

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Accreditation Cycle**

#### ***Introduction***

This chapter provides an overview of the accreditation cycle which is comprised of three major activities. These activities and their purpose are briefly described below. In the following chapters each activity is reviewed in more detail. The underlying expectation of the accreditation process is that all accredited credential programs are implementing programs that are aligned to the Commission's adopted standards and are engaged in continuous, on-going collection of data about candidate competence and program effectiveness, are analyzing the data, and are using the results to make programmatic improvements. Taken as a whole, the elements of the accreditation cycle prepare the institution and the accreditation review team to identify an institution's strengths and any areas needing improvement.

#### **I. Purpose**

The overarching goal of the accreditation system is to ensure that educator preparation programs are aligned with the Common Standards and all relevant Program Standards which require, among other things, that institutions develop comprehensive data collection systems to support continuous program improvement and to demonstrate candidates' knowledge and skills for educating and supporting all students in meeting the state-adopted academic standards. The graphic in Figure 1 emphasizes the continuous nature of the accreditation system.

Four primary purposes are achieved through the accreditation system. First, the process creates a mechanism by which educator preparation programs, their institutions, and the COA are held accountable to the public and to the education profession. Through participation in the accreditation process, educator preparation programs document their adherence to educator preparation standards and their use of data for on-going analyses of program effectiveness. Second, the cycle supports institutions' adherence to appropriate program standards, generally the CTC-adopted teacher preparation standards. Third, by requiring institutions to use data to identify areas needing improvement, the accreditation process helps ensure high quality educator preparation programs. Fourth, the accreditation cycle encourages institutions to create and utilize systematic and comprehensive evaluation processes to ensure their candidates are well qualified for teaching or specialist services credentials and that their programs are providing the rigorous content and pedagogical preparation new teachers and other educators need to be successful.

#### **II. Overview**

The accreditation process is a seven-year cycle of activities. Figure 1, below, illustrates the accreditation cycle of activities. These activities are the biennial reports, program assessment and the site visit. Each educator preparation institution has been assigned to a cohort. Each cohort is on a specific seven-year cycle. Table 1, at the end of this chapter, is a generic cohort chart for a cohort that is in Year 1 and is completing Year 1 activities.

Institutions are, therefore, at different points in the accreditation cycle, depending on their assigned cohort.. The cohort model distributes the workload of the CTC, its staff, and the Board of Institutional Review (BIR) members, which is composed of trained education professionals who review program documents and conduct the accreditation site visits. A brief overview of each activity will be provided here. For a full description and guidance on preparing for each activity, please see the appropriate chapters.

Figure 1 Accreditation cycle of activities



### ***Biennial Reports***

Biennial reports are submitted to the CTC every two to three years. The purposes of the reports are to ensure that institutions are collecting and analyzing candidate and program data on a regular basis and that program improvement activities are being identified

based on the results of the analyses. Institutions prepare the biennial reports by collecting and analyzing two to three years of candidate and program data. Submissions occur following years one, three, and five. Each institution identifies one of three due dates on which its submission will be due: August 15, September 15, or October 15.

When writing the report, the institution briefly describes its programs, the number of candidates in each program, the types of programs it runs, and any programmatic changes that have occurred since the last accreditation activity. Each program separately reports candidate and program effectiveness data by presenting the data, analyzing the data, and identifying program strengths and concerns. The reports conclude with an institutional summary and plan of action that describes actions the institution will take to address any concerns identified by the analysis of the data within and/or across programs. Subsequent biennial reports will give the institution an opportunity to report on changes that were implemented as a result of the prior biennial report.

### ***Program Assessment***

Program Assessment is the activity during which key program documents are reviewed to determine whether the educator preparation program appears to be aligned to program standards. This activity begins in the fourth year of the accreditation cycle and may require 12-15 months to complete depending on the reviewers' need for more information from the institution.

During an institution's Program Assessment year, each of its educator preparation programs submit documents demonstrating how the program meets the relevant program standards. If the program is transitioning to newly adopted standards, it may submit a transition plan (see Chapter Six for more information). The program document has three parts.

- Part One is a narrative describing how the program is meeting each program standard.
- Part Two includes course of study and key assignments/assessments that provide the documentation to support the narrative in Part One.
- Part Three describes the procedures used to measure candidate competence\* and program effectiveness as measured against appropriate standards, including documentation that those measures are administered in a consistent and equitable manner. Information from Part Three supports the program's Biennial Reports.

*\*For Tier II educator preparation programs candidate competence refers to a candidate's growth in competence while enrolled in the Tier II program.*

Each program at an institution may determine when to submit its document during the Program Assessment window (*see Commission's website for due dates*).

Pairs of trained BIR members review program documents to determine whether each program is preliminarily aligned with program standards or whether more information is needed to make that determination. Following each round of reviews, the feedback form, the Preliminary Report of Findings, is sent to the program. The Preliminary Report describes which standards are preliminarily aligned with standards and identifies what additional information is needed to make a preliminary determination of other program standards. Institutions are encouraged to provide additional information, if requested, so

that the Program Assessment process can be completed in advance of the Site Visit. Results of the process are used to determine the configuration of the site visit team. For example, if reviewers have determined that additional information is still needed before a program can be found to be preliminarily aligned, an additional person might be assigned to that institution's site visit team who can focus on the program that didn't complete Program Assessment.

### ***Site Visit***

The Site Visit takes place in year six of the accreditation cycle. The site visit allows a BIR team to consolidate and verify information from the Biennial Reports and the Program Assessment processes for the purpose of making findings about the extent to which an institution and its programs meet the Common and Program Standards and to generate an accreditation recommendation. The team performs interviews with samples of stakeholders from each of an institution's programs and completes limited document reviews to confirm or disconfirm information from the other sources. The team also examines evidence about the institution's policies and practices as they impact educator preparation programs. Based upon the findings of all three activities, an accreditation recommendation is made to the COA.

Institutions are assigned a state consultant approximately one year in advance of the site visit in order to help them prepare for the visit. The Administrator of Accreditation works with each institution to establish the visit dates, site team size and configuration. During this time, the institution prepares both its Preconditions Report (which describes the institution's context and describes how it satisfies program preconditions) and its Site Visit Documentation, which describes how it satisfies the Common Standards. These documents are sent in advance of the Site Visit to all team members.

In year seven of the accreditation cycle, institutions provide follow up information from the site visit findings to the COA per the COA's accreditation decision.

## **III. Cohort Activities**

All approved educator preparation sponsors are assigned to one of seven cohorts. Table 1, below, illustrates the accreditation tasks associated with each year in the cycle. To identify the cohort assignment of an institution, use the link below the table which takes one to the main accreditation webpage. At the bottom of the page is a link to an alphabetized list of institutional assignments to cohorts. Above that link are links to each cohort.

Table 1. Sample of one cohort's cycle of accreditation activities. Each cohort started its cycle in a different year to spread out the work of CTC staff.

Academic Year (AY)	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Cycle Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Institutional Activity</b>	Institutional Data Collection  <b>Biennial Report</b>	Institutional Data Collection	Institutional Data Collection  <b>Biennial Report</b>	Institutional Data Collection  <b>Program Assessment</b>	Institutional Data Collection  <b>Biennial Report</b>	Institutional Data Collection  <b>Site Visit</b>	Institutional Data Collection  Site Visit follow-up
<b>Due to CTC</b>	Biennial Report (Data for Academic Years 6, 7, and 1)	Nothing	Biennial Report (Data for Academic Years 2 and 3)	Program Assessment	Biennial Report (Data for Academic Year 4 and 5)	Preconditions Report  Common Standards Self-Study	7 <sup>th</sup> Year Follow Up Report, if applicable
<b>Due dates</b>	15 <sup>th</sup> of Aug., Oct. or Dec. of Academic Year 2	None	15 <sup>th</sup> of Aug., Sept., or Oct., of Academic Year 4	Oct., Nov., or Dec. of Academic Year 4	15 <sup>th</sup> of Aug. or Oct. of Academic Year 6 <sup>1</sup>	6-12 months before visit  2 months before visit	Up to 1 Year after Site Visit, if applicable
<b>COA/CTC Feedback What &amp; when</b>	-CTC Staff feedback due - Aug: 8-10 weeks Oct: 10-12 weeks Dec: 12-16 weeks	None	-CTC Staff feedback due - Aug: 8-10 weeks Sept: 10-12 weeks Oct: 12-16 weeks	Preliminary findings on each program and all standards by Jan. of Year 5	-CTC Staff feedback due - Aug: 6-8 weeks Oct: 6-8 weeks	Accreditation decision made by COA	COA Review of 7 <sup>th</sup> Year Report and a Revised Accreditation decision, if applicable

*Italics = COA/NCATE Joint Visit (F= Fall Semester; S= Spring Semester)*

Each institution can determine its cohort assignment by consulting the CTC's webpage. The information will be found at <http://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/program-accred.html>.

<sup>1</sup> CTC staff strongly encourage institutions to submit the Third Year Biennial Report on the August or September due dates to maximize the timeframe between Biennial Report and Program Assessment submissions.