

Discussion of Identifying Exemplary Practices February 2014

Overview

This report discusses a pilot program to begin to identify exemplary practices through the Commission's accreditation system.

Staff Recommendation

This is an information item.

Background

In February 2013, the COA discussed the possibility of the Commission's accreditation system identifying which programs are exemplary and disseminating that information such that other programs can learn from, and possibly replicate, to the extent possible, the successes. The COA Agenda item can be accessed at: <http://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/coa-agendas/2013-02/2013-02-item-12.pdf>.

In the February 2013 COA agenda item, staff had noted that the Commission had signaled that it was interested in pursuing the possibility of identifying exemplary practices or programs. In December 2012, the Commission discussed the 10 basic tenets of the accreditation system (Appendix A). One of these tenets states, "Currently, institutions are held to meeting the specific language of the standard and there is no attempt to identify excellence beyond meeting the standard."

Currently, the Commission's accreditation system determines whether an institution is meeting state adopted educator preparation standards. The Commission's accreditation teams are charged with examining evidence to make a determination about whether the program and institution has met or not met standards. While sometimes it is clear that institutions or programs have particular strengths, the current accreditation system does not account for this in a finding of "exceeds standards" or other similar language. No place in the Commission's current accreditation system provides guidance or the opportunity for the Commission to identify particularly successful programs and practices.

At various times in the Commission's history of program review and accreditation direction for team reports has included specific sections on program strengths and commendations. In recent years, the Commission's focus has been on whether an institution meets standards, with any strengths being noted within the existing team report narrative, rather than being specifically called out as such. The Commission's interest in not only identifying whether the programs meet standards, but whether there are practices that may enhance and improve educator preparation suggests it may be time to revisit how this might be achieved through inclusion in accreditation team. Elliot Eisner, addressed this issue in *Why Standards May Not Improve Schools (1993)*, "as a unit of measurement, a standard is a vehicle for describing, rather than appraising a set of qualities...to determine matters of value, we need something more."

The new accreditation system established by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) will include a tiered accreditation status. Although little is known at this time about how this new approach will be implemented, it is clear that there is growing sentiment among some accrediting bodies and policymakers to acknowledge and identify programs that are going “beyond the standards.”

The Commission staff discussed this topic further with the Commission at its March 2013 Commission meeting (<http://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/agendas/2013-03/2013-03-3E.pdf>). At this meeting, the Commission staff provided a list of possible options for identifying exemplary programs and included with those options were comments and concerns raised by the members of the COA:

1. *Designate those institutions with all Common and Program Standards met as being an exemplary institution.* The COA suggested that those institutions which have met all the Commission’s standards upon an initial site visit could be deemed exemplary. Historically, about half the institutions with site visits receive full accreditation but few institutions receive a finding of all Common Standards and all program standards met upon an initial site visit.

As illustrated in the table below, over the past six years, 60 institutions that offer initial teacher preparation hosted site visits. Of these, 33 earned **Accreditation** from the COA, but only 13 of the institutions initially met all of the Commission’s standards—both Common and Program. Meeting all of the Commission’s standards could be one way to identify institutions that are doing an exemplary job of preparing educators. Additional historical data on accreditation decisions is provided in Appendix D.

Year	Total Visits	Total Visits Initial Teacher Preparation	Accreditation Decision				All Standards Met
			Accreditation	Stipulations	Major Stipulations	Probationary Stipulations	
2006-07	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
2007-08	6	6	3	3	0	0	0
2008-09	14	12	7	2	3	2	4
2009-10	13	13	6	3	4	0	4
2010-11	31	10	4	5	0	1	0
2011-12	40	18	12	6	0	0	4
Totals	105	60	33	19	7	3	13

The argument against such a system could be that the standards establish the minimum criteria that must be met for continued approval. Meeting all standards does not, in and of itself, indicate that the institution is doing an “exemplary” job in preparing educators, if the common definition of exemplary is used. Nevertheless, these institutions have, in fact, been found to meet all of the Commission’s standards with no concerns raised by the review team or the COA.

2. *Designate a specific Commission-approved program as exemplary.* Each credential program area has a number of program standards. Most of the Commission’s program standards follow a similar structure – program design standards, curriculum and fieldwork standards, and candidate assessment standards. In order to designate an entire program as exemplary, it is reasonable to assume that all areas of the program would need to be found to be meeting standards and that some number of the standards would be exceeded in some manner, as defined by criteria to be established by the Commission.
3. *Identify specific program components as exemplary.* In the COA discussion there was recognition that nearly all programs have some areas that could be improved and some areas of strength. Allowing review teams to identify components of standards as implemented by a program – rather than whole standards or entire programs – might mitigate some of the potential political and practical challenges associated with other options, while at the same time accomplishing the major objective of allowing for identification and dissemination of promising practices. Recognizing that a program has, for example, a highly effective master teacher training program might be more useful to another institution looking to improve its master teacher training program than trying to replicate the successes of an entire program in an entirely different local context.

A variation of this concept, and one that could perhaps be accomplished without a major change in the accreditation system, is that the Commission staff could work with the COA and the site visit teams to more explicitly highlight exemplary program components or best practices within the existing team reports. Team members would have flexibility in identifying exemplary programs or practices, but would have to include justification for making that determination.

4. *Adopt an NCATE-like model.* NCATE’s continuous improvement model requires that an institution identify a particular standard that it believes it not only meets, but exceeds or is well on the way to exceeding in some manner. A rubric for each standard has been adopted by NCATE with three categories for reviewers to consider, “unacceptable,” “acceptable,” and “target.” While somewhat different from exemplary, the “target” category implies that the institution exceeded minimum standards. An example of the three-level rubric for a part of an NCATE standard is included in Appendix B. One advantage of this approach is that the institution may know best where its strengths are, is given the opportunity to identify this area and then demonstrate, with evidence, that it has met the target level. A disadvantage to this approach is that it addresses an entire standard and may restrict a review team from recognizing exemplary practices (aspects that comprise only a portion of an entire standard). This approach would require that the Commission adopt a new rubric for determining the standards findings.

5. *Adopt an approach similar to that used by the Teacher Education Accrediting Council (TEAC).* The TEAC model requires that institutions make a claim about the quality of their program and provide evidence to support their claims. Such a model might be used with programs or aspects of programs that an institution believes it is implementing in an exemplary manner. The review team could, based upon the evidence presented, determine whether the program is, in fact, exemplary. This approach would require the Commission to adopt revised accreditation policies.
6. *Adopt an outcomes-based model.* The Commission could identify criteria that focus on the effectiveness of program outcomes by examining (a) results of candidate performance on authentic instruments that assess their performance and/or (b) evidence of candidate and graduate performance in the field. Institutions that would like to be considered for this exemplary status would present data that make the case that their candidates and graduates are highly effective, as defined in some manner by the Commission. In discussions about this model, members of the COA expressed reservation about this type of approach.
7. *Adopt a combination of approaches.* The Commission could consider adopting a system that allows for multiple or integrated approaches to identifying exemplary programs or best practices. For example, review teams could have the option of identifying exemplary programs and exemplary practices, and not be limited to one or the other.

Commission discussion of the options listed above resulted in clarification that the Commission continues to be interested in moving forward with the identification of exemplary practices, but also clarified that at this time, there was no interest in doing so by creating an onerous and burdensome process. The Commission discussion also clarified for staff that the Commission, at least at this time, did not necessarily indicate the need to identify whole *programs* or whole *institutions* as “exemplary” but rather, was more interested in identifying those practices within programs that stand out in some manner.

This clarification has significant implications for moving forward. This clarification allows the COA and accreditation team members broader flexibility in acknowledging those aspects of program design and implementation that are either notably effective, innovative, or exemplary in some other fashion without having to create a multi-layered process by which that can happen. Teams could be given latitude to identify what those practices are and explain why they are to be considered exemplary. It allows the COA to acknowledge these practices without impacting decisions around other aspects of the program, whether these other areas are those in which the standards are being met or not met and require stipulations.

Spring 2014 Visits

This clarification paves way for a pilot process to take place with the Spring 2014 visits. Given that the Commission seeks to identify exemplary practices and given that there is an expectation that the accreditation system is the most effective way to do so, Commission staff have identified three questions that Spring 2014 accreditation teams have been asked to consider and, **if appropriate**, address in the team reports. The questions are:

- 1) What aspect of this institution's program is exemplary or innovative?
- 2) Explain how this aspect of the program is exemplary or innovative?
- 3) What evidence supports that the exemplary or innovative practice is effective in preparing educators?

There is not an expectation that every institution's report would include a response to these questions. In fact, it is expected that *only* those programs that are to be considered by the team as truly exemplary or innovative would contain this section.

It is important to note that this approach does not eliminate the identification of institutions or programs that meet all Commission adopted standards. If the COA would like to identify those institutions in its annual report to the Commission, that is also a possibility for moving forward.

Next Steps

The COA will begin receiving reports from the Spring 2014 accreditation site visit at its next (April 2014) meeting. If any reports containing exemplary practices are among those presented in April, the COA can begin to discuss the inclusion of this section and its implications during the accreditation debriefing period. At the end of the Spring 2014 visits, the COA can include this information in the Annual Report to the Commission. In addition, it will be important for the COA to deliberate the benefits and challenges of the inclusion of these questions for accreditation and other policy purposes and inform the Commission, or other means of acknowledging exemplary aspects of programs.

Appendix A

Tenets of the Commission's Accreditation System

The Accreditation System is the Commission's means for ensuring that approved programs are preparing educators who are effective and are focused on continuous improvement

Basic tenets of the accreditation system include:

- a. Institutions are held to the adopted standards—both Common and Program—Each standard and each phrase of in each standard
- b. Currently, the institutions are held to meeting the specific language of the standard and there is no attempt to identify excellence beyond meeting the standard
- c. Evidence needs to be provided/collected from multiple sources to support standard decisions and accreditation recommendations
- d. What an institution is asked to do should be beneficial to the institution's educator preparation efforts and the Commission's accreditation- process
- e. When an institution is required to submit something, the submission should be reviewed and feedback provided from the Commission (COA, BIR, staff)
- f. If the CTC has necessary information already, do not request that the institution submit that information again
- g. Many of the activities previously conducted during the 4-day site visit have been distributed across the seven year cycle (Biennial Report, Program Assessment and the shorter site visit)
- h. Only BIR members make standard decisions and accreditation recommendations
- i. Only the COA makes accreditation decisions
- j. Accreditation ensures program quality which leads to better prepared educators

There are clear relationships among:

- 1) effort on part of institution—time preparing documents and in preparation for accreditation activities, and effort on part of BIR and CTC staff—to review, understand and evaluate what the institution submits;
- 2) evidence available for review by BIR members and staff, and confidence in BIR member decisions regarding findings on standards and recommendations on accreditation status, which directly impact
- 3) consistency/accuracy of the COA's decisions on accreditation and stipulations

The system should maximize the reliability, validity and consistency of accreditation decisions while not exceeding a reasonable amount of effort on the part of institutions, members of the BIR, and CTC staff.