



Redesigning WASC for 2012-2020

Presentation for the WICHE
Commission, May 2011

Reasons for this Redesign

- Commitment to the region when the 2001 Handbook was adopted
- Follow-up to the 2006-07 External Review
- USDE requirement for periodic comprehensive review of the Standards
- Challenges to the effectiveness of accreditation

Changes in Higher Education requiring New Approaches to Accreditation

- Low graduation rates
- High student debt/high default rates
- Difficulty in transferring credit
- Dissatisfaction with quality of undergraduate education/low levels of learning
- Rapid growth of online education
- Practices of the for-profit industry
- Increased federal regulation

... More Changes in Higher Education

- Changing demographics, including older, working, more diverse students
- Swirl: majority of students attend more than one institution
- Open source and DIYer's
- Growth of online programs/institutions
- Growth of the for-profit sector
- Shrinking support for publics and trend to privatize public universities

Perceptions about Accreditation

- Lack of oversight of the for-profit sector
- Emphasis on process, not results
- Inadequate attention to graduation rates and student learning outcomes
- “Pass-fail” nature of accreditation
- Lack of transparency about process and results
- Cost and labor-intensiveness of accreditation
- Long terms of accreditation

The Changing Roles of Accreditation

Core Functions of Accreditation	Compliance Centered	Improvement Centered	Accountability Centered
Scope of Review	All standards applied to assure compliance	Key areas selected and approved by accreditor for improvement	Specific areas identified as part of all reviews to address common policy issues – e.g., retention/graduation rates, student learning outcomes
Level of Judgment	Must demonstrate standards are met at least at minimum level	Simplified compliance review and primary emphasis on recommended improvements	External reference points reviewed and evaluated – by comparative indicators of institutional type
Public Reporting	Public announcement of grant of accreditation	Reports internally circulated for improvement; accrediting action publicly reported	Meaningful and clear public information about institutional performance and commission actions reported

Changes within the WASC Region

- 163 now accredited/candidates
- 24 institutions in eligibility
- Growth in national footprint and for-profit institutions
- Possible growth in community college baccalaureate degrees
- International institutions seeking WASC accreditation
- Growth in online offerings

Guiding Principles of the Redesign

- Student-centeredness
 - Accountability and quality assurance
 - Transparency of the process and results
 - Efficiency in the process
 - Heightened attention to learning and completion results
 - New modes of oversight of for-profits
 - Respect for institutional diversity and mission
 - Support for innovation
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Major Topics for Handbook Development

- Retention and graduation
- Levels of learning
- Degree qualifications profile
- Public reporting and transparency
- Changing ecology of learning
- Institutional review process

Retention/Graduation

- A WASC emphasis since 2008
- Creating a common template with overall and disaggregated data
- Establishing groups of comparable institutions in order to set target rates/timelines and share good practices

Degree Qualifications Profile/ Levels of Learning

- Considering how to integrate the DQP into WASC standards/policies
 - Establishing core UG competencies and identifying methods for measuring student learning/external benchmarking
 - Creating learning communities of institutions using the same methods of assessment
 - Establishing level of achievement that is "good enough"
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Public Reporting and Transparency

- Making explicit the information on student achievement that institutions must publish
 - Making WASC more transparent by publishing Commission action letters
 - Developing a more effective communications strategy so that accreditation is not so opaque
 - Considering a publicly available key-indicator rating system
 - Adding “public” members/students to the review processes
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Changing Ecology of Learning

- Considering several “bundles” of change and how to address them in the Handbook
 - E.g., characteristics of learners, new delivery systems, globalization, new players and kinds of affiliations, outsourcing, open source
 - Considering a research and development function for WASC
 - Developing a pathway for institutions to innovate/pilot
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Task Force on For-Profit Education

- Developing new expertise and new ways to evaluate:
 - Governance structures
 - Financial data
 - Recruitment and student services practices
 - Faculty models
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Institutional Review Process Redesign

- Assure that progress to date is sustained
- Shorten the five-year three-stage process without reducing rigor
- Use of off-site reviews, existing data, and technology
- Allow adaptability graduated to the strengths of the institution
- Do regular off-site monitoring
- Create teams of evaluator “specialists”