

Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation

The Commission provides accreditation services to institutions located in the states of California and Hawaii, the territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Federated 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 as the primary mode of curriculum delivery

Prior to making formal application, an institution wishing to become affiliated with WASC must begin by assessing itself in relation to the basic criteria for institutional eligibility as stated on the following pages. The institution should also review the standards of accreditation and Commission policies as they will provide a clear statement of ultimate Commission expectations of institutional performance and quality and give further definition to the eligibility criteria. The eligibility process is designed to screen institutions prior to a period of formal and extensive institutional self study so that only institutions which meet the basic criteria for eligibility may proceed.

The Commission uses the same self study and site visit process for accreditation applications. The results of a self study and on-site visit could be denial, candidacy, or accreditation. Clearly, the history of the applicant institution will have a significant bearing on the Commission's decision.

In order to determine eligibility, the institution must completely meet all Eligibility Requirements. Compliance with the criteria is expected to be continuous and will be validated periodically, as part of every institutional self study and comprehensive evaluation and annual report.

Institutions that have achieved accreditation are expected to include in their self study reports information demonstrating that they continue to meet the Eligibility Requirements.

1. Authority

No postsecondary institution will be considered eligible for candidacy or accreditation unless it has a charter and/or formal authority from an appropriate governmental agency (where such agency exists) to award a certificate or diploma. To be eligible an institution must meet all legal requirements to provide a program of education beyond the secondary level. 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.

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 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 generally accepted practices. Public institutions governed by statutory or system regulatory requirements provide appropriate information about awarding of academic credit.

9. Student Learning and Achievement

The institution defines and published for each program the 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.

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 development and 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.

13. Information and Learning Resources

The institution provides access to sufficient information and learning resources and services to support its mission and instructional programs.

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 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 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.