institutions whose default rate for Title IV programs requires a default reduction plan should provide a copy of their plan for review; and
  - c. A set of exhibits and data displays chosen by the institution as evidence of its Commitment to Capacity. These may include examples of policies and procedures, additional data, or examples of how particular activities are undertaken, as suggested by particular Commission Standards, Criteria for Review, or Questions for Institutional Engagement.
3. Reflective Essays in regard to each specific Standard that indicate what the exhibits contained in the Portfolio mean to the institution, what issues they raise, and why those included were chosen in addition to the prescribed exhibits.
4. A Concluding Essay that summarizes the institution’s case that it meets the Commitment to Capacity, provides a reflective view of its strengths and weaknesses in relation to the Commission’s Standards, and proposes appropriate recommendations and follow up steps. The Concluding Essay should include commentary on the institution’s preparedness for undertaking the Educational Effectiveness Review.
5. An Appendix that documents the institution’s response to previous concerns identified by the Commission in its action letter and major recommendations of the last visiting team.

In preparing the Institutional Presentation as a whole, institutions should be mindful of several important priorities relevant to all four Accreditation Standards. These include:

- ☞ Establishment of clear objectives;
- ☞ Indicators and metrics of achievement, and/or specific bodies of evidence that can help the institution to determine the degree to which objectives are being achieved; and
- ☞ Actions taken on the basis of evidence in order to improve performance.

These three priorities should guide an institution as it conducts its self review, selects exhibits for the Institutional Portfolio and determines the contents of Reflective Essays for the Preparatory Review.

**Report Length:** The entire Preparatory Review Report is limited to 35 pages of text (single spaced), exclusive of exhibits and Appendices.

**Possible Models for the Preparatory Review Report:** The normal model expected for organizing the Preparatory Review Report will be to arrange the exhibits by the four Commission Standards. In this case, it is recommended that Reflective Essays be prepared that cover the exhibits associated with each Standard. Consistent with the approved Institutional Proposal, possible alternative models might include; 1) Exhibits organized in terms of the institution’s strategic planning priorities, with a cross reference to Commission Standards; and 2) Exhibits organized around special themes, with a cross reference to Commission Standards. Since the intent is for the Institutional Portfolio to be of on-going use to the institution, the model chosen should reflect institutional needs as well as the ability to present the necessary evidence for review.

**Process of the Preparatory Review:** Because the Preparatory Review is intended to be organized for the purposes stated above, the institution is not expected to prepare a comprehensive self review.

Nor is the institution expected to provide data in response to each and every Criterion for Review included under the four Commission Standards. Rather, using a combination of prescribed and specially selected exhibits, the institution is expected to demonstrate it possesses the basic resources, structures, and processes to meet the Core Commitment to Capacity and the broad statement of each Standard.

To verify the evidence included in the Preparatory Review Report, there will be a brief site visit using the methodology of academic audit. Characteristics of the site visit include the following:

1. **TEAM SIZE.** Preparatory Review Teams will normally range from two to four people, depending on the size and complexity of the institution and the scope of the issues involved;
2. **VISIT LENGTH.** Preparatory reviews normally will involve no more than one to two days on campus;
3. **PROCESS OF REVIEW.** The Preparatory Review Team is responsible to assure “due diligence” on the part of the institution. Accordingly, a sample of key processes and issues will be selected by the Review Team in advance of the visit for review and auditing. Teams will use a combination of approaches to gather evidence while on campus—for example, sampling specific administrative processes and procedures to verify that they are followed or in place, reviews of documentary evidence, and structured interviews;

## THE PREPARATORY REVIEW REPORT—FOCUSES ON CORE COMMITMENT 1 TO INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

(Limited to 35 pages of text, exclusive of exhibits and appendices)

### INCLUDES:

- Introduction, including changes in context since the Proposal
- Institutional Portfolio
  - Basic Descriptive Data
  - Set of Stipulated Policies (Appendix 1)
  - Set of exhibits and data displays
- Reflective Essays indicating what the Portfolio exhibits mean to the institution
- Concluding Essay
- Appendix with institution’s response to previous team and Commission concerns

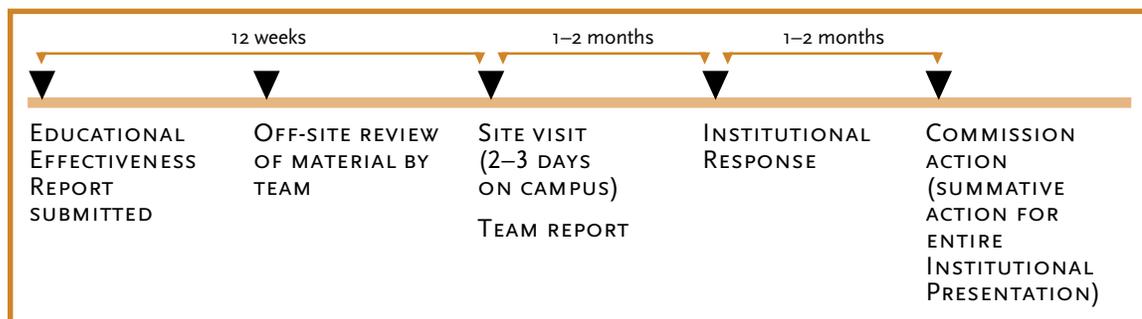
4. **PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES.** The Preparatory Review Team is expected to review the Preparatory Review Report prior to the site visit and communicate with the institution to clarify any ambiguities contained therein, to request additional evidence, and/or to submit specific questions or issues that it wishes to explore more fully in the course of the review; and
5. **TEAM REPORT.** The Preparatory Review Team will prepare a report of its Preparatory Review, commenting on institutional compliance with accreditation standards, especially those in relation to the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity as embodied in the Standards. The team also is expected to comment on the institution's preparedness to engage in serious analysis of Educational Effectiveness and to assist the institution by recommending ways to improve the focus and presentation of issues in the framework being used for the Educational Effectiveness Review. The team report will be submitted to the institution for comment on errors of fact before the report is finalized and sent to the Commission. The institution will also be provided opportunity to prepare a formal written statement in response to the final report which will be provided to the Commission.

**Commission Action:** Following submission of the team report, the Commission will take action. The range and definition of Commission decisions are found in Section IV of the Handbook. Typically, the Commission may act as follows:

1. Receive the report of the Preparatory Review Team, find that the institution fulfills its expectations under the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity, and proceed with the schedule for the Educational Effectiveness Review. Accreditation (or Candidacy) will continue.
2. Identify any additional issues to be addressed in the Educational Effectiveness Review, adjusting the date of the Educational Effectiveness Review if needed.
3. Impose a monitoring condition or a sanction if warranted.

### Stage 3: The Educational Effectiveness Review

**Purposes:** The Educational Effectiveness Review is intended to be significantly different from the Preparatory Review. Its primary purpose is to invite sustained engagement by the institution on the extent to which the institution fulfills its educational objectives. Through a process of inquiry and engagement, the Educational Effectiveness Review also is designed to enable the Commission to make a judgment about the extent that the institution fulfills its Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness: *The institution evidences clear and appropriate educational objectives and design at the institutional and program levels, and employs processes of review, including the collection and use of data, that assure the delivery of programs and learner accomplishments at a level of performance appropriate for the degree or certificate awarded.* Specific purposes of the Educational Effectiveness Review include:



1. To review the design and results of institutional efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs;
2. To examine institutional practices for evaluating student learning and to develop and share good practices in using educational results to improve the process of teaching and learning;
3. To examine the alignment of institutional resources with activities designed to achieve the institution's educational objectives; and
4. To promote sustained engagement with selected issues of Educational Effectiveness consistent with Commission Standards. These will have already been identified by the institution and approved through the Proposal Review Process. The institution is encouraged to select issues of importance to itself in this process, so the Review will be of maximum local utility.

**Timing:** As developed and approved through the Proposal Review Process, normally 12 months following the Preparatory Review.

**Who Is Involved in Preparation:** In light of the primary emphasis placed on inquiry and engagement related to questions of teaching and learning in this Review, it is expected that faculty will be deeply involved in the design and implementation of the Educational Effectiveness Report and review process, as well as others at the institution connected to issues of Educational Effectiveness.

**Possible Models for the Educational Effectiveness Report:** The Educational Effectiveness Review is intended to enable institutions to explore topics or themes that are related to the institution's own priorities and needs, with special emphasis on the assessment and improvement of student learning. The Commission Standards, especially Standards 2 and 4, serve as a frame for selecting topics to be examined in the course of the Educational Effectiveness Review. The format for the Educational Effectiveness Report will therefore vary significantly based upon the institutional context and model for review agreed upon through the Proposal Review Process. Examples of the most prominent models that have emerged from past WASC experimental visits are found on the WASC website ([wascweb.org](http://wascweb.org)), along with their support contacts and material. Models for the Educational Effectiveness Review include:

1. **SPECIAL THEMES.** Under this model, in addition to the required elements specified below, the institution will carefully select a limited number of topics for review in depth; identify expected areas of inquiry or researchable questions for each topic; select a methodology for engaging each topic; and carry out each investigation as a rigorous research-based study. Typically, three or more topics should be selected involving aspects of Educational Effectiveness. At least one of these must give explicit attention to student learning and be supported by concrete data on educational results;
2. **STRATEGIC PLANNING-BASED.** Under this model, in addition to the required elements specified below, the institution would identify a limited number of areas of emphasis in its current strategic plan for in-depth review. The intent is to align the Commission's concern with Educational Effectiveness with the priorities set under the institution's own internal planning processes. The agreed upon topics should be addressed in depth, and should involve significant engagement with evidence of student learning based on educational results. The topics should also emphasize the use of such evidence for improvement of the institution's educational effectiveness;
3. **COMPREHENSIVE.** Under this model, the institution will produce a single comprehensive document describing how it goes about the process of investigating and assuring educational quality. This could be a comprehensive review of assessment at the institution; a comprehensive examination of how the institution might become more learning-centered; or an extensive

review of the entire institution under specific points of inquiry. In any of these approaches, the institution would be expected to include evidence-based discussions of student learning based on educational results; and

4. **AUDIT-BASED.** Under this model, the institution would follow an “audit-like” approach to examining key processes for assuring quality in teaching and learning, including such activities as curriculum design and approval; the establishment and maintenance of academic standards (e.g. grading and the levels of achievement signified by its degrees and other academic awards); instructional evaluation and improvement; and/or the program review process for academic and non-academic programs. A major intent of this audit process is to determine the degree to which the institution’s own design for such processes is actually being carried out in practice at the institutional, school, departmental, or classroom level. As a result, the heart of the “audit” would involve selecting particular examples—for example, a few academic programs, courses, or instructional staff—and examining these in depth to determine alignment. Institution’s electing this approach have sometimes used external “audit” models to guide them—for example the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award framework or the Academic Audit approaches adopted by both Great Britain and Hong Kong.

**Common Elements of the Educational Effectiveness Report:** Although the particular model approved in the Institutional Proposal will largely govern the format and content of the Educational Effectiveness Report, all Educational Effectiveness Reports should include the following elements:

1. **A DESCRIPTION OF THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS APPROACH:** All institutions are to provide background descriptions and analyses of how they approach Educational Effectiveness through their own intentional system of quality assurance and improvement. This part of the Report

## THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REPORT

—FOCUSES ON CORE COMMITMENT 2 TO EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

(limited to 50 pages of text, exclusive of exhibits & appendices)

### INCLUDES:

- A description of the Educational Effectiveness approach
- Deep engagement and analysis of Educational Effectiveness such as:
  - Several analytical essays (for a Special Themes Model)
  - A single, extended essay (for a Comprehensive or Audit Model)
- Supporting evidence for the analysis of Educational Effectiveness, building on the Institutional Portfolio prepared for the Preparatory Review
- An Integrative Component

is intended to provide the team and Commission with the basic context for examining Educational Effectiveness at the institution. This section should also serve the institution by providing an opportunity to inventory the scope and effectiveness of the institution's quality assurance processes for maintaining and improving educational quality. The institution should broadly describe a) the design and approaches the institution takes to assure quality in teaching and learning; b) the kinds of evidence of learning it collects; and c) the way in which such evidence is used to support further inquiry and improvement;

2. **DEEP ENGAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS:** As part of the Educational Effectiveness Review, each institution is expected to engage the issue of Educational Effectiveness in depth. Several possible approaches are identified on page 46; each has been found in experimental visits to serve institutions well. If the institution has been approved for a Special Themes Model, it might develop several analytical essays that treat aspects of Educational Effectiveness in depth; or, one or a series of analytical essays might be prepared to examine the implications of specific groups of exhibits related to Educational Effectiveness included in the enhanced version of the Institutional Portfolio developed for this stage of the review process. Under a Comprehensive or Audit Model, the Analysis of Educational Effectiveness might be a single extended essay.

Regardless of the model for the Report that is approved at the Proposal stage, the institution is expected to move well beyond description of activities to analysis of evidence, reflections on how well the institution's quality assurance processes are working, and ways that those processes have led to further improvement that can be used by the institution. In addition, the Educational Effectiveness Review should provide an occasion for engagement of the institution's constituencies, especially its faculty, organized around the approved model to further its understanding of Educational Effectiveness and to lead to specific recommendations for improvement. In all cases, the institution is expected to work with evidence of educational results and student learning as a major part of the Educational Effectiveness Report;

3. **SUPPORTING EVIDENCE:** Building on the Institutional Portfolio developed for the Preparatory Review, the institution should present additional evidence and exhibits that support its analysis of Educational Effectiveness and student learning. The institution should provide an updated table listing current assessment activities such as the one originally submitted as part of the Preparatory Review. In addition, the institution might include selected results of assessment studies, results of any summative learning measures deemed important by the institution (e.g., pass rates for licensure examinations, capstone courses, etc.), surveys of graduates and current students, and employer feedback on former student performance. Depending upon the particular model chosen for the Educational Effectiveness Report, the exhibits selected might be organized in terms of particular Commissions Standards related to teaching and learning or around particular themes or issues related to Educational Effectiveness as selected by the institution and described in its original Proposal; and
4. **AN INTEGRATIVE COMPONENT:** All Educational Effectiveness Reports are expected to include an Integrative Component in which the institution synthesizes and integrates the discrete elements of its Educational Effectiveness Self Review and the impact of the entire sequential accreditation review process. For most institutions, this will take the form of an integrative chapter. Some institutions may choose to provide integrative comments and reflections throughout their presentation. Whichever model is used, the institution should move beyond the separate topics for review, and ask: Were there common themes or issues that emerged? What was learned from the internal review process, and what major recommendations emerged? Were the goals and outcomes established in the Proposal achieved? What will be the next steps taken to address the major recommendations of the internal review process, and how will momentum be sustained?

**Report Length:** Regardless of the model chosen, the entire Educational Effectiveness Report will be limited to 50 pages of text (single spaced), exclusive of exhibits.

**Process of Review:** The Educational Effectiveness Review involves an on-site visit organized in alignment with the model chosen by the institution and focused on the Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness through the topics raised in the Educational Effectiveness Presentation and Commission Standards.

1. **TEAM SIZE:** The Educational Effectiveness Review Team will normally range from five to seven people depending on the nature of the institution and scope of issues. Its members will be specially trained in the purposes and methodologies for this review.
2. **VISIT LENGTH:** The Educational Effectiveness Review will normally involve from two-three days on campus.
3. **PROCESS OF REVIEW:** The Educational Effectiveness Review Team will be selected to ensure expertise in the special issues or themes of the review and in topics related to educational effectiveness. Teams will use a combination of methods to gather evidence while on campus—for example, sampling core quality assurance processes and student learning assessment methods, structured interviews, and review of documentary evidence. They may also conduct selected on-site audits designed to validate the procedures used by the institution in conducting its own process of self-investigation and/or verify the accuracy of data included in the Report. Finally, depending on the model chosen by the institution, they may provide additional feedback in a collaborative mode on topics selected by the institution.
4. **PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY.** As in the Preparatory Review, the Educational Effectiveness Review Team may also communicate with the institution in advance of the visit to clarify any ambiguities contained in the Educational Effectiveness Presentation, to request additional evidence, and/or to submit specific questions or issues that it wishes to explore more fully in the course of the review.
5. **TEAM REPORT.** The Educational Effectiveness Review team will prepare a report of its review, commenting on the institution's posture with respect to the Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness. In doing so, the team will be expected to use the institution's presentation and supporting evidence along with the on-site review to demonstrate the institution's ability to sustain an evidence-based inquiry into the topic of educational effectiveness that leads to institutional improvement. Where applicable, the team will also be expected to comment on issues or themes selected by the institution, with recommendations for improvement and on those issues identified by the Commission after the Preparatory Review for consideration at the Educational Effectiveness Review. The team report will be submitted to the institution for comment on errors of fact before the report is finalized and sent to the Commission. The institution will also be provided opportunity to prepare a formal written statement in response to the final report which will be provided to the Commission.

**Commission Action:** Following submission of the Educational Effectiveness Review team report, the Commission will take action. The range and definition of Commission decisions are described in Section VI of the *Handbook*. Typically, the Commission will act as follows:

1. Receive the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review Team and determine if the institution has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments as embodied in the Commission Standards. The Commission reviews the reports of the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews to determine that the institution has satisfactorily addressed both Core Commitments as embodied in the Commission Standards. With positive results from both reviews, the Commission will reaffirm accreditation.

2. Reaffirm accreditation with monitoring conditions.
3. Impose a sanction.
4. Schedule follow up activities as needed.

## Fees and Charges

A fee schedule for the Commission and Association of Senior Colleges and Universities is prepared each year and is available on the WASC website and from the Commission office. Annual fees are based on institutional enrollment. In addition, fees and expenses are charged for the following activities:

**Eligibility Applications:** Fees are charged for the initial application, reapplications, and for appeal of eligibility determinations. Information for institutions seeking Eligibility can be found in the Commission publication, *How To Become Accredited*, available through the WASC office or downloadable from the WASC website.

**Candidacy/Accreditation Applications:** After an institution has been determined to be eligible, it is required to file a one-time fee. This fee covers some on-site consultation, staff conferences as needed, and advice on preparation for an Institutional Review and team visit.

**Evaluation Visits:** The institution is billed for the expenses of the visiting team, including the cost of the chair's preliminary visit and appearance before the Commission, staff travel, and a visit fee established for the type of visit. The expenses of special visits made by the Commission because of special inquiries are also paid by the institution.

**Special Charges:** Additional charges will be assessed for unusually complex evaluations which require staff time beyond that normally expended. These include visits to out-of-region programs and to institutions requiring unusually large teams in relation to the size of the institution. In such cases, the Commission will charge an additional fee. After one substantive change or out-of-region visit has been made for an institution in a year, the same principle of excess costs will apply to additional visits.

**Commission Review of a Negative Action:** When an institution requests a Commission Review, there will be a special processing fee and a deposit against costs. If the actual costs are less than paid, the excess will be refunded. If actual costs are greater, the institution will be billed for the difference.

All fees are due and payable upon submission (for applications) or upon receipt of a bill from the Commission office. Late payments may jeopardize the institution's accreditation.

A current schedule of fees and charges is available from the Commission office and the WASC website, [www.wascweb.org](http://www.wascweb.org).



IV



# Commission Decisions on Institutions

## Commission Decisions on Institutions

Once the Commission has made a decision regarding Candidacy or Accreditation of an institution, it will notify the institution in writing as promptly as possible. The forms of possible Commission action with regard to institutions are:

1. Grant Initial Candidacy and Initial Accreditation
2. Defer Initial Candidacy or Initial Accreditation
3. Continue Accreditation between the Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review
4. Reaffirm Accreditation
5. Reaffirm Accreditation with a formal Notice of Concern
6. Issue a Warning
7. Impose Probation
8. Issue an Order to Show Cause
9. Terminate Accreditation
10. Deny Initial Candidacy or Initial Accreditation

All of the above Commission actions except the formal Notice of Concern, are made public and are published in an *Annual Directory*, in a report following each Commission meeting, and in a public Statement of Affiliation Status (see Appendix 3). In addition, in taking the above actions, the Commission may impose conditions or request additional reporting or site visits.

DECISION	PUBLIC/PRIVATE	TIME UNTIL COMMISSION REVIEW
Reaffirm Accreditation	Public	Up to 10 years
Reaffirm Accreditation with Formal Notice of Concern	Reaffirm (public) Notice of Concern (private)	Up to 4 years
Issue a Warning	Public	2-year limit under federal law
Impose Probation	Public	2-year limit under federal law
Issue Show Cause Order	Public	1-year limit
Terminate Accreditation	Public	date specified

## 1. Grant Initial Candidacy and Initial Accreditation

**Initial Candidacy:** The institution must demonstrate that it meets all or nearly all of the Standards for Accreditation at a minimum level, with a clear plan in place to meet the Standards at a substantial level of compliance for accreditation. Candidacy is limited to four years, and is granted only when an institution can demonstrate that it is likely to become accredited in this time period.

**Initial Accreditation:** The institution has met Commission Standards at a substantial level, and is ready to move into the accreditation cycle of review. Initial Accreditation is limited to five years before the next comprehensive review.

## 2. Defer Initial Candidacy or Initial Accreditation

A Deferral is not a final decision. It is interlocutory in nature and designed to provide further guidance and time for the institution to correct certain deficiencies. This action allows the Commission to indicate to an institution the need for additional information or progress in one or more specified areas before a positive decision can be made.

## 3. Continue Accreditation between the Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review

This action is taken after the Commission has received the report from the Preparatory Review, identified issues to be considered as part of the next review, and is ready to proceed to the Educational Effectiveness Review. If necessary, the Commission will issue a Notice of Concern or impose a sanction following the Preparatory Review.

## 4. Reaffirm Accreditation

Reaffirmation of Accreditation indicates that the Commission has found an institution has met or exceeded the expectations of the Standards. It is granted for up to ten years and may be accompanied by the request for interim reports and visits. When accreditation is reaffirmed, institutions are most often placed on a seven- or a ten-year cycle.

## 5. Reaffirm Accreditation with a formal Notice of Concern

This action provides notice to an institution that, while it currently meets WASC Standards, it is in danger of being found in noncompliance with one or more Standards if current trends or findings continue. Institutions issued a formal Notice of Concern will have a special visit within four years to assess progress. If the issues are not addressed, a sanction will be imposed, triggering the two-year rule, described below.

A formal Notice of Concern is not made public by the Commission. This means it is neither published in the *Directory* nor identified when members of the public call for information on the accreditation status of the institution.

## Commission Sanctions

Under USDE regulations, when the Commission finds that an institution fails to meet one or more Standard, it is required to notify the institution and give the institution up to two years from the date of its action to correct the situation. If the institution fails to take corrective action, the Commission is required under USDE regulations to terminate accreditation. The law permits an extension of this two-year time frame when good cause is found. The Commission has determined it will grant an extension for good cause only under exceptional circumstances.

All sanctions are made public and published in the *Annual Directory*. Since all sanctions trigger the new federal two-years-and-terminate rule, public notice is warranted regardless of the label of the sanction.

The Commission has adopted several different sanctions—Warning, Probation and Show Cause—to enable the Commission to inform the institution and the public its view of the severity of concerns regarding noncompliance with one or more Commission Standards. These sanctions are not intended to be applied sequentially. Whichever sanction is imposed, the Commission is required by federal law to terminate accreditation, rather than to continue the institution under the same or a new sanction for another two-year period, unless clear progress has been made within two years. Only when there is clear evidence of good cause will the sanction period be extended.

Because all sanctions reflect that an institution has failed to meet one or more Standards for Accreditation, thus triggering the two-year-to-termination rule, the institution will need to demonstrate that it has come into compliance with the cited Standard(s) within the two-year period.

### 6. Issue a Warning

A Warning reflects that an institution fails to meet one or more of the Standards for Accreditation. While on Warning, any new site or degree program initiated by the institution will be regarded as a substantive change (see the Substantive Change Manual for details). The candidate or accredited status of the institution continues during the Warning period.

When an institution is placed on Warning, the Commission will request that a meeting be set up between WASC staff and representatives of the institutional board of trustees within 90 days following the placement of the sanction. The purposes of the meeting are to further communicate the reasons for the Commission action, to learn of the institution's plan to achieve wider notice within the institution of the action taken by the Commission and the reasons for it, and to discuss the institution's plan for responding to the action.

### 7. Impose Probation

Probation is a determination that an institution has been found to have serious issues of noncompliance with one or more Commission Standards. While on Probation, the institution will be subject to special scrutiny by the Commission, which may include a requirement to submit periodic prescribed reports and to receive special visits by representatives of the Commission. In addition, while on Probation, any new site or degree program initiated by the institution will be regarded as a substantive change (see the Substantive Change Manual for details). The candidate or accredited status of the institution continues during the Probation period.

When an institution is placed on Probation, the Commission will request that a meeting be set up between WASC staff and representatives of the institutional board of trustees within 90 days following the placement of the sanction. The purposes of the meeting are to further communicate the reasons for the Commission action, to learn of the institution's plan to achieve wider notice within the institu-

tion of the action taken by the Commission and the reasons for it, and to discuss the institution's plan for responding to the action.

## 8. Issue an Order to Show Cause

An Order to Show Cause is a decision by the Commission to terminate the accreditation of the institution within a maximum period of one year of the date of the Order, unless the institution can show cause why such action should not take effect. Such an Order is typically issued when an institution, having been placed on Warning or Probation for one year, has been found not to have made sufficient progress to come into compliance with Commission Standards. The institution has the burden of proof to demonstrate why its candidacy or accreditation should not be terminated. The institution must demonstrate that it has responded satisfactorily to Commission concerns, that it has come into compliance with all Commission Standards, and will likely be able to sustain such compliance. An Order to Show Cause may also be issued as a summary sanction for unethical institutional behavior (see Policy on p. 56).

The candidate or accredited status of the institution continues during the Show Cause period, but, during this period, any new site or degree program initiated by the institution will be regarded as a substantive change requiring prior approval. In addition, the institution may be subject to special scrutiny by the Commission, which may include special conditions, the requirement to submit prescribed reports or to receive special visits by representatives of the Commission.

Two copies of the Order to Show Cause will be sent to the chief executive officer, who is to forward one copy to the chair of the governing board. In addition, when an Order to Show Cause has been issued, the Commission will request that a meeting be set up between WASC staff and representatives of the institutional board of trustees within 90 days following the issuance of the order. The purposes of the meeting are to underscore the meaning of an Order to Show Cause, to further communicate the reasons for the Commission action, and to discuss the process to be used for the show cause review.

## 9. Terminate accreditation

An action to terminate accreditation is made with a specific date of implementation specified. It is subject to both the Commission Review Procedures and the WASC appeals process. If an institution closes after a termination action, there are federal requirements imposed on both the institution and WASC for making teach-out arrangements.

## 10. Deny Initial Candidacy or Initial Accreditation

In its decision to deny Initial Candidacy or Initial Accreditation, Commission policy provides that an institution may reapply once it has demonstrated that it has addressed the issues leading to the denial, and, in all cases, it must wait at least one year before reapplying. Denial is an appealable action. (See the following section on the Commission Review Process).

## Publication of Actions

The Commission will make its actions public, when appropriate, through its Executive Director, and will publish in the WASC *Annual Directory*, the WASC website, the *Western Exchange* newsletter, in a Statement of Affiliation Status, (See Appendix 3) and the appropriate national directories, the status of each institution. Those institutions under Warning, Probation, or Show Cause will be so noted in these publications and on the WASC web site. If the filing period for review or appeal is still pending, a footnote will be printed to the effect that, "The institution may request a review of this action by\_\_\_."

In all cases of public negative action, the Commission will give the institution written reasons for its decision. A public statement about the action will be prepared in consultation with the institution for response to inquiries. The Commission reserves the right to make the final determination of the nature and content of the public statement.

If an institution so conducts its affairs that they become a matter of public concern, or uses the public forum to take issue with a negative action of the Commission relating to that institution, the Commission may disseminate, through the Executive Director, the action taken, and the bases for that action, making public any pertinent information available to it. (See Policy on Disclosure of Accrediting Documents and Commission Actions, p. 104).

## Summary Sanctions For Unethical Institutional Behavior

If it appears to the Commission or its staff that an institution is in serious noncompliance with Standard One (Institutional Purposes and Integrity) in a manner that requires immediate attention, an investigation will be made and the institution will be offered an opportunity to express itself on the matter. If the Commission concludes that the institution has so acted it may:

1. Sever relations if the institution is an applicant, but not yet a candidate or accredited; or
2. If the institution is a candidate or accredited, either:
  - a. issue an Order to Show Cause why its Candidacy or Accreditation should not be terminated at the end of a stated period; or
  - b. in an extreme case, sever its relationship with the institution by denying or terminating candidacy or accreditation; or
3. Apply less severe sanctions as deemed appropriate.

## Commission Review Process

Institutions that are placed on Probation or Show Cause, or for which applications for Candidacy or Accreditation are denied, or for which Candidacy or Accreditation is terminated by the Commission, may request a review of this decision by the following procedures. These review procedures are designed as a continuation of the accreditation peer review process and are therefore considered to be non-adversarial.

1. When the Commission takes any of the actions listed above, its Executive Director will notify the institution concerned of the decision by certified mail, return receipt requested, within approximately 14 calendar days of the Commission's decision. Said notification shall contain a succinct statement of the reasons for the Commission's decision.
2. If the institution wishes a review of the Commission action, it shall file with the Executive Director a request for a review under the policies and procedures of the Commission. This request is to be submitted by the chief executive officer of the institution and co-signed by the chair of the governing board. Requests for review by an institution in a multi-college system shall also be signed by the chief executive officer of the system. The request for review must be received by certified mail, return receipt requested, within 28 calendar days of the date of the mailing of the Commission's notification of its decision to the institution.

3. Within 21 calendar days after the date of its request for review, the institution, through its chief executive officer, must submit a written statement of the specific reasons why, in the institution's opinion, a review of the Commission's decision is warranted. This written statement shall respond only to the Commission's statement of reasons for the Commission's decision and to the evidence that was before the Commission at the time of its decision. In so doing, the institution shall identify specific errors of fact or omissions of fact which were material to the decision and provide evidence in support of each. The institution may also point out areas where, in the institution's judgement, the Commission gave undue importance to certain facts to the detriment of other facts that should have been given more weight in the decision. The institution may not introduce facts that were not available at the time the team visited the institution.

It is the responsibility of the institution to identify in the statement of reasons what specific information was not considered, or was improperly considered, by the visiting team or the Commission and to demonstrate that such acts or omissions were a material factor in the negative decision under review.

The statement of reasons will be reviewed by Commission staff for compliance with this provision. If, in the judgment of Commission staff, the statement of reasons is deficient, it will be forwarded to the Commission chair. No review committee will be appointed should the Commission chair concur.

If the statement of reasons is returned, the institution will be provided the opportunity to revise the statement within 21 days from the date the notice of return is sent to the institution. Should the institution resubmit its statement of reason within the prescribed time period, the revised statement will be reviewed by Commission staff. If the revised statement is still found deficient, it will be forwarded to the Commission chair. Should the Commission chair concur that the revised statement is deficient, no review committee will be appointed. This action is final and is not subject to the WASC appeals process.

4. On acceptance of the institution's written statement referred to in (3) above, a committee of three or more persons will be selected by Commission staff. A roster of the review committee will be sent to the institution normally within 30 calendar days of the date of the Commission's receipt of the institution's written statement. No person who has served as a member of the visiting team whose report is subject to review shall be eligible to serve on the review committee. The institution will be provided opportunity to object for cause to any of the proposed review committee members. After giving the institution this opportunity, Commission staff will finalize the membership of the review committee.
5. Within a reasonable period of time after the review committee has been selected, the Executive Director will schedule a visit.
6. Prior to the visit to the institution, the review committee will go over available information. If additional information is needed, the chair of the review committee may request such information from the chief executive officer of the institution, Commission staff, or the prior team, before, during, or after the visit.
7. The review visit will be investigative and designed to determine if the Commission's decision was substantially supported by the evidence before the Commission at the time of its decision.
8. Commission staff will assist the review committee as needed. The Committee may interview, among others, the chair or members of the previous visiting team. Outside legal counsel is not permitted to attend or be present in meetings with the review committee without consent of the review committee chair.

9. The review committee should open and close its visit with a meeting with the chief executive officer of the institution. At the closing meeting, the chair should, among other matters, attempt to ascertain whether or not the institution has any complaints about any aspect of the visit.
10. The review committee should prepare a report that cites and evaluates the evidence which the institution has presented in support of its request for review. In addition, the review committee may evaluate additional evidence that, in its opinion, is relevant to its recommendation to the Commission.
11. The chair of the review committee will submit a copy of the review committee's report that is referred to in (10) above to the chief executive officer of the institution, the chair of the institution's governing board, and the Executive Director of the Commission, normally within 30 calendar days of the end of the review committee's visit.
12. Within 14 calendar days of the institutions's receipt of the review committee's report, the chief executive officer will submit a written response to the Executive Director of the Commission, with a copy to the Chair of the review committee, for transmittal to the Commission.
13. In a confidential letter to the Commission, the review committee will recommend whether the decision of the Commission under review should be affirmed or modified.

The recommendation of the review committee to the Commission will not be disclosed to the institution being reviewed. The recommendation is not binding on the Commission.

14. No assurance can be made that action on the request for review will be scheduled on the agenda of the next Commission meeting.
15. The chief executive officer of the institution and a limited number of its staff will be invited to meet with two Commissioners designated as readers and the chair of the review committee shortly before the meeting of the Commission at which the report will be acted upon. Discussion at this preliminary meeting will be confined to the report of the review committee referred to in (10) above and the institution's response to this report.
16. The two readers will report the substance of this meeting to the Commission when it meets. Institutional representatives may, upon the institution's request, appear before the Commission.
17. The Commission will reach a final decision to: (1) reaffirm its original decision; (2) modify it; or (3) reverse it. As soon after the meeting as practicable, the Executive Director will notify the chief executive officer of the institution by certified mail of the Commission's decision.
18. When Accreditation or Candidacy has been denied or withdrawn, the institution may file an appeal with the President of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges through the Executive Director of the Commission in accordance with the provisions of Article VI of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Copies of the WASC Constitution are printed in the WASC *Annual Directory* or are available from the Commission office. An Appeals Manual is also available from the Commission office.
19. When the Commission action is denial or withdrawal of accreditation or candidacy, the institution retains its prior status until the review process of the Commission is completed. If the institution files a subsequent appeal with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, its status remains unchanged until that appeal has been heard and decided.

20. Special charges for the review process have been established by the Commission. Current charges are available from the Commission office. In addition, the Commission has adopted implementation procedures for the review process, which are available upon request from the Commission office.

## Notification of Decisions

### Commission Decisions Regarding Accreditation Status

The Commission will provide written notice to the Secretary of the US Department of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public no later than 30 days after it makes a decision regarding:

- ☞ initial accreditation, candidacy, or reaffirmation;
- ☞ a final decision to place an institution on probation or show cause; or
- ☞ a final decision to deny, withdraw, suspend, revoke or terminate the accreditation or pre-accreditation status of an institution.

In addition, the Commission will provide written notice to the public regarding the decisions to place an institution on Probation or Show Cause, or to deny, withdraw, suspend, revoke, or terminate accreditation status within 24 hours of its notice to the institution or program.

No later than 60 days after these decisions, the Commission will make available to the Secretary of the US Department of Education, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, and the public upon request, a brief statement summarizing the reasons for the agency's decision, and the comments, if any, that the affected institution may wish to make with regard to that decision.

### Institutional Decisions Regarding Accreditation Status

The Commission will notify the Secretary of the US Department of Education, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, and, upon request, the public if an accredited or pre-accredited institution:

- ☞ Decides to withdraw voluntarily from accreditation or pre-accreditation, within 30 days of receiving notification from the institution that is withdrawing voluntarily from accreditation or pre-accreditation;
- ☞ Lets its pre-accreditation status lapse within 30 days of the date on which pre-accreditation status lapses.

### Regard for decisions of other agencies

If the Commission is notified by another recognized accrediting agency that an applicant or candidate institution has had a status of recognition with that agency denied, revoked, or terminated, the Commission will take such action into account in its own review if it is determined that the other agency's action resulted from a deficiency that reflects a lack of compliance with the *WASC Handbook of Accreditation*.

If the Commission is notified by another recognized accrediting agency that an accredited institution has had a status of recognition with that agency revoked, suspended, or terminated, or has been placed on a publicly announced probationary status by such an accrediting agency, the Commission will review its own status of recognition of that institution to determine if the other agency's action resulted from a deficiency that reflects a lack of compliance with WASC's *Handbook of Accreditation*. If so, the Commission will determine if the institution's status with the Commission needs to be called into question or if any follow-up action is needed.

If the Commission is notified by a state agency that an applicant, candidate or accredited institution has been informed of suspension, revocation, or termination of the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education, the Commission will review its own status of recognition for that institution to determine compliance with the *Handbook of Accreditation*. If the Commission finds the institution is no longer in compliance with the *Handbook*, the Commission will determine the appropriate action to be taken.

In implementing this policy, the Commission relies on other accrediting bodies and state agencies to inform the Commission of adverse action so the Commission can undertake the review specified in this policy. Applicants for Eligibility with the Commission shall provide information on any actions by a recognized accrediting association within the past five years. In addition, the Commission requires candidate and accredited institutions holding accredited or candidate status from more than one USDE recognized institutional accrediting body to keep each institutional accrediting body apprised of any change in its status with one or another accrediting body.



V



Policies  
&  
Practices

The Commission has found that there are a number of issues that arise during the course of accreditation review that may not affect all institutions but which are considered important. In such areas the Commission has developed and adopted formal policy statements. These Policies are intended to give guidance to institutions. They do not have the force and effect of Standards, but do represent expected areas of good practice. All Policies have been reviewed publicly within the region for comment prior to adoption. In a number of areas, Policies have been adopted which are inter-regional in scope and are intended to create the basis for consistent practice by regional accrediting commissions throughout the country.

The Policies in this section have been divided into two categories: those that concern institutions; and those that concern the Commission's relationship between institutions and other agencies.

Comments on these Policies are welcome and recommendations for change to them or for areas where additional policy statements would be useful.

## Policies Concerning Institutions

## ACCREDITATION LIAISON OFFICER

The chief executive officer of each campus selects an Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) to work with the Commission and its staff on matters of accreditation. In appointing the liaison officer, the chief executive officer should consider the following criteria: perspective of the institution, visibility, accrediting experience or desire to become involved in WASC activities, and clerical resources.

### Duties recommended for the liaison officer are:

1. To provide an identified place on campus where information can be disseminated and questions answered about institutional and specialized accreditation.
2. To prepare the Annual Report and notify the Commission of substantive changes and program developments as required by Commission policy.
3. To maintain a file of all accreditation materials, such as Institutional Review reports, evaluation team reports, accreditation manuals and guidelines, schedules of all visits, and correspondence from accrediting offices including Commission Action Letters. It may also be appropriate for the library to keep duplicates of Institutional Review reports and evaluation team reports. The liaison officer should make sure that faculty, administration, staff, and students know that these materials are available.
4. To interpret for the institution Commission accrediting Standards, policies, and procedures, and to call attention to particular sections of the *Handbook* that may have application to certain aspects of the campus particularly when Standards or Commission Policies are adopted or revised.
5. To serve as chair or resource person for the institutional self review, coordinate preparations in advance of evaluation visits, and assist in follow-up studies resulting from the evaluation.
6. To attend meetings of liaison officers in order to receive information and participate in policy development.
7. To serve on evaluation teams when invited.
8. To develop and coordinate accreditation visits and schedules when possible.
9. To receive and respond to, as appropriate, copies of complaints referred by the Commission staff to the chief executive officer.
10. To receive Commission bills for fees and visit expenses, and make sure they are paid promptly.

The chief executive officer may, of course, serve as liaison officer. Most chief executive officers, however, welcome relief from this responsibility, preferring to delegate it to a senior member of the faculty or administration who is interested in accreditation and who will report to the chief executive officer on all relevant activities.

It is hoped that the liaison officer will receive a suitable degree of visibility on campus, even to the extent of having this position recognized as an official committee or quasi-administrative duty. The liaison officer can provide an effective relationship between the Commission and the institution and enhance the participation of the institution in accreditation. The Commission hopes that the liaison officer will seek advice and counsel from the Commission staff.

## COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The decision to enter into a collective bargaining agreement is primarily institutional, and is governed by state laws for public institutions and federal laws for independent institutions. The Commission takes no position on such agreements and neither encourages nor discourages them.

Since regional accreditation evaluates the effectiveness of an institution in achieving its stated purposes, the primary concern of accreditation lies with the institution as a totality. Whenever institutional policies and procedures are modified by collective bargaining agreements, the modifications must not contravene the requirements of Commission Standards, or disrupt the educational processes of the institution.

At institutions with collective bargaining agreements, the review process, the evaluation team, and those responsible for accreditation decisions must address the impact of collective bargaining on the quality and effectiveness of the institution. To help achieve this result, the Commission requests:

1. Institutional review participation by representatives of the entire campus community—administrators, faculty, and support staff—as well as appropriate involvement of trustees and students. Collective bargaining processes shall not impede such participation;
2. Assessment both by the review committee and the evaluation team of the impact of collective bargaining on educational quality, on professional relationships and responsibility, on effectiveness of the institution and on nondiscrimination, equal opportunity, and affirmative action policies;
3. Institutional effort to clarify the respective roles of, and relationship between faculty bargaining units and other faculty governance organizations, as well as between graduate student bargaining units and other relevant staff, faculty and student governance organizations; and
4. Inclusion in the institutional presentation of bargaining agreements and availability of related documents for visiting teams.

If an institution believes that collective bargaining negotiations will impair an effective review process or team visit, the chief executive officer is invited to confer with the Commission Executive Director or assigned Commission staff member.

## COLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

The primary concern of an educational institution is its educational effectiveness. That effectiveness can be measured by evaluating the contribution of each institutional program in achieving the educational objectives of the institution as a whole.

Sports and athletics of all kinds—intercollegiate, intramural, and recreational—are deeply rooted in educational institutions and in American society. Well-conducted programs of athletics add significantly to the educational experience, and to a collegiate atmosphere of wholesome competition. These programs deserve attention by the accrediting process as important elements of higher education. The issue is not whether there should be athletics programs, but rather that they be conducted with integrity, and in a manner consistent with sound educational policy and the institution's educational objectives.

### Objectives

Athletic program objectives should represent the views of students, faculty, administration, and trustees; it should be prepared and approved through a process which provides for their contributions and their expressions of approval or concern. The objectives are to be reviewed periodically to ensure that they represent the current position of the institution and that those who are governed by them understand them.

### Programs

An educational institution must determine for itself the scope and goals of its athletic programs, and should make an appropriate commitment of budget and resources. Whatever shape the programs take, they should be fully institutionalized and integrated into the larger educational environment of the campus. Institutional policies should encourage the interests and participation of both men and women in team and individual sports, in intramural as well as varsity competition; these policies should assure access for all students to appropriate equipment and facilities.

The type and level of intercollegiate competition should be proportional to the size and resources of the institution. Intercollegiate programs should be demonstrably constructive, and never exploitative for particular interests of the institution, the alumni, or the public.

If students who participate in intercollegiate athletics are subject to different institutional policies and procedures, the institution must be able to explain and justify those policies in relation to the purposes of the institution.

Intercollegiate athletics should not inappropriately limit or detract from intramural and recreational athletics programs on a campus.

### Organization and Personnel

While organizational details will vary with local conditions, ultimate responsibility for all programs rests with the chief executive officer of the campus and the governing board. If there is an advisory committee overseeing athletic programs, it should involve representatives of appropriate constituencies including faculty, students, and administration. Coaches and athletic directors are staff at some institutions, faculty at others, and administrators at still others; their professional qualities and attitudes are of primary significance in establishing and maintaining the level and educational validity of athletic programs.

## Items for Institutional Review and Guidance for On-site Evaluators

### Philosophy And Purpose

1. There is a statement of philosophy and purpose for athletic programs that is periodically reviewed.
2. The goals and scope of the athletic program reflect institutional purposes and the actual commitments made to the athletic program.
3. The program is integrated into the larger educational environment of the institution.

### Control

4. The institution's control over collegiate athletics is demonstrably effective.
5. The roles of the chief executive officer, any faculty advisory committee, the athletic director, and the faculty athletic representative are clearly stated and understood.

### Academic Standards

6. Special admissions for athletes are the same as for institutional special admissions, and are under the authority of regular academic structures.
7. Degree requirements are the same for athletes as for other students. Academic advising and counseling are under appropriate academic control. If special athletic department tarring programs are offered, they are also conducted under appropriate academic control.
8. The graduation rates of student athletes are measured and efforts are undertaken to ensure reasonable progress toward the degree.

### Fiscal Accountability

9. All expenditures and income from whatever source, together with the administration of scholarships, grant-in-aid, loans and student employment, are fully controlled by the institution. They are included in its regular planning, budgeting, accounting, and auditing procedures.

### Professional Staff

10. The athletic and coaching staff reflects high standards of integrity and the values of the institution.
11. The coaching staff exerts a positive influence on student athletes in terms of academic performance and character building.
12. The reporting channels are clear.
13. Position descriptions are available for all staff.
14. Professional staff meet generally accepted levels of preparation.

## CONTRACTS WITH UNACCREDITED ORGANIZATIONS

An accredited institution is solely responsible for the academic and fiscal elements of all instructional programs and courses for which the institution provides credit. These responsibilities include course content and the delivery of the instructional program; selection and approval of faculty; admission, registration, and retention of students; evaluation of prior learning; evaluation of student progress and the awarding and recording of credit. An accredited institution does not lend its accreditation to unaccredited agencies or individuals who operate as contractors to develop and market educational programs. Unaccredited agencies wishing to offer instructional programs may seek their own accreditation via established procedures.

An accredited institution may enter into contractual relationships which will support and enhance its instructional programs or provide useful auxiliary services and facilities. These include:

1. Assisting with publicizing programs and in the recruitment of students, but not with their admission;
2. Providing instructional resources and facilities, especially those not available to students at the accredited institution. These include cooperative efforts permitting students or interns to use the facilities of business and industry, hospitals, public agencies, etc.;
3. Providing resource people, especially those with knowledge and abilities not available at the institution; and
4. Providing an independent evaluation of the program offered by the institution.

Accredited institutions may also enter into contractual relationships with public or private agencies designed to provide either regular or special instructional program to their employees. These include contractual arrangements with public or independent schools to provide instruction for teachers, with hospitals to provide instruction for medical personnel, with business and industry for instruction of special groups of employees, etc. In all cases the accredited institution is directly responsible for the performance of all academic and fiscal matters related to the program.

Existing contracts should be reviewed against this policy.

## CREDIT FOR PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

It is the position of the Commission that the academy has a significant role beyond that of certifying what a student has learned elsewhere. It is within the academy that a student typically earns academic degrees.

Credit for prior experiential learning is offered only under the conditions enumerated below. This policy is not designed to apply to such practices as CLEP, advanced placement, or ACE evaluated military credit. Questions about this policy should be referred to Commission staff.

1. Credit for prior experiential learning is offered only at the undergraduate level. It is not offered at the graduate level.
2. Portfolio-based credit for prior experiential learning is awarded for no more than 30 semester units, or the equivalent, toward the degree. Credit is awarded only for documented learning which ties the prior experience to the theories and data of the relevant field.
3. Credit is awarded only in areas which fall within the regular curricular offerings of the institution and are part of the instructional program the student completes.
4. Institutions using documentation and interviews in lieu of examinations, demonstrate that the documentation provides academic assurances of equivalency to credit earned by traditional means.
5. No assurances are made in advance regarding the number of credits to be awarded.
6. Credit is awarded only by faculty holding regular appointments in the appropriate discipline. The awarding of credit, and the determination of the amount of such credit, is made by a qualified faculty member. The faculty member ensures that assessment procedures are appropriate for the credit awarded.
7. Credit is only awarded to matriculated students and is identified on the student's transcript as "credit for prior experiential learning." The institution is prepared, on request, to furnish documentation describing the learning that was assessed, how such learning was evaluated, and the basis on which such credit was awarded.
8. Steps are taken to ensure that credit for prior experiential learning does not duplicate credit already awarded or remaining courses planned for the student's academic program.
9. Policies and procedures for awarding experiential learning credit are adopted, described in appropriate institutional publications, and reviewed at regular intervals.
10. Fees charged are realistically related to the cost of the program. Adequate precautions are provided to ensure that payment of fees does not influence the award of credit.

## DISTANCE EDUCATION & TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED INSTRUCTION

The Commission policy on on- and off-campus programs offered via distance learning modalities requires that all degree programs in which 50 percent or more of the program by any means—satellite, video, Internet, or any other kind of technology-mediated modality—should be submitted to the Substantive Change Committee for prior approval.

A comprehensive explanation of the Commission's policies and procedures regarding distance education and substantive change may be found in the Substantive Change Manual, available on the WASC website or through the WASC office.

Please also refer to the Policy on Substantive Change, page 86.

# STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY

Approved on February 23, 1994

## Purpose

Quality and diversity have come to be profoundly connected in pursuing goals that are explicit in the mission statements of colleges and universities themselves: goals of expanding knowledge, educating capable citizens, and serving public needs. The 1988 Standards incorporated issues of diversity and the following statement was developed in 1994 to guide institutions in thoughtful engagement of diversity as they prepared self studies. The Commission has reaffirmed the role that diversity plays in the 2000 Standards.

## A Definition of Diversity

The word “diversity” has been used frequently in discussions of higher education policy in the last 70 years. It has been used to refer to the great variety of American institutions of higher education—their varying missions, pedagogies, and constituencies. It also has been used to refer to the enrollment of students from various regions of the United States and nations of the world. Beginning in the decade of the 1960s, diversity was used to describe students from historically underrepresented ethnic groups, most of whom were the first in their families to attend college. Shortly thereafter, diversity was applied not only to the student body of an institution, but also to the faculty, administration and board of trustees. The impact and meaning of diversity, however, were still focused upon numerical ethnic profiles, and had not reached issues of student life, curriculum or pedagogy.

As is the case with many other important concepts (e.g., innovation, quality, fairness), diversity is difficult, if not impossible, to define in words that are fully satisfactory. However, it is useful to think of diversity in higher education as having three vital and related dimensions: 1) representation; 2) the nature of campus community; and 3) the impact of group membership on both individual development and the content of academic scholarship and study.

**1. Representation.** Diversity concerns representation of different groups in the various constituencies of a college or university—its student body, faculty, staff and governing board. Concerns about representation are closely linked to the challenge of achieving educational equity, in terms of the matriculation and graduation of persons from those ethnic groups in the United States that have been historically underrepresented in colleges and universities.\*

Given the rapidly changing composition of the population in this region, race and ethnicity are major factors in this discussion of group representation. Other aspects of diversity deserve careful consideration as well, including socioeconomic class, gender, age, religious belief, sexual orientation and disability. Each of these aspects of diversity has been addressed in the self studies conducted by some accredited institutions in this region. In selecting various aspects of diversity for study, institutions have been influenced by the nature of their missions, the nature of their student bodies and the requirements of law (particularly with regard to disability and gender).

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\* The Commission follows the dictionary definition of “ethnic” as “characteristic of a religious, racial, national, or cultural group.”

In thinking about diversity on campus it is important to stress that representation is not merely a matter of numbers, but also concerns how individuals participate in the life of a college or university. The Commission recommends the distinction between diversity and affirmative action drawn by the Diversity Planning Council of the University of California, Davis:

- ☞ “Affirmative action is retrospective in that it is designed to rectify the effects of past discrimination. Diversity, on the other hand, is prospective. It looks forward to the creation of an environment that supports the aspirations of all persons....”
- ☞ “Affirmative action excludes certain groups from consideration under its provisions. For example, it excludes white males except those who are disabled or who are Vietnam era veterans. Diversity includes all groups that are part of the working or living environment....”
- ☞ “Affirmative action is quantitative in that it emphasizes the numerical representation of women and persons of color in the work force. Diversity views affirmative action efforts to increase the number of persons of color and women as necessary but not sufficient to create the changes in the environment that will enhance the chances of success for those who gained access through affirmative action efforts....” (*Building a Diverse Campus*, UC Davis, p. 9, 1991).

**2. Community on Campus.** A second dimension of diversity concerns the character of the academic community that emerges through the interaction of people of different backgrounds and points of view. An effective academic community calls for respect and cooperation among the various groups represented within the institution. One important goal is the strengthening of collegiality that, in turn, encourages vigorous debate and the examination of competing ideas. Such collegiality becomes impossible where there is domination of members of one group by members of another or the systematic neglect of the perspectives and aspirations of the members of any group on campus.

During the course of discussion of this statement, conflicting positions were expressed with regard to how the issue of sexual orientation should be addressed. Commission Standards state that “religious institutions have the right to select students and faculty on the basis of adherence to religious beliefs.”

There is an extremely important consensus among accredited institutions in this region that all institutions are obligated to adhere to Commission Standards on respect of persons, including policies against harassment, and to provide due process procedures to resolve individual grievances. Whatever an institution’s prohibitions may be regarding the behavior of its members, these must not be accompanied by institutional actions that express animosity or disrespect for persons for reasons of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, age, religious belief, sexual orientation or disability.

**3. Group Membership and Identification.** A third dimension of diversity concerns the extent to which group differences and affiliations should be recognized and affirmed by colleges and universities. It can be said of each of us, “In some ways you are like everyone else, in other ways you are like some, and in some ways you are like no other.” We are accustomed to thinking of ourselves as part of the human race (“like everyone else”) and as unique persons (“like no other”). Dilemmas arise with respect to group membership (“like some”) and whether the recognition of group membership contributes to academic and community-building goals.

Every person is simultaneously a member of many groups, and these group memberships have different saliency with respect to various functions carried out by academic institutions. For example, a student may begin her day by attending early Mass. For this purpose, her religious identification is crucial. She may then visit the financial aid office where socioeconomic class and age are relevant. In her history class her Vietnamese heritage may well affect her perspective on the matters under discussion and how she serves as a resource for her fellow students. Later in the day, as a member of the College task force responding to the Americans with Disabilities Act, her reliance upon a wheel chair is the group identification of most importance. And, finally, as she returns to her living group, her gender has helped

determine where she lives and with whom. This person is a unique human being. But important aspects of her uniqueness are shaped by her simultaneous membership in many groups. A campus that recognizes these groups, and seeks to serve the needs of each of them, is not negating the uniqueness of this student or the shared humanity of all, but rather, is striving to enhance and build upon some of the group memberships that shape a student's life.

Identification with groups, including ethnic identification, is certainly nothing new on American college campuses. But what is new is the number of groups now pressing for recognition and their proportions within the student bodies of most institutions. In particular, the proportion of students of color has now grown to the point that they represent the majority of students in the public elementary and secondary schools of our region and on many of our college campuses. The negotiation of new relationships among individuals and groups is underway, and these changes produce a good deal of the controversy that accompanies diversity. Such changes are often awkward and sometimes difficult. But these changes also bring new intellectual challenges and can contribute greatly to educational quality by offering a more profound understanding of ourselves and our world and an education of greater relevance to participants in a multicultural society.

## Educational Quality and Diversity

Discussions of quality in higher education are often dominated by measures such as student scores on examinations taken at college entrance (the SAT or the ACT), scores on the Graduate Record Examination or examinations for entrance into professional schools, the proportion of applicants refused admission, endowment per student, or the reputation of faculty members in individual disciplines. As measures of the quality of teaching and learning, especially at the undergraduate level, these measures are plainly inadequate. When the meaning of educational quality is examined at a deeper level, the connections between quality and diversity become clearly important:

- ☞ A quality education introduces students to the richness of the intellectual world and broadens the range of scientific and cultural topics on which students can exercise discernment, logic, and balanced judgment. Many colleges and universities have found that these purposes are advanced by curricula that examine more fully the philosophies, values, perspectives, history and achievements of the various cultures of the world and of the United States. In extending the curriculum, these efforts have not replaced study of Western and European values, but rather can connect with and extend beyond these traditions. Such efforts have had substantial effects on the content and methodology of political science, literature, philosophy, art, sociology and history and of certain professional fields such as law, medicine, and business.
- ☞ A quality education helps students acquire the habit of critical analysis of data, assumptions and argument. It is therefore of educational value when students, through classroom instruction, study, and interaction with students and faculty of diverse backgrounds learn to evaluate differing points of view. Immersion in an environment of diverse and competing ideas is important to the development of independent thought.
- ☞ A quality education prepares a student to grasp and respond constructively to persons, ideas, situations and challenges novel to his or her experience. In most college and university mission statements these purposes are connected with the importance of higher education in equipping students for the responsibilities of life after graduation. Today's students will live in a society, and quite likely in a locality, of many ethnic and cultural traditions. They will live in a world of highly interdependent national economies. This world will call for the ability to understand and work with people of other backgrounds. Diversity and educational quality are thus connected in accomplishing, in today's terms, the task of preparing students for the worlds of work and civic participation.

- ☞ One of the contributions of a quality education is greater awareness of the vicissitudes of the individual life, including one's own. Higher education can promote an understanding that people can succeed under adverse conditions. Diversity is of special value here. For example, a college has enhanced the future of its graduates if its students come to know disabled persons who are participating, contributing members of the campus community.
- ☞ Participating in a quality academic program enriches faculty as well as students. In a diverse academic community faculty are called upon, in their teaching, to be aware of the differing experiences and perspectives of students and their varying interests and learning styles. In responding, faculty also learn.

The colleges and universities accredited by the Commission have enormous assets when using diversity to enhance quality in these ways. Among these assets are:

- ☞ The demographic diversity of the region
- ☞ Their traditions of scholarship that commit them to the extension of knowledge
- ☞ Their tradition of cosmopolitanism—the tradition that educated people are citizens of the world, and not only of nations, classes, and ethnic groups
- ☞ Their traditions of free inquiry

On this final point we are mindful that some claim that a focus on diversity brings with it an intimidating environment on campus that discourages individuals from freely expressing their ideas within the very broad boundaries set by judicial interpretation of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. As the foregoing discussion of diversity and quality would suggest, the Commission firmly rejects curtailment of free expression and inquiry. The bedrock of education in a democratic society is free and open discussion. Indeed, one sign of a healthy institution is the thoughtfulness of its internal disagreements and the extent to which all segments of the institution feel free to participate in its debates.

## Expectations for Institutional Review and Presentation

The Commission expects that a climate of respect for a diversity of backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives is fostered on each campus and that issues of diversity are appropriately engaged. Under Standard 1, Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives, Criterion 1.5 states, "Consistent with its purposes and character, the institution demonstrates an appropriate response to the increasing diversity in society through its policies, its educational and co-curricular programs, and its administrative and organizational practices." The 1994 Statement on Diversity raises the following points respecting diversity:

1. *Institutional mission and purpose should be reexamined.* Governing boards have an especially important role in this regard. As students, faculty and staff within institutions become more diverse, there is an even greater need to focus on common purposes and to identify core values. For example, Occidental College has identified this set of values to which it is committed: honesty, integrity, promise keeping, pursuit of excellence, pursuit of truth, caring, compassion, and respect for others. The reexamination of institutional purpose, which should be at the heart of every self study, also implies a sober assessment of conflicting goals. As an example, how might an institution balance its desire to diversify its student body by providing more financial aid for low-income students with the objective of increasing faculty salaries or providing more academic support services to all students on campus?

2. *Institutions should seek and achieve diversity within their student bodies, faculty, administrative staff, and governing boards.* In many cases colleges and universities choose, at their own initiative, to compare their composition to regional or state populations or to the United States as a whole. In other instances, the reference group is the particular constituency, often religious in nature, that the institution has pledged to serve. In applying its Standards, the Commission respects the institution's own view of its constituency, based upon its unique mission. For example, a single-sex institution or a college that requires adherence to a particular religious faith as a requirement for admission need not give up those requirements in order to increase its diversity. Each institution can, however, analyze the diversity present in the constituency it chooses to serve and actively seek to reflect that diversity in its membership.
3. *Each institution will work toward "appreciation of diversity" as an outcome of undergraduate instruction, and consider all forms of diversity as they affect the educational process.* Colleges are diverse in many ways (e.g., the various academic disciplines and fields of professional study as well as the diversity of the college community in terms of age, political belief, socioeconomic class, religious faith, interest in the arts and athletics, regional and national background). How can the various forms of diversity be understood, appreciated, and valued in the curriculum?

A desirable objective is that all students learn from and about each other. As the Association of American Colleges declared in its 1985 report, "Integrity in the College Curriculum":

"All study is intended to break down narrow certainties and provincial vision.... In a sense, we are all from the provinces, including New Yorkers and Bostonians, whose view of the world can be as circumscribed as that of native Alaskans who have never left their village.... At this point in history colleges are not being asked to produce village squires but citizens of a shrinking world and a changing America."

Faculty of each institution have primary responsibility to rise to this challenge as they plan curricula, design courses, and teach and advise students. Each institution is free to pursue these goals as it sees fit. Institutions have chosen a variety of means, including the integration of the study of diversity into existing courses under the sponsorship of existing disciplinary departments, the development of courses that stress the comparative study of different cultures, and the creation of women's studies programs and ethnic studies departments.

4. *In addressing the need for a co-curricular environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of students, the variety of students already enrolled at the institution should be addressed.* In particular, we recommend steps to achieve a better understanding of the characteristics, interests, aspirations and learning needs of all segments of the student population. As institutions address problems faced by students from historically underrepresented groups and women in terms of classroom learning, support from faculty, the availability of academic support services or the quality of residential life, they often find that the appropriate responses benefit all students. We have in mind here programs of collaborative learning that have served to increase student success in introductory calculus classes and residential programs that have successfully enhanced cross-cultural understanding and student retention by involving a critical mass of students from at least two different ethnic groups.
5. *Institutions should assess the strength and weaknesses of efforts to make diversity integral to its plans for institutional improvement.* What are the next steps to be taken? Whose cooperation and effort is needed to make those steps effective? How will the institution assess its diversity efforts over time? Some of the answers come from retention statistics and other quantitative data. It may be helpful to look at comparable data over time and examine trends in individual schools and departments as well as for the campus as a whole. Of equal importance is probing beneath the numbers to illuminate individual perceptions and patterns of interaction among the members of various groups. The Commission urges institutions to conduct systematic assessments of

how different students, faculty and staff view their experiences on campus (often referred to as studies of “campus climate”). These assessment tasks are complex and difficult. For example, expressions of disappointment that an institution does not yet meet goals regarding diversity may be more the product of forward progress which raises expectations rather than the result of a lack of commitment. Questionnaires and small group meetings of students, staff and faculty from different backgrounds can bring such experiences and perceptions to the surface and can serve as the source of creative suggestions. One important result of such discussions is likely to be the healthy questioning of stereotypes about what people think and a high degree of interest in improving human communication and understanding within the institution. In this regard, institutions may want to review the reports of diversity committees of various institutions throughout the region. In addition, the Commission sponsored the creation of *Dialogues for Diversity*, with the assistance of The James Irvine Foundation. This new book is a resource for campuses wishing to organize campus dialogues about diversity issues. This book is part of the American Council on Education Series on Higher Education.

The fundamental challenge is to create a culture on campus where the wisdom and will to build trust among people and groups is widely distributed and opportunities for enhancing diversity and community are encouraged and supported. There is no expectation that within the richness of our institutional variety that there will be a uniform response. Nevertheless, we all have the same challenge—to perform well the special role of higher education in effectively realizing the human potential of all of our citizens, a goal critical for students, faculty, staff and for the common good of our society.

## HONORARY DEGREES

The Commission recognizes that honorary degrees may be appropriately awarded for scholarly achievement, attainments which demonstrate unusual creativity, or distinguished service. The integrity of earned degrees, however, should be protected; therefore, the Commission discourages the awarding of earned degrees as honorary degrees or the use of terminology which implies such.

## INSTITUTIONAL UNITS IN A SYSTEM (Public or Independent Institutions)

When several operationally separate units are governed by a single board with a central system administration, the purposes of accreditation will more nearly be served by close coordination between the institution, the system's central administration, and the Commission during the period of self analysis, the on-campus visit, and the Commission hearing. The guidelines that follow are designed to assist all concerned in arriving at a clearer understanding of institutional purposes and accomplishments while preserving integrity and autonomy.

### **Section of Institutional Presentation Prepared By System Administration**

The Institutional Presentation may include a section prepared by the system administration that briefly describes system objectives, policies, and operations, and provides an analysis of educational effectiveness. Alternatively, this information may be provided in a separate systemwide policy and data portfolio.

Other matters the system might provide:

1. A description of the governing board;
2. A description of the procedure for the development and approval of new academic programs and major system policies;
3. A description of the system's academic program review process;
4. An outline of the budget process;
5. An explanation of relationships with and authority of agencies external to the system;
6. An explanation of relationships with, and delegation of, authority between the system office and the several institutions;
7. Identification of systemwide groups, their organization and function. Such groups might include chief institutional administrators as well as groups representing faculty, students, and alumni;
8. An appraisal of the effectiveness of the system in meeting its goals; and
9. A forecast of major programmatic, enrollment, and capital trends for the system in the next five or ten years.

### **Institutional Appraisal**

The institution includes in its Institutional Presentation, either in a separate section or otherwise, an appraisal of its identity as a system member and the effect of system policies in achieving institutional purposes.

## Visiting Teams and Their Relationship to the System Office

In order that a team visiting an institution in a system may have the best possible understanding of the system and the system relationships affecting the institution being reviewed, the following are recommended:

1. The team chair may wish to visit the central office to meet system officials or interview them by telephone to become familiar with systems operations and issues;
2. When a visit to central headquarters is not possible, a representative of the system will be available to the team;
3. A copy of the final report and Commission action letter will be sent by the institution to the system head; and
4. The system administration will make a report to the governing board following Commission action.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

If an institution recruits and enrolls international students, the institution must demonstrate that it admits and serves such students in a responsible and sensitive manner.

1. Where the number of international students is significant, the institutional statement of purposes includes the education of international students and recognizes the consequent implications for the institution. Special services, including orientation, community assistance, personal and academic counseling, and special language programs, are adequate, available, and provided by persons specially trained for these purposes.
2. Among the concerns that require explicit attention before international students are admitted are the following:
  - a. Foreign credentials are reviewed by competent evaluators who apply clear and consistent institutional standards. Appropriate English language skills for undergraduate or graduate level work are required for admission;
  - b. Representations regarding the institution, both written and oral, are accurate, up-to-date, and effectively communicated; and
  - c. Governmental regulations regarding the issuance of documents for new and continuing international students are made known to students and are followed.
3. Once international students are on campus, they are subject to the same procedures, safeguards, legal protection, and general opportunities accorded domestic students. The institution should ensure that:
  - a. Undue reliance upon tuition or fee income from students who matriculate from one particular country or region is avoided;
  - b. Special fees, if assessed for international students, are dedicated to the provision of additional services for them;
  - c. Tuition and fees for international students are not significantly out of proportion to those charged to other students subject to similar legal residence requirements;
  - d. Immediate access to records provides required immigration, academic, and special services information;
  - e. Mandated and technical services are in compliance with US government regulations for international students and are carried out by trained personnel; and
  - f. The academic freedom of international students is protected.

## LAW SCHOOLS IN CALIFORNIA

California institutions with law schools, including freestanding law schools, seeking accreditation or candidacy may apply to the Commission if:

1. As applicants for candidacy, the law school has been at least provisionally accredited by the Committee of Bar Examiners of the State Bar of California; or
2. As applicants for accreditation, the law school has been fully accredited by the Committee of Bar Examiners of the State Bar of California; and
3. In both instances the institution meets the Eligibility Criteria of the Commission for Candidacy or Accreditation.

Standards and Policies of the Commission will form the bases for the evaluation of all such schools and for Commission decisions. The standards or criteria of other accrediting or licensing organizations will not be used in lieu of Commission Standards.

The institution should submit with its application all reports received within the preceding five-year period from other accrediting agencies, including the Committee of Bar Examiners of the State Bar of California.

## MATTERS UNDER LITIGATION

It is the policy of the Accrediting Commission not to become involved in litigation within an institution. The Commission is not an adjudicatory agency, and it is not the role or function of the Commission to arrive at any determination regarding the merits of any aspect of pending litigation. The Commission's concerns are to determine whether an institution is in compliance with Commission Standards and to assist institutions, through established procedures, in the improvement of quality.

Because of the sensitivities created when litigation is pending during a site visit by an evaluation team, the Commission has developed the following guidelines.

### **Responsibility of the Institution**

It is the responsibility of the institution to inform the Commission staff, prior to a visit, of any relevant pending litigation against the institution. The staff will consult with the Accreditation Liaison Officer to determine if any special advice will need to be provided to the team chair. If interviews with the team are requested, the team chair shall determine how such interviews are to be conducted.

### **Responsibility of the Visiting Team**

Visiting teams should not comment on pending litigation in such a way as to express an opinion about the merits of the lawsuit or its outcome. Team members are not precluded from meeting with individuals involved in litigation and hearing from them regarding the litigation itself or issues that are the subject of the litigation, but team members are responsible for reporting such discussions to the team chair. If such a meeting is held or if the subject of the litigation arises during the course of interviews, the institution will be informed by the team chair. Team members are cautioned against saying or writing anything that may be used by either party in support of their positions in the lawsuit.

If questions arise prior to, during, or after a visit, Commission staff should be consulted.

## OBSERVERS ON EVALUATION TEAMS

Occasionally, the Commission permits observers who are not on the roster of evaluators to participate in evaluation visits for purposes of research. The institution and the team chair will always be notified in advance and the consent of each obtained before an observer is permitted to join a team. Expenses shall be borne by the observer unless otherwise arranged.

## STUDY ABROAD

Study abroad can be an important phase of undergraduate and graduate programs in American colleges and universities. Carefully planned and administered foreign study can add significant dimensions to a student's educational experience. A study abroad program should:

- a. Be clearly related to the objectives of the sponsoring or participating institution;
- b. Have a well defined rationale stating the specific nature and purposes of the program and be accurately represented in the institution's catalog and all promotional literature;
- c. Provide educational experiences related to the institution's curriculum;
- d. Be available to students carefully selected according to ability and interest;
- e. Have a carefully articulated policy regarding the availability of financial assistance to students for programs required by the institution;
- f. Have clearly specified language proficiency requirements when appropriate to the program and place of study and clearly defined methods of testing proficiency prior to acceptance into the program;
- g. Provide intended participants with accurate and current information specifically describing the following: program opportunities and limitations; how and where instruction will be given and the relationship to the foreign institution; grading practices; highlights of significant differences between a home campus experience and what can be expected abroad, including information about local attitudes and mores; and a description of local living conditions and the extent of responsibility assumed by the program for housing participants;
- h. Provide extensive orientation for participants prior to departure for and on arrival in the foreign country with respect to the matters in *g* above, augmented with more detailed information and instruction related to the specific program;
- i. Provide counseling and supervisory services at the foreign center, with special attention to problems peculiar to the location and nature to the program;
- j. Guarantee adequate basic reference materials to offset any limitations of local libraries or inaccessibility to them;
- k. Include clearly defined criteria and policies for judging performance and assigning credit in accordance with prevailing standards and practices at the home institution; a common basis for determining grade equivalents is established when several institutions are involved with a single overseas institution or in a consortium;
- l. Stipulate that students will ordinarily not receive credit for foreign study undertaken without prior planning or approval on the student's home campus;
- m. Include provisions for ongoing institutional oversight including assessment of the educational effectiveness of these programs;
- n. Assure fair reimbursement to participants if the program is not delivered promised for reason within the sponsor's control; and

- o. Provide opportunity, at the conclusion of the student's program or upon return, to process and reflect on the experience that may contribute to the student's and others' learning.

Cooperative arrangements are urged among American institutions seeking to provide foreign study opportunities for their students. In many cases, resident directors, faculty, and facilities could be shared with significant improvement in the efficiency and economy of the operation. One basic reference collection, for example, supported and used by students from several programs, is likely to be more satisfactory than several separate ones.

Credit is not awarded for travel alone. Commercially sponsored "study/travel programs" should be thoroughly investigated by an institution before granting degree credit for these activities.

Travel/study courses meet the same academic standards, award similar credit, and are subject to the same institutional control as other courses and programs offered by the sponsoring or participating institution.

Credit for travel/study courses is limited to a maximum of one semester unit of credit per week of full-time travel/study with one additional unit of credit for additional readings, papers and class meetings required before or after the course (or the equivalent in quarter system units).

## SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

Substantive changes in institutions are to be reported to the Commission and approved in advance of implementation. A substantive change of a candidate or accredited institution is one that may significantly affect its quality, objectives, scope, or control, or that triggers conditions established in federal law. The Commission regards the following as examples of substantive change:

- ☞ any significant change in the established mission or objectives of the institution;
- ☞ any change in the legal status, form of control, or ownership of the institution;
- ☞ the addition of courses or programs that represent a significant departure, in either content or method of delivery, from those that were offered when the agency last evaluated the institution;
- ☞ the initiation of 50% or more of any degree program offered through distance education or electronically mediated;
- ☞ the addition of courses or programs at a degree or credential level above or below that which is included in the institution's current accreditation or candidacy;
- ☞ a change from clock hours to credit hours;
- ☞ a substantial increase in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program;
- ☞ a substantial increase in degree programs at an existing level, on- or off-campus, or mediated electronically;
- ☞ the establishment of an additional location geographically apart from the main campus at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program.

A comprehensive explanation of the Commission's policies and procedures regarding Substantive Change may be found in the Substantive Change Manual, available on the WASC website or through the WASC office.

Please also refer to the Policy on Distance Education and Technology-Mediated Instruction, page 70.

## TRANSFER AND AWARD OF ACADEMIC CREDIT

This statement is directed to institutions of postsecondary education and others concerned with the transfer of academic credit among institutions and the awarding of academic credit for extra-institutional learning. Basic to this statement is the principle that each institution is responsible for determining its own policies and practices with regard to the transfer and award of credit. Institutions are encouraged to review their policies and practices periodically to ensure that they accomplish the institution's objectives and that they function in a manner that is fair and equitable to students. Any statements regarding the transfer and award of academic credit should be used as guides, not as substitutes for institutional policies and practices.

Transfer of credit is a concept that involves transfer between dissimilar institutions and curricula and recognition of extra-institutional learning, as well as transfer between institutions and curricula of similar characteristics. As their personal circumstances and educational objectives change, students seek to have their learning, wherever and however attained, recognized by institutions where they enroll for further study. It is important for reasons of social equity and educational effectiveness, as well as for the wise use of resources, for all institutions to develop reasonable and definitive policies and procedures for acceptance of transfer of credit. Such policies and procedures should provide maximum consideration for the individual student who has changed institutions or objectives. It is the receiving institution's responsibility to provide reasonable and definitive policies and procedures for determining a student's knowledge in required subject areas. All institutions have a responsibility to furnish transcripts and other documents necessary for a receiving institution to judge the quality and quantity of the work. Institutions also have a responsibility to advise students that the work reflected on the transcript may or may not be accepted by a receiving institution.

### Inter-Institutional Transfer of Credit

Transfer of credit from one institution to another involves at least three considerations:

1. The educational quality of the institution from which the student transfers;
2. The comparability of the nature, content, and level of credit earned to that offered by the receiving institution; and
3. The appropriateness and applicability of the credit earned to the programs offered by the receiving institution, in light of the student's educational goals.

### Accredited Institutions

Accreditation speaks primarily to the first of these considerations (the quality of the institution from which the student transfers), serving as the basic indicator that an institution meets certain minimum standards. Users of accreditation are urged to give careful attention to the accreditation conferred by accrediting bodies recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CHEA has a formal process of recognition that requires that any accrediting body so recognized must undergo a review and evaluation process. Under these standards, CHEA has recognized a number of accrediting bodies, including:

1. Regional accrediting commissions (which historically have accredited the more traditional colleges and universities but which now accredit proprietary, vocational-technical, and single-purpose institutions as well);

2. National accrediting bodies that accredit various kinds of specialized institutions;
3. Certain professional or specialized organizations that accredit free-standing professional schools, in addition to programs within multi-purpose institutions.

(CHEA annually publishes a list of recognized accrediting bodies, as well as a directory of institutions accredited by these organizations. More information can be found on CHEA's website at CHEA.org)

Although accrediting agencies vary in the ways they are organized and in their statements of scope and mission, all accrediting bodies that meet CHEA's standards for recognition function to ensure that the institutions or programs they accredit have met generally accepted minimum standards for accreditation.

Accreditation affords reason for confidence in an institution's or a program's purposes, in the appropriateness of its resources and plans for carrying out these purposes, and in its effectiveness in accomplishing its goals, insofar as these things can be judged. Accreditation speaks to the probability, but does not guarantee, that students have met applicable standards of educational accomplishment.

### **Comparability and Applicability**

Comparability of the nature, content, and level of transfer credit and the appropriateness and applicability of the credit earned to programs offered by the receiving institution are as important in the evaluation process as the accreditation status of the institution at which the transfer credit was awarded. Since accreditation does not address these questions, this information must be obtained from catalogs and other materials and from direct contact between knowledgeable, experienced faculty and staff at both the receiving and sending institutions. When such considerations as comparability and appropriateness of credit are satisfied, however, the receiving institution should have reasonable confidence that students from accredited institutions are qualified to undertake the receiving institution's educational program.

### **Admissions and Degree Purposes**

At some institutions there may be differences between the acceptance of credit for admission purposes and the applicability of credit for degree purposes. A receiving institution may accept previous work, place credit value on it, and enter it on the transcript. That previous work, because of its nature and not its inherent quality, however, may be determined to have no applicability to a specific degree to be pursued by the student.

Institutions have a responsibility to make this distinction, and its implications, clear to students before they decide to enroll. This should be a matter of full disclosure, with the best interests of the student in mind. Institutions also should make every reasonable effort to reduce the gap between credits accepted and credits applied toward an educational credential.

### **Unaccredited Institutions**

Institutions of postsecondary education that are not accredited by CHEA-recognized accrediting bodies may lack that status for reasons unrelated to questions of academic quality. Such institutions, however, cannot provide a reliable, third party assurance that they meet or exceed minimum standards. That being the case, students transferring from such institutions may encounter special problems in gaining acceptance and transferring credits to accredited institutions. Institutions admitting students from unaccredited institutions should take special steps to validate credits previously earned.

## Foreign Institutions

In most cases, foreign institutions are chartered and authorized by their national governments, usually through a ministry of education. Although this provides for a standardization within a country, it does not produce useful information about comparability from one country to another. No other nation has a system comparable to voluntary accreditation. The Division of Higher Education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is engaged in a project to develop international compacts for the acceptance of educational credentials. At the operational level, four organizations—the Council on International Exchange (CIEE), the National Council on the Evaluation of Foreign Student Credentials (CEC), the National Association of Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA), and the National Liaison Committee on Foreign Student Admissions (NLC)—often can assist institutions by distributing general guidelines of admission and placement of foreign students. Equivalency or placement recommendations are to be evaluated in terms of the programs and policies of the individual receiving institution.

## Validation of Extra-institutional and Experiential Learning for Transfer Purposes

Transfer-of-credit policies should encompass educational accomplishment attained in extra-institutional settings as well as at accredited postsecondary institutions. In deciding upon the award of credit for extra-institutional learning, institutions will find the services of the American Council on Education's Office of Educational Credit helpful. One of the Office's functions is to operate and foster programs to determine credit equivalencies for various modes of extra-institutional learning. The Office maintains evaluation programs for formally structured courses offered by the military, and civilian non collegiate sponsors such as business, corporations, government agencies, and labor unions. Evaluation services are also available for examination programs for occupations with validated job proficiency evaluation systems, and for correspondence courses offered by schools accredited by the National Home Study Council. The results are published in a guide series. Another resource is the General Education Development (GED) Testing Program, which provides a means for assessing high school equivalency.

For learning that has not been validated through the ACE formal credit recommendation process or through credit-by-examination programs, institutions may wish to explore the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) procedures and processes. Pertinent CAEL publications designed for this purpose are available.

## Use of This Statement

This statement was endorsed by the three national associations most concerned with practices in the area of transfer and award of credit—the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, the American Council on Education/Commission on Educational Credit, and the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation.

Institutions are encouraged to use this Statement as a basis for discussions in developing or reviewing institutional policies with regard to transfer. If the Statement reflects an institution's policies, that institution might want to use this Statement to inform faculty, staff, and students.

## UNANNOUNCED VISITS

In its discretion, the Commission may choose to conduct unannounced visits to institutions when circumstances lead the Commission to believe that an institution's activities may not be in conformity with the Commission's Standards, or to verify that institutional representation concerning off-campus activities are accurate and consistent with its representations to the public.

# Policies Concerning Commission Relationships with Institutions and Other Agencies

## COMPLAINTS

- AGAINST ACCREDITED AND CANDIDATE INSTITUTIONS
- AGAINST WASC

### Review of Complaints Involving Affiliated Institutions

Accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges is an expression of confidence that an institution is satisfactorily achieving its objectives and that it meets or exceeds the Commission's standards of quality, integrity, and effectiveness. The Commission is concerned with institutional integrity and with performance consistent with Commission Standards and Policies.

Consequently, the Commission values information provided by students, faculty, and other members of the public about accredited institutions. This information helps the Commission to assure that an institution continues to meet the Standards set by the Commission. Procedures have been established, therefore, to provide a mechanism for the Commission to consider complaints that address violations of the Commission's Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Criteria, or procedures. However, the Commission does not intervene in the internal procedures of institutions or perform as a regulatory body. The Commission is also not an adjudicatory or grievance-resolving body.

Accordingly, the Commission does not consider allegations concerning the personal lives of individuals connected with its affiliated institutions. It assumes no responsibility for adjudicating isolated grievances between students, faculty, or members of the public and individual institutions. The Commission does not act as a court of appeal in matters of admission, granting or transfer of academic credit, grades, fees, student financial aid, student discipline, collective bargaining, faculty appointments, promotion, tenure, dismissals, or similar matters.

The Commission can and does respond, however, to complaints regarding allegations of conditions at affiliated institutions that raise significant questions about the institution's compliance with the standards of conduct expected of an accredited institution. In addition to procedures for the review of complaints by the Commission, each affiliated institution is required to have in place student grievance and public complaint policies and procedures that are reasonable, fairly administered, and well-publicized. The Commission also requires, per USDE regulations, that each institution maintain a record of complaints received by, or available to, the Commission. Complaint records should be maintained by the institution for the time period between Preparatory Reviews.

### Procedures for Handling Complaints

1. When an oral complaint regarding a member institution is received, the complainant is advised of the Complaint Policy Statement and requested to submit the complaint in writing with substantial documentation to the Executive Director of the Commission.
2. When a written complaint regarding a member institution is received, the Executive Director or an assigned staff member acknowledges in writing receipt of the complaint within 30 business days.
3. It is the complainant's responsibility to do the following:
  - a. State the complaint in the clearest possible terms.

- b. Provide in writing a clear description of the evidence upon which the allegation is based. The evidence should state relevant and provable facts, and support the allegation that the institution is in significant violation of the rules of good practice as stated in the Commission's Standards and Policies.
  - c. Demonstrate that all remedies available at the institution (grievance procedures, appeals hearings, etc.) have been exhausted. The complainant should describe what has been done in this regard.
  - d. Attest that the matter in question is not under litigation.
  - e. Acknowledge awareness that the Commission may send a copy of the complaint to the chief executive of the institution.
  - f. Sign the complaint.
4. After acknowledging receipt of the complaint, Commission staff will analyze it to determine if it is within the scope of Commission Policies and jurisdiction and if there is adequate documentation.
  - a. Complaints will be considered only when they report conditions that are substantially documented and reflect the lack of due process or identify issues such as to jeopardize the quality of educational programs, the general welfare and integrity of the institution, or raise significant questions about the institution's compliance with Commission Standards.
  - b. If it is determined that the complaint is not within the scope of Commission Policies and jurisdiction, the complainant will be so notified. Individual complaints, whether acted on or not by the Commission, will be retained in Commission files for ten years.
  - c. In case adequate documentation is not provided, the complainant is notified within 30 business days in writing that complaints can be considered only when reported conditions are substantially documented and reflect lack of due process or identify issues such as to jeopardize the quality of the educational programs, the general welfare and integrity of the institution, or raise significant questions about the institution's compliance with Commission standards. In case institutional grievance appeal procedures have not been utilized, the complainant is advised to do so first.
  - d. The Commission may proceed with considering complaints against an institution even if the institution is the subject of a pending action by another body.
5. When the complaint appears to be within the scope of Commission Policies, is substantially documented, and, where appropriate, institutional appeal procedures have been utilized, a copy of the complaint will be forwarded to the institution's chief executive officer, normally within 15 business days after acknowledging receipt of the complaint. The chief executive officer will be asked to respond to the Commission within 30 business days.
6. When the response from the chief executive officer of the institution is received, Commission staff compares the document provided by the complainant and the institution and determines one of the following:
  - a. The complaint will not be processed further.
  - b. The complaint has sufficient substance to warrant further review.

- c. Where appropriate, a resolution is suggested to the complainant and the institution.
  - d. If the complaint raises issues regarding the noncompliance of an institution under Standard 1, Institutional Integrity, the Commission may invoke its policy on “Summary Sanctions for Unethical Institutional Behavior.”
7. Although every effort will be made to expedite the further review and/or final decision, it is not possible to guarantee a specific time frame in which the process will be completed. If further review is warranted, the time required to conduct the investigation may vary considerably depending on the circumstances and nature of the complaint.
8. The Commission’s actions normally include one or more of the following:
- a. The complaint will not be processed further.
  - b. Recommendations will be made to the institution suggesting changes in procedures or adherence to the Standards and Policies of the Commission.
  - c. In serious cases, a visit to the institution will be made by an ad hoc committee of the Commission to review the situation.
9. The complainant and the institution will be notified of the Commission’s review of the complaint.
- a. If the complaint is reviewed further as in 8 b-c above, the complainant and the institution will be notified of the outcome of the review.

Prior to the Commission’s disposition of the complaint, the institution will have an opportunity to respond in writing to the findings of the review.\* The complainant and the institution involved will be notified of the decision. The decision as communicated by the Executive Director or assigned Commission staff member is final.

- b. If the complaint was referred to WASC by another agency, that agency will receive copies of the correspondence that state the outcome of the complaint.

## Complaints Against WASC

If an individual complainant alleges that the Commission did not follow the complaint procedures outlined in this Policy, that individual may submit a written complaint to the Chair of the Commission. The Chair shall designate one or more persons to review the handling of the complaint. Such complaints should be addressed to “Commission Chair” at the WASC office address. The complaint should state what procedure was not followed and how the procedure was material to the decision rendered. Concern that the action was not in accordance with the complainant’s desires is not in and of itself cause for review of the complaint.

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\* If an institutional response is not received by the Commission within 60 days of the request for such response having been mailed or the Commission otherwise concludes that a violation of the Commission’s Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Criteria, or procedures may have occurred, the Commission may initiate such further proceedings as the circumstances warrant, including the initiation of proceedings that may result in a sanction.

Upon the review by the Chair and determination that the complaint is appropriate for further review, the Commission Chair shall designate one or more persons to review the handling of the complaint. The Commission shall review the report of the designated reviewer(s) and shall notify the complainant and the institution, if applicable, of its response to the complaint within 60 days. If any action is required, the Commission shall take prompt and appropriate follow-up action, as necessary. The Executive Director shall compile annually a list, available to the public on request, that summarizes the complaints against the Commission and their dispositions. Upon advice of counsel, the Commission retains the right to withhold public disclosure of information if potential legal action is involved in the complaint.

For further information, please call the WASC office at 510.748.9001.

# COOPERATION AMONG ACCREDITING AGENCIES

## Basic Principles

Cooperation among accrediting agencies may occur in many areas and take a variety of forms. The programmatic accrediting agencies provide the institutional accrediting agencies with standards of excellence in the specialized fields and assistance in evaluating them. The institutional accrediting agencies in turn provide the programmatic accrediting agencies with assistance in the appraisal of supporting and related areas of institutional control and management. Institutional accrediting agencies, programmatic accrediting agencies, and institutions should work closely together in the total accrediting process.

It is the intent of this policy to identify a range of opportunities for cooperative endeavors, rather than to propose a single structure for cooperation. Cooperation not only is a desirable goal, but sincere, continuing efforts toward its achievement are essential if accreditation is to remain a positive force in advancing quality education. Toward this end, the following principles are set forth:

1. Facilitating cooperation between and among institutional and programmatic accrediting agencies should be an objective of CHEA, the accrediting agencies, and the institutions served by them.
2. Consistent with the concept of voluntary accreditation, each institution of postsecondary education should decide for itself whether to seek accreditation by any appropriate agency or combination of agencies.
3. Institutions desiring coordinated accrediting activities, particularly among agencies accrediting programs located within the same academic administrative unit (i.e., a School of Professional Studies), should be offered every possible assistance and cooperation.
4. Coordination begins with the designation of responsibility within the institution for liaison with the various accrediting agencies.
5. To be successful, coordination requires advance planning by both the institution and the accrediting agency or agencies involved.
6. Representatives of each accrediting agency will be responsible to their parent agency for investigating and reporting activities carried out as part of the accrediting cycle.

## Definitions And Cooperative Arrangements

**An institutional (general) agency** accredits an institution as a whole and therefore includes all areas, activities, and programs of the institution. Normally, institutional accreditation testifies to: (a) the appropriateness of the objectives of the institution; (b) the adequacy of its organization, program, and resources, both material and human, when viewed against its objectives and generally accepted accrediting standards; and (c) evidence of the accomplishment of institutional criteria of eligibility provide that degree programs, however specialized, must rest upon a base of liberal or general studies required by all or most students. However, accreditation of the institution as a whole is not, and should not be interpreted as being, equivalent to specialized accreditation of a part or program of the institution and should not be represented as such.

**Programmatic (specialized) accrediting agencies** accredit program(s) within the total institution (or in the case of single purpose institutions, may accredit the institution as a whole). The focus of specialized accreditation is on the effectiveness with which the program meets its objectives and those of the institution, and the accrediting standards of quality education. Normally, specialized accreditation reviews the relationship of the program to the larger unit, the adequacy of the organization and resources for program maintenance and development, and evidence of accomplishment of programmatic objectives. However, specialized accreditation does not purport to make judgments on the institution as a whole (except in the case of single purpose institutions).

The following cooperative relationships have been developed:

Between institutional agencies and institutional accreditation agencies, including:

- ☞ Regional and regional agencies
- ☞ Regional and national agencies
- ☞ National and national agencies
- ☞ Regional or national and programmatic (functioning as an institutional) agencies
- ☞ Institutional and programmatic agencies
- ☞ Programmatic and programmatic agencies

Each accrediting agency should function in accordance with its own purposes and recognized scope of activity. The unique contribution of both institutional and programmatic accrediting to the total evaluative process and benefits accruing to the institution, the program, and the agencies from the coordinated effort have been recognized.

## Guidelines For Cooperation

### **Institutional Role**

The institution should assume a leadership role in suggesting how cooperating accrediting agencies can best work together to provide optimum service to the institution.

### **Need for Written Agreements**

Written agreements should be established among accrediting agencies that propose to cooperate. In initial form these may be relatively simple and deal primarily with matters of principle, becoming more specific as the cooperating agencies resolve procedural differences through experience. Sharing of the written agreement with all participants in the accrediting process will reduce potential misunderstandings and conflicts.

## Designation of Accrediting Responsibility

### 1. Between two or more institutional accrediting agencies:

An institution with operations that cross regional boundaries must be prepared to deal with all of the regional accrediting agencies involved; however, the home regional accrediting agency will serve as the coordinating agency.

A specialized institution for which there is a national specialized institutional accrediting agency (such as the American Association of Bible Colleges, Association of Independent Colleges and Schools, Distance Education Training Council) is encouraged to deal with the appropriate specialized agency. If the institution desires to seek only regional accreditation, the institution should so inform the specialized agency.

A specialized institution seeking accreditation from two or more national, specialized accrediting agencies must determine what constitutes its predominant emphasis (specialization), and that determination will identify the appropriate coordinating agency.

A specialized institution for which there is a programmatic accrediting agency that accredits freestanding specialized institutions (such as the American Bar Association, Association of Theological Schools, National Association of Schools of Music, etc.) is encouraged to deal with the appropriate programmatic agency. If the institution desires to seek accreditation from an institutional accrediting agency as well, the programmatic agency would serve as the coordinating agency. If the institution desires to seek only institutional accreditation, the institution should so inform the programmatic agency.

### 2. Between institutional and programmatic accrediting agencies:

When a multi-purpose institution seeks a coordinated accreditation involving both an institutional accrediting agency and one or more programmatic accrediting agencies, the institutional accrediting agency will serve as the coordinating agency.

When external coordination is not possible, an institution should seek accreditation for an academic administrative unit or sub-unit within the institution after it has achieved appropriate accreditation of the more inclusive entity (total institution, college/school, division, department, program—in that order).

### 3. Between programmatic accrediting agencies:

When an institution seeks accreditation involving two or more programmatic accrediting agencies (located within the same or in different academic administrative units), the chief executive officer of the institution, with mutual agreement and consent of the involved accrediting agencies, shall designate the coordinating agency, with responsibility normally going to the agency representing the program with the largest enrollment. This agency will coordinate the accrediting activities (joint and/or autonomous) consistent with the established guidelines.

## Accreditation Standards

The accreditation standards of the participating accrediting agencies (institutional and programmatic) shall apply during the review. Team members should be aware of the range of standards being utilized. Procedures followed during the visit and the subsequent reporting phase must reflect the standards as required by each agency. In instances in which standards may overlap or vary, the visit and the report must incorporate data relevant to the specific agencies.

## Contacts with Institutions

Accrediting agencies that utilize staff pre-visits should arrange a joint institutional visit to negotiate details of the cooperative accrediting process. When all parties are not involved in a pre-visit, participating agencies will contact the institution individually regarding the Institutional Presentation, the visit, and other expectations. However, these contacts must be carefully coordinated to eliminate conflicting instructions regarding the joint accrediting process. Participating institutions should be flexible in establishing visitation dates.

## Alternatives to Institutional Review

When the institution, or an administrative unit within an institution, is seeking accreditation from more than one agency, the Institutional Review/self study may take a variety of forms, including the following: (a) common self study; (b) core self study; with varying supplemental analysis; (c) separate self studies; with certain common elements; (d) a non-traditional alternative.

Institutions may wish to prepare a single self-study report designed to meet all requirements of each agency. The nature and format of the self-study document should be negotiated at the time a joint accrediting cycle is initiated. When the team will function as a unit (such as an institutional agency and a programmatic agency visiting a single-purpose institution), a common self study is indicated. In multi-purpose institutions, joint visits may be concurrent rather than coordinated. In the consultative stages establishing the accrediting process, a procedure for responding adequately to the data needs of all the accrediting agencies should be negotiated.

## Visiting Team and On-site Visit

Written agreements should include: the team's composition; the complementary skills required and the responsibility for their selection; designation of the chair (who will normally be from the coordinating agency); procedures to be followed during the visit; the format of the written report; the process of its development; the nature of recommendations and their reporting to the institution.

Cooperating agencies are encouraged to share data about potential site visitors, forming common pools of names when possible or exchanging information in specific situations. All potential site visitors may be selected from this common pool by the coordinating agency, or the cooperating agencies may determine criteria (size of team, areas of competency desired, background experience related to institution to be visited, etc.) Each cooperating agency should specify the number of team members to be selected. When there are more than two cooperating agencies, the chair should be designated by the coordinating agency. When there are only two cooperating agencies, co-chairs may be designated by each agency. The chair (or co-chair) is responsible for making logistical arrangements.

A specialized accrediting agency can add a valuable dimension by working cooperatively with an appropriate institutional accrediting agency in the selection of a generalist to serve on the team. When an institutional accrediting agency needs certain expertise on a team, the appropriate specialized accrediting agency can provide assistance. In developing cooperative team arrangements, however, the integrity of the review process must be preserved. Generalists cannot effectively replace specialists, or vice versa, and a large team representing several accrediting agencies may not be as effective as coordinated multiple teams.

## Commission Action

Accrediting decisions based on team reports are made in accordance with the policies established by the participating agencies. When a common team report is filed, each accrediting commission should receive a copy. When a common report is not feasible, each accrediting commission should take action on the report prepared by its team representatives. Each commission should take such action as its standards require and as supported by the report data. Accrediting actions by any commission (institutional or programmatic) should be shared with participating accrediting agencies.

## Fees and Costs

Because the costs of an accrediting cycle should be reduced through virtue of cooperation among accrediting agencies, fees and costs should be determined between and among accrediting agencies prior to the accrediting process. The institution is responsible for paying the usual fees to each agency to cover any cost of general agency services related to the accrediting cycle. Direct costs of a site visit can be reduced through such cooperative arrangements as a joint team, and therefore the fee to the institution can be proportionately reduced. In instances when a cooperating agency does not assess a fee to the institution, its proportionate costs will have to be determined and that agency will honor its share. Each agency should handle its own billing.

It should be noted that one of the most significant reductions in the cost burden to the institution can result from a combined Institutional Review/self study.

## Other Policies Regarding Cooperation Among Accrediting Agencies

Following each Commission meeting, the Commission will distribute to other appropriate recognized accrediting agencies and appropriate state agencies a list of actions taken on the accreditation and candidate status of institutions, noting all non-compliance actions and those monitoring actions that are public.

See also the Procedures for DEALING WITH INSTITUTIONS THAT OPERATE CROSS-REGIONALLY, page 101.

# DEALING WITH INSTITUTIONS THAT OPERATE CROSS-REGIONALLY

## Adopted by the Commission June 2000

To preserve the values and practices of peer review and regional accreditation, the evaluation of institutions that deliver education at a physical site(s) in another region(s) will be undertaken with the participation of the host regional accrediting commission(s). This will include the joint (home/host) review of off-campus sites in a host region against the accreditation standards of that region.

Procedures for the evaluation of colleges and universities operating interregionally will honor these basic principles:

1. The mission of the institution will be respected throughout the evaluation process;
2. The design and implementation of the strategy fashioned to evaluate its host region instructional sites will be developed collaboratively by the participating regional commission together with the affected institution;
3. The home region's evaluation processes will serve as the basis for the joint evaluations and the home region will take the leadership role in initiating and overseeing the process;
4. The home region will be solely responsible for final accrediting actions, but will respond to issues brought to its attention by the host commission as identified through its involvement in the institutional review;
5. Host commission participation in an interregional accrediting process shall not constitute accreditation of the institution by that host commission; and
6. The host region retains the discretion to determine its involvement in the evaluation of institutions operating interregionally.

## Exchange Information

To assure that each commission is adequately apprized of the instructional activities of out-of-region institutions in its region, the following information will be exchanged as specified:

- ☞ Annually, each commission will notify the other affected commissions of any of its institutions operating interregionally. The information provided will include: location(s), levels of degree offerings, and number of students enrolled. It is understood here as elsewhere, that notice need only be provided regarding those locations where 50 percent or more of a degree program is offered.
- ☞ Each commission will notify other relevant commissions when one of its institutions intends to establish a new out-of-region instructional site. In such cases, the home commission, in consultation with the host region together with the institution, will determine if the new site(s) constitute a substantive change and thus be subject to review under the interregional accrediting processes.

## Procedures for the Interregional Accrediting Process

### Notice to Host Region of Planned Evaluations

The home region will provide timely notice to the host region(s) of:

- ☞ scheduled comprehensive evaluations of institutions with instructional sites in the host region;
- ☞ any focused visits which include the review of sites in the host region or includes issues related to off-campus programming; and
- ☞ any other evaluations of new sites in the host region.

### Procedures for Evaluations

- ☞ **STANDARDS TO BE APPLIED.** The standards of both the home and host region will be applied at host region sites using a “home standards plus” model. That is, the standards of the home region will be used as the basis for the evaluation as supplemented by any criteria of the host region identified in the design process for the evaluation.
- ☞ **EVALUATION PROTOCOL.** Well in advance of the comprehensive visit, the home and host commissions, in consultation with the institution, will develop protocol for the evaluation of host region sites to include: 1) the scope of the review; 2) region; 3) the content of the self-study report(s); 4) any other matters of agreement relevant to the evaluation.
- ☞ **SITE TEAM COMPOSITION.** The size and composition of the team visiting host sites will be jointly determined, with the host region being afforded the opportunity to appoint up to 50% of the team’s membership. The host region may otherwise be appointed in keeping with home region procedures. It is understood that the host region’s conflict of interest policy will apply for the team members it appoints.
- ☞ **COSTS.** The costs for the evaluation of host region sites will be billed in keeping with the home region’s policies. The home region will otherwise administer reimbursement of evaluator expense also in keeping with its policies.

### Procedures for Evaluation Reports

- ☞ A single evaluation report will be prepared for each of the sites visited within the host region, as agreed upon by the commission involved.
- ☞ The evaluation report will include a review of the site under the home region’s standards, and as appropriate, findings regarding the host region’s standards as previously identified and any topics included in the evaluation under prior agreement. Recommendations to the home region can be made by both home and host sub-groups on the team.
- ☞ Site team reports are provided to the host region by the home region upon receipt. In cases of comprehensive evaluations, the home region’s institutional evaluation report is also forwarded to the host region.
- ☞ The host region is responsible for establishing processes for the timely review of site-specific evaluation reports prior to their being considered by the home region’s commission so as to

provide any comments it believes should be taken into consideration as the institution's case is reviewed.

- ☞ The policy of confidentiality for team recommendations of the home region will apply.

### Procedures for Decisions and Notification

- ☞ The home region's decision-making processes will ensure that the institution has the opportunity to respond to the team report and any comments from the host region before a final decision is made.
- ☞ The home region takes the final accrediting action and is responsible for providing notification of that action to all relevant parties, including the host region.
- ☞ When the final action differs from the recommendation and comments of the host region, if any, rationale for the action will be sent upon request by the home to the host region.
- ☞ The home region is responsible for addressing any misrepresentation of the interregional evaluation on the institution's accreditation status.

### Policy Statement on Separately Accreditable Institutions

In an effort to be consistent and equitable to all institutions, the following criteria for identifying separately accreditable institutions will be applied by each of the regional accrediting commissions.

An instructional site located in a region other than that of its home campus must seek separate accreditation in the region it exists if it functions independently of operational control of the parent college or university. An instructional site will be deemed operationally independent and accreditable by the host region when it meets these criteria. The instructional site:

- a. has substantial financial and administrative independence from the home institution including matters related to personnel;
- b. has a full time chief administrative officer;
- c. is empowered to initiate and sustain its own academic programs;
- d. meets, or has the potential to meet, the eligibility requirements of the host region; and
- e. has degree-granting authority in the state or jurisdiction in which it is located.

Each regional commission will determine if any of its affiliated institutions have instructional sites that appear to be separately accreditable. Following consultation with the host commission and the institution, the home region will make the determination as to the status of such sites that meet these criteria. The host region agrees to take deliberate steps toward reviewing any instructional sites identified as operationally independent in keeping with its policies and procedures for applying institutions. An institution identified as separately accreditable will continue to be included in the accreditation of the parent college or university until it achieves separate accreditation.

Off-campus instructional sites, regardless of location, not found to be operationally independent are included in the accreditation of the home campus. The operational independence of such sites is periodically reviewed under this policy.

# DISCLOSURE OF ACCREDITING DOCUMENTS AND COMMISSION ACTIONS

The records of the Commission, including Institutional Presentations and visiting team reports, are confidential as described in the Commission Code of Good Practice and Ethical Conduct, Section I, page 9.

## I. Institutional Presentations and Other Institutional Reports

Institutions are encouraged to distribute throughout the institution the self-reviews, portfolios, and Institutional Presentations filed with the Commission.

The Commission, with the approval of the institution, may permit representatives from other institutions access to the institution's reports and presentations or evaluation team reports. Also, with prior approval of the institution, the Commission may allow Institutional Presentations and other reports to be used by educators who are conducting research relating to the accreditation process and institutional improvement.

## II. Visiting Team Reports and Commission Action Letter

Institutions are encouraged to distribute the visiting team report and Commission action letter broadly within the college community, especially to the governing board, to promote institutional improvement. Careful efforts are to be made to avoid publication or distribution of excerpts that quote only those favorable to the institution or that take statements out of their context in the report. This does not preclude schools or departments from quoting with objectivity individual portions relating only to them. When selective quotations are made in public documents, the institution must also indicate that a copy of the entire report can be obtained from the institution.

As a matter of policy, the Commission expects the action letter to be distributed to the faculty leadership and governing board to inform these groups of the action of the Commission and those issues the Commission has identified for further attention and follow-up.

The Commission, as a general rule, will not release visiting team reports to the public. With the approval of the institution, the Commission will allow access to visiting team reports to those conducting research on accreditation. If an institution releases only selected portions of the report in such a manner as to become a public concern, however, the Commission reserves the right to release the entire report.

## III. Public Statements by Institutions

If an institution uses the public forum to take issue with an official action of the Commission relating to the institution, the Commission may announce, through the Executive Director, the action taken, and the bases for that action, and make public any pertinent information available to it. This is not to apply to the announcement by an institution that it intends to seek a review or appeal a negative action.

If an institution chooses to disclose its accredited status, the Commission, by federal regulation, requires institutions to identify WASC by name, including WASC's address and telephone number.

#### IV. Public Disclosure by the Commission About Institutions

Upon inquiry, the Commission will release the following information about accredited, candidate, or applying institutions:

- a. The status of eligibility application(s) made and eligibility committee decisions;
- b. The dates of Initial Candidacy and/or Accreditation;
- c. The date of denial or removal from Candidacy;
- d. The date and nature (comprehensive or other) of the most recent on-site evaluation or special report, and subsequent Commission action regarding the institution's candidate or accredited status;
- e. The date and nature (comprehensive or other) of the next scheduled on-site evaluation or special report required by the Commission;
- f. For institutions placed on Probation or Show Cause status, denied Initial Candidacy or Accreditation, or whose Candidacy or Accreditation is terminated, the date of such action(s) and a statement for the reasons for the sanction;
- g. Whether the institution has sought a review or appeal of a negative action of the Commission, and if so, the status and outcome of such review or appeal.

#### V. Public Notice of Operating Procedures and Third Party Comment for Institutional Visits

WASC maintains and makes available to the public, upon request, the following information:

Available in the *Handbook of Accreditation*:

- a. Description and procedures for Reaffirmation of Accreditation
- b. Accreditation Standards
- c. Policy on Commission Decisions on Institutions
- d. Policy on Public Disclosure by the Commission About Institutions

Available in *How To Become Accredited*:

Description and procedures for Eligibility, Candidacy, and Initial Accreditation

Available in the *WASC Annual Directory*:

The list of all Candidate and Accredited institutions, the date of the last reaffirmation visit, and the date of the next scheduled review of the institution.

Available upon request and on the website:

Names, academic and professional qualifications, and relevant employment and organizational affiliations of Commissioners and WASC administrative staff.

Available on the website and in the *Western Exchange* newsletter:

Public notice when an institution is being considered for accreditation and reaccreditation, invitation for third-party comment about the institution's qualifications either in writing or at the Commission hearing, and results of Commission decisions on institutional accreditation.

## **VI. Statement of Affiliation Status**

The Commission has joined several other regions in compiling a common form to record an institution's status of affiliation with the Commission. This Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) discloses the information listed in Section IV in a form that is published annually and is available on the WASC website. See Appendix 3 for a sample copy of the SAS.

## **VII. Public Correction of Incorrect or Misleading Information Released by an Institution**

WASC provides for the public correction of incorrect or misleading information an accredited or candidate institution releases about its Eligibility, Candidacy, or Accreditation status; the contents of reports of onsite reviews; and the Commission's decisions with respect to institutions.

## PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE COMMISSION

The Commission typically meets at each Commission meeting, in both executive and public session.

Executive sessions are held for the following purposes:

1. To take institutional accrediting actions;
2. To review financial and personnel issues;
3. To review legal issues;
4. To assess consistency of Commission actions and the application of Commission Standards and policies to individual institutions or types of institutions;
5. To discuss the need for standards or policies arising from specific institutional accrediting actions; and
6. To assess Commission and staff functioning, workload and priorities.

Public sessions are two types:

1. Public hearings are occasionally conducted where formal comments and presentations from institutional representatives are solicited on policy issues or proposals for new standards, policies or procedures; and
2. Public meetings, where Commission conducts its business in public, are open to institutional representatives, and other interested parties

All Commission Standards and Policies related to institutions are adopted in public session. Prior to adoption any Commission Standard or Policy relating to institutions will be circulated to institutions for comment. Notice of regular Commission meetings will be provided to institutions at least 30 days before each regular meeting of the Commission, indicating the agenda of the meeting.

Individuals who wish to bring items that are not on the agenda to the attention of the Commission shall request, no less than 14 days before the Commission meeting, by written statement to the Executive Director with a request that one or more items be placed on the agenda. Additions to the agenda, and time allocations for their discussion, are made at the discretion of the Commission. Special meeting of the Commission may be called because of the extraordinary circumstances. In such cases, notice of these time requirements may be waived.

If individuals wish to meet with members of the Commission, they must so advise the Executive Director no less than 14 days before the Commission meeting. If such a request is approved, the Executive Director will make arrangements for how many Commissioners will meet, when, and for how long, with the requesting individual(s).

When an institution under the Commission's jurisdiction is being considered for accreditation or candidacy, public notice shall be given on the WASC website, and opportunity shall be made for third-party comment concerning the institution's qualifications for accreditation or candidacy. Third-party comment must be submitted in writing, signed, accompanied by return address and telephone number, and addressed to the Executive Director of the Commission not less than 21 days before the scheduled Commission consideration.

At Commission meetings observers are seated as space allows. If the meeting, or a portion thereof, is conducted as a public *hearing*, the Commission shall establish procedures and time limits for comments by institutional representatives to the Commission. If the meeting, or a portion thereof, is conducted as a public *meeting*, the Commission shall conduct its regular business. If time permits, at the end of the meeting, or at the end of the discussion of an individual item, a limited amount of time may be set aside for comments from observers.

**Minutes:**

Minutes of actions taken at all public sessions shall be maintained and made available to any interested party following their approval by the Commission at the next succeeding meeting. Accreditation actions taken at each meeting shall be distributed to institutions within a reasonable time following that meeting. Additionally, a report of matters discussed and any actions taken in executive session, other than institutional accrediting actions, shall be prepared and made available to institutions.



VI



# Federally Mandated Policies

## Federally Mandated Policies

The policies listed in this section are those required of all accrediting agencies in order to be in compliance with the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended most recently as 1999. Many of these policies have been included in the WASC policies in Section V, and they are iterated here for ease of reference, with citations for the Federal Register.

### Maintenance of Accreditation Records [§602.15(b)(1)]

The Commission maintains for each institution the reports of all accreditation teams, including the last two full accreditation or preaccreditation reviews, including on-site evaluation team reports, interim reports, special visit and fact-finding reports, and the institution's formal responses to these reports, and the letters to the institution reporting the Commission's action following each visit. In addition, the Commission shall maintain a copy of the institution's most recent self-study report (or Institutional Review), and all decisions regarding the accreditation and preaccreditation of any institution, including all correspondence that is significantly related to those decisions.

### Teach-Out Agreements [§602.24(c)]

If an institution accredited by the Commission closes or terminates one or more programs and enters into a teach-out agreement with another institution, the initiating institution must submit the agreement to the Commission for approval prior to its implementation. The teach-out agreement may be approved only if the agreement is between institutions that are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency; is consistent with applicable standards and regulations; and includes, if appropriate, the Commission guidelines on closing an institution. For approval by the Commission, the agreement must be consistent with applicable standards of accreditation and Commission Policies. In addition, the agreement must provide for the equitable treatment of students by ensuring that:

1. The teach-out institution has the necessary experience, resources, and support services to provide an educational program that is of acceptable quality and reasonably similar in content, structure, and scheduling to that provided by the closed institution;
2. The teach-out institution demonstrates that it can provide students access to the program and services without requiring them to move or travel substantial distances.

If an institution the Commission accredits or preaccredits closes, the Commission must work with the Department of Education and the appropriate State agency, to the extent feasible, to ensure that students are given reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional charge.

The Commission has adopted Guidelines for Closing An Institution, available from the Commission office.

### Dually Accredited Institutions

Any institution seeking or holding accreditation from more than one nationally-recognized institutional accrediting body must describe itself in identical terms to each recognized institutional accrediting body with regard to purpose, governance, programs, degrees, diplomas, certificates, personnel, finances, and constituents, and must keep each institutional accrediting body informed of any change in its status with one or another accrediting agency.

If a recognized institutional or specialized accrediting agency takes adverse action on a dually accredited institution or places the institution on public sanction, the Commission will promptly review the institution's candidate or accredited status to determine if the other agency's action resulted from the institution's non-compliance with criteria similar to those of the Commission. Findings of non-compliance with the Commission *Handbook of Accreditation* could affect the continuing status of recognition with the Commission.

## Title IV Compliance

### Response to Secretary regarding Title IV Compliance

Upon request of the Secretary of Education for the purpose of assisting the Secretary in resolving problems with the institution's participation in Title IV programs, the Commission will provide information it has available germane to an accredited or candidate institution's program responsibilities or eligibility to participate under Title IV of the Higher Education Act.

### Notification of the Secretary of Fraud or Abuse

The Commission will provide the Secretary of Education notice of the name of any institution it has reason to believe is engaged in fraud or abuse or is failing to meet its responsibilities under Title IV of the Higher Education Act, and the reasons for such concern. The Commission shall notify the institution if its name is submitted to the Secretary under this provision.

### Default Rates

Institutions participating in the Title IV programs under the HEA and designating WASC as their gate-keeping agency shall be able to demonstrate diligence in keeping loan default rates at an acceptably low level and must also comply with program responsibilities defined by the Department of Education. Institutions that have a default rate requiring a default reduction plan should provide a copy of their plan to the Commission. Commission staff shall review the plan to determine its appropriateness, and to determine if any follow-up action is needed. Excessive default rates in the student loan program may be cause for a special report or evaluation.

### Compliance with Title IV

During the course of the Preparatory Review, there will be a review of loan default rates and negative actions taken by the Department of Education regarding compliance of the institution with the requirements of Title IV. In addition, the Commission will review information provided by the Secretary of Education when notified of negative action taken by the Department regarding responsibilities under Title IV. The Commission will determine if the information calls into question compliance with Commission Standards and whether any follow-up action is needed. Excessive default rates in the student loan program may be cause for a special report or evaluation.

### Review of Standards [§602.21]

The Commission maintains a comprehensive, systematic program of review demonstrating that its Standards are adequate to evaluate the quality of the education provided by the institutions it accredits. The process occurs at regular, reasonable intervals and involves all of the agency's relevant constituencies.

## Conflict of Interest [§602.15(a)(6)]

In carrying out its accreditation responsibilities, the Commission seeks to ensure that its decisions are based solely on the application of professional judgement to the information resulting from its evaluation procedures. Therefore, it seeks to avoid conflict of interest and the appearance of conflict of interest. A conflict of interest is defined as any circumstance in which an individual's capacity to make an impartial and unbiased accreditation decision may be affected because of a prior, current, or anticipated institutional affiliation(s), or other significant relationship(s) with an accredited institution or an institution seeking any recognition by the Commission.

The following examples of affiliations and other significant relationships pertain to visiting team members, Commissioners, and Commission staff. Such affiliations and significant relationships should be disclosed to the Executive Director for discussion and evaluation. Affiliations that would pose a conflict of interest include any of the following during the past five years: employee, former employee, applicant for employment, board member (including institutional foundation boards), appointee, paid consultant, current student, graduate, or instructor. Any relationship involving a written agreement and/or compensation may create a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest and should be included. Other significant relationships that should be reported for their potential in prejudicing decision making include: having a close relative (spouse, child, or parent) affiliated with the institution under review, receiving an award from the institution, and/or having a close personal or professional relationship at the institution under review where that relationship might have a material effect on accreditation review.

**Visiting Team Members:** In selecting visiting teams the Commission avoids individuals who have a known conflict of interest in participating in a specific institutional review. Individuals invited to participate are expected to decline to serve in the evaluation of an institution where they have, or where it might reasonably appear that they have, a conflict of interest. If unsure about a conflict of interest, individuals are expected to disclose possible conflicts to the Commission staff via the Conflict of Interest Form for discussion and evaluation. It is the policy of the Commission that team members not consult with an institution they have visited for one year following the visit. Institutions, in reviewing proposed teams, are encouraged to bring to the attention of Commission staff any possible conflicts of interest.

**Commissioners:** Commission members are expected to commit themselves to full disclosure and restraint in any institutional consideration involving a conflict of interest. Members of the Commission will absent themselves from the room when there are deliberations or votes on decisions regarding institutions with which they are affiliated or with which they have participated as a member of the most recent visiting team. They shall not participate in discussions or vote on decisions on institutions with which they have a conflict of interest. Commissioners shall complete the Conflict of Interest Form upon joining the Commission; this Form is updated annually as needed during their tenure on the Commission. Commissioners who are uncertain regarding the possible appearance or reality of conflict of interest shall seek the advice of the Commission chair and the Executive Director. Where a conflict of interest has been found to exist, it shall be reported to the Commission, noted in the minutes, and notice shall be provided to the institution that the Commissioner did not participate in the Commission discussion or vote.

**Commission Staff:** Commission staff are committed to full disclosure and restraint in any institutional consideration involving a conflict of interest. Staff members will absent themselves from deliberations on decisions regarding institutions with which they have been affiliated during the previous five years. Staff members may not participate in private consulting or other employment arrangements with any institution accredited by or a candidate for accreditation with the Commission. Staff also may not receive honorary degrees or awards from any institution with candidate or accredited status with the Commission.

Notice of any conflict of interest, or situation that might be perceived as a conflict of interest, shall be provided to the Executive Director. In the case of the Executive Director, notice shall be given to the Commission chair. A record of institutions where there is a conflict of interest will be kept in the employee's personnel file.

**Consultants and other agency representatives:** Consultants and others with a formal contractual relationship with WASC who, in the course of their work may become involved in Commission policy, institutional evaluation, or the accreditation decision of specific institutions, will be required to complete the Conflict of Interest Form and the Form shall be kept on file.

## Notice to Secretary of Changes in Scope of Recognition [§602.27]

The Commission will notify the Secretary of Education of proposed changes in policies, procedures, or accreditation standards that would alter its status or scope of recognition or might alter compliance with the criteria for recognition. The Commission will provide the Secretary with a copy of any annual report it prepares, its Annual Directory of Schools and Colleges, and the name and information about any institution that the Commission believes is failing to meet its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities, or is engaged in fraud or abuse. The Commission will respond with information to the Secretary's requests for information about accrediting activities and information that may bear upon an institution's compliance with its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities.

## Regard for Decisions of Other Agencies [§602.28(1-4)]

In considering whether to grant initial accreditation or preaccreditation to an institution, the Commission will not grant initial or renewed accreditation if it knows, or has reasonable cause to know, that the institution is the subject of:

1. A pending or final action brought by a State agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education;
2. A decision by a recognized agency to deny accreditation or preaccreditation;
3. A pending or final action brought by a recognized accrediting agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution's accreditation or preaccreditation; or
4. Probation or an equivalent status imposed by a recognized agency.

If upon review, the Commission acts to make an exception to any of the above and acts to grant accreditation or eligibility status, it will provide to the Secretary, within 30 days of its action, a thorough and reasonable explanation, consistent with its Standards, why the action of the other body does not preclude the granting of accreditation.

## Consideration of Accrediting Decisions of Other Agencies

The Commission adopts the following practices with respect to notice of adverse actions by other agencies:

1. If the Commission is notified by another recognized accrediting agency that an applicant or candidate institution has had a status of recognition with that agency denied, revoked, or ter-

minated, the Commission will take such action into account in its own review if it is determined that the other agency's action resulted from a deficiency that reflects a lack of compliance with the *Handbook of Accreditation*.

2. If the Commission is notified by another recognized accrediting agency that an accredited institution has had a status of recognition with that agency revoked, suspended or terminated, or has been placed on a publicly announced probationary status by such an accrediting agency, the Commission will review its own status of recognition of that institution to determine if the other agency's action resulted from a deficiency that reflects a lack of compliance with the *Handbook of Accreditation*. If so, the Commission will determine if the institution's status with the Commission needs to be called into question or if any follow-up action is needed.
3. If the Commission is notified by a state agency that an applicant, candidate or accredited institution has been informed of suspension, revocation, or termination of the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education, the Commission will review its own status of recognition for that institution to determine compliance with the *Handbook of Accreditation*. If the Commission finds the institution is no longer in compliance with the *Handbook*, the Commission will determine the appropriate action to be taken.

In implementing this Policy, the Commission relies on other accrediting bodies and state agencies to inform the Commission of adverse action so the Commission can undertake the review specified in this policy. Applicants for Eligibility with the Commission shall provide information on any actions by a recognized accrediting association within the past five years. In addition, the Commission requires candidate and accredited institutions holding accredited or candidate status from more than one USDE recognized institutional accrediting body to keep each institutional accrediting body apprised of any change in its status with one or another accrediting body.

## Sharing of Accreditation Information with Other Agencies

### [§ 602.28(e)]

The Commission routinely shares with other appropriate recognized accrediting agencies and state agencies information about the accreditation or preaccreditation status of an institution or program and any adverse actions it has taken against an accredited or preaccredited institution or program.

Following each Commission meeting, the Commission will distribute to other appropriate recognized accrediting agencies and appropriate State agencies a list of actions taken on the accreditation and candidate status of institutions, noting all non-compliance actions and those monitoring actions that are public.



VII



The  
Commission

## The Commission and the Association of Senior Colleges and Universities

The Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities consists of up to 25 members who serve overlapping three-year terms. Commissioners are nominated and elected by the Presidents of institutions that are members of the Association of Senior Colleges and Universities. The Commission includes three public members; a representative who is or has served on the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges; a representative who is or has served on the Commission for Schools, or persons who have served in an administrative or faculty position for institutions accredited by those Commissions; and representation from the area served by the Senior College Commission in the Pacific Basin (Hawaii, the territories of Guam, American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) and from outside the Western region from the governing boards, administration, and faculty of accredited institutions. The Commission members reflect diversity in institutional characteristics such as mission, size, geography and location, and personal characteristics such as ethnicity and gender. They also represent a balance of public and private institutions.

The Commission meets three times a year, once in retreat format, and twice to consider institutional actions. A complete list of Commissioners and accredited institutions can be found on the WASC web site.

### The Annual Meeting

In addition to selecting members of the Commission, the Association of Senior Colleges and Universities has a second purpose: to hold an Annual Meeting of its constituent institutions as a forum for the discussion of issues of current interest concerning accreditation. Information about the date, location, and topic of the Annual Meeting can be found on the WASC web site.



VIII



Other  
Resources

## ACCREDITATION AGENCIES AND RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) is comprised of three accrediting commissions. Each commission develops its own standards, procedures and fiscal policies, under the authority and subject to the approval of the WASC board of directors. For a copy of the WASC Constitution and a list of Candidate and Accredited institutions, refer to the *WASC Annual Directory*, which is available from WASC, 985 Atlantic Avenue #100, Alameda, CA 94501.

Accreditation actions of each of the three commissions are certified by the Board of Directors of WASC. Accreditation ceases whenever an institution fails to pay its annual fees, requests in writing that its accreditation be terminated, or when a Commission formally acts to terminate accreditation.

**Accrediting Commission for Schools.** The Commission is located at 533 Airport Blvd., Burlingame, CA 94010. Telephone: 650-696-1060.

Members of the Commission are named by the Association of California School Administrators; the California State Department of Education; the Department of Education of the State of Hawaii; the Hawaii Government Employee's Association; the other two WASC Commissions; the California School Boards Association; and the California Teachers Association. Commission membership also includes representatives of the California Association of Independent Schools, and the Catholic and Seventh-Day Adventist Schools. A public representative is appointed by the California Congress of Parents and Teachers.

**Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges.** The Commission office is located at 3402 Mendocino Ave., Santa Rosa, CA 95403. Telephone: 707-569-9177.

The Commission consists of members named by a special Commissioner Selection Committee. At least five of the appointments are faculty; at least five of the appointments are public representatives; at least three are administrators; at least one represents the independent institutions; at least one represents institutions in the Pacific Basin. The Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities and the Accrediting Commission for Schools provide nominations representing their sectors. The Commission also includes members appointed by the Chancellor of California Community Colleges and the President of the University of Hawaii.

**Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities.** The Commission office is located at 985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100, Alameda, CA 94501. Telephone: 510-748-9001.

The Commission consists of up to 25 members, but no less than 18 members, who serve overlapping terms. Commission members are elected by the presidents of the institutions accredited by the Commission.

Other regional college commissions in the United States are:

**Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools,** Commission on Higher Education, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Telephone: 215-662-5600.

**New England Association of Schools and Colleges,** Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, 209 Burlington Rd., Bedford, MA 01730. Telephone: 781-271-0022.

**North Central Association of Colleges and Schools,** Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, 30 N. LaSalle, Suite 2400, Chicago, IL 60602. Telephone: 800-621-7440; 312-263-0456.

**Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges**, Commission on Colleges, 11130 N.E. 33rd Place, Suite 120, Bellevue, WA 98004. Telephone: 425-827-2005.

**Southern Association of Colleges and Schools**, Commission on Colleges, 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097. Telephone: 800-248-7701; 404-679-4501.

**The Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)** is a non-profit organization of colleges and universities serving as the national advocate for voluntary self-regulation through accreditation. It is supported by member institutions and regional, national, and specialized and professional accrediting bodies. It is governed by a 15-member Board of Directors consisting of nine current chief executive officers of degree-granting colleges and universities representative of associate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral/research institutions and six current or former trustees, faculty members, academic administrators, or members of the public at large. CHEA has offices at One Dupont Circle, #854 NW, Washington DC 20036-1110. Telephone: 202-955-6126.

# GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS USED IN ACCREDITATION

**AABC:** American Association of Bible Colleges.

**AACRAO:** American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

**Academic Credit:** Credit applicable toward a degree or credential at the institution awarding it or accepting it on transfer.

**ACCJC:** Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges.

**Accrediting Body:** A voluntary, non-governmental association established to administer accrediting procedures. A listed accrediting body is one that is officially listed by the Secretary of Education because it is used as part of the Department of Education's processes for determining institutional eligibility for certain federal funds.

**Accreditation:** A voluntary process involving an association of schools and/or colleges to encourage high standards of education. Accreditation indicates that the Commission judges that the institution, in a manner consistent with Commission standards, offers its students on a satisfactory level the educational opportunities implied in its objectives and is likely to continue to do so.

**Accreditation Liaison Officer:** The individual in an institution assigned to carry on continuing relations with the Accrediting Commission. See Policy on Accreditation Liaison Officer, page 64.

**Admission Policy:** The rationale and criteria which determine the applicants who will be admitted to an institution.

**AICCU:** Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities.

**AICPA:** American Institute of Certified Public Accountants; publishes the guide, *Audits of Colleges and Universities*.

**Appeal:** An appeal from certain Commission decisions to a panel in accordance with due process described in the Constitution of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. (See also Review, below.)

**ATS:** Association of Theological Schools.

**Baccalaureate:** See "Degrees, B.A. and B.S." below, and also Standard 2.

**Calendar:** The institution's scheduling arrangement for classes, i.e., quarter, semester, summer, intercession, etc.

**Candidate or Candidate for Accreditation; Candidacy:** A status of preliminary affiliation with the Commission, awarded for three years, following a specified procedure for Institutional Review and on-site visitation. Candidacy is subject to one period of renewal. Candidacy is not accreditation and does not assure eventual accreditation. It is an indication that an institution is progressing toward accreditation.

**Catalog:** The official bulletin or college publication stating admission and graduation requirements, institutional mission, majors, minors, current course offerings, costs, faculty, and all other significant information necessary for an accurate understanding of the institution.

**Central Office:** Refers, as appropriate to the context, to statewide offices of the university systems, such as the University of California, University of Hawaii, and California State University, or the central administration of an independent institution with multiple campuses.

**CHEA:** The Council for Higher Education Accreditation, a non-profit organization of colleges and universities serving as the national advocate for voluntary self-regulation through accreditation.

**College:** Generic term to denote any of the postsecondary educational institutions including universities eligible for accreditation or accredited by the Commission. In this *Handbook*, the term does not refer to a specialized unit of university campus; it is used as a synonym for “institution.”

**Commission:** Refers to the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

**Complaint:** In WASC terms, a signed, written complaint to the Commission about an institution, or against WASC. See policy on Complaints Against Accredited and Candidate Institutions, page 92.

**Course:** A single subject described in college catalog or bulletin.

**Credentials:** (1) A certificate stating that the student has been graduated from a certain curriculum or has passed certain subjects; (2) a statement signed by proper authority certifying that a person is authorized to perform certain functions or has been designated as an official representative; (3) a detailed record of an application for a position, usually including transcripts of academic records and testimonials relative to previous experience, performance, and character; (4) the confidential file of an applicant sent to prospective employers; (5) teaching credentials.

**Credit, Unit of:** A quantification of student academic learning. One semester unit represents how much time a typical student is expected to devote to learning in one week of full time undergraduate study (at least 40-45 hours including class time and preparation). Thus a six-week summer session might, if full-time, equate to six units. An alternative norm is one unit for three hours of student work per week (e.g., one hour of lecture and two of study or three of laboratory) for ten weeks per quarter or 15 weeks per semester. A full-time undergraduate student program should normally be 14 to 16 units, and, if full-time, no less than 12 units. More time is expected to be devoted to study at the graduate level, typically more than three hours of study for every hour in class. A full-time graduate program is normally nine units or less. Considerable excess allowed on grounds of student ability should be subject to special analysis and approval.

#### Degrees:

**B.A., B.S.:** An undergraduate degree normally representing about four years (120 semester or 180 quarter units) of college study, or its equivalent in depth and quality of learning experience. The B.S. usually implies more applied orientation and the B.A. more liberal education orientation, although these distinctions are not always clear.

**M.A., M.S.:** A first graduate degree, representing at least one year of post-baccalaureate study (30 semester or 45 quarter units), or its equivalent in depth and quality. The distinctions between M.A. and M.S. are similar to those between B.A. and B.S. Some M.A. and M.S. degrees are merely continuations at a higher level of undergraduate work without basic change in character. Others emphasize some research that may lead to doctoral work.

**M.B.A., M.P.A., M.S.W., etc.:** Professional degrees requiring up to two years of full-time study. Extensive undergraduate preparation in the field may reduce the length of study to one year.

**Ph.D.:** The standard research-oriented degree which indicates that the recipient has done, and is prepared to do, original research in a major discipline. The Ph.D. usually requires three years or more of postgraduate work including an original research thesis or project.

**Ed. D., Psy. D., M.D., J.D., etc:** Degrees with emphasis on professional knowledge. These degrees normally require three or more years of prescribed postgraduate work.

**Executive Director:** The chief full-time employee of the Commission.

**Experiential Learning:** See on policy on Credit for Prior Experiential Learning, page 69.

**Faculty:** As used here, refers to instructional faculty, not librarians, administrators, counselors, etc., who may have faculty rank. Full-time faculty: Those employed by the institution whose primary employment obligation is to teaching and research at the institution. Part-time or adjunct faculty: Faculty whose major responsibility is not related to the institution in question. These faculty are customarily assigned one or two classes with class-related responsibilities only.

**Fiscal Control; Fiscal Responsibility:** Final authority at the institutional level and responsibility for all financial transactions including billing, collection of revenues, payment of salaries and other obligations, loans, debt service, bonding, and insurance. An institution is expected to have full and direct control of all financial or monetary affairs related to courses, credits, and programs using its name.

**Graduate Standing:** Advancement from undergraduate to graduate status. For admission to graduate standing, a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution and specified grade average are generally required. Examinations and/or personal recommendations may also be required. Frequently the graduate dean or the dean of the student's major department and/or committee must approve the applicant. Admission to a graduate school gives the privilege of taking course work; it does not imply that the student will later be admitted to candidacy for a degree.

**Higher Education:** Postsecondary education emphasizing degrees or credentials rather than solely trade or vocational preparation.

**Independent College:** College or university with self-perpetuation, or otherwise not publicly chosen, board of directors. The institution receives little, if any, direct tax support.

**Institutional Presentation:** Materials prepared for each stage of the Institutional Review Process, including the Institutional Proposal, the Preparatory Review, and the Educational Effectiveness Review.

**NACUBO:** National Association of Collegiate and University Business Offices which publishes "College and University Business Administration."

**NWASC:** Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges.

**Outcomes:** Used to describe the anticipated or achieved results of programs or the accomplishment of institutional objectives, as demonstrated by such indicators as student attitudes, knowledge and/or performance.

**Planning:** The development of a design or scheme of arrangement with a definite purpose. Institutional planning may be of the education program, the physical plant, or budgets and finances, and is intended to accomplish the purposes of the institution.

**Portfolio Based Credit:** Information prepared by the student to be used as evidence in the evaluation process to determine any credit which may be awarded for prior experiential learning.

**President:** A generic term signifying the chief executive officer of an institution. Chancellor, director, etc., may be substituted.

**Private College:** See Independent College.

**Professional Program:** An educational program designed to prepare persons for a specific profession. It may apply to undergraduate programs preparing for direct entry into employment (e.g., nursing, accounting). Some programs are offered at both undergraduate and graduate levels (e.g., engineering, business management). Most are primarily or solely graduate in nature (e.g., medicine, law, dentistry). All professional programs presuppose a background preparation in liberal or general education.

**Program:** A systematic, usually sequential, grouping of courses, forming a considerable part, or all, of the requirements for a degree or credential; may refer to the total educational offering of an institution.

**Public College:** College or university with a governing board elected or appointed by elected officials and with some of its financial support from tax funds.

**Public Service:** A function accepted by nearly all publicly supported institutions and many independent colleges and universities; service of a practical nature to the external (non-academic) community—local, regional, national, or international. Public service often includes public lectures and performances, various forms of applied research, non-credit courses, and agricultural or other similar forms of extension programs. It should not include activities unrelated to or in conflict with the institution's purposes and capabilities. It may include making the physical plant available to the outside community.

**Quarter:** A calendar of approximately 11 weeks, with ten full weeks of academic class work or its equivalent.

**Research:** May refer to collection of institutional data useful for self-analysis or planning (institutional research); to that carried on by teacher-scholars in order to remain current in their fields or expertise; or to that expanding a field knowledge or its application ("pure" or "applied" research).

**Review:** Upon request of an institution, reexamination by the Commission of a sanction taken by it. See policy on Commission Review Process, page 56.

**SAS:** Statement of Affiliation Status. A common form used by several regional accrediting agencies to simplify public information on each institution's affiliated status with the Commission.

**Semester:** A calendar of 17 weeks with at least 15 full weeks of academic class work or its equivalent in effort.

**Team:** An accrediting evaluation committee; a group of men and women assigned to review the Institutional Review or other report and conduct an on-site evaluation visit to the institution.

**University:** An institution with numerous graduate degree programs and adequate resources to support them, as defined by the Standards.

**WASC:** Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

## WASC Forms, Publications, and Web Site

The WASC web site, [www.wascweb.org](http://www.wascweb.org), provides downloadable forms for institutions, including the Summary Data Form, the Annual Report Form, and Publications Order forms. The web site also features a directory of WASC accredited institutions, a calendar of events, and links to other educational resources.

Additionally, the Commission is committed to providing all manuals, including *How To Become Accredited*, the Substantive Change Manual, and Chair and Visit Guides, on the web site in easily downloadable versions. The site includes an email link for questions and comments on all aspects of the Commission's relationship to institutions.



IX



# Appendices

## APPENDIX I

### Stipulated Policies

One of the required elements an institution must include in its Institutional Proposal (Section III, page 40, #9) is an Institutional Stipulation Statement signed by the chief executive officer. One of the stipulations is “that the institution has published and publicly available policies in force as identified by the Commission. Such policies will be available for review on request throughout the period of accreditation.”

Those policies and statements include:

#### Institutional Integrity

- ☞ A widely disseminated, written policy statement of commitment to academic freedom in teaching, learning, research, publication, and oral presentation
- ☞ Due process procedures that demonstrate faculty and students are protected in their quest for truth
- ☞ Written policies on due process and grievance procedures for faculty, staff and students
- ☞ A clear statement of institutional policies, requirements, and expectations to current and prospective employees
- ☞ Institutionally developed and published non-discrimination, equal opportunity, and affirmative action policies
- ☞ Clearly written policies on conflict of interest for board, administration, faculty, and staff, including appropriate limitations on the relations of business, industry, government, and private donors to research in the institution
- ☞ A clear statement that the institution agrees to abide by WASC Policy on Substantive Change and the Policy on Distance and Technology-Mediated Instruction

#### Research

- ☞ Policies covering human subjects and animals in research, classified research, patent provisions, cooperative research relations with industry, and other similar issues related to the integrity and independence of the research enterprise
- ☞ Institutions that support applied research having the potential for producing significant revenue have clear policies on how faculty responsible for such research share revenue from patents, licenses, and sales. Institutions supporting entrepreneurial activity of faculty of institutionally sponsored research parks have clear policies covering the involvement of faculty in such ventures, the protection of basic research, and the publication of research results

#### Educational Programs

- ☞ Precise, accurate, and current information in printed material regarding a) educational purposes; b) degrees, curricular programs, educational resources, and course offerings; c) student

charges and other financial obligations, student financial aid, and fee refund policies; d) requirements for admission and for achievement of degrees; and e) the names of the administration, faculty, and governing board

- ☞ Publications that make clear the status (e.g., full-time, part-time, adjunct) of each faculty member
- ☞ Clearly articulated policies for the transfer of credit to ensure that students who transfer in with general education course credits meet the institution's own standards for the completion of the general education requirement
- ☞ Policies and procedures for additions and deletions of programs
- ☞ Requirements for continuation in, or termination from, academic programs, and a policy for readmission of students who are disqualified for academic reasons
- ☞ Clearly stated graduation requirements that are consistently applied in the degree certification process

## Faculty

- ☞ Personnel policies governing employment of teaching fellows and assistants
- ☞ Policy designed to integrate part-time faculty appropriately into the life of the institution
- ☞ Explicit and equitable faculty personnel policies and procedures
- ☞ Policies on salaries and benefits
- ☞ Policies for faculty and staff regarding privacy and accessibility of information

## Library

- ☞ Written library collection development and weeding policies, including the bases for accepting gifts

## Students

- ☞ Admission and retention policies and procedures, with particular attention to the application of sound admission and retention policies for athletes, international students, and other cases where unusual pressures may be anticipated
- ☞ Clearly defined admissions policies attentive to the special needs of international students
- ☞ Policies on student rights and responsibilities, including the rights of due process and redress of grievances
- ☞ Publications that include policies and rules defining inappropriate student conduct
- ☞ A policy regarding fee refunds that is uniformly administered, and consistent with customary standards

## Finances

- ☞ Policies, guidelines, and processes for developing the budget
- ☞ Clearly defined and implemented policies with regard to cash management and investments, approved by the governing board
- ☞ Policies and a code of ethics for employees involved in buying, bidding, or providing purchase orders
- ☞ Policies on risk management, addressing loss by fire, burglary and defalcation; liability of the governing board and administration; and liability for personal injury and property damage
- ☞ Policies regarding fundraising activities that comply with sound ethical accounting and financial principles

## APPENDIX 2

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **1. What is new about this model and its focus on educational effectiveness?**

The goals of this new model are to create a value-adding process through accreditation review that 1) is aligned with institutional priorities; 2) builds within the institution a culture of evidence; and 3) gives greater emphasis to educational effectiveness. The Commission believes that the new model of review with fewer standards (four, reduced from nine) will enable institutions to accomplish these goals within the context of the accreditation history.

The model is also intended to generate deep engagement with issues of educational effectiveness and help institutions develop clearer indicators and evidence best reflecting institutional effectiveness with respect to student learning and academic achievement. The three-stage, sequential review process invites an institution to explore areas of educational effectiveness with increasing depth, first by providing a broad description of what it is currently doing with assessment activities (during the Preparatory Review) and then by analyzing the issue of educational effectiveness in depth (during the Educational Effectiveness Review).

#### **2. How can we best use this new model?**

Recognizing that any accreditation review requires substantial institutional investment, the new model was designed with an eye toward helping institutions develop internal institutional indicators building, to the extent possible, on existing institutional evidence. The Review Process relies on portfolios that can be retained and updated for subsequent reviews, and it promotes serious institutional inquiry and engagement with issues of consequence.

With the implementation of the new model, WASC is attempting to move to a “best practice” model, and help institutions build from within and work with other institutions in a mode of collaborative inquiry. WASC intends to hold workshops (including at the WASC Annual Meeting in April) and provide other resources, both on its website and through publications, to help institutions build systems that will incorporate continuous feedback about educational effectiveness.

#### **3. Does WASC have specific ways in which it expects us to evaluate educational effectiveness and student learning?**

The Commission has carefully attempted to create a process that is based on inquiry and exploration of educational effectiveness. There are many ways institutions can approach these issues, and WASC has already been working with institutions to develop such approaches and share them more widely. What is clear from this new direction is that all institutions need to be engaged in this inquiry as part of the accreditation review cycle. The Commission encourages multi-faceted approaches that are creative and adaptive to each institution’s needs. Thus, there is no intention to require specific methods of evaluation or assessment by each institution; rather experimentation is encouraged and the sharing of results with others within the institution and “good practices” across institutions. The WASC Annual Meetings have been deliberately revised with this specific purpose in mind.

#### **4. How can we avoid duplicative costs throughout the three-stage review process?**

By focusing the review and building on existing evidence within the institution, the intent is to shift the kind and quantity of material needed to be prepared for WASC. The Commission is already supporting the development of presentation formats that are updatable and that use technology effectively. Experience from Data Portfolios used in several visits has been that these portfolios have use within the

institution after the accreditation visit has been completed. Also, by developing topics for the Educational Effectiveness Review that are aligned with institutional needs and priorities, greater value will be provided to institutions. In sum, over the entire accreditation cycle it is intended that there will be less burden and far greater impact than with the current process.

#### **5. Will this new model cost more?**

Under the new framework, it is believed that there will be start-up costs to develop institutional portfolios and material for Preparatory Reviews in updatable formats. Thereafter, it is likely there will be costs savings achieved. Educational Effectiveness Reviews are intended to be aligned with institutional priorities, so that greater value will be received by the institution for the costs involved. Implementation of any new model will be labor intensive for Commission staff working with institutions. The Commission has anticipated this problem by authorizing an increase in staff and is now developing a business plan to assure that the Commission has the capacity to support institutions under this new model. We anticipate continuing to seek grants that will allow for many of the developmental expenses to be funded with non-institutional resources.

#### **6. Does each Criterion need to be addressed, as well as each Guideline, and Question for Engagement?**

The Criteria reflect key aspects of each Standard. The evidentiary base for each Criterion is provided in the Institutional Portfolio, but each Criterion does not need to be reflected as an Institutional Portfolio element. However, new institutions must cover all Criteria; and institutions placed on Sanction for not meeting one or more Standards must respond to the Sanction-related Criteria.

Guidelines are normative ways of addressing a particular Criterion, and there are not Guidelines for all Criteria. Where Guidelines are noted, the Commission is attempting to offer further interpretation of the Criteria and suggest intended ways institutions can demonstrate they have addressed them. When an institution does not adhere to a Guideline it needs to demonstrate its practice addresses the intent of the Guideline in an equally effective way.

Questions for Institutional Engagement are purposefully framed as questions to engage an institution in inquiry and to lead an institution to an exploration of its performance within the context of its purpose. Institutions will likely emphasize some of these Questions more than others when evidence of Capacity under each Standard is assembled. Institutions are expected to review the Questions and to identify areas that deserve further in-depth exploration in the process of preparing its Proposal. The selection of Questions is presented in the institution's Proposal for Review.

#### **7. Will the same team visit an institution for both the Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review?**

There will be an overlap. Some team members will go to both visits; some will be specific to the Preparatory Review and some to the Educational Effectiveness Review.

#### **8. Will under-resourced institutions be placed on sanction after the Preparatory Review?**

The most frequent Commission action following the Preparatory Review will be to Continue Accreditation. However, there may be times when some issues are isolated for the institution to work on, and the date of the Educational Effectiveness Review may be modified slightly in order to allow the institution time to respond to those issues.

**9. Will all sanctions be made public?**

Yes, under the new Decisions policy adopted by the Commission in this *Handbook*. The only private formal notice to an institution is the action that Reaffirms Accreditation with a formal Notice of Concern. The Notice informs an institution that while it currently meets Standards, it is in danger of being found in noncompliance. The Reaffirmation is public; the Notice is not.

**10. Are sanctions applied sequentially, either in ascending or descending order?**

Commission Sanctions are not intended to be applied sequentially, either in ascending (e.g., from Probation to Warning) or descending (from Warning to Probation) order. When a Sanction is imposed, unless clear progress is made within two years, the Commission is required by federal law to terminate accreditation. Only when there is good cause will the Sanction period be extended.

## APPENDIX 3

### Sample Statement Of Affiliation Status

PACIFIC COAST COLLEGE

100 Campus Drive  
Ocean City, CA 93000  
(800) 624-3157  
Fax: (555) 555-1030  
www.paccoast.edu

Chief officer: ..... Dr. Joan K. Smith, President

Legal status: ..... Private, not-for-profit institution

Affiliation<sup>1</sup>: ..... Independent

FTE Enrollment: ..... Undergraduate–950; Graduate–49

Degree levels<sup>2</sup>: ..... Associate's (14), Bachelor's (54), Master's (1)

Locations of off-campus sites where 50 percent or more of a degree program is offered more than 25 miles from home<sup>3</sup>:

❖ In state: ..... San Diego

❖ Out-of-state: ..... Honolulu, HI

Programs offered by distance learning (type) ..... MBA (Internet)

..... BS in Oceanography (web-based)

Current status: ..... Accredited<sup>4</sup>

First accredited: ..... 1976

Granted candidacy: ..... 1970

Most recent Commission action (reason for action): ..... February 22, 1996

Last comprehensive evaluation: ..... 1995

Next comprehensive evaluation: ..... 2004/2005

Reports required: ..... October 1, 2001

Focus of report: (identify<sup>5</sup>) ..... Progress report on enrollment and finances

Other visits required: ..... None

Focus of visit: (identify<sup>5</sup>)

Statement last revised: ..... November 2000

#### Procedural notes on the SAS:

1. AFFILIATION. For for-profit institutions, “Affiliation” is replaced by “Ownership,” and the name of the owner is listed.
2. DEGREES. Possible entries: Associates, Bachelors, Masters, Specialists, First Professional, and Doctorate.

3. **LOCATIONS.** The form will list all locations where 50% or more of a degree is offered. For programs offered via technology-mediated instruction, the form will list those where 50 percent or more of the program is offered via distance education
4. **AFFILIATION STATUS.** If a public sanction has been imposed such as Warning, Probation, or Show Cause, the sanction would be noted here, e.g., Accredited (on Probation).
5. **REASONS FOR REPORTS OR VISITS.** A brief statement will be provided indicating the issues to be addressed in any follow-up visit or report.
6. **PUBLIC DISCLOSURE NOTICE.** If the Commission has imposed a Sanction, the SAS form will disclose the Sanction, and indicates a statement of reasons is available upon request.

## APPENDIX 4

### Comments Form

The Commission is interested in learning your thoughts on the revised *Handbook of Accreditation*. Please e-mail the WASC Commission office at [wascsr@wascsenior.org](mailto:wascsr@wascsenior.org), or fax this response form to 510.748.9797.

1. The Commission outlined values for implementing the *Handbook*, including recognizing the diversity of institutions and institutional missions, and acknowledging that all institutions are at different places on a continuum of development. Do you think the stated values are inculcated in the *Handbook*?
2. Is the Institutional Review Process clear? What questions remain about the three-staged process?
3. Is the format of each section easy to read? What would you change?
4. What works particularly well? What changes are needed?

**You may fax this Comments form to the WASC office at 510.748.9797**



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