

Review of Accreditation Criteria Policy

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities conducts a systematic program of review of its accreditation criteria to ensure that they are relevant to the educational needs of students and adequate to evaluate the quality of the education provided by the institutions it accredits and preaccredits. In determining the specific procedures it follows in evaluating its accreditation criteria, the Commission ensures that its program or review includes these elements:

- (1) The Commission conducts a regular review of its accreditation criteria every eight years.
- (2) The Commission takes the following steps in conducting a regular review of its accreditation criteria:
 - (a) The Commission convenes an accreditation review committee for the accreditation criteria being reviewed. Each accreditation review committee is chaired by a Commissioner. Membership in an accreditation review committee consists of representatives of two-year and four-year member institutions from the public and private sectors who possess experience and expertise in the area of the accreditation criteria under review.
 - (b) Notification of the review process; a copy of the accreditation standards(s) under review; request for comment regarding the adequacy, effectiveness, and clarity of the standard(s); and request for suggestions for changes to the standard(s) under review are sent to: the chief executive officer, accreditation liaison officer, and chair of the governing board of each accredited and preaccredited institution; and heads of the appropriate state higher education system authorities. These institutional leaders are responsible for disseminating information regarding the review of the accreditation criteria process to their constituencies on and off campus. Notification of the review process is also sent to heads of appropriate state agencies that oversee higher education. Public notice of the review and request for comment will be posted to the Commission's website.
 - (c) The accreditation review committee reviews the comments received from the constituencies identified above and also reviews standards for accreditation from other accrediting agencies.
 - (d) The accreditation review committee prepares an analysis of findings and recommendation, with rationale, regarding suggested changes, if any, to the Commission's accreditation criteria. The accreditation review committee's findings and recommendation, with rationale, are forwarded to the Commission for consideration at its next regularly scheduled meeting.
- (3) If the Commission determines that changes to its accreditation are not required, a notice is sent to the presidents and accreditation liaison officers of preaccredited and member institutions and a public notice of this determination is posted on the Commission's website. If the Commission determines that a change to its standards for accreditation is needed, it acts within 12 months of the date of that determination to initiate action to

revise the accreditation criteria and completes the revision to the accreditation criteria within 24 months from the date the determination was made. The Commission takes the following steps in revising its accreditation criteria:

- (a) The Commission charges the accreditation review committee identified above with drafting a proposed revision to the accreditation criteria;
- (b) Based upon the charge from the Commission and input received from constituencies, the accreditation review committee prepares a draft of proposed changes and recommendation for consideration by the Commission.
- (c) Following a review of the draft of the proposed revision to the accreditation criteria and recommendation from the accreditation review committee, the Commission may reject the proposed changes and return the matter to the accreditation review committee for further work. If the Commission accepts the proposed changes, including modifications it deems necessary, the changes are forwarded to its constituencies for review and comment. A notice of proposed change(s) and call for comment is distributed to: the president and accreditation liaison officer of all preaccredited and member institutions; and the heads of appropriate state higher education systems; and heads of appropriate state agencies that oversee higher education. Public notice of the proposed change(s) and call for comment is posted on the Commission's website.
- (d) The Commission allows a minimum of 30 days for receipt of comments from its constituencies regarding proposed changes to the accreditation criteria.
- (e) At its next regularly scheduled meeting, the Commission reviews comments received from its constituencies. It may refer the matter back to the accreditation review committee for further work or accept the proposed changes with modifications it may deem necessary and distribute the proposed changes to the membership for a vote of approval.
- (f) Member institutions have thirty (30) days to complete and return the ballot. The votes are tabulated and the Commission announces the results at the next regularly scheduled Commission meeting. If approved by the membership, a copy of the revised accreditation criteria is distributed to the presidents and accreditation liaison officers of preaccredited and member institutions identified above and posted on the Commission's website.
- (g) At the Commission's discretion, it may undertake a review of the accreditation criteria to address minor changes within a shorter timeframe than eight years.