

Accreditation Reference Manual

for Team Members and Institutions

POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS



2010 EDITION

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Accreditation Reference Manual

for Team Members and Institutions

POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

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2010 EDITION

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Introduction

This manual is designed to be used by team members in preparation for a full on-site accreditation visit. It is also intended for use by postsecondary institutions as they carry out the self-study process and prepare for the full on-site visit. The manual is intended for use in conjunction with the *Guide to Evaluating Postsecondary Institutions*. The Commission also provides an *Accreditation Procedure and Policy Handbook* that serves to give considerable elaboration on Commission's expectations and requirements for postsecondary institutions. The evaluation visit format and related instructions described in this manual for both the evaluation team and the institution are to be used by all postsecondary institutions seeking reaffirmation of accreditation or initial accreditation.

The ACS WASC accreditation model is based on both an internal and external review of an institution. The accreditation paradigm includes the following elements:

- Standards of good practice that are generally accepted by similar institutions and the Commission
- Internal, comprehensive self-study by the institution at periodic intervals
- Assessment of the institution through its self-study against the ten ACS WASC standards by external, peer evaluators with recommendations to the institution and the Commission
- Decision by the Commission regarding the accreditation status of the institution
- Follow-up by the institution to address both the institution's own plans for improvement and the team recommendations identified in the evaluation process, all of which are incorporated in a comprehensive action plan

The evaluation team, made up of professional peers who volunteer their services, offers independent insights based on careful analysis of the Self-Study Report and an on-site evaluation. The team:

- Evaluates the institution using the ACS WASC ten standards of accreditation
- Confirms and validates evidence for the assertions in the Self-Study Report against the standards
- Reveals problem areas not identified in the self-study by the institution
- Reinforces and extends the institution's commitment to its continuing pursuit of excellence
- Assures the Commission that the institution continues to meet Eligibility Requirements
- Assures the Commission that the institution has been responsive to recommendations of previous visiting teams

- Assures the Commission that the institution has developed sound evaluation and planning procedures to foster improvement of student achievement and student learning outcomes
- Assures the Commission that the institution merits reaffirmation of accreditation or advises the Commission that the team cannot recommend such action

The importance of these judgments in maintaining the quality of education in all institutions deserves the team's best efforts as it develops the report to the institution and to the Commission. Team members have a special responsibility to maintain the integrity of the accreditation process and outcomes which enables ACS WASC to meet its goals. Quality assurance to the public and institutional improvement can only be achieved through the conscious commitment of all who participate.

Role of the Federal Government

The Higher Education Act as amended in 2008 put into law several regulations by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) that pertain to accrediting agencies that seek federal recognition. ACS WASC holds USDE recognition and therefore will hold institutions accountable to federal regulations. Through USDE recognition, ACS WASC member institutions qualify for a variety of federal financial aid programs. Each time federal regulations change, the Commission may need to revise its compliance components and the requirements to which institutions must conform.

Therefore, all evaluation teams that conduct comprehensive visits are required to review the following requisites of federal law:

- The institution's continued compliance with the Commission's Eligibility Requirements
- The off-campus locations where 50% or more of a program is offered
- Data on Student Achievement
- Data on Student Learning
- Records of formal student complaints
- All student and public information released by the institution about its requirements for programs, courses, and certificates; length of programs; costs; student completion rates; transfer rates; job placement; and licensure pass rates
- Information on the health of the financial aid program(s) at the institution including loan default rates over the past three years, plans to reduce those rates, reviews of financial aid program(s), and audits of same

Evaluation teams should verify whether or not the institution is participating in any of the following Title IV, HEA federal student aid programs:

Federal Pell Grant (Pell Grant), Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG), National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent Grant (National SMART Grant), Federal Work-Study (FWS), Federal Perkins Loan (Perkins Loan), William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan (Direct Loan), and the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) programs. The Direct Loan Program includes the Federal Direct Stafford/Ford Loan Program, the Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford/Ford Loan Program, the Federal Direct PLUS Program and the Federal Direct Consolidation Loan Program. The FFEL Program includes the Federal Stafford Loan Program (Stafford Loan), the Federal PLUS Program (PLUS), and the Federal Consolidation Loan Program (CL). The FSEOG, FWS, and Perkins Loan programs are known as the campus-based programs. (List valid as of July 2009).

Role of the Accrediting Commission

Communication with the Institution

Eighteen months prior to the anticipated date of the evaluation visit, the Commission office will contact the institution regarding the upcoming visit and self-study.

Training for Institutions

All institutions must be certain that institutional representatives attend training sessions provided by the Commission eighteen months prior to hosting a visiting team. As reinforcement, the ACS WASC website (www.acswasc.org) contains a PowerPoint presentation that is used for training of institutional personnel and can be downloaded for review purposes. However, this is not to take the place of the training sessions that are scheduled by the Commission.

Team Chair Selection

The Commission selects chairs for their expertise and accreditation experience. The typical chair has experience as a chief executive officer of an institution.

Team Selection

Commission staff develops the teams from a roster of experienced educators who have exhibited leadership and balanced judgment. Typically, a team is comprised of faculty members, administrators, and others who are knowledgeable of postsecondary education. Each team is selected to provide experienced, impartial professionals appropriate for the institution being evaluated and to address any special concerns the institution may have expressed. Although, institutions may ask for special expertise, they may not request specific individuals. Every attempt is made to structure teams that are reflective of the unique nature of the institution and the community it serves. The size and complexity of the institution being evaluated will determine the number of persons on the team. The Commission seeks a balance of experienced and first-time team members, and each team includes persons with experience at institutions similar to the institution being evaluated.

Team Training

All team members are required to attend a team member training workshop conducted by the Commission prior to the visit. All chairs are required to attend team chair training each time they serve and are usually in attendance at team evaluator workshops with their teams.

Materials from ACS WASC

The Commission office sends copies of all previous team reports, any progress reports, and Commission action letters accumulated during the past six-year term to the chair and team. The chair also receives the most recent Annual Report and a summary of complaints against the institution that have been submitted to the Commission.

Materials from the Institution

The institution sends copies of the Self-Study Report, catalog, and most recent class schedule to the team chair and team members eight weeks before the visit. Some institutions will include additional materials that could inform the team about the institution. The Self-Study Report is to be submitted as follows:

- One hard copy and one electronic copy (CD) to the team chair
- One hard copy and one electronic copy (CD) to each team member
- At least one copy, hard copy or CD or both, for the institution's files
- One electronic copy (CD) sent to the Southern ACS WASC office

Accrediting Commission for Schools, WASC
43517 Ridge Park Drive, Suite 100
Temecula, CA 92590-3615

Note: All electronic copies must be presented on a compact disc (CD) in Microsoft Word [.doc] format.

Role of the Team Members

Peer Review

The team members provide an independent peer review of an institution. The team uses the accreditation standards to prepare a report for the institution's use which analyzes the adequacy of its resources, the effectiveness of its procedures, the quality of its performance in pursuit of its stated goals, and its evidence of student achievement and student learning. The team seeks to validate quality and integrity and to inspire continuous improvement of institutional performance.

The task of the 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 standards. The evaluator looks for coherence between what the institution asserts and what evidence it provides in support of its assertions.

Conflict of Interest

The Commission makes special effort to maintain the integrity of the accreditation evaluation process. To this end, team members are expected to disclose any possible conflict of interest before accepting an assignment. Commission policy identifies the following conditions under which a team member should decline an invitation to serve or ask for an assignment to another team. The Commission will not knowingly invite or assign participation in the evaluation of an institution anyone who has:

- Any current or prior employment at the institution/district being evaluated
- Current or prior candidacy for employment at the institution/district being evaluated
- Any current or prior service as a paid consultant or other business relationship with the institution/district that may create a conflict or the appearance of a conflict of interest
- Personal or financial interest in the ownership or operation of the institution/district
- Close personal or familial relationships with a member of the institution/district
- Other personal or professional connections that would create either a conflict or the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- Receipt of any remuneration, honoraria, honors, or other awards from the institution/district

A conflict of interest arising from one of the relationships described above typically expires five years after the relationship ends. A team member or chair who has any questions about possible conflict of interest should contact the ACS WASC office.

Expectations of Team Members

Team members are expected to:

- Know the ACS WASC standards, eligibility requirements, federal compliance regulations, and pertinent policies
- Recognize the standards as the necessary conditions for high-quality education
- Recognize the standards as statements of best practice in postsecondary education
- Understand that institutions are accredited using ACS WASC standards rather than the regulations or requirements of other groups
- Appreciate that peer review lies 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
- Maintain confidentiality

The Commission requires that team members keep confidential all institutional information read or heard before, during, and after the team visit. Sources of information that should remain confidential include previous institutional and team reports, the current self-study, interviews and written communication with campus personnel, students, board members and community members, and team discussions.

The team chair will make assignments and seek information from team members well ahead of the visit. It is very important that each individual prepare materials and respond quickly to requests by the team chair. Each team member should read the Self-Study Report carefully, especially those areas in which the chair has given him or her specific assignments.

Each team member should thoroughly read the historical materials sent by the Commission because they provide the accreditation background of the institution during its last cycle. During preparation, the team member should identify members of the institution's stakeholders to interview and prepare interview questions based on identified issues. Team members should come to the first team meeting prepared to summarize the key issues they have identified in their areas of responsibility, present drafts of questions for interviews, and share lists of those individuals or groups to be interviewed.

The team will assess the Self-Study Report as a means for determining whether the institution meets Commission standards and for identifying potential areas for improvement. Each team member is to share concerns with the team, maintaining balance and perspective, and cross-validating when conflicting information is discovered. While it is important to listen to any member of the institution's stakeholders who wishes to be heard, the evaluator must distinguish between the problems of individuals and those problems that could affect learning and teaching. In short, the evaluator must be diagnostic, impartial, and, ultimately, able to make recommendations for improvement to the institution.

Team members are expected to arrive on time and to be present continuously for the entire visit, including the chair's oral report to the institution on the final day. Team members are expected to devote their time during the visit to the assignments made by the team chair.

Although efforts are made for team members to attend a number of classes, it may be impossible to visit every class or meet with every member of the faculty. This may be the case with large institutions, but with smaller institutions it may be possible to attend every class and meet every faculty member. Since most members of the faculty will have shared in the preparation for the evaluation visit, all should be aware of the presence of the evaluation team and have opportunities to communicate with team members. The size and scope of the institution may limit the opportunities to communicate with team members. Team members should expect to visit off-campus locations where 50% or more of a program is offered.

During the visit, team members should give particular attention to the extent to which the institution has carried out or addressed the critical areas for follow-up made in the most recent accreditation cycle. The institution must respond to every critical area. Team members should note carefully the sections in the institutional Self-Study Report that describe action on, or responses to, earlier critical areas for follow-up. The team members may find that there may be instances in which the institution has not agreed with a critical area identified by the team. In such cases, the institution's report should state the reasons for the disagreement. Team members should also note the institution's discussion of the status of the self-identified action plans from the previous Self-Study Report. The team should also determine how the institution responded to additional site visits and reports required by the Commission.

The team must also verify that the institution continues to meet the Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation, which are the Commission's core criteria for institutional eligibility. Because these basic criteria must be continuously met, the Commission requires that all accredited institutions include in their Self-Study Report evidence demonstrating that they continue to meet these requirements. The Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation can be found in the *Accreditation Procedure and Policy Handbook*.

Above all else, the team member should assess the institution's educational outcomes: what is happening to the students in the classroom, laboratory, and institution's environment generally, and whether this is effective and in line with the institution's evidence of institutional achievement, its structures and procedures, its resources, and student achievement and learning.

Role of the Team Chair

The chair organizes the evaluation visit, makes necessary arrangements for the team, speaks for the team, and writes the final team report. Prior to the visit, the chair contacts the institution and members of the team to ensure that needed resources will be available and that members are appropriately assigned. During the evaluation visit, the chair organizes team discussions, sees that all necessary contacts are made, sees to the needs of the team, and assures that the limited time of the team is used effectively. At the conclusion of the visit, the chair conducts a final open meeting with members of the institution's staff. At this meeting the chair reports the team's major findings and the recommended critical areas for follow-up.

Participation in Training

All chairs are required to attend a chair training workshop each time they serve conducted by the Commission prior to the visit. They are usually in attendance at team evaluator workshops with their teams.

Prior to the Visit

The team chair makes a visit to the campus the semester before the scheduled team visit. Several months may have passed since the self-study was completed, and major changes may have occurred which will materially affect the course and conduct of the site visit. Visiting the institution gives the team chair the opportunity to establish personal relationships with key individuals, get a sense of the physical layout of the team workroom, and begin logistical arrangements for the team, including assessment of computer hardware and software needs. This pre-visit also provides the institution with a clearer sense of what the team will need and the opportunity to correct any deficiencies the team chair may note.

Correspondence with the Team

The team chair corresponds with the team members to welcome them to the team, to make assignments, to provide information about travel and housing, to indicate the team schedule, and to set the tone for the entire visit.

Manager of the Site Visit

The team chair is responsible to the Commission for the successful completion of the evaluation site visit. In this capacity, the team chair guides the team during the visit, ensuring that the institutional outcomes are assessed in light of the institutional mission and the Commission's standards and that the team members have the support necessary to complete their assignments.

Author of the Team Report

The chair is responsible for writing a clear, concise, well-organized and coherent document that will stand up under the careful scrutiny of a wide variety of readers. The report should honestly reflect the views of the team, setting forth the limitations and difficulties which the institution is experiencing and the plans and potential it has for overcoming them. The report should also indicate those aspects of the institution that are especially commendable because of the strengths that have been demonstrated. When a team member report is well written, the chair can often use major portions in the final report. However, team members should understand that the team chair is expected to produce a coherent, unified account of the team findings. In doing so, the team chair has considerable editorial latitude in constructing the final report.

Analysis of the Self-Study and Self-Study Report

Preparation and Documentation

A team member should look at how the Self-Study Report was developed, written, and edited; what evidence exists of broad involvement by the institution's constituencies; and the nature and quality of the evidence offered in support of the institution's assertions. In addition, the evaluator should determine if the Self-Study Report serves as an effective vehicle for evaluation of the institution by noting if a team member could use the Self-Study to assess the integrity, quality, and effectiveness of the institution. Evidence cited in the Self-Study Report should provide the means for determining the extent to which the institution meets or exceeds the standards of accreditation.

Quality of the Self-Study Report

Regarding responses to previous recommendations and Commission actions, the Self-Study Report should provide evidence the institution fully addressed the recommendations and now complies with the federal requirements and the ACS WASC Accreditation Standards. If there have been other reports and visits, these issues should have been incorporated into the Self-Study Report. The Self-Study Report should also provide evidence that the institution meets or exceeds the standards of accreditation and demonstrate that the institution is meeting its educational goals and objectives. The institution should provide evidence that systematic and effective institutional planning and evaluation are being incorporated into institutional decision-making. The Self-Study Report should also identify issues of concern to the institution.

The Guide to Evaluating Postsecondary Institutions

The *Guide to Evaluating Postsecondary Institutions* is designed to be used by institutions conducting a self-study and preparing a Self-Study Report, and by teams conducting a comprehensive evaluation. The *Guide* is meant to provoke some thoughtful consideration about whether the institution meets the Accreditation Standards and is also intended to provide some guidance for a holistic, systemic view of an institution and its quality. This common guide is predicated on the belief that both institutional members and team members use the standards to assess the institution, and that they should be using the same tools to conduct that assessment.

Team members should reference the *Guide* each time they engage in activities associated with a comprehensive accreditation visit. In the main body of the *Guide*, team members will find "Questions to Use in Institutional Evaluation." Here the reader will find the 2010 Standards followed by sample questions about their application at an institution. The questions are designed to guide a thoughtful examination of institutional quality. There are many other questions that institutions could develop to stimulate thorough self-reflection. Likewise, there are many other questions team members can and should ask to determine the degree to which the institution is meeting the standards and ensuring institutional quality and improvement. The questions should not be used as a substitute for the standards or as substitutes for thorough introspection and examination. At the end of each standard, there is a list of potential sources of evidence. This non-exhaustive list is not meant to indicate that each of the documents must be present, but that these might be sources of the evidence. There may be many other sources that institutions should provide and teams should request.

During the Site Visit

The evaluation site visit is the culmination of a challenging, time-consuming, and expensive activity on the part of the institution being visited. If done well, the self-evaluation process will be of great value to the institution. Team members need to be sensitive to the impact of their presence on the various individuals associated with the institution.

For team members, the team experience provides an opportunity to make a professional contribution which is not duplicated by any other experience. It is perhaps one of the best professional development activities in which one can engage. Working together with a group of colleagues, team members are able to become part of the life of an institution in a very unique way.

Accreditation evaluations are about verifying and about helping. Teams have the responsibility of determining whether the institution meets or exceeds the standards of accreditation and of providing guidance to the institution in the form of critical areas for follow-up for improving the effectiveness of the institution. The team's opinions about the educational quality of the institution assist the Commission in giving assurance to the public that the institution is meeting its educational purposes.

As noted above, the team will be looking for evidence that the institution can support its assertions. In addition, the team will seek evidence of quality regarding the policies referenced in the Commission's standards and policy manuals.

Sample Visiting Committee Schedule

Preparation Day (Sunday)

- 1:00–1:30 Visiting Committee arrives at the hotel arranged by the institution and the Visiting Committee Chair
- 1:30–4:00 The Chair oversees an introductory meeting to prepare the Committee for the visit
- 4:00–4:30 Tour of the facility (school provides maps, class schedules, personnel lists, etc.)
- 4:30–6:00 Schools may arrange (not required) for a social function that includes institutional personnel, governing board members, advisory committee members, local community leaders, and the Visiting Committee

First Day (Monday)

- 7:30–8:30 Meeting with Leadership Team
- 8:30–12:00 Visiting Committee interviews, class visits, review of documents, etc.
- 12:00–1:00 Lunch (with parent group or student group)
- 1:00–3:00 Visiting Committee continues visiting, observing, and writing
- 3:00–4:30 Institutional Committees and Focus Group Meetings

Second Day (Tuesday)

- 7:30–8:30 Meeting with Leadership Team
- 8:30–12:00 Visiting Committee interviews, class visits, review of documents, etc.
- 12:00–1:00 Lunch (with parent group or student group)
- 1:00–3:00 Visiting Committee continues visiting, observing, and writing
- 3:00–4:30 Institutional Committees and Focus Group Meetings

Third Day (Wednesday)

- 7:30–8:30 Meeting with Leadership Team
- 8:30–12:00 Visiting Committee completes reports
- 12:00–1:00 Lunch with Leadership Team to present draft of *Visiting Committee Report*
- 1:00–3:00 Visiting Committee finishes *Visiting Committee Report* and *Documentation & Justification Statement*
- 3:00–3:30 Exit meeting: Committee presents major findings to all stakeholders

The schedule may be modified to adjust for the size of the institution and the number of additional or branch campuses and where they are located. The chair, in consultation with the head of the institution, should adjust the schedule to fit the situation.

Initial Meeting of the Visiting Team

The team generally meets the day before the first day of the scheduled visit (see sample schedule above). At this first planning session, the visiting team reviews assignments, examines supplementary materials, arranges schedules, and discusses the Self-Study Report of the institution and may actually spend time at the institution examining evidence. An optional social function may be arranged that could include institutional personnel, governing body members, advisory committee members, local community leaders, and the visiting team. If time permits during this first day of activities, a brief tour of the institution's facilities may be included. Team members should come to this initial meeting prepared to summarize key issues they have identified in their primary areas of responsibility, present drafts of questions for interviews, share lists of those individuals or groups to be interviewed, and present lists of additional evidence needed for review.

Meeting with Institutional Staff

Early in the visit the team meets with administrators, the self-study leadership team, and other members of the institution's staff most involved in preparation of the Self-Study Report. At the meeting, the general plan of the visit is discussed with institutional staff. Team members can clarify questions they have about the institution's self-study and schedule meetings with individuals or groups such as the governing board, faculty, administration, classified staff, students, and other persons.

Remainder of the Visit

Team members arrange conferences, make class visits, hold individual interviews, attend team meetings scheduled by the team chair, and review documents provided by the institution. Class schedules should be available and staff contacts arranged. Schedules of faculty hours and contact information, such as phone numbers, are helpful. One or more open sessions where any member of the institution's constituency may meet with the team on any aspect of the self-study should be held. These sessions should be informal conversations, not large forums for formal presentations by special groups or special interests.

The team chair receives a summary of any formal complaints about the institution which have been received by the Commission. One or more team members may be asked to verify that any issues related to those complaints have been addressed. Some members of the team will also be allowed access to the formal file of student complaints to ascertain if the issues were reasonably

addressed. Occasionally, someone at the institution challenges the accreditation process, self-study, or visit. Information concerning these matters should be brought to the attention of the team chair and the team as a whole.

Team Meetings During the Visit

Meetings of the evaluation team are held several times during the visit to summarize the work accomplished, to share concerns, and to plan for the remainder of the visit. In the late morning of the final day, the team meets to review findings and make final plans for the preparation of its evaluation report, including what critical areas for follow-up are to be included and incorporated into the institution's action plan.

Exit Meeting

The team holds a final open meeting with members of the institution's constituents. At this meeting, the chair identifies areas of strength and articulates the critical areas for follow-up that the team has developed that will become part of the institution's action plan. While team members are expected to be present for this final oral report from the team chair, the chair is the spokesperson for the team.

Team members should expect to depart immediately at the end of this meeting. Expressing thanks for assistance, enjoyment at meeting people, or observing institutional activities is appropriate, but team members should avoid engaging in extended conversations about the visit. Team members should not respond to questions from the institution's constituents or the press.

The team should keep in mind that under no circumstances should the visiting team's confidential recommendation to the Commission regarding candidacy or accreditation of the institution should be revealed. This recommendation must be acted upon by the Commission before the official outcome of the visit is determined.

After the Site Visit

Review of the Team Report Draft

Following the visit and prior to submission of the final report to the Commission, the team chair submits a draft of the report to team members for comment and to the chief administrator of the institution for correction of any factual errors. It is very important that team members communicate with the chair about the draft in a timely manner.

Communication between the institution and the evaluation team should occur through the team chair and/or Commission office. Contacts by individuals from the institution or in the course of other professional activities should be referred to the team chair or the Commission office.

Team's Confidential Recommendation to the Commission

The visiting team will recommend a term of accreditation which will be acted upon by the Commission. A term of accreditation is the period of time that best reflects the degree to which the institution meets Commission standards. The team members will collaborate on the completion of a Documentation and Justification Statement that will support their term recommendation to the Commission. Term options are to be found on the sample accreditation recommendation ballot. Samples of these documents are on the next several pages.



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Postsecondary Institutions Recommendation for a Term of Accreditation

Name of Institution Visited:
 Address of Institution:
 Name of District:
 Manual Used in Self-Study:
 Visit:
 Date of Visit:
 Accredited Grade Span:
 Enrollment:

The Visiting Committee's CONFIDENTIAL recommendation:

<input type="checkbox"/>	A Term of Accreditation for Six Years: A term of six years with a written Progress Report to the School's governing board on the critical areas or major recommendations listed in the Visiting Committee Report. Upon review and formal acceptance by the board, the report will be filed with the WASC Office.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A Term of Accreditation for Six Years with a Review: A term of six years with a complete Progress Report on critical areas or major recommendations and a one-day, on-site review by a two-member committee to be completed not later than the third year of the six-year term.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A Term of Accreditation for Three Years: A term of three years with a Progress Report on critical areas of improvement and action plans, and a two-day visit as a requisite to continued accreditation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	A Term of Accreditation for One or Two Years: A term of one or two years (circle one or two) with a complete Progress Report and revisit to serve as a warning that unless prompt attention is given to the critical areas or major recommendations, accreditation may be denied.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denial of Accreditation: Denial of accreditation based on conditions detailed in the Visiting Committee Report

Note: The Commission reserves the right to grant terms of accreditation other than those above, including a recommendation for a full self-study at any time. Such action will follow a Commission review of the Visiting Committee Report. In the event of a formal appeal, this document will be provided to the chief administrator.

VISITING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
Type or print name	Signature
	Committee CHAIRPERSON
	Date

POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS DOCUMENTATION AND JUSTIFICATION STATEMENT

For proper processing, please complete the following information:

Chair Name	Name and City of Institution Visited	
Chair's Work Phone	Chair's Home Phone	Alt. number during end of June (if applicable)
E-mail address (if applicable)		

Complete the Narrative Rationale for each standard. Check the box of the rating that best fits the results of the self-study and the visit that was selected through Visiting Team dialogue and consensus.

- **Meets WASC Standard:** The results of the self-study and the visit provide evidence that this area meets WASC standards.
- **Does not meet WASC Standard:** The results of the self-study and the visit provide evidence that this area does not meet WASC standards.

An accreditation term will be based upon an institution demonstrating that it meets all of the following ten (10) standards:

STANDARD 1: The institution that is designed for adult students, to demonstrate strong commitment to a mission that emphasizes achievement of student learning in vocational and avocational endeavors, and to communicating the mission internally and externally. The institution uses analyses of quantitative and qualitative data and analysis in an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, implementation, and re-evaluation to verify and improve the effectiveness by which the mission is accomplished.

Visiting Committee Rating: Meets the Standard Does not meet the Standard

Narrative Rationale:

STANDARD 2: The institution recognizes and utilizes the contributions of leadership throughout the organization for continuous improvement of the institution. The organizational structure and roles of governance are designed to facilitate decisions that support student learning programs and services and improve institutional effectiveness, while acknowledging the designated responsibilities of the governing board and the chief administrator.

Visiting Committee Rating: Meets the Standard Does not meet the Standard

Narrative Rationale:

STANDARD 3: The institution demonstrates a conscious effort to produce and support student learning, measures that learning, evaluates how well learning is occurring, and plans for changes to improve student learning. The institution also organizes its key processes and allocates its resources to effectively support student learning. The institution demonstrates its effectiveness by providing 1) evidence of the achievement of student learning outcomes and 2) evidence of institution and program performance. The institution uses ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning to refine its key processes and improve student learning.

Visiting Committee Rating: Meets the Standard Does not meet the Standard

Narrative Rationale:

STANDARD 4: The institution offers high-quality educational programs in recognized and emerging fields of study that culminate in identified student outcomes leading to certificates, licensure, or other indicators of program completion. Educational programs are systematically assessed in order to assure currency, improve teaching and learning strategies, and achieve stated student learning outcomes. The provisions of this standard are broadly applicable to all instructional activities offered by the institution.

Visiting Committee Rating: Meets the Standard Does not meet the Standard

Narrative Rationale:

STANDARD 5: The institution uses established procedures to design, identify student learning outcomes for, approve, administer, deliver, and evaluate courses and programs. The institution recognizes the central role of its faculty for establishing quality and improving courses, programs, and student learning outcomes.

Visiting Committee Rating: Meets the Standard Does not meet the Standard

Narrative Rationale:

STANDARD 6: The institution recruits and admits diverse students who are able to benefit from its programs, consistent with its mission. Student support services address the identified needs of students and enhance a supportive learning environment. The entire student pathway through the institutional experience is characterized by a concern for student access, progress, learning, and success. The institution systematically assesses student support services using student learning outcomes, faculty and staff input, and other appropriate measures in order to improve the effectiveness of these services.

Visiting Committee Rating: Meets the Standard Does not meet the Standard

Narrative Rationale:

STANDARD 7: The institution employs qualified personnel to support student learning programs and services wherever offered and by whatever means delivered, to ensure institutional effectiveness. Personnel are treated equitably, are evaluated regularly and systematically, and are provided opportunities for professional development. Consistent with its mission, the institution demonstrates its commitment to the significant educational role played by persons of diverse backgrounds by making positive efforts to encourage such diversity. Human resource planning is integrated with institutional planning.

Visiting Committee Rating: Meets the Standard Does not meet the Standard

Narrative Rationale:

STANDARD 8: Learning resources for students are sufficient to support the institution's educational programs and other activities in whatever format and wherever they are offered. Such services include library services and collections appropriate to the size and scope of the institution, its courses and programs. There are tutoring programs, learning centers, computer laboratories, and learning technology development and training. The institution provides access and training to students so that learning resources may be used effectively and efficiently. The institution systematically assesses these resources using student learning outcomes, faculty input, and other appropriate measures in order to improve the effectiveness of the resources.

Visiting Committee Rating: Meets the Standard Does not meet the Standard

Narrative Rationale:

STANDARD 9: Financial resources are sufficient to support student learning programs and services and to improve institutional effectiveness. The distribution of resources supports the development, maintenance, and enhancement of programs and services. The institution plans and manages its financial affairs with integrity and in a manner that ensures financial stability. The level of financial resources provides a reasonable expectation of both short-term and long-term financial solvency. Financial resources planning is integrated with institutional planning.

Visiting Committee Rating: Meets the Standard Does not meet the Standard

Narrative Rationale:

STANDARD 10: Physical resources, which include facilities, equipment, land, and other assets, support student learning programs and services and improve institutional effectiveness. Physical resource planning is integrated with institutional planning.

Visiting Committee Rating: Meets the Standard Does not meet the Standard

Narrative Rationale:

Provide a brief narrative, which summarizes the Visiting Committee's rationale for the recommended term: *(If there is an unresolved minority opinion please indicate and explain.)*

- **Term options seriously considered**
- **Reasons for the term recommended**

In the comments reflect upon the following:

- The Visiting Team's discussions and process (summarize as needed in the narrative)
- The degree to which the institution is meeting the WASC standards overall

Expenses and Reimbursements to Team Members

Team members receive expense forms as part of the packet of information from the Commission office. Team members will also receive a copy of the latest reimbursement policy for public institutions. In some cases, the public institution will reimburse the team members directly. In other cases, the reimbursement may come from ACS WASC. In either instance, the team chair and members will be informed regarding what to expect with respect to reimbursement. Team members make their own travel arrangements, but lodging reservations may be made by the institution's administration. The team chair and members will be informed about lodging arrangements well in advance of the visit. When submitting the expense form to the institution or ACS WASC, receipts for such expenses as public transportation, lodging, and meals should be attached. Personal expenses not identified on the expense form are the responsibility of the team member. Approval for rental cars must be secured in advance from the Commission staff.

Evaluation of the Team Members, the Team Chair, and the Visit

In order to ensure that the quality of the evaluation process is maintained, the Commission requires that the visit and each of the Commission's representatives be evaluated. Each team member is asked to evaluate the team chair, the team chair evaluates team members, and the chief executive of the institution evaluates the team and the visit. Evaluation forms are included as part of the packet of information that is sent from the Commission office.

The Evaluation Report

Preparing the Evaluation Report

The evaluation report is not usually a long document. It should be a concise and constructive document that the Commission can use in making a decision about the accredited status of the institution as well as a document that the institution can use for improvement. The report should:

- Evaluate the institution in light of its own stated mission, objectives, and Commission standards
- Make favorable comments when commendation is due
- Provide evidence to support the critical areas for follow-up identified by the team and provide a fair and useful estimate of the effectiveness of the institution
- Emphasize student achievement and student learning outcomes
- Avoid naming individuals, either in praise or blame. Comment if necessary on the office and not the officeholder.
- Avoid being prescriptive, leaving specific remedy to be worked out by the institution
- Serve the institution well for the next accreditation cycle
- Be comprehensive in its scope

In preparing the report, consideration should be given to the following:

- Does the report connect in such a way that there are no mixed or conflicting messages?
- Does the report say exactly what is intended, so that there can be no misinterpretations?
- Does the language of the report clearly represent observations, conclusions, and recommendations as coming from the team as a whole, not just from one member's perspective?
- Does the report deal fairly with the entire institution, without advocating selectively for constituency or other special interests?
- Does the text of the report support the critical areas for follow-up? Do the observations and conclusions clearly state the context or evidence on which the statements are based? Are the specific standards cited to refer the institution to statements of best practice and Commission expectations?
- Is the tone of the report appropriate to the circumstances and intended effect? Unduly harsh criticism or language can affect the climate of an institution and can be harmful to individuals. The report should encourage the institution to take appropriate actions. Accreditation employs the language of diplomacy, while being direct and clear as to meaning.

- Ensure that the report does not detail matters outside of the purview of the Commission’s standards of good practice. Advocacy of other positions, objectives, or compliance requirements, no matter how praiseworthy or fashionable, must be framed within the context and language of the standards.
- Consider who may read the report and with what purposes in mind. Review the report through public eyes because the report can end up there.

Format of the Team Chair’s Evaluation Report

The complete evaluation team report is written by the team chair. A template for the report is included below so that team members can understand what the entire report includes and how their report to the team chair contributes to the whole. Following is the format for the team report.

Title Page: This page states the name of the institution visited, dates of the visit, name of the team chair/author of the report. It includes the statement: “This report represents the findings of the evaluation team that visited (name of the institution) on (dates).”

Introduction: This section is a brief statement of the nature of the institution and its accreditation history. General observations about the institution and about the visit are stated in the introduction. If there are areas of strength to be noted, they could be appropriately included in the introduction.

Responses to Critical Areas for Follow-up of the Previous Evaluation Team: This section of the report evaluates efforts by the institution to address previous critical areas for follow-up. Thoughtful responses to the critical areas are expected from an institution.

Evaluations Using ACS WASC Eligibility Requirements: This section provides most of the substance of the report and is the section to which each team member makes a contribution. The team member’s written report is used by the team chair in writing the evaluation team report for the institution and Commission. The team report notes whether evidence has been offered to demonstrate that the institution is accomplishing its published objectives and that these objectives are appropriate to postsecondary education and consonant with Commission standards. The report establishes whether each standard and eligibility requirements have been met by the institution. The team also provides detailed guidance during the course of the visit.

The Self-Study Report Format

The visiting team chair should ensure that the institution has included the basic information the Commission requires in a Self-Study Report. The Report should contain at least these elements:

Cover/Title Page

The cover must include the name of the institution, the institution’s address, the title of the document (“Self-Study Report”), and the date of the Visiting Team visit.

Preface

The Self-Study Report must begin with a preface written by the chief administrator. It may contain, but not necessarily limited to, an appraisal of methods employed in conducting the self-

study and the major benefits as viewed by the chief administrator and staff. It is suggested that the preface consist of 500 words or less.

List of Self-Study Committee Members

A list of self-study committee members must follow the preface. This list makes it easier for Visiting Team to contact those people directly responsible for each standard or program area.

Table of Contents

The Table of Contents should list the major portions of the self-study and where they can be found.

Institutional and Community Characteristics

Characteristics of the institution and the community it serves must be described in narrative form by including the items listed below as a minimum. If the institution consists of more than one campus, characteristics must be addressed per location (history, staffing, program offerings, community information, etc.).

Institutional Characteristics

1. State the name of the institution.
2. State the address (city, state, zip code, telephone, email, web site).
3. List all campuses with addresses (branches and extensions).
4. Record, briefly, the history of the institution. Be sure to include such data (if applicable) as:
 - a. Date of charter authorization.
 - b. Date first students were in attendance.
 - c. Date the institution had its first program completers or graduates.
 - d. Type of control (government agency, independent, etc.)
5. Give an overall summary of the following:
 - a. The total number and type of postsecondary technical educational programs offered (business, health, etc.)
 - b. The level of offerings for postsecondary students and type of certificates awarded.
 - c. Overall enrollment number that reflects a typical calendar year.
 - d. The total number of full- and part-time administrative and instructional staff employed by the institution.
 - e. Summary of non-traditional programs (reading instruction, adult literacy, etc.).
6. Indicate which calendar system is used at the institution (quarter, semester, 6-month, 12-month, other)
7. Explain what constitutes a typical full-time student load in class hours per week.
8. Briefly describe the delivery systems the institution uses (traditional classes — lecture, lab, work-based activities; distance education media; Internet; etc.).

Community Characteristics

1. Describe the geographic area (towns, cities, counties, etc.) served by the institution. Exhibit a map.
2. Describe the population of the areas served by the institution. Show total population of service area, and provide the source and date of this population data.

3. Describe any important population characteristics in the community served that affect the institution and its services.
4. Describe basic changes anticipated in the size or characteristics of population in the area that may affect the nature of the institution's services.

Progress Report

The institution is to provide a summary of progress on the action plan that addresses critical areas for follow-up from the previous Self-Study Report. It should also include any recommendations that resulted from any other visit or report required by the Commission during the immediate previous accreditation cycle.

Standards

This section of the Self-Study Report is to contain the institution's responses, in narrative form, to the ten standards and their related criteria.

Action Plan

The Action Plan should include such areas as the following:

- statement of the area for improvement
- rationale for the area based on self-study findings and visiting team recommendations
- ways of assessing progress
- specific steps toward achieving completion of the plan
- timeline
- persons responsible
- resources needed
- means to monitor and report progress to constituents

Glossary

To ensure that the Self-Study Report is easy to read, a glossary of abbreviations and terms should be included. This section may follow Standard Ten and include abbreviations and terms applicable to the institution throughout the text.