

Discussion of Policy with Respect to Focused Reviews

January 2011

Overview of this Report

One of the important modifications in the revised accreditation system is the fact that all institutions sponsoring educator preparation in California participate in the Commission's accreditation system on an ongoing basis. In the prior accreditation system, once an institution had a status of "Accreditation," the Commission and the COA could not require that institution to submit additional information or host a site visit until the next scheduled visit which was six years from the prior site visit.

This agenda item begins a discussion of the types of situations that should be brought to the COA's attention for discussion of possibly scheduling a Focused Review (Site Visit) during the institution's seven year accreditation cycle in addition to the regularly scheduled sixth year.

Staff Recommendation

This is an information item only.

Background

Current accreditation policy allows the COA to schedule a Focused Site Visit at any time during the accreditation cycle. However, Commission accreditation documents currently do not specify the types of situations in which the COA might consider a Focused Review. Currently, the only clear statement on this topic is that if an institution does not submit a report for one of its accreditation activities and after the Administrator of Accreditation contacts the institution, no report is submitted, then the staff could ask the COA to send a focused review team to the institution. There are a variety of times when information is due to the Commission for accreditation and other purposes:

Scheduled accreditation activities:

- ***Biennial Report: due in the fall after Years 1, 3, and 5***
- ***Program Assessment: due in the fall of Year 4***

In addition to scheduled accreditation activities, information is requested by the Commission for additional purposes such as Title II reporting and TPA data collection

- ***Title II: program enrollees, confirmation of passage of examinations***
- ***TPA Data: candidate and assessor data***

The issue of submission of requested information is addressed in Preconditions 6 and 7:

- (6) **Commission Assurances.** To be granted initial program accreditation by the Committee on Accreditation, the program proposal must (a) demonstrate that the program will fulfill all of the applicable standards of program quality and effectiveness that have been adopted by the Commission; (b) assure that the institution/district will cooperate in an evaluation of the program by an external team or a monitoring of the program by a Commission staff member within four years of the initial enrollment of candidates in the program; and (c) assure

that the institution/district will participate in focused reviews of one or more aspects of the program when designated by the Commission.

- (7) **Requests for Data.** To be granted initial or continuing accreditation by the Committee on Accreditation, the institution/district must identify a qualified officer responsible for reporting and respond to all requests from the Commission for data including, but not limited to, program enrollments, program completers, examination results, and state and federal reporting within the time limits specified by the Commission.

In the four years of implementing the Commission's revised accreditation system, institutions have at times been late submitting the documentation for the specified accreditation activity, but no institution has refused to submit the information.

The only other key concept discussed to date related to Focused Visits, has been that the COA would only make a decision about an institution's accreditation status after reviewing a report from a team of individuals from the Board of Institutional Reviewers (BIR) who have visited the institution. Staff has repeatedly stated that the COA would not change an institution's accreditation status based only on a staff recommendation when there had been no site visit or Focused Review prior to the COA's action. Therefore, it becomes important to have clear criteria for when a Focused Review should be scheduled.

Existing Policy Regarding Focused Reviews The current accreditation policy is not clear as to what situations, in addition to not submitting required information and reports, would cause the COA to schedule a Focused Review. The purpose of this agenda item is to begin a discussion of this topic. Staff reviewed both the *Accreditation Framework* and *Accreditation Handbook* for language related to this topic:

In the *Accreditation Framework*, it states

"The Committee on Accreditation may grant full accreditation to an institution/program sponsor, but require follow-up by one or more programs or the institution/program sponsor as a unit. The required follow-up will be documented in reports submitted to the Committee on Accreditation." (http://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/PDF/accreditation_framework.pdf, page 19)

Other than this statement, the *Framework* discusses the attributes of accreditation. One of the attributes discussed is Intensity and the following language is from the Framework (page 3):

Accreditation should focus with intensity on key aspects of educational quality and effectiveness. While allowing and encouraging divergence, the process should also be exacting in assembling key information about critical aspects of educational quality and effectiveness. The scope of accreditation should be comprehensive, and the information generated by the review processes should be sufficient to yield reliable judgments by professional educators.

Accreditation standards should encompass the critical dimensions of educator preparation. In order to recommend an institution/program sponsor for accreditation,

experienced professional reviewers should be satisfied that the institution/program sponsor provides a comprehensive array of excellent learning opportunities and assurances that future educators have demonstrated that they have attained the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to be effective professionals. Accreditation decisions should be based on information that is sufficient in breadth and depth for the results to be credible and dependable. Accreditation reviewers should understand the components of the program under review and the types of standards-based evidence that substantiate its overall quality and effectiveness. To find out if broad, quality-oriented standards are met, and to make reliable judgments and sound recommendations, reviewers need to assemble a considerable body of data that is collectively significant.

The language addressing Intensity suggests that the accreditation system must hold institutions to quality and effectiveness—and not only in the sixth year of the accreditation cycle. If the scope of accreditation is to be comprehensive, the idea of a Focused Review during the accreditation cycle, if needed, would be one of the components to ensure that the accreditation system is implemented with intensity.

In the *Accreditation Handbook* the concept of a Focused Review in the middle of the accreditation cycle is discussed briefly in Chapter 5 on Biennial Reports. The following is an excerpt from that chapter.

It is possible that information provided by an institution in a biennial report could reveal a significant concern with the operation or efficacy of a credential program. In such cases, the COA could proceed by requesting additional information from the institution, directing staff to hold a technical assistance meeting with the institution to address the concerns, or scheduling a focused site Biennial Reporting visit to be conducted by members of the Board of Institutional Review (BIR) members, apart from the regularly scheduled accreditation visit. However, only after an accreditation site visit by a review panel of experts would the institution be subject to stipulations or denial of accreditation.

During the first years of implementation of the Biennial Report process, staff has been very supportive in the comments provided back to the institutions. For each institution's first submission, staff did not require a resubmission of the Biennial Report even if the report did not contain the required information. With the Biennial Reports submitted this past fall, institutions in two of the cohorts have now submitted their second Biennial Reports. As the staff review is fully underway on these reports, staff requests additional direction from the COA about what kinds of information might lead to a recommendation for a Focused Review. For instance, if a second or later Biennial Report submission seems to show that an approved educator preparation system is not preparing candidates with the knowledge and skills as specified in the program standards, should this prompt a Focused Review? Should staff contact the institution and provide technical assistance and request an updated Biennial Report before sharing information with the COA?

A Focused Review during years 2-5 of the accreditation cycle would be necessary only if it is suspected that an institution is not meeting standards (Common and/or Program) based on

information submitted through one of the accreditation activities or the lack of required information being submitted. It seems quite unlikely that a Focused Review would ever be necessary in years 1, 6 or 7.

Prior to suggesting to the COA that a Focused Visit is necessary, staff would contact the institution and offer technical assistance and support to address the situation. Historically staff has provided technical assistance to institutions through a variety of methods. Commission staff may confer with an institution or a program director over the phone, through a video conference or another technological communication system, or through a visit to the institution. At times, program leaders come to the Commission to confer with consultants. Now that the revised accreditation system is operating, program leaders may attend Initial Program Review (IPR) or Program Assessment (PA) reading sessions. In addition, staff has presented many technical assistance sessions which are archived and available through the Commission's website at any time.

Possible Questions to Discuss

Staff requests that the COA discuss the various situations that might warrant a Focused Visit. In addition, staff requests that the COA discuss whether to begin the development of specific criteria that will assist staff in understanding when to bring forth a recommendation for a focused revisit. Some of the questions to consider to begin this discussion are as follows:

- When would the COA want to know that staff has concerns about an institution?
- What information would the COA like to have, understanding that COA meetings are public and all information would be agendized?
- What role does the Administrator of Accreditation play in determining if a Focused Review is needed?
- What type of situation would initiate a Focused Review?

Next Steps

Based on the COA's discussion, staff will prepare an agenda item for a future COA meeting continuing the discussion on this topic.