

ACCREDITATION 101: OVERVIEW

THE VALUE OF ACCREDITATION

Accredited status from an institutional accreditor, such as the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), enables an institution to qualify for federal grants and contracts, to distribute federal financial aid to its students, and for students' credits to be more easily transferred to other accredited institutions.

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

ACCJC member institutions undergo a comprehensive review for reaffirmation of accreditation every eight years to determine whether they continue to meet ACCJC's expectations and are engaged in sustainable efforts to improve educational quality, institutional effectiveness, and successful outcomes for all students. The review consists of four main components ...

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

- 1. Institutional Self-Evaluation:** The college rigorously examines its policies, practices, and student achievement data against the ACCJC Accreditation Standards. It compiles these findings into an Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) and submits it to the ACCJC.

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

2. **Peer Evaluation:** A trained team of education professionals—typically faculty, administrators, and staff from other member institutions—reviews the ISER, conducts a comprehensive site visit, and evaluates institutional practices.

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

3. **Team Report & Recommendation:** The peer review team drafts a report summarizing findings, noting exemplary practices, and making recommendations for improvement or standard compliance.

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

4. **Review & Decision:** The ACCJC Commission reviews the ISER, the Peer Review Team Report, and the institution's response. The Commission then votes to grant, reaffirm, defer, or issue sanctions against the institution's accreditation status.

COMMON ACRONYMS

There are many acronyms used in accreditation. Besides ACCJC and ISER, the most common include:

- **ALO – Accreditation Liaison Officer.** The campus contact who manages the college's accreditation work.

COMMON ACRONYMS

- **ILO – Institutional Learning Outcome.** Broad skills and knowledge that all graduates of the college should possess.
- **ISS – Institution-Set Standards.** Baseline performance thresholds internally established to measure student achievement and institutional effectiveness.

COMMON ACRONYMS

- **PLO – Program Learning Outcome.** What students should know or be able to do after completing a whole program or major.
- **RSI – Regular and Substantive Interaction.** A federal and accrediting mandate requiring online instructors to actively and predictably engage with students.

COMMON ACRONYMS

- **SAO – Service Area Outcome.** Measurable goal for non-instructional student support departments, such as the library or financial aid.
- **SLO – Student Learning Outcome.** Measurable goal describing a specific knowledge, skill, or ability a student must demonstrate by the end of a course.

ACCREDITATION STATUS

The ACCJC assigns formal statuses to indicate institutional compliance with educational standards and eligibility requirements. The primary accreditation statuses include Accredited, Warning, Probation, Show Cause, and Termination.

ACCREDITATION STATUS

- **Accredited/Reaffirmed:** The institution meets all standards and provides satisfactory educational quality and student success.
- **Warning:** The first formal sanction issued when an institution is found non-compliant with one or more standards.

ACCREDITATION STATUS

- **Probation:** A more severe sanction indicating the institution has serious, ongoing, or unresolved compliance issues.
- **Show Cause:** The most severe sanction prior to termination. It requires the institution to present evidence to the Commission demonstrating why its accreditation should not be withdrawn.

SELF EVALUATION REPORT

The Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) is a comprehensive document that community and junior colleges must submit to the ACCJC during their evaluation cycle. It documents the college's compliance with educational quality and institutional effectiveness standards.

SELF EVALUATION REPORT

The ISER requires colleges to critically assess their own programs, services, and student outcomes, and acts as the primary tool used by peer review teams to evaluate a college's accreditation status. It consists of four overarching standards.

PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE STANDARDS

- Reflect current norms and practices within US higher education
- Focus on outcomes and improvement
- Use clear language and minimize redundancies
- Balance accountability and improvement
- Emphasize equity and inclusion

STANDARDS

The four overarching accreditation standards are:

1. Institutional Mission and Effectiveness
2. Student Success
3. Infrastructure and Resources
4. Governance and Decision-Making

STANDARD 1

Standards 1.1 through 1.5

Ensures that the institution defines its mission, sets goals for student achievement/improvement, and uses data to evaluate and improve.

Evidence Includes: Educational Master Plan, Student Equity Plan, Data Dashboards, Program Review (ASPIRE)

STANDARD 2

Standards 2.1 through 2.9

Verifies that the institution ensures high-quality instructional programs and support services that lead to student success, including learning outcomes.

Evidence Includes: Environmental Scan, Curriculum Handbook, Student Learning Outcomes

STANDARD 3

Standards 3.1 through 3.10

Ensures that the institution employs qualified personnel and maintains financial, physical, and technological resources to support student success.

Evidence Includes: Equal Employment Opportunity Plan, Facilities Master Plan, District Technology Master Plan

STANDARD 4

Standards 4.1 through 4.6

Defines the roles of the governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students in institutional governance, decision-making, and integrity.

Evidence Includes: Board Policies and Administrative Procedures, SBCCD Strategic Plan, Trustee Handbook

ACCREDITATION REPORTS

The cycle for currently accredited institutions follows these structured phases and requirements:

- **Comprehensive Review & Self-Evaluation** (Every 8 Years): Institutions must conduct a thorough internal assessment and compile an ISER. A team of professional peers reviews the report and conducts an external evaluation/site visit to validate the findings.

ACCREDITATION REPORTS

- **Midterm Report:** Midway through the cycle (4 years after the comprehensive review), the institution submits an update detailing major improvements and actions taken in response to any formal recommendations. It also requires a review of student learning and achievement data.

ACCREDITATION REPORTS

- **Substantive Change:** If an institution makes major changes to its mission, adds a branch campus, or merges with another organization, it must follow the Substantive Change Manual process.
- **Follow-Up Reports:** When noncompliance issues are identified during an evaluation, the Commission may require corrective follow-up or focused visits.

DISCUSSION / QUESTIONS

