

Chapter Four

The Accreditation Cycle

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the accreditation cycle which is comprised of several major activities. These activities and their purposes 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 programs are implemented such that they align with 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 Preconditions, 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 on the next page (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 Commission-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 include annual data analysis, preconditions review, Common Standards review, program review, the site visit, and seventh-year follow up

activities. Each educator preparation institution has been assigned to a cohort. Each cohort is on a specific seven-year cycle. A list of Cohort assignments as well as summaries of accreditation activities (cohort maps) for each cohort can be found on the Commission’s [accreditation webpage](#). Institutions are, therefore, at different points in the accreditation cycle, depending on their assigned cohort. The cohort model distributes the workload of the Commission, 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 in this chapter. For a full description and guidance on preparing for each activity, please see the appropriate chapters for each activity.

Figure 1 Accreditation cycle of activities

CHART OF ACCREDITATION CYCLE



Annual Data Analysis

The purpose of annual data analysis is 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 analysis.

Data and analysis collected by an institution will be reported annually, and uploaded to the Commission data warehouse. Each program analyzes their data and identifies program strengths and concerns in regard to candidate competence and program effectiveness, to determine if any programmatic changes are needed. Subsequent analysis will give the institution an opportunity to report on changes that were implemented as a result of prior analysis.

Preconditions Review

During Year One and Year Four of the accreditation cycle institutions must respond to all relevant preconditions which are grounded in statute, regulations and/or Commission policy, for each approved program.

Common Standards and Program Review

During Year Five of the accreditation cycle institutions must respond to the Common Standards and complete Program Review. Program Review is the activity during which key program documents are reviewed to determine whether the educator preparation program appears to be aligned to program standards.

During an institution's Program Review, each of its educator preparation programs submit documents demonstrating how the program meets the relevant program standards. The Program Review includes:

- a. **Submission of Program Documents.** An Institution/program sponsor submits required documentation including, but not limited to, the key categories: Program Description, Organizational Structure, Qualifications of Faculty and Instructional Personnel, Course Sequence, Course Matrix, Fieldwork and Clinical Practice. Additional documentation may be required specific to each credential area.
- b. **Review of Program Document and Preliminary Report of Findings.** Trained members of the Board of Institutional Reviewers serve as reviewers and consider all information and determine preliminary findings for all program standards. Documents will be reviewed once with feedback in the form of the *Preliminary Report of Findings* provided to the institution. An institution must prepare an addendum based upon the preliminary findings and make the addendum available to the site visit team prior to the accreditation site visit.
- c. **Use of Results.** The Preliminary Report of Findings provides a basis for an accreditation site visit team's review of the program's implementation in year six. Findings will be

used to determine the type, size and complexity of the programs to be reviewed and the structure, size and expertise of the site visit review team to be selected.

Site Visit

The Site Visit takes place in year six of the accreditation cycle. The site visit allows a BIR team to verify information from the institution's annual data analysis, Preconditions, Common Standards, and Program Review processes for the purpose of making findings about the extent to which an institution and its programs meet the Preconditions, Common Standards 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 refute 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 these 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 electronic copies of all its documentation which can be accessed by the entire site visit team.

Follow Up

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

III. Cohort Activities

All approved educator preparation sponsors are assigned to one of seven cohorts. Each institution can find its cohort assignment and corresponding accreditation activity by year at the Commission's [Accreditation Schedule and Activities](#) webpage.