

Chapter Four

The Accreditation Cycle

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the accreditation cycle which is comprised of several major activities. In the following chapters each activity is reviewed in more detail. The fundamental expectation of the accreditation process is that all accredited programs are implemented in alignment with the Commission's adopted standards and that institutional and program personnel are engaged in continuous, on-going collection of data about candidate competence and program effectiveness, are analyzing the data, and are using the results of that analysis to make programmatic improvements. Taken as a whole, the elements of the accreditation cycle prepare institutions and accreditation review teams 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. 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 Committee on Accreditation (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. Finally, the accreditation cycle encourages institutions to create and utilize systematic and comprehensive evaluation processes to ensure their candidates are well prepared and that their programs are providing the rigorous content and pedagogical preparation new 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 collection and analysis, preconditions review, Common Standards review, program review, the accreditation site visit, and seventh year follow up activities. Each Commission-approved institution is assigned to a color cohort, based on a specific seven-year cycle. Therefore, institutions will be at different

points in the accreditation cycle depending on their assigned cohorts. 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 Schedule and Activities](#) webpage. The cohort model distributes the workload of the Commission, its staff, and the Board of Institutional Review (BIR) members. The BIR is composed of trained, volunteer education professionals who review program documents, program data, and conduct the accreditation site visits. A brief overview of each activity is 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 Collection, Analysis, and Use for Continuous Improvement

The Commission's accreditation system requires that institutions collect, analyze, and use candidate and program data on a regular basis and that program improvement activities are identified based on the results of that data.

The Commission's Common Standards require that each approved institution has a well-developed comprehensive unit and program improvement system. Each program is responsible for analyzing its data and identifying program strengths and concerns regarding candidate competence and program effectiveness to determine if any programmatic changes are needed. Documentation of changes implemented as a result of data analysis is an important feature of demonstrating that the institution is considering data when making programmatic changes and improvements.

Annual Accreditation Data System (ADS)

In addition to an institution's own institutional data collection process, each Commission approved institution is required to participate in the Commission's Annual Accreditation Data System (ADS) by providing specified data. The institution will report data annually by uploading it to the ADS. Commission staff use the data to develop data dashboards. These data are then available to accreditation site visit teams, Commission staff, and institutional personnel. Dashboards are also available to the public on the Commission's website.

Preconditions Review

Institutions and their programs are expected to be in compliance with all preconditions at all times. During year one and year four of the accreditation cycle, institutions must submit information related to all relevant preconditions. This includes General Preconditions and all preconditions associated with each credential program offered by the institution. Preconditions are grounded in state statute, regulations and/or Commission policy.

During years one and four, staff review responses to all preconditions. If an institution is determined to be out of compliance with one or more preconditions, the institution will be notified as soon as possible with a requirement that the institution act within 30 days of the date of notification to rectify the matter. The report finding will be presented to the COA to determine what additional action should be taken in the event that the review finds that one or more responses do not comply with preconditions, or the institution fails to act within the 30 days. Action will depend on the severity and/or type of noncompliance, up to and including denial of accreditation.

The precondition reviews in years one and four, however, are not the only times in which an institution may be found to be out of compliance. If it comes to light in any manner and at any point during the 7-year cycle that an institution is out of compliance with a precondition, action may be taken by the COA against the institution.

Common Standards and Program Review

During year five of the accreditation cycle, institutions submit required information for the Common Standards Review and Program Review.

Common Standards Review

Common Standards Review is the activity during which key information is provided by the institution and assessed by reviewers to determine whether the institution appears, based on the document review only, to address the Common Standards and whether additional information is needed for the accreditation visit.

a. Submission of Common Standard Evidence

Each institution in year five submits evidence as required by the Commission that relates to the Commission adopted Common Standards. Each institution submits one response that reflects all of its educator preparation programs, regardless of whether the institution's programs are housed within different colleges, schools, division, or departments within the institution.

b. Review of Common Standards Evidence and Preliminary Report of Findings

Trained members of the Board of Internal Reviewers (BIR) serve as reviewers and consider all information to determine preliminary findings for all Common Standards. Submissions are reviewed once with feedback provided to the institution in the form of the *Preliminary Report of Findings*. An institution must prepare an addendum that addresses the reviewers' comments and questions based upon the preliminary findings and make the addendum available to the accreditation team prior to the accreditation site visit.

c. Use of Results

The *Preliminary Report of Findings* along with the institutional addendum provided prior to the accreditation site visit provides a basis for the accreditation team's review of the Common Standards implementation in year six.

Program Review

Program Review is the activity during which key program evidence is provided by the institution and assessed by reviewers to determine whether the educator preparation program appears, based on the document review only, aligned to program standards or whether additional information is needed for the accreditation visit.

a. Submission of Program Documents. An institution submits required documentation including, but not limited to, the key categories of Program Summary, Organizational Structure, Qualifications of Faculty and Instructional Personnel, Course Sequence, Course Matrix, Fieldwork and Clinical Practice. Additional evidence may be required specific to each credential area.

b. Review of Program Evidence and Preliminary Report of Findings. Trained members of the BIR serve as reviewers and consider all information to determine preliminary findings for all program standards. Submissions are reviewed once with feedback

provided to the institution in the form of the *Preliminary Report of Findings*. An institution must prepare an addendum that addresses the reviewers' comments and questions based upon the preliminary findings and make the addendum available to the accreditation team prior to the accreditation visit.

- c. **Use of Results.** The *Preliminary Report of Findings* along with the program's addendum provides a basis for the accreditation team's review of the program's implementation in year six. Findings in the *Preliminary Report of Findings* will be used to determine the type, size, and complexity of the programs to be reviewed as well as the structure, size, and expertise of the site visit review team to be selected.

Site Visit

The accreditation visit takes place in year six of the accreditation cycle. The accreditation visit allows a BIR team to consider information gathered from the Preconditions, Common Standards review and responses, and Program Review processes. Any and all data about the institution and its programs, including data within the ADS system, is also considered. The purpose of the accreditation visit is to determine the extent to which an institution and its programs meet the Preconditions, Common Standards and Program Standards and to make an accreditation recommendation to the COA. The accreditation team conducts interviews with constituents from each of the institution's programs and completes a review of documents and data 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 nine months to one year in advance of the accreditation visit to assist the institution in preparing for the visit. During the time leading up to the accreditation visit, the institution organizes documentation and evidence that will be accessed by the accreditation team on the institution's accreditation webpage.

Follow Up

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