Washington State University
Overview of the Accreditation Process

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What is Accreditation?

Accreditation is the oldest and best known seal of higher education quality. Its four roles include:

1. Sustain/enhance quality
2. Maintain academic value in H.E.
3. Prevent politicizing H.E.
4. Serve the public interest
Accreditation Expectations

The accreditation process requires institutions to examine their own goals, operations and achievements. The process provides expert evaluation by a visiting evaluation committee to evaluate quality and verify compliance.
Accreditation Outcomes

Academic Quality is Enhanced
Achievements are Documented
Accountability is Demonstrated
Improvement Is Made Based on Assessment and Evaluation
Regional Accreditation

Regional accrediting agencies are recognized by the US DOE and CHEA and accredit institutions within a prescribed geographic region.

Regional accreditors accredit entire institutions, not individual programs or subject content areas.
Assurances

Accreditation affirms that institutions-

Have clearly defined and appropriate educational objectives;

Have conditions under which objectives can reasonably be achieved;

Are substantially accomplishing their objectives; and

Are reasonably organized, staffed, and supported to continue to do so.
Benefits

Federal Student Financial Aid
Federal Funds for Specified Programs and Services
Quality Assurance and Integrity
Academic Transferability
The Prestige of Accreditation
Evaluating Quality

Quality cannot always be defined in the same terms for all institutions.

Therefore, an evaluation determines:

1) how well the institution’s mission and goals are being achieved; and

2) how consistent the M/G’s are with Commission's criteria for accreditation.
Evaluation Criteria

Conditions and principles, agreed upon by member institutions, that characterize educational quality and effectiveness. They are qualitative statements that with evidence, peers may evaluate. Criteria include:

Eligibility Requirements - characteristics and conditions necessary for initial and ongoing accreditation.

Standards – primary criteria by which quality, candidacy, and accreditation are evaluated.

Related Policies – to inform and clarify the standards.
Taxonomy of a Standard
Standard

Standard Number and Title

Example
Standard Two - Educational Program and Its Effectiveness
Standard Element

Standard Element Number and Title
(Conceptual Framework)

Example
Standard 2.B - Educational Program Planning and Assessment
Standard Element Narrative (Philosophy)

Example

Educational program planning is based on regular and continuous assessment of programs in light of the needs of the disciplines, the fields, or occupations for which programs prepare students, and other constituencies of the institution.
Standard Indicator & Declarative Statement (Quality Measures)

Example

2.B.3 The institution provides evidence that its assessment activities lead to the improvement of teaching and learning.
Standards

One  Institutional Mission and Goals, Planning and Effectiveness
Two  Educational Program & Its Effectiveness
Three Students
Four  Faculty
Five  Library and Information Resources
Six  Governance and Administration
Seven Finance
Eight Physical Resources
Nine Institutional Integrity
Standards Are Interrelated.

Repetition among the Standards and Policies emphasizes the interconnected nature of the institution.

Assessment, Evaluation, Measurement, or Judgment of Quality and Effectiveness are explicitly referenced in each standard.
Key Considerations

Institutional Planning and Effectiveness
(Standard Element 1.B)

Educational Program Planning and Assessment
(Standard Element 2.B, Policy 2.2)

General Education/Related Instruction
(Policy 2.1)

Distance Education
(Policy 2.6)

Faculty Evaluation
(Policy 4.1)

Governance System, Board, and Administration

Financial Planning, Adequacy, and Management

Contractual Agreements with External Organizations
(Policy A-6)
NWCCU Standards & Policies . . .

Do not say how an institution must plan and evaluate.

Do not say institutions must practice a particular model of evaluation.

Do not say quantitative evaluation is preferable to qualitative.

DO say that qualitative and quantitative must complement each other.

Do say ongoing outcome assessment must be continuous and must be an integral part of institutional planning.

Do not define "adequate", "appropriate", or "sufficient" since they are dictated by institutional mission and goals.
Compass Check
Mapping Direction

If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will do.

White Rabbit in ‘Alice in Wonderland’
Lewis Carroll and George Harrison
Destinations

If headed in the wrong direction, going faster isn’t better.
Setting the Bar

What are your institution’s expectations of itself?
Institutional Expectation

Our Expectation Is to Effectively Fulfill Our Mission
Self-Study Goals

Understand, assess, analyze, evaluate, and improve planning and effectiveness of the institution in fulfilling its mission—not merely defending what already exists;

Identify educational outcomes and document student achievement of educational outcomes;

Document that Commission Eligibility Requirements, Standards, and Policies are met;

Accurately, candidly, directly identify strengths, weaknesses, and achievements of institutional activities, structures, and processes.
Quality and Accountability

Does your institution fulfill its mission?
Are institutional goals achieved?
Are intended outcomes realized?
Is institutional integrity maintained?
Does your institution continuously improve?
How do you know?
What is your evidence?
Key Questions

Who are we? (Values)
What do we claim to do? (Mission)
Are we doing it? (Integrity)
How well are we doing it? (Effectiveness)
How do we know? (Evaluation)
What data do we collect? (Evidence)
What do the data tell us? (Analysis)
What are we doing as a result? (Planning)
Model Self-Study Characteristics

Design is appropriate to the institution

Process is inclusive and internally motivated with leaders committed to the process

Self-study is a critical review of mission, goals, and practices and assesses and evaluates effectiveness in achieving its mission & goals

Report is data driven, analytical, with minimal description

Self study outcomes are incorporated in planning to improve institutional effectiveness
Role of the Steering Committee

Motivate, encourage and support participants

Design the study and translate it into clearly defined structures, roles and tasks

Deliver a clear charge for the tasks and assign individuals/groups to the tasks

Set a realistic schedule and allocate resources needed to complete the tasks

Establish clear channels of communication

Coordinate collection & synthesis of data
Conducting the Self Study

Identify institutional outcomes
Identify criteria that measure intended institutional/program outcomes
Collect data based upon the criteria
Assess, analyze, and evaluate the data
Indicate how results are used in planning
Develop and implement change strategies
Ockham’s Razor

The Law of Parsimony

The Simplest, Most Direct Approach Is Usually the Best and the Most Efficient
Writing the Report

Be concise! (200 pages +/- plus appendices)
Editing Carefully
Be candid, forthright and succinct
Flow should be smooth and logical
Avoid jargon
Be brief on narration and description
Rely on data and analysis to support claims
“Speak” in a common voice
Proof final copy for errors and omissions
Provide an Executive Summary
The Self-Study Report

Scholarly, analytical document
Accurately reports the results of self-study
Authentic reflection of the institution
Readable and useful!
Organized around Standards and *Guide for Self Study* (suggested)
Candidly assesses outcomes
Analyzes assessment data
Identifies areas for improvement
Specifies plans to achieve improvement
Executive Summary

Succinct, comprehensive snapshot
Provides institutional context
Major changes since last evaluation
Summary of major findings
Implications
Plans for improvement
Chapter Structure and Contents

Standards Chapters
Organized around the standards
Do not duplicate support documents
Data-based description (just enough!)
Data-based analysis
Data-based evaluation
Conclusions
Plans for improvement
Chapter summary
Summary Chapter

Summary
Institution-wide synthesis across all Standards
Major findings
Conclusions
Plans for institutional improvement
Supporting Documentation

Required Documentation
- Included in body of the report
- Included in the appendices
- Accompanying the report

Required Exhibits
- Summarized in the self-study
- Included in the appendices
- Available in the committee room

Suggested Material
- Suggested items for self-study
- Made available in the committee room
Typical Weaknesses

Incongruent mission, goals, & activities
Lack of assessment, analysis, and evaluation
No consequences from the self-study
Little, if any, use of data to document claims
Data not clearly tied to planning, outcomes assessment, or institutional effectiveness
Unsupported statements of apparent fact
Lack of synthesis of issues across Standards
Preparing for the Visit

Identify an institutional liaison for each member of the visiting committee.

Publish Third Party Comment Announcement.

At least 30 days prior to the visit, mail required documents to the Commission office and each Committee member.

Organize exhibits in the Committee room.

Gather computers and support resources in the Committee room.
The Visiting Committee

Represents the Commission

Composed of Peers
  Out of state
  Similar educational environment
  Completed evaluator training
  Designated areas of responsibility
  Chaired by Commissioner/Seasoned Evaluator

Validates the self-study
Evaluates the institution
Reports findings
Submits confidential recommendation
Anatomy of the Visit

Pre-Visit Meeting
  Committee Organizational Meeting

Day 1
  Introductory Meeting
  Evaluation Activities
  Committee Meeting

Day 2
  Evaluation Activities
  Committee Meeting

Day 3
  Final Committee Meeting
  Chair Meeting with President
  Exit Meeting
Following the Visit

Institution responds to the Evaluation Committee’s report to correct errors of fact.

Institution is invited to address the Commission at its next scheduled meeting.

Commission renders a decision based upon:

- Institutional self study;
- Evaluation Committee’s report;
- Response from the institution;
- Testimony from Evaluation Committee Chair;
- Presentation by the President; and
- Evaluation Committee’s recommendation.
Commission Actions

- Reaffirm Accreditation
- Defer Action
- Issue or Continue Warning
- Impose or Continue Probation
- Issue or Continue Show-Cause Order
- Terminate Accreditation
Contact Information

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Questions?

Aspirin?