Postsecondary Accreditation Manual

2011 EDITION

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Postsecondary Accreditation Manual

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2011 EDITION

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Introduction

WASC Accreditation Process

WASC advances and validates quality ongoing school improvement by supporting its private and public elementary, secondary and postsecondary member institutions as they engage in a rigorous and relevant self-evaluation and peer review process that focuses on student learning.

The review and approval of educational programs around the world is accomplished through the accreditation process. Self-study, internal review, and external validation by trained educators provide educational institutions the opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses and chart a course for ongoing school improvement through the use of a schoolwide *Action Plan*.

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) is one of six regional accrediting associations in the United States. The WASC Commission provides assistance to over 4500 educational institutions located in California, Hawaii, The Pacific Islands, and East Asia. WASC has accredited educational institutions since 1962 and is now considered a trademark that represents quality education throughout its region.

WASC is composed of three separate Commissions:

1. Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges/Universities: www.wascweb.org/senior
2. Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges: www.accjc.org
3. Accrediting Commission for Schools: www.acswasc.org

The Accrediting Commission for Schools is specifically responsible for the accreditation of postsecondary institutions. This division not only extends its services to public, charter, independent, and religious K–12 schools, but it also provides accreditation for supplementary educational programs and postsecondary institutions that are non-profit and non-degree-granting. WASC does not accredit distance-education-only schools or for-profit postsecondary institutions.

Examples of non-profit, non-degree granting postsecondary schools include adult schools, ROCPs, prison vocational training programs, and private technical institutes. Earning accreditation status allows postsecondary schools to prepare students for meaningful educational advancement with credits that are accepted by other educational institutions.

WASC accredits individual schools, not specific programs that are part of a school. In addition, WASC accreditation does not qualify institutions to apply for Title IV funds; achieving Title IV eligibility must be accomplished through another accrediting agency specifically approved for that purpose.

Benefits of WASC Accreditation

The WASC accreditation process validates the integrity of a school's program and identifies it as a trustworthy educational institution. WASC accreditation is a prestigious accomplishment based on rigorous peer review that has a unique focus on student learning. It provides schools with a system to manage change and promote ongoing school improvement.

The benefits of WASC accreditation include the following:

1. WASC has been selected by the California Department of Education as the official accrediting body in California.
2. WASC is one of the six regional accrediting agencies in the United States. In 1961, in The Hague, WASC was recognized as a world-wide accrediting agency (Hague Apostille). Therefore, WASC-accredited schools have their credits accepted worldwide.
3. WASC accreditation is accepted by the University of California college/university system. Schools must have WASC accreditation (including candidacy status) in order to submit courses to the University of California, Office of the President (UCOP) for purposes of approval on the UC "a-g approved coursework" list.
4. Possessing WASC-accredited high school transcripts is one of the key requirements for California residents to participate in the Cal Grant Program.
5. WASC accreditation validates student transcripts and provides for the smooth transfer of credits from school to school.
6. WASC accreditation opens the door for acceptance into many colleges and universities.
7. WASC accreditation is necessary for applications to certain scholarship programs.
8. WASC accreditation is strongly encouraged for all charter schools.
9. WASC accreditation is necessary for certain post-high school work applications.
10. WASC accreditation provides additional benefits for students planning to enter the United States military.

Accreditation Self-Study Expectations

Throughout the entire WASC self-study accreditation process, there are five overarching expectations that schools must meet:

1. The involvement and collaboration of all stakeholders in the self-study process.
2. The clarification of the institution's mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes.
3. The assessment of the actual student program and its impact on student learning with respect to the institutional mission, Schoolwide Learner Outcomes, and WASC Postsecondary Criteria.
4. The creation of a schoolwide *Action Plan* that develops programmatic plans to address identified key issues.
5. The development of an accountability system for monitoring the implementation of the schoolwide *Action Plan*.

The WASC Process

The WASC accreditation process consists of three major components:

1. School self-evaluation based on the school's mission, Schoolwide Learner Outcomes, and WASC criteria resulting in the writing of a *Self-Study Report*.

2. Peer review accomplished by a three and a half-day site visit by a committee of WASC-trained educators.
3. Implementation of the schoolwide *Action Plan* that addresses key issues identified by the school and the WASC Visiting Committee which is annually reviewed and refined based on progress made.

The school's mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs) provide the foundation for the institution's entire academic program. Together, these state the global knowledge, skills, and understanding students should possess by the time the student completes the planned instructional program. The attainment of school SLOs drives the instructional program and supports all operations of the school.

Translating the school's purpose in its SLOs for all students is a beginning; the self-study phase of the accreditation process involves an in-depth gathering of evidence that enables the school to take an honest look at what is/what is not working compared to WASC criteria. This verification through evidence is key to learning about the actual instruction experienced by students.

Observable evidence includes analyzing the following:

- What students are doing and producing (student work)
- Student interviews and observations
- Hard data and information, e.g., learning data, student indicators for attendance, special needs, and accomplishment of SLOs

The writing of the self-evaluation report, the *Self-Study Report***,** requires four major tasks that the Leadership Team and Focus Groups must complete:

- Task 1 – Profile, Student and Institution Characteristics (Chapter I of the *Self-Study Report*)
- Task 2 – Progress Report on the schoolwide *Action Plan* that Integrated Past Identified Key Issues (Chapter II of the *Self-Study Report*)
- Task 3 – School Response to the WASC Postsecondary Criteria (Chapter III of the *Self-Study Report*)
- Task 4 – Revision of the schoolwide *Action Plan* (Chapter IV of the *Self-Study Report*)

[Detailed descriptions of the tasks begin on page 17.]

WASC Postsecondary Criteria for Accreditation

The WASC accreditation process is built on the WASC Postsecondary Criteria that represent the foundational areas that postsecondary schools must address to earn accreditation status.

1. Institutional Mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs)
2. Organizational Infrastructure and School Leadership
3. Faculty and Staff
4. Curriculum
5. Instructional Program

6. Use of Assessment
7. Student Support Services
8. Resource Management
9. Community Connection
10. *Action Plan* for Continual Improvement

The WASC Postsecondary Criteria are the standards or expectations that schools must address in their written *Self-Study Report*. Each criterion is supported by several "indicators" that unfold different aspects of each criterion. In the *Self-Study Report*, schools are required to respond in narrative form to each indicator as they give an overall response to how well they meet the criterion expectations.

Participants in the Accreditation Process

The WASC accreditation process brings four groups together — two from the school and two from WASC:

1. School Leadership Team
2. School Focus Groups
3. WASC Visiting Committee
4. WASC Commission

A major goal of WASC accreditation is to unify all stakeholders in educational institutions so that they work together on self-evaluation and school improvement issues. The accreditation process is most powerful when all stakeholder groups take ownership of the school's mission, purpose, SLOs, and educational programs and then commit to ongoing school improvement.

Stakeholders are defined as those who have a vested interest in the successful operation of the school. Schools may have different stakeholders depending on how they are organized.

Examples of possible stakeholders are:

- Governing Board (district board, institution board, private company, etc.)
- Administration
- Faculty
- Support staff (office staff, aides, bookkeeping staff, facilities staff, etc.)
- Students
- Community/business/trade advisory groups
- Booster club or donor organization

Each stakeholder group has a specific role to play in the accreditation process. Stakeholders that serve in a school Focus Group or on the Leadership Team contribute to the accomplishment of the successful accreditation process. Depending on the size of the school, individuals may serve on more than one Focus Group, and, in the case of very small schools, may serve on all Focus Groups as a committee of the whole. It is up to the school to organize the Leadership Team and

Focus Groups in the way that is best for them, ensuring that the findings and supporting evidence of the self-study reflect all areas of the institution.

Many schools also develop subject-area or programmatic committees that provide valuable evidence that informs Focus Groups as they write their portion of the school's *Self-Study Report*. All possible stakeholders can have access this way through surveys, meetings, or emails to contribute to the Focus Groups as they gather and analyze evidence of student learning. In this way, all departments are represented in the final *Self-Study Report*. This is not required by WASC; it is, however, recommended for larger schools that have sufficient faculty members to form such subject-area, department, or programmatic committees.

Responsibilities of Accreditation Participants

The Leadership Team, Focus Groups, the WASC Visiting Committee, and the WASC Commission all have responsibilities in the accreditation process. Each has products to complete and **responsibilities** to fulfill.

Leadership Team

Suggested Participants: (each school decides how to establish its Leadership Team)

- Administration members
- Self-Study Coordinator
- Chair of each Focus Group
- Other stakeholders the school identifies so that the Leadership Team represents the entire school constituency

Products:

- *Self-Study* Report
- *Action Plan*

Responsibilities:

- Oversee the self-study process and complete the *Self-Study Report*
- Review and synthesize findings of Focus Groups
- Complete Task 1 (School Profile), Task 2 (Progress Report), and Task 4 (Revision of the schoolwide *Action Plan*) in the self-study; these correspond to Chapters I, II, and IV in the *Self-Study Report*
- Prepare a written response to **WASC Postsecondary Criteria #1, 2, 3, 8, 9, and 10** in Chapter III of the *Self-Study Report*
- Oversee the completion of the schoolwide *Action Plan*
- Hold all committees and stakeholder groups accountable for involvement in the accreditation self-study process
- Review and revise the school mission statement and SLOs as needed
- Coordinate the follow-up process to monitor the successful implementation of the schoolwide *Action Plan*

Focus Groups

Participants:

- Faculty, staff members, and Board members (as the school determines)
- The size of Focus Groups is up to each school based on school size and type; however, research reveals that smaller groups with less than 15 members are usually more productive; the important factor is that all school departments and programs are represented in each Focus Group
- Four Focus Groups:
    1. Curriculum (WASC Criterion 4)
    2. Instructional Program (WASC Criterion 5)
    3. Use of Assessment (WASC Criterion 6)
    4. Student Support Services (WASC Criterion 7)
- Note: Schools may choose to form programmatic committees that represent specific departments or programs (similar to home groups in K–12 schools) that can bring valuable input and evidence that is added into the work of the Focus Groups.

Products:

- Written reports that contribute to Chapter III in the *Self-Study Report*

Responsibilities:

- Review the profile (Chapter I of the *Self-Study Report*) as it provides important evidence that informs Task 3 (Chapter III) of the *Self-Study Report*.
- Each Focus Group should respond to its specific Criterion (4, 5, 6, or 7) and provide written narratives to be included in Chapter III of the *Self-Study Report*.
- Respond to all indicators that describe each criterion
    - The additional discussion questions provided are for school use only as they describe to what extent they meet or exceed the WASC indicator.
    - Discussion questions do not have to be individually answered.
- Identify the school's areas of strength and key issues for each criterion.
- Present findings to the Leadership Team and engage in meaningful discussions on how the data and analysis impact the *self-study*.
- Provide input on Task 4, the revision of the schoolwide *Action Plan*, under the direction of the Leadership Team.

WASC Visiting Committee

Participants:

- WASC-appointed chair who is experienced in the accreditation process
- Volunteer educators from WASC member institutions

Products:

- *Visiting Committee Report*
- *Documentation and Justification Statement*
- Term Recommendation Ballot

Responsibilities:

- Complete WASC training every year.
- Read the school's *Self-Study Report* completely and analyze the school's findings.
- Complete prewriting assignments as directed by the Visiting Committee chair.
- Commit to a three and one-half day visit without schedule or duty conflicts.
- Collaborate with Visiting Committee Members to analyze the school's findings and present schoolwide strengths and key issues that will be integrated into the schoolwide *Action Plan*.

The WASC Commission

Participants:

- The WASC Commission consists of 32 representatives from various educational, business, and state organizations who oversee the WASC accreditation process

Products:

- Term determination decisions
- Written policies and procedures to govern the WASC accreditation process

Responsibilities:

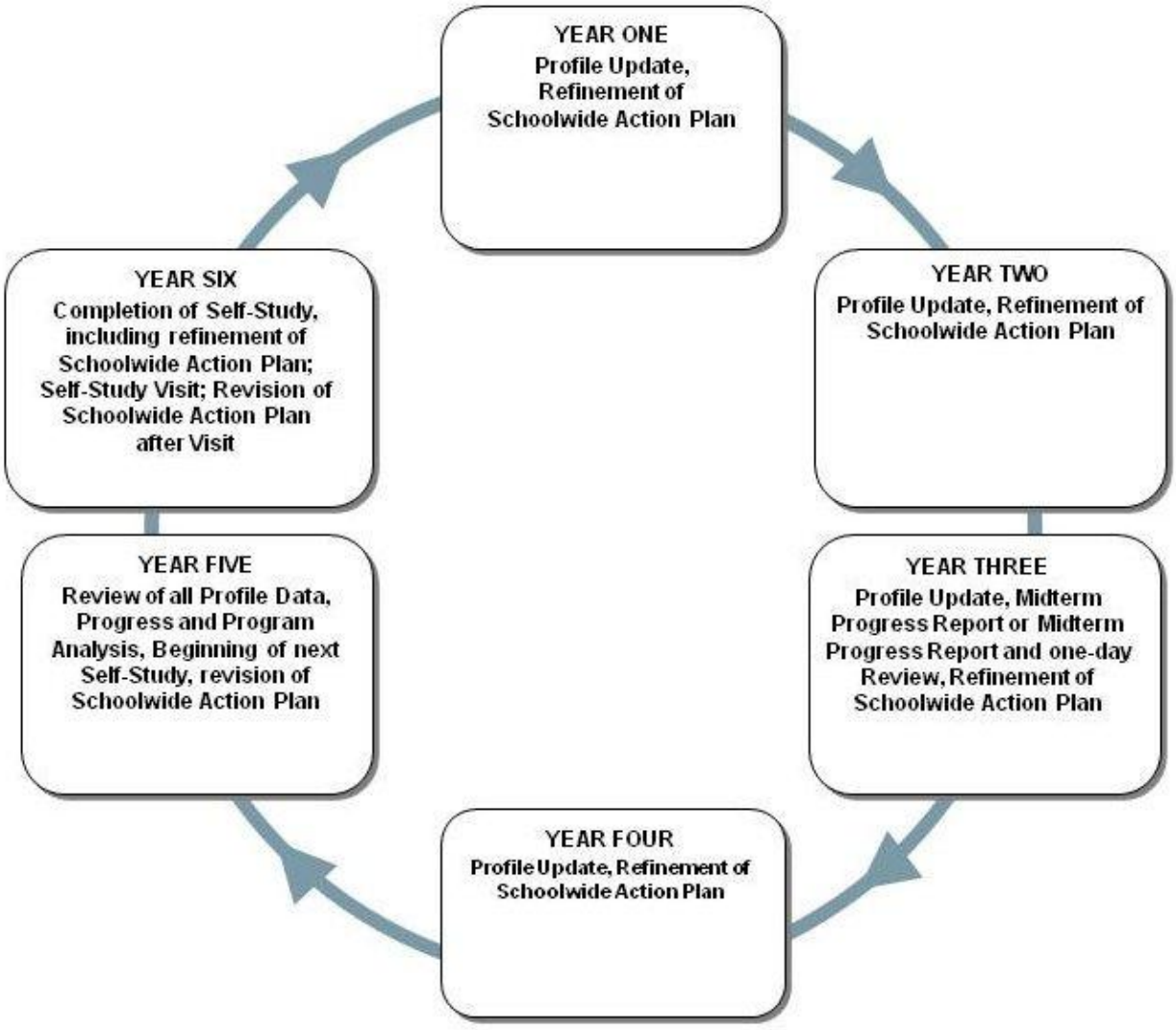
- The Commission meets three times a year to review all *Visiting Committee Reports* and *Documentation and Justification Statements* that describe the accreditation visits that have occurred since the last Commission meeting.
- The Commission reviews the effectiveness of the school and then awards a specific term of accreditation.
- The Commission oversees the policies, procedures, and financial status of WASC.

WASC Six-Year Cycle

The WASC accreditation process is an ongoing process that is most effective when it is embedded into the daily life and activities of the school. Accreditation is a process, not an event. The most successful schools are those that engage in self-evaluation, analysis of student learning data, and *Action Plan* implementation on a continual basis.

Visits by WASC-trained educators are scheduled during the six-year cycle according to the term determination by the WASC Commission.

WASC has a six-year cycle of activities that maximizes the impact of school improvement activities connected with the accreditation process as visualized in the following diagram:



WASC Six-Year Accreditation Cycle

[This section is for first-time applicants only — those already in the WASC process should go to page 15 where the self-study process description begins.

Applicants — Beginning the Process

Steps to Candidacy or Initial Accreditation Status

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

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

Before postsecondary institutions contact 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:

<u>Criterion 1 — Institutional Mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes</u>

- 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.

<u>Criterion 2 — Organizational Infrastructure and School Leadership</u>

- 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 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 WASC

Postsecondary schools that are interested in accreditation should complete the "Request for Affiliation" form (available at www.acswasc.org) and submit it with fees to the WASC office at 533 Airport Blvd., Suite 100, Burlingame, CA 94010. This affiliation form allows 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 WASC eligibility requirements and accreditation criteria and policies of the 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 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 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 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 WASC Commission.

If the Visiting Committee determines that the school meets eligibility requirements for accreditation, it will recommend to the 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.

How to Advertise WASC Candidacy or Initial Accreditation Status

Institutions that have earned Candidacy status are moving toward full accreditation but have not yet attained it. Initial Accreditation reflects that the school has met basic WASC criteria and has a support system that can sustain the school program into the foreseeable future. If the institution has earned Initial Accreditation status, it has all the rights and privileges of an accredited institution.

In advertising, schools must state their accredited status based on the decision of the WASC Commission. Institutions will be able to publish or state their status as follows:

- "A Candidate for Accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges."
- "Initially Accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges."
- "Fully Accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges" (after the first full self-study and site visit).

The Self-Study Process

Accreditation Components

After a school has earned initial accreditation, the next event is a full institution-wide self-evaluation within three years, ending in a written *Self-Study Report* that presents the school's findings. During the three-year period of initial accreditation, the school works on key issues identified by the Initial Visiting Committee. Following the completion of the school's self-study, a Visiting Committee comprised of WASC-trained educators spends three and a half days on campus validating the self-study and writing a *Visiting Committee Report* that presents its findings to the WASC Commission.

The self-study process consists of three components:

1. School self-evaluation ending in a written *Self-Study Report*
2. Peer review by WASC Visiting Committee ending in a *Visiting Committee Report* to the WASC Commission
3. Ongoing school improvement though the implementation of the schoolwide *Action Plan*

Suggested Timeline of Accreditation Activities

The self-study process begins for institutions immediately upon earning "initial accreditation" status. WASC accreditation is most effective when schools embed expectations, activities, and a focus on key issues in their entire program. The initial accreditation term lasts for three years and allows the school time to prepare for its first full self-study site visit.

Schools are expected to assign specific personnel to attend all three sessions of WASC training. It is recommended that schools send their administrator, Self-Study Coordinator, and Focus Group chairs (if possible). These training sessions assist schools in understanding WASC criteria and processes and give practical tips on how to gather support from all stakeholders to accomplish accreditation requirements. These sessions are most helpful in guiding schools as they write their school *Self-Study Report* and prepare for the accreditation site visit.

As an institution approaches its full site visit, accreditation activities increase. The following timeline gives schools guidance in how to plan ahead for the writing of the *Self-Study Report* and hosting the site visit:

12–18 Months Prior to the Full Site Visit

- Establish or refresh the Leadership Team and Focus Groups
    - Focus Group 1 – Curriculum
    - Focus Group 2 – Instructional Program
    - Focus Group 3 – Use of Assessment
    - Focus Group 4 – Student Services
- Send institutional representatives to Session I of WASC training
- Review the mission statement of the school

- Orient stakeholders to the WASC Postsecondary Criteria
- Review and revise Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs)
- Develop or update the institutional, community, and student profile (Task 1)
- As part of Task 1, begin to focus on student learning data for analysis, drawing conclusions and creating recommendations to address key issues
- Review progress on current schoolwide *Action Plan* that integrated the key issues left by the last Visiting Committee, either at the initial visit or at the last full visit (Task 2)

6–12 Months Prior to the Full Site Visit

- Send school representatives to Session II of WASC training
- Gather and analyze data from the Leadership Team and Focus Groups and begin writing the *Self-Study Report* in preparation for the site visit
- Address the WASC Postsecondary Criteria and identify to what extent your school meets or exceeds WASC expectations
- Continue to gather learning data, disaggregate and analyze it, and then draw conclusions that can become the basis for specific recommendations for the *Action Plan*
- As part of the WASC Postsecondary Criteria analysis, identify "School Strengths" and "Key Issues" for each of the WASC Postsecondary Criteria

3–6 Months Prior to the Full Site Visit

- Send school representatives to Session III of WASC training
- Complete a rough draft of the *Self-Study Report* three months before the site visit and send it out to all stakeholder groups for their final input; also, send a copy or portions as they are completed to the Visiting Committee Chair for his/her input
- Use the self-study findings (school strengths and key issues) to revise the schoolwide *Action Plan* (Task 4) with appropriate input and discussions with stakeholders
- Establish a relationship with the assigned Visiting Committee Chair by hosting a previsit to collaborate on the Site Visit Schedule, logistical details, and visit expectations
- Assure institution-wide consensus and establish a follow-up process to monitor the implementation of the schoolwide *Action Plan*

1–3 Months Prior to the Full Site Visit

- Complete the final draft of the *Self-Study Report;* mail a hardcopy and email an electronic copy to the Visiting Committee 4–6 weeks prior to the visit
- Finalize the schoolwide *Action Plan* and have the governing body approve it
- Share copies of final drafts with all stakeholder groups and ask that they read it before the Visiting Committee arrives in order to prepare for meaningful discussions
- Finalize details for the site visit: i.e., schedule, housing, food, meeting locations, etc.
- Stay in close communication with the Visiting Committee Chair

The Self-Study Report

Self-Study Report Format

The *Self-Study Report* is typically presented in a notebook, spiral bound booklet, or other published format. The entire report should be paginated consecutively and be compiled into one electronic document.

There are eight specific components in the *Self-Study Report* electronic template provided by WASC:

- Cover/Title Page
- Preface
- List of Self-Study Teams, Committees, or Focus Group Members
- Table of Contents
- Chapter I — Institutional, Community, and Student Characteristics
- Chapter II — Progress Report on the Schoolwide *Action Plan* Showing Integration of the Key Issues
- Chapter III — Self-Study Findings based on the WASC Postsecondary Criteria
- Chapter IV — The Schoolwide *Action Plan* Revision

The most extensive chapter in the *Self-Study Report* is Chapter III — the school's findings on how well it meets or exceeds the WASC Postsecondary Criteria. These are the standards that must be met for the school to earn accreditation status. Each of the WASC Postsecondary Criteria has supporting indicators that give a deeper and more complete description of the meaning of each criterion. These indicators are given for each criterion to encourage thoughtful dialogue and judgment about institutional quality by the institution's stakeholders engaged in the self-study process.

In addition, the supplied indicators are supported by discussion questions that are intended to provoke thoughtful reflection and discussion among all stakeholders about institutional quality. The discussion questions are provided to help schools evaluate their programs and, though each question does not have to be specifically addressed, answers need to be embedded within the overall response to the criterion.

Schools are expected to base their self-study findings on evidence taken from the work of Focus Groups. For evidence to be useful, it must have undergone analysis and reflection by the institution's stakeholders in each Focus Group. Evidence should be relevant, verifiable, representative, and accurately presented as it is integrated into Chapter III. A school's *Self-Study Report* is most effective when it is clearly written, well-organized, and thorough. The more transparent a school is in its self-study, the more effective the Visiting Committee can be in guiding the school on its journey toward school improvement.

Responses to the WASC Postsecondary Criteria are to be given in narrative form. The WASC self-study accreditation process is not a compliance process accomplished by checklists; it is a

school improvement process that relies on meaningful discussions and reflective comments by the institution in its *Self-Study Report*.

After completing the school's response to each of the WASC Postsecondary Criteria, Focus Groups must identify what the school's strengths and key issues are in relation to the findings. This is an important part of completing each response to the WASC Postsecondary Criteria because these identified strengths and key issues form the foundation of the school's final conclusions and recommendations for the schoolwide *Action Plan*.

Self-Study Report Template Description

The *Self-Study Report* template may be found on the WASC website (www.acswasc.org). This template provides the structure of the *Self-Study Report* and gives prompts and places for schools to respond to complete the document. In the pages that follow, a complete description is given of the components of the template that can be found online.

Cover/Title Page

The cover includes the name of the institution, the institution's address, the title of the document (Self-Study), and the date of the Visiting Committee visit.

Preface

The *Self-Study Report* begins with a preface (500 words or less) written by the administrator/ director. It should describe how the accreditation process was implemented in the school, how it was received by stakeholders, and how the self-study process impacted the school and student learning. The administrator/director should confirm to what degree the school meets the five overarching self-study expectations of the WASC process, listed as follows:

1. The involvement and collaboration of all stakeholders in the self-study process
2. The clarification of the institution's mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs)
3. The assessment of the actual student program and its impact on student learning with respect to the institutional mission, Schoolwide Learner Outcomes, and the WASC Postsecondary Criteria
4. The creation of a schoolwide *Action Plan* that develops programmatic plans to address identified key issues
5. The development of an accountability system for monitoring the implementation of the schoolwide *Action Plan*

List of Self-Study Committee Members

A list of Self-Study Focus Group members, Leadership Team members, and any other programmatic committees follows the preface. This list makes it easier for the Visiting Committee to contact the people directly responsible for each WASC criterion or program area during the site visit.

Table of Contents

The Table of Contents lists the chapters of the *Self-Study Report* and the pages where each chapter heading or subheading begins. It is important that the entire *Self-Study Report* be paginated as one continuous document.

Chapters I–IV of the Self-Study Report

Writing Chapters I–IV of the *Self-Study Report* is accomplished by completing four tasks:

1. Task 1 — Profile, Student, and Institution Characteristics (Chapter I of the *Self-Study Report*)
2. Task 2 — Progress Report on the schoolwide *Action Plan* that Integrated Past Identified Key Issues (Chapter II of the *Self-Study Report*)
3. Task 3 — Response to the WASC Postsecondary Criteria (Chapter III of the *Self-Study Report*)
4. Task 4 — Revision of the schoolwide *Action Plan* (Chapter IV of the *Self-Study Report*)

Chapter I — Task 1

Task 1: Institutional, Community, and Student Characteristics – Institution's Mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes

Participants:

- Leadership Team

Product:

- *Self-Study Report,* Chapter I

Procedures:

- Clarify institutional mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs).
- Include all pertinent data that is relevant to the success of students in the institution.
- Gather and analyze the learning data and draw conclusions.
- Draft succinct narrative descriptions that profile the students and community served by the institution. This narrative should include important socioeconomic and demographic data about the students and the community, a specific summary of current student academic performance, and any identified trends that have impacted the school.
- Provide a brief summary of all programs offered.
- Disseminate the draft to all staff and make modifications after input is received.
- Prepare the final summary profile along with supporting charts, graphs, and learning data (past three years if possible).

Specific Information Required:

Basic Institutional Information:

- ✓ Narrative description of your school — who are you, why do you exist, what do you do best, what makes you unique as an institution

- ✓ School address, website, branches, extension sites, etc.
- ✓ History of the institution (date school began, number of students in first years, original mission and purpose, location, facilities, etc.)
- ✓ Student demographics (ethnicity, gender, enrollment patterns, etc.)
- ✓ Governance structure of the institution
- ✓ Schoolwide Learning Outcomes (SLOs)
- ✓ The total number and types of programs offered and the number of students in attendance
- ✓ Typical class size for teachers
- ✓ Types of certificates awarded
- ✓ Total number of administrative and teaching staff members
- ✓ Calendar system used
- ✓ Typical load for the average student

Community Information:

- ✓ Description of geographic area
- ✓ Population of area served by the school
- ✓ Population characteristics
- ✓ Anticipated changes in school demographic data

Student Learning Data:

- ✓ Gathered learning data from multiple sources (as many as possible)
- ✓ Disaggregated and interpreted student learning data (three years if possible)
- ✓ Conclusions drawn from the analysis of learning data (trends, irregularities, and anomalies)
- ✓ Supporting charts and graphs to display learning data
- ✓ Summary of major conclusions of analysis and what recommendations would best address identified key issues
- ✓ Course and program completion rates
- ✓ Job placement rates or military enrollment rates
- ✓ ESL promotion data
- ✓ CASAS benchmark data
- ✓ Licensing exam pass rates
- ✓ GED pass rates

Task 1 Self-Check Questions: (for Leadership Team reflection as Task 1 is completed; these questions do not have to be answered in writing)

- Has the school community gathered and analyzed all pertinent data in order to clarify the characteristics and achievement of all the students?
- Has the Leadership Team produced a "user-friendly" profile for all stakeholders?
- Have the school faculty and staff members and other stakeholders discussed the profile data and drawn conclusions to aid in school improvement planning?

- Will the questions raised from the profile analysis be integral to the work of the Focus Groups?
- Will the institutional, community, and student information be regularly updated and used by the stakeholders as the institution focuses on student achievement?

Chapter II — Task 2

Task 2: Progress Report on Key Issues since the previous self-study

Participants:

- The Leadership Team

Product:

- *Self-Study Report,* Chapter II
  - ✓ Significant Developments
  - ✓ Procedures for *Action Plan* Implementation and Monitoring
  - ✓ Progress on *Action Plan* sections showing the integration of the key issues and any midterm, revisit, or special visit recommendations

Procedures:

The school is to provide a summary of progress on the *Action Plan* that addresses key issues 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 previous accreditation cycle. The school is required to:

- In the profile section of the *Self-Study Report* (Chapter I), describe any significant developments that have had a major impact on the school or specific changes in programs since the last visit. (Note: If the school's last visit was an initial visit, the report should respond to the recommendations left by the Initial Visit Visiting Committee).
- Describe the school's procedures for the implementation and the monitoring of the *Action Plan*.
- Comment on the accomplishment of each current *Action Plan* key issue; cite evidence, including how each area has met identified growth targets and contributed to the accomplishment of one or more SLOs for all students. Show how the schoolwide *Action Plan* addressed the key issues from the last full self-study.
- Comment separately on key issues that have already been addressed and are not currently in the *Action Plan*.
- Describe how progress on the key issues in the *Action Plan* has impacted student learning.

Task 2 Self-Check Questions: (for Leadership Team reflection after Task 2 is completed; these questions do not have to be answered in writing)

- Did the institution address each key issue within the schoolwide *Action Plan*? If the key issue is not in the current *Action Plan*, did the school address it separately?

- Did the institution show how all key issues from the last self-study or initial visit were integrated into the schoolwide *Action Plan*?
- Does this chapter show how progress on each key issue has impacted the accomplishment of Schoolwide Learner Outcomes?

Chapter III — Task 3

Task 3: Analysis of the Quality of the School Program

Participants:

- Focus Groups
- Leadership Team

Product:

- *Self-Study Report,* Chapter III
  [On the pages that follow, the WASC Postsecondary Criteria are described along with supporting indicators and discussion questions for schools to use for reflection and discussion. The product of Task 3 is Chapter III, a narrative written response to all of the WASC Postsecondary Criteria and all of the supporting indicators.]

Procedures:

- Using information gained in Tasks 1 and 2, analyze the quality of the entire school program using the WASC Postsecondary Criteria as the standard.
- Use appropriate methods to gather pertinent information, focusing on what students are doing and what they are producing. Methods include:
  - Observations of students in classrooms
  - Examination of student work
  - Interviews of students
  - Examination and analysis of student learning data
  - Analysis of student and parent surveys
  - Interviews with school staff and other stakeholders
- Provide narrative responses that describe to what extent the institution meets or exceeds expectations of the WASC Postsecondary Criteria by responding with findings and supporting evidence for the accomplishment of each criterion and supporting indicators. Finish by identifying strengths and key issues to address.
  1. Institutional Mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs)
  2. Organizational Infrastructure and School Leadership
  3. Faculty and Staff
  4. Curriculum
  5. Instructional Program
  6. Use of Assessment
  7. Student Support Services
  8. Resource Management

9. Community Connection
10. *Action Plan* for Continual Improvement

WASC Postsecondary Criteria

Chapter III is the most extensive chapter in the *Self-Study Report*. WASC Postsecondary Criteria are the backbone of the accreditation process and schools must show to what extent they meet or exceed all ten WASC Postsecondary Criteria expectations.

Under each of the WASC Postsecondary Criteria, there are supporting indicators that break down the criteria into smaller parts. Schools should respond in narrative form to each indicator and provide a description that describes to what extent the school meets or exceeds the indicator expectations. The school must comment on every indicator as they provide answers for each of the WASC Postsecondary Criteria.

Discussion questions (bulleted questions under each indicator) are also provided to help schools understand the exact intent of each indicator. They are provided to help schools evaluate their program and, though each discussion question does not need to be specifically addressed, answers need to be embedded within the overall response to the criterion.

After each criterion and supporting indicators have been addressed, schools are given the opportunity to list evidence that supports the assertions made in the narrative section. This evidence is to be available upon request during the site visit.

On the pages that follow, the **WASC Postsecondary Criteria** are listed along with supporting indicators and discussion questions.

Criterion 1: Institutional Mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes

The institution demonstrates a strong commitment to its mission, emphasizing student achievement. The school communicates its mission internally and externally. Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs) are developed and reviewed annually to ensure that they are current and relevant.

Indicator 1.1 *The institution has a statement of mission that describes its broad educational purpose, its intended student population, and its commitment to high levels of student learning.*

Discussion Questions

- In what ways does the mission statement reflect the institution's commitment to high levels of student learning?
- How does the institution establish learning programs and services that are aligned with its mission and that match the needs of its student population?
- What documents does the school have that proves that the institution is legally authorized by the state or appropriate government agency to grant credits, certificates, or diplomas?

Indicator 1.2 *The mission statement is approved by the governing body, published internally and externally, and regularly reviewed and revised to connect to current student learning needs.*

Discussion Questions

- Who was involved in the development of the mission statement and how was it accomplished?
- How is the mission statement communicated to the institution's constituents?
- How often is the mission statement reviewed and revised in order to maintain relevancy and effectiveness?
- Who is involved in this review and revision process?

Indicator 1.3 *The institution's mission statement is central to institutional planning and decision-making activities*

Discussion Questions

- How does the school consider its mission and SLOs in its planning and decision-making activities? What evidence does the school have to support the use of the mission statement and SLOs in planning processes?
- How is analysis and review of the institution's mission and achievement of SLOs related to the revision of the schoolwide *Action Plan* each year?

Indicator 1.4 *The institution establishes Schoolwide Learner Outcomes that identify the broad, global goals for all students based on current and future student learning needs.*

Discussion Questions

- How were the SLOs developed and how are they measured?
- How do faculty members integrate these SLOs into their lesson planning?
- How are all stakeholders connected to the SLOs?

Indicator 1.5 *The institution demonstrates the incorporation of current research-based ideas into learning programs to ensure that the institution's overarching goals (SLOs) are current and relevant.*

Discussion Questions

- What is the process used to evaluate current educational literature and integrate new ideas that address current and future student learning needs?

- What process is used to look at student learning data results to see what needs current students have and explore what new ideas might be useful to address these needs?
- To what extent does the regular review and revision of SLOs include discussion based on current educational research?
- How does the review of profile data impact the review and revision of the SLOs?
- How does the achievement of SLOs connect to the schoolwide *Action Plan*?

Indicator 1.6 *The institution has a process in place to regularly review the courses and programs offered so that the needs of the community are met.*

Discussion Questions

- How does the institution use annual profile data to evaluate course and program offerings?
- To what extent does the institution gather input from current students and the community at large to determine future course and program offerings?

What are the Institution's Strengths and Key Issues for Criterion 1? (no specific number of responses is required)

Strengths:

-
-

Key Issues (Prioritized):

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Suggested Sources of Evidence (to be made available upon request during the site visit)

- List of those involved in the development of the mission statement and SLOs
- Minutes of Self-Study Committees, Board meetings, faculty meetings, administrative councils, student committees, etc.
- Minutes of meetings where the mission statement and analysis of learning data are reviewed
- The institution's catalog and student handbooks
- Publications, promotional materials, and other media that are used to provide information internally and externally about the institution and its mission

Criterion 2: Organizational Infrastructure and School Leadership

The institution utilizes the contributions of leadership throughout the organization to provide for continuous improvement. The organizational structure and roles of governance are clearly defined and designed to facilitate decisions that support student learning and improve institutional effectiveness. The governing body enables the administrator/director to implement policy and lead the institution effectively.

Indicator 2.1 *The institution has clearly defined roles of governance that provide for ethical and effective leadership and results in continued improvement of the institution.*

Discussion Questions

- How do the organizational structure and job descriptions promote efficiency and impact school improvement?
- How does the governing body implement its requirements for membership and training?
- To what extent does the governing body handle policy issues and long-term planning while allowing the administrator/director to oversee the day-to-day operations of the institution?
- How does the governing body support the school leadership and hold them accountable without micromanaging them?
- To what extent does the governing body demonstrate honesty and integrity in its relationships with stakeholders, other institutions or agencies, and with its own local community members?

Indicator 2.2 *The leadership of the institution creates a positive learning environment in a collegial and collaborative atmosphere that provides the foundation for school improvement and high levels of achievement for students.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the administrator/director effectively lead the institution as both a visionary and academic leader?
- To what extent do school leaders effectively guide the institution toward school improvement?
- What evidence exists to show that school leaders are trusted by the stakeholders?
- To what extent do the faculty and staff display that they are motivated by school leaders to bring focus to student learning and school improvement?

Indicator 2.3 *The institution's governance, decision-making structure, and organizational processes are regularly evaluated to ensure their integrity and effectiveness.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the institution include all stakeholders in the regular evaluation of the institution as a whole?
- How do stakeholders have a voice in decision-making processes?
- How does the institution widely communicate the results of regular evaluations and use them as the basis for school improvement?
- What process does the institution use to evaluate its organization, governance structures, and decision-making procedures?

Indicator 2.4 *The institution has an established infrastructure of policies and procedures that provides stability and consistency for all institutional programs, activities, and events.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the school document its policies and procedures in a Policy Manual?
- How do written policies guide decision-making processes?
- How does the organizational infrastructure support all academic programs, activities, and events so that students are able to achieve Schoolwide Learning Outcomes?
- How often does the school review and update its Policy Manual?
- How do faculty, students, and staff members have established mechanisms for providing input into institutional decisions?
- To what extent is the creation of new policies as well as the decisions made based on current policies done in a transparent and ethical manner?

What are the Institution's Strengths and Key Issues for Criterion 2? (no specific number of responses is required)

Strengths:

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-

Key Issues (Prioritized):

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-

Suggested Sources of Evidence (to be made available upon request during the site visit)

- License, charter, or legislative authorization to operate (if applicable)
- Addresses of all campuses affiliated with the institution

- List of the institution's governing body members by name, title, and professional and/or business affiliations
- Flow chart of organizational governance and decision-making processes
- Policies of the Governing Board and published by-laws of the institution
- Copies of Board minutes
- Copy of any contract between the institution and any agency, corporation, institution, or individual that involves processing financial aid, instruction, administration, recruiting, or placement services, etc.
- Examples of how leadership has empowered the staff to focus on student learning

Criterion 3: Faculty and Staff

The institution employs qualified personnel to support student learning programs and services to ensure institutional effectiveness. Personnel are treated equitably, evaluated regularly, and provided opportunities for professional development that impact student learning.

Indicator 3.1 *The institution employs personnel who are qualified by appropriate education, training, and experience in line with its school mission and SLOs.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent are the institution's personnel sufficiently qualified to guarantee the integrity of programs and services?
- What methods does the institution use to assure that qualifications for each position are closely matched to specific programmatic needs and aligned with the school's mission?
- How does the institution determine the number of faculty and staff members needed to meet the learning needs of all students?

Indicator 3.2 *The institution's hiring process is marked by clear communication regarding job descriptions, expected job skills, and procedures for the selection of personnel.*

Discussion Questions

- Who is involved in the hiring process and to what extent is there transparency in the advertisement for open positions?
- To what extent do job descriptions accurately reflect position duties, responsibilities, and employer expectations?
- By what means does the institution verify the qualifications of applicants and newly hired personnel?

Indicator 3.3 *The institution develops personnel policies and procedures that are clearly communicated to all employees.*

Discussion Questions

- What processes does the institution use to develop and publicize its personnel policies?
- How does the institution ensure that it administers its personnel policies and procedures consistently and equitably?
- To what extent does the institution have a written code for professional ethics for all personnel and communicate expectations to them?
- What are the institution's provisions for keeping personnel records secure and confidential?
- How does the institution provide employees access to their records?

Indicator 3.4 *The institution assures the effectiveness of its faculty and staff members by evaluating all personnel systematically.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the institution establish written Postsecondary Criteria for evaluating all personnel, including performance of assigned duties and participation in institutional responsibilities?
- How is the evaluation process built on a collegial spirit that fosters growth and improvement?
- By what methods does the institution define "effective teaching" in its evaluation process? How is that effectiveness judged?
- Who does the annual evaluations of employees and are the results of such evaluations documented and shared in follow-up meetings with the employees under review?
- What process is in place to assure that evaluations lead to improvement in job performance?

Indicator 3.5 *Faculty members take ownership of student progress toward achieving stated Schoolwide Learner Outcomes.*

Discussion Questions

- What are the roles of teachers and other staff members in the development of SLOs?
- How often do faculty members meet to discuss SLOs and analyze student learning data to ensure that students are achieving SLOs?

Indicator 3.6 *The institution provides all personnel with appropriate opportunities for professional development.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the institution plan professional development activities that are connected to student learning needs?
- To what extent does the institution provide funding for professional development opportunities?
- How does the institution ensure meaningful evaluation of professional development activities?
- What impact do professional development activities have on the improvement of teaching and learning? How does the institution evaluate that improvement?

Indicator 3.7 *The institution regularly evaluates all non-teaching support staff members and provides direction and support for improvement of their skills.*

Discussion Questions

- What process is in place for the regular evaluation of all non-teaching personnel?
- To what extent are job descriptions and duty expectations regularly reviewed and revised to meet the current needs of the school?
- How is the support staff included in meetings and processes (as appropriate) to engage them as important stakeholders in the learning programs of the school?

What are the Institution's Strengths and Key Issues for Criterion 3? (no specific number of responses is required)

Strengths:

-
-

Key Issues (Prioritized):

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-

Suggested Sources of Evidence (to be made available upon request during the site visit)

- Document describing hiring procedures
- Personnel evaluation forms
- Policy manuals, faculty handbook
- Faculty orientation programs
- Job descriptions
- Copies of written formal evaluations for each staff member

- Plan for professional growth opportunities
- Evidence of faculty participation in professional growth activities that are focused on student learning

Criterion 4: Curriculum

The institution demonstrates a conscious effort to support student learning through the development of a challenging, coherent, and relevant curriculum that allows all students the opportunity to reach Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs). The school's curriculum reveals its mission and SLOs and connects directly to current student learning needs. The school pursues current, research-based curriculum development information to keep its programs relevant and effective.

Indicator 4.1 *The institution has a documented curricular map that outlines courses of study necessary to reach stated outcomes, licensure requirements, or certificate expectations.*

Discussion Questions

- How does the school list all courses and provide course outlines and objectives for all stakeholder groups?
- To what extent does each course have clearly defined learner outcomes?
- How is institutional resource allocation connected to curriculum development needs?

Indicator 4.2 *The institution regularly reviews curriculum in order to ensure that the content taught in the classrooms is accurate and relevant.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the institution have a curriculum review cycle in place that includes as many stakeholders as possible?
- To what extent does the curriculum review process result in written conclusions that are used to make allocation decisions?
- What processes are in place to ensure that learning materials are providing accurate and up-to-date information to students?
- To what extent are all teachers involved in the curriculum development process?
- How does the curriculum reflect the school's mission and how does it connect to the school's SLOs?
- How often is the entire school curriculum evaluated for relevancy in light of changing student demographics?

Indicator 4.3 *Students have access to texts, learning materials, and information resources that are sufficient to meet the course learning objectives.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the institution provide texts and/or learning materials in a timely manner?
- To what extent does the institution provide sufficient library resources, or access to such resources, to support classroom instruction?
- How does the school make learning labs, computer labs, etc. available to students to support their learning needs?
- How does the institution support the quality of its instructional programs by providing technology and other learning resources that are sufficient in quantity, currency, and variety to facilitate educational offerings?

What are the Institution's Strengths and Key Issues for Criterion 4? (no specific number of responses is required)

Strengths:

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Key Issues (Prioritized):

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Suggested Sources of Evidence (to be made available upon request during the site visit)

- Curriculum guides, documents, etc. that show the overall curricular plan
- Minutes of meetings regarding curriculum development
- Review cycle for texts and other learning materials
- Course descriptions for all classes
- Course learning outcomes for all classes
- Assessment results that show student progress toward curricular goals
- Student achievement data from school profile (Chapter I)

Criterion 5: Instructional Program

The instructional staff uses research-based instructional strategies and teaching methodologies that engage students at high levels of learning and allow them to achieve Schoolwide Learner Outcomes and course objectives. Faculty members are given ongoing training in various instructional strategies that allows them to address the varied learning styles of students in their classrooms.

Indicator 5.1 *The school provides high-level instruction with appropriate breadth, depth, rigor, and sequencing for all programs and courses.*

Discussion Questions

- How does the institution measure the quality of instruction in its classrooms?
- How do faculty members keep current in instructional strategies and methodologies in their areas of expertise?

Indicator 5.2 *The institution uses delivery modes and teaching methodologies that reflect the diverse needs and learning styles of its students.*

Discussion Questions

- What opportunities for dialogue are provided for faculty members to discuss student learning needs and pedagogical approaches?
- What teaching strategies and methodologies are commonly used?
- To what extent are teachers given support in developing differentiated teaching strategies to ensure that all students' needs are addressed?
- To what extent have faculty members discussed the relationship among teaching strategies, methodologies, and student performance?

Indicator 5.3 *The institution is actively engaged in integrating new technology into the instructional program of the school.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the institution have a team in place to review technology advances in instruction and how it can be adapted and used effectively in the school?
- To what extent does the institution have policies in place to govern the acceptance of credits earned through outside online programs?
- How are faculty members trained to use technology more effectively in their own classrooms?
- To what extent does the school offer online learning options or virtual classroom experiences for students?

What are the Institution's Strengths and Key Issues for Criterion 5? (no specific number of responses is required)

Strengths:

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-

Key Issues (Prioritized):

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Suggested Sources of Evidence (to be made available upon request during the site visit)

- Examination of representative student work
- Observations of students engaged in learning
- Student interviews and self-reflections about learning
- Student learning data from school profile
- Documents used in training workshops for teachers related to instructional practices
- Identification of resource materials (books, articles, etc.) that are used to improve the instructional program of the school
- Documents used in the evaluation of teachers that indicate how they are reviewed in regard to instructional practices used in their classrooms

Criterion 6: Use of Assessment

The instructional staff uses established assessment procedures to design, administer, deliver, and evaluate courses, programs, and student learning levels. The institution recognizes the central role of its faculty for improving courses and programs through the assessment instruments and practices used in the school. Assessment is used to measure student progress, to modify learning approaches, and to carry out institutional planning and ongoing school improvement.

Indicator 6.1 *Clear learning outcomes are developed for each course so that success can be measured and students who are struggling can be identified and helped.*

Discussion Questions

- How are core competencies and specific learning outcomes developed for every course?
- How are courses regularly evaluated in regard to depth, breadth, rigor, and sequencing?
- What improvements to courses and programs have occurred as a result of analysis of learning data?

Indicator 6.2 *The institution gathers learning data from multiple sources, disaggregates and analyzes the results, draws conclusions, and makes recommendations for change based on assessment results.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent do the administration and faculty frequently meet to analyze student learning data and use results to improve the educational program of the school?
- What changes have faculty made in teaching methodologies or instructional strategies to improve learning as a result of learning data analysis?
- How does the school document the conclusions it reaches when analyzing student learning data so that recommendations can be made to address key issues?
- How are assessment results integrated into the institution's teaching and learning process with a focus on individual student learning?
- How are the results of data analysis connected to the schoolwide *Action Plan* so that student learning needs are the driving force of the school?
- How are assessment results evaluated with school SLOs in view?

Indicator 6.3 *Student learning data analysis is used to make institutional changes that enables students to reach educational goals and achieve academic success.*

Discussion Questions

- How often do the administration and faculty meet to talk about student learning levels, assessment results, etc.?
- To what extent do faculty members use formative and summative assessment results to modify learning and teaching approaches?
- How has the analysis of learning data impacted the instructional program of the school and improved learning levels for students?
- How does the school use assessment results to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and courses it offers?

Indicator 6.4 *Assessment results are reported regularly to all stakeholders so that accountability can be maintained and that student learning remains the focus of the school.*

Discussion Questions

- How often are student learning results reported to appropriate stakeholder groups, i.e. governing body, faculty, and community members? How is this done?
- What processes are in place to use learning data analysis as a way to identify students who require additional help?
- How are learning results reported to the community at large?

Indicator 6.5 *The institution relies on assessment results for institutional planning, Action Plan revision, and resource allocation.*

Discussion Questions

- Who is involved in the institutional planning of the school? Are all stakeholders represented?
- How often is learning data analysis used to assess the relevance and appropriateness of course offerings at the institution?
- To what extent does the governing body and administration make financial allocation decisions based on the analysis of learning data?
- In what way has the assessment of learning data resulted in the modification of the schoolwide *Action Plan*?

What are the Institution's Strengths and Key Issues for Criterion 6? (no specific number of responses is required)

Strengths:

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-

Key Issues (Prioritized):

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Suggested Sources of Evidence (to be made available upon request during the site visit)

- Listing of all assessment instruments and processes and student learning data analysis
- Schoolwide Learner Outcomes and courses objectives for each class or program offered
- Documentation showing pass rate for each program requiring a licensure exam
- Evidence that analysis of learning data is driving the school's programs and is embedded in the schoolwide *Action Plan*

Criterion 7: Student Support Services

The institution recruits and admits students who are able to benefit from its programs. Student support services address the identified needs of students and create 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 Schoolwide Learner Outcomes, faculty, staff, and student input and other appropriate measures in order to improve the effectiveness of these services.

Indicator 7.1 *The institution provides sufficient student support services that enhance the learning environment and encourage the achievement of Schoolwide Learner Outcomes.*

Discussion Questions

- What specific support services are provided to the students by the institution?
- To what extent does the institution offer financial aid counseling, learning resource assistance, academic counseling, personal counseling, technology support, and health services?
- By what means does the institution assure the quality of its student support services?
- How does the institution demonstrate that these services support student learning?
- How is information regarding student services shared with students so that they know all the options available to them?

Indicator 7.2 *The institution designs, maintains, and evaluates counseling and/or academic advising programs to support student development and success in the transition to further education or employment opportunities.*

Discussion Questions

- How does the institution develop, implement, and evaluate counseling and/or academic advising?
- How does the counseling or academic advising program assist students directly with their transition to advanced educational opportunities or connection to employment opportunities?
- What professional development opportunities are provided to school counselors or advisors?

Indicator 7.3 *The institution provides support for all students from the recruitment and admissions phase to the successful completion of the school program of choice.*

Discussion Questions

- How does the school address:
    - Marketing, community awareness, recruitment of new students?
    - Transitioning new students into the school?
    - Providing meaningful learning experiences for students?
    - Transitioning students into job placement or further education?
    - Assessment of success in years that follow to ensure that the students reach their desired outcomes?

- To what extent does the school have clear admission policies in line with its mission that guides student admission?
- To what extent does the institution provide students with information on school policies and procedures that clarifies expectations that impact them?
- How are students given counseling regarding the completion of their program so that they stay on track and successfully meet their goals?

Indicator 7.4 *The institution regularly evaluates student needs in order to provide support services that increase the likelihood of success for all students.*

Discussion Questions

- How does the institution research and identify the learning support needs of its student population and provide appropriate services and programs to address those needs?
- To what extent does the institution offer appropriate extra-curricular and co-curricular programs (whenever possible) that meet the needs of its constituency?
- How are online services and services at off-site locations evaluated?
- How frequently does the institution evaluate student support services and revise what is offered to meet current student needs?

Indicator 7.5 *The institution maintains student records permanently, securely, and confidentially with provision for secure backup of all files.*

Discussion Questions

- How does the institution publish and follow established policies for release of student records?
- To what extent are there institutional policies in place that govern the maintenance and security of student records?
- To what extent are all student records kept in a secure location and protected from fire damage or loss?

Indicator 7.6 *Institutional information is easily accessible to all stakeholders and prospective students and is free from misrepresentation or false promises.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the institution provide a catalog for its constituents with precise, accurate, and current information?
- How does the school clearly identify where publications with policies and procedures can be accessed?

- How does the school assure that accepted students can benefit from the program they enter?
- How does the school document the accomplishment of the intended outcomes?

What are the Institution's Strengths and Key Issues for Criterion 7? (no specific number of responses is required)

Strengths:

-
-

Key Issues (Prioritized):

-
-

Suggested Sources of Evidence (to be made available upon request during the site visit)

- Written policies and procedures connected to student transcripts
- Student personnel records, including admission and scholastic records
- Placement information and follow-up data and studies regarding the transition of students from the program to places of employment
- Description of health services provided
- Professional development opportunities for support staff in charge of student services

Criterion 8: Resource Management

Financial resources are sufficient to support student learning programs and services. 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.

Indicator 8.1 The institution has sufficient resources to offer its current educational courses and programs.

Discussion Questions

- Has the school stayed within budget for the past three years?
- What evidence is there that the institution has sufficient revenues to support educational improvements?
- How does the institution review its mission and goals as part of the annual fiscal planning process?

Indicator 8.2 *The institution operates with financial integrity and transparency and has a management system in place with appropriate control mechanisms to ensure sound financial practices are followed.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent are clear financial operating procedures in place with appropriate checks and balances?
- What do the annual audit statements reveal about the integrity of the institution's financial management?
- How does the institution provide timely corrections to audit exceptions and management advice?
- To what extent does the institution regularly review financial policies and practices and adjust to changing needs and conditions?
- How does the institution report regularly to all stakeholders with financial updates and decisions?
- To what extent is there sufficient cash flow to maintain school programs?
- To what extent are there sufficient reserves in place to respond to emergencies and budget shortfalls?
- To what extent does the institution have sufficient insurance?
- How does the institution oversee financial aid, grants, externally funded programs, contractual relationships, auxiliary organizations, and institutional investments and assets?

Indicator 8.3 *Institutional planning reflects a realistic assessment of current financial resources and looks forward in long-range strategic planning.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the governing body and administration receive regular reports on the financial condition of the institution?
- How does the governing body and administration connect short-term and long-term financial planning with the schoolwide *Action Plan's* identified priorities?
- To what extent are institutional funds currently being used judiciously so that the facilities and support materials are sufficient for all the programs and courses offered?
- To what extent does the institution have plans for payments of long-term liabilities and obligations, including debt, health benefits, insurance costs, building maintenance costs, etc.?

Indicator 8.4 *The institution provides facilities that are clean, safe, and well-maintained in order to provide for an effective learning environment.*

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the institution annually review needs for improved or additional facilities with a focus on student learning?
- How is the learning environment enhanced by the facilities or how are the facilities an impediment to the successful completion of SLOs?
- To what extent do the facilities provide a safe and nurturing learning environment for students that makes them feel welcomed?

What are the Institution's Strengths and Key Issues for Criterion 8? (no specific number of responses is required)

Strengths:

-
-

Key Issues (Prioritized):

-
-

Suggested Sources of Evidence (to be made available upon request during the site visit)

- Copy of the institution's budgets for past three years and projected budget for next year
- Financial management policies and procedures, routine purchasing policies/procedures
- Student financial aid records and procedures
- Copy of financial statements including notes audited by an independent certified public accountant (or other as required by state law) for the last two fiscal years
- Health department inspection reports
- A copy of system and forms used in reporting accidents
- Long-range strategic financial plan (if it exists)
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of the maintenance program
- Reports of safety inspections
- Insurance policies for facilities
- Copy of facilities lease agreements
- Evaluations of the safety and security plan
- Earthquake and other natural disaster preparedness and evacuation plans

Criterion 9: Community Connection

The institution seeks to enhance its educational effectiveness by developing close partnerships and relationships with community members. Connections within the community provide students with expanded learning experiences, including additional educational or vocational opportunities.

Indicator 9.1 *Efforts are made by the institution to connect to community leaders, businesses, and organizations that can enhance the learning opportunities for students.*

Discussion Questions

- What connections with local businesses and organizations are currently in place?
- To what extent do community leaders come on campus for events and activities?

Indicator 9.2 *The institution has outlets for students in community service or internship opportunities that are connected to student programs that will enhance their learning experiences in line with the institution's mission.*

Discussion Questions

- What service or internship opportunities are currently in place for students?
- What evidence can be provided to indicate the reputation of the institution in the community?
- What efforts have been made to connect the school with its community through service projects?

Indicator 9.3 *The institution informs its community regarding its mission, its programs and learning opportunities, recognizing the benefits that community support can bring.*

Discussion Questions

- How does the school use its profile (Chapter I of the *Self-Study Report*) to understand and connect to its community?
- How have students been successful in the community after leaving the school?
- What programs or processes are in place to connect the school to its community?

What are the Institution's Strengths and Key Issues for Criterion 9? (no specific number of responses is required)

Strengths:

-
-

Key Issues (Prioritized):

-
-

Suggested Sources of Evidence (to be made available upon request during the site visit)

- List of local businesses that could potentially be of assistance to the school
- List of all service opportunities in the last three years
- Evidence of surveys or other efforts to follow graduates after leaving the school

Criterion 10: Action Plan for Continuing Improvement

The institution uses the self-study process to identify key issues that are inserted into a schoolwide *Action Plan* that governs school improvement activities and events. The schoolwide *Action Plan* is used regularly, reviewed annually, and monitored consistently by the governing body to ensure continuing school improvement.

Indicator 10.1 The institution has created an Action Plan that reflects the efforts of all stakeholders to plan for future growth and improvement.

Discussion Questions

- To what extent does the *Action Plan* identify specific goals, timelines for completion, persons responsible, reporting instruments, and benchmarks to measure accomplishment?
- How is the *Action Plan* reviewed annually and how are revisions made to respond to changing conditions and current student needs?
- How does the *Action Plan* focus primarily on student learning needs?

Indicator 10.2 As a result of the accreditation process, the institution has identified key issues (short-term and long-term) that will impact student learning and increase the achievement levels of students.

Discussion Questions

- How did the self-study process identify the key issues for the school?
- How have the key issues been prioritized by the institution?
- To what extent have all stakeholders met to discuss the *Action Plan* and give input to its implementation?

Indicator 10.3 The institution has procedures in place to implement the Action Plan with the support of stakeholders.

Discussion Questions

- For each *Action Plan* key issue, how has the school identified an individual or group responsible to implement the needed action steps to address the key issue?

- To what extent has the governing body and administration funded the activities or events needed to address key issues?
- What opportunities are provided for all stakeholders to have a voice in the regular review and revision of the *Action Plan*?

Indicator 10.4 The institution has a definitive plan for how the Action Plan is to be monitored to maintain accountability, as well as to report progress to all stakeholders.

Discussion Questions

- How does the *Action Plan* specify how the improvement efforts will be monitored and who will oversee the process?
- How will progress be reported to all stakeholders?

Indicator 10.5 The schoolwide Action Plan is used for institutional planning, resource allocation, and the evaluation of existing programs.

Discussion Questions

- To what extent is the schoolwide *Action Plan* user-friendly and practical for all stakeholders' involvement?
- How does the governing body use the *Action Plan* in resource allocation discussions?
- To what extent does the school leadership use the *Action Plan* in its decision-making processes?

What are the Institution's Strengths and Key Issues for Criterion 10? (no specific number of responses is required)

Strengths:

-
-

Key Issues (Prioritized):

-
-

Suggested Sources of Evidence (to be made available upon request during the site visit)

- Minutes of Board meetings where *Action Plan* was discussed and evaluated
- Copy of long-range strategic plan (if it exists)
- Evidence that the *Action Plan* is regularly used and has brought change to the institution

[This concludes Chapter III of the *Self-Study Report* produced in Task 3 that responds to the WASC Postsecondary Criteria.]

Chapter IV — Task 4

Task 4 Revise the schoolwide *Action Plan* based on the key issues identified in the self-study process

Participants:

- Leadership Team

Product:

- *Self-Study Report,* Chapter IV

Procedures:

- Review and discuss the strengths and key issues identified after each criterion response in Chapter III of the *Self-Study Report*.
- Complete the synthesis process described as follows:
  1. Copy all the identified "strengths" from the entire *Self-Study Report* and paste them on one page so that they are in one complete list of all self-study strengths.
  2. Note which strengths are similar in topic or nature and combine them as logically possible. It often works that two or three separate but similar "strengths" can be fused into one more complete and expanded "strength." Collapse all strengths into common strands or themes.
  3. Through this process, a larger list can be boiled down to a smaller list of major schoolwide strengths. This provides a "big-picture" look at the strengths of the institution identified in the entire self-study process.
  4. Next, do the same for "key issues" from the entire report; copy and then paste them into one complete list.
  5. Repeat the synthesis work and create a synthesized list of major key issues.
  6. An added step is involved here — prioritize this list in order of importance, keeping in mind that the areas that most greatly impact student learning are the most critical.
  7. Select the top key issues that you want to add to the schoolwide *Action Plan* as the major key issues to address in the next three years.

After completing the synthesis process and identifying the major key issues, these should be integrated into the schoolwide *Action* Plan and mailed to the WASC office by June 1.

- In the revised *Action Plan,* include the following components to address each key issue:
  - ✓ Statement of the key issue
  - ✓ Rationale for the key issue based on self-study findings and Visiting Committee recommendations
  - ✓ Student Learning Outcomes addressed
  - ✓ Ways of assessing progress
  - ✓ Specific steps to address the key issue
  - ✓ Timeline for specific steps

- ✓ Persons responsible and others who are involved
- ✓ Resources needed
- ✓ Means to monitor and report progress to stakeholders

- Ensure stakeholder consensus on the *Action Plan*
- Develop strategies that provide for the ongoing involvement of stakeholders

The Site Visit

After the institution has completed its self-study, a three and one-half day site visit follows with WASC-trained educators who come to the campus to validate the programs and operations of the school based on WASC Postsecondary Criteria and provide recommendations for future school improvement. Through observation, interviews, examination of student work, and various meetings the Visiting Committee gains insight into the school culture and is able to give recommendations to the school as it plans for future school improvements.

The Visiting Committee, made up of professional peers from WASC-accredited schools, offers independent insights based on careful analysis of the self-study during its onsite evaluation.

The mission of the Visiting Committee is to:

- Validate and enhance the institution's program to support student learning using the WASC Postsecondary Criteria as the standard.
- Confirm and validate evidence for the assertions in the *Self-Study Report* with the WASC Postsecondary Criteria in view.
- Provide insights on challenges not identified by the institution in the self-study.
- Assist the school in revising its *Action Plan* to bring greatest focus to key issues that impact student learning.
- Reinforce and extend the institution's commitment to ongoing school improvement.
- Assure the WASC Commission that the institution continues to meet WASC Postsecondary Criteria and eligibility requirements.
- Assure the WASC Commission that the institution has been responsive to key issues identified by previous Visiting Committees.
- Assure the WASC Commission that the institution has developed sound evaluation and planning procedures to foster improvement of student achievement and success in meeting Schoolwide Learner Outcomes.
- Assure the WASC Commission that the institution merits reaffirmation of accreditation or advise the Commission that the team cannot recommend such action.

Visiting Committee Members have a special responsibility to maintain the integrity of the accreditation process which enables WASC to provide assurance to the public that the institution is worthy of accredited status.

Preparing for the Site Visit

Eighteen months prior to the anticipated date of the evaluation visit, the WASC office will contact the institution regarding the upcoming visit and written *Self-Study Report*. It is important that all institutions send representatives to the training session provided by WASC eighteen months prior to hosting a Visiting Committee.

Approximately nine months in advance of the site visit, the WASC office will assign a Visiting Committee Chair to lead the site visit at the school. The Chair will establish contact with the school and will serve as a guide for the school throughout the site visit process. The Chair functions as a mentor by answering accreditation questions, giving advice on rough drafts of the *Self-Study Report*, and preparing the school for the visit. The Visiting Committee Chair visits the school 6–12 months ahead of the accreditation visit to become better acquainted with the Leadership Team and school personnel.

The Leadership Team **(**consisting of the Self-Study Coordinator, the chair of each Focus Group, appropriate program/school administrators, and other members of the educational community) is responsible to host the site visit to ensure that it is successful and profitable.

The Visiting Committee

The WASC Visiting Committee consists of experienced educators from WASC-accredited schools, either faculty members, administrators, or others who are knowledgeable in the field of postsecondary education. All Visiting Committee Members are required to attend a team member training workshop conducted by WASC prior to the visit.

Although institutions may ask for special expertise for Visiting Committee Members, they may not request specific individuals. Every attempt is made to structure Visiting Committees to reflect the unique nature of the institution and the community it serves. The size and complexity of the institution being reviewed will determine the number of members on the Visiting Committee.

The Visiting Committee Chair organizes the site visit, confirms the schedule with the school, approves hotel accommodations, and oversees the first draft of the *Visiting Committee Report* (VCR). Prior to the visit, the Chair serves as the contact person with the institution and coordinates all aspects of the visit with the Leadership Team. During the site visit, the Chair organizes team discussions, sees that all necessary contacts are made, sees to the needs of the Committee, and ensures that time is used effectively. At the conclusion of the visit, the Chair leads the exit meeting that reports the team's major findings to the school and its stakeholders.

The Visiting Committee Chair makes at least one previsit to the campus the semester before the scheduled team visit. Visiting the institution gives the Chair the opportunity to establish personal relationships with key individuals, get a sense of the physical layout of the school, and begin finalizing logistical arrangements. This previsit also provides the institution with the opportunity to correct any deficiencies the Chair notes in the rough draft of the school *Self-Study Report*.

Visiting Committee Members provide an independent peer review of the institution. Members use the WASC Postsecondary Criteria as the foundation as they work as a team to prepare the *Visiting Committee Report* for both the WASC Commission and the institution. The *VCR*

analyzes the adequacy of school 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.

Visiting Committee Members are expected to disclose any possible conflict of interest before accepting an assignment. WASC Commission policy identifies certain conditions under which a team member should decline an invitation to serve or ask for an assignment to another committee.

WASC will not knowingly assign an educator to serve on a Visiting Committee if he/she has:

- Any current or prior employment at the institution being reviewed
- Any current or prior candidacy for employment at the institution being reviewed
- Any current or prior service as a paid consultant or other business relationship with the institution that may create a conflict or the appearance of a conflict of interest
- Any personal or financial interest in the ownership or operation of the institution
- Any close personal or familial relationships with a member of the institution
- Any other personal or professional connections that would create either a conflict or the appearance of a conflict of interest
- Any receipt of remuneration, honoraria, honors, or other awards from the institution

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

[*A Visiting Committee Member Checklist and a Visiting Committee Chair Checklist that describe specific directions and responsibilities can be found in the Resources section at the end of this document.*]

Suggested Site Visit Schedule

The schedule for the site visit is developed collaboratively with the Visiting Committee Chair and the school Leadership Team. It is up to the school to notify all stakeholders of meeting times and locations. The Site Visit Schedule can be flexible to accommodate members of committees, Board members, or other stakeholder groups. The schedule may also be modified to accommodate the size of the school, the number of separate campuses, and the number of team members required. It is also possible for smaller schools (under 500 students) to shorten the visit to two and one-half days.

<u>Preparation Day (Sunday)</u>

1:00–1:30	Visiting Committee arrives at the hotel or school
1:30–3:30	The Chair leads a preparation meeting for the Visiting Committee
3:30–4:00	Tour of the facility (school provides maps, class schedules, personnel lists, etc.)
4:00–5:00	Visiting Committee meets with the school Leadership Team
5:00–6:00	Schools may arrange (optional) for a Board reception or social function that includes institutional personnel, Governing Board members, advisory committee members, local community leaders, etc.

First Day (Monday)

7:30–8:30	Meeting with Leadership Team
8:30–12:00	Visiting Committee interviews, class observations, review of documents, etc.
12:00–1:00	Lunch (with student group or faculty)
1:00–3:00	Visiting Committee continues visiting, observing, and writing its report
3:00–4:30	Focus Group Meetings
4:30–5:00	Optional Leadership Team Meeting to report on Day One findings

Second Day (Tuesday)

7:30–8:30	Meeting with Leadership Team
8:30–12:00	Visiting Committee interviews, class observations, review of documents, etc.
12:00–1:00	Lunch (with student group or faculty)
1:00–3:00	Visiting Committee continues visiting, observing, and writing report
3:00–4:30	Focus Group Meetings
4:30–5:00	Optional Leadership Team Meeting to report on Day Two findings

Third Day (Wednesday)

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

What Occurs During the Site Visit

The site visit consists of observations, interviews, and meetings with governing body members, faculty members, students, Leadership Team members, and other identified stakeholders.

The Visiting Committee is there to confirm the accuracy and thoroughness of the self-study and then write a report to the WASC Commission with its visit findings. The Committee is not there to evaluate individual teachers in the classrooms; their observations help them gain a sense of the learning atmosphere on campus and the level of student engagement.

The Visiting Committee meets with administrators, the Leadership Team, and other members of the institution's staff most involved in preparation of the *Self-Study Report* in order to ask questions they have from their analysis of the *Self-Study*.

The combination of these activities, added to in-depth discussions among the Visiting Committee Members, provides the necessary information to write an accurate *Visiting Committee Report* for the WASC Commission.

The Exit Meeting

The Visiting Committee holds a final open meeting with members of the institution's constituents on the final day. At this meeting, the Visiting Committee reports its findings and highlights the school's major areas of strength and articulates the key issues that will become part of the institution's *Action Plan* in the future.

After the meeting concludes, Visiting Committee Members chat briefly and informally with those in attendance and give appropriate thanks before leaving the campus. The team should keep in mind that under no circumstances should the Visiting Committee's confidential recommendation to the Commission regarding accreditation term be revealed. The Committee only makes a recommendation for a term to the WASC Commission; it is up to the Commission to make the final decision on the school's term. Therefore, the Visiting Committee should not express what recommendation they made but allow the Commission to give official notice of the term granted.

Documents the Visiting Committee Produces

The Visiting Committee's main responsibility during the site visit is to write a 30–40 page report on its findings. This report is submitted both to the school and to the WASC Commission who has the responsibility to grant the term of accreditation. The *Visiting Committee Report* provides the findings of the Visiting Committee. The most important part of the report is the identification of the school's major strengths and major key issues that need to be addressed for the school's continuing improvement.

The Visiting Committee Report

The following suggestions are offered to Visiting Committee Chairs as they guide the Visiting Committee in completing the *Visiting Committee Report (VCR).*

1. The *VCR* 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 school improvement.
2. In writing the *VCR*:
    a. Validate the institution in light of its own stated mission, objectives, and the WASC Postsecondary Criteria.
    b. It is critical that the *VCR* contain the analysis of learning data, along with charts and graphs, taken from the profile section of Chapter I so that the WASC Commission can accurately evaluate the level of student learning taking place.
    c. Include favorable comments when deserved.
    d. Provide evidence to support the key issues identified by the team and provide a fair and useful estimate of the effectiveness of the institution.
    e. Emphasize student achievement and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes.
    f. Avoid naming individuals, either in praise or blame. Comment, if necessary, on the office and not the officeholder when offering recommendations.

g. Avoid being prescriptive, leaving specific remedies to be worked out by the school. It is best to write recommendations that include "who" is responsible," "what" to do, and "why" to do it…leaving the "how" to do it up to them.

3. In preparing the *VCR*, consideration should be given to the following:
   a. Is the *VCR* consistent throughout — no mixed or conflicting messages?
   b. Does the *VCR* say exactly what is intended, so that there can be no misinterpretations?
   c. Does the language of the *VCR* clearly represent observations, conclusions, and recommendations as coming from the team as a whole, not just from one member's perspective?
   d. Does the *VCR* deal fairly with the entire institution, without advocating selectively for certain special interests?
   e. Does the text of the *VCR* support the key issues identified? Do the observations and conclusions clearly state the context or evidence on which the statements are based? Are the specific WASC criteria cited to refer the institution to statements of best practice and Commission expectations?
   f. Is the tone of the *VCR* 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 *VCR* should encourage the institution to take appropriate actions but should be stated diplomatically.
4. The *VCR* is written for the Commission and the school — be sure that the *VCR* is written with both audiences in view. A template is provided online for the *VCR*. It includes the following components:

   Title Page: This page states the name of the institution visited, dates of the visit, and the name of the team chair.

   Chapter I — 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. Briefly summarize the most critical information from the student/community profile that impacts the school, including the following:

   - Brief description of the students and community served by the school
   - School analysis of student achievement data
   - Other pertinent data

   Chapter II — Progress Report based on the key issues of the previous WASC Visiting Committee: This section of the report validates efforts by the institution to address key issues from previous Visiting Committees. Thoughtful responses to the key issues are expected from an institution.

   Chapter III — Evaluation of School's Response to the WASC Postsecondary Criteria: This section provides most of the substance of the *VCR* and is the section to which each team member makes a contribution. 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 consistent with the WASC Postsecondary Criteria.

Chapter IV — Action Plan Effectiveness: The report ends with the identification of the school's major areas of strength and its major key issues that will be embedded into the schoolwide *Action Plan.*

Documentation and Justification Statement

In addition to the *Visiting Committee Report*, the Visiting Committee also completes a 5–7 page *Documentation and Justification Statement*. This is a confidential document that includes the Visiting Committee's evaluation of the school as it reviews each of the WASC Postsecondary Criteria and the overarching goals of the self-study process. The last page of the document gives a detailed accounting of how the Visiting Committee arrived at its term recommendation to the WASC Commission (a copy of this document is included in the Resources section).

Accreditation Status

The WASC Commission meets three times a year and reviews all the documentation of site visits, reading through the *Visiting Committee Report* and *Documentation and Justification Statement* for each school visited. The Commission then grants a term of accreditation based on the evidence presented. If there are questions that arise during the evaluation of a *Visiting Committee Report*, a call is placed to the Visiting Committee Chair for clarification. The principal of each institution is notified following the Commission meeting regarding the term of accreditation granted.

The WASC Commission members have identified the most important accreditation factors that impact their decision on the term to be granted. They look at the WASC Postsecondary Criteria to see if the school has met them and that they support high achievement for all students. In addition, the Commission looks at the five overarching goals of the self-study process to determine if the school has successfully accomplished them, listed as follows:

1. Institutional Mission and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs)
2. Organizational Infrastructure and School Leadership
3. Faculty and Staff
4. Curriculum
5. Instructional Program
6. Use of Assessment
7. Student Support Services
8. Resource Management
9. Community Connection
10. *Action Plan* for Continual Improvement
11. The involvement and collaboration of all stakeholders in the *Self-Study* process
12. The clarification of the institution's purpose and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes
13. The assessment of the actual student program and its impact on student learning

14. The development of a schoolwide *Action Plan* that addresses identified key issues
15. The development and implementation of an accountability system for monitoring the accomplishment of the schoolwide *Action Plan*

Based on these factors, the Commission may grant a term of 6 years, 6 years with a one-day review, 3 years, 2 years, 1 year, or a denial of accreditation. Terms of 3 years, 2 years, or 1 year have a one-day or two-day site visit at the end of the term.

After the Site Visit

After the visit, the *Self-Study* Coordinator and Administrator/Director meet immediately with the Leadership Team to review the *Visiting Committee Report* and begin the follow-up process.

The Leadership Team coordinates the refining and implementation of the action steps for each section of the schoolwide *Action Plan*. The narrative suggestions and key issues identified by the Visiting Committee should be integrated into the *Action Plan*.

The school should mail five (5) hard copies of the *Visiting Committee Report* to the WASC office at 533 Airport Blvd., Suite 200, Burlingame, CA 94010. Schools should also email an electronic copy of the *Visiting Committee Report* to both the WASC offices in Burlingame (mail@acswasc.org) and Temecula (mailsocal@acswasc.org).

A copy of the modified *Action Plan* should be sent to WASC by June 1. The Leadership Team involves the total staff in annual assessment of progress, including data analysis about student learning in relation to SLOs and academic standards; this will result in modifications annually of the *Action Plan*, including annual Board approval.

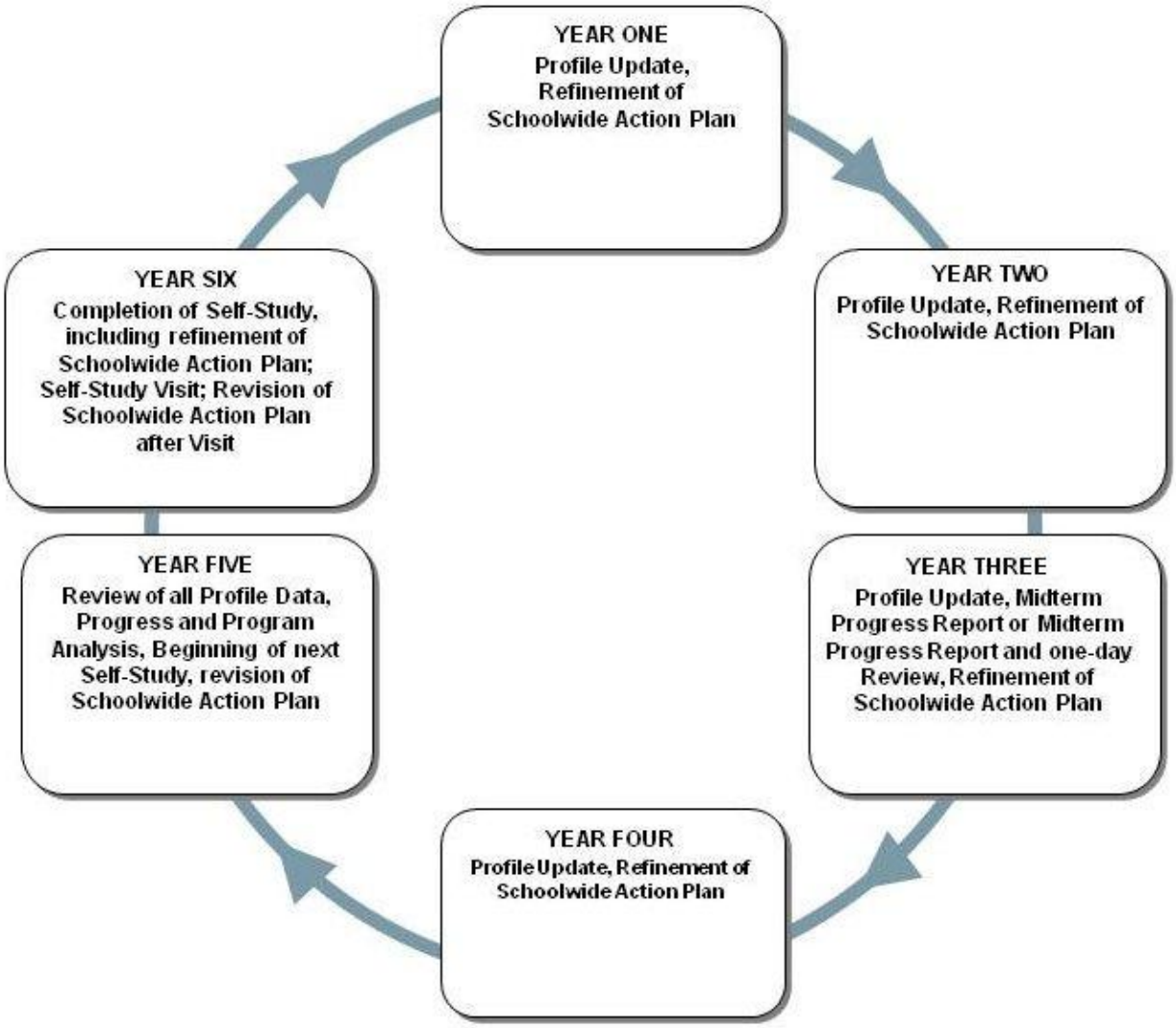
If the school annually reviews its *Action Plan* and progress on each key issue, the reports generated will be included in the next self-study.

After the visit is completed, the institution should do the following:

1. Annually update the student/community profile and analyze it with all shareholders.
2. Annually summarize progress on the *Action Plan* key issues, noting responses and making any necessary modifications or refinements to the *Action Plan*.
3. Periodically, review the school's SLOs.
4. Analyze and synthesize data that provides evidence of school progress and complete a three-year written report for submission to WASC.
5. Host a one-day review if the school was granted a six-year term with a one-day visit.
6. In preparation for the next self-study (usually 18 months prior to the full self-study visit), ensure that all shareholders are knowledgeable of student achievement data and other current data, including progress on all aspects of the *Action Plan*.
7. Using the WASC Postsecondary Criteria, involve shareholders through Focus Groups in the examination of the program using the information from the past years about student achievement and program changes.

The WASC Six-Year Cycle

Regardless of what term of accreditation is awarded, all WASC schools are on a six-year cycle. A major self-study is only completed once every six years. Other written reports may be required based on terms of accreditation but all schools only complete a full self-study once every six years.



WASC Six-Year Cycle

Possible WASC Visits During the Six-Year Cycle

Visits

Schools that have been granted a one-, two-, or three-year term will have visits at the conclusion of their term. Written reports are required in preparation for these visits with special focus on the key issues left by the previous Visiting Committee (Note: the report is not a full *Self-Study Report*, a report on progress made on key issues left by the previous Visiting Committee).

Schools that have been granted a six-year term with a midterm visit will have a one-day visit from two members of the previous Visiting Committee to check up on progress made on the major key issues. The school must provide a written *Midterm Report* for this visit; the Visiting Committee will also send a written report to the WASC Commission.

Special Visits

From time to time special circumstances occur that warrant a special visit from WASC to a school site. An official complaint may generate the need for a follow-up visit. Occasionally, schools request a special visit to assist them with a major changes or issue.

Substantive Change Visits

The WASC Commission encourages school improvement. It has the responsibility, however, to monitor major changes that occur in postsecondary schools to ensure that the WASC criteria is still being met and institutional goals are kept in view. In order to maintain their integrity, institutions must guarantee the quality of their programs and services even as they make changes. When a substantive change occurs at a school, WASC sends one or two members to the school for a one-day visit to ensure that the changes have had a positive impact on the school.

Below is a list of six conditions which typically require substantive change approval and a one-day site visit:

1. Change in mission, scope, or name of the institution
2. Change in the nature of the constituency served (new demographic added to current constituency)
3. Change in the location or geographical area served (new or added location offering at least 50% of instructional services)
4. Change in the control of the institution (change in legal status, governance, ownership, merge, split, etc.)
5. Change in courses/programs that represents a significant departure from current practice (new curriculum, faculty, facilities, certificate program, use of distance learning, etc.) that impacts the entire school
6. Change in credit awarded (addition of more than 50% in number of credit hours awarded, or a change from clock hours to credit hours)

Schools that require a substantive change visit should complete the “Substantive Change Explanation Form” available on the WASC website (www.acswasc.org) and send it to the WASC office in Temecula. There is a fee assessed for the substantive change visit.

WASC Resources

This section provides WASC resources that are available to assist schools and Visiting Committees in the accreditation process. In addition to the resources listed, there are many templates, samples, forms, and explanations that can be found on the WASC website (www.acswasc.org).

WASC resources include:

1. Resources for Schools
2. Resources for Visiting Committees

Resources for Schools

School Self-Study Coordinator/Administrator Checklist

Before the Site Visit

1. _____ Participate in WASC training sessions One, Two, and Three.
2. _____ Establish a general calendar for the major self-study events and a more detailed timeline of specific committee meetings and tasks to be accomplished.
3. _____ Ensure there is appropriate support for the visit from governance leaders, district leaders, etc., including the allowance of professional time for staff members, financial resources, and clerical/technical help.
4. _____ Orient faculty, staff, and students to their roles in the accreditation process. This orientation should include:
   - An overview of the WASC accreditation process and its benefits to the school community
   - Accreditation term factors as seen in the *Documentation and Justification Statement* used by the Visiting Committee
   - The importance of analyzing learning data, drawing conclusions, recommending changes, and embedding recommendations into the schoolwide *Action Plan*
   - The importance of the ongoing improvement process for successful student learning
5. _____ Appoint leaders and teacher/staff members to appropriate groups.
   - The Leadership Team (composed of the Focus Group chairs, the Self-Study Coordinator, the Administrator/Director and other selected members)
6. _____ Train the Focus Group Chairs/Leaders and emphasize:
   - A review of the basic purpose of the self-study, visit, and school improvement process
   - The importance of verification and in-depth gathering of evidence
   - The use of the WASC Postsecondary Criteria, discussion questions, and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes
   - How groups should function, how often to meet, what kind of written reports to produce that will become part of the self-study
   - How to synthesize findings and identify clear strengths and key issues for each criterion
7. _____ Participate in regular meetings to monitor progress of the self-study groups.
8. _____ When contacted by the Visiting Committee Chair, begin planning for the visit schedule, accommodations, and Chair expectations.
9. _____ Oversee the editing and completion of the final *Self-Study Report*. Stakeholders should read it and have input to ensure the document is accurate and representative of all groups.

10. _____ Prepare copies of the *Self-Study Report* to be sent to the Visiting Committee Members approximately 4–6 weeks prior to the visit.
11. _____ Send an electronic copy of the *Self-Study Report* to mail@acswasc.org.
12. _____ Prior to the site visit, finalize the schedule with the Visiting Committee Chair.

During the Site Visit

13. _____ Provide the Visiting Committee with a comfortable working area, institutional map, schedule of classes, parking places, name tags, and office supplies. Ensure that there is adequate technology support as requested by the Chair.
14. _____ Remind all Focus Groups of their meeting times; remind Leadership Team of its daily meetings. Stay in continual contact with the Visiting Committee Chair to smooth out the visit details.
15. _____ Work with the Leadership Team to revise the schoolwide *Action Plan* according to the findings of the self-study, inserting the major key issues into the *Action Plan*.
16. _____ Arrange a place for the Exit Meeting — be sure that all stakeholders are invited.

After the Site Visit

17. _____ Sends ten (10) copies of the *Visiting Committee Report* to the WASC office in Burlingame, CA. Send an electronic copy to both WASC offices.
18. _____ Integrate the findings of the Visiting Committee into the schoolwide *Action Plan*. All major key issues listed in the *Visiting Committee Report* should be inserted into the schoolwide *Action Plan*.
19. _____ Send the revised *Action Plan* to the WASC office in Temecula, CA by June 1 and distribute copies to all stakeholder groups.
20. _____ Begin the implementation process of the schoolwide *Action Plan* and ensure that all stakeholders understand their responsibilities and tasks involved in bringing school improvement to the campus through the *Action Plan*.

Sample Action Plan Format

Schools are encouraged to design their own *Action Plan* that best fits their school needs and that will be most usable by all stakeholder groups. There are certain components for the *Action Plan,* however, that are required:

- Statement of the Major Key Issue
- Steps Necessary to Address the Key Issue
- Person(s) Responsible for Follow-up
- Timeline for Completion
- Resources Needed
- Assessment Instrument to Measure Progress
- Method to Monitor and Report Progress

The example below is just one way of organizing *Action Plan* activities; school's can develop the format that they like as long as it includes the key components that are required.

Example of *Action Plan* Format

Key Issue: The administration and faculty should develop the school's assessment process so that it includes gathering learning data from multiple sources, disaggregating the data, drawing conclusions, writing recommendations to address issues identified, and connecting them to the schoolwide *Action Plan* so that the analysis of learning data will drive the school instructional program.

Rationale: This key issue is critical to the improvement of the school because student learning is the most important aspect of the school. Analyzing student learning data should impact school planning, teacher evaluation, professional development activities, and resource allocation. Ongoing school improvement should be driven by the analysis of student learning data.

Steps to Address Key Issue	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline for Completion	Resources Needed	Methods to Assess, Monitor, and Report Progress
Identify and gather multiple sources of learning data	Administration Faculty Appointed leader	Fall – this year	Time provided for this activity	Collected learning data; report to Leadership Team and Board
Disaggregate and analyze learning data	Administration Faculty Appointed leader	Fall – this year	Time provided for this activity	Update provided to Board
Complete written report of conclusions from analysis	Administration Faculty Appointed leader	Spring – next year	None	Written conclusions submitted to Leadership Team and Board
Prepare recommendations to respond to issues raised through the analysis of data	Administration Appointed leader	Spring – next year	None	Recommendations submitted to Leadership Team and Board
Connect recommendations to the schoolwide *Action Plan*	Administration	Summer – next year	None	Revised *Action Plan* presented to the Board for approval
Report findings to all stakeholder groups	Administration	Fall – next year	None	Written report provided to students, faculty, and community at large

Resources for the Visiting Committee

Visiting Committee Member Checklist

Before the Visit

1. _____ Attend the one-day WASC member training workshop.
2. _____ Study the WASC *Postsecondary Accreditation Manual* and be familiar with Visiting Committee responsibilities:
    - Understand WASC expectations for Visiting Committee Members
    - Represent your own institution and WASC professionally
    - Maintain careful confidentiality throughout the visit
    - Do not compare the school to your own school — do not use the words, "At my school, we do it this way…"
    - Understand the purpose of the visit is to help the school improve, not to criticize them, condemn them, or imply authority as a Visiting Committee Member over school personnel
3. _____ Review the WASC Postsecondary Criteria and the *Self-Study Report* format to prepare to validate the school's *Self-Study Report*.
4. _____ Receive and respond to instructions from the Chair, including narrative prewriting assignments. Members are responsible to pre-write certain sections of the *Visiting Committee Report* and submit them in advance to the Chair. The Chair will compile the prewriting of all members and come to the site visit with a rough draft of the *Visiting Committee Report*. (Write in narrative style, not with bullets or in outline form).
5. _____ Refer any questions or concerns to the Chair of the Visiting Committee, not the school directly.
6. _____ Review the Site Visit Schedule and clear your calendar from any conflicts.
7. _____ After receiving the *Self-Study Report* from the school:
    - Read the entire *Self-Study Report* carefully — note questions, clarifications needed, inconsistencies, areas of strength, key issues to address, etc.
    - Review to what extent the school meets WASC Criteria and the school's Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs)
    - Validate the schoolwide *Action Plan*
    - Prepare questions regarding issues and concerns, note clarifications and evidence that should be pursued during the visit
8. _____ Receive final communication from the Chair:
    - Confirms initial meeting time and visit logistics
    - Reviews how reimbursable expenses are to be handled

During the Visit

9. _____ Arrive on time for all meetings; be ready to participate in a positive manner.
10. _____ Through observations, interviews, review of documents, examination of student work, and meetings with stakeholder groups, validate the quality of program experienced by students and find evidence of successful student learning.
11. _____ Follow the Chair's direction in visiting classrooms, especially if there are multiple sites.
12. _____ Determine to what degree the SLOs are being accomplished.
13. _____ Look for evidence of an ongoing process for institution improvement through the use of the schoolwide *Action Plan*.
14. _____ Let the process unfold — don't prejudge; validate, verify, and document your findings.
15. _____ Concentrate on being a good listener. Prepare good questions to ask that will lead to quality discussions, not just short yes or no answers.
16. _____ Prepare to lead Focus Group meetings in your assigned area. Have well-prepared questions ready to go to gain input from all members of the Focus Group.
17. _____ Avoid involvement in institution issues that are not pertinent to the self-study and visit. Direct all difficult situations or discussions to the Chair.
18. _____ Work cooperatively with all other Visiting Committee members as findings are discussed and decisions made. This is a consensus process — be a team player!
19. _____ Support the Chair as he/she works with the Leadership Team to thoroughly discuss the synthesis of the concepts of the WASC Postsecondary Criteria, the self-study, and the findings during the visit as reflected in the draft *Visiting Committee Report*.
20. _____ Make necessary *Visiting Committee Report* modifications and finalize the report.
21. _____ Assist in the preparation of the *Documentation and Justification Statement* and the accompanying *Ballot* that will give the WASC Commission your recommendation for a term of accreditation.
22. _____ Complete the expense voucher and the optional chair evaluation form. Keep copies of all receipts.
23. _____ Participate in the presentation of the findings to the entire staff. The recommended term of accreditation is confidential; do not reveal the term or imply the term to anyone.
24. _____ Send appropriation "thank-you's" for the school's hospitality and cooperation in the self-study process.

The WASC 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 — not about criticizing or a show of force as a committee. Visiting Committees have the responsibility of determining whether the institution meets or exceeds the WASC Postsecondary Criteria of accreditation and of providing guidance to the institution in the form of identifying key issues that will improve 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.

Visiting Committee Chair Checklist

Previsit Preparation

1. _____ Return invitation to WASC office accepting the invitation to chair the Visiting Committee.
2. _____ Attend the WASC one-day Chair Training.
3. _____ Become familiar with the *Postsecondary Accreditation Manual*.
4. _____ Begin regular communication with the administrator/director and Self-Study Coordinator to answer questions and give assistance.
5. _____ Arrange a one-day preliminary visit to the school campus.
    - Meet with the administrator/director, Self-Study Coordinator, Leadership Team, and other staff members as possible.
    - Discuss the logistics of the visit, progress made on the self-study, and read the rough draft of early chapters to offer suggestions.
    - Provide an overview of the accreditation process and duties of all stakeholder groups.
    - Validate committee organization/membership.
    - Determine how evidence has been gathered and analyzed with respect to the WASC Postsecondary Criteria and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes.
    - Determine how learning data is analyzed and used in the Focus Group or Leadership Team discussions.
    - Determine if the *Action Plan* is supported by the Focus Groups and Self-Study Committees. Will the *Action Plan* effectively guide the work of the institution and ensure quality learning for students? Can the *Action Plan* sections be implemented immediately within existing resources?
    - Establish the visit schedule to maximize time for dialogue with the Focus Groups and Leadership Team, the gathering of evidence (class/program observations, interviews, examination of student work, and meetings with institutional groups), and time for the Visiting Committee to complete its report.
    - Does the schedule for the visit permit daily dialogue with the Leadership Team regarding preliminary findings, thereby building the trust and rapport for ongoing communication and collaboration?
    - Finalize housing and visit arrangements.
    - Gather copies of previous self-studies, midterm reports, and /or revisit committee reports, current *Action Plan*, student/community profile, and other pertinent background materials.
6. _____ Receive roster of Visiting Committee Members from WASC office.
    - Call each Visiting Committee Member, welcome them to the team, and thank them for their willingness to participate.

- Send initial letter via email, including the institution's description, to the members; WASC will send the postsecondary manual directly to the Visiting Committee Members.
- Ask members to fill out form indicating their preferences for the prewriting assignments for the rough draft of the *Visiting Committee Report*.
- Remind members that they are required to participate in Visiting Committee training.
- Make frequent contact with Visiting Committee Members and keep them updated on visit details and documents in process.

7. _____ Maintain regular contact with the school.
   - Do they need further direct assistance?
   - Is there progress on the self-study?
   - Will the *Action Plan* impact quality learning for students?
8. _____ Send second letter to Visiting Committee Members.
   - Assign prewriting assignments with careful instructions and deadlines.
   - Remind them to compare the institution's self-study to the WASC Postsecondary Criteria and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes.
   - Ask members to send written questions about issues and concerns, and note clarifications and evidence that should be pursued during the visit.
   - Compile a list of questions to bring to the site visit.
   - Include the schedule for the visit.
9. _____ After the *Self-Study Report* has been sent to all Visiting Committee Members by the school, contact the Visiting Committee Members:
   - Confirm the receipt of the *Self-Study Report.*
   - Offer assistance with assigned tasks and prewriting assignments.
   - Remind members to send written questions to be answered during the visit.
   - Confirm the initial meeting time.
10. _____ Write Chapters I and II of the *Visiting Committee Report*.
11. _____ Add the pre-writing sections of Chapter III by the Visiting Committee Members and create a rough draft of the *Visiting Committee Report* to bring to the site visit.
12. _____ Plan the orientation meeting for Visiting Committee Members prior to the initial meeting at the institution (e.g., Sunday afternoon). The meeting should cover:
    - Purpose of visit, conducting the visit in an atmosphere of collaborative and open communication.
    - Emphasis upon the WASC Postsecondary Criteria and institution's Schoolwide Learner Outcomes as the basis for evaluating the *Self-Study* and the visit.

- Discussion of self-study: trends/perceptions, questions, concerns, and the relationship of the document to WASC criteria and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes.
- Discussion of ways to gather evidence.
- Review of overall schedule.
- Review of the accreditation term determination worksheet and how consensus will be reached for a recommendation to the WASC Commission.
- Plan out how to gather evidence through class/program observations, interviews, examination of student work and other data, program and Focus Group meetings.
- Stress with Visiting Committee to avoid prescription and "how we do it at our school" discussions.

13. _____ Create a detailed timeline for the visit that will allow the Visiting Committee to complete its tasks of writing the *Visiting Committee Report*, *Documentation and Justification Statement,* and the *Ballot.*

<u>During the Visit</u>

14. _____ Give the school leader a copy of the rough draft of the *Visiting Committee Report* on Sunday so that he/she has the chance to read it through Sunday night.
15. _____ Meet daily with the institution leaders, including the Leadership Team, about Visiting Committee findings, questions, visit logistics, etc.
16. _____ Guide the Visiting Committee members to discuss and investigate any issues or questions raised in the dialogue with the Leadership Team.
17. _____ Facilitate necessary *Visiting Committee Report* modifications as the *Visiting Committee Report* is finalized.
18. _____ Facilitate the Visiting Committee discussion of the term of accreditation that will be recommended to the WASC Commission.
19. _____ Complete the *Visiting Committee Report*, *Documentation and Justification Statement,* and sign the *Ballot* that will be sent to the WASC office.
    - Be sure that the *Visiting Committee Report* is consistent and aligned to the *Documentation and Justification Statement*, and the recommended term.
    - Have Visiting Committee Members sign the *Ballot*
20. _____ Have Visiting Committee members complete expense vouchers and give them an opportunity to complete the optional chairperson evaluation form.
21. _____ Plan for the Exit Meeting — read major areas of strength and major key issues; give all members a chance to publicly say "thank you;" have the Committee stay briefly after the meeting concludes for some social interaction.
22. _____ Do not imply the recommended term of accreditation; the term recommendation is to be kept confidential.

23. _____ Remind the school leadership to integrate the Visiting Committee suggestions and recommendations into the schoolwide *Action Plan* for immediate implementation.

24. _____ Confirm with the Self-Study Coordinator that ten (10) copies of the *Visiting Committee Report* have been sent to the WASC office in Burlingame (533 Airport Blvd., Suite 200, Burlingame, CA 94010)

After the Visit

25. _____ Send appropriate "thank-you's" to school leadership individuals and Visiting Committee members.

26. _____ Notify WASC right away of any problems that need to be addressed.

27. _____ Send Visiting Committee Member evaluations, expense reports, etc. to the WASC office.

Sample Documentation and Justification Statement

On the pages that follow, you will find a copy of the form that is used by the Visiting Committee to determine their recommendation to the WASC Commission. It is helpful for schools and Visiting Committees to be familiar with this document because it shows how the Visiting Committee evaluates the school based on the WASC Postsecondary Criteria and how it then justifies its term recommendation with a narrative description of the decision-making process.

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 different)**
Chair's Email Address		

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

- **Highly Effective**: The results of the self-study and the visit provide evidence that this factor has had a high degree of impact on student learning, the school's program and the school's operation.
- **Effective**: The results of the self-study and the visit provide evidence that this factor has had a satisfactory level of impact on student learning, the school's program, and the school's operation.
- **Somewhat Effective**: The results of the self-study and the visit provide evidence that this factor has had a limited impact on student learning, the school's program, and the school's operation.
- **Ineffective**: The results of the self-study and the visit provide evidence that this factor has had little or no impact on student learning, the school's program, and the school's operation.

SAMPLE

WASC Criterion 1: The institution demonstrates a strong commitment to its mission, emphasizing student achievement. The school communicates its mission internally and externally. Schoolwide Learner Outcomes (SLOs) are developed and reviewed annually to ensure that they are current and relevant.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

WASC Criterion 2: The institution utilizes the contributions of leadership throughout the organization to provide for continuous improvement. The organizational structure and roles of governance are clearly defined and designed to facilitate decisions that support student learning and improve institutional effectiveness. The governing body enables the administrator/director to implement policy and lead the institution effectively.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

SAMPLE

WASC Criterion 3: The institution employs qualified personnel to support student learning programs and services to ensure institutional effectiveness. Personnel are treated equitably, evaluated regularly, and provided opportunities for professional development that impact student learning.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

SAMPLE

WASC Criterion 4: The institution demonstrates a conscious effort to support student learning through the development of a challenging, coherent, and relevant curriculum that allows all students the opportunity to reach Schoolwide Learner Outcomes. The school's curriculum reveals its mission and SLOs and connects directly to current student learning needs. The school pursues current, research-based curriculum development information to keep its programs relevant and effective.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

WASC Criterion 5: The instructional staff uses research-based instructional strategies and teaching methodologies that engage students at high levels of learning and allow them to achieve Schoolwide Learner Outcomes and course objectives. Faculty members are given ongoing training in various instructional strategies that allows them to address the varied learning styles of students in their classrooms.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

WASC Criterion 6: The instructional staff uses established assessment procedures to design, administer, deliver, and evaluate courses, programs, and student learning levels. The institution recognizes the central role of its faculty for improving courses and programs through the assessment instruments and practices used in the school. Assessment is used to measure student progress, to modify learning approaches, and to carry out institutional planning and ongoing school improvement.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

SAMPLE

WASC Criterion 7: The institution recruits and admits students who are able to benefit from its programs. Student support services address the identified needs of students and create 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 Schoolwide Learner Outcomes, faculty, staff, and student input and other appropriate measures in order to improve the effectiveness of these services.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

SAMPLE

WASC Criterion 8: Financial resources are sufficient to support student learning programs and services. 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.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

WASC Criterion 9: The institution seeks to enhance its educational effectiveness by developing close partnerships and relationships with community members. Connections within the community provide students with expanded learning experiences, including additional educational or vocational opportunities.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

WASC Criterion 10: The institution uses the self-study process to identify key issues that are inserted into a schoolwide *Action Plan* that governs school improvement activities and events. The schoolwide *Action Plan* is used regularly, reviewed annually, and monitored consistently by the governing body to ensure continuing school improvement.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

SAMPLE

Institution Purpose: The institution has clarified its mission statement and Schoolwide Learner Outcomes so that there is unity and commitment by all stakeholders to support student meeting overarching school goals.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

Capacity to Implement the Action Plan: The institution has the commitment and will to implement the Action Plan and monitor its progress effectively.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

Success in Addressing Past Key Issues: The institution has shown that it has successfully responded to key issues identified by previous Visiting Committees, thereby giving the Visiting Committee confidence that it will continue its commitment to ongoing school improvement.

Visiting Committee Rating: ☐ Highly Effective ☐ Effective ☐ Somewhat Effective ☐ Ineffective

Narrative Rationale:

SAMPLE

Justification Statement

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

In 1–2 pages, please describe:

- **Term options seriously considered**
- **Evidence that weighed most heavily in the final term recommendation**
- **Specifically what term recommendation the Committee is making**
- **Reasons for the term recommended**
- **How did the Visiting Committee reach consensus? Please describe in detail how the discussions progressed, what different points of view were offered, and how final consensus was reached**
- **How the recommended term best supports school improvement**
- **Re-state clearly the final term recommendation decision**

SAMPLE

Accrediting Commission for Schools

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Sample Postsecondary Institutions
Recommendation for a Term of Accreditation (Ballot)

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:

☐	**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.
☐	**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.
☐	**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.
☐	**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.
☐	**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

SAMPLE