

# Initial Visit Procedures Manual

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**WASC Initial Visit Procedures for:**

- **Postsecondary Institutions**
- **ROCP Institutions**



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## WASC Philosophy

The Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) believes that the goal of any institution should be to provide for successful student learning. Each institution should develop a philosophy, goals, and mission to reflect its beliefs. For ongoing program improvement, each institution should engage in objective and subjective internal and external evaluations to assess progress in achieving its purpose.

The Commission grants accreditation to an institution based upon the following:

The presumption that the primary goals of accreditation are

- certification to the public that an institution is a trustworthy institution of learning.
- the improvement of the institution's programs and operations to support student learning.

The institution's self-study and the visiting committee's report provides compelling evidence that

- the institution is substantially accomplishing its stated purposes and functions identified as appropriate for an institution of its type.
- the institution is meeting an acceptable level of quality in accordance with the Conditions of Eligibility and Standards adopted by the Commission.

## WASC Mission

The mission of the Commission is to foster excellence in all institutions with which it is affiliated by encouraging institutional improvement through a process of continuing evaluation and monitoring, and to recognize, by accreditation, institutions that meet an acceptable level of quality, in accordance with established standards.

## Affiliation Procedures

- An institution seeking affiliation will complete a “Request for WASC Affiliation” form and submit it to WASC with a \$150 application fee. The cost of the initial visit includes this application fee. If after review of the “Request for WASC Affiliation” an institution is not deemed eligible for affiliation with WASC, the application fee will be refunded. The application fee will not be refunded to institutions that withdraw on their own from the application process. Institutions that reschedule or postpone the initial visit to a different academic year will be required to pay an **additional** application fee to restart the application process.
- The institution will then be provided with a “Postsecondary Candidacy Application” template that should be completed and submitted. Information provided with this form should describe the institution’s status in relation to the Conditions of Eligibility. In addition to the documentation provided with the application, the institution should make available other supporting documentation during the initial visit.
- On receipt of the forms, the Executive Director will arrange for a two-member, one-day visit to the institution. Initial visits to newly established institutions will not occur prior to the first full year of operation. Following the visit, the committee will prepare a report to present to the WASC Accrediting Commission for Schools for action. This will include recommendations regarding the institution’s ongoing improvement and assess its readiness for initial affiliation. The institution will be notified by the Executive Director of the Commission’s action.
- If the Commission’s action is unfavorable and the institution is not granted affiliation, the institution may re-apply when, in its judgment, it meets the Conditions of Eligibility.
- If the Commission’s action is favorable, the institution will be granted *Candidate for Accreditation* status for a term not to exceed three years. It is expected that the institution will complete a self-study for full accreditation during the third year. A full term of accreditation may be granted as a result of a full self-study completed during the candidacy term.

- Institutions that are granted candidacy status are to submit annual Postsecondary Accreditation Annual Reports to the Executive Director indicating progress being made in meeting the recommendations of the initial visiting committee and noting any substantial changes in the organization or operation of the institution.
- The fee schedule for initial visits, annual membership dues, and other visits may be found on the WASC website at [www.acswasc.org](http://www.acswasc.org).

Institutions that are approved as *Candidate for Accreditation* may use the following phrase in advertising and/or student transcripts.

**Approved Candidate for Accreditation, Western Association of Schools and Colleges**

## Postsecondary Candidacy Application Guidelines

On the pages that follow are the requirements for initial affiliation with WASC. The requirements, or Conditions of Eligibility, are organized into eighteen areas. Each of the areas must be addressed by the institution, and the initial visit team will assess the extent to which the institution is meeting the requirements. Prior to the eighteen areas is a basic requirement that the institution is located within the geographic territory served by WASC, and that it is non-degree granting, non-profit, and meets the distance learning and correspondence requirement.

Any documentation the institution decides to provide to the initial visit team should be assembled in a convenient location at the institution on the day of the visit.

The initial visit team will write a report after the visit that will include recommendations regarding the institution's ongoing improvement and that assesses the institution's readiness for WASC affiliation. The institution's Postsecondary Candidacy Application and the initial visit team's written report will be submitted to the WASC Accrediting Commission for Schools for review and action.

Institutions that are granted *Candidate for Accreditation* status by the Commission should immediately begin preparation for a full self-study by following the *Postsecondary Institutions Accreditation Manual* available on the WASC website.

Institutional personnel should plan to attend WASC training sessions for postsecondary institutions in preparation for beginning the self-study process. Dates, times, and locations for training sessions are on the WASC website.



## Postsecondary Candidacy Application

The institution will be provided with Postsecondary Candidacy Application form template on CD for completing the required information and to state the degree to which the institution is meeting the eighteen Conditions of Eligibility. The information requested in the application form is shown below.

### Institutional Description

**Eligibility Requirements:** The Commission provides accreditation services to institutions located in the states of California and Hawaii, the territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Federates States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

Postsecondary institutions that may apply to the Commission for affiliation are:

- Non-degree granting vocational and technical institutions
- Non-profit
- Not using distance education or correspondence as the primary mode of curriculum delivery (see WASC *Policy Manual*, Part II, Section VIII, Paragraph 800 for a complete definition; available on the WASC website at [www.acswasc.org/pdf\\_postsecondary/CommissionByLawsPartII.pdf](http://www.acswasc.org/pdf_postsecondary/CommissionByLawsPartII.pdf))

**Community and Institutional 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.).

### Community Characteristics

1. Geographic area (towns, cities, counties, etc.) served by the institution. Exhibit a map.
2. 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. Any important population characteristics in the community served that affect the institution and its services.
4. Basic changes anticipated in the size or characteristics of population in the area that may affect the nature of the institution's services.

### Institutional Characteristics

1. Name of the institution.
2. The address (city, state, zip code, telephone, email, web site).
3. List of all campuses with addresses (branches and extensions).
4. Brief history of the institution, including 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. 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.).
  - f. Summary of graduate's success in finding "gainful employment" upon completion of the postsecondary program.
  - g. Demonstrate that the Federal requirements for an annual report and website reporting have been completed, including:
    - Graduation rates for each program
    - Cost of each program
    - Placement rates for graduates of each program (required by 2013)
    - The median loan debt for students in each program
6. Indication of calendar system used at the institution (quarter, semester, 6-month, 12-month, other).
7. Explanation of what constitutes a typical full-time student load in class hours per week.
8. Brief description of the delivery systems the institution uses (traditional classes — lecture, lab, work-based activities; distance education media; Internet; etc.).

## **Conditions of Eligibility**

Institutions will indicate the degree to which they are meeting each requirement:

### **1. Authority**

No postsecondary institution will be considered eligible for candidacy or accreditation unless it has a charter and/or formal authority from a State government agency, State official, licensing board, or educational agency that affirms or conveys the authority to the institution to operate educational programs beyond secondary education. If incorporated, the institution shall submit a copy of its articles of incorporation.

## **2. Mission**

The institution's educational mission is clearly defined, adopted, and published by its governing board consistent with its legal authorization and defines its broad educational purposes, its intended student population, and its commitment to achieving student learning. The institution guards against any misrepresentations in word or print regarding the nature of the institution's program, its financial charges, or the employability of its graduates.

## **3. Governing Board**

The institution has a functioning governing board responsible for the quality, integrity, and financial stability of the institution and for ensuring that the institution's mission is being carried out. This board is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the financial resources of the institution are used to provide a sound educational program; its membership is sufficient in size and composition to fulfill all board responsibilities.

The governing board is an independent policy-making body capable of reflecting constituent and public interest in board activities and decisions. A majority of the board members has no employment, family, ownership, or other personal financial interest in the institution. The board adheres to a conflict of interest policy that assures that those interests are disclosed, that they do not interfere with the impartiality of governing body members or outweigh the greater duty to secure and ensure the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution.

## **4. Chief Executive Officer**

The institution has a chief executive officer appointed by the governing board whose responsibility is to the institution and who possesses the requisite authority to administer board policies. The chief executive officer shall not serve as the chair of the governing board.

## **5. Administrative Capacity**

The institution has sufficient staff with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support its mission and purpose.

## **6. Operational Status**

The institution is operational for at least one year with students actively pursuing its instructional programs.

## **7. Educational Programs**

The institution offers 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.

## **8. Academic Credit**

The institution awards academic credits based on Federal guidelines that define “credit hour” as:

- A semester or trimester hour of credit that includes at least 30 hours of instruction.
- A quarter hour of credit that includes at least 20 hours of instruction.
- An academic year that includes at least 26 weeks of instruction for clock-hour programs and 30 weeks of instruction for credit-hour programs.
- A semester that includes at least 15 weeks of instruction and quarter programs that have at least 10 weeks of instruction.

## **9. Student Learning and Achievement**

The institution defines and publishes each program’s expected student learning and achievement outcomes. Through regular and systematic assessment, it demonstrates that students who complete programs, no matter where or how they are offered, achieve these outcomes. The institution meets Federal Regulations (July 2010) regarding the monitoring of “satisfactory academic progress” in order to remain eligible to receive Title IV, HEA funds.

## **10. Faculty**

The institution has a core of qualified faculty which is sufficient in size and experience to support all of the institution’s educational programs. A clear statement of faculty responsibilities must include professional development, review of curriculum, as well as assessment of learning.

## **11. Student Services**

The institution provides for all of its students appropriate services that support student learning and development within the context of the institutional mission.

## **12. Admissions**

The institution has adopted and adheres to admission policies consistent with its mission that specify the qualifications of students appropriate for its programs. The institution validates high school diplomas according to Federal regulations effective July, 2010 for all admitted students. The institution uses alternative pathways allowed by Federal regulations to enroll students, such as the “ability to benefit” testing or the completion of 6 credits of postsecondary course work.

## **13. Information and Learning Resources**

The institution supports its mission and instructional programs by providing access to sufficient information, learning resources, and academic services.

## **14. 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.

## **15. 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. At the time of the institution’s Initial Visit, the institution shall submit a copy of the current budget and institutional financial audits and management letters prepared by an outside certified public accountant or by an appropriate public agency who has no other relationship to the institution for its past two most recent fiscal years, including the fiscal year ending immediately prior to the date of the Initial Visit. The audits must be certified and any exceptions explained.

## **16. 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 develops a working action plan that 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.

## **17. Public Information**

The institution guards against any misrepresentations in word or print regarding the nature of the school's program, financial charges, or the employability of its graduates. The institution provides a catalog for its constituencies with precise, accurate, and current information concerning the following:

### General Information

- Official Name, Address(es), Telephone Number(s), and Web Site Address of the Institution
- Educational Mission
- Courses and Programs
- Academic Calendar and Program Length
- Available Student Financial Aid (if any)
- Available Learning Resources
- Names of Administrators and Faculty
- Names of Governing Board Members

### Requirements

- Admissions
- Student Fees and Other Financial Obligations
- Certificates, Graduation, and Transfer

### Major Policies Affecting Students

1. Academic Regulations, including Academic Honesty
2. Acceptance of Transfer Credits
3. Nondiscrimination
4. Grievance and Complaint Procedures
5. Sexual Harassment
6. Refund of Fees
7. Locations or publications where other policies may be found

## **18. Relations with the Accrediting Commission**

The institution provides assurance that it adheres to the Eligibility Requirements and accreditation standards and policies of the Commission, describes itself in identical terms to all its accrediting agencies, communicates any changes in its accredited status, and agrees to disclose information required by the Commission to carry out its accrediting responsibilities. The institution will comply with Commission requests, directives, decisions, and policies and will make complete, accurate, and honest disclosure. Failure to do so is sufficient reason, in and of itself, for the Commission to impose a sanction or to deny or revoke candidacy or accreditation.

## Program Offerings

A list of all programs (exact titles) offered by the institution.

## Important Notice

The following condition must be met before an institution can host a Visiting Committee for an initial visit or re-accreditation:

- For institutions seeking an initial visit or re-accreditation, in order to provide the public an opportunity to comment on the institution's qualifications for candidacy or re-accreditation, the institution being considered must give notice in the appropriate newspaper(s) and/or other media services. This notice for comments must be made prior to hosting a Visiting Committee for an initial visit or re-accreditation. The notice must state that the institution is applying for candidacy or re-accreditation by the Accrediting Commission for Schools of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. In addition, it must state that persons wishing to make comments should write to:

Executive Director  
Accrediting Commission for Schools  
WASC  
533 Airport Blvd., Suite 200  
Burlingame, CA 94010

- Persons making comments must provide their names and mailing addresses.

For additional information on this requirement, please refer to Commission's *Policy Manual, Part II*, Section I, Paragraph 110; available on the WASC website at [www.acswasc.org/pdf\\_postsecondary/CommissionByLawsPartII.pdf](http://www.acswasc.org/pdf_postsecondary/CommissionByLawsPartII.pdf).

## Postsecondary Candidacy Application Form Submission Instructions

The institution is to send copies of the completed Postsecondary Candidacy Application form to the WASC Temecula office. The report is to be submitted six weeks prior to the visit as follows:

- One (1) hard copy
- Three (3) electronic copies on CD

**Note:** All electronic copies must be submitted on compact discs (CD) in Microsoft Word [.doc] format. Be sure to include the institution's name and address on the CD label.

The WASC Temecula office address is:

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





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