

ACS WASC Steps to Candidacy or Initial Accreditation Status for Postsecondary Schools

There are four steps required to achieve candidacy or initial accreditation status:

1. ACS WASC Postsecondary Criteria requirements are met at least at a basic level
2. Request affiliation with ACS WASC
3. Complete a written *Initial Visit Report*
4. Host a successful one-day initial visit by an ACS WASC representative or team.

Schools who earn candidacy or initial accredited status have up to three years to prepare for a full site visit that can, from that point on, earn full accredited status with possible terms up to six years in length.

Step 1 — ACS WASC Postsecondary Criteria Met

Before postsecondary institutions contact ACS WASC requesting affiliation, it is important that they confirm that they have the beginning pieces in place to meet, at least at a basic level, all ten of the following criteria:

Criterion 1 — Institutional Mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes

- Authority — Postsecondary institutions must have a charter and/or formal authority from an appropriate governmental agency (where such agency exists) to award a certificate or high school diploma. An institution must meet all legal requirements to provide a program of education beyond the secondary level. If incorporated, the institution must submit a copy of its articles of incorporation.
- Mission — The institution's educational mission must be clearly defined, adopted, and published by its governing Board. The mission must identify its broad educational purposes, its intended student population, and its commitment to successful student learning. The mission must be foundational for institutional planning and school decision-making processes.
- Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs) — The institution must develop measureable learner outcomes that are global in scope and reflect the school's mission and purpose.

Criterion 2 — Organizational Infrastructure and School Leadership

- Governing Board — The institution must have 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. Its membership must be sufficient in size and composition to fulfill all Board responsibilities.
- Administrator/Director — The institution must have an administrator/director appointed by the Governing Board who possesses the requisite authority to administer Board policies. This person cannot serve as the chair of the Governing Board.

- Administrative Capacity — The institution must have sufficient staff with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support the school’s mission and purpose.
- Operational Status — The institution must be operational with students actively pursuing its instructional programs when it applies for accreditation status. Schools may not apply for accreditation before they begin operations.
- Academic Credit — The institution must award academic credits based on generally accepted practices. Public institutions governed by statutory or system regulatory requirements must provide appropriate information about awarding academic credit. (Non-academic classes such as arts & crafts, senior exercise classes, etc. do not apply). Reminder: WASC accredits schools, not individual programs in schools.
- Admissions — The institution must adopt and adhere to admission policies consistent with its mission that specify the qualifications of students appropriate for its programs.
- Procedural infrastructure — The institution must have a system of policies and procedures that govern school operations and administrative decision-making processes.

Criterion 3 — Faculty and Staff

- Faculty — The institution must have a qualified faculty which is sufficient in size and experience to support all of the institution’s educational programs. Faculty responsibilities should include their participation in curriculum development, assessment of student learning, and professional development activities.
- Personnel policies — The institution must have policies and procedures that govern how faculty and staff members are hired, evaluated, and compensated.

Criterion 4 — Curriculum

- Educational Programs — The institution must offer 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.
- Curricular Mapping — The institution must have an organized curricular plan that provides direction for faculty members as they plan for instruction and assessment.

Criterion 5 — Instructional Program

- Student Learning and Achievement — The institution must define and publish the learner outcomes for each program. Through regular and systematic assessment, it must demonstrate that students who complete programs achieve these outcomes.
- Instructional Strategies — The institution must provide qualified faculty members who use a variety of instructional strategies that meet the diverse learning needs of students.
- Technology Integration — The institution must develop technology resources for students and have expectations embedded in the instructional program so that students can be prepared with 21st century skills.

Criterion 6 — Use of Assessment

- Analysis of Learning Data — The institution must have a process in place to gather learning data from multiple sources, disaggregate and analyze the data, draw conclusions and develop recommendations to address identified learner needs.
- Use of Assessment Results — The institution must use learning data analysis results in curriculum review, development of the instructional program, provision of professional growth activities for teachers, and for long-term institutional planning.

Criterion 7 — Student Support Services

- Student Services — The institution must provide appropriate services that support student learning and development within the context of its institutional mission.
- Counseling Services — The institution must provide personal counseling support as well as college planning counseling services.

Criterion 8 — Resource Management

- Information and Learning Resources — The institution must provide access to sufficient information and learning resources that support its instructional programs.
- Financial Resources — The institution must manage its financial resources to support student learning programs and services, to improve institutional effectiveness, and to assure financial stability.
- Financial Accountability — The institution must annually undergo an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or public agency and report results to school stakeholders.
- Facilities — The institution must provide facilities that are clean, safe, and adequate for the academic programs and courses offered.

Criterion 9 — Community Connection

- Public Information — The institution must provide a catalog for its constituencies with precise, accurate, and current information regarding its programs, available financial aid, admissions requirements, and student fees.
- Connection to Community — The institution must make an effort to connect to community leaders, businesses, and organizations that can enhance the educational opportunities for students.

Criterion 10 — *Action Plan* for Continual Improvement

- Institutional Planning and Evaluation — The institution must systematically evaluate and make public how well it is accomplishing its purposes, including the assessment of Schoolwide Learner Outcomes. The institution must provide evidence of planning for improvement of institutional operations and processes, student achievement of educational goals, and student learning levels.
- Schoolwide Action Plan — The institution must have a user-friendly schoolwide *Action Plan* that guides school improvement efforts and provides the basis for all ongoing development activities.

Once an institution has determined that it has met these ten ACS WASC Postsecondary Criteria, at least at a basic or beginning level, it can proceed to step #2 in the accreditation process.

Step 2 — Request Affiliation with ACS WASC

Postsecondary schools that are interested in accreditation should complete the “ACS WASC Affiliation Application Request” form (available at www.acswasc.org) and submit it with fees to the ACS WASC office at 533 Airport Blvd., Suite 100, Burlingame, CA 94010. This affiliation form allows ACS WASC to confirm that the school meets the ten eligibility requirements necessary to enter the accreditation process and that it is a non-degree granting, non-profit school that does not use online education for more than 50% of its programs.

The institution must provide assurance that it will adhere to ACS WASC eligibility requirements and accreditation criteria and policies of the ACS WASC Commission. It must describe itself in identical terms to all its accrediting agencies, communicate any changes in its accredited status, and agree to disclose information required by the ACS WASC Commission. The institution must agree to comply with Commission requests, directives, decisions, and policies and make complete, accurate, and honest disclosure.

Once the affiliation form has been accepted and approved, the postsecondary school is notified by the ACS WASC office that an initial visit will be held as soon as the school completes the next step in the process, i.e., preparing the *Initial Visit Report*.

Step 3 — Prepare the Initial Visit Report

The *Initial Visit Report* is prepared by the postsecondary school in preparation for a one-day initial visit. This *Initial Visit Report* gives evidence that the postsecondary school meets the eligibility requirements to be considered for accreditation.

Although the *Initial Visit Report* asks for school and community descriptions and lists of program offerings, the majority of the report is directed toward addressing the ten specific eligibility requirements that must be met for the school to proceed in the accreditation process.

Step 4 — Host an Initial Visit

When the school seeking accreditation completes the *Initial Visit Report*, one or two ACS WASC-trained educators will visit the campus for one day and validate the *Initial Visit Report*. The Visiting Committee verifies the contents of the *Initial Visit Report* and then submits a written report to the ACS WASC Commission.

If the Visiting Committee determines that the school meets eligibility requirements for accreditation, it will recommend to the ACS WASC Commission that the school be granted “Initial Accreditation” status for a three-year period. Initial Accreditation status enjoys all the rights and privileges of full accreditation, although it is still reported as Initial Accreditation in all publications.

If the school does not meet all the eligibility requirements but does have the potential to meet them within a three-year time period, the Commission will grant the school “Candidacy” status. This is not accredited status but simply identifies the school as one that is pursuing accreditation status. If the school does not meet a majority of the eligibility requirements, the school will be given time to correct deficiencies and then host another initial visit at a later time.