



Overview of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities Revised Eligibility Requirements

In January 2010 following the vote of the membership, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities approved a new set of Standards for Accreditation and a new accreditation process. The revised Standards for Accreditation and the seven-year accreditation cycle will be implemented for all accredited institutions in January 2011.

Following the formulation of the new standards and a new accreditation cycle, the Commission undertook a process of revising a new set of Eligibility Requirements (ERs). Eligibility Requirements articulate an expected level of performance or set of pre-conditions that must be met when evaluating an institution's Application for Consideration for Candidacy, the granting or continuing of Candidacy, granting Initial Accreditation, or reaffirming accreditation.

The proposed new Eligibility Requirements include modification of the Eligibility Requirements enumerated on pages 5-8 of the *Accreditation Handbook*, 2003 edition, and several new ERs developed to align and complement the new accreditation standards.

Applicant and candidate institutions will be evaluated on all twenty four proposed Eligibility Requirements as part of their respective Applications for Consideration for Candidacy, Evaluations for Candidacy, Interim Candidacy Evaluations and Evaluations for Initial Accreditation. Accredited institutions will be evaluated on the proposed ERs in the following way in accordance with the new seven-year accreditation cycle. In the Year One Report, institutions will address ER 2 *Operational Status*, and ER 3 *Mission and Core Themes*. In the Year Three Report institutions will address ER 4 *Operational Focus and Independence*; ER 5 *Nondiscrimination*; ER 6 *Institutional Integrity*; ER 7 *Governing Board*; ER 8 *Chief Executive Officer*; ER 9 *Administration*; ER 10 *Faculty*; ER 11 *Educational Program*; ER 12 *General Education and Related Instruction*; ER 13 *Library and Information Resources*; ER 14 *Physical and Technical Infrastructure*; ER 15 *Academic Freedom*; ER 16 *Admissions*; ER 17 *Public Information*; ER 18 *Financial Resources*; ER 19 *Financial Accountability*; ER 20 *Disclosure*; and ER 21 *Relationship with the Accreditation Commission*. In the Year Five Report, the institution will address ER 22 *Student Achievement* and ER 23 *Institutional Effectiveness*. And, lastly, in the Year Seven Report, the institution will address ER 24 *Scale and Sustainability*. It is assumed that accredited institutions have met ER 1 *Operational Status*.

The final version of the Eligibility Requirements and a ballot will be sent to the membership in late March 2010.

NORTHWEST COMMISSION ON COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
Proposed – Revised Eligibility Requirements
February 5, 2010

**Eligibility Requirements for Candidates for Accreditation and
Accredited Higher Education Institutions**

1. OPERATIONAL STATUS

The institution has completed at least one year of its principal educational programs and is operational with students actively pursuing its degree programs at the time of the Commission accepting a candidate's Application for Candidacy. The institution has graduated at least one class in its principal educational program(s) before the Commission's evaluation for initial accreditation.

2. AUTHORITY

The institution is authorized to operate and award degrees as a higher education institution by the appropriate governmental organization, agency, or governing board as required by the jurisdiction in which it operates.

3. MISSION AND CORE THEMES

The institution's mission and core themes are clearly defined and adopted by its governing board(s) consistent with its legal authorization, and are appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education. The institution's purpose is to serve the educational interests of its students and its principal programs lead to recognized degrees. The institution devotes all, or substantially all, of its resources to support its educational mission and core themes.

4. OPERATIONAL FOCUS AND INDEPENDENCE

The institution is concerned predominately with higher education in the operation of its programs and services. The institution has sufficient organizational and operational independence to be held accountable and responsible for meeting the Commission's standards and eligibility requirements.

5. NONDISCRIMINATION

The institution is governed and administered with respect for the individual in a nondiscriminatory manner while responding to the educational needs and legitimate claims of the constituencies it serves as determined by its charter, its mission and core themes.

6. INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

The institution establishes and adheres to ethical standards in all of its operations and relationships.

7. GOVERNING BOARD

The institution has a functioning governing board responsible for the quality and integrity of the institution and for each unit within a multiple-unit institution to ensure that the institution's mission and core themes are being achieved. The governing board has at least five voting members, a majority of whom have no contractual or employment relationship or personal financial interest with the institution.

8. CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The institution employs a chief executive officer who is appointed by the governing board and whose full-time responsibility is to the institution. Neither the chief executive officer nor an executive officer of the institution chairs the institution's governing board.

9. ADMINISTRATION

In addition to a chief executive officer, the institution employs a sufficient number of qualified administrators who provide effective leadership and management for the institution's major support and operational functions and work collaboratively across institutional functions and units to foster fulfillment of the institution's mission and achievement of its core themes.

10. FACULTY

Consistent with its mission and core themes, the institution employs and regularly evaluates the performance of appropriately qualified faculty sufficient in number to achieve its educational objectives, establish and oversee academic policies, and ensure the integrity and continuity of its academic programs wherever offered and however delivered.

11. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The institution provides one or more educational programs which include appropriate content and rigor consistent with its mission and core themes. The educational program(s) culminate in achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes, and lead to collegiate-level degree(s) with degree designation consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.

12. GENERAL EDUCATION AND RELATED INSTRUCTION

The institution's bachelor and graduate degree programs require a planned program of major specialization or concentration. The institution's baccalaureate degree programs and/or academic or transfer associate degree programs require a substantial and coherent component of general education as a prerequisite to or an essential element of the programs offered. All other associate degree programs (e.g., applied, specialized, or technical) and programs of study of either 30 semester or 45 quarter credits or more for which certificates are granted contain a recognizable core of related instruction or general education with identified outcomes in the areas of communication, computation, and human relations that align with and support program goals or intended outcomes.

13. LIBRARY AND INFORMATION RESOURCES

Consistent with its mission and core themes, the institution maintains and/or provides access to library and information resources with an appropriate level of currency, depth, and breadth to support the institution's programs and services wherever offered and however delivered.

14. PHYSICAL AND TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The institution provides the physical and technical infrastructure necessary to achieve its mission and core themes.

15. ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The institution maintains an atmosphere in which intellectual freedom and independence exist. Faculty and students are free to examine and test all knowledge appropriate to their discipline or area of major study as judged by the academic/educational community in general.

16. ADMISSIONS

The institution publishes its student admission policy which specifies the characteristics and qualifications appropriate for its programs, and it adheres to that policy in its admissions procedures and practices.

17. PUBLIC INFORMATION

The institution publishes in a catalog and/or on a website current and accurate information regarding: its mission and core themes; admission requirements and procedures; grading policy; information on academic programs and courses; names, titles and academic credentials of administrators and faculty; rules and regulations for student conduct; rights and responsibilities of students; tuition, fees, and other program costs; refund policies and procedures; opportunities and requirements for financial aid; and the academic calendar.

18. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The institution demonstrates financial stability with sufficient cash flow and, as appropriate, reserves to support its programs and services. Financial planning reflects available funds, realistic development of financial resources, and appropriate risk management to ensure short-term solvency and long-term financial sustainability.

19. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

For each year of operation, the institution undergoes an external financial audit, in a reasonable timeframe, by professionally qualified personnel in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. Results from the audit, including findings and management letter recommendations, are considered in a timely, appropriate, and comprehensive manner by the administration and governing board.

20. DISCLOSURE

The institution accurately discloses to the Commission all information the Commission may require to carry out its evaluation and accreditation functions.

21. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

The institution accepts the standards and related policies of the Commission and agrees to comply with these standards and policies as currently stated or as modified in accordance with Commission policy. Further, the institution agrees that the Commission may, at its discretion, make known the nature of any action, positive or negative, regarding the institution's status with the Commission to any agency or members of the public requesting such information.

22. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The institution identifies and publishes the expected learning outcomes for each of its degree and certificate programs. The institution engages in regular and ongoing assessment to validate student achievement of these learning outcomes.

23. INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The institution systematically applies clearly defined evaluation and planning procedures, assesses the extent to which it achieves its mission and core themes, uses the results of assessment to effect institutional improvement, and periodically publishes the results to its constituencies. Through these processes it regularly monitors its internal and external environments to determine how and to what degree changing circumstances may impact the institution and its ability to ensure its viability and sustainability.

24. SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

The institution demonstrates that its operational scale (e.g., enrollment, human and financial resources and institutional infrastructure) is sufficient to fulfill its mission and achieve its core themes in the present and will be sufficient to do so in the foreseeable future.