

# Purpose and Processes of Accreditation

ACCJC, WASC

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Peer Accreditation is a progressive and time-proven method for assuring that higher education institutions can continue to improve and offer a quality education to the men and women who will lead their communities in the future. By establishing high standards, continuously evaluating themselves against the standards, and periodically being evaluated by educational professionals outside the organization, colleges and universities can provide a degree or certificate that students and the community trust.

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# The Purposes of Accreditation are:

- To provide assurance to the public that education provided by institutions meets acceptable levels of quality
- To promote continuous institutional improvement
- To maintain the high quality of higher education institutions in the region and in the nation

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# Accreditation Supports Institutional Development

- Establishing standards of quality based upon excellent practices in higher education and
- Evaluating institutions with these standards using a three-part, peer-based process that entails
  - Institutional self evaluation (Internal)
  - External evaluation
  - Commission review and decision

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# Institutions Seek Accreditation to:

1. Provide assurance to the public that the education provided meets acceptable levels of quality
  - And thus to qualify for student access to Federal Financial Aid funds
2. Promote continuous institutional improvement in accordance with standards established by member institutions in the region.
3. Maintain the quality of higher education in the U.S.

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# Commission Actions on Institutions

## The Commission:

- Determines the accredited status of a member institution
- Communicates the accreditation decision to the institution
- Communicates the accreditation decision to the public
- Requires the institution make all reports available to students and the public

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# National Perspective

## STRUCTURE AND AUTHORIZATION

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# REGIONAL ACCREDITATION

- 6 REGIONS, 7 REGIONAL ACCREDITORS
  - New England (NEASC) – 241 institutions
  - Mid Atlantic (Middle States Commission) – 527 institutions
  - South East (SACS – Southern Association) – 1028 institutions
  - North Central (Higher Learning Commission) – 1,006 institutions
  - Northwest (Northwest Commission) – 163 institutions
  - West & Pacific
    - WASC, Senior (WASC, SCUC) – 215 institutions
    - ACCJC, WASC (2 year colleges) – 135 institutions

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# Regional Accreditation

- Each Region establishes its own standards and accreditation practices
- Each regional accreditor is governed independently (Commissions)
- Standards across all regions follow common themes – based on U.S. Department of Education guidelines and higher education effective practice.
- Regional accreditors are independently recognized by the US Department of Education

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# Federal Role in Accreditation

## USDE Regulations

Accreditors are recognized by the USDE, and must meet federal regulations in their standards and practices.

USDE regulations and interpretations of regulations come directly to institutions and come to institutions through regulations for accreditors. Among those recently highlighted in USDE briefings:

- Institution-set standards for satisfactory performance in achieving student success (achievement and learning); teams to determine if the standards are reasonable and evaluate institutional attainment
- Academic Credit / Clock to Credit Hour Conversion
- Student Complaints
- Appropriate use of DE/CE terminology
- Monitoring fiscal condition/stability
- Two-Year Rule

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# Federal Role in Accreditation

## USDE Recognition guidelines

- § 602.16(a)(1) The agency's accreditation standards effectively address the quality of the institution or program in the following areas:

(v) Fiscal and administrative capacity as appropriate to the specified scale of operations.

[Per USDE, accreditation standards and accreditation practice must set forth the expectation that institutions demonstrate financial stability and adequate administrative staff ....]

# Examples – fiscal capacity

- SACS-COC:
  - 3.10.1: The institution's recent financial history demonstrates financial stability (**Financial stability**)
  - 3.10.3: The institution exercises appropriate control over all its financial resources. (**Control of finances**)
- HLC:
  - Criterion Five. Resources, Planning, and institutional Effectiveness:
    - D.1 The institution is able to meet its current financial obligations
    - D.3 The institution has future financial projections addressing its long-term financial sustainability

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- Standard III.D. Financial Resources
  - The level of financial resources provides a reasonable expectation of both short-term and long-term financial solvency. [III.D.]
  - ... The internal control structure has appropriate control mechanisms and widely disseminates dependable and timely information for sound financial decision making. [III.D.2.]

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# Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, Policies, and Rubrics

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# Eligibility Requirements (ERs)

- 21 criteria which must be met before an institution can apply for eligibility status with the ACCJC see *Accreditation Reference Handbook*
- Compliance with ERs is expected to be continuous and is verified periodically, usually during the educational quality and institutional effectiveness review

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# ERs related to fiscal responsibility, stability, or resources

3. **Governing Board:**  
Responsible for quality, integrity, and financial stability of institution .... Responsible for ensuring that the financial resources of the institution are used to provide a sound educational program
4. **Chief Executive Officer:**  
Full time responsibility is to institution .... Possesses the requisite authority to administer board policies
5. **Administrative Capacity:**  
Sufficient staff ... to support its mission and purpose
13. **Faculty:**  
Substantial core of qualified faculty
14. **Student Services:**  
Appropriate student services

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# ER's related to Standard III

## 16. Information and Learning Resources

The institution provides, through ownership or contractual agreement, specific long-term access to sufficient information and learning resources and services to support its mission and instructional programs in whatever format and wherever they are offered.

## 17. Financial Resources

The institution documents a funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to support student learning programs and services, to improve institutional effectiveness, and to assure financial stability.

## 18. Financial Accountability

The institution annually undergoes and makes available an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or an audit by an appropriate public agency .... It is recommended that the auditor employ as a guide Audits of Colleges and Universities, published by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. ....

## 19. Institutional Planning and Evaluation

The institution systematically evaluates and makes public how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes, including assessment of student learning outcomes. The institution provides evidence of planning for improvement of institutional structures and processes, student achievement of educational goals, and student learning. The institution assesses progress toward achieving its stated goals and makes decisions regarding improvement through an **ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation.**

# Accreditation Standards

- Are necessary conditions for high-quality education
- Reflect excellent practice in higher education, not common practice
- Apply to diverse institutions

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## Standards are not:

- Inclusive of *every* good practice in higher education
- Representative of state or system regulations or requirements or used to enforce those regulations or requirements
- Meant to represent the “standards” of other groups that establish best practices or quality measures

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# The ACCJC Standards

**Standard I: Institutional Mission and Effectiveness**

**Standard II: Student Learning Programs and Services**

**Standard III: Resources**

**Standard IV: Leadership and Governance**

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# From Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Effectiveness, Part II: Planning

## Sustainable Continuous Quality Improvement

- The institution uses ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning to refine its key processes and improve student learning.
- There is a dialogue about institutional effectiveness that is ongoing, robust and pervasive; data and analyses are widely distributed and used throughout the institution.
- There is an ongoing review and adaptation of evaluation and planning processes
- There is consistent and continuous commitment to improving student learning; and educational effectiveness is a demonstrable priority in all planning structures and processes

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# Policies- Institutional, Organizational and Internal

- Included in the Accreditation Reference Handbook, along with ERs, Standards, and Bylaws
- Revised on a regular basis because of:
  - Continuous quality improvement
  - Changes in Federal Regulations and new interpretations
  - Developments in higher education effective practice
- Institutional Policies are submitted to the field for comment and review
  - Policy Committee develops, refines, and edits
  - Adopted by Commission for “First Reading”
  - Submitted for Field Review– 6-8 weeks
  - Adopted by Commission as Policy at “Second Reading”

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# Revision of the Standards

- Solicited Input and Comment
- Developed “Guiding Questions for Review”
- Identified recurring themes in comments
- Developed a working draft
- Developed a final draft (January 2014)
- Public Hearings for comment
- Adoption of Revised Standards (June 2014)
- Implementation of Revised Standards (July 2015)

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# The Accreditation Process

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# The Accreditation Process

- Institutional Self Evaluation Report
  - 2 year process
  - Self-analysis of the college against the ER's, Standards, and Policies
- Site Visit by the external evaluation team
  - Review of self-evaluation report and related evidence
  - On site review of college to verify and validate the self-evaluation report

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# External Evaluation:

- Is about the ACCJC Standards, which are “statements of excellence in practice” and are necessary conditions for high quality education which must be met at all times
- Is not about the regulations or requirements of other groups
- Is at the heart of the accreditation process
- Relies on evidence in making judgments about the institution

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# Evaluation Teams:

- Represent the Commission
- Are objective, flexible and confidential
- Do not base evaluation on personal opinions or preconceived ideas about “how it should be done”
- Accept and adhere to the Policy on Conflict of Interest for Commissioners, Evaluation Team Members, Consultants...

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# ROLE OF THE EVALUATOR

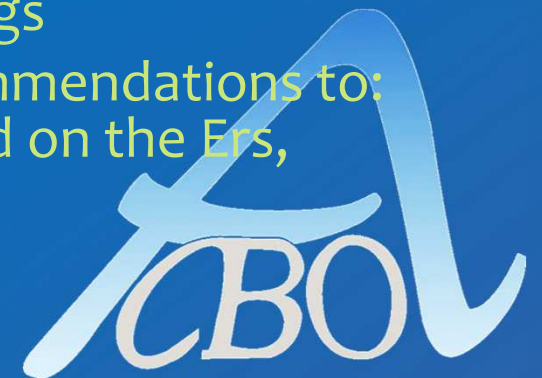
## BEFORE THE SITE VISIT

- Read materials and the self-evaluation report
- Identify college personnel to be interviewed
- Identify key issues
- Be diagnostic, impartial, and be able to make recommendations for improvement

## DURING THE SITE VISIT

- Examine and verify evidence that the institution can demonstrate and support the assertions in the self-evaluation report
- Conduct interviews and attend team meetings
- In conjunction with the team, develop recommendations to: “meet the standards” or “to improve” based on the Ers, accreditation standards, and policies

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# The Team Chair:

- Organizes the external evaluation visit
- Guides the team during the visit
- Is the author of the final report

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# The External Evaluation Team Must:

## Have a working knowledge of:

- Eligibility Requirements (ERs)
- Accreditation Standards
- Adherence to Commission policies

## Review:

- The institution's demonstrated compliance with ERs, Standards, Policies
- Responses to previous team's recommendations
- Evidence provided in support of all conclusions reached in the Self Evaluation Report

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# ROLE OF THE EVALUATOR

- PEER REVIEW

- The role of the peer evaluator is that of a colleague who shares a commitment to educational excellence by making diagnostic recommendations that improve the institution's ability to meet the Commission's Accreditation Standards. The task of the evaluator is to look for coherence between what the institution asserts and what evidence it provides in support of its assertions.

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# ROLE OF THE EVALUATOR

- CONFLICT OF INTEREST
  - The Commission makes a special effort to maintain the integrity of the accreditation process. Commission policy identifies the conditions under which an evaluator should decline an invitation to serve.
  - A conflict of interest arising from one of the relationships described that typically expires five years after the relationships ends.



# ROLE OF THE EVALUATOR

- CONFIDENTIALITY

- **Policy on Public Disclosure and Confidentiality in the Accreditation Process:** requires External Evaluation Team members to refrain from discussing information obtained in the course of service as an evaluation team member.
- Information that should remain confidential includes the “... current Institutional Self Evaluation Report; previous External Evaluation Reports; interviews and written communication with campus personnel, students, governing board members, and community members; evidentiary documents; and evaluation team discussions.
- “What happens in the VISIT stays with the visit”

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# ROLE OF THE EVALUATOR

## REVIEW OF EVIDENCE

- categorical information that represents qualitative and/or quantitative attributes of variables or a set of variables;
- Is accurate, up-to-date, reliable, and tested for validity and significance (not heresy)
- May be qualitative and/or quantitative presented in data tables, charts and graphs or in documentary form with analyses; Is longitudinal where appropriate
- Is disaggregated by relevant sub-populations defined by the institution and the USDE

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# SUMMARY OF EXPECTATIONS FOR EVALUATORS

- Knowledge of the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and pertinent Commission policies;
- recognize the Standards as the necessary conditions for high quality education;
- understand that institutions are accredited using ACCJC's Accreditation Standards rather than the regulations or requirements of other groups
- Recognize peer review is at the heart of the accreditation process;
- remember that team members represent the Commission;
- maintain objectivity and flexibility; rely on evidence in making judgments about the institution

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# Questions or Comments

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