

**WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES
ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SENIOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

**GUIDELINES FOR THE
INSTITUTIONAL PROPOSAL**

First Revision February 2004
Second Revision June 2006

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*These changes are to pages 37-40 of the 2001 Handbook of Accreditation. A first round of revisions were approved by the Commission in February 2004. Graphical inserts from the original text have been removed and will be revised upon approval of the content. This draft revision has been approved for circulation to the region for comment prior to adoption by the Commission. Final revisions were approved and adopted by the Commission June 2006.

Stage 1. The Institutional Proposal

Purposes: The Institutional Proposal is the first stage in the accreditation review cycle and guides the entire accreditation review process. It establishes a framework for connecting each institution's context and priorities with the Standards of Accreditation for the accreditation review cycle. Once accepted, the Proposal serves as the primary basis for both institutional self-review and team evaluation, and is given to each evaluation team and the Commission, along with the Accreditation Standards, as the basis upon which the evaluation of the institution should occur.

The Proposal plays a key role in the accreditation process, by enabling the institution to:

1. Establish the context for its accreditation review cycle;
2. Conduct a preliminary evaluation of itself under the Standards of Accreditation to identify areas of needed improvement;
3. Link its self-review under the Standards with defined outcomes for the accreditation review;
4. Identify the key issues of Institutional Capacity to be addressed in the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR);
5. Develop strategies for assessing and improving student and organizational learning in the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER);
6. Identify for both stages of review (CPR and EER) such necessary components as researchable questions, key indicators of performance, evidence to be collected and used in the process, committees or groups to be involved, and the resources needed as components of a workplan for the review cycle;
7. Evaluate the effectiveness of its data gathering and analysis systems; and
8. Develop a portfolio of data tables and institutional evidence that can serve the institution throughout and beyond the review process.

Timing: The Proposal is submitted two-and-a-half years prior to the CPR in order to be finalized two years prior to the CPR. The date of its submission is set by the Commission.

Format and Required Elements: The Proposal represents a plan of work that should be framed as a single interconnected process for the two stage review. Considerable thought needs to be given by each institution to what it intends to accomplish through the entire review process, and how different institutional constituencies will be engaged in developing, approving and implementing the Proposal and during the later phases of the CPR and EER. The Proposal process is designed to enable institutions to adapt the accreditation review to their context and accreditation history with WASC, and demonstrate their response to the Standards of Accreditation through the particular approach developed in the Proposal. Based on the experience of institutions that have most successfully implemented the three-stage process, the accreditation review process can lead to significant institutional engagement and improvement on important issues, especially

relating to educational effectiveness. The Proposal process also allows for an institution to align activities undertaken for its accreditation review to its strategic plan or focus on key areas of improvement.

In the design of the Proposal, institutions are encouraged to be creative, build on processes already in place, focus on a limited number of issues that can be addressed in depth, critique and refine the analysis and use of evidence collected by the institution, and significantly increase the institution's attention to student learning.

The Commission staff has developed a set of materials to support the Proposal process, and these are occasionally updated or revised. Check the WASC website, www.wascsenior.org for the latest versions of these materials.

The Proposal should be organized into four (4) sections:

- A. Setting the Institution's Context and Relating the Proposal to the Standards
- B. Framing the Review Process to Connect the Capacity and Educational Effectiveness Reviews
- C. Demonstrating a Feasible Plan of Work and Engagement of Key Constituencies
- D. Presenting Appendices Connected to the Proposal

Within this framework, all institutional Proposals are to include the following elements:

A. Setting the Institution's Context and Relating the Proposal to the Standards

1. **Institutional Context Statement.** This key section of the Proposal lays the foundation for why a particular set of issues and approaches is being proposed by the institution for its accreditation review. Drawing upon institutional data, especially that provided in the Data Tables addressing financial capacity, diversity and retention, this section should briefly describe: i) the institution's background, ii) strengths and challenges, and iii) the current state of the institution's approaches to identifying and assessing student learning outcomes across the institution. The Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators is to be submitted and is designed to be used developmentally across the CPR and the EER. In addition, the institution should identify how the Proposal responds to issues raised by the most recent Commission action letter and, where relevant, issues identified by the Substantive Change or Interim Report Committees.
2. **Preliminary Self-Review under the Standards of Accreditation.** Using the WASC "Worksheet for Preliminary Self-Review Under the Standards" and the "What Really Matters on Your Campus?" exercise, or through other means, the institution is to identify key issues arising under the Standards, especially those relating to student learning results and organizational learning/quality assurance systems, and demonstrate that these issues are being addressed through the approach taken by the institution in its Proposal and plan of work. [The Self-Review Worksheet may be submitted as an appendix and is optional.]
3. **Process for Proposal Development and Leadership Involvement.** In this section, the institution should describe how it went about developing the Proposal design and generated broad institutional support for it. Key institutional leaders, especially the chief executive officer, chief academic officer, and faculty leadership, should be significantly

involved in the design and implementation of the Proposal and be demonstrably committed to its implementation and success.

B. Framing the Review Process to Connect the Capacity and Educational Effectiveness Reviews. The Commission support documents “*Two Lenses on Two Reviews*” and the Framework for Evaluating Educational Effectiveness (along with the FAQ’s) are useful references to assist in developing this section, especially B.2 and B.3 (see www.wascsenior.org for the latest versions and additional materials).

1. **Overview and Goals for the Accreditation Review Process.** The institution should describe in this overview section a coherent vision and specific outcomes for the entire accrediting review as a single connected process, specifying what it intends to accomplish, and how the CPR and EER are connected and aligned to achieve these outcomes. The institution should also consider the outcomes intended for the accreditation review process as identified on page 36 of the *Handbook*.

2. **Approach for the Capacity and Preparatory Review.** This section should describe how the institution intends to address the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity by discussing three key foci:

i) the institution’s self-assessment of its capacity (resources, structures and processes), especially under Standards 1, 3 and 4. The institution should identify key issues and strategic themes it intends to address in the CPR and the intended outcomes for the CPR. For each issue and/or theme, the institution should identify what key indicators will be developed or relied on, who will be involved, and the specific organization of activities to achieve the outcomes identified. This section should reference, where appropriate, the institution’s self-review under the Standards and key Standards and Criteria for Review (CFRs) that will be emphasized in the CPR; and

ii) the institution’s infrastructure to support educational effectiveness, especially under the Standards 2 and 4 and

iii) the institution’s level of preparation for and progress toward the EER at the time of the CPR.

3. **Approach for the Educational Effectiveness Review.** This section should describe how the institution intends to address the Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness by discussing:

i) the institution’s intended specific outcomes for this stage of review, rather than a list of activities the institution plans to undertake. As with the CPR, these outcomes may be related to key issues and/or strategic themes. For each issue/theme, the institution’s intended specific research questions, methods of inquiry, key indicators, and the specific groups that will be involved in the review process should be indicated. Areas where institutional systems of quality assurance are to be reviewed and improved (e.g., program review processes, capstone courses, portfolio reviews) should also be identified and incorporated into the Proposal. The institution should explain why it has proposed this particular

approach to the EER; this rationale should flow from the institution's self-review under the Standards and analysis of the current state of its student learning outcomes assessment. This section should additionally reference, where appropriate, the institution's self-review under the Standards and key Standards and Criteria for Review (CFRs) that will be emphasized in the EER, and

ii) the institution's specific plans for how it will review and improve student and organizational learning across the institution. The institution will also need to identify how it will review and evaluate actual student work and learning to assure that the level of learning achieved by students meets the program's and institution's outcomes, and

Finally, the Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators is to be included.

C. Demonstrating a Feasible Plan of Work and Engagement of Key Constituencies

1. **Workplan and Milestones.** Either in this section or as part of the sections above, the Proposal should indicate for each stage how the work will be conducted, the organizational structures and processes to be used, and the key indicators that are likely to be included in the Institutional Presentation. Milestones and a statement of what will be accomplished by the time of the CPR and the EER should be provided. It is expected that the work for the EER will occur simultaneously with the preparation for the CPR rather than sequentially. This will allow for evidence, especially student learning results, and student portfolios and other work, to be reviewed, analyzed, discussed, and acted upon.
2. **Effectiveness of Data Gathering and Analysis Systems.** This section should review the effectiveness of the institution's data gathering and analysis systems for both undergraduate and graduate programs, especially those relating to the collection, dissemination and use of disaggregated retention data, student learning results, licensure examination results, job placement rates, graduate school acceptance rates, and other key outcomes data. The institution should indicate how these data gathering and analysis systems will be used, and as necessary, improved, to support internal institutional dialogue and a "culture of evidence" throughout the accreditation review process and beyond.
3. **Commitment of Resources to Support the Accrediting Review.** This section should describe how the institution will organize, oversee, and support the review process during its several stages. What human, technological and physical resources will be relied upon to support the accrediting review process? To what extent will the process be linked to ongoing institutional structures and priorities to increase value and reduce unnecessary work? Is there a budget for the process?

D. Presenting Appendices Connected to the Proposal

1. **Data Tables.** Include the set of Data Tables and the Summary Data Form for the Proposal, available on the WASC website (www.wascsenior.org) for downloading. All data should be presented in the form of five-year historical trends. Throughout the Proposal, references to the institution's analysis of these data, especially the Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators and other appendices, should be made as appropriate.
2. **Off-Campus and Distance Education Degree Programs.** List all degree programs where 50 percent or more of the program is offered off-site (both those within 25 miles and those more than 25 miles from the home campus) or by distance learning. Describe how

evaluation of these programs will be incorporated into the review process. Under Commission policy the accrediting process will need to include a review of distance education degree and off-campus programs. The body of the Proposal should indicate how these programs will be included in the institution's self-review.

3. **Institutional Stipulations.** Provide 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 Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and to Educational Effectiveness, that it will engage in the process with seriousness and candor, that data presented are accurate and that the Institutional Presentation will 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. Special attention will be paid to the institution's policies and recordkeeping regarding complaints and appeals.
 - b. 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 distance education degree programs to ensure that all have been approved as required by the WASC Substantive Change process.

Length of Proposal. Exclusive of Data Exhibits and Stipulations, the Institutional Proposal should not exceed fifteen (15) pages in length.

Proposal Review Process: Following submission, the Institutional Proposal is reviewed by a panel of the Proposal Review Committee (PRC), a peer review committee comprised of institutional and Commission representatives. The PRC is authorized to accept proposals that it believes will result in a review that can effectively demonstrate that an institution fulfills the two Core Commitments required for accreditation. In cases where the PRC has doubts that the Proposal will result in such a review process the Committee may request further information from the institution and/or may require revision and re-submission of the Proposal. 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. The final copy of the Proposal is distributed to evaluation teams and the Commission. The current fees for the first and any subsequent Proposal submissions is found on the Commission website (www.wascsenior.org).

Changes After Acceptance. Once accepted, the Proposal may be further refined or modified during the accreditation process by mutual consent, or by the Commission following the CPR. This can occur, for example, once the institution is underway with implementation of the Proposal design, or upon the recommendation of the evaluation team following the CPR.