

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN OSHKOSH

Get ready, here it comes!

Unless everyone can agree on what a degree is and whether that is what you've gotten when you graduate, that degree doesn't mean much.

The process of accreditation ensures that our institution meets agreed upon standards that we have what it takes to provide a university education.

UW Oshkosh is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, one of six regional accrediting associations in the United States (see box below). After initially being accredited (UW Oshkosh was first accredited in 1915), each institution is reviewed once every ten years by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association.

UW Oshkosh was last reaccredited in 1997.

The process consists of a comprehensive self-study by the institution. It's easy to look at reaccreditation as a test or review that needs to be gotten through, but this self-study can also serve to guide the process that the University uses to plan for the future. At UW Oshkosh, the Governing Ideas which have been used in the ongoing planning process share many of the characteristics of the Higher Learning Commission's criteria (see next page).

Following the self-study is a review by an evaluation team of educators from other schools outside our immediate region. The site visit by this team will occur in Spring 2007.

The self-study and the report of the visiting team from the 1997 process (as well as lots of other information) can be found on the web at http://www.uwosh.edu/nca_accreditation/NCADocuments.php

A committee to guide the process was appointed by Provost Keith Miller in 2003. The committee is co-chaired by Margaret Genisio, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Curricular Affairs, and Craig Fiedler, COEHS. The committee consists of a faculty member representing each of the divisions of the College of Letters and Science, and each of the professional colleges, three members of the academic staff, one member of the classified staff, and one student.

Subcommittees were formed to identify documents which provide evidence that we meet the Higher Learning Commission's criteria. The complete list can be found on page 3 of this newsletter.

Who are these people?

In a very real sense, they are us.

The North Central Association is a voluntary organization made up of colleges, universities and other institutions of higher learning in the nineteen-state North Central region: Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, New Mexico, South Dakota, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Wyoming. There are five other regional accrediting associations in the United States. NCA itself is part of the larger Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

NCA is not an agency of the government, although it is recognized by the Department of Education.

The Higher Learning Commission is the section of NCA that establishes the criteria and conducts the reviews for degree granting institutions of higher learning. NCA has other commissions that deal with other types of institutions and special topics.

The site review teams are made up of educators who come from outside our area. In 1997, the nearest team members were from Duluth, Minnesota and South Bend, Indiana. Four staff members at UW Oshkosh, Muriel Hawkins, Michael Zimmerman, Adele Newson-Horst, and Tom Sonnleitner participate in evaluation teams at other schools. Dr. Newson-Horst also serves on the Commission's team that trains consultant/evaluators.

What do we have to prove?

The Criteria for Accreditation are organized under five major headings. Each criterion has three elements: Criterion Statement, Core Components, and Examples of Evidence. These elements are defined as follows.

Criteria Statements:

These statements, adopted by the Commission, define necessary attributes of an organization accredited by the Commission. An organization must be judged to have met each of the Criteria to merit accreditation. Sanctions may be applied if an affiliated organization is in jeopardy of not meeting one or more of the Criteria.

Core Components:

The Commission identifies Core Components of each criterion. An organization addresses each Core Component as it presents reasonable and representative evidence of meeting a criterion. The review of each Core Component is necessary for a thorough evaluation of how an organization meets a criterion.

Examples of Evidence:

The Commission provides in the Examples of Evidence illustrative examples of the specific types of evidence that an organization might present in addressing a Core Component. Organizations may provide other evidence they find relevant to their mission and activities. Some types of evidence suggested by the Commission may not be appropriate for all organizations; therefore, the absence of a specific type of evidence does not in and of itself mean that the organization fails to meet a Core Component.

Criterion One:

Mission and Integrity

The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

Criterion Two:

Preparing for the Future

The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Criterion Three:

Student Learning and Effective Teaching

The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

Criterion Four:

Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge

The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

Criterion Five:

Engagement and Service

As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

The full descriptions with all the core components and examples of evidence can be found on the web at http://www.uwosh.edu/nca_accreditation/criteria.php

These don't look familiar

If you were involved in the 1997 reaccreditation, these criteria may look a little unfamiliar. In the late 1990's The Higher Learning Commission reviewed its mission and structure. Among its new goals were increasing the focus of accreditation on the quality of higher learning and to "place emphasis on the institutions' own process of quality assurance and quality improvement." A result was to redefine the criteria for accreditation. The new criteria were adopted in 2004, and required in 2005.

Time line

Spring 2005

Committee requests documents supporting criteria from departments.

Fall 2005

Document due to committee for review.

Spring 2006

Steering committee analyzes information; prepares, completes studies, prepares rough draft of the self-study report

Summer 2006

Draft of Self-Study is completed and available for review and comment.

Fall 2006

Final Self Study is completed.

Spring 2007

Evaluation team visits campus.

Committee Membership

Faculty

Merlaine Angwall	COLS-Fine/Performing Art
Peggy Davidson	COLS-Humanities
Craig Fiedler - Co Chair	COEHS
Jaya Jambunathan	CON
John Koker	COLS-Math/Science
Quintin Sullivan	COLS-Social Science
Vacant	COBA
Sam Adams (Ad Hoc)	COEHS

Academic Staff

Nick Dvoracek	Media Services
Susan Finkel	COEHS
Jean Kwaterski	Student Affairs

Administration

Margaret Genisio - Co Chair	Provost's Office
Susan Nuernberg	Chancellor's Office
Lori Worm	Administrative Services
Mike Watson	Institutional Research

Classified Staff

Vacant

Student

Amanda Cone

Criterion subcommittees

Criterion One: Mission and Integrity

Merlaine Angwall - Co Chair	Theatre
Nick Dvoracek - Co Chair	Media Services
Rosemary Smith	CON
Beth Heuer	Affirmative Action
Thom Nustad	Foundation
Michael Ford	COEHS
B.S. Sridhar	COBA

Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future

John Koker - Chair	COLS-Math/Science
Steve Arndt	Facilities Management
John Berens	Enrollment & Information Services
Bill Mode	Geology
Tom Keefe	Foundation
Barbara Rau	COBA

Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching

Margaret Genisio - Co Chair	Provost Office
Quintin Sullivan - Co Chair	Social Work
Sam Adams	COEHS
Bryan Lilly	COBA
Suzanne Marnocha	CON
Mike Watson & Joe Franklin	Institutional Research
Amanda Cone	O.S.A

Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge

Craig Fiedler - Co Chair	COEHS
Jaya Jambunathan - Co Chair	CON
Lane Earns	Provost Office
Linda Freed	Sponsored Programs
Gary Adams	Psychology
Lori Carrell	Communications

Criterion Five: Engagement and Service

Jean Kwaterski - Co Chair	Student Affairs
Peggy Davidson - Co Chair	Journalism
Dale Feinauer	COBA
Marsha Rossiter	Graduate Studies
Stephanie Stewart	CON
Perry Rettig	COEHS
Colleen McDermott	Biology
Sue Schierstedt	COBA
John Harris	CAPP
Susan Neitzel	Center for Community Partnerships
Irma Burgos	Academic Support

What will I be asked to do?

The Higher Learning Commission emphasizes that the reaccreditation process should have wide participation from the campus community.

This spring, all departments will be asked to submit documents that provide evidence that UW Oshkosh meets the criteria. The Criterion subcommittees have compiled lists of documents supporting each criteria, but each department will also be asked to review the criteria and their core components and suggest additional documents that support the criteria.

These documents will be used to prepare the self-study and will be made available to the site visitation team in a Resource Room, and most of them will also be provided on the Reaccreditation web site at http://www.uwosh.edu/nca_accreditation/NCADocuments.php

As the process continues individuals may be asked to contribute to newsletters and announcements, and everyone will be asked to review and comment on the draft self-study.

Frequently asked questions about accreditation

Q. What is the value of accreditation?

A. Accreditation provides both public certification of acceptable institutional quality and an opportunity and incentive for self-improvement in the accredited organization. The Commission reaches the conclusion that a college or university meets the Criteria only after the organization opens itself to outside examination by experienced evaluators familiar with accrediting requirements and with higher education. The process of accreditation provides the accredited organization with an opportunity for critical self-analysis leading to improvement in quality and for consultation and advice from persons from other organizations.

Q. What is the difference between regional accreditation and state licensure?

A. While many states have established regulations that must be met before an educational organization may operate, in most states such regulations represent a minimum basis for protection of students. State authorization should not be confused with institutional or specialized accreditation. To operate legally, a college or university may need state authorization, but it does not necessarily have to be accredited by an institutional or specialized accrediting association. In fact, an organization must have the appropriate authorization by a state to operate before it can seek affiliation with the Commission.

Q. Why doesn't the Commission rank colleges?

A. Various publications base ranking on specific numerical details (such as size, tuition, and endowment); faculty selectivity; and/or public opinion. The purpose of accreditation is to provide public assurance of educational quality and institutional integrity. It is important to remember that colleges and universities differ from one another in significant ways, including mission, programs offered, and students served. Therefore, the important issue for each student is whether the college meets his or her needs. Published rankings are one source of information, but they should not be the only source.

Q. Does accreditation guarantee that credits and degrees can be transferred to another college or university?

A. No. The college or university to which the student has applied determines transferability of credits and degrees. Transferability depends on the college or university at which credits or degrees were earned, how well the credits mesh with the curriculum offered by the school to which the student wishes to transfer, and how well the student did in the courses. Many organizations choose to consider the accredited status of the college at which the credit or degree was earned as one factor in the transfer decision. Some have specific agreements with other colleges or universities guaranteeing transfer of credits. Organizations should be prepared to explain their institutional policies on transfer and the factors in an individual transfer decision. Students should be skeptical of any school that makes unqualified assertions that its credits will transfer to all other schools. Anyone planning to transfer credits should, at the earliest opportunity, consult the receiving organization about the transfer—before taking the courses for transfer, if possible.

Q. What is the difference between institutional accreditation and program accreditation?

A. Institutional accreditation speaks to the overall quality of the organization without making judgments about specific programs. Institutional accreditation is accreditation of all programs, sites, and methods of delivery. The accreditation of individual programs, such as those preparing students to practice a profession, is carried out by specialized or program accrediting bodies that apply specific standards for curriculum and course content. The Commission does not maintain lists of programs offered by its accredited organizations. Each specialized accrediting body publishes a list of programs it accredits. This information also is shown in the annual directories, Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education, published by the American Council on Education, and Higher Education Directory, published by Higher Education Publications, which are available in many libraries.

This FAQ is reproduced with permission from the UW LaCrosse accreditation web site (<http://www.uwlax.edu/nca/FrequentlyAskedQuestions.htm>). Their review takes place one year ahead of ours in 2006.