



Overview of the Accreditation Redesign Process for 2012–2020

Senior College Commission, Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Since 2001, nearly all WASC institutions have made enormous progress in defining learning outcomes for their programs and establishing systems to assess those outcomes. However, the swiftly changing social, economic, environmental and political landscape has altered the way in which higher education is conceived and delivered. The region is now faced with greatly increased expectations for institutional accountability and consumer protection, as well as demands for improved academic standards and student performance (as measured by graduation rates and post-graduation job placement). Additionally, new fiscal realities have made cost-effectiveness a paramount issue for WASC and its constituent institutions.

Goals

WASC's primary task is to redesign the accreditation process to best serve institutions and the public in the next decade. We will build on the successes and lessons of the current process, as outlined in the *2001 and 2008 Handbook of Accreditation* (http://www.wasc senior.org/findit/files/forms/Handbook_of_Accreditation_2008_with_hyperlinks.pdf), while adapting to better meet the needs of institutions and students in the 21st century. The resulting *2012–2020 Handbook of Accreditation* will:

- Shorten and/or focus the institutional review process and create multiple, adaptive approaches to review.
- Develop a clear public accountability and quality assurance role that moves beyond minimum standards.
- Increase transparency in the accreditation process.
- Explore possible applications of the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) within the accreditation process.
- Identify levels of accreditation, moving beyond merely being “accredited” or not.

- Bridge senior-level institutions with community colleges more effectively.
- Clarify what can be taken off the table in the review process, so that institutions at higher levels of compliance are not required to demonstrate repeatedly that they meet minimum thresholds.
- Explore alternative models and new approaches to education and credentialing, and the role of WASC in that effort.
- Increase oversight of for-profit institutions, especially those that are publicly traded.
- Develop a public advocacy role to communicate about issues of quality and effectiveness in higher education.

Guidelines and Core Principles

- Continue to recognize the diversity of institutions and their unique missions, and to review them on a continuum of development, beyond minimum threshold accreditation standards.
- Affirm the centrality of students and student learning as the common purpose of all candidate and accredited institutions.
- Affirm the obligation of institutions to expect and support the success of *every* student.

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- Recognize the responsibility of accreditation to both inform and protect consumers, by promoting best practices and by ensuring that institutions are not engaged in fraudulent or harmful practices with regard to student recruitment or the teaching/learning process.
- Maintain flexibility, adaptability and a continuing posture of experimentation, emphasizing collaboration between institutions and WASC.
- Promote continuing development and use by institutions of qualitative and quantitative indicators of performance, benchmarked against national, regional or peer comparisons, as possible.
- Rely on evidence already available to institutions, as well as non-institutional sources, so that accreditation does not represent an “add-on” to the kinds of evidence institutions routinely collect to examine their own effectiveness.
- Continue to press toward more cost-effective ways to accomplish accreditation goals without sacrificing the quality or integrity of the process.

Timeline

SEPTEMBER 2010

Planning group frames goals for the revision process.

NOVEMBER 2010

Steering Committee establishes principles and process for revision.

FALL 2010

Regional meetings held to solicit feedback on initial ideas.

JANUARY – MARCH 2011

Task Forces on Graduation /Retention, New Ecology of Learning, Degree Profiles/Levels of Learning, For-Profit Institutions, and Public Reporting/Transparency meet and frame initial recommendations. Institutional survey on the effectiveness of the Standards and the current accreditation process are conducted by NCHEMS.

APRIL 2011

Meetings held with institutional CEOs, CAOs and ALOs at the annual Academic Resource Conference.

MAY 2011

Steering Committee reviews results and feedback from Task Forces and public meetings.

SUMMER 2011

Task Force on Degree Profiles /Levels of Learning meets to discuss implementation of Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile. Institutional Review Process Task Force outlines options for new visit process. Other Task Forces hold follow-up meetings as needed.

SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER 2011

Regional meetings with faculty groups, accreditation liaison officers and others to review proposed changes and seek further feedback and recommendations.

NOVEMBER 2011

Public hearing on the proposed accreditation redesign. Commission adoption of framework for staged implementation.

NOVEMBER 2013

Projected adoption date for a *2012–2020 Handbook of Accreditation*.

NOVEMBER 2014

First cycle of redesigned comprehensive reviews begin.

Ways to Stay Informed and Participate

We welcome your feedback and hope that you will engage with us in this most important process.

- Visit and add your comments to the WASC website (<http://www.wascsenior.org/handbook>). Updates, announcements, and documents related to the Handbook Revision will be regularly posted here.
- Discuss your ideas with members of the Steering Committee (<http://wascsenior.org/handbook/committeeroster>).
- Respond to periodic reports and requests for comments and feedback sent by the WASC office and Steering Committee.
- Participate in regional meetings and webinars, which will be held at several key stages in the process.