

# **How to Become Accredited**

Procedures Manual for

**Eligibility,  
Candidacy, and  
Initial Accreditation**

# Introduction

The Commission has prepared this procedures manual for institutions that are interested in pursuing accreditation by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. The manual explains the steps involved in moving from Eligibility through Candidacy to Initial Accreditation, a process that normally takes from four to eight years.

This manual is intended for use in tandem with the *Handbook of Accreditation*, which includes the Standards of Accreditation necessary for an institution to achieve Candidacy and Initial Accreditation. The *Handbook* is available for purchase through the WASC office, and may also be downloaded at no charge from the WASC website, at [www.wascsenior.org/eligibility](http://www.wascsenior.org/eligibility).

Inquiries may be directed to WASC, 985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100, Alameda, CA 94501; (510) 748-9001; email: [wascsr@wascsenior.org](mailto:wascsr@wascsenior.org); website: <http://www.wascsenior.org>.

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**T**he Commission has established formal procedures by which institutions can move through the required stages that lead to accreditation. These stages include:



Each stage has specific criteria, processes, and timeframes. (See the Overview at the conclusion of this document for a summary.) **An institution starting the process should carefully consider the requirements for each step to ensure its understanding of the process and be aware that the timeframe for the entire process may take four to eight years.**

## **Who May Apply?**

Postsecondary institutions incorporated in the states of California and Hawaii, the territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, and the Pacific Island Trust Territories that offer one or more programs leading to the baccalaureate or higher degree may apply to the Commission for eligibility. Institutions within this region that are part of a larger system or organization that is headquartered outside the WASC region may be considered for eligibility if the institution meets the WASC definition of a separately accreditable unit. (See *Policy Statement on Separately Accreditable Units* under *Dealing with Institutions that Operate Cross-Regionally* in the *Handbook of Accreditation*.)

The Commission is an institutional accreditation body that emphasizes academic quality and processes that ensure educational effectiveness throughout the institution. It accredits institutions rather than individual programs, including all institutional operations wherever located. In so doing, it reviews evidence of the institution’s capacity to achieve educational effectiveness—structures, processes, resources, procedures, and outcomes—as well as evidence of the academic quality of educational programs within the institution. Where an institution provides programs not commonly offered by accredited institutions of higher education, the institution bears the burden of demonstrating that the subject matter offered is appropriate to higher education, academic in quality and rigor, and can be reviewed by peers from accredited institutions.

## **Applying for Eligibility**

Institutions interested in obtaining WASC accreditation are reviewed to determine if they are eligible to pursue accreditation. This process, guided by 23 Eligibility Criteria and anticipating the WASC Standards, screens each institution to determine whether it is ready to begin the formal process of data collection and institutional reflection required for an accreditation review. The screening process is conducted by the Eligibility Review Committee (ERC) – a group of peer educational evaluators trained for this role – which conducts its work through smaller panels of its members, selected with reference to the nature of the applicant.

## Before You Apply

Institutions are **strongly encouraged** to begin the application process by:

1. Consulting with WASC staff to discuss your institution's intention and readiness for the accreditation process.
2. Attending a WASC-sponsored workshop that describes the level of readiness expected of the institution at each step as it moves through Eligibility, Candidacy, and Initial Accreditation. This workshop is offered annually in connection with WASC's Academic Resource Conference (ARC) (generally in April) and at other announced times as interest may require.

These steps provide important perspectives for the institution, helping it evaluate its own readiness, and increasing the likelihood that an ERC panel will have sufficient information upon which to make an informed decision regarding its eligibility. They can also help in preparing your application by:

- a. Providing additional information on the WASC values, policies and processes, Eligibility Criteria, and Standards of Accreditation, together with essential WASC documents and publications.
- b. Offering an explanation of the 23 Eligibility Criteria and an appraisal of the institution's readiness to meet them, the eligibility application process, and (as needed) examples of other institution's eligibility applications, typical timelines, and other resources.
- c. Reviewing the scoresheet the ERC panel will use in evaluating the application, thus guiding the institution's preparation of its application.
- d. Arranging one visit by WASC staff to the institution (if requested, and with travel costs invoiced to the institution) to become familiar with the institutional setting and context, and to explain the WASC processes to others at the institution.
- e. Providing staff review of a draft of the Eligibility Application, giving formative feedback on the completeness of the application and, as needed, the suitability of the materials provided to support an ERC panel decision.
- f. Requesting clarification of the application or identifying additional information for the institution to provide in anticipation of the ERC panel review.

## The Eligibility Process

1. An institution begins the process by submitting an Eligibility application electronically via LiveText. In order to access LiveText, a designated Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) from the institution must contact the WASC office to obtain a username and password. Detailed information about submitting the application, required forms, fees, and other resources, may be found at [www.wascsenior.org/eligibility](http://www.wascsenior.org/eligibility).

The application consists of the following elements:

- A cover letter indicating the institution's intent to pursue Eligibility, signed by the chief executive officer and the chair of the governing board.
- The Eligibility Report which addresses each of the 23 Eligibility Criterion (explained in full detail later in this document).
- The Summary Data Form and Signed Stipulation (see Criterion 4).

- ❑ A check for the requisite Eligibility fee. (Current fees may be found on the WASC website at [www.wascsenior.org/eligibility](http://www.wascsenior.org/eligibility).) This fee entitles the institution to staff support and guidance throughout the Eligibility application and review process.
2. Following review of the draft application and further consultation with staff, the institution may elect to suspend consideration of its application for a period of up to six months to allow it time to address needed changes. The institution may withdraw formally from the Eligibility process without prejudice at any time prior to an ERC panel review and receive a refund of 50% of the Eligibility Application fee.
  3. Once the application is received, WASC staff will select and convene an Eligibility Review Committee (ERC) panel to review and act upon the application, generally within 30 to 60 days of receiving the application. Institutional representatives will be invited to participate in one portion of this review, via conference call, to answer questions and provide clarification, as needed.
  4. Directly after the review, staff will prepare an action letter (the formal document WASC uses to communicate its actions), detailing the panel's findings regarding the institution's standing on each of the 23 Criteria. There are three possible outcomes following a review by the ERC:
    - a. If the application is **approved**, the institution is granted Eligibility for a period of four years. The institution is then eligible to apply for Candidacy and begins this process by submitting the Candidacy and Initial Accreditation fee within 60 days of receipt of the action letter indicating approval by the ERC panel (see the current fee schedule). Upon receipt of the fee, a WASC staff liaison is assigned to work with the institution in preparation for its Candidacy review. The fee provides the institution with WASC staff support through the Candidacy process. (Additional visit-related fees are invoiced at the time of each visit.)
    - b. If the application is **deferred**, the institution may re-apply with a supplemental application, addressing only those Criteria that the ERC panel determines the institution did not meet in the first application. The first reader of the panel and WASC staff review the supplemental application. A supplemental fee (as listed on the current fee schedule) is due with the supplemental application if it is submitted within two years of receipt of the action letter. After two years, the full Eligibility Application fee applies.
    - c. If the application is **denied**, the institution must resubmit an application that addresses all of the Eligibility Criteria. Typically, an ERC panel will act to deny an application rather than defer when an application fails to meet a significant number of criteria, especially those related to institutional capacity. An institution wishing to appeal a denial of Eligibility by an ERC panel may do so by submitting a statement clearly setting forth the reasons the institution disagrees with the panel's findings in the action letter. The institution's statement, along with the action letter, is sent to the President/Executive Director within 30 days after receipt of the action letter. These materials are then presented to the Executive Committee of the Commission for its review and final determination. The requesting institution pays an Eligibility Appeal processing fee (see the current fee schedule). The Commission Review and Appeal Process (outlined in the *Handbook of Accreditation*) does not apply to Eligibility denials.

## Eligibility Criteria

The Eligibility Criteria are basic qualifications that an institution of higher education must meet to be considered for Candidacy for Accreditation. The Criteria establish a basis for determining that the institution has purposes accreditable by the Commission and has developed sufficient planning and operational activities to provide a reasonable basis for believing that Candidacy could be achieved within the Eligibility period, normally a four-year period. A determination of Eligibility is not an official status with the Commission but only the outcome of a preliminary review that enables an institution to proceed with the data collection, institutional self-reflection, and evaluation required for Candidacy and Initial Accreditation reviews. By granting Eligibility, no assurance is made that an institution will eventually be granted either Candidacy or Initial Accreditation. These judgments will be made in light of additional institutional presentations and on-site reviews to assess the institution's alignment with the WASC Standards of Accreditation.

Following is a list of the 23 Eligibility Criteria. Below the explanation of each Criterion is listed the related supporting documentation that institutions typically provide with their Eligibility Application. The list of documents is intended as a guideline for institutions preparing for the Eligibility Review process; either additional or similar documents may be provided in keeping with the focus of each Criterion. Providing all relevant information in an organized and succinct form will assist with the staff review and the Committee Panel decision-making process.

### Criterion 1. Authority

The institution is authorized to operate as an educational institution and to award degrees by the appropriate governmental organization or agency as required by each of the jurisdictions or regions in which it operates. Private institutions, whether organized as non-profit or for-profit corporations or as partnerships must present policies and planning documents making it clear that decisions about the distribution of surpluses or profits give priority to sustaining and enhancing the educational mission and academic infrastructure of the institution, and to ensuring effective student learning and student success. For institutions incorporated in California, the institution shall have completed the full formal state approval process<sup>1</sup>; temporary approval will not be accepted. For law schools in California, the institution shall also demonstrate that it is accredited by the California State Bar Association.

- Degree-granting approval statement or certificate from an appropriate body
- Articles of incorporation (private institutions), including indication of the type of organizational structure (non-profit, LLC, Sub-S, or the like), and whether the institution is owned or sponsored by a related entity which is not eligible for WASC accreditation

### Criterion 2. Institutional Integrity: Purposes

The institution's purposes are clearly defined and appropriate for higher education. They are formally adopted by the governing board and published in key institutional documents. Published statements reflect the institution's commitment to achieving student learning.

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<sup>1</sup> At the present time (spring 2009), the enabling legislation that created California's Bureau for Private Postsecondary & Vocational Education (BPPVE) has expired and renewing legislation is uncertain. Thus, state approval in California cannot now be obtained. During this hiatus, applicant institutions that have not previously obtained full state approval may move forward in their pursuit of WASC accreditation on a provisional basis only. This means that, should the Eligibility Review Committee grant eligibility on the basis of the institution's status with regard to the other 22 Eligibility Criteria, the institution must obtain State approval once the appropriate agency has been established by the legislature and, in any case, before the institution can be awarded Initial Accreditation. An exception to this requirement may be granted when an applicant institution qualifies under the previous BPPVE legislation, CEC §94739 (b)(8) which exempts from BPPVE oversight an institution that charges less than \$500 for its educational programs. The Commission has determined that this exemption can apply, for example, to research institutions that pay doctoral students as members of funded research units rather than charge them tuition.

- Copy of statement(s) of mission or institutional purposes as they appear in a published catalog, institutional website, or other public document

### **Criterion 3. Institutional Integrity: Alignment**

The institution offers academic programs and administrative support consistent with its purposes, and ensures a climate of openness and academic freedom.

- Statements of Academic Freedom from official publications, such as a faculty handbook
- Conflict of Interest statements for board members

### **Criterion 4. Governing Board**

The institution has a functioning governing board (or the equivalent) responsible for the quality, integrity, and financial sustainability of the institution and for ensuring that the institution's mission is being achieved. The governing board is an independent policy-making body capable of reflecting constituent and public interest through its membership, activities, and decisions. The board must demonstrate its responsibility for, and involvement with, strategic planning for the development of the institution through and beyond the period necessary for accreditation. As evidenced by both its bylaws and its practice, the board must demonstrate that it has the authority to evaluate the chief executive officer's performance, including setting the terms of the CEO's contract and renewing or terminating the contract as may be necessary. A majority of the board members must not be employed by the institution; be family members related to the chief operating officers, shareholders, or trustees of the institution; or have a personal financial interest in the institution. Its membership must be sufficient in size and composition to fulfill board responsibilities. If a separate institutional governing board is not possible or appropriate, the Commission may approve alternative means by which this criterion may be met. Neither the chief executive officer nor another institutional executive officer may serve as the chair of the institution's governing board. If the applicant is a proprietary institution and the chief executive officer is also an owner or investor, the bylaws must clearly designate that the board has the authority to appoint, evaluate and, if necessary, terminate this officer.

- A current list and biographical information, including affiliations, of all governing board members
- A copy of the governing board bylaws and statement of board responsibilities
- Certification that the board does not have a majority of persons with employment, family, or personal interest in the institution, signed by the chief executive officer and governing board chair
- A copy of the board's conflict of interest policy
- Signed Stipulation: Letter signed by the chair of the governing board and president that all information presented to the Commission is accurate, that the institution agrees to adhere to the requirements of Eligibility (if granted), and in pursuing Candidacy and Initial Accreditation agrees to abide by the Standards, Policies, and Procedures of WASC

## **Criterion 5. Chief Executive Officer**

The institution has a chief executive officer who is appointed by the governing board and whose full-time or primary responsibility is to the institution.

- Name, address, and biographical information or curriculum vitae of chief executive officer
- Description of CEO's primary responsibilities to the institution including, though not limited to, time spent on campus performing administrative duties and/or fulfilling teaching responsibilities

## **Criterion 6. Administrative Capacity**

The institution has a chief financial officer whose full-time or primary responsibility is to the institution, and sufficient staff with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to conduct and support its affairs and the achievement of its purposes.

- Organizational chart, including names of those in key positions
- Names and biographical information of key administrative staff
- Position description of the chief financial officer

## **Criterion 7. Operational Status**

It must be clear that institutional planning and resources are sufficiently mature to ensure that, by the time of the Candidacy review, the institution will be operational with students actively pursuing its degree program(s).

- Current or intended schedule of classes
- Enrollment history of the institution; if operational, for up to three years
- Other evidences of planning

## **Criterion 8. Degree Programs: Extent**

Substantial portions of the institution's educational offerings are programs that lead to degrees, and significant proportions of its students are enrolled in the degree programs.

- List of degrees, together with course and credit requirements for each degree
- Catalog designation of college-level courses for which degree credit will be granted
- Enrollment projections or history for degree programs

## **Criterion 9. Degree Programs: Quality**

The institution's degree programs are congruent with its purposes, are based on a recognized higher education field(s) of study, are of sufficient content and length, and are conducted at levels of quality and rigor appropriate to the degrees offered. At least one degree program must lead to the baccalaureate degree or higher.

- Data on retention, persistence, and numbers and disciplines of graduates, where available
- Catalog (or intended copy) describing program(s) being offered and graduation requirements
- Other marketing materials not submitted relative to Criterion 8 above

## **Criterion 10. Educational Objectives and Student Learning**

The institution clearly defines and publishes educational objectives for each program, including expected student learning outcomes, and identifies how these objectives and outcomes will be addressed within the curriculum. Strategies for assessing students' achievement of these educational objectives, including direct review of student work products, are also established.

- Published statements that describe educational objectives and learning outcomes for each program



- Outcomes assessment methodology, with criteria and framework for program and/or unit reviews, created with significant faculty involvement
- At least two sample syllabi, including statements of how learning outcomes will be assessed for the courses submitted

### **Criterion 11. Academic Credit**

The institution awards academic credits based on generally accepted practices in degree-granting institutions of higher education.

- Institutional policies on award of credit

### **Criterion 12. Transfer Credit**

If the institution accepts transfer students, it has established policies for the review and acceptance of transfer credits consistent with WASC policies.

- Institutional policies on transfer of credit, including criteria for their acceptance, and maximum allowable number of transfer credits applicable to its degree programs
- Position description for person(s) making judgments about the appropriateness of transfers of credit, including required qualifications for persons holding this position

### **Criterion 13. General Education**

The institution defines and incorporates into all of its undergraduate degree programs a substantial component of general education, including both lower- and upper-division offerings, designed to ensure basic collegiate skills, breadth of knowledge, and the structures of intellectual inquiry. Educational objectives for the general education program, which include student learning outcomes, are periodically reviewed and revised with faculty involvement, and include demonstrated competence in writing, critical thinking, scientific literacy, and computational skills, and an introduction to the broad domains of knowledge. Degree credit for general education programs should be consistent with levels of quality and rigor appropriate to higher education.

- Rationale for the design of the general education program
- List of general education courses, including catalog descriptions
- For an undergraduate institution, syllabi submitted for review should include two general education courses

### **Criterion 14. Faculty**

The institution has a substantial core of qualified faculty, sufficient in size, background, and experience to support all of the institution's educational program offerings, including a core of faculty whose primary responsibility is to the institution. A clear statement of faculty responsibilities must exist, which include the development and review of the curriculum, and assessment of student learning at multiple levels.

- Full-time and part-time faculty roster, including degrees earned (with names of regionally accredited institutions where earned) and relevant prior experience
- Statement of faculty responsibilities
- Criteria used for designating full or part time
- Faculty assigned to courses (where available)
- Current curriculum vitae for full-time faculty members (where this number is large, a sample of vitae is sufficient)

- Description of the structure and processes used for faculty governance, involvement in curriculum development and review, setting academic standards, and participation (if any) in the institution's governance

### **Criterion 15. Student Services**

The institution provides for all of its students appropriate student services that support student learning, persistence, and development for all its students consistent with their characteristics and its institutional purposes.

- Demographic characteristics of students (gender, ethnicity, typical age, or other useful characteristics)
- Intended methodology and data available (or intended) from reviews of student services units
- Description of qualifications of the key persons designated to provide these services

### **Criterion 16. Admissions**

The institution has adopted and adheres to admission policies consistent with its purposes that specify the qualifications of students that are appropriate to the degree levels offered.

- Copy of admissions policy from a published statement, including criteria for admission
- Copy of enrollment application
- Articulation agreements
- Marketing or outreach plans and materials

### **Criterion 17. Information and Learning Resources**

The institution holds or otherwise provides long-term access to sufficient information and learning resources to support its purposes and all of its educational programs. To supplement resources beyond the core library of the institution, there may be specific long-term written arrangements for student access to off-campus or electronic resources. Programs are in place to train students in the use of library and other information resources, and to develop information literacy skills. The institution must demonstrate that library and learning resource use is a fundamental part of all its curricula, and that faculty are involved in ensuring such use.

- Profile of holdings and resources, including descriptions of computing facilities availability and usage
- Copies of agreements for access to external resources, for both print and electronic sources
- Description of information literacy expectations for institutional and external library and computing facilities
- Plan for library and computer development

### **Criterion 18. Financial Resources**

The institution documents a viable funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to support its purposes and educational programs and to ensure financial stability. It is expected that the institution not show a cumulative operating deficit for the current and preceding two years, or since its inception if less than two years. If the institution shows a deficit, the institution must explain the reasons for the deficit, demonstrate that it has the resources to ensure its financial viability, and present a plan to restore a fiscally healthy state.

- Current and proposed budgets for the next three years
- Documentation of any external foundation or other funding support
- Description of available resources, including lines of credit, properties held, and other forms of capitalization, sufficient to sustain the institution's operations during its pursuit of accreditation

## **Criterion 19. Financial Accountability**

The institution annually undergoes and makes available an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or an audit by an appropriate public agency. The institution shall submit a copy of each of the two most recent audited financial statements and management letters (if any). The audit must (1) be prepared by an outside certified public accountant that has no other relationship to the institution; (2) be certified and any exceptions explained; and (3) specify whether any capital or operational funds have been provided by employees or Board members of the organization and describe any conditions related to such provisions.

- Certified independent audit, including management letter(s), for the two most recent years. It is recommended that the auditor employ the appropriate statements of accounting standards as follows:
  - State-supported institutions should use GASB Statements 34 and 35 and any other applicable GASB statements, which are available at <http://store.yahoo.com/gasbpubs/publications-statements-of-standards.html>.
  - Not-for-profit institutions should use the Audit and Accounting Guide, “Not-for-Profit Organizations,” issued by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, which embodies FASB Statements 116 and 117 and other applicable FASB statements, available at <http://www.fasb.org/st#fas125>.
  - For-profit entities should use regular corporate accounting standards.

## **Criterion 20. Institutional Planning**

The institution provides evidence of basic planning for the development of the institution, which identifies and integrates plans for academic personnel, learning resources, facilities, and financial development. The institution also has established procedures for program and/or unit review, including methods for assessing student learning and the attainment of educational goals, and for using the data obtained from institutional research to support planning for institutional improvement.

- Current educational, fiscal, facilities, and distance education plans that include proposed growth and changes for the next three years
- Documentation of approval of current plans and of formal adoption of a systematic planning process by the institution’s governing board
- Description of the institution’s planning process, including calendared cycles

## **Criterion 21. Institutional Evaluation and Assessment of Student Learning**

The institution actively engages in, or has a plan in place to systematically engage in, the evaluation of how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes related to student learning and educational effectiveness.

- Description of the institution’s plans for systematic institutional effectiveness review and quality assurance processes (if different from Criterion 20 above)
- Criteria for program and/or unit review
- Institutional plans for and/or activities undertaken to assess aggregate student achievement and to conduct program and/or unit reviews, including faculty engagement with evidence of student achievement

## **Criterion 22. Public Information**

The institution publishes in its catalog, or in other appropriate places, accurate and current information that describes its purposes and objectives, admission requirements and procedures, financial aid policies and procedures, rules and regulations directly affecting students, programs and courses, degrees offered and the degree requirements, costs and refund policies, formal and informal grievance procedures, financial aid policies, academic credentials of faculty and administrators, and other items relative to students' attending the institution or withdrawing from it.

### **General Information must include at least the following:**

- Official name, address, telephone, website
- Educational mission
- Course, program, degree offerings
- Academic calendar and program length
- Available student financial aid
- Available learning resources (library, technology, and support services)
- Names and degrees of administrators and faculty
- Names of governing board members
- Admissions criteria and processes
- Student fees and other financial obligations
- Degrees, certificates, graduation and transfer policies

### **Major Policies Affecting Students:**

- Academic regulations including academic honesty
- Nondiscrimination policies and procedures
- Acceptance of transfer credits
- Grievance and complaint procedures
- Sexual harassment policies and procedures
- Refund of tuition and fees
- Location or publications where other policies may be found

## **Criterion 23. Relations with the Accrediting Commission**

The governing board provides a formal statement as part of its Eligibility Application that the institution agrees to adhere to these Eligibility Criteria, describe itself in identical terms to all of its accrediting agencies, promptly communicate any changes in its status, and disclose any and all information required by the Commission to carry out its accrediting responsibilities. Further, the institution agrees that in pursuing Candidacy and Initial Accreditation, it is committed to abiding by the Standards, Policies, and Procedures established by WASC.

- Copy of policy formally adopted by the governing board assuring compliance with Commission Standards, Policies, and Procedures
- List of other accreditations or approvals (if any) held by the institution
- Copies of the most recent actions taken by other accrediting agencies or approval bodies, including information about conditions or concerns raised by such bodies
- Copy of how the institution is represented by those accrediting agencies (may be copied from its website)

## Representation of Status

A determination of Eligible is not a formal status with the Commission, but rather a preliminary review of an institution to determine that the institution is potentially accreditable and may proceed with the process to achieve Candidacy. It is, therefore, important that the institution not represent Eligibility as other than it is. If an institution chooses to state publicly that it has been determined to be Eligible, it may make the following statement:

“(Name of institution) has applied for Eligibility from the Senior College Commission of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. WASC has reviewed the application and determined that (Name of institution) is eligible to proceed with an application for Candidacy for Accreditation. A determination of Eligibility is not a formal status with the Accrediting Commission, nor does it ensure eventual accreditation; it is a preliminary finding that the institution is potentially accreditable and can proceed within four years of its Eligibility determination to be reviewed for Candidacy status with the Accrediting Commission. Questions about Eligibility may be directed to the institution or to WASC at [www.wascsenior.org](http://www.wascsenior.org) or at 510-748-9001.”

No statement should be made about possible future accreditation status or qualification not yet conferred by the Commission. Statements such as the following are **not** permissible: “(Name of Institution) has applied for Eligibility [or Candidacy] with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges”; or “It is anticipated that Eligibility [or Candidacy] will be granted in the near future.” Such language will be viewed as a breach of institutional integrity.

When an institution is granted Eligibility, and has submitted the application and fee for Candidacy and Initial Accreditation, a WASC staff member will be assigned to the institution to guide it in preparing for its Candidacy Review. The WASC letter expressing the findings of the ERC panel relevant to its status with each Criterion, along with the *Handbook of Accreditation*, will be valuable in this preparation.

## Support for Candidacy and Initial Accreditation

In order to provide optimal institutional support during the next two stages, WASC staff offer specific support to help institutions understand and work with the Standards of Accreditation, respond to issues identified by the ERC panel during its review of the application, prepare their institutional reports, and organize for site visits. A WASC staff liaison is assigned to the institution upon receipt of the Application for Candidacy. The Candidacy Support fee covers the Commission’s work related to the review processes. (Current fees may be found on the WASC website at [www.wascsenior.org/eligibility](http://www.wascsenior.org/eligibility).) This fee covers:

1. Staff will: review draft reports; establish and orient visiting teams; assist teams with site visits; and follow up with feedback to the institution related to Commission actions; one WASC staff liaison visit to the institution is provided, if requested, with staff travel expenses invoiced to the institution.
2. Staff will evaluate institutional and visiting team reports; when the Commission takes formal action regarding Candidacy, staff draft and send action letters and help to clarify the next steps in seeking Initial Accreditation.

In addition to this support fee, institutions will pay the related review fee; each site teams’ visit expenses (team travel, meal, and hotel expenses); any legal fees incurred by WASC on behalf of the institution in its pursuit of Eligibility, Candidacy, or Initial Accreditation; and for institutional participation in any workshops provided by WASC. A current fee schedule is posted on the WASC website. (NOTE: utilizing these support services does not in itself guarantee that an institution will achieve its desired standing either in the first or in subsequent attempts.)

# Candidacy

When a determination has been made by the Eligibility Review Committee that an institution meets the Eligibility Criteria specified above, the institution will then submit a formal **Application for Candidacy**. The application form is to be signed by the chief executive officer of the institution and the chair of the governing board and submitted with the Candidacy application fee. The application form and schedule of fees are found at the WASC website: [www.wascsenior.org/eligibility](http://www.wascsenior.org/eligibility). The Candidacy fee covers the partial costs of WASC staff support throughout the Candidacy application process as described above. Institutions are also invited to send representatives to the WASC workshops that provide support in preparation for the comprehensive review process.

## The Candidacy Review

The Candidacy Review is an institution's first review under the Commission's Standards of Accreditation. The granting of Candidacy is a significant step and should be based on evidence of meeting WASC Standards. It is fundamentally a compliance review in which an institution demonstrates that it meets the expectations for accreditation at a minimum level by:

1. Demonstrating that it has reviewed itself with reference to the Standards of Accreditation, including attention to each Criterion for Review and Guideline.
2. Demonstrating that it meets all or nearly all of the Criteria for Review and Guidelines at least at a minimum level.
3. Demonstrating that it meets all or nearly all of the Standards of Accreditation at a minimum level.
4. Having a clear and feasible plan in place to meet all the Standards and Criteria for Review at a substantial level by the time of the Initial Accreditation Review.
5. Having developed approaches to self-examination and to ensuring quality in its teaching and learning functions.

An institution seeking Candidacy must have students enrolled in degree programs at the time of the Candidacy Review.

## Candidacy Review Process

Institutions being reviewed for Candidacy will follow the institutional review procedures described in Section III of the *Handbook of Accreditation*, with the exceptional of the procedural differences identified below.

**Letter of Intent.** Twelve months prior to the date of the first site visit for Candidacy, and again twelve months prior to the first visit for Initial Accreditation, the institution submits a Letter of Intent (LOI) to the WASC office. The LOI should address the following:

1. The LOI for *Candidacy* should describe how the institution has addressed each of the areas of concern identified in the Eligibility Review Committee (ERC) action letter granting Eligibility under each of the Eligibility Criteria.

The LOI for *Initial Accreditation* should describe the institution's response to areas of concern identified by the Commission action letter awarding Candidacy.

2. Description of how the institution will prepare for the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) and the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER), including organizational structures and timelines, using a comprehensive approach to the self-study that addresses each of the Standards of Accreditation and related Criteria for Review (CFR)s. The letter should address how broad support for the review process will be generated. It should also indicate how key leaders and other stakeholders will be involved in preparing for each review.
3. Identification of intended outcomes that the institution wishes to achieve by means of the review process. Key institutional issues arising under the Standards, especially those related to learning results and organizational quality assurance, should be directly addressed with alignment to both the CPR and EER.
4. As needed, a description and explanation of any changes in the leadership, ownership, or governance structures of the organization that have transpired subsequent to the ERC review.
5. The institution's most recent audited financial statement, with detailed explanations of any negative financial levels or trends and of any matters of concern identified by the auditors in the related Management Letter (which must be included if provided by the auditor).
6. The current Summary Data Form (found at [www.wascsenior.org/eligibility](http://www.wascsenior.org/eligibility)), showing enrollment and retention levels and trends by degree level, faculty and staff hires, and similar relevant operational data.
7. A stipulation that the institution will be reviewed only for the degree levels explicitly planned or in operation at the time of the ERC review. Any new degree programs or levels added after the ERC action will not be considered for approval at Candidacy.

The Letter of Intent should be no more than 15 pages in length.

**Approach to the Review.** For Candidacy, the institution prepares for and conducts a two-stage review: a Capacity and Preparatory Review, followed by the Educational Effectiveness Review. It is the responsibility of the institution to do a self-review during both stages that addresses the five components described under "The Candidacy Review" (above). During the Capacity and Preparatory Review, institutions are expected to address the Standards at the level of performance indicated in the Criteria for Review and Guidelines, demonstrating that they meet these at least at a minimum level. In writing the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report, institutions should include reflective essays on the institution's findings under each Standard.

During the Educational Effectiveness Review, institutions are again expected to follow a comprehensive approach to the review, which addresses each of the Standards and CFRs. This approach enables an institution to review how well it supports student learning across the institution and how overall quality assurance systems are employed to assess and improve student and organizational learning. The Educational Effectiveness report should move beyond description of activities to include analysis and reflection on learning results and the actions that the institution has taken for improvement of those results.

It is expected that faculty will be involved in developing the assessment strategy, in writing both the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review reports, and in constructing the exhibits that accompany each report. Since these are the initial visits for the institution under Commission Standards, the institution is to give primary attention to presenting evidence demonstrating compliance with Commission Standards.

**Timing for the Review.** For the Candidacy review, the Capacity and Preparatory Review and Educational Effectiveness Review will normally occur two semesters (or one year) apart unless, following the Capacity & Preparatory Review, WASC staff determine that the interval should be

modified (though not extended more than two years). Precise scheduling of these visits will depend on institutional readiness and availability of WASC staff for placement on the visit calendar. In addition, the Commission will make a decision only after both reviews have been completed, rather than after each stage of review. Issues raised during the Capacity and Preparatory Review may be carried over to the Educational Effectiveness Review.

**Team Reports and Institutional Due Process.** In the Candidacy process, the visiting teams for the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review will prepare reports following each of these reviews. The Commission will take actions regarding the institution only after the completion of both stages of the review. Consistent with WASC procedures with visiting team reports, the institution will be given a draft copy of each report for correction of errors of fact prior to the report being finalized. Once the report is finalized, the chief executive officer of the institution is also given opportunity to respond in writing to the final report that is provided to the Commission, and is invited to appear before the Commission to discuss the team reports before Commission action is taken.

Commission policy permits an institution to withdraw its request for Candidacy at any time and without prejudice (even after the Capacity and Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews) prior to final action by the Commission.

## **Denial of Candidacy**

A decision to deny Candidacy is subject to Commission review and WASC appeals processes. An institution that is denied Candidacy following the Institutional Review Process may reapply for Candidacy when it can demonstrate that it has substantially addressed or resolved those issues identified in the Commission action of denial. In such cases the Commission typically extends institutional Eligibility for a specified period. Reapplication may be made only during the term of the institution's Eligibility; otherwise, a new application for Eligibility will need to be submitted. The Commission's *Policy on Reapplication after Denial of Candidacy or Initial Accreditation* (available on the WASC website) guides the Commission in determining the steps the institution will need to take as it reapplies for Candidacy under these circumstances.

## **Representation of Candidate Status in Institutional Publications**

Candidate for Accreditation status is granted for a maximum period of four years and is not retroactive. Once an institution has attained the status of Candidate for Accreditation, it should provide students with appropriate notice of its status, such as in the course catalog and on the institutional website. The institution must use the following statement whenever it describes that status publicly:

“[Name of institution] has been recognized as a Candidate for Accreditation by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 985 Atlantic Avenue, #100, Alameda, CA 94501, 510-748-9001. This status is a preliminary affiliation with the Commission awarded for a maximum period of four years. Candidacy is an indication that the institution is progressing toward Accreditation. Candidacy is not Accreditation and does not ensure eventual Accreditation.”



## **Procedures Required of Candidate Institutions**

Institutions granted Candidacy are required to:

1. Submit an Annual Report in the format required by the Commission
2. Keep the Commission informed of any significant changes or developments, especially those required to obtain prior approval by the Commission Substantive Change Policy
3. Pay annual dues according to the schedule posted on the WASC website

## **Process to Accelerate the Candidacy and Initial Accreditation Reviews**

The Commission has established the status of Candidacy as one of preliminary affiliation with the Commission. Candidacy is limited to four years' duration. The Commission's experience is that institutions, especially new ones, typically need the full four-year period to meet Commission Standards at a substantial enough level to be granted Initial Accreditation. In unusual circumstances, especially for established institutions, the findings of the first site visit team may lead it to believe that the institution does not need the full four-visit sequence leading to Candidacy and then to Initial Accreditation. When the evaluation of the site team and WASC staff both recommend, the Commission may adopt an abbreviated review process. In such cases, the visiting team may evaluate evidences for both capacity and educational effectiveness relative to the Standards of Accreditation in fewer than the mandated four site visits, potentially resulting in a shortened timeline for granting Initial Accreditation.

A visiting team and WASC staff consider the following factors when making a recommendation to the Commission for an accelerated process toward Initial Accreditation:

1. The institution has a sufficient history to enable a review team to make presumptions about its future performance with respect to the Standards.
2. The institution has significant and stable capacity, with no outstanding issues of concern.
3. The institution has substantial evidence of academic performance and educational effectiveness, including culminating measures of learning for its graduates.
4. During the Capacity and Preparatory Review, the site team identifies no major issues under the Standards.
5. The institution appears ready to demonstrate that it meets Commission expectations for both Candidacy (see pp.12-15) and Initial Accreditation (see pp. 16-18).

Upon the recommendation of the initial site team and WASC staff, and with the approval of the Commission, the review team will be authorized to evaluate the institution for Initial Accreditation during its subsequent site visit. The team may then make one of several recommendations to the Commission: (a) Grant Initial Accreditation; (b) Deny Initial Accreditation and grant Candidacy; (c) Defer action pending further institutional preparation, with the institution remaining in Eligibility status. Candidacy status is not conferred without an on-site visit to assess institutional readiness. Under the conditions of this accelerated process, if the institution is granted Candidacy rather than Initial Accreditation, it may not appeal the Commission's decision.

For institutions that are recommended for acceleration of the Candidacy and Initial Accreditation reviews, the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review for Initial

Accreditation will occur one year apart. In addition, the on-site reviews for Initial Accreditation will be expanded by one day. The Commission will take action only after the Educational Effectiveness Review.

## Initial Accreditation

An institution is reviewed for Initial Accreditation no later than the end of its four-year term of Candidacy or at an earlier date as determined by Commission action. To be reviewed for Initial Accreditation, an institution must have graduated at least one class that has completed a full cycle of one or more of the institution's programs prior to the completion of the institutional review process.

In seeking Initial Accreditation, the institution shall submit an **Application for Initial Accreditation** signed by the chief executive officer and governing board chair. A copy of the application form may be found at the WASC website: [www.wascenior.org/eligibility](http://www.wascenior.org/eligibility).

The institution will undertake the review process outlined in Section III of the *Handbook of Accreditation*, with the exception that the institution is not required to submit a Proposal. Instead, the institution is asked to submit a Letter of Intent as described in the Institutional Review Process for Candidacy. All Initial Accreditation reviews follow a comprehensive approach for the institution's reports, which addresses all CFRs, rather than a thematic approach. The Commission shall specify the dates for the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review at the time of granting Candidacy. These reviews will normally be conducted three semesters apart, though the Commission may set a shorter or longer interval depending on scheduling availability and institutional readiness. The Commission will take action following each of the two reviews.

## The Initial Accreditation Review

The Initial Accreditation Review moves beyond a mere compliance review, considering evidence of the institution's capacity for deep engagement with significant issues, including issues related to the institution's educational effectiveness. The institution demonstrates that it meets all of the Standards of Accreditation and the Core Commitments by:

1. Demonstrating that it has reviewed itself in reference to the Standards of Accreditation and the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness.
2. Demonstrating that it meets all of the Standards at a substantial level.
3. Demonstrating its commitment to developing and sustaining Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness.
4. Demonstrating that it has successfully addressed the Criteria for Review and Guidelines identified in the action letter as being of concern at the time of the Candidacy review.
5. Having collected evidence of student learning and being able to demonstrate how it has used such evidence to support inquiry and improvement in support of educational effectiveness.

An institution seeking Initial Accreditation must have graduated at least one class that has completed a full cycle of one or more of the institution's programs prior to the completion of the institutional review process. The institution should demonstrate broad engagement with capacity and educational effectiveness issues, avoiding mere assertions of compliance. In acting to grant Initial Accreditation, the Commission may set the effective date of accreditation up to six months prior to the date of the Commission's action in order to accommodate the most recent graduating class, providing that during its visit the team has been able to evaluate forms of culminating evidence of the graduates' achievements.

## Representation of Accredited Status in Institutional Publications

Initial Accreditation is granted for a maximum period of seven years. Accreditation status is not granted retroactively, though in some cases the effective date may be set prior to the date of the Commission action. Institutions granted the status of Accreditation must use the following statement if they wish to describe the status publicly.

“[Name of institution] is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 985 Atlantic Avenue, #100, Alameda, CA 94501, 510-748-9001.”

The phrase “fully accredited” is to be avoided, since no partial accreditation is possible.

The accredited status of a program should not be misrepresented. The accreditation granted by WASC has reference to the quality of the institution as a whole. Since institutional accreditation does not imply specific accreditation of any particular program in the institution, statements such as “this program is accredited” or “this degree is accredited” are incorrect and misleading.

## Reapplication

The Commission decision to deny Initial Accreditation is subject to Commission review and WASC appeals processes. An institution that is not granted Initial Accreditation may reapply only after it is prepared to demonstrate that it has corrected the deficiencies noted in the review process. It must wait at least one year before reapplying. The Commission’s *Policy on Reapplication after Denial of Candidacy or Initial Accreditation* (available at [www.wascsenior.org](http://www.wascsenior.org)) guides the Commission in determining the steps the institution will need to take as it reapplies for Initial Accreditation under these circumstances.

## Degree Level Approval

The Commission has designated three categories of institutional authority to initiate new degree programs, with related institutional responsibilities for applying for new degree approval through the WASC Substantive Change process. In brief, these categories are as follows: **General Approval (G)** is granted to institutions that have offered 10 or more degrees in at least five different disciplines for 10 or more years. These institutions may offer new degree programs without prior approval from the Substantive Change process. **Specified Approval (S)** applies to institutions that have offered five or more degrees in a specified field for at least 10 years. These institutions may offer new programs in these disciplines at the same degree level(s) without obtaining prior approval through the Substantive Change process. All other institutions are considered as having **Individual Approval (I)**, which means that the institution must apply in advance for approval to begin any new degree programs. (See the policy *Categories of Degree-Level Approval and Related Institutional Responsibilities* at [www.wascsenior.org](http://www.wascsenior.org).)

Institutions that have been granted Candidacy and are pursuing Initial Accreditation are designated as having “**I**” approval classification. The Commission’s action letter granting Candidacy will specify the degrees that are being offered at the time. Any additional degree programs anticipated by Candidate institutions must be approved in advance through the Substantive Change process.

When an institution is evaluated for Initial Accreditation, the visiting team that makes the recommendation to the Commission to grant Initial Accreditation (following the Educational Effectiveness Review) will also make a recommendation with respect to the institution’s degree-level classification. In making this recommendation, the team will take into account the institution’s degree program history and the Commission’s relevant decision criteria. The Commission’s action will be

consistent with the Degree-Level Approval policy. The action letter granting Initial Accreditation will specify the institution's degree authority classification and list the degrees being offered at the time of the decision.

## **Fees and Charges**

Institutions granted Candidacy and/or Initial Accreditation will be assessed annual dues, prorated from the effective date of the Commission's action. A dues and fee schedule for the Commission is prepared each year and is available on the WASC website and from the Commission office. Annual dues are based on institutional enrollment. In addition, fees and expenses are charged for the following activities, with fees due and payable upon submission of the application. Late payments for any invoices from the WASC office may jeopardize the institution's accreditation.

**Eligibility Applications:** Fees are charged for the initial application, reapplications, and for appeal of Eligibility determinations.

**Candidacy/Initial Accreditation Applications:** After an institution has been determined to be eligible, it is required to file a fee at the time of its application for Candidacy. As the institution is not invoiced for membership dues until Candidacy is granted, this fee covers some on-site consultation, staff conferences by phone or email, and other forms of staff support in preparation for institutional self studies, reports, and team visits.

**Evaluation Visits:** The institution is billed for the expenses of the visiting team, including team conference calls and staff travel, and the visit fee established for the type of visit. Expenses related to special visits made by the Commission because of special inquiries are also paid by the institution.

**Special Charges:** Additional charges will be assessed for unusually complex evaluations which require staff time beyond that normally expended. These include visits to out-of-region programs and to institutions requiring unusually large teams in relation to the size of the institution.

**Commission Review of a Negative Action:** When an institution requests a Commission Review, there will be a special processing fee and a deposit against anticipated costs, both due at the time of a written request for a review. If the actual costs are less than paid, the excess will be refunded. If actual costs are greater, the institution will be billed for the difference.



## How to Become Accredited: An Overview

	<b>Eligibility to Apply for Candidacy</b>	<b>In the Candidacy Period</b>	<b>Initial Accreditation</b>
<b>Duration of Status and Sequence of Steps:</b>	<p>a) Eligibility is granted for a maximum of four years, from date of ERC action letter to date of Commission action granting Candidacy.</p> <p>b) The institution demonstrates intent to pursue Candidacy by submitting an application and fee within 60 days of receiving ERC letter; a WASC liaison is assigned at this time to assist the institution in its next steps.</p> <p>c) The CPR visit for Candidacy is typically scheduled three to four semesters after Eligibility is granted, with a two semester interval to the EER visit. A Letter of Intent is submitted to WASC 12 months prior to CPR visit.</p> <p>d) If Candidacy is not achieved within the four year period, upon evidence provided through a team visit, the Commission may extend the Eligibility period by up to one year.</p> <p>e) If Commission denies Candidacy, it will specify which steps must be repeated to reapply, potentially including up to a new ERC review.</p>	<p>a) Candidacy is granted for a maximum of four years, beginning from receipt of the Commission action letter granting Candidacy and continuing to the date of the Commission action granting Initial Accreditation</p> <p>b) The CPR visit for Initial Accreditation is typically scheduled two semesters after the EER for Candidacy, with the EER visit for Initial Accreditation three semesters later</p> <p>c) If Initial Accreditation is not achieved within the four year period, upon evidence provided through a team visit, the Commission may extend Candidacy period by up to one year.</p> <p>d) If Commission denies Initial Accreditation, it will specify which steps must be repeated to reapply, potentially including one or more visits and a new ERC review</p> <p>e) The Commission takes action only following the EER except when acting to allow an accelerated process</p>	<p>The Commission takes action following each of the two site visits. Initial Accreditation is granted for five or seven years, as set by Commission. The time period is from Commission action granting Initial Accreditation to the date of the CPR visit for reaffirmation of accreditation.</p>
<b>Judgment based on:</b>	23 Eligibility Criteria	Standards of Accreditation and CFRs at <b>minimal</b> level (See also pp. 12-15)	Standards of Accreditation and CFRs at <b>substantial</b> level (See also pp. 16-18)

	<b>Eligibility to Apply for Candidacy</b>	<b>In the Candidacy Period</b>	<b>Initial Accreditation</b>
<b>Primary focus of review:</b>	Determines if institution is within that “universe of institutions” that WASC accredits in terms of mission and strength, offering program(s) in generally recognized fields of knowledge, and showing promise of achieving Initial Accreditation within allotted time.	Determines if institution has depth and scope of planning and resources to show promise for achievement of Initial Accreditation by the time of its Initial Accreditation reviews	Determines that institution is ready for accreditation and continuation of this status under the regular WASC reaffirmation cycle
<b>Operational Status:</b>	State licensure/approval; governance staff, planning, and resources in place and adequate to sustain efforts	Students enrolled in the programs	Students graduated from a full cycle of one or more of the degree program(s)
<b>Type of Review:</b>	Paper review; by WASC staff and a Panel of the Eligibility Review Committee (ERC)	On-site by peer team; Letter of Intent one year in advance Two-stage, normally two semesters apart, assuming institutional strength and scheduling availability; Commission action only after EE review; staff Transmittal Letter after CPR Comprehensive Model for self-study	On-site by peer team; Letter of Intent one year in advance Two-stage, normally three semesters apart, depending on institutional strength and scheduling availability; maximum two years apart Commission action following each review Comprehensive Model for self-study
<b>Fee and Dues:</b>	Fee: As posted on website. No annual dues	Candidacy Fee as posted on WASC website, plus review fee and visit expenses for each review. Annual Dues payable upon receiving either Candidacy or, if accelerated, Initial Accreditation.	
<b>Accelerated Process</b> Based on strong institutional status as verified by at least one on-site visit, and recommendation by both the CPR team and WASC staff, the Commission <i>may</i> act to accelerate the process of Candidacy and Initial Accreditation, as follows:	<p>Commission <i>may</i> accelerate the Candidacy and Initial Accreditation process, <b>if</b>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The institution has a sufficient history to enable a review team to make presumptions about its performance.</li> <li>2. The institution has significant and stable capacity, with no outstanding issues or concerns.</li> <li>3. The institution has substantial evidence for, and record of, academic performance and educational effectiveness.</li> <li>4. During the Capacity and Preparatory Review, the team identifies no major issues under the Standards.</li> <li>5. The institution appears ready to demonstrate that it meets Commission Standards at a <b>substantial</b> level.</li> </ol> <p>The Commission may act to allow the EER visit (extended by one day) to count for Initial Accreditation. Then the Commission may: (a) Grant Initial Accreditation; (b) Deny Initial Accreditation and grant Candidacy; or (c) Require an additional visit to determine readiness for Initial Accreditation. Under the conditions of this accelerated process, if the institution is granted Candidacy rather than Initial Accreditation, it may not appeal the Commission’s decision.</p>		