

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES
ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SENIOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

-excerpted from the *2001 Handbook of Accreditation* (p. 37-40)

Stage 1. The Institutional Proposal

Purposes: The Institutional Proposal is the first element of the Institutional Presentation and the first stage in the accreditation review cycle. Its purpose is to guide the entire accreditation review process. Once the Proposal is approved it becomes part of the total body of instrumental material that supports the review during its subsequent two stages. As such, the Proposal will be shared with each subsequent review team and with the Commission. The Proposal enables the review process to be anchored in each institution's distinctive context and its intended goals for the accreditation process. The staged review process is also intended to make meaningful contributions to each institution's own internal planning and review mechanisms, as well as to reduce the burden associated with having to do work unrelated to institutional priorities. Commission interests are assured by the fact that each Proposal is reviewed by a peer committee charged with the responsibility of applying Commission criteria to each Proposal and its alignment with the Core commitments and Accreditation Standards. Once approved, the Proposal may be further refined or modified during the accreditation process by mutual consent or by the Commission following the Preparatory Review. It provides both the institution and the commission with a foundation for carrying out the accreditation process within a written and approved framework.

In sum, the Institutional Proposal enables the institution to:

1. Establish the context for its next accreditation review cycle by describing the institution's most important features, and the most important issues that it wishes to address;
2. Define specific goals and outcomes for the accreditation review in light of issues arising from the institution's own planning and development processes and emerging from the institution's examination of itself under the new accreditation Standards, as well as specific issues raised by the Commission as a result of the last institutional review;
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of its data gathering and analysis systems;
4. Identify how the institution will present basic data and Reflective Essays on Institutional Capacity for the Preparatory Review;
5. Explore educational effectiveness and support institutional improvement by identifying the institutional strategy to be used for the Educational Effectiveness Review; and
6. Propose the timing and relationship between the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews (normally 12 to 18 months).

Timing: Submitted two-and-a-half years prior to the Preparatory Review in order to be finalized two years prior to the Preparatory Review. Formal date of submission established by the Commission.

Format and Required Elements: Institutional Proposals are to include the following elements:

1. A Statement of Institutional Context that briefly describes the institution's background, its current context, a brief and basic presentation of its major strengths and challenges, and a synopsis of responses to issues raised by the Commission action letter and, where relevant, issues identified by the Substantive Change or Interim Report Committees. This Statement should also connect the context for the accreditation review to the institution's vision and strategic plan.
2. A description of the expected outcomes of the Accreditation Review Process. As the Commission has attempted to model this process on page 36, expected outcomes for the institution should be more than a statement of activities or identification of topics for review. The institution is expected to identify specific outcomes that it seeks to achieve through the accreditation review process and particular processes, policies, or procedures (e.g. planning, program review, establishing academic standards, faculty development, etc.) that it intends to improve through the process.
3. A description of how representatives of the institution's constituencies were involved in the development and internal approval of the Proposal and how they will be involved subsequently in the review process. It is expected that key institutional leadership, especially the faculty leadership have been involved in the design of the proposal, the format of review, the selection of special themes, the method of inquiry, and the most significant indicators that will be developed as evidence.
4. A description of how the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews will be staged and timed to address institutional goals and to demonstrate the institution's fulfillment of the two Core Commitments.
5. For the Preparatory Review, a brief description how the institution intends to present evidence to demonstrate compliance with Commission Standards including the proposed format of presentation and types of key indicators that will be included in the Institutional Portfolio. This statement should also include commentary on the effectiveness of the institution's data gathering and analysis systems, and the steps to be taken to develop institutional evidence to support both the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews.
6. For the Educational Effectiveness Review, a brief description of the format to be used by the institution to engage issues of Educational Effectiveness (see p. 45 of the *2001 Handbook*), the special emphases being proposed in light of the format selected, the methods to be used to engage these issues, and the ways in which the institution will address issues of student learning. This statement should also identify the key evidentiary indicators the institution will develop and/or apply to support its Educational Effectiveness Review.
7. A prescribed set of Basic Descriptive Data presented in standard form that address a range of common institutional characteristics including enrollments, listings of the institution's academic programs, numbers of faculty and staff employed, and available fiscal, physical, and information resources. All data should be presented in the form of five-year historical

trends. These Data Tables will be available on the WASC website (wascweb.org) for downloading.

8. A list of all degree programs where 50 percent or more of the program is offered off-site (more than 25 miles from the home campus) or by distance learning.
9. An Institutional Stipulation Statement signed by the Chief Executive Officer that establishes:
 - a) That the institution is using the review process to demonstrate its fulfillment of the two Core Commitments, that it will engage in the process with seriousness, that data presented are accurate and fairly present the institution.
 - b) That the institution has published and publicly available policies in force as identified by the Commission (see Appendix 1, p. 126). Such policies will be available for review on request throughout the period of accreditation.
 - c) That the institution will abide by procedures adopted by the Commission to meet United States Department of Education (USDE) procedural requirements (see Section VI).
 - d) That the institution will submit all regularly required data, and any data specifically requested by the Commission during the period of Accreditation (or Candidacy).
 - e) That the institution has reviewed its off-campus programs and degree programs offered by distance learning to ensure that they have been approved by the WASC substantive change process.

Exclusive of data displays and stipulations, the Institutional Proposal should not exceed ten pages in length.

Proposal Review Process: Following submission, the Institutional Proposal is first reviewed by Commission staff and may be commented on with requested revisions prior to submission to the Proposal review Committee (PRC). The PRC is authorized to approve proposals which it believes assure that an institution will be able to effectively demonstrate that it fulfills the two Core Commitments required for accreditation. In cases where the PRC has doubts that the Proposal will result in a review process that is capable of doing so, the Committee may request further information from the institution and/or may require revision and re-submission of the Proposal itself. At the conclusion of the review process, Commission staff will inform the institution that its Proposal has been accepted and that it can proceed with the review. Working with Commission staff, the institution is responsible for preparing a final copy of the Proposal or use by evaluation teams and the Commission.