

Overview of the UWSP Re-Accreditation Process

Introduction : UWSP is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, HLC for short. This accreditation is an extremely important part of our institutional credentials: it assures students and community members that our programs and campus climate meet high standards of quality; it qualifies us to receive federal aid on behalf of our students; and it identifies us to other institutions and to potential employers as an institution focused on student success in all aspects of our campus. Accreditation is awarded by the HLC after a rigorous review of the university and our ability to meet public standards of integrity, quality, and long-term stability. UWSP was first accredited in 1916 and has been continuously accredited since 1951. Re-accreditation occurs on a ten year cycle. There are two general procedures for re-accreditation from the HLC: the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality, PEAQ, and the Academic Quality Improvement Program, AQIP. UWSP participates in the PEAQ which is the template for the remainder of this document. (AQIP is a continuous improvement model whereby the review process occurs on a yearly basis with considerably more feedback and interaction with the HLC.)

We will be reviewed for re-accreditation in the spring of 2008. This process happens in two distinct steps.

First Step: The first requires us to perform an extensive evaluation of all campus activities in comparison to five criteria and four cross-cutting themes that have been established by the HLC; see later in this document for a compilation of these items. **This evaluation is referred to as the Self-Study and will be performed in a variety of ways. UWSP has decided to employ broad campus participation in performing the Self-Study and thereby use the re-accreditation process to engage the entire campus.**

Second Step: The second step involves a two or three day site visit by a Higher Learning Commission Peer Review Corp. This group of about ten academicians will have access to faculty, staff, students, and administrators during their visit, as well as a broad range of documents. They will also receive our Self-Study report approximately two months before arriving on campus and will come prepared with specific questions and areas to explore. The report of the Peer Review Corp will be sent to the Chancellor during the summer of 2008 and will announce the results of the process. The decision will discuss the continuing accreditation status, barring discovery of significant, enduring problems, which is not expected, but the report may include stipulations or follow-up conditions.

The following pages give an overview of the structure and the timing of our Self-Study process, which will lead up to the site visit in the spring of 2008. The structure reflects a synthesis of protocols from a number of other institutions, which have been reviewed and modified for our particular climate on the UWSP campus.

Structure: Two coordinators have broad oversight of the Self-Study process: one representative each from the divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. The Self-Study report is organized around the five criteria and subtended core components identified by the HLC. Each of the five criteria are being researched by separate committees, which will draft individual

summary reports. An editor will combine the five reports along with introductory and transition information to produce the Self-Study report. The HLC allows some liberty in formatting the report, but also has some required elements.

A Steering Committee (SC) has been designated to coordinate and implement the entire process. The SC is comprised of: the two coordinators, the chairs of the five criteria committees, two campus marketing specialists, the editor, and two representatives from the Student Government Association.

Timeline: This timeline is an outline only. The Steering Committee has developed a detailed schedule of events that fleshes out this outline.

Spring 2006 The five Criteria Chairs identified their working committees with advice from the Steering Committee. The two coordinators, five criteria chairs, and the editor attended the HLC Annual Meeting, March 31-April 04, to become very well acquainted with the accreditation process and to coalesce as a team. The Steering Committee developed a detailed timeline for producing a complete draft of the Self-Study report for August 2007 and for handling the logistics of the site visit (which occurs in March 2008) by October 2007; rooms on campus are being reserved for the site visit.

Summer 2006 The two coordinators organized for fall and identified types and potential sources of information. The virtual resource room and website were developed over the summer by two IT specialists, Randy Peelen and Justin Poggemann.

Fall 2006 and Spring 2007 The Self-Study process has begun in earnest. The collection of evidence of the five criteria and 21 core components and the writing of five sub-reports will take place prior to February, 2007. The Steering Committee will meet on a biweekly basis for review of progress and discussions of evidence.

Summer 2007 Editing of reports and compilation into the self-study report by the editor will take place. Reviews of the report will be carried out by senate and administrative representatives. The continuing development of virtual and physical resource libraries will occur during the summer 2007.

Fall 2007 All components will be finalized by December 1, 2007. All arrangements for the site visit will be finalized. The Steering Committee will begin plans for the finale celebration.

Spring 2008 A successful site visit will occur. Celebration of the completion of the process will be carried out.

Summer/Fall 2008 An announcement will be made about the re-accreditation and reviewing responses of visiting team. The Steering Committee will prepare notes and a reaction to the report by forming an action plan for the coming five years. A final celebration of the successful process will occur.

Self-Study Personnel: The self-study will be conducted by a variety of campus faculty and staff. The following job descriptions show who will do what to accomplish this project.

HLC Self-Study Steering Committee

General Description

The Steering Committee has broad advisory oversight of the entire self-study process. It is the main advisory committee for the two self-study coordinators, helps coordinate the activities of other committees, and provides advice and encouragement for the working committees to stay on task and on time. The Steering Committee will meet about once every three weeks beginning in the spring of 2006 and will meet every two weeks as the activities of the self-study escalate through 2006-2007 and into 2007-2008 until the site visit in the spring of 2008.

Specific Tasks

1. Become expertly familiar with the HLC criteria and the core components for accreditation; understand the types of evidence appropriate for the self-study and how the cross-cutting themes should be woven into the final report.
2. Understand the philosophy of the UWSP self-study process and the several goals of the process; establish early direction for the self-study process during the spring of 2006 and the 2006- 2007 academic year; provide advice and feedback to the self-study coordinators following this period.
3. Develop a detailed timeline for activities leading up to the site visit in the spring of 2008 and the subsequent celebrations; arrange for the beginning of the accreditation self-study in the fall of 2006.
4. Assist in recruitment of committee members, as requested by committee chairs.
5. Alert Criterion Committees to possible sources of information as they begin the self-study process in earnest.
6. Devise the format for the Self-Study Report, advise the editorial committee on its production, and assure proper publication of the report.
7. Provide for accurate deployment of the associated website and the currency of materials posted there.
8. Ensure broad campus participation in the self-study process and dissemination of the findings; establish mechanisms for regular communication to the campus concerning the process and progress of the self-study.
9. Review the findings of the Criterion Committees to make sure the committees are in step with the timeline; remain very well informed of all aspects of the self-study process and provide necessary encouragement and feedback.

HLC Self-Study Coordinators

General Description

There are two coordinators for the HLC self-study process, one from academic affairs and one from student affairs. The coordinators have general oversight of the entire re-accreditation process and will make the day-to-day operational decisions during the actual self-study process which starts in fall of 2006. The coordinators are the chief contacts concerning the process. They will help shape policy during the spring of 2006 and the 2006-2007 academic year, in conjunction with the Steering Committee, and will thereafter direct the process, with counsel from the Steering Committee.

Specific Tasks

1. Have a detailed understanding of accreditation in general and the HLC process in particular; maintain a set of documents related to HLC; be familiar with the 1998 self-study and, especially, the suggestions made to UWSP from the evaluation team.
2. Coordinate all aspects of the accreditation process with guidance from the Steering Committee; Co-chair the Steering Committee and maintain accurate proceedings of all meetings.
3. Serve as chief contacts for administration, faculty and governance, and staff on the progress of the self-study process; maintain contact with our HLC campus liaison.
4. Coordinate the logistics of the site visit including arranging for accommodations for visiting team, campus facilities and meeting arrangements, and the resource room for the team.
5. Meet with Criterion Committee chairs to review progress and problems associated with their tasks; help troubleshoot issues and find workable solutions.
6. Participate in HLC training as necessary, including attendance at the HLC Annual Meeting in April 2006.
7. Work with the editor on issues of content, continuity, and style of the self-study report.

HLC Self-Study Criterion Committees

General Description

The Criterion Committees, of which there are five, are the basic working committees of the Self-Study process. Here, the data are collected, analyzed, and organized to demonstrate that UWSP is fulfilling its mission and meeting the core components of the HLC accreditation criteria. The Criterion Committees will format their findings in a report to the editorial committee so that the results can be incorporated into the self-study document. The five Criterion Committees are:

- 1. Criterion One: Mission and Integrity**
- 2. Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future**
- 3. Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching**
- 4. Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge**
- 5. Criterion Five: Engagement and Service**

While these committees are focused on specific criteria and types of evidence, there will be considerable coordination between them, through the Steering Committee and the Coordinators, to avoid duplication of effort and to share findings of interest to other committees.

Specific Tasks

The timeline for discharging the duties of the committee will be determined in detail by the Steering Committee.

1. Understand the steps of accreditation and both the philosophy and the organization of the UWSP self-study process.
2. Become familiar with all five criteria for accreditation and the associated core components; develop expert understanding of the criterion for the committee, the core components of that criterion, and the types of evidence that the HLC accepts as support for meeting the criterion; understand the cross-cutting themes and how they relate to the types of evidence required by HLC.
3. Collect data related to the committee's specific criterion, organize these data into evidence supporting either UWSP's meeting the criterion or the possible need for improvement/change, and write a summary for the editorial committee.
4. Provide feedback, through the committee chair, to the Steering Committee concerning the self-study process and findings of the committee.

HLC Self-Study Criterion Committee Chairs

General Description

The chairs of the Criterion Committees will have the primary task of keeping the committees on schedule and uncovering all evidence related to their assigned criterion and core components.

Specific Tasks

1. Understand the philosophy of the UWSP self-study process and the several goals of the process; have expert knowledge of the five criteria, the core components related to their specific criterion, the types of evidence that HLC accepts as supporting our meeting the criterion, and the cross-cutting themes and how they are documented.
2. Participate as a member of the Steering Committee.
3. Participate in HLC training, including the April 2006 HLC annual meeting.
4. Recruit membership to the Criterion Committee with advice from the Steering Committee as necessary.
5. Develop comprehensive understanding of UWSP programs and sources of information on our practices.
6. Write the Criterion Committee report for use by the editor in writing the self-study report. The format of the Criterion Committee report will be suggested by the editor.

HLC Web and Virtual Resources Coordinator(s)

General Description

The Web and Virtual Resources Coordinator(s) have oversight of the Self-Study Web Site and deploys the resources comprising the virtual resource center for the self-study and site visit.

Specific Tasks

1. Understand the philosophy of the UWSP self-study process and the several goals of the process.
2. Design a web presence for the self-study process that serves as an information portal for the campus and other constituencies, allows for exchange of information among the self-study participants, and provides a “market visibility” to reinforce the value of the accreditation process.
3. Upon advice of the Steering Committee and Criterion Committees, prepare an appropriate digital collection of institutional documents for use by the campus community and the visiting evaluation team during the site visit.
4. Help implement electronic publicity and announcements related to the self-study process and related events.

HLC Self-Study Editor

General Description

The editor will produce the self-study report, taking his lead from the Steering Committee. Information will be assembled from the Coordinators and the five Criterion Committees.

Specific Tasks

1. Understand the philosophy of the UWSP self-study process and the several goals of the process.
2. Be familiar with several examples of self-study reports from other institutions in order to provide guidance for the style of our report.
3. Provide early input to the Steering Committee concerning the style and content of the self-study report and lead the Committee in deciding the general “look and feel” of the UWSP report; help the Committee in devising a reasonable time line necessary to produce a final draft of the report by the end of summer, 2007; help monitor, in concert with the Coordinators, progress toward this goal.
4. Accept input from the two Coordinators and reports from the five Criterion Committees for revision and inclusion into the final report.
5. Write the final report and help bring it to publication in the form decided on by the Steering Committee.
6. Participate in the April 2006 HLC annual meeting.

The editor will also have a full-time appointment during the summer of 2007 and partial release during the fall of 2007 and possibly the spring of 2007.

The Criteria for Accreditation: The Criteria for Accreditation are organized under five major headings. Each Criterion has three elements: Criterion Statement, Core Components, and Examples of Evidence. The **Criteria Statements** 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. An organization addresses each **Core Component** as it presents reasonable and representative evidence of meeting a Criterion. **The Examples of Evidence** illustrate the types of evidence an organization might present in addressing a Core Component. (Visit the Commission's Web site or the *Handbook of Accreditation* to view the Examples of Evidence.) The Criteria are intentionally general so that accreditation decisions focus on the particulars of each organization, rather than on trying to make it fit a pre-established mold. The widely different purposes and scopes of colleges and universities demand criteria that are broad enough to encompass diversity and support innovation, but clear enough to ensure acceptable quality. The Criteria Statements and Core Components are presented here.

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.

- 1a. The organization's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization's commitments.
- 1b. In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.
- 1c. Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.
- 1d. The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.
- 1e. The organization upholds and protects its integrity.

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.

- 2a. The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.
- 2b. The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
- 2c. The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.
- 2d. All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

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.

- 3a. The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.

- 3b. The organization values and supports effective teaching.
- 3c. The organization creates effective learning environments.
- 3d. The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

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.

- 4a. The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.
- 4b. The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.
- 4c. The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.
- 4d. The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.

Criterion Five: Engagement and Service. As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

- 5a. The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.
- 5b. The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.
- 5c. The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.
- 5d. Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.

The **Four Cross-Cutting Themes** are characteristics of a viable institution that the HLC expects to see in all of the evidence. These four themes are:

- An institutional orientation toward the future;
- A focus on learning;
- Internal and external connectedness;
- Institutional distinctiveness.

“Promises” from 1998 NCA Self-Study Report

The March 1998 Accreditation Self-Study Report was organized according to the Five Criteria upon which accreditation was based. Note that these criteria have changed for the current process. At the end of each section in the report, a summary of areas for improvement and particular strengths highlighted several foci for improvement. The areas identified by the self-study for possible change are given here *verbatim* for reference.

Criterion One: The institution has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education.

- Institutional Planning–

Development of an ongoing three- to five-year cycle planning process which includes significant input from all campus constituencies. Such a process would provide ongoing planning, eliminate the urgency to complete sporadic planning, and allow for more significant and timely input from all areas.

Development of a process for deallocation and reallocation of resources for the 2000-2001 biennium and beyond to replace the process used under the most recent planning exercise but which expires under a sunset clause in 1999.

- Academic program planning–

Development of policies, procedures, and criteria for evaluating and rating programs and for enhancing, maintaining, reducing, or eliminating offerings according to budgetary circumstances in order to eliminate across-the-board or proportional deallocations.

Review and revision of program review procedures and requirements for submittals to place greater emphasis on planning at the department level, so that departmental planning is one of the first steps in institutional planning.

- Governance–

Review and revision of the Faculty Senate structure, methods of nomination, election procedures, and the role of classified staff in the Senate.

Development of ways to encourage governance participation, particularly among younger faculty, and to provide appropriate rewards for such participation.

- In addition, the University should consider the merits of re-establishing a campus Center for Excellence in Teaching, and the development of procedures for program review of non-academic units.

Criterion Two: The institution has effectively organized the human, financial, and physical resources necessary to accomplish its purposes.

- The University must enter the 21st century with an adequate budget and with reasonable assurance that continual cuts and deallocations will not occur.

Otherwise, the only viable way to avoid creeping mediocrity is to cut programs and services.

Criterion Three: The institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes.

- Assessment–

Provision for the sharing of assessment results with deans and the Provost/Vice Chancellor, and with students, alumni, and the community.

Development of procedures–in keeping with Board of Regents policy on the purposes of assessment and NCA guidelines on assessment–to relate assessment results to the budgeting process.

Integration of student evaluations of faculty and academic staff and peer observations of classroom teaching into the assessment process.

Clarification of anticipated outcomes for each of the fourteen skills and knowledges and development of more effective assessment tools to determine whether students are achieving what the University believes appropriate and necessary.

- Development–

Provision of an incremental increase in funding for development and research, including not only more fund for UPDC but also increases in departmental travel funds.

Criterion Four: The institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness.

- Planning–

Development of a process (and review criteria, if necessary) to replace the existing process for deallocation/reallocation, which expires in 1999.

Development of an ongoing, rolling three-year planning cycle as part of the responsibility of the University Planning Committee.

- Resources–

Development of procedures to make the use of assessment results and other qualitative evaluative factor an integral part of planning, budgeting, and resource allocation.

Criterion Five: The institution demonstrates integrity in its practices and relationships.

- The *University Handbook* must be completed and kept current.

Resources

The HLC has a very helpful website that links to various documents and position papers. In particular, the *Handbook of Accreditation, Third Edition*, is available for download from that site. This is the official guide for procedures involved in the accreditation process. You can also find a directory of institutions which may provide helpful contacts.

<http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/>

Handouts from presentations at the NCA/HLC annual meetings, which cover the spectrum of issues involved in accreditation and the self-study process, can be found at

<http://www.ncahlc.org/annualmeeting/>

Accreditation can (and should) be very public process and several schools have dedicated web sites for their documents, including organizational strategies, timelines, and personnel involved in the accreditation. Institutions seem very willing, typically, to share information and advice concerning their experiences in re-accreditation. The following are a few sites that are active as of August 2005 and are using the new criteria in their self-study. This list is very brief but shows the wide variety of approaches, timelines, and self-study report formats that have been used.

Miami University of Ohio, <http://www.units.muohio.edu/accreditation/>

Loyola University-Chicago, <http://www.luc.edu/nca/selfstudy/>

The University of Northern Colorado, <http://www.unco.edu/nca/>

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater,
<http://www.uww.edu/hlcselfstudy/2006selfstudy.htm>

New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology <http://externalweb.nmt.edu/nca/>

Eastern Illinois University, <http://www.eiu.edu/~acaffair/NCA/>