

# HANDBOOK FOR PEER EVALUATORS



*2017 Edition*



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## Introduction

Peer evaluation is an important step in the accreditation process and informs decisions regarding the accreditation status of member and candidate institutions. As an evaluator, you assume a significant responsibility for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities and to the institution being evaluated. In fulfilling your responsibilities you are expected to conduct an objective and unbiased evaluation of the institution based on the Commission's Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation. These expectations require the highest standards of professional conduct.

This handbook is intended to assist you in serving as a peer evaluator for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. Its purpose is to promote consistency in the use of procedures and application of the Commission's Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation in the accreditation process. It contains important general information about accreditation and the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, but is designed primarily as a practical, step-by-step guide to what must be done before, during, and after an evaluation. Although evaluators may have considerable experience with evaluation, this handbook does not presume any particular level of knowledge about the Commission or the evaluation process.

Advance preparation and planning are essential to the peer-evaluation process. Please review this handbook and other materials provided by the Commission well in advance of the evaluation. These documents should also be readily available during the evaluation.

As part of their responsibilities, evaluators prepare and submit an analytical, evidence-based, and clearly written report of findings. Evaluators also prepare a Confidential Recommendation for consideration by the Board of Commissioners. It contains evaluators' recommendations on accreditation status, actions, and future oversight of the institution. (See the Confidential Recommendation section of the *Handbook* for further information.)

## **Type, Scope, and Structure of Peer Evaluations**

### **Mid-Cycle and Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) Committee Evaluations**

On-site Mid-Cycle and Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) Evaluations are conducted for accredited institutions in the third and seventh years of the seven-year accreditation cycle.

For a Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) Peer Evaluation, a committee of evaluators assesses the institution with respect to all Eligibility Requirements and all Standards. The size of Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) Peer-Evaluation Committees varies, since they consist of one evaluator (the Chair) to evaluate Standard Five and one evaluator (each) to assess the institution's respective Core Themes. A seasoned evaluator is assigned to chair on-site committee evaluations.

### **Comprehensive Committee Evaluations**

A comprehensive peer evaluation is conducted for institutions seeking accreditation with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. They are conducted for consideration of Candidacy, continuation of Candidacy, and consideration of Accreditation. Other than the scope of the evaluation, the procedures used to conduct Mid-Cycle, Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7), and Comprehensive evaluations are the same.

### **Ad Hoc Evaluations**

An ad hoc peer evaluation, with or without an on-site visit, may be requested when an urgent or important matter arises that needs to be reviewed outside the normal biennial reporting sequence. One or more evaluator assesses the institution with respect to the accreditation criteria specified by the Commission. If two or more evaluators are assigned to an ad hoc evaluation, one is designated as the chair. Evaluators prepare a draft report of findings which is sent to the institution for correction of factual errors. The peer-evaluation report is finalized and sent to the Board of Commissioners, along with their Confidential Recommendation for consideration by the Board of Commissioners when action is taken.

### **Financial Resources Review**

Evaluations of finance-related issues are evaluated by a team of peer evaluators with financial expertise. A report of findings and Confidential Recommendation is prepared and submitted to the Board of Commissioners for consideration when action is taken.



## **Role of the Evaluator**

An evaluator's first responsibility is to read carefully and think critically about the institution's self-evaluation report, which is the evaluator's primary preliminary source of information. Evaluators should also give careful attention to the supporting materials provided by the institution. As part of their peer-evaluation report of findings, evaluators are expected to make independent assessments of the quality and usefulness of the institution's self-evaluation report and support materials.

Evaluators are encouraged to approach their assignments as colleagues rather than as auditors. The Commission has no formulas or rating scales to apply or impose. The role of the evaluator is to identify the institution's significant strengths and weaknesses. Evaluators need to approach the task with humility; no one knows all the answers. They should keep in mind that the institution is to be evaluated in terms of its own expectations for itself as well as the expectations reflected in the Commission's Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards.

The evaluation culminates in the preparation and submission of a peer-evaluation report that documents findings. The importance of a clear, informative, well-documented, evidence-based report of findings cannot be overstated. Its primary function is to give the institution and Board of Commissioners a critical analysis of the areas evaluated. The role of the evaluator in writing the report is not to describe but to evaluate by assessing the assigned area(s) objectively, critically, and constructively. The evaluator's job is to focus on assessment of the institution with respect to the Commission's Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation. Guidelines for writing the evaluation report are detailed in another section of this handbook.

The chair of the evaluation prepares a draft of the peer-evaluation report and distributes it to fellow evaluators for a final review. He or she then sends the final draft to the institution for correction of any factual errors. Following consideration of feedback received from the institution, the chair finalizes the peer-evaluation report and forwards it to the Commission office. The Commission office sends the official copy to the institution along with an opportunity to provide a written response to the peer-evaluation report, if it chooses to do so, for consideration by the Board of Commissioners when action is taken. Along with the final version of the peer-evaluation report, evaluators submit their Confidential Recommendation for consideration and action by the Board of Commissioners.

## **Prelude to the Evaluation**

For on-site evaluations, dates for Mid-Cycle, Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7), and Comprehensive on-site evaluations are proposed to the institution approximately 9 months in advance of a visit. Approximately six months prior to the visits, the lists of evaluator assignments are sent to the respective institutions for review. Once confirmed, these lists of assignments become the basis for selecting evaluators.

Care is taken to avoid conflicts of interest, or the appearance of conflicts of interest, in the selection of evaluators. Evaluators are selected from peer institutions from states other than the state in which the institution to be evaluated is located. They are selected based upon their areas of expertise, and matched to the evaluation assignments.

Approximately eight weeks prior to on-site evaluations, the roster of evaluators, complete with contact information, are sent to the respective institutions. If, however, an institution objects (for cause) to a particular evaluator—and the Commission President finds merit in the basis for that objection—an alternative peer evaluator will be selected. The cost to the institution for on-site evaluations is determined by Commission policy and based upon the number of evaluators for the evaluation.

Institutions preparing for on-site evaluation visits are asked to provide recommendations on hotels in the area that could house the evaluation committee and provide a meeting room to accommodate evaluators for an organizational meeting on the day prior to the first day of the visit. They are also asked to provide an on-campus meeting room suitable for use by evaluators as a work room and meeting room. This room will also serve to house supporting documents provided by the institution to help evaluators in fulfilling their responsibilities. The room is to be private, where confidential materials may be left safely and where committee conversations can be conducted without intrusions. Inasmuch as this location will serve as a workroom for evaluators, the institution is asked to provide Windows compatible computers, printers, telephones, copier, paper shredder, and other technical and other support as may be necessary in the conduct of the visit.

### **Preparing for an Evaluation Assignment**

Approximately six to eight weeks before an evaluation, the Commission office will provide evaluators with information related to the evaluation. Institutions being evaluated will send copies of their self-evaluation reports and supporting documentation to each evaluator. For on-site evaluations, the institution will send its report and documentation approximately six to eight weeks prior to the visit. The following suggestions are provided to assist evaluators in preparing for an effective evaluation:

- Be prepared, do your homework, and review all materials sent by the institution and Commission.
- Consult with the chair if you have questions after you review that information.
- Prepare a general outline of your evaluation report or your section of the evaluation report.
- List documents you want to review in addition to the self-evaluation report and support materials.
- Be prepared to comment on the quality and usefulness of the institution's self-evaluation report and support materials.
- Be an active participant in the evaluation.
- Maintain objectivity.
- Focus on the Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation.
- Identify problems or deficiencies with respect to the Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards appropriate to the scope of the visit, regardless of the size, characteristics, or reputation of the institution. Do *not* be swayed by an institution's "good intentions" if unsupported by actions.
- Before, during, and after the evaluation, respect the confidentiality of the peer review process, including the institution's self-evaluation report, other institutional documents, and any action taken by NWCCU on the institution. Do *not* disclose any information about the institution or evaluation with anyone other than your fellow evaluators on this evaluation.
- Do *not* use your assignment as a vehicle to recruit faculty, staff, or students or suggest your own availability as a consultant or employee.
- Do *not* accept gifts, favors, or services from the institution. Souvenir gifts are permissible, but should be limited to inexpensive items representative of the institution or its geographic location.
- Focus attention on the identification of significant matters. DON'T waste time on minor issues.
- Do *not* be prescriptive; there may be many acceptable ways for an institution to resolve a problem.
- Do *not* engage in discussions or issues that have no relation to the evaluation.
- Do *not* evaluate the institution by your own institution's standards or practices.
- Concentrate on the accuracy and fairness of your findings and judgments.
- Avoid actions and written or verbal comments that may undermine the credibility of the evaluation, the evaluators, the institution being evaluated, or the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.
- Refer all questions and inquiries from the media to the chair.

## Conducting the Evaluation

Except for ad hoc peer evaluations conducted by a single individual, evaluations are accomplished through the collaborative work of a panel or committee of evaluators. Within those structures, each evaluator has a particular assignment to ensure that the Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards, appropriate to the scope of the evaluation, are addressed. While individual evaluators have specific responsibilities for elements of the peer-evaluation report, all evaluators have responsibility for the report of findings as a whole.

A detailed set of operating procedures for peer evaluators is not possible, as no two institutions are the same. Peer evaluators are expected not only to address the nature and scope of the evaluation but to adapt themselves to the circumstances by employing the techniques that best reflect the institution being evaluated. The effectiveness of the evaluators is directly proportionate to their ability to work as a team. They need to confer with each other frequently in a cooperative effort, and to remember that each bears an important responsibility for the overall success of the evaluation.

The chair has overall responsibility for the evaluation process and is the official spokesperson for the evaluation. He or she is responsible for ensuring that all appropriate aspects of the institution are studied and evaluated, and that evaluators persist until they are confident of their findings. In summary, the chair is responsible for ensuring that the peer evaluation is conducted effectively.

In conducting the evaluation, evaluators *must not* take sides or advocate for or against any institutional constituency in applying the accreditation criteria. They must evaluate the institution in accordance with the requirements of the Commission, even if an institution's internal policies or practices or external mandates appear to compromise the accreditation criteria.

Institutional policies and agreements and external mandates *do not* contravene the requirements of Commission's Eligibility Requirements or Accreditation Standards. If peer evaluators conclude that policies, agreements, or mandates are in conflict with the requirements of the Commission, they are obligated to write a Recommendation for immediate corrective action by the institution on the matter. Any contention by the institution that it cannot respond to such a Recommendation because of policy, contract, or mandate provisions is irrelevant to the obligation of the evaluators to identify the lack of compliance with the relevant accreditation criteria.

Peer evaluators lead a double life. They cannot help thinking about their own institution while seeking to understand and evaluate another. The experience is richly rewarding in this respect, but peer evaluators are encouraged to take an objective approach and to focus on the reality of the institution being evaluated, neither comparing nor promoting their own views or preferred ways of doing things.

### **On-site Mid-Cycle, Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7), and Comprehensive Committee Evaluations**

On-site Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) evaluations of accredited institutions are conducted in the seventh year of the seven-year accreditation cycle. On-site Comprehensive evaluations are conducted for institutions seeking accreditation with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. The only significant difference between on-site evaluations of accredited institutions and on-site evaluations of institutions seeking accreditation is the scope of the evaluation. Conducted in the third year of the seven year cycle, the Mid-Cycle Evaluation is intended to ascertain an institution's readiness to provide evidence (outcomes) of mission fulfillment and sustainability in the Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7). It is to assist institutions in determining if the process of outcomes assessment will lead them to a successful Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) self-evaluation and peer evaluation. It is intended to be a formative and

collegial evaluation with the institution in conversation with the evaluators. Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) evaluations assess the institution with respect to all Eligibility Requirements and all Standards. Comprehensive evaluations assess the institution with respect to all Eligibility Requirements and all Standards. All three types of on-site evaluations are conducted by committees of peer evaluators and share the same procedures, timelines, and protocols.

Because regional accreditation is a voluntary process, on-site peer evaluations are conducted at the invitation of the institution. As guests, evaluators recognize that their hosts have their daily work to do while the peer evaluators are on campus, and that evaluators' work schedules must be designed with respect to the ongoing work of the institution. Arrangements are made by the chair, in consultation with the institution, well in advance of the visit to schedule opportunities for evaluators to meet with individuals of their choosing, to hold open meetings with faculty, staff, and students (respectively) so that interested individuals may meet with committee members, and to request a meeting with representatives of the institution's governing board. The schedule of these meetings is communicated by the institution's administration to its constituencies.

Committee members should seek supplemental materials, documents, and interviews that will substantiate claims made by the institution. Evaluators should respect the confidentiality of the self-evaluation report and any other institutional documents. Documentary materials such as admission and registrar's records, library order lists, course syllabi, tests, term papers, theses, and annual reports are valuable, because they are prepared for internal consumption rather than for outside use. Departmental, faculty, committee, and governing board minutes usually offer a means of discovering whether or not these bodies understand and exercise their proper functions.

Evaluators should be prepared to do a great deal of objective listening. They must take special care not to get involved in either personnel problems or internal politics. Pertinent information from disgruntled informants should be carefully and thoroughly checked for accuracy. When a "problem" is uncovered, it should be brought to the attention of the committee.

The following are guidelines for evaluators during the visit:

- Be a contributing member of the committee as it goes about its tasks and as it seeks consensus. Participate in the discussions, and display a willingness to cooperate.
- Be on time for all visit-related meetings.
- Keep receipts of all expenses; submit them with a completed expense voucher following the visit.
- Social events—such as receptions, dinners, and performances—are strongly discouraged.
- Plan your schedule so that you are available for the entire visit. If a problem develops, contact the chair or the Commission office.
- Avoid inflammatory written or oral comments that may subject you or other peer evaluators to charges of libel or slander. Libel, in its broadest sense, is defined variously as any written statement that is shown or published that is defamatory, or that maliciously or damagingly misrepresents, or that will harm a person's reputation or hold that person up to contempt or ridicule. Slander is a spoken statement that has the same result.
- Classroom visitations are not permitted. However, engaging students in out-of-class settings, such as the student union or library, is permitted and may yield useful information.
- Advise the chair in advance of the visit regarding computer hardware or software you will need.
- Prior to the visit, prepare a list of persons you want to interview during the visit, indicating the order and the amount of time needed for each, and communicate your list to your institutional contact. The chair may also request a copy of this list. At a minimum, be sure to bring a list of planned interviews and times to the organizational meeting the night before the start of the visit.
- Develop questions to be asked when you conduct your on-site interviews.
- Make your own transportation arrangements. Be sure to arrive in time to participate in the committee's organizational meeting the evening before the start of the visit.

### Organizational Meeting

Approximately eight weeks prior to the visit, the Commission will provide evaluators with a packet of information related to the visit, including the time and location of the organizational meeting, which is usually held at the hotel where the committee is lodged. While the committee chair may need to modify the schedule and the committee's activities somewhat, depending upon the type of institution being evaluated, local circumstances, and nature of the peer evaluation, the following is typical of the schedule followed by the committee.

The committee convenes for an organizational meeting, typically at 4:00 p.m. on the day before the on-site evaluation begins. Occasionally this time is adjusted to accommodate travel and arrival times of committee members. In general, however, experience indicates that a 4:00 p.m. meeting works well providing at least two hours for the meeting, and leaving sufficient time for dinner or, perhaps, further study of institutional documents. Later in the evening, there will still be time for communication with the chair and other committee members, as necessary.

At the organizational meeting:

- The specific work and responsibilities of the committee, including the type and scope of peer evaluation and the charge to the committee, is reviewed.
- The chair verifies the titles and contact information of committee members.
- Individual evaluation and writing assignments are reviewed and confirmed. It is important that everyone clearly understands his or her responsibilities. Be prepared to provide the chair with a paper copy and electronic copy of your section of the report at the conclusion of the visit.
- While one person may be assigned to write a particular section of the peer-evaluation report, several committee members may have information to contribute to that section of the report. Thus, these collaborations need to be identified early in the evaluation process.
- The institution's self-evaluation report and supporting materials are discussed and evaluated. Responsibility for writing the section of the peer-evaluation on the assessment of those materials is confirmed.
- Guidelines for writing the peer-evaluation report are discussed, including expectations regarding format, style and content.
- The chair may distribute an outline of the final report showing individual assignments for particular sections (and blanks where assignments still need to be made).
- The chair reviews the schedule of activities for the committee, especially any prearranged conferences or interviews on campus. Expectations regarding the committee's executive sessions will be noted.
- The protocol, format, and objectives of the exit meeting, the final event of the visit, are discussed.
- The chair confirms that each committee member has developed a schedule of evaluation activities and interviews with institutional personnel.
- The chair confirms attendance at the open meetings with faculty, staff, students, and board members.
- The chair underscores the importance of sharing information among committee members and seeking out specific information to provide to designated members of the committee who may be assigned responsibility for writing a section of the peer-evaluation report.
- The chair reminds each committee member to begin drafting assigned sections of the report early in the visit.
- The committee's workroom on campus and the materials available there are noted. Committee members may request additional information if it is needed.
- The chair reminds evaluators that all contacts from news media should be referred to the chair.
- Arrangements for meals and transportation, as well as the Commission's policy on reimbursement, are reviewed.
- The chair provides an opportunity for questions and answers as well as informal interaction among committee members on any topic following completion of the agenda.

## Day One

At a time and location agreed upon prior to the visit, the on-site evaluation begins with a brief meeting of the committee with the institution's chief executive officer to introduce committee members to invited institutional personnel. Normally the institution's chief executive officer welcomes the evaluation committee, makes announcements, and introduces those present from the institution. The chair then introduces members of the evaluating committee, indicates the areas they are evaluating, reviews the purpose of accreditation, and discusses the procedures to be followed during the visit. Following the meeting, evaluators begin their evaluation activities.

Evaluators conduct interviews and review materials, facilities, equipment and other resources to evaluate the institution with respect to the Commission's Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation. Evaluators should be sure that they have a reasonable schedule of interviews that include an appropriate range of institutional personnel. While interviews are the primary focus for Day One of the visit, evaluators should not unduly schedule themselves so as not to allow sufficient breaks for reflection and review of important supporting documents related to their assignments. Do not hesitate to consult with the chair if assistance is needed.

The committee meets, typically at 4:00 p.m., in the on-campus committee workroom for an executive session. This meeting, which usually does not last longer than two to two and a half hours, includes:

- Brief sharing of general observations about each evaluator's assignment. Observations should be presented as succinctly as possible.
- Problem areas are identified and strengths are discussed.
- Discussion and identification of areas of concern that require follow-up on the next day.
- Review of institutional personnel that have been interviewed and those who still need to be interviewed, to ensure representative coverage across the institution. Remember that Day Two of the visit is the last opportunity for interviews.
- Discussions of individual areas of Compliments and Concerns and preliminary identification of potential overarching Commendations and Recommendations. ***The peer-evaluation report is to provide clear evidence that supports the committee's findings, including Compliments, Commendations, Concerns, and Recommendations, being considered for inclusion in the peer-evaluation report.*** Since a Concern or Recommendation indicates a problem area with regard to the Commission's accreditation criteria appropriate to the scope of the evaluation, all Concerns and Recommendations must cite one or more Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard, appropriate to the scope of the visit, as the basis for the Concern or Recommendation.
- The agenda for Day Two of the visit and expectations regarding the next day's executive session are reviewed.

Following the executive session, committee members continue to work on the preliminary drafts of their sections of the peer-evaluation report. The chair may schedule dinner for the entire committee for this evening. Institutional personnel should never be present for executive sessions or evening committee meals.

## Day Two

Interviews, review of documents, and other evaluation activities continue and are concluded by the time the committee goes into executive session late in the afternoon. Committee members may be able to return to their writing activities at different times during the afternoon.

The Committee meets again, in executive session, typically at 4:00 p.m., in the committee workroom on the afternoon of Day Two of the visit. ***Potential Commendations and Recommendations should be brought to this executive session for consideration by the full committee.*** During the executive session the committee:

1. Reaches agreement on Commendations and Recommendations. Commendations should be considered only for truly noteworthy practice, not for good intentions. Recommendations should reflect documented problem areas with respect to one or more Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard appropriate to the scope of the evaluation.
2. Reaches general agreement on the content of the Confidential Recommendation.
3. Ensures all potential Concerns and Recommendations have adequate supporting narrative, are not prescriptive, and derive from the Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards appropriate to the scope of this visit.
4. Determines who will draft language for the Commendations and Recommendations for final consideration by the committee on Day Three of the visit.
5. Reviews the time and format of the exit meeting.
6. Reviews the Day Three agenda, including procedures and times for check-out and other related matters, and protocol for the exit meeting, and submission of draft sections to the chair.

The chair is responsible for guiding the evaluation committee to agreement on the content of the Confidential Recommendation to the Board of Commissioners, including the committee's positions on the:

- Accreditation status of the institution
- Imposition or removal of a sanction
- Status of areas previously determined to be out-of-compliance to be addressed in this evaluation
- Recommendations emanating from this peer-evaluation report
- Type and timing of future oversight of the institution

During the evening of Day Two of the visit, evaluators are expected to complete drafts of their respective sections of the peer-evaluation report. While there may be time for final discussion among committee members on the morning of Day Three of the visit, there will be limited time for writing.

### Day Three

On the final morning of the visit the committee meets once again in executive session to:

- Summarize the general points, including Commendations and Recommendations, to be covered in the exit meeting. Evaluation committee members are expected to be present for that meeting.
- Finalize Commendations and Recommendations.
- Ensure all Commendations and Recommendations reflect the consensus of the committee.
- Ensure all Concerns and Recommendations cite one or more Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard appropriate to the scope of the evaluation.
- Agree upon the evaluation of the institution's self-evaluation report.
- Agree on the content of Confidential Recommendation to the Board of Commissioners.

Following the final executive meeting, evaluators may use the remaining time to finalize their sections of the peer-evaluation report. The chair will collect those drafts prior to departure from campus.

### Exit Meeting

The evaluation visit concludes with an exit meeting, which is one of the most important aspects of the evaluation process. The audience for that meeting is determined by the institution's chief executive officer. The committee chair and the institution's chief executive officer will establish the time and location for that meeting. The entire evaluation committee is expected to be in attendance at the exit meeting. It is important that the tone and content of the exit meeting be consistent with the written peer-evaluation report.

As a courtesy, the chair meets with the institution's chief executive officer shortly before the exit meeting to read the committee's Commendations and Recommendations that will be reported verbally at the exit meeting. This meeting also provides the chair with an opportunity to convey evaluators' observations that may not be appropriate for the exit meeting.

At the exit meeting, the chair provides a verbal report of major findings. The chair opens with an appropriate statement of thanks on behalf of the committee and then reads the committee's Commendations and Recommendations. For each Recommendation, the chair cites an Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard, appropriate to the scope of the evaluation, as the basis for the Recommendation. There is no opportunity for debate or for questions and answers, other than those directly related to Commission procedures and timelines.

### Final Report

After completion of the on-site evaluation, the chair prepares and distributes an initial draft of the complete peer-evaluation report to evaluators for their review. Following feedback from the committee, the chair prepares a final draft of the peer-evaluation report and forwards it to the institution's chief executive officer for correction of any factual errors in the report. The chair considers the institutions corrections, the chair finalizes the report and submits it, along with the Confidential Recommendation, to the Commission office for consideration by the Board of Commissioners when action is taken.

The Commission office sends the final version of the peer-evaluation report to the institution, along with an invitation to submit a written response to the report, if it chooses to do so. For Comprehensive and Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) evaluations, the institution is invited to have representatives present in person at the meeting of the Board of Commissioners when the matter is considered to discuss the evaluation and to respond to questions. The evaluation committee is represented by the chair at the Board of Commissioners meeting in-person for Comprehensive and Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) evaluations.

### **Ad Hoc Peer Evaluations**

An Ad Hoc evaluation is conducted, with or without an on-site evaluation, when a problem or deficiency of such importance or urgency arises that a follow-up evaluation is required outside the normal reporting and evaluation cycle. In either case, the scope of the evaluation will be specified in a communication from the Commission office. If more than one evaluator is assigned, a chair will be identified.

For off-site Ad Hoc evaluations, the evaluator draws conclusions based solely on the institution's self-evaluation report and supporting materials. The evaluator does not visit the institution, and no interviews are conducted with members of the institution. However, the evaluator(s) may seek clarification from the institution on questions that arise in reviewing the institution's materials.

Following completion of the off-site evaluation, the evaluator prepares an initial draft of the peer-evaluation report and sends it to the institution's chief executive officer for correction of any factual errors. Following receipt of feedback from the institution, the evaluator finalizes the report and submits it, along with the Confidential Recommendation, to the Commission office. The Commission office sends the final version of the peer-evaluation report to the institution, along with an invitation to submit a written response to the peer-evaluation report, if it chooses to do so.

For on-site Ad Hoc peer-evaluations, evaluators have a physical presence on campus. Evaluators should plan to arrive at the headquarters hotel by late afternoon of the day before the visit is to take place to meet with fellow evaluators, if any, to make final preparations for the visit, including:

- Confirmation of the scope of the visit and areas to be evaluated



- Agreement on areas of responsibility, including confirmation of assignments
- Discussion of preliminary perceptions based upon the institution's self-evaluation report and supporting materials in relation to the request of the Commission for the evaluation
- Time and agenda for the visit. (If a two-day visit is scheduled, confirm a time to meet on subsequent days.)
- Confirmation of evaluation responsibilities and writing assignments for the Ad Hoc Peer-Evaluation Report

The Ad Hoc evaluation visit begins with a morning on-campus meeting with institutional representatives where introductions are made. That initial meeting is devoted primarily to a review and discussion of the responses in the institution's self-evaluation report and supporting materials. A period of questions and answers may follow. The purpose of the opening meeting is to verify and clarify the information received, and to gain insight, perspective and understanding of the matters being addressed.

After the initial meeting, the schedule is organized to use evaluators' time wisely in meeting with institutional personnel appropriate to the scope of the evaluation. Depending on the nature of the areas under review, evaluator(s) may meet with groups as well as individual institutional representatives. Although the evaluator(s) receives institutional materials prior to the visit, other written materials (as appropriate) may be reviewed during the visit to establish a sound basis of evidence for the evaluators' report of findings. In this case, the evaluator(s) should allow time to review those materials carefully.

Regardless of how carefully the time schedule of meetings is organized in advance to accomplish the purpose of the focused visit, interruptions and late changes are not uncommon. The evaluator(s) needs to accommodate the daily work schedules of those on campus as much as possible. If one person has a schedule conflict, the evaluator(s) should try to make an adjustment. Sometimes a telephone interview or conference telephone call can be arranged when individuals are unable to meet in person with the evaluator(s).

For a two-day Ad Hoc evaluation with multiple evaluators, the late afternoon meeting of the first day is for informal discussion of assigned areas. The principal interviews and meetings on campus should have been completed by the end of the first day. Discussion centers on how the institution has met or not met the areas of concern in the request of the Commission. Evaluators also discuss interviews or items to be explored the next day. At the conclusion of this meeting, the evaluators should have preliminary findings on Commendations, Recommendations, and the Confidential Recommendation to the Board of Commissioners.

The second day of a two-day Ad Hoc evaluation is used for any meetings and interviews not scheduled or completed the first day, for working on the Ad Hoc Peer-Evaluation Report, and for preparing for the exit meeting with the institution that signals the conclusion of the visit. Prior to the exit meeting, evaluators reach agreement on their Commendations, Recommendations, and content of the Confidential Recommendation.

The Ad Hoc evaluation visit concludes with an exit meeting, one of the most important aspects of the evaluation process. The audience for that meeting is determined by the institution's chief executive officer. The chair and the institution's chief executive officer will establish the time and location for that meeting. All evaluators are expected to be in attendance at the exit meeting. It is important that the tone and content of the exit meeting be consistent with the written peer-evaluation report.

At the exit meeting, the evaluator provides a verbal report of major findings. The evaluator opens with an appropriate statement of thanks on behalf of the evaluator(s) and then reads Commendations and Recommendations. For each Recommendation, the evaluator cites an Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard, appropriate to the scope of the evaluation, as the basis for the Recommendation. There is no opportunity for debate or for questions and answers, other than those directly related to Commission

procedures and timelines.

Following the conclusion of the on-site evaluation, the chair prepares and distributes an initial draft of the complete peer-evaluation report to other evaluators, if any, for their review. Following feedback from the evaluators, the chair prepares a final draft of the peer-evaluation report and forwards it to the institution's chief executive officer for correction of any factual errors contained in the report. Following receipt of feedback from the institution, the chair finalizes the report and submits it, along with the Confidential Recommendation, to the Commission office. The Commission office sends the final version of the peer-evaluation report to the institution, along with an invitation to submit a written response to the peer-evaluation report, if it chooses to do so.

### **Confidential Recommendation**

Each peer evaluation is supported by a Confidential Recommendation to the NWCCU Board of Commissioners. It is advisory only and provides Commissioners with: 1) evaluators' opinions of their major findings, including the nature of Recommendations contained in the peer-evaluation report; 2) suggested future oversight regarding those findings; and 3) proposed action on the accreditation status of the institution (See Appendices A and B).

The Confidential Recommendation should be consistent with the content and tone of the peer-evaluation report. Contents of the Confidential Recommendation are *not* included in the peer-evaluation report or disclosed in any manner to the institution. For panel and committee evaluations, the chair, on behalf of the panel or committee, provides a rationale for the content of the evaluators' Confidential Recommendation.

### **Writing the Peer-Evaluation Report**

A well-developed and clearly written peer-evaluation report contains a limited amount of description—only enough to provide context—and an analysis of the institution's strengths and weaknesses related to the Commission's accreditation criteria appropriate to the scope of the evaluation. The analysis should include statements of evidence based upon information verified by evaluators through institutional documents and interviews with campus constituencies. The analysis then leads to Compliments, Concerns, Commendations, and Recommendations to assist the institution in its efforts toward continuous improvement and compliance with the Commission's accreditation criteria.

The evaluators' written report of findings is a critical component of the evaluation process. The chair sets deadlines for possible revisions, in consultation with fellow evaluators. While the chair has overall responsibility for the peer-evaluation report and support materials, including the section on the quality and usefulness of the institution's self-evaluation report, he or she should not be required to spend considerable time in editing and rewriting individual sections. A well-written peer-evaluation report:

- Provides an accurate description and analysis of the institution that is understandable to those having little or no knowledge of the institution, i.e., Commissioners who are assigned as readers
- Evaluates—succinctly and clearly—institutional strengths and weaknesses with sufficient evidence, analysis, and synthesis to provide a clear understanding of the basis for findings
- Evaluates the institution with respect to the Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation
- Provides a solid foundation and sufficient explanation in the body of the report as the basis for all Compliments, Concerns, Commendations, and Recommendations
- Comments on the quality and usefulness of the institution's self-evaluation report and supporting materials
- Is free of typing, spelling, and grammatical errors

- Maintains a consistent and appropriate format throughout the report. Compliments and Concerns are to be numbered and listed at the end of the appropriate section of the peer-evaluation report.
- Represents evaluator consensus on the wording of Commendations and Recommendations and in the tone of the narrative
- Uses terms such *evaluator(s)*, *evaluation committee*, *committee*, or *committee member(s)* instead of *inspector(s)*, *auditor(s)*, or *reviewer(s)*
- Contains no language that indicates the content of the Confidential Recommendation to the Board of Commissioners
- Includes no reference to *compliance* or *non-compliance* anywhere in the body of the report or statements of Compliments, Concerns, Commendations, and Recommendations, since matters of compliance and non-compliance are determined solely by the Board of Commissioners

### **Common Content**

Each peer-evaluation report begins with a common structure. The remainder of the report is determined by the scope of the evaluation.

Title page which includes:

- Type of peer evaluation conducted
- Name and address (City and State) of the institution evaluated
- Date(s) of the evaluation
- The following statement: *A confidential report of findings prepared for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities*

Table of Contents

Roster with names and titles of the chair and evaluators

Introduction

Assessment of the Institution's Self-Evaluation Report and support materials

Evaluators report briefly on the quality of the institution's self-evaluation report and supporting materials. Specifically, they comment on the accuracy, adequacy, and usefulness of the information provided in establishing an initial understanding of the institution with respect to the accreditation criteria appropriate to the scope of the evaluation. They may also provide formative feedback which may be useful to the institution in conducting and reporting future self evaluations. The institution's self-evaluation report and support materials are expected to:

- Address Eligibility Requirements and Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation
- Provide evidence to support the conclusions stated or implied in the self-evaluation report
- Document appropriate analysis and synthesis resulting from a critical self evaluation and reflection on the results of that self evaluation
- Identify areas of institutional strengths
- Identify areas in need of improvement and recommendations to address those areas
- Articulate procedures and timelines for progress on those recommendations
- Brief summary of methods used to conduct the institution's self-evaluation

Topics addressed as addenda to the institution's Self-Evaluation Report (if any)

The institution may be requested to address one or more area or Recommendation from: 1) a previous evaluation; 2) issues/concerns resulting from a substantive or minor change or institution's annual report; or 3) allegations contained in a documented complaint about an institution. This may take the form of an Ad Hoc evaluation or addendum to the institution's self-evaluation report. Evaluators are expected to assess the institution's progress in addressing the Commission's concerns related to those areas or Recommendations. Do this by stating specific area or Recommendation to be addressed as a heading and report findings related to that matter. Repeat as necessary for each additional area or Recommendation to

be evaluated. For Ad Hoc Peer-Evaluation Reports, skip to the Summary section to complete the report.

Eligibility Requirements (appropriate to the scope of the evaluation)

Inasmuch as the Eligibility Requirements closely parallel certain Standards, it is not necessary to prepare a separate section of the peer-evaluation report to report explicitly on them. In general, evaluators need only make a brief summary statement in this subsection regarding the Eligibility Requirements appropriate to the scope of the evaluation with the understanding that the content of those Eligibility Requirements will be addressed in the sections of the report that report on the corresponding Standards.

### **Section One (Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) and Comprehensive Peer-Evaluation Reports)**

This section reports evaluators' findings regarding the clarity of the institution's purpose and expectations of itself with respect to fulfillment of that purpose. Because the entire peer-evaluation proceeds from the institution's own definition of its mission, a clear articulation of that mission is an essential first step taken by the institution; gaining a clear understanding of that mission is also essential for evaluators. Evaluation of the institution with respect to Standard One is the collective responsibility of all evaluators. However, one person is usually assigned responsibility for writing this section of the peer-evaluation report on behalf of the committee (for on-site evaluations).

#### Report on Standard 1.A Mission

Evaluators report their findings on the clarity of the institution's mission and its usefulness in providing direction for the institution's efforts, including the allocation of resources and application of capacity. Within the context of its own mission statement, the institution is expected to develop and define its expectations for mission fulfillment. Further, guided by that definition of mission fulfillment, the institution articulates an acceptable threshold or extent of mission fulfillment.

#### Report on Standard 1.B Core Themes

To develop a deeper understanding of the institution's purpose, the institution is expected to interpret its mission in the form of core themes, each of which represent a fundamental aspect of its mission. For each core theme, the institution is expected to identify clearly defined objectives as well as indicators of achievement that are assessable, meaningful, and useful to the institution in assessing its achievement of those objectives.

### **Section Two (Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) and Comprehensive Peer-Evaluation Reports)**

Evaluators report their findings with respect to the institution's potential to fulfill its mission as a whole. To do so, they evaluate its resources and capacity represented by its major assets, functions, and structures. Evaluators conduct their evaluation informed by an understanding of the institution's core themes, but do not evaluate the institution's resources and capacity with respect to individual core themes. Those judgments are reserved for Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) peer-evaluations. While individuals have responsibilities to write specific subsections of Section Two of the peer-evaluation report, the nature of the Standards being evaluated require a broadly collaborative effort in which information is widely shared among evaluators.

#### Report on Standard 2.A Governance

Evaluators report the results of their assessment of the institution's capacity to effectively govern itself within the context of its mission and characteristics. Included in the evaluation is an assessment of the institution's governing board, leadership and management, and policies and procedures in order to determine the institution's potential to effectively manage and operate in a manner that is consistent with its mission and characteristics.

#### Report on Standard 2.B Human Resources

Evaluators report their findings on the assessment of the institution's human resources with respect to

qualifications, preparation, and effectiveness in achieving its mission. Because this Standard calls for a comprehensive assessment of faculty, staff, and administration throughout the institution, evaluators are encouraged to collaborate and share information for consolidation by the evaluator assigned to this section.

#### Report on Standard 2.C Education Resources

Evaluators report their findings on the institution's educational programs and infrastructure. The institution is expected to identify and publish expected student learning outcomes for its degrees and certificates, programs, and courses, and to demonstrate that its educational program, as a whole— wherever offered and however delivered—has appropriate rigor and potential to fulfill the educational intentions embedded in its mission.

#### Report on Standard 2.D Student Support Resources

Evaluators report their findings on the institution's programs and services, assessing the extent to which they are consistent with the institution's mission and characteristics, and promote an environment— wherever offered and however delivered—that supports student success.

#### Report on Standard 2.E Library and Information Resources

Evaluators report their findings on the availability, adequacy, and appropriateness of library and information resources, wherever offered and however delivered, to support fulfillment of the institution's mission. Library and information resources and services are evaluated in terms of the quality of its holdings, planning, instruction and support, and security in support of the academic intentions embedded in its mission.

#### Report on Standard 2.F Financial Resources

Evaluators report their findings on the potential of the institution's financial resources to support fulfillment of its mission. Evaluators assess financial management, planning, and processes as well as the adequacy and stability of its financial resources in light of the institution's mission and characteristics.

#### Report on Standard 2.G Physical and Technological Infrastructure

Evaluators report their findings on their evaluation of the adequacy, appropriateness, safety, and security of the institution's physical and technological resources, wherever located and however delivered, to support fulfillment of its mission. For this section, evaluators assess the essential *infrastructure* upon which the application of technology relies. The *use* of technology is evaluated in other sections of the peer-evaluation report.

#### ***Section Three (Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) and Comprehensive Peer-Evaluation Reports)***

In this section, evaluators report on overarching institutional planning as a whole, rather than planning for individual functional units, core themes, or programs or units.

#### Report on Standard 3.A Institutional Planning

Evaluators report findings on the adequacy and effectiveness of institutional planning in providing direction that leads to fulfillment of the institution's mission by guiding allocations of resources and application of capacity. Institution-wide planning should reflect the interdependent nature of institutional operations, functions, and resources with sufficient flexibility to address unexpected circumstances that have the potential to impact the institution's ability to fulfill its mission.

#### ***Section Four (Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) and Comprehensive Peer-Evaluation Reports)***

In this section, evaluators provide separate subsections—one for each core theme—to evaluate each core theme holistically with respect to planning, implementation, assessment, and use of assessment results toward achievement of the objectives identified for the core theme.

#### A Report on each Core Theme to Evaluate Standards 3.B Core Theme Planning; 4.A Assessment; and 4.B

### Improvement as they Relate to that Core Theme

Each core theme will be reported in a separate subsection to provide an evaluation of the core theme with respect to the criteria contained in *Standards 3.B Core Theme Planning, 4.A Assessment, and 4.B Improvement*. In preparing a core theme subsection of the peer-evaluation report, the evaluator assesses the alignment, adequacy, and contribution of planning, resources, and capacity. Further, the evaluator evaluates the institution's self-assessment of achievement of the objectives of its respective core themes and use of assessment results for improvement.

As part of their review, evaluators evaluate the institution's assessment of the goals or intended outcomes for the programs or services that contribute to achievement of the respective core theme objectives. In particular, intended student learning outcomes (with indicators of achievement) are identified, published, and assessed for the institution's educational degrees and certificates, programs, and courses.

### ***Section Five (Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) and Comprehensive Peer-Evaluation Reports)***

Evaluators assess the institution's effectiveness in fulfilling its mission, its ability to monitor and adapt to changing environments, and its potential to continue to fulfill its mission at an acceptable level for the foreseeable future.

#### Report on Standard 5.A Mission Fulfillment

Evaluators report their findings on the institution's fulfillment of its mission, the definition of mission fulfillment, the articulation of an acceptable extent or threshold of mission fulfillment, and the analysis and synthesis of the achievement of the objectives of its core themes, the essential elements of its mission. While one evaluator is assigned responsibility for writing this section, a high level of collaboration among evaluators will be necessary.

#### Report on Standard 5.B Adaptation and Sustainability

Evaluators assess the institution's ability to monitor its internal and external environments and demonstrate the capability to adapt as necessary its mission, core themes, programs, and services to accommodate changing and emerging needs, trends, and influences to ensure enduring institutional relevancy, productivity, viability, and sustainability. Evaluators' findings are informed by the results of the evaluation of the institution's resources and capacity (Standard Two) regarding the institution's potential to remain relevant, sustainable and viable over time.

### **Summary**

At their discretion, evaluators may provide a brief narrative of overarching findings and conclusions.

### **Compliments, Commendations, Concerns, and Recommendations**

Evaluators may note institutional Commendations (if any) regarding noteworthy conditions or accomplishments, and Recommendations (if any) that the institution must address to resolve problematic areas with regard to the Commission's Eligibility Requirements or Accreditation Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation.

#### Compliments and Commendations

A *Compliment* is a congratulatory statement or noteworthy practice or achievement of an area within the institution and may or may not rise to the level of an institutional Commendation. Compliments are documented in the narrative of a section within the body of the peer-evaluation report and enumerated at the end of the corresponding section. While Compliments do not need to cite an Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard, the narrative should sufficiently explain the reasons for giving the Compliment. A Compliment should not be given for good intentions.

Example of a Compliment:

The evaluator compliments the institution for the active engagement of all instructional units in the collection, analysis, synthesis, and use of data and information to conduct assessment of its educational programs and services.

A *Commendation*, enumerated at the end of peer-evaluation report, is a laudatory statement agreed upon by the evaluation team as a whole concerning a noteworthy institutional practice or exceptional achievement. Commendations should not be given merely for good intentions. The narrative within the body of the peer-evaluation report should provide the basis for the Commendations.

Example of a Commendation:

The evaluators commend the institution's faculty, staff, and administration for creating an inclusive culture of caring, respect, and approachability where students are encouraged and supported in their personal growth and educational achievements.

### Concerns and Recommendations

A *Concern* is intended to be advisory to the institution to indicate that attention to the matter is warranted although it may or may not rise to the level of a Recommendation that requires immediate action. Concerns are documented in the narrative of a section within the body of the peer-evaluation report and enumerated at the end of the corresponding section. While a Concern may or may not rise to the level of a Recommendation, all Recommendations must be grounded in one or more Concern cited in the body of the peer-evaluation report.

Example of a Concern:

Despite its large volume of library and information resources, the evaluator is concerned that for some programs, the institution does not appear to hold or provide access to library and information resources with appropriate levels of currency, depth, and breadth to support achievement of student learning outcomes and program goals (Eligibility Requirement 13; Standard 2.E.1).

A *Recommendation* indicates that an institution is not in compliance with one or more accreditation criterion or that it is substantially in compliance with one or more accreditation criterion, but in need of improvement. Recommendations are explicitly listed at the end of the peer-evaluation report to indicate that the institution has been cited for one or more problem or deficiency of a serious nature that require immediate institutional action. Evaluators are asked to indicate, as part of the Confidential Recommendation, those Recommendations judged to be areas of non-compliance with accreditation criteria, and those Recommendations judged to be areas substantially in compliance but needing improvement.

The Board of Commissioners makes and communicates to the institution the final determination of areas of non-compliance and areas for improvement. It also notifies the institution of any follow-up oversight requested by the Board. For areas determined by the Board of Commissioners to be out-of-compliance with the accreditation criteria, the institution is notified that USDOE regulations and Commission policy require the institution to come into compliance with the identified accreditation criteria within the time set forth by the Board of Commissioners or risk having its accreditation status removed.

Example of a Recommendation:

While noting the recent implementation of a comprehensive student learning assessment plan and evidence that assessment is conducted in many areas, evaluators did not find evidence that assessment of student learning is conducted across all educational areas. Therefore, the evaluators recommend the institution take immediate action to fully implement its student learning assessment plan to document, through an effective, regular, and comprehensive system of assessment of student achievement, that

students who complete its courses, programs, and degrees, wherever offered and however delivered, achieve associated learning outcomes (Standard 4.A.3). Further, the evaluators recommend the institution document that it uses the results of its assessments to improve student achievement (Standard 4.B.2).

#### Guidelines in Developing Concerns and Recommendations

Concerns and Recommendations lacking supporting evidence are not valid. Supporting evidence may be quantitative or qualitative, consisting of facts discovered or verified by evaluators. It must be objective, current, and specific to an Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard. Whatever form the evidence takes, it must relate to an Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard, appropriate to the scope of the evaluation, and create and substantiate the basis for the Concern or Recommendation.

The evaluator must provide sound, evidence-based reasons for a Concern or Recommendation. In evaluating whether an issue is a Concern or a Recommendation, it is worthwhile to ask: In what ways does the evidence demonstrate a problem or deficiency with Eligibility Requirements or Accreditation Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation? The professional judgment of the evaluator must be brought to bear. In many cases the evaluator will not be able to make use of quantitative requirements but will be called upon to judge "adequacy" or what is "appropriate" or "sufficient." These judgments are unavoidable and are necessary in carrying out the accreditation process. In any case, the narrative should be as specific as possible in explaining the cause for the Concern or Recommendation.

In developing and reporting Concerns and Recommendations, evaluators should:

- Ensure Concerns and Recommendations are coherent, understandable, and relevant to an Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard appropriate to the scope of the evaluation.
- Ensure that Concerns and Recommendations are clearly stated. As much as possible, use specific language which identifies the problem or deficiency (accompanied in most cases by language from the Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard cited).
- Ensure that Concerns and Recommendations cite one or more relevant Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard appropriate to the scope of the evaluation.
- Ensure the Concerns and Recommendations are not prescriptive by requiring or suggesting one approach over another.
- Ensure that Concerns and Recommendations call for the institution to take action, rather than simply thinking about taking action, to remedy a problem or deficiency related to an Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard appropriate to the scope of the evaluation.
- Ensure all Commendations and Recommendations (respectively) are numbered sequentially.

*Avoid* Concerns or Recommendations that:

- Prescribe a solution to a problem or condition
- Are based upon the evaluator's personal view of "good practice" or a successful practice at another institution, since good ideas do not always transfer from one institution to another
- Are not explicitly addressed in an Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard appropriate to the scope of the evaluation
- Apply the standards of another accrediting organization (NCATE, ABET, ALA)
- Are intended to give the institution, or constituencies within the institution, "political leverage" (It is sometimes tempting -- the institution may even encourage it -- to help an institution by including a Concern or Recommendation intended to put pressure on one constituency or another. Such temptations must be strictly avoided to preserve the credibility of the accreditation process.)
- Call upon the institution to hire staff, spend money, start new programs, construct new facilities, etc. Evaluators may conclude, based upon clear evidence, that the institution has insufficient resources to adequately support its mission. If that is the case, it should be so stated, but more resources may be



unrealistic and only one of several options. Moreover, it is not the place of evaluators to dictate to an institution how to solve the problem; it is the obligation of evaluators to identify gaps between the Commission's accreditation criteria and institutional practice.

### **Layout and Submission of the Peer-Evaluation Report**

The following guidelines should be followed in publishing and submitting the peer-evaluation report:

- Number all pages (except Title page, Table of Contents, and Introduction).
- Use letter-size portrait orientation (8½" wide by 11" high) with 1" margins on all sides.
- Use 11- or 12-point type face. Larger fonts may be used for major headings, which should be in bold print face and double spaced from the text. Do not use script or italic as the primary font.
- Single space text in the body of the report.
- Prepare an electronic copy of the peer-evaluation report as a single Windows-compatible file in Microsoft Word document. Also, prepare an electronic copy of the associated Confidential Recommendation as a single Windows-compatible file in Microsoft Word format.
- Email the peer-evaluation report and Confidential Recommendation as attachments to:

**Reports@nwccu.org.**

## **Guidelines for Committee and Panel Chairs**

Peer evaluations are critical components of the NWCCU accreditation process. They enable informed decisions about the accreditation status of NWCCU institutions. The Commission depends upon you, as a committee or panel chair, to ensure the evaluation is conducted in an objective and effective manner. It is your responsibility to ensure that your fellow evaluators are adequately prepared for the evaluation and that the report of findings is complete, analytical, clearly written, accurate, and evidence based with respect to the Eligibility Requirements and Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation.

As a chair you fulfill multiple roles. At times you serve as a mentor, evaluator, and editor. As a mentor, you serve as a role model for fellow evaluators, guide them in fulfilling their responsibilities, and orient them on expectations for professional standards and conduct. In that capacity, you may also need to assist an inexperienced evaluator in determining how to carry out certain responsibilities and how best to deal with problems which may arise.

In the role of evaluator, you have responsibility for specific elements of the Eligibility Requirements and Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation. Many of those areas require considerable collaboration, so you serve more as the writer of those areas of the peer-evaluation report, rather than the sole evaluator of those areas. You also have an important leadership role in ensuring that all evaluators conduct their evaluations in light of the Commission's Eligibility Requirements and Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation.

In your role as editor you assist colleagues in developing and formatting their respective sections of the peer-evaluation report—ensuring that they have sufficient evidence to support the report's Recommendations and evaluators' Confidential Recommendation. You may find it useful to communicate clearly your expectations regarding format, terminology, structure, etc. to your fellow evaluators prior to the onset of the evaluation. Delete all first person singular language in order to emphasize that the report is a consensus of all evaluators. Further, delete: 1) all personal references except in the introduction; 2) all references to institutional personnel interviewed or references to statements they have made; 3) all statements which imply, predict or recommend Commission action.

Remind your fellow evaluators that whenever institutional policies and procedures are driven by collective bargaining agreements, state mandates, contracts, etc., such arrangements do not contravene the requirements of Commission's accreditation criteria. If evaluators find problematic areas with respect to the Eligibility Requirements or Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation, they are obligated to incorporate those determinations in their report of finding, even if those problems are the result of the institution's compliance with collective bargaining agreements, state mandates, contracts, etc. Any contention by the institution that it cannot respond to such a Recommendation because of the provisions of those documents is irrelevant to the obligation of the committee to identify the problem as it relates to one or more Eligibility Requirement or Standard appropriate to the scope of the evaluation.

Caution evaluators against advocating for specific constituencies or taking sides in internal disputes. Further, evaluators should be reminded that the institution's self-evaluation report, supporting materials, and self-evaluation process are to be evaluated with respect to the Commission's requirements—even if they appear to be compromised by internal disputes or self-interest strategies.

Several weeks prior to the onset of the evaluation, you will receive a packet of information from the Commission office, including a roster of evaluators and logistics related to the evaluation. Shortly thereafter, institutions will provide evaluators with copies of their self-evaluation reports and supporting documentation. Review these materials at your earliest convenience and contact the Commission office if you have questions or concerns.

It is very important that you communicate with your fellow evaluators shortly after receiving the materials from the Commission office. Following receipt and review of the institution's materials you may want to schedule audio or web conferences to assist your panel or committee in developing a clear understanding of its charge. These virtual meetings also provide excellent opportunities to clarify expectations and responsibilities and help evaluators translate the theory of the evaluation into practice as it relates to the institutions being evaluated. Sample initial communications are provided in Appendices D and E of this *Handbook*.

Your initial communication with fellow evaluators should:

1. Remind committee members to read the entire self-evaluation report in order to see their own areas of responsibility in a larger context.
2. Notify evaluators that they are expected to evaluate the quality, acceptability, and usefulness of the institution's self-evaluation report and supporting materials and to be prepared to comment on these matters early in the evaluation process.
3. Provide evaluators with your expectations concerning their specific evaluation assignments and writing responsibilities.
4. Encourage evaluators to outline their respective sections of the peer-evaluation report(s).
5. Remind evaluators to refer to the *Handbook for Peer Evaluators* for additional information.
6. For on-site evaluations:
  - a. Remind evaluators they are expected to be present throughout visit, including attendance at the exit meeting. If a problem develops requiring an evaluator to vary from these expectations, immediately contact the Commission office.
  - b. Identify special circumstances. For on-site evaluations this might include visitations to off- campus sites which require arrangements prior to the onset of the evaluation visit.
  - c. Identify computer hardware and software or support needs.
  - d. Encourage evaluators to develop questions to ask in interviews. Provide guidance regarding procedures for making interview appointments. You may want to ask for a list of persons (by name or title) they would like to interview, indicating the preferred order and the amount of time needed for each. The list of people to be interviewed needs to be forwarded to the institution well in advance of the visit. You may want evaluators to provide you with the names of interviews for coordination purposes or you may ask evaluators to communicate those names directly to their respective institutional liaisons.

### **Special Considerations for On-site Committee Evaluations**

A number of meetings need to be scheduled in advance of Mid-Cycle, Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7), and Comprehensive on-site evaluation visits. These include: 1) meeting with representatives of the governing board only; 2) an open meeting with faculty only; 3) an open meeting with staff only; and 4) an open meeting with students only. The meeting with representatives of the governing board should not include institutional personnel. Typically, the chair identifies at least one additional evaluator to attend the governing board meeting. As many evaluators as possible should be encouraged to attend the open meetings with faculty, staff, and students. A lead evaluator should be identified to facilitate those meetings. Contact the institution's chief executive officer (or designee) well in advance of the visit to determine the times and locations of those meetings and names of board members who plan to attend the meeting with the governing board. To avoid scheduling conflicts, the times of these visits should be communicated to committee members well in advance of the visit.

Convene the committee for organizational purposes at 4:00 p.m. on the day before the evaluation begins. The time of the organizational meeting may be adjusted to accommodate travel constraints. Experience shows that a 4:00 p.m. meeting works well because it allows at least two hours for the meeting before dismissal for dinner. At that meeting, consider the following topics with the committee to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the evaluation process. Moreover, it will make your work as chair much easier if you appropriate attention to each of the following:

1. Review the specific work and responsibility of the committee including the type of evaluation, scope of the evaluation, and the charge to the committee.
2. Verify the contact names, titles, and contact information of committee members.
3. Review individual evaluation and writing assignments. Be sure everyone clearly understands these matters. Stress that the draft report must be in your hands by the end of the visit.
4. Discuss and evaluate the institution's self-evaluation report and supporting materials and confirm writing assignments for the peer-evaluation report.
5. Discuss guidelines for writing the report and reinforce expectations regarding format, style and content.
6. Distribute (if not done via earlier communications) the table of contents for the peer-evaluation report showing individual assignments for particular sections of that report.
7. Review the schedule of interviews and visits to off-campus sites (if any). Preview expectations regarding the committee's sessions (see "First Day on Site" and "Second Day on Site" later in this section). Emphasize the importance of careful time management especially in interviews and report writing.
8. Discuss the exit meeting regarding format, and objectives (see "Third Day on Site" for exit meeting guidelines).
9. Make sure committee members understand they may request additional interviews and materials, if needed.
10. Review arrangements for meals and transportation, as well as the Commission's policy on reimbursement.
11. Note your availability to committee members including times and location, while on site.
12. Discuss the manner in which institutional persons wishing to present grievances, or purporting to represent aggrieved parties, may address the committee. If necessary, you should attempt to arrange a special meeting with a representative delegation from the committee at which such persons may address the delegation.
13. Review the procedure for dealing with news media (all contacts from news media should be referred to you, staff liaison (if present), or the Commission office).
14. Confirm that each committee member has developed an individual schedule of evaluation activities and is prepared to establish a schedule of individual interviews.
15. Discuss helpful interview strategies, particularly for inexperienced evaluators.
16. Remind evaluators to begin drafting assigned sections of the report early in the visit.
17. Underscore the importance of communication, collaboration, and coordination among committee members in seeking out specific types of information to provide to designated members of the committee.
18. Provide the opportunity for inexperienced committee members to interact, on an informal basis, with you and experienced committee members regarding any topic of concern following completion of the agenda for the organizational meeting.

An opening meeting is scheduled on the first day of the visit. The time and location of that meeting is included in the correspondence provided by the Commission office. It is a brief meeting that offers the opportunity for evaluators to meet with key institutional representatives and principal contacts on campus. Normally the institution's chief executive officer welcomes the evaluators, makes announcements, and introduces the institutional representatives present. You are then invited to make opening comments, introduce your fellow evaluators, indicate their areas of responsibility areas, and outline the nature and scope of the evaluation and procedures that will be followed. Following the introductions, the committee members will pair off with the institutional representatives and the evaluation on campus begins.

You are encouraged to monitor progress of committee members (particularly inexperienced persons) to be sure that they are on a reasonable schedule and interviewing an appropriate range of institutional personnel. You

may find it helpful to schedule a brief "touch-base" meeting with the entire committee just before or after lunch. As the visit progresses, you may wish to see some writing samples and offer guidance as needed.

The committee is scheduled to meet in executive session, usually at 4:00 p.m. on the first full day. Do not schedule executive sessions after dinner (that time should be reserved for writing). You should exercise careful control so that the executive session does not last longer than two and a half hours. Activities during this session should include the following:

1. Invitation for evaluators to share (briefly) general observations from evaluators.
2. Discussion of tentative problem areas and areas of strength.
3. Identification of potential Commendations and Recommendations.
4. Clarification of areas that require follow-up on the next day.
5. Review of institutional personnel who have been interviewed and those who still need to be interviewed, to ensure representative coverage across the institution. Remind committee members that the next day is their last opportunity for interviews. Remind evaluators that their reports should clearly provide the evidence which supports potential Compliments, Concerns, Commendations, and Recommendations under consideration. Also, remind evaluators that Concerns and Recommendations must cite an NWCCU Eligibility Requirement or Standard.
6. Review of the next day's schedule and expectations regarding the next day's executive session.

As evaluators continue to conduct their evaluations, you may choose to schedule a brief "touch-base" meeting just before or after lunch may be helpful. During the executive session on the second day of the visit (typically at 4:00 p.m.), facilitate development of consensus on the essence of Commendations and Recommendations for inclusion in the peer-evaluation report, even though complete narrative text for the report will not have been finished at this point. Also, reach consensus on the Confidential Recommendation that will be forwarded to the Board of Commissioners for their consideration. Once agreement has been reached on these matters, remind evaluators that their narratives should provide evidence to support these conclusions. Experience suggests drafting the actual language of the Commendations and Recommendations during this executive meeting expedites completion of the committee's work the next day. In preparation for the final day of the visit, review the time and format of the exit meeting scheduled for the next day and review the next day's schedule, including: 1) procedures for submitting evaluators' draft reports to the chair; 2) logistics regarding hotel check-out and transportation following the visit; and 3) time, location, and expectations for the exit meeting.

While the time of the exit meeting will have been established in consultation with the institution's chief executive officer (or designee) prior to the visit, you should confirm the time and location of that meeting. Prior to that meeting, you will have a courtesy meeting with the chief executive officer to share (verbally only) the evaluators Commendations and Recommendations. The contents of the Confidential Recommendation are not disclosed to institutional personnel. All evaluators are expected to attend the exit meeting.

A final executive meeting is held on the morning of the last day of the visit. During that session, you are to facilitate consensus on the final wording of Commendations and Recommendations and content of the Confidential Recommendation. Be sure to confirm the Eligibility Requirements and/or Standards cited as the basis for Recommendations. Please ensure that Commendations and Recommendations are clear, understandable, and grammatically correct.

The exit meeting is one of the most important aspects of the chair's responsibilities. It is imperative that the tone and content of the exit report be consistent with the written report. The exit report should be based on the Eligibility Requirements and Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation visit and leave no doubt about institutional strengths and weaknesses as judged by the evaluators.

At the exit meeting the chair usually opens with an appropriate statement of thanks on behalf of the committee and outlines the procedures that will be followed following completion of the visit. The chair announces that this is not an opportunity for discussion or debate, but rather an opportunity for those present to hear the evaluators' Commendations and Recommendations. The Commendations and Recommendations are then read and the evaluators leave the exit meeting and immediately depart the campus.

### **Post-Evaluation Responsibilities**

Following the evaluation you are to compile individual reports into a draft of the evaluators' peer-evaluation report. The introduction should be written with particular care. This is where the philosophy of evaluation is brought into sharp focus. The essential features of the evaluation are pulled together and highlighted. The introductory and concluding statements should be clear, fair, and reflective of the report as a whole.

Upon completion of the committee or panel peer-evaluation report, send it to fellow evaluators for a final review to ensure the process of compiling and editing the report accurately reflects their findings. Following that review, send the draft peer-evaluation report to the institution's chief executive officer (or designee) for correction of factual errors. The purpose in doing so is to eliminate errors of fact, not to engage in efforts to influence the substance or tone of evaluators' findings. Infrequently, the institution may challenge interpretations or conclusions which are deemed ill-founded, but the chair has the final authority on the content and wording of the peer-evaluation report. The institution is typically allowed seven to ten business days to provide those corrections, if any. If you receive substantive changes, you may wish to consult with fellow evaluators before finalizing the peer-evaluation report.

When finalized, submit the peer-evaluation report and Confidential Recommendation to the Commission office by the designated deadline. You are also asked to provide a brief evaluation of the performance of each evaluator via the forms provided by the Commission office. The Commission office sends the final version of the peer-evaluation report to the institution, along with an opportunity to provide a written response to the report.

There are no post-evaluation responsibilities for panel chairs. For committee evaluations, the chair and the institutional representative(s) meet with the Board of Commissioners. For Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) and Comprehensive evaluations, there is a 60-minute in-person meeting with the Board of Commissioners at the time scheduled by the Commission office. For both types of on-site evaluations, the peer-evaluation report and Confidential Recommendation are provided to Commissioners in advance of the meeting. Each meeting with the Board of Commissioners follows a similar format. Absent the institutional representatives, the chair is asked if there is anything the chair wishes to convey to the Board before institutional representatives are invited into the meeting. Institutional representatives are then invited into the meeting. Introductions are made and the chair makes very brief synopsis of the evaluation. Care should be taken to avoid disclosing information contained in the Confidential Recommendation or making substantive comments about the institution which are not treated in the peer-evaluation report.

The institution's chief executive officer (or designee) is invited to make brief opening comments. Two commissioners, assigned as review specialists, then lead the initial questioning of the institutional representatives. Other commissioners may follow with their own questions. At the conclusion of the question and answer session, the institutions chief executive officer is invited to make closing comments. Institutional representatives are then excused from the meeting and the chair is asked for a reaction to the information provided by the institution as it relates to the evaluators' findings. Commissioners then debate the matter and take formal action. Once a decision has been reached, the chair is excused. The Board's action is communicated in writing to the institution a few weeks thereafter.

**Confidential Recommendation to the NWCCU Board of Commissioners**

Institution Visited: \_\_\_\_\_ Lead Evaluator/Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation Type:  Year One /  Mid-Cycle /  Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) /  Comprehensive /  Ad Hoc /  FRR\*

**1. Accreditation Status Recommended Action:** (Check one of the following actions; include date if Deferring Action.)

- Reaffirm *Accreditation*
- Grant *Accreditation*: Level (A.A., B.A./S., etc) \_\_\_\_\_
- Grant *Accreditation at new degree level*: Level(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- Grant *Candidacy*
- Continue *Candidacy*

Include date if recommending deferring action:

- Defer Action until  Spring/ Fall of \_\_\_\_\_ (year).

Please cite Eligibility Requirements (ER) and/or Standards that are out of compliance and lead to any of the following recommendations.

- Deny *Accreditation* ER and/or Standards \_\_\_\_\_
- Deny *Candidacy* ER and/or Standards \_\_\_\_\_
- Remove *Accreditation* ER and/or Standards \_\_\_\_\_
- Remove *Candidacy* ER and/or Standards \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Recommendations regarding previous recommendations that your committee evaluated that were cited as areas of Non-Compliance:**

a. Recommendation(s) # \_\_\_\_\_ of the  Spring/ Fall \_\_\_\_ (year)  
( Year One/ Year Three/ Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7)/ Ad Hoc/ FRR\*) Peer-Evaluation Report ***remain non-compliant***.

b. Recommendation(s) # \_\_\_\_\_ of the  Spring/ Fall \_\_\_\_ (year)  
( Year One/ Year Three/ Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7)/ Ad Hoc/ FRR\*) Peer-Evaluation Report ***are now in compliance***.

**3. Recommendations regarding previous recommendations that your committee evaluated that were in compliance:**

- a. Recommendation(s) # \_\_\_\_\_ are fulfilled.
- b. Recommendation(s) # \_\_\_\_\_ are continued. Date to be reviewed \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Recommendation(s) # \_\_\_\_\_ are now non-compliant. Date to be reviewed \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Recommendations from current Evaluation Report:**

- a. Recommendation(s) # \_\_\_\_\_ of current peer-evaluation report are areas of non-compliance.
- b. Recommendation(s) # \_\_\_\_\_ of current peer-evaluation report are areas substantially in compliance, but where improvement is required.

**5. Recommended Follow-Up:** Please check as appropriate.

If recommending follow-up please cite: 1) Season and year of follow-up; 2) Recommendations to be addressed.

**a. \_\_\_Address in next regularly scheduled report**

Recommendation(s) # \_\_\_\_\_

**b. \_\_\_Ad Hoc Self-Evaluation Report**

With/ Without visit in  Spring /  Fall \_\_\_\_ (year)

Recommendation(s) # \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Sanction (if appropriate):** (If issued or continued, indicate the season and year for re-evaluation.)

Issue:  *Warning*  *Probation*  *Show-Cause* for ER(s)/Standard(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Continue:  *Warning*  *Probation*  *Show-Cause* for ER(s)/Standards(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Remove:  *Warning*  *Probation*  *Show-Cause* issued for ER(s)/Standard(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendation(s) leading to this action: \_\_\_\_\_

Lead Evaluator/Chair Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Explanations for the Confidential Recommendations**

Provide a concise rationale for each of the following:

Section 1. Accreditation Status: Recommended accreditation action:

Section 2. Recommendations regarding previous recommendations cited as areas of non-compliance that were reviewed in this evaluation:

Section 3. Recommendations regarding previous recommendations that were in compliance:

Section 4. For each Recommendation, note as to whether the Recommendation represents area(s) where the institution is substantially in compliance with cited Eligibility Requirement(s) or Standard(s), but where improvement is needed or whether the Recommendation represents area(s) where the institution is out of compliance with cited Eligibility Requirement(s) or Standard(s). **Please be sure to refer to all Recommendations:**

Section 5. Recommended follow-up if any:

Section 6. Recommendation regarding issuance, continuation or removal of Sanction(s):

## Guide to Completing the Confidential Recommendation Form

The Confidential Recommendation is a non-binding advisory to the Board of Commissioner. It is an important component of the peer-evaluation process that informs Commissioners of the judgments and opinions of the evaluators regarding accreditation actions and future oversight. **The contents of the Confidential Recommendation are not shared publicly or privately, in written or verbal form, with the institution or any of its constituents.** The following is provided to guide completion of the Confidential Recommendation Form.

- 1. Recommended Action**  
For most evaluations, only one category will apply. For others, such as institutions going to a different degree level, two actions may be marked. For example, if an institution accredited at the associate and baccalaureate degree levels and a candidate at the master's degree level, the evaluator might mark "reaffirmation of accreditation" at the associate and baccalaureate degree levels and "granting of accreditation" at the master's degree level.
- 2. Sanction, if appropriate**  
The evaluator may, based upon an evaluation of areas within the scope of the evaluation upon which the sanction is based, suggest imposition, continuation, or removal of a sanction. *Warning*, *Probation* and *Show-Cause* are public sanctions. If the evaluator is changing the level of the sanction, then the old sanction would be removed and the new sanction would be imposed. For example, if elevating a sanction from *Warning* to *Probation*, the evaluator would remove *Warning* and impose *Probation*. If imposing a sanction, note the Eligibility Requirements or Standards that serve as the basis for the sanction.
- 3. Status of Current Areas of Non-Compliance (within the Scope of this Evaluation) Cited Previously:**  
Some areas within the scope of the evaluation may be areas where the institution is currently out-of-compliance with one or more Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard. In those cases, the evaluator is asked, following an evaluation of those areas, for a determination as to whether those areas continue to be out-of-compliance or whether they are now in compliance with the cited Eligibility Requirements or Accreditation Standards.
- 4. Discernment of Recommendations Originating from Your Evaluation Report:**  
The evaluator is to provide a determination of compliance or non-compliance for each of the Recommendations resulting from the evaluation. As such, each Recommendation at the end of the peer-evaluation report must be accounted for in this section of the Confidential Recommendation.
- 5. Recommended Follow-Up**  
Evaluators identify suggested oversight for areas identified in the peer-evaluation report and Recommendations. Areas determined to be out-of-compliance with one or more Eligibility Requirement or Accreditation Standard must be evaluated not later than two (2) years from the season in which the determination was made. That timeline may be extended for areas within the scope of this evaluation determined previously to be out of compliance and determined by the evaluators to be still out-of-compliance. Evaluators may request that non-financial matters may be addressed as addenda to regularly scheduled evaluations. Evaluators may request ad hoc reports (with or without visits) if they determine that the seriousness or urgency of the matter requires another review before the next regularly scheduled evaluation.

# **(Evaluation Type e.g., Mid-Cycle) Peer-Evaluation Report**

**Name of Institution**

**City, State**

**Dates of the Evaluation**

*A confidential report of findings prepared for the  
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities*

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<sup>2</sup>Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) and Comprehensive Peer-Evaluation reports only

<sup>3</sup>Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) and Comprehensive Peer-Evaluation reports only

## Sample Letter from On-site Evaluation Committee Chairs

(Dear (Evaluator Name):

As chair I want to welcome to this on-site evaluation committee. By now you should have received materials from the office of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities pertaining to the (type of evaluation) evaluation of (name of institution) scheduled for (dates). You should also have received directly from the institution a copy of its self-evaluation report and supporting materials, catalog, class schedule, and Basic Institutional Data Form. Since this type of evaluation places a premium on communication, collaboration, and coordination, I will contact you in the near future to schedule a virtual meeting to begin the work of the committee.

The primary purpose of our work is to evaluate the institutions with respect to the Eligibility Requirements and Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation. It is important, therefore, that you have a general understanding of those criteria and thorough understanding of those criteria that relate to your specific evaluation assignment. I encourage you to review the *Handbook for Peer Evaluators*, especially the areas pertaining to the type and scope of this on-site evaluation.

If you have not completed your travel plans, please do so at your earliest convenience. The Commission asks that each evaluator be responsible for his or her own expenses, which will be reimbursed following submission of a completed expense voucher (available under the Forms link on the Commission's website) with receipts attached. Please see the back of the expense voucher for important information regarding the Commission's policy on reimbursement of expenses.

On the eve of the on-site evaluation we will have an organizational meeting at (hour) on (date) in the (location of meeting) at the (hotel/motel). It is important that each committee member be present for this important meeting. In preparing for this meeting, please contact me by email or phone at your earliest convenience to apprise me if you will bring your own computer or request the use of a computer from the institution. Also let me know of any special circumstances related to this visit.

When we meet for our organizational meeting, we will discuss a number of important issues. Please be prepared to discuss the following:

- The quality and readability of the institution's self-evaluation report and supporting materials;
- The usefulness of the self-evaluation report and supporting materials in coming to an understanding of the institution and its compliance with the Eligibility Requirements and Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation;
- Information needed by evaluators to better understand the institution and its compliance with the Eligibility Requirements and Standards appropriate to the scope of the evaluation; and
- Preliminary perceptions regarding possible Compliments, Commendations, Concerns, and Recommendations, based on the self-evaluation report and supporting materials.

Experienced evaluators know that it is particularly helpful to identify in advance the persons they need to interview the first day on campus. If you will send me a list of those persons by name or title, I will arrange to have interviews scheduled for you. If, on the other hand, you wish to contact your point of contact directly to schedule these interviews, that is also acceptable.

Experienced evaluators find it helpful to prepare—in advance of the visit—a tentative outline for their respective components of the peer-evaluation report. Consulting the *Handbook for Peer Evaluators* may be helpful in preparing your outline. I also encourage you to prepare a list of questions you wish to ask

of each of the persons you intend to interview. This will keep your interviews focused on the important questions and allow you to use your time wisely. It is also important for you to identify any institutional documents that you will need to review while on campus.

The exit meeting is normally scheduled for late morning on the last day of the evaluation. If flight options are limited, the time of the exit meeting may be scheduled to enable reasonable return flights. The exit meeting is typically very short and all committee members are expected to be present. For those traveling by air, please factor in time for travel to the airport security clearance in scheduling return flights.

I look forward to working with you on this important evaluation visit. If you have questions or special circumstances, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

(Name), (Title) and Chair, (Name of Institution) Evaluation Committee

## **Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning)**

### **Introduction**

The *Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning)* have been developed by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) to assist institutions in planning distance education and to provide an assessment framework for institutions already involved in distance education and for evaluation teams. They are based on a 2006 report prepared by the General Accounting Office, *Evidence of Quality in Distance Education drawn from Interviews with the Accreditation Community* and the “Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education,” prepared by WCET. They are intended to be used in conjunction with the relevant standards and policies of NWCCU.

The *Guidelines* comprise nine hallmarks of quality for distance education. In their discussions of how their distance education programming fulfills their accreditor’s standards, institutions are asked to include evidence of the extent to which they meet these hallmarks. Examples of the types of evidence that institutions might use are given below. These lists are not meant to be exhaustive; it is likely that institutions will include additional types of evidence in their reports.

## **Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (On-line Learning)**

### **1. On-line learning is appropriate to the institution's mission and purposes.**

#### **Examples of evidence:**

- a. The mission statement explains the role of on-line learning within the range of the institution's programs and services.
- b. Institutional and program statements of vision and values inform how the on-line learning environment(s) is created and supported.
- c. As appropriate, the institution incorporates into its on-line learning programs methods of meeting the stated institutional goals for the student experience at the institution.
- d. The recruitment and admissions programs supporting the on-line learning courses and programs appropriately target the student populations to be served.
- e. The students enrolled in the institution's on-line learning courses and programs fit the profile of the students the institution intends to serve.
- f. Senior administrators and staff can articulate how on-line learning is consonant with the institution's mission and goals.

### **2. The institution's plans for developing, sustaining and, if appropriate, expanding on-line learning offerings are integrated into its regular planning and evaluation processes.**

#### **Examples of evidence:**

- a. Development and ownership of plans for on-line learning extend beyond the administrators directly responsible for it and the programs directly using it.
- b. Planning documents are explicit about any goals to increase numbers of programs provided through on-line learning courses and programs and/or numbers of students to be enrolled in them.
- c. Plans for on-line learning are linked effectively to budget and technology planning to ensure adequate support for current and future offerings.
- d. Plans for expanding on-line learning demonstrate the institution's capacity to assure an appropriate level of quality.
- e. The institution and its on-line learning programs have a track record of conducting needs analysis and of supporting programs.

### **3. On-line learning is incorporated into the institution's systems of governance and academic oversight.**

#### **Examples of evidence:**

- a. The institution's faculty have a designated role in the design and implementation of its on-line learning offerings.
- b. The institution ensures the rigor of the offerings and the quality of the instruction.
- c. Approval of on-line learning courses and programs follows standard processes used in the college or university.
- d. On-line learning courses and programs are evaluated on a periodic basis.
- e. Contractual relationships and arrangements with consortial partners, if any, are clear and guarantee that the institution can exercise appropriate responsibility for the academic quality of all on-line learning offerings provided under its name.



**4. Curricula for the institution's on-line learning offerings are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to programs offered in traditional instructional formats.**

**Examples of evidence:**

- a. The curricular goals and course objectives show that the institution or program has knowledge of the best uses of on-line learning in different disciplines and settings.
- b. Curricula delivered through on-line learning are benchmarked against on-ground courses and programs, if provided by the institution, or those provided by traditional institutions.
- c. The curriculum is coherent in its content and sequencing of courses and is effectively defined in easily available documents including course syllabi and program descriptions.
- d. Scheduling of on-line learning courses and programs provides students with a dependable pathway to ensure timely completion of degrees.
- e. The institution or program has established and enforces a policy on on-line learning course enrollments to ensure faculty capacity to work appropriately with students.
- f. Expectations for any required face-to-face, on-ground work (e.g., internships, specialized laboratory work) are stated clearly.
- g. Course design and delivery supports regular and substantive faculty-student and student-student interaction.
- h. Curriculum design and the course management system enable active faculty contribution to the learning environment.
- i. Course and program structures provide schedule and support known to be effective in helping on-line learning students persist and succeed.

**5. The institution evaluates the effectiveness of its on-line learning offerings, including the extent to which the on-line learning goals are achieved, and uses the results of its evaluations to enhance the attainment of the goals.**

**Examples of evidence:**

- a. Assessment of student learning follows processes used in onsite courses or programs and/or reflects good practice in assessment methods.
- b. Student course evaluations are routinely taken and an analysis of them contributes to strategies for course improvements.
- c. Evaluation strategies ensure effective communication between faculty members who design curriculum, faculty members who interact with students, and faculty members who evaluate student learning.
- d. The institution regularly evaluates the effectiveness of the academic and support services provided to students in on-line courses and uses the results for improvement.
- e. The institution demonstrates the appropriate use of technology to support its assessment strategies.
- f. The institution documents its success in implementing changes informed by its programs of assessment and evaluation.
- g. The institution provides examples of student work and student interactions among themselves and with faculty.
- h. The institution sets appropriate goals for the retention/persistence of students using on-line learning, assesses its achievement of these goals, and uses the results for improvement.

**6. Faculty responsible for delivering the on-line learning curricula and evaluating the students' success in achieving the on-line learning goals are appropriately qualified and effectively supported.**

**Examples of evidence:**

- a. On-line learning faculties are carefully selected, appropriately trained, frequently evaluated, and are

- marked by an acceptable level of turnover.
- b. The institution's training program for on-line learning faculty is periodic, incorporates tested good practices in on-line learning pedagogy, and ensures competency with the range of software products used by the institution.
  - c. Faculty are proficient and effectively supported in using the course management system.
  - d. The office or persons responsible for on-line learning training programs are clearly identified and have the competencies to accomplish the tasks, including knowledge of the specialized resources and technical support available to support course development and delivery.
  - e. Faculty members engaged in on-line learning share in the mission and goals of the institution and its programs and are provided the opportunities to contribute to the broader activities of the institution.
  - f. Students express satisfaction with the quality of the instruction provided by on-line learning faculty members.

**7. The institution provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in on-line learning offerings.**

**Examples of evidence:**

- a. The institution's admissions program for on-line learning provides good web-based information to students about the nature of the on-line learning environment, and assists them in determining if they possess the skills important to success in on-line learning.
- b. The institution provides an on-line learning orientation program.
- c. The institution provides support services to students in formats appropriate to the delivery of the on-line learning program.
- d. Students in on-line learning programs have adequate access to student services, including financial aid, course registration, and career and placement counseling.
- e. Students in on-line learning programs have ready access to 24/7 tech support.
- f. Students using on-line learning have adequate access to learning resources, including library, information resources, laboratories, and equipment and tracking systems.
- g. Students using on-line learning demonstrate proficiency in the use of electronic forms of learning resources.
- h. Student complaint processes are clearly defined and can be used electronically.
- i. Publications and advertising for on-line learning programs are accurate and contain necessary information such as program goals, requirements, academic calendar, and faculty.
- j. Students are provided with reasonable and cost-effective ways to participate in the institution's system of student authentication.

**8. The institution provides sufficient resources to support and, if appropriate, expand its on-line learning offerings.**

**Examples of evidence:**

- a. The institution prepares a multi-year budget for on-line learning that includes resources for assessment of program demand, marketing, appropriate levels of faculty and staff, faculty and staff development, library and information resources, and technology infrastructure.
- b. The institution provides evidence of a multi-year technology plan that addresses its goals for on-line learning and includes provision for a robust and scalable technical infrastructure.

**9. The institution assures the integrity of its on-line learning offerings.**

**Examples of evidence:**

- a. The institution has in place effective procedures through which to ensure that the student who registers

in a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. The institution makes clear in writing that these processes protect student privacy and notifies students at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional costs associated with the verification procedures. **(Note: This is a federal requirement. All institutions that offer distance education programming must demonstrate compliance with this requirement.)**

- b. The institution's policies on academic integrity include explicit references to on-line learning.
- c. Issues of academic integrity are discussed during the orientation for on-line students.
- d. Training for faculty members engaged in on-line learning includes consideration of issues of academic integrity, including ways to reduce cheating.

*October 2013*

<sup>1</sup> Institutions are encouraged to consult "Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education," prepared by WCET and available at <http://wcet.wiche.edu/advance/resources>



## **Guidelines for the Preparation of the Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report**

### **Purpose and Process**

Conducted in the third year of the seven year cycle, the Mid-Cycle Evaluation is intended to ascertain an institution's readiness to provide evidence (outcomes) of mission fulfillment and sustainability in the Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7). It is to assist institutions in determining if the process of outcomes assessment will lead them to a successful Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) self-evaluation and peer evaluation. It is intended to be a formative and collegial evaluation with the institution in conversation with the evaluators.

### **Guidelines Overview**

The Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation (MCE) includes institutional self-evaluation on its assessment efforts at both the macro and micro level. Macro refers to an overview of the entire process of assessment for mission fulfillment at the institution. Micro refers to providing representative examples of the details of the assessment process. Thus, the MCE will include three parts; Part I: Overview of entire assessment plan; Part II: Representative examples of assessment process from beginning to end; and Part III: Evaluative overview in the light of Parts I and II.

#### **Part I: Overview of Institutional Assessment Plan**

Informed and guided by Standards 1 and 3-5, Part I of the MCE will be a narrative shaped by the questions below describing the institution's plan for linking/aligning mission (Standard One) with mission fulfillment and sustainability (Standard 5).

As you analyze your assessment plan please respond to the following questions:

- Describe/explain your process of assessing mission fulfillment. Who is involved in the assessment? Is the Board of Trustees involved?
- Are your core themes and objectives still valid?
- Is the institution satisfied that the core themes and indicators selected are providing sufficient evidence to assess mission fulfillment and sustainability? If not, what changes are you contemplating?

#### **Part II:**

The institution will provide two representative examples of how it has operationalized its mission and core themes progressing from objectives to indicators to outcomes to mission fulfillment. These examples should be regarding student learning either at the institutional, program or course level. They should illustrate how you are "closing the loop" on student learning assessment.

As you provide these examples please include analysis in regard to the following questions:

- Are your indicators, for the selected examples, proving to be meaningful? Do you have too many indicators or too few?
- What has the institution learned so far and what changes are contemplated? What has been your progress to date using the data? Do the data tell you what you are looking for?
- How are data being collected, analyzed, and utilized and the findings communicated to constituents?

**Part III:**

In light of your analysis in Part I of your overall assessment plan and in light of your analysis of the representative examples you provided in Part II please respond to the following question:

- Moving forward to the Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) what will you need to do?

No response to Eligibility Requirements is necessary.

If responses to Recommendations have been requested to accompany the Mid Cycle Evaluation please include these in a separate document.

## **Process**

1. There will be a 1 ½ day onsite visit of two evaluators. The visit will be collaborative and formative.
2. The self-evaluation report will be due 4-5 weeks prior to the visit.
  - The body of the report should be approximately 10-15 pages in length
  - Examples of assessment can be appendices to the report but should be concise
3. Evaluators will coordinate with the ALO to determine who will be involved in the campus process. The visit should include senior leadership including the President and those involved in the process.
4. The evaluators will have a closing formative conversation with the institution to share their findings.
5. The Board of Commissioners will review the Self-Evaluation and the Peer Evaluation and determine whether the Self-Evaluation is acceptable or unacceptable.

## **Report Layout**

1. Use letter size portrait orientation (8½" wide by 11" high) with 1" margins on all sides.
2. Use 11- or 12-point type face for the body of the report. Larger fonts may be used for major headings which should be in bold print face and double spaced from the text. Do not use script or italic as the primary font.
3. Number all pages (except Title page and Table of Contents page).
4. Title page to include:
  - a. Title of Self-Evaluation Report
  - b. Name of Institution
  - c. Date Submitted
5. Table of Contents
6. Single space text in the body of the report.

## **Publication of Report**

### Print Version

1. Except for the front and back covers of bound reports, use WHITE 20 pound paper.
2. Other than the Title Page and Table of Contents page, print on BOTH SIDES of the paper.
3. Staple the report in the upper left corner

### Electronic Version

1. Provide the body of the self-evaluation report as a single Windows-compatible Adobe Acrobat file. If included, appendixes may be sent as a single Adobe Acrobat file. *Non-Acrobat files and multi-file documents may be returned.* The file should be emailed to: [reports@nwccu.org](mailto:reports@nwccu.org).

## **Submission of the Report**

Submit the following to the Commission Office:

1. Five (5) printed copies of the self-evaluation report;
2. One (1) electronic copy of the self-evaluation report; (either by email or on electronic media) and
3. One (1) copy of the institution's catalog.

Submit the following to each evaluator:

1. One printed copy of the self-evaluation report;
2. One electronic copy of the self-evaluation report (may be negotiated if evaluators prefer electronic versions only)

**Please contact the Commission Office at 425-558-4224 if you have questions on these guidelines.**



# Guidelines for the Preparation of Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability (Y7) Self-Evaluation Reports

(Revised 4/10/14)

## Structure and Contents

1. Title page to include:
  - a. Title of Self-Evaluation Report
  - b. Name of Institution
  - c. Date Submitted
2. Table of Contents
3. Institutional Overview [Two (2) pages maximum]
4. Basic Institutional Data Form
  - a. The Basic Institutional Data Form may be found on the NWCCU website ([www.nwccu.org](http://www.nwccu.org)) by hovering over the “Publications, Forms, and Updates” button on the left hand side of the website and selecting the “Forms” option.
  - b. On the Forms page, the document will be found under the heading “Forms for Institutions”.
5. Preface
  - a. Brief update on institutional changes since the institution’s last report
  - b. Response to topics previously requested by the Commission (i.e., Addenda)
6. Mission, Core Themes, and Expectations
  - a. Executive Summary of Eligibility Requirements 2 and 3
  - b. Standard 1.A *Mission* to include [Three (3) pages maximum]:
    - i. Institution’s mission statement
    - ii. Interpretation of mission fulfillment
    - iii. Articulation of an acceptable threshold, extent, or degree of mission fulfillment
  - c. Standard 1.B *Core Themes* to include: One Section for each Core Theme [Three (3) pages maximum per Core Theme]:
    - i. Title of the Core Theme
    - ii. Brief description of the Core Theme
    - iii. Objectives to be achieved via the Core Theme
    - iv. Indicators of achievement of the respective Core Theme objectives
    - v. Rationale for the selection of the respective indicators of achievement—why they are assessable and meaningful measures of achievement of the associated Core Theme objectives.
7. Resources and Capacity
  - a. Executive Summary of Eligibility Requirements 4 through 21
  - b. Standard 2.A *Governance*
  - c. Standard 2.B *Human Resources*
  - d. Standard 2.C *Education Resources*
  - e. Standard 2.D *Student Support Resources*
  - f. Standard 2.E *Library and Information Resources*
  - g. Standard 2.F *Financial Resources*
  - h. Standard 2.G *Physical and Technological Infrastructure*

8. Institutional Planning
  - a. Standard 3.A *Institutional Planning*
9. Core Theme Planning, Assessment, and Improvement
  - a. Executive Summary of Eligibility Requirements 22 and 23
  - b. One section for each Core Theme to address Standards 3.B *Core Theme Planning*, 4.A *Assessment*, and 4.B *Improvement* as they relate to each respective Core Theme
10. Mission Fulfillment, Adaptation, Sustainability
  - a. Eligibility Requirement 24
  - b. Standard 5.A *Mission Fulfillment*
  - c. Standard 5.B *Adaptation and Sustainability*
11. Conclusion [Five (5) pages maximum]

## Report Layout

1. Use letter size portrait orientation (8½” wide by 11” high) with 1” margins on all sides.
2. Use 11- or 12-point type face for the body of the report. Larger fonts may be used for major headings which should be in bold print face and double spaced from the text. Do not use script or italic as the primary font.
3. Number all pages (except Title page and Table of Contents page).
4. Single space text in the body of the report.

## Publication of Report

### Print Version

1. Except for the front and back covers of bound reports, use **WHITE** 20 pound paper.
2. Other than the Title Page and Table of Contents page, print on **BOTH SIDES** of the paper.
3. The **NWCCU office** copies of the report and appendices should be stapled or clipped together and three-hole punched.
4. Copies of the report sent to **evaluators** should be bound using spiral binding. Bind lengthy appendices as a separate document.

### Electronic Version

1. Provide the body of the self-evaluation report as a single Windows-compatible Adobe Acrobat file. If available, appendixes may also be sent as a single Adobe Acrobat file. ***Non-Acrobat files and multi-file documents may be returned.*** The file should be emailed to: reports@nwccu.org.

## Submission of the Report

### Submit the following to the Commission Office:

1. Five (5) printed copies of the self-evaluation report;
2. One (1) electronic copy of the self-evaluation report; and
3. One (1) copy of the institution’s catalog (*electronic acceptable*).

### Submit the following to each evaluator:

1. One printed copy of the self-evaluation report;
2. One electronic copy of the self-evaluation report, and
3. One copy of the institution’s catalog to each evaluator (*electronic acceptable*).

Please contact the Commission Office at 425/558-4224 if you have questions on these guidelines.







## Guidelines for the Preparation of Special Reports

Please submit six (6) printed copies of report materials, one electronic copy of the report, and one copy of the catalog to the Commission office. Send each evaluator a printed set of materials and an electronic copy of the report.

### **Structure**

1. Title page containing (as a minimum):
  - a) Institution name;
  - b) Type of report (i.e., Focused Interim Report); and
  - c) Date.
2. Table of Contents.
3. Introduction regarding the context for the report (i.e., when the report was requested, why it was requested (result of Focused, Regular, or Comprehensive evaluation; result of a substantive change, etc.))
4. List each Recommendation or topic to be addressed followed by a thorough response to the Recommendation or topic. Repeat until all Recommendations and/or topics have been addressed.
5. Concluding statement summarizing the institution's progress in addressing the areas of inquiry requested by the Commission.

### **Layout**

1. Use letter size portrait orientation (8½ inch width by 11 inch height) with 1 inch margins on all sides.
2. Use 11- or 12-point type face for the body of the report. Larger fonts may be used for major headings. Headings should be typed in bold print face and double spaced from the text. Do not use script or italic as the primary font.
3. Number all pages (except Title page, Table of Contents, and Introduction).
4. Single space text in the body of the report.

### **Publication**

To conserve paper and minimize shipping costs, please adhere to the following:

#### **Print Version**

1. Use **WHITE** 20 pound paper for the report.
2. Other than the Title Page and Table of Contents page, copy on **BOTH SIDES** of the paper.
3. Three-hole punch the report and appendices (if any).
4. Staple smaller reports in the upper left corner. Clip larger reports. Do not bind or shrink-wrap reports!

#### **Electronic Version**

1. Provide the body of the report as a single Windows-compatible Adobe Acrobat file. If available, appendixes may also be sent as a single Adobe Acrobat file. ***Non-Acrobat files and multi-file reports may be returned.*** The file should be emailed to: [reports@nwccu.org](mailto:reports@nwccu.org).

Contact the Commission Office at 425/558-4224 if you have any questions regarding these guidelines.



## **Guidelines for Preparation of the Financial Resources Review (FRR)**

Through the Financial Resources Review the Commission will monitor the institution's financial and enrollment conditions.

In preparing the Financial Resources Review, the Commission asks that the institution provide the following information:

1. A Narrative Report. The narrative component of the report is a principal component of the Commission's review of the institution. The narrative should demonstrate to the Commission the institution's understanding of its fiscal and enrollment situation and provide evidence that it is developing realistic plans and taking concrete action to address its challenges. The Commission's review will focus on whether or not the financial condition of the institution has stabilized and/or improved and the likelihood of continued improvement.

### **The narrative should:**

- a. Explain and appraise the institution's current financial and enrollment situation in terms of its strengths and concerns (for example, if the institution has debt, an explanation should be provided of how the institution is addressing the issue of debt);
- b. Describe the institution's plans and a framework for working through the above identified challenging issues (for example, how does the institution plan to enhance and strengthen available resources);
- c. Address the Board's involvement in financial planning. This includes providing evidence (through minutes of Board meetings and Board actions) of the Board's understanding of the fiscal challenges facing the institution and how they are being addressed;
- d. Explicate the assumptions underlying the institution's budgetary and enrollment projections.
- e. Discuss the contents of the audited financial statements, including any data which may require explanation to be understood.
- f. Address the nature and results of efforts taken since the last Commission review to respond to noted fiscal concerns and the outcomes of those efforts.

In completing the narrative, sufficient detailed information should be included to assure the Commission has a comprehensive understanding of the institution's fiscal and enrollment situation.

1. Actual budget results for the last three years;
2. Budget projections for a minimum of three years;
3. Actual enrollments for last three years and projected enrollments for next three years;
4. The institution's most recent audited financial statement and the accompanying management letter.

Please submit eight (8) printed copies and one electronic copy of the report as a single Adobe Acrobat file by the date requested in the Commission's notification letter.