

Campus Briefing for Our Upcoming Accreditation Team Visit

A team of peer reviewers appointed by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) will be on campus March 31-April 02, 2008 for our continued accreditation evaluation. The campus has been preparing for this visit since April of 2004 and we are well situated to “pass” the evaluation and take advantage of it to move forward with our mission. The campus can review progress and documentation for this evaluation at the UWSP Accreditation website, www.uwsp.edu/accreditation.

The Peer Review Team consists of: Dr. Adelaide H. Parsons, Director of International Programs and TESOL, Southeast Missouri State University; Dr. Joel E. Anderson, Chancellor, University of Arkansas at Little Rock; Dr. Fernando P. Delgado, Dean, College of Liberal Arts; Hamline University, Dr. Narbeth R. Emmanuel, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Southern Illinois, University, Edwardsville; Dr. Amado Gabriel M. Esteban, Provost, Seton Hall University (Team Chair); Dr. Douglas Haneline, Professor of English, Ferris State University and; Mr. Steven L. Ludwig, Vice President for Administrative Affairs, St. Cloud State University. These colleagues essentially volunteer for this service. (The Commission pays for their travel and an honorarium.) **We are not allowed to contact these individuals before the site visit except through official channels.** While they are on campus, however, these team members will provide us with focused feedback and perspective about our programs, curricula, and policies in a constructive manner.

As part of the site visit, the peer reviewers will be meeting with a variety of campus and off-campus stakeholders. The Team Chair will develop the schedule for their visit and it will most likely include meetings with faculty, staff, and students. It is very important that we all be available during the process and prepared to answer specific questions that the evaluation team may have if they request to meet with us. Below are some tips about meeting with the peer evaluators during the site visit.

1. Reaccreditation is not a legal proceeding and we are by no means being interrogated. You can expect a collegial conversation in which the peer reviewers have a legitimate interest in what goes on at UWSP. They will have specific questions that they have developed after reading our Self-Study Report and perusing our accreditation website.
2. Be open and honest in your responses to questions; UWSP has nothing to hide. The self-study process has revealed considerable evidence of an exemplary institution focused on student learning. We are not without our challenges, of course, but the weight of the evidence strongly supports our request for reaccreditation.
As much as possible, give direct and succinct answers. Remember, it is their conversation and they will have a full schedule, so be considerate of the evaluator’s time.
3. It is not advisable to describe idiosyncratic characteristics of individuals or offices on campus or to lodge personal complaints. For example, “I can never move my ideas forward because Dr. X in office Y does not like me and is too picky on procedures!” is not helpful. But, if you deem it harmful to student learning, you may certainly make a comment such as: “The University could better support faculty travel to professional meetings in order to allow us better exposure to current issues in our discipline,” or “The campus procedures for approving XYZ are cumbersome and sometimes slow.” Include comments on things you appreciate about UWSP: “Our college has promoted a very helpful process of strategic planning that

has prompted us to focus on our strengths as a department, rather than lamenting our hurdles. Our departmental initiative on QRX is a direct result of the planning.” Remember, you are talking to peers who are well aware of the academic enterprise and its inherent strengths and foibles. The evaluators are interested in seeing a structure that is focused on accomplishing our mission and can help us address the challenges we face.

4. You should be familiar with our current mission statement(s) and with *Vision 2015*. The team will not ask you to recite these but they may ask you to describe them. Please see the accreditation website referenced above for more details on the institutional mission and vision statements. Also, please note that the tagline for the UWSP accreditation process is “*It’s All About Learning!*” You should decide whether you agree with this exclamation and how your position either supports it or is indifferent to it. (There are, of course, no positions that are antagonistic to this slogan!) Note, too, that this is not a university slogan, only an accreditation tagline.
5. If the mission of your unit involves instruction, be prepared to answer “How do you know your students are learning?” What are the specific assessment strategies that are used to assure and improve student learning? Are the assessment results taken into consideration when planning curricular changes or budget allocations? How or why not?
6. A question like “What does the next ten years hold for your unit?” may be asked of anybody. What vision do you and your colleagues have for your program during the next decade? How is the vision being translated into planning?

Remember, this is an important event for UWSP, but is not an inquisition. The visiting team will be genuinely interested in what we do here, so please don’t hesitate if you are asked to meet with them. They will not make impromptu requests of you and their schedule will be established before they arrive on campus. In general, we should expect a collegial interaction with colleagues from peer institutions who are genuinely concerned about and interested in the quality of our programs for students.

Some further suggestions for preparing for their visit: 1) Review the major decision processes on campus but especially in your unit. How are new personnel hired? How do curricular decisions get made on campus? How are employee grievances handled? What is the process for evaluation of teaching, service, and scholarship within your unit? How and by whom would a major new initiative be approved and launched? Who handles student requests or complaints? 2) Browse the accreditation web site and peruse the many documents that have been placed in the Virtual Resource Room (accessible from the left-hand menu.) Especially download and read the Self-Study. This document will be sent to the visiting team well in advance of their arriving on campus and it is the primary statement of how we meet the five criteria for re-accreditation. You should also be very conversant with reports and other documents related to your specific unit.

If you have any questions or would like to make comments, please contact any member of the Accreditation Steering Committee. The membership of this committee is listed on the accreditation website. While at the website, please review the mission and values of the Steering committee.