

How to Become Accredited

Procedures Manual for
**Eligibility,
Candidacy, and
Initial Accreditation**



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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 Initial Accreditation, a process that normally takes from four to six years.

This procedures manual is intended to be used 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 is also downloadable from the Senior College page of the WASC website, at www.wascsenior.org/wasc/.

Inquiries may be directed to WASC, 985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100, Alameda, CA 94501; e-mail <http://www.wascsenior.org/wasc/>

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The Commission has established formal procedures by which institutions can move through the required stages that lead to accreditation. All institutions seeking accreditation by the Commission must first go through a screening process that determines that the institution is eligible to be considered for accreditation. The steps are:

- Eligibility Screening
- Achieving Candidacy
- Achieving Initial Accreditation

Each step has specific criteria, processes, and time frames. An institution starting the process should carefully consider the criteria for all the steps to ensure its understanding of the criteria it will have to meet at each step. The institution should be aware that the likely time frame for the entire process is four to six years.



Eligibility

All institutions interested in obtaining WASC accreditation must first be reviewed to determine if they are eligible for such accreditation. This process, guided by Eligibility Criteria and 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 accreditation review.

Who Is Eligible?

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.

The Commission is an institutional accreditation body, emphasizing academic quality and educational effectiveness. 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.

Process

Institutions are urged to begin the process of pursuing eligibility through consultation with WASC staff prior to submitting application materials to the WASC office. This consultation gives staff the opportunity to offer formative feedback to the institution prior to completion of its application. The purpose of this consultation is to ensure that a Panel of the Eligibility Review Committee has sufficient information upon which to make an informed decision.

Upon receiving the completed application and a positive staff review, as described below, a Panel of the Eligibility Committee will be convened, typically by conference call, to review the application in light of the Eligibility Criteria.

The Eligibility process consists of the following steps:

1. An initial consultation is provided to interested institutions in a two-hour phone call or meeting, without charge, to discuss the Eligibility Criteria and process.
2. For staff support and guidance beyond the initial consultation, institutions are to submit a completed application form signed by the chief executive officer and the chair of the governing board, indicating the institution's intent to pursue eligibility, along with the requisite eligibility application fee. (The current fee is found on the WASC website.) This fee entitles institutions to support throughout the eligibility application and review process. Upon receipt of this fee, WASC staff will assist institutions in the following ways:
 - a. Provide an overview of the WASC values, policies and processes, eligibility criteria, and Standards of Accreditation, together with essential WASC documents and publications
 - b. Offer a preliminary review of the 23 Eligibility Criteria and discuss the readiness of the institution to meet them, the eligibility application process, and (as needed) examples of other institution's eligibility applications, typical timelines, and other resources
 - c. Review the Eligibility Review Committee (ERC) Scoresheet to guide institutional preparation of the application
 - d. Arrange 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 explain the WASC processes to others at the institution
 - e. Provide 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 informed Panel decision.
 - f. Request clarification of the submission or identify needed additional information for the institution to provide for an eligibility Panel to convene.
3. 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. No additional fee is charged.
4. The institution may withdraw formally from the Eligibility process at any time prior to a Panel review and receive a refund of 50% of the Eligibility Application fee.

Following the above consultation, the institution submits its Eligibility Application. Six (6) copies of the completed application must be provided, together with the signed Stipulations and the Summary Data Form. Staff will

- a. Select and convene an ERC panel to review and act upon the application;

- b. Prepare an Action Letter based on the Panel's findings that addresses institution's standing with regard to each Criterion;
 - c. Work with the institution on any needed follow up.
- 5. If the application is **approved**, a staff liaison is assigned who works with the institution in preparation for its Candidacy review. Within 60 days of approval by the ERC, the institution is responsible to submit the Candidacy and Initial Accreditation fee. Upon receipt of the fee, the institution is placed on the visit calendar at the appropriate time. The fee, as posted on the WASC website, provides Commission support for the institution through the Candidacy and Initial Accreditation process.
- 6. If the application is **deferred**, the institution may re-apply with a supplemental application, addressing only those Criteria that the panel determines the institution did not meet in the first application. The original panel and Commission staff reviews the supplemental application. A supplemental fee is assessed if the supplemental application is submitted within two years of receipt of the action letter. After two years, the full Eligibility Application fee applies.
- 7. If the application is **denied**, the institution must resubmit an application that addresses all the Eligibility Criteria. If possible, members of the original panel will evaluate the resubmitted application.
- 8. An institution wishing to appeal a denial of Eligibility by an Eligibility Review Committee Panel may do so by submitting to the Executive Director, within 30 days after receipt of the Committee Panel report, a statement clearly setting forth the reasons the institution disagrees with the Committee Panel's report. The institution's statement, along with the Committee Panel report, is presented to the Commission for its review and final determination. *The requesting institution pays an Eligibility Appeal processing fee (see Fees and Charges on the WASC website). The Commission Review and Appeal Process (see Section IV, page 56 of the Handbook of Accreditation) does not apply to Eligibility denials.*

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 three-year period of Eligibility. A determination of Eligibility is not an official status with the Commission but only a preliminary review to enable an institution to proceed with the data collection, institutional self-reflection, and evaluation required for Candidacy and Initial Accreditation reviews. No assurance is made by granting Eligibility that an institution will eventually be granted either Candidacy or Initial Accreditation. These judgments will be made in light of additional institutional presentations and reviews to assess the institution's alignment with WASC Accreditation Standards.

Following is a list of the twenty-three Eligibility Criteria. Below each Criterion is listed the related supporting documentation that institutions are expected to provide with their Eligibility Application. The list of documents is intended as a guideline for institutions preparing for the

Eligibility Review process. 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 must be incorporated; they cannot be partnerships. All institutions must present policies making it clear that decisions about the distribution of surpluses or profits give priority to the educational mission and improvement of the institution, and to assure effective student learning and student success. For institutions incorporated in California, the institution shall have completed the full formal approval process; 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)

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.

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

Criterion 3. Institutional Integrity: Alignment

The institution offers programs and provides administrative support in alignment with its purposes, and provides a climate of openness and academic freedom.

- Statements of Academic Freedom

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 carried out. The governing board is an independent policy-making body capable of reflecting constituent and public interest in its membership, activities, and decisions. It 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 is 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 an executive officer may serve as the chair of the institution's governing board.

- A current list and biographical information, including affiliations, of all governing board members
- Copy of the governing board bylaws and statements 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
- 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 Eligibility, and in pursuing Candidacy and 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 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

Criterion 7. Operational Status

By the time of Candidacy review, the institution is operational with students actively pursuing its degree programs.

- Current schedule of classes
- Enrollment history of the institution for a minimum of three years

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 them.

- List of degrees, course, and credit requirements
- Catalog designation of college-level courses for which degree credit is granted
- Documentation from catalog or other public document that describes the courses, units, and curricular sequence of the educational 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 beyond.

- Names of degrees that reflect the mission and purposes of the institution
- Data on retention, persistence, and numbers and disciplines of graduates

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 the means for achieving these objectives and outcomes. Processes for evaluating the achievement of educational objectives, including review of student learning outcomes, are also established.

- Catalog statements that describe educational objectives and learning outcomes for each program
- Outcomes assessment methodology and criteria and framework for program and/or unit reviews
- Sample syllabi, including statement of learning outcomes 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

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, and include demonstrated competence in writing 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 and design of the general education program. List of general education courses, including catalog descriptions
- Sample course syllabi for general education courses (2-3 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 programs offered, including a core of faculty whose primary responsibility is to the institution. A clear statement of faculty responsibilities must exist and 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 and experience
- Statement of faculty responsibilities
- Current schedule of classes identifying faculty
- Current curriculum vitae for each "core" faculty member (where the number of core faculty is large, a sample of vitae is sufficient)
- Description of the structure and processes used for faculty governance, involvement in curriculum development, review, setting academic standards, and institutional governance

Criterion 15. Student Services

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

- Demographic characteristics of students
- Outcomes methodology and data from program and/or unit reviews of student services units

Criterion 16. Admissions

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

- Copy of admissions policy from a published statement, including criteria for admission
- Copy of enrollment application

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 these resources beyond the core library of the institution, there may be specific long-term written arrangements for student access to readily available 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 also be able to demonstrate that library use is a fundamental part of all its curricula.

- Profile of holdings and resources, including descriptions of computing facilities availability and usage
- Copies of agreements for access to external resources
- Documentation of student training 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 assure financial stability. It is expected that the institution not show a cumulative operating deficit for the current and preceding two years. If the institution shows a deficit, the institution bears the responsibility to justify the reasons for the deficit and to demonstrate it has the resources to assure its financial viability and a plan to restore any deficit.

- Current and proposed budgets for the next three years
- Documentation of any external foundation or other funding support

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 the current budget and a copy of the last two (2) years' audited financial statements and management letters, including the fiscal year immediately prior to the date of submission, prepared by an outside certified public accountant that has no other relationship to the institution. The audit must be certified and any exceptions explained. The audit must specify whether any capital or operational funds have been provided by employees or Board members of the organization.

- Certified independent audit, including management letter(s), for the past two 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 and formal adoption of a planning process by the institution's governing board

Criterion 21. Institutional Evaluation/Assessment of Student Learning

The institution actively engages in or has a plan in place to systematically evaluate how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes, including assessment of student learning and documentation of its educational effectiveness.

- Description of the institution's plans for systematic institutional review and quality assurance processes
- Criteria for program and/or unit review
- Institutional plans and/or activities undertaken to assess student learning outcomes and conduct program and/or unit reviews, including engagement with authentic student achievement related to the institution's stated outcomes

Criterion 22. Public Information

The institution publishes in its catalog, or 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 attending the institution and withdrawing from it.

General Information must include at least the following:

- ☞ Official name, address, telephone, Web site
- ☞ Educational mission
- ☞ Course, program, degree offerings
- ☞ Academic Calendar and program length
- ☞ Academic Freedom Statement
- ☞ Available Student Financial Aid
- ☞ Available Learning Resources (Library, technology, and support services)
- ☞ Names and Degrees of Administrators & Faculty
- ☞ Names of Governing Board Members

Requirements:

- ☞ Admissions
- ☞ Student Fees and Other Financial Obligations

- ☞ Degrees, Certificates, Graduation and Transfer

Major Policies Affecting Students:

- ☞ Academic Regulations including Academic Honesty
- ☞ Nondiscrimination
- ☞ Acceptance of Transfer Credits
- ☞ Grievance & Complaint Procedures
- ☞ Sexual Harassment
- ☞ Refund of 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, describes itself in identical terms to all its accrediting agencies, promptly communicates any changes in its status, and agrees to disclose any and all information required by the Commission to carry out its accrediting responsibilities. Further, the institution agrees that in pursuing Candidacy and Accreditation, it is committed to abiding by the Standards, Policies, and Procedures established by WASC.

- ☞ Copy of policy formally adopted and published by the governing board assuring compliance with Commission Standards, Policies, and Procedures
- ☞ List of other accreditations or approvals held by the institution
- ☞ Copies of the most recent actions taken by other accrediting or approved bodies including information about conditions of concerns raised by such bodies
- ☞ Statement that describes the institution's representation by those accrediting bodies

Representation of Status

A determination of Eligibility is not a formal status with the Commission. It is a preliminary review of an institution to determine that the institution is potentially accreditable and may proceed with the process for Candidacy. It is, therefore, important that the institution not represent Eligibility for more 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 assure eventual accreditation; it is a preliminary finding that the institution is potentially accreditable and can proceed within three 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 wascsr@wascsenior.org or 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, a Commission staff member will be assigned to the institution, to guide it through the Candidacy and Initial Accreditation Reviews. Institutions granted Eligibility will be guided in preparing for their Candidacy Review by this staff liaison, by the letter from the Eligibility Review Committee Panel, and by the *Handbook of Accreditation*.

Support for Candidacy and Initial Accreditation

In order to provide optimal institutional support during the next two stages, the Commission offers specific support to help institutions understand and work with the Standards for Accreditation, respond to issues identified by the Eligibility Review Panel, prepare their institutional reports, and organize for site visits. A single Candidacy & Initial Accreditation Support fee covers the necessary institutional review processes. (See the WASC website current fee schedule.) This fee will include:

1. Staff support for both reviews (review of draft reports; establish and orient teams; assist teams with site visits; follow up with feedback to institution related to Commission actions); one WASC staff liaison visit to institution during each stage, if requested
2. Commission action for both reviews (evaluate reports; take formal action; draft/approve Action Letters)
3. Up to four (4) days of on-site consultation (not including travel expenses) by a WASC Staff Associate¹, consulting days to be distributed at institution's discretion between preparation for the two visits

In addition to this support fee, institutions will pay for teams' visit expenses (specifically for team travel, meal, and hotel expenses); and legal fees incurred by WASC on behalf of the institution, and for institutional participation in any workshops provided by WASC. Annual Dues become payable at the point of Candidacy or Initial Accreditation, whichever comes first. (NOTE: Participation in this support program 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 that an institution meets the Eligibility Criteria specified above, the institution has the opportunity to 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 a Candidacy application fee. The form and schedule of charges are found at the Commission website: www.wascsenior.org/wasc/. The Candidacy fee covers the partial costs of Commission staff support throughout the Candidacy application process. Upon receipt of the formal application and fee, a Commission staff member is assigned to the institution to assist with the Candidacy Review. An office conference or visit to the institution will then be arranged to provide further information about Commission Standards and procedures for the Candidacy Review.

The Candidacy Review

¹ Staff Associates will agree to a non-consultation provision related to the institutions they assist under this program, which will be in force for the period of up to one year after Initial Accreditation is granted.

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 in reference to the Standards for 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 a minimum level.
3. Demonstrating that it meets all or nearly all of the Standards for Accreditation at a minimum level.
4. Having a clear and feasible plan in place to meet all the Standards and Criteria by the time of the Initial Accreditation Review.
5. Having developed approaches to self-examination and assuring quality in teaching and learning.

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

Institutional Review Process

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

Letter of Intent. For the Candidacy and Initial Accreditation Reviews, a formal Proposal as described in the *Handbook* is not required. In lieu of the Proposal, institutions are expected to provide to their staff liaison a year in advance of the Preparatory Review a two- to three-page Letter of Intent. The Letter should outline the framework and institutional emphases for the Review. Three subjects should be addressed in the Letter:

1. Brief response to the most recent Commission or Panel concerns, focusing on how these issues will be addressed in the review process
2. Description of how the institution will prepare the Capacity and Preparatory Review and Educational Effectiveness Reviews using the Comprehensive approach as described in Section III of the *Handbook*
3. Identification of targeted areas for improvement that the institution will address during the review process

Comprehensive Approach to the Review. It is the responsibility of the institution to do a self-review that addresses the five components described under "The Candidacy Review" (above). During the Capacity and Preparatory Review, institutions are expected to address the Standards in reflective essays at the level of performance indicated in the Criteria for Review and Guidelines for each Standard. In writing the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report, the Criteria for Review may be grouped to address special themes or areas of emphasis.

During the Educational Effectiveness Review, institutions are expected to follow the Comprehensive approach to the review, described in Section III of the *Handbook*. The Comprehensive approach enables an institution to review how 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. It is expected that faculty will be involved in developing the assessment strategy, in writing the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review reports, and in constructing the exhibits that accompany each report. Since this is the initial visit 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 one semester unless, following the Capacity & Preparatory Review, WASC staff determine that the interval should be extended to two semesters. Scheduling of these visits will depend on institutional readiness and scheduling availability. In addition, the Commission will act 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 evaluation 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 evaluation 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 (even after the Capacity and Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews) prior to final action by the Commission.

Denial

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.

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 *Catalog* and on the institutional website. The institution must use the following statement whenever they describe 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 (WASC), 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 form in the format required by the Commission.
2. Keep the Commission informed of any significant changes or developments, especially those required to have prior approval by the Commission Substantive Change Policy.

Process to Bypass the Candidacy Review

The Commission has established the status of Candidacy as one of preliminary affiliation with the Commission. Candidacy is limited to four years. The Commission’s experience is that most institutions need the full four-year period to meet Commission Standards at a substantial enough level to be granted Initial Accreditation. In unusual circumstances, an institution’s self examination may lead it to believe that it does not need the full four-year Candidacy period. Under such circumstances, and where the evaluation of the Eligibility Panel so recommends, Commission staff will consider a request by the institution to schedule the Initial Accreditation Review at an earlier time. Any such request is subject to the approval of Commission staff and must be substantiated by the favorable review of the Eligibility Panel.

An institution wishing to bypass the Candidacy Review should indicate its interest in doing so at the time of its Eligibility Review. If Eligibility is granted and the determination is made by both the Panel and the Commission staff, the institution should submit, within 30 days after the Eligibility Review, its Initial Accreditation Application form and fee.

The following criteria are to be used and should be addressed by the institution in its letter to the Executive Director requesting to bypass the Candidacy Review.

1. The institution has a long enough history to enable a review team to make presumptions about its performance
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
4. During the Eligibility Review, the Eligibility Review Committee Panel identifies no major Eligibility issues under the Criteria
5. The institution appears ready to demonstrate that it meets Commission expectations for both Candidacy (see p. 10) and Initial Accreditation (see pp. 13, 14).

With the approval of the Executive Director, the site review team will be authorized to evaluate the institution for Initial Accreditation. The team may make one of several recommendations to

the Commission following its visits: (a) Grant Initial Accreditation; (b) Deny Initial Accreditation and grant Candidacy; (c) Defer action on the proposal pending further institutional preparation, with the institution remaining in the Eligibility status. Candidacy status is not conferred without an on-site visit to assess institutional readiness.

In preparation for such a site visit, the Institution will supplement its Eligibility Application materials with a specific request for consideration for Initial Accreditation. Staff should be consulted before such a request is made to discuss the format of presentation of any additional materials.

For institutions that are approved to seek to bypass the Candidacy review, the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review for Initial Accreditation will occur one semester or one year apart, depending on institutional readiness and scheduling availability. The Commission will take action only after the Educational Effectiveness Review. In addition, the on-site Reviews for Initial Accreditation will be expanded by one day.

Initial Accreditation

An institution is reviewed for Initial Accreditation at the end of its four-year term of Candidacy or at an earlier date as approved by the Executive Director. 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 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 is found at the Commission website: www.wascsenior.org/wasc/.

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 are to follow the Comprehensive model for the Educational Effectiveness Report (see discussion above for the Candidacy Review and Section III of the *Handbook*). 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 18 months 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 review.

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 for Accreditation and the Core Commitments by:

1. Demonstrating that it has reviewed itself in reference to the Standards for 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 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 Institutional Review Process. The institution should demonstrate engagement with capacity and educational effectiveness issues beyond the compliance level.

Representation of Accredited Status in Institutional Publications

Initial Accreditation is granted for a maximum period of seven years. Accreditation status is not granted retroactively. 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 like "this program is accredited" or "this degree is accredited" are incorrect and misleading.

Reapplication

The Commission decision to deny Accreditation is subject to Commission review and WASC appeals processes. An institution that is not granted Accreditation may reapply only after it is prepared to demonstrate that it has corrected the deficiencies noted in the accreditation process; it must wait at least one year before reapplying.

Fees and Charges

A fee schedule for the Commission and Association of Senior Colleges and Universities is prepared each year and is available on the WASC website and from the Commission office. Annual fees are based on institutional enrollment. In addition, fees and expenses are charged for the following activities.

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 one-time fee at the time of its application for Candidacy and Initial Accreditation. This fee covers some on-site consultation, staff conferences as needed, and up to four days of on-site advice on preparation for an Institutional Review and team visit provided by WASC Staff Associates.

Evaluation Visits: The institution is billed for the expenses of the visiting team, including the cost of the chair's preliminary visit and appearance before the Commission, staff travel, and a 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. In such cases, the Commission will charge an additional fee. After one substantive change or out-of-region visit has been made for an institution in a year, the same principle of excess costs will apply to additional visits.

Commission Review of a Negative Action: When an institution requests a Commission Review, there will be a special processing fee and a deposit against costs. 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. All fees are due and payable upon submission (for applications) or upon receipt of a bill from the Commission office. Late payments may jeopardize the institution's accreditation.