



NWCCU

NORTHWEST COMMISSION ON
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The Handbook of Accreditation

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Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

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Introduction

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) provides a comprehensive system of support and information pertaining to institutional continuous quality improvement and effective and informed accreditation reviews.

The NWCCU is pleased to provide this updated 2023 version of *The Handbook of Accreditation* as a primary resource:

1. To describe NWCCU's role and mission as a USDE recognized institutional accreditor.
2. To describe the lifecycle of accreditation for participating institutions.
3. To provide guidelines and resources for institutional success in the accreditation process.

In addition to the *Handbook*, NWCCU provides significant supporting documentation on policies, guides, and associated resources, which may be referenced herein and are available on the NWCCU's website.

These resources include, but are not limited to:

- The *Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) Handbook*, which provides resources for institutional accreditation liaison officers, charged with overseeing and facilitating accreditation activities at their respective institutions.
- The *Peer Evaluator Guide*, which provides resources for peer evaluation teams as part of the cycle of review for accredited and candidate institutions.
- The *Substantive Change Manual*, which describes changes that occur at an institution following accreditation that must be reported or approved to be included under the institution's accreditation.
- The [NWCCU Website](#), which includes Eligibility Requirements, Standards, Policies, institutional actions, contact information, and up-to-date resources.

Copyright

The *Handbook* is copyrighted with a Creative Commons license (Attribution-Noncommercial-ShareAlike) that allows sharing and remixing with attribution but does not allow the work to be used for commercial purposes. It is the Commission's goal, through wide dissemination and application of the *Handbook*, that the Standards and processes of NWCCU accreditation inform and contribute to institutional continuous quality improvement and effective and informed accreditation reviews.

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Section I: The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)

Accreditation is a voluntary process where a college or university is evaluated by peers according to established standards. It provides public assurance about the quality of education and a mechanism for institutions to evaluate themselves and improve. When an institution is accredited, it signals to students, the institutional community, and the public that the institution is substantially achieving its mission and that it meets or surpasses key standards to support student achievement.

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities is a Washington State nonprofit corporation, recognized as a 501(c)(3) organization by the Internal Revenue Service. NWCCU provides institutional accreditation for public and private institutions of higher education throughout the United States and internationally.

USDE Scope of Recognition: The accreditation and pre-accreditation (“Candidacy status”) of institutions, including the accreditation of programs offered via correspondence education, and distance education within these institutions. This recognition also extends to the Executive Committee. Geographic area of accrediting activities: the United States.

Title IV Eligibility: Through its peer evaluation process, NWCCU ensures that its accredited and pre-accredited member institutions are eligible for Title IV of USDE’s Higher Education Act programs in accordance with 34 CFR Part 602.10.

NWCCU Vision Statement: The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities aspires to be the premier accreditation agency whose member institutions foster access, belonging, and success for every student.

NWCCU Mission Statement: The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities accredits institutions of higher education by applying data- and evidence-informed standards and processes to support continuous improvements and promote equitable student achievement and success.

To achieve this mission, NWCCU promotes institutional learning to advance student achievement, student learning, and student success; supports institutional efforts to close equity gaps, enhance educational quality and institutional effectiveness; facilitates analytical self-assessment and critical peer review; ensures accountability and transparency; and advances research and engagement.

Part A: Purpose and Audience

NWCCU provides a comprehensive system of support and information pertaining to institutional continuous quality improvement and effective and informed accreditation reviews.

The Handbook of Accreditation is intended to serve a variety of readers, including representatives of institutions accredited by NWCCU and those seeking accreditation; chairs and members of peer evaluation teams; those interested in establishing good practices in higher education; and the general public.

In addition to the *Handbook*, the Commission provides significant supporting documentation on policies, guides, and associated resources that may be referenced herein and are available on [NWCCU's website](#).

Overview and Structure

Each major section of NWCCU's *Handbook of Accreditation*, aligned with [USDE's regulations on accreditation](#), describes the *Why, What, When, Whom, and How of accreditation*. For reference, in this document:

- The "*Handbook*" refers to the *NWCCU Handbook of Accreditation*.
- "The Commissioners" refers to the individuals elected by NWCCU member institutions to serve up to two, three-year terms on the decision-making Board of Commissioners.
- The "Commission" and "NWCCU" refer to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities as an agency and/or its staff.
- "NWCCU Staff Liaison" refers to the senior vice president who serves as the assigned liaison between NWCCU and the institution.
- "The Standards" refers to the NWCCU 2020 Standards for Accreditation.

Updates and Revisions

The Commission reserves the right to update the *Handbook* and related policies and procedures at any time to comply with federal requirements or to respond to new needs among NWCCU members. Standards, Eligibility Requirements, and Policies are updated in accordance with NWCCU's Review of Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, and Policies Policy. Individuals and institutions should refer to the [NWCCU website](#) or contact NWCCU Staff Liaisons for the most recent version of all NWCCU publications.

NWCCU also welcomes suggestions for improvement of the *Handbook* and ways to make it and the accreditation process more effective and useful to institutions, students, and members of the public.

Part B: Context of Accreditation

Principles of NWCCU Accreditation

The overriding purpose of NWCCU accreditation is to assure stakeholders that an NWCCU-accredited institution has been rigorously evaluated and that it meets or exceeds the criteria required to maintain accreditation. In addition, the accreditation process is designed to build a culture of evidence, promote a commitment to continuous institutional improvement, validate institutional integrity, and provide opportunities for feedback that improves the accreditation process.

Accreditation status granted by NWCCU is recognition that an institution's own purpose and mission are soundly conceived, that its educational programs promote student success and help close equity gaps, and that its structure, resources, and programs support and result in achieving the institution's stated mission and purpose. When granted or reaffirmed, accreditation applies to the entire institution at the time of the most recent evaluation. It indicates that the institution as a whole has been evaluated and has been found to be substantially fulfilling its mission and substantially meets NWCCU's expectations for compliance with the accreditation standards.

Significant institutional changes initiated subsequent to the most recent evaluation are not automatically included in the institution's accreditation and require the submission of a Substantive Change prospectus to the Commission for review and analysis (See the NWCCU [Substantive Change Policy](#) and [Substantive Change Manual](#)).

NWCCU considers and honors each institution's stated mission and unique characteristics when evaluating institutions for accreditation. NWCCU recognizes and supports the diversity of purpose and organizational culture among its colleges and universities. Member and candidate institutions range from large, urban, multi-campus universities to small, rural colleges to Tribal colleges; from religiously-affiliated colleges to non-denominational institutions; from liberal arts-focused, private institutions to professional and technical-focused public colleges; from institutions of residential student communities to colleges of all-commuter student bodies; and from institutions that are highly selective to those with open admission policies. In respecting such diversity, indicators of educational quality and institutional effectiveness cannot be defined in absolute terms.

Commission Responsibilities

Just as the effectiveness of the peer-review system requires the institutional members to be involved and committed to the accreditation process, the Commission is also dedicated to the integrity of the process for the member institutions and the public that rely on accreditation as a trustworthy authority of educational quality. The responsibilities of the Commission include:

- Maintaining official records of Commission actions on institutions.
- Maintaining institutional reports, materials, and evaluation reports through two complete evaluation cycles.

- Sharing the member status (Accredited, Candidate, etc.) of institutions with other recognized accrediting bodies.
- Taking the actions of other accreditation agencies into account when considering whether to grant Candidacy or Initial Accreditation status.
- Taking the adverse actions of other accreditation agencies or state agencies into account when considering whether to reaffirm the accreditation of a member institution.
- Filing notifications with the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) within thirty (30) working days regarding the actions it has taken on institutions.
- Immediately filing copies of correspondence to institutions that involves adverse or negative actions, such as Probation or Show-Cause.
- Responding to USDE inquiries regarding institutional eligibility for Higher Education Act programs, including Title IV (Student Assistance).
- Notifying institutions about claims of Title IV fraud and abuse.
- Sharing clear evidence of possible Title IV fraud and abuse with the USDE.

The Commission is charged with establishing accreditation criteria, evaluating institutions against those criteria, and accrediting the institutions that meet those criteria. As part of that process, NWCCU provides expert review and analysis by peer evaluators, commendations for accomplishments and recommendations for improvement. Since the accreditation status of an institution is reviewed periodically, institutions are encouraged to undertake continued self-study and improvement. NWCCU staff provide counsel and assistance to established and developing institutions throughout this continuous process.

Good Practices and Ethical Conduct

To fulfill its responsibilities, NWCCU has created a set of best practices and ethical standards to guide interactions with institutions and its own internal operations and procedures.

The Commission maintains a commitment to:

1. Apply with good faith effort its Standards, policies, and procedures fairly and consistently.
2. Provide means by which institutions and others can comment on the effectiveness of the reviews to make necessary changes.
3. Provide institutions and the general public access to non-confidential information regarding Commission actions and opportunities to make informed comment in the development of NWCCU policies.
4. Promote continuing and effective communications between NWCCU and institutions through the [Accreditation Liaison Officer](#) (ALO) at each institution.
5. Maintain and implement a conflict-of-interest policy for members of peer evaluation teams, Commissioners, and NWCCU staff to ensure fairness and prevent bias.

6. Value the diversity of institutions and consider an institution's mission, purpose, and character when applying the Standards.
7. Promote continuous improvements in institutional educational effectiveness.
8. Provide institutions a reasonable period of time to comply with Commission requests for information and documents.
9. Protect the confidentiality of an institution's proprietary information.
10. With respect to the accreditation review process:
 - a. Emphasize the value and importance of institutional self-evaluation and the development of appropriate evidence to support the accreditation review process.
 - b. Recognize that more time and support will be required for institutions at risk of being out of compliance.
 - c. Conduct reviews using qualified peer evaluators with experience at similar institutions to promote impartial and objective judgment and avoid conflicts of interest.
 - d. Provide institutions an opportunity to object, for cause, to the assignment of particular person(s) to the institution's peer evaluation team.
 - e. Arrange for interviews with administration, staff, faculty, students, governing board members, and other stakeholders during the accreditation review process.
11. With respect to Commission decisions on an institution's accreditation, provide the opportunity for the institution to:
 - a. Respond in writing to draft team reports in order to correct errors of fact and propose redactions of proprietary information.
 - b. Respond in writing to final team reports on issues of substance.
 - c. Appear before the Commission when Initial Candidacy, Initial Accreditation, and Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness reports are considered for actions.
 - d. Receive written notice no later than 30 days after Commission decisions are made.
 - e. Appeal Commission actions according to [the Appeals Procedure Policy](#).
12. Request a written response from an institution or refer a matter to the next review team when the Commission finds that an institution may be in violation of the [Eligibility Requirements](#), [Standards](#), or [Policies](#). If the response is deemed inadequate, Commission staff may request supplemental information or schedule a fact-finding site visit to the institution. The institution will bear the expense of such a visit.
13. Permit withdrawal of a request for initial accreditation at any time prior to final action by the Commission.
14. Withdraw accreditation or candidacy in circumstances as provided in the *Handbook of Accreditation*.

The Changing Landscape of Higher Education

A hallmark of U.S. higher education in the 21st century is the diversity of institutions, their missions, and the students they serve. Common across this diversity is a widespread understanding that higher education represents both a public good and a private benefit, fostering individual development and serving the broader needs of society and the nation. The impact of higher education extends beyond the institution, contributing to the improvement of quality of life, problem solving, and shaping the future, which are essential to supporting economic prosperity, to create an informed and civically engaged populace, and to sustain democracy in the United States.

Accreditation in the United States has been committed to affirming that high-quality education, regardless of the different missions of individual institutions, contributes to the public good through the application of standards for quality. Student success is at the center of accreditation; thus, accreditation seeks to establish standards and measurements of quality that ensure that students earn degrees in a timely manner, and that those degrees have demonstrable meaning and currency within the society at large. That meaning also extends to graduates' ability to be societally engaged and to obtain productive employment.

Accounting for quality is a matter of public trust, given the billions of dollars the federal and state governments provide higher education through direct investment in institutions, federal and state financial aid for students, and tax exemptions for public and non-profit institutions. Quality matters to students, families, employers, and other critical stakeholders. Accreditation, therefore, has evolved in form and function as it has adapted to continuous institutional and social changes, as well as increased global interdependence and dramatic developments in information and communication technologies.

Types of Accreditation

There are three types of accreditation in the United States: (1) institutional, (2) national, and (3) specialized or programmatic. On July 1, 2020, the United States Department of Education's (USDE) regulations eliminated the designation of regional accreditor and, thus, the seven accreditation agencies previously known as regional accreditors, such as NWCCU, are now referred to as institutional accreditors and may accredit institutions nationally.

An institution may only be accredited by one institutional accrediting agency. An institution accredited by an institutional accreditor may also be accredited by a national accreditor and have academic programs accredited by specialized or programmatic accrediting agencies. Students attending institutions that are institutionally accredited may be eligible to apply for U.S. federal financial aid. Accreditation also helps ensure that credits and degrees earned are generally recognized for purposes of transfer, admission to other institutions, and employment.

In many countries, the maintenance of educational standards is a governmental function; in the U.S., in contrast, accreditation is voluntary process that is undertaken by volunteer, external peer evaluators, and accrediting organizations are funded by the annual dues paid by member institutions. Peer evaluation teams comprise experts and representatives from similar institutions evaluate an institution for initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation.

Institutional

NWCCU is one of seven institutional accrediting agencies that operate within a scope of authority approved by the USDE. Institutional accreditors, members of the [Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions](#) (C-RAC), have previously overseen higher education institutions within the 50 states and U.S. territories, along with institutions outside of the U.S., which have voluntarily sought membership for accreditation. Institutional accreditation assures the educational community, students, parents, employers, policymakers, and the public that an accredited institution has met high standards of quality and effectiveness.

Institutional accreditors, including NWCCU, are required to undergo periodic reaffirmation of their recognition as approved institutional accreditors by the [National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity](#) (NACIQI), which advises the U.S. Secretary of Education.

Institutional accreditation applies to an institution as a whole, not individual programs or units within the institution. The accrediting process requires institutions to examine their missions, operations, and achievements. It then provides expert review and analysis by peer evaluators, including commendations for accomplishments and recommendations for improvement.

One of the requirements for institutions seeking to attain eligibility for federal funds is to hold Accredited or Candidate (pre-accreditation) status (see section 2 for descriptions) with one of the recognized accrediting agencies recognized by the Secretary of the USDE. Institutional accrediting agencies have no legal control over educational institutions or programs. They promulgate standards of quality and effectiveness and admit to membership those institutions that meet those standards.

While the procedures of institutional accrediting agencies differ in detail, their rules of eligibility, basic policies, and levels of expectation are similar because they are all aligned with the [USDE regulations for accreditation](#). Given these variations in detail, institutional accreditation of higher education institutions is intended to:

- Foster excellence in higher education through the development of criteria and guidelines for assessing educational effectiveness.
- Encourage institutional improvement of educational endeavors through continuous self-reflection and evaluation.
- Assure the educational community, the general public, and other agencies or organizations that an institution has a clearly defined and appropriate purpose, exhibits through its resources and capacity the potential to fulfill its purpose, demonstrates that it substantially fulfills its purpose, and is likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.
- Assure the quality of educational experiences of students or graduates seeking to transfer to other institutions for additional or advanced education or to seek employment.
- Provide guidance and assistance to established and developing institutions.
- Ensure member institutions comply with applicable federal and state regulations and

- laws, including Title IV program requirements.
- Hold institutions accountable.

Due to the rigorous procedures involved in evaluating institutions for accreditation, federal, state, and non-governmental agencies use institutional accreditation as a requirement for funding or certification.

National

National accrediting agencies are not bound by geographic constraints, and typically accredit institutions that are frequently single-purpose in nature, such as business or information technology institutes, or those that have a clear thematic mission, such as faith-based, distance education, or liberal arts institutions. Like institutional accreditors, national accrediting agencies accredit entire institutions rather than individual education programs; have no legal control over educational institutions or programs; promulgate standards of quality and effectiveness; and admit to membership those institutions that meet those standards. Students attending institutions accredited by national accrediting agencies are also eligible for USDE's Title IV programs.

Programmatic/Specialized

Specialized or programmatic accrediting agencies accredit individual educational programs within an institution with regard to program-specific standards (e.g., business, law, engineering, nursing). Each of these specialized accrediting organizations has specific definitions of eligibility, standards for accreditation, and operating procedures. Educational programs accredited by specialized accrediting agencies may reside within comprehensive institutions or single-purpose institutions. Institutionally or nationally accredited institutions may also house programs with specialized accreditation.

Part C: NWCCU Overview

History, Current Status, Scope, and Authority

NWCCU is a voluntary, nongovernmental organization that supports the improvement of educational institutions. Founded in 1917, NWCCU and its predecessors have been listed since 1952 by the USDE as a nationally recognized accreditor of institutions offering postsecondary level programs of at least one academic year in length. NWCCU has been recognized by the USDE and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) as a reliable authority concerning the quality of education provided by member institutions of higher education offering associate degrees, baccalaureate degrees, and post-baccalaureate degrees. NWCCU's recognition was most recently reaffirmed in 2018 by USDE and CHEA.

As a voluntary, nongovernmental agency, NWCCU does not have the responsibility to exercise the regulatory control of state and federal governments or to apply their mandates regarding collective bargaining, affirmative action, or health and safety regulations. Furthermore, NWCCU does not enforce the standards of specialized accrediting agencies, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), or other nongovernmental organizations, although institutions may wish to review the publications of such agencies as part of the self-evaluation process.

Retention of Records

In accordance with its [Records Retention Policy](#), NWCCU maintains the official records of Commission actions on institutions. It also retains copies of institutional Self-Evaluation Reports, supporting documentation, and Peer evaluation Reports that formed the basis for those actions. NWCCU records include the two most recent Comprehensive Self-Evaluation Reports (or the equivalent) of each institution, including on-site Peer-Evaluation Reports, the institution's or program's responses to on-site reports, periodic review reports, including Annual Reports, any reports of special NWCCU reviews conducted between regularly scheduled reviews, and a copy of the institution's most recent Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (the comprehensive self-evaluation report or its equivalent). NWCCU also maintains a record of all approved Substantive Changes.

Board of Commissioners

Members of the [NWCCU Board of Commissioners](#) are elected by Member institutions. The NWCCU President serves as an ex-officio, non-voting member of the Board. The composition of the Board, roles and responsibilities of Commissioners and standing Committees, elections, terms, and other relevant matters are described in NWCCU's [Bylaws](#). Standing Committees of the Board include:

1. Executive Committee, chaired by the Board Chair.
2. Nominations Committee, chaired by the Immediate Past Chair.
3. Bylaws, Standards, and Policies Committee, chaired by the Board Secretary.
4. Finance Committee, chaired by the Board Treasurer.

5. Audit Committee, chaired by a Commissioner appointed by the Board Chair.

In addition, ad hoc committees or task forces may be created by the Board Chair to consider a specific task or pursue a specific initiative.

NWCCU Eligibility Requirements, Standards for Accreditation, and Policies

NWCCU evaluates the accreditation status of institutions against its Eligibility Requirements, Standards for Accreditation, and Policies, all of which are in accordance with federal regulations.

Eligibility Requirements. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) requires that every member, applicant, and candidate institution be a degree-granting institution whose mission is focused on excellence in higher education and meets the [Eligibility Requirements](#).

Failure to meet any Eligibility Requirement is considered an issue of non-compliance and may lead to the imposition of a sanction or adverse action for a member institution, denial of application for candidacy, or denial of initial accreditation.

NWCCU Standards for Accreditation. The [Standards for Accreditation](#) are best understood within the context of the seven-year accreditation cycle. The Standards are interconnected and build upon each other in a recursive cycle of continuous improvement. NWCCU has two Standards:

Standard One: Student Success, and Institutional Mission and Effectiveness

Standard Two: Governance, Resources, and Capacity

Design and Function

The Standards for Accreditation are statements that articulate the quality and effectiveness expected of Accredited institutions, and collectively they provide a framework for continuous improvement within institutions. The Standards also serve as indicators by which institutions are evaluated by peers. The Standards are designed to guide institutions in a process of self-reflection that blends analysis and synthesis in a holistic examination of:

- The institution's Mission.
- The translation of the Mission into assessable objectives supported by programs and services.
- The appraisal of the institution's potential to fulfill the Mission.
- The planning and implementation involved in achieving and assessing the desired outcomes of programs and services.
- An evaluation of the results of the institution's efforts to fulfill the Mission and assess its ability to monitor its environment, adapt, and sustain itself as a viable institution.

Structure

Each of the Standards for Accreditation is designated by a number and title (e.g., Standard One – Student Success and Institutional Mission and Effectiveness), and is further defined by elements of the standard, which are designated by the number of the standard followed by the letter of the element (e.g., 1.A Institutional Mission). The criteria for evaluation more specifically define the elements and are identified by the number of the standard, followed by the letter of the standard element, followed by the number of the criterion (e.g., 1.A.1). Each Standard is introduced by a narrative summary intended only to provide direction, not to be addressed as a criterion.

NWCCU Policies. [NWCCU Policies](#) are aligned with USDE regulations and are approved by the NWCCU Board of Commissioners and guide and provide clarity regarding Commission and institution responsibilities and requirements. Policies are regularly reviewed and updated, as needed, for currency and accordance with applicable federal regulations.

Educational Programming

NWCCU offers educational programming including webinars, academies, fellowships, workshops, and an annual conference to assist institutions in developing expertise in areas relevant to the Standards. Educational programming offers a useful and supportive way to build and develop institutional accreditation leaders and fosters a continuous drive for institutional effectiveness and success. Information on educational programming may be found on [NWCCU's website](#).

Dues and Fees

NWCCU assesses [annual dues for Candidate and Member institutions](#) based on an institution's educational and general expenditures (E&G) plus auxiliary services (exclusive hospital expenditures), for the previous academic year as reported to IPEDS. Canadian institutions are billed based on submitted audited financial statements. Invoices for annual dues are sent out to the institutional CEO during September of each year. Dues must be paid upon receipt of invoices; late payments of more than 60-days are assessed additional charges. The current dues structure may be found in the [Dues and Fees section](#) of NWCCU's website.

Institutions are billed for the evaluation visits approximately two months prior to onsite visits. Fees for virtual evaluations, such as for the Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review are billed approximately two months prior to the review being undertaken. For Special and Ad Hoc visits, institutions may be billed in part or in total following the visit. Fees for all visit types and Substantive Changes are found in the [Dues and Fees section](#) of NWCCU's website. The Commission is also committed to a regular review of Substantive Change and Evaluation fees, and reserves the right to adjust the fee schedule.

The Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)

All member institutions are required to identify an Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) consistent with the [Accreditation Liaison Officer Policy](#). ALOs serve the critically important role

of leading institutional accreditation efforts and responses and, therefore, institutional CEOs should consider appointing individuals with the skills, institutional knowledge, and authority to serve effectively in the role.

The institution's ALO is the primary contact between NWCCU and the institution for all matters related to NWCCU accreditation, including the submission of reports and the review and institutional visit process. This includes ensuring the completion of the Annual Report, submission of Substantive Changes, and keeping their respective NWCCU Staff Liaison informed of matters of significance related to institutional accreditation. Members of peer evaluation teams communicate with the ALO on matters related to visit logistics and reports.

If someone other than the ALO is delegated responsibility for overseeing any part of NWCCU accreditation processes, the ALO is responsible for keeping that person updated and forwarding to that person any necessary information sent by NWCCU or the peer evaluation team.

ALOs are provided regular and ongoing training by NWCCU and should use the [ALO Handbook](#) as a primary resource for meeting their responsibilities and effectively guiding their institutions through the accreditation process. This resource is primarily designed as a practical, step-by-step guide to the role of the ALO. It may also be used as a companion to NWCCU's ALO Canvas course. Throughout the handbook, ALOs will be directed to corresponding modules of the Canvas course, which provide additional information, examples, and videos.

NWCCU Staff Liaisons

Every institution is assigned a designated senior vice president to serve as [NWCCU Staff Liaison](#). NWCCU Staff Liaisons are a resource to support the institution in the accreditation process.

The liaison, together with other NWCCU staff members, provides support and guidance to the institution, the peer evaluation team, and the Board of Commissioners throughout the accreditation cycle. Institutions should also reach out to their NWCCU Staff Liaisons to clarify accreditation requirements and processes (e.g., self-evaluation reports, Substantive Changes).

Responsibilities of NWCCU Regarding State and Federal Regulatory Requirements

As an institutional accreditor, NWCCU is responsible for communicating with USDE and other relevant regulatory agencies its actions regarding member institutions in accordance with federal regulations. NWCCU must also take into consideration actions taken by other regulatory agencies and other accrediting bodies that may impact the accreditation status of the institution.

Actions of State Regulatory Agencies and other Accrediting Bodies

Institutions seeking reaffirmation of their accreditation status or those intending to seek accreditation by NWCCU must be in good standing with or be approved by the relevant state regulatory authority to provide a program of education beyond the secondary level. As part of its [Title IV and disclosure responsibilities](#), NWCCU must report within 30 days to USDE and

relevant state regulatory authorities, decisions and actions taken pertaining to its Accredited and/or Candidate institutions.

NWCCU may not grant Candidacy or grant or reaffirm Accreditation to an institution if it knows, or has reasonable cause to know, that the institution is the subject of:

1. A pending or final action by a state agency to suspend or discontinue the right to offer postsecondary programs.
2. A decision by another recognized institutional accreditor to deny, withdraw, or suspend Candidacy or Accreditation.
3. A probation or equivalent status by another recognized agency.

In the event the institution is the subject of one of the preceding negative or adverse actions by another agency and NWCCU determines there is rationale to still grant the institution Candidacy or Accreditation consistent with NWCCU Eligibility Requirements, Standards, and Policies, NWCCU may do so but must provide to USDE within 30 days of the action as to why the action of the other agency does not preclude NWCCU from granting Candidacy or Accreditation.

In considering whether to grant Accreditation or Candidacy status to an institution, the Commission requires the institution to report actions taken by other recognized accrediting or relevant state regulatory bodies that have (a) denied such status to the institution, (b) placed the institution on public probation, or (c) revoked the Accreditation or Pre-Accreditation status of the institution.

An Accredited or Candidate institution is expected to remain in good standing with other recognized accrediting or specialized accrediting bodies that have granted Accreditation or Pre-Accreditation status to program(s) within the institution. If another recognized accrediting body or governmental regulatory agency (a) places an institution or a principal program offered by the institution on public Probationary status, or (b) revokes such status, the institution must report that action to NWCCU within 30 days. Upon learning of an adverse action by another recognized accreditation agency, NWCCU will promptly review the Accreditation or Candidacy status it has previously granted to the institution to determine if there is cause to alter that status.

Complaints against Member or Candidate Institutions or NWCCU

When a stakeholder believes a member or candidate institution may not be in compliance with NWCCU Eligibility Requirements, Standards, or Policies, a complaint may be filed. All complaints are responded to in accordance with NWCCU's [Complaints regarding Candidate or Member Institutions Policy](#).

Persons alleged to have been aggrieved by acts or omissions related to accreditation functions of NWCCU may serve a complaint upon NWCCU. Similarly, complaints against NWCCU are reviewed and responded to in accordance with NWCCU's [Complaints against NWCCU Policy](#).

Individuals with questions regarding potential complaints against an institution or NWCCU are encouraged to contact NWCCU, either through the general information email or through the institution's NWCCU Staff Liaison.

Relationship with U.S. Department of Education

NWCCU maintains regular communication with the USDE and other federal agencies. It responds to USDE inquiries regarding institutional eligibility for participation in the Higher Education Act (HEA) Title IV programs. The Commission forwards any received claim of Title IV fraud and abuse to the institution for comments, and it shares with the USDE clear evidence regarding such a claim. If USDE notifies NWCCU that an institution is participating in Title IV HEA programs under a provisional program participation agreement, or is placed on a reimbursement payment method under 668.16(2)(c) or heightened cash monitoring payment methods requiring the Secretary's review, NWCCU will require a teach-out plan from the institution.

Further, NWCCU communicates Commission actions to USDE in accordance with regulations, including accreditation affirmation decisions and major Substantive Changes.

NWCCU will be responsive to USDE requests and changes regarding Accredited or Candidate institutions. This includes, but is not limited to, conforming designations of an institution's branch campuses and additional locations with the Secretary's if it learns its designations diverge (34 CFR § 602.24(f)(2)); and ensuring that it does not accredit or pre-accredit an institution comprising fewer than all of the programs, branch campuses, and locations of an institution as certified for title IV participation by the Secretary, except with notice to and permission from the Secretary (34 CFR § 602.24 (f)(3)).

In addition to the outlined timelines for notifications above, NWCCU will also notify USDE and other state and regulatory agencies and, upon request, the public, if an Accredited or Candidate institution voluntarily withdraws from accreditation or allows its status with NWCCU to lapse. In accordance with 34 CFR § 602.26(f)(1)(2), these notifications will take place within 10 business days of notification of voluntary withdrawal by the institution or the effective date of the lapse of accreditation.

Section 2: The Lifecycle of Accreditation

NWCCU currently accredits approximately 160 member institutions. There is a process to becoming a member of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, and that process is the lifecycle of accreditation.

There are three steps on the path to becoming a full member of NWCCU:

- Inquiry to Pre-Applicant
- Applicant
- Candidate

Each of these steps or stages comes with a purpose, benefits, institutional responsibilities, timelines, a way to transition to the next level, fees, and corresponding Commission actions. All of these will be discussed in this section. Details and associated timelines are also provided on the [NWCCU Accreditation Process page](#). Institutional responsibilities at each stage typically include institutional reports on prescribed timelines. Templates and specific guidelines for such reports are described in Section 3 of the *Handbook* and available on NWCCU's website.

Note that these descriptions of advancement through stages with NWCCU apply to institutions not currently accredited or pre-accredited by another USDE-recognized institutional accreditor. Institutions may only be accredited by one USDE-recognized institutional accreditor at a time. Institutions currently accredited by another USDE-recognized institutional accreditor interested in pursuing NWCCU accreditation shall follow the procedures outlined in NWCCU's [Institutions Accredited by Another Accreditor Policy](#). Note that institutions interested in pursuing NWCCU accreditation must be in good standing without a current sanction from their current institutional accreditor.

Stage 1: Inquiry to Pre-Applicant

The Inquiry stage begins when representatives of a college or university contacts NWCCU to explore the possibility of beginning the membership process. NWCCU does not immediately place an institution on the path towards membership. Instead, NWCCU takes the time to understand the institution's circumstances and goals to determine if becoming a member of NWCCU aligns with the institution's objectives.

The Pre-Applicant stage extends typically over six months to two years, where NWCCU Staff Liaison assigned to the institution will meet with institutional leadership and review and provide guidance on the materials necessary for the institution to be considered for Applicant status by the Commission. During this stage, NWCCU will review materials to ensure the institution meets the requirements for accreditation.

It is common during the Pre-Applicant stage for an institution, particularly private, for-profit institutions, to make governance changes to align with NWCCU's Eligibility Requirements.

Purpose: The purpose of the Inquiry stage is for the institution and NWCCU to learn about each other and determine if pursuing NWCCU membership supports institutional and NWCCU goals.

Once an institution is in the Pre-Applicant stage, the institution has time to learn about the Eligibility Requirements and Standards and consider what is necessary to meet them.

Fees: There are two fees for the stages in this process.

Inquiry: When an institution determines it would like to proceed with the process, an introductory conversation is scheduled, usually involving an NWCCU Staff Liaison and the institution's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and ALO. Soon after the introductory conversation, the institution will be invoiced for the Application Inquiry Fee (see [NWCCU Schedule of Fees](#)). The institution will be assigned an NWCCU Staff Liaison by the NWCCU President to work with the institution through the Inquiry stage.

Pre-Applicant: When an institution prepares for applicant status, there is a fee for Application for Consideration of Eligibility and the onsite visit by the NWCCU Staff Liaison (See below and [NWCCU Schedule of Fees](#)).

Benefits: The primary benefit of being in the Inquiry and Pre-Applicant stages is having an assigned NWCCU Staff Liaison to support the institution as it begins a review of its own status with respect to NWCCU Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation.

Institutional Expectations and Responsibilities: In the transitional stage from inquiry to applicant (i.e., the Pre-Applicant stage), the institution is responsible for meeting deadlines and working with the assigned NWCCU Staff Liaison to provide required documentation for review and action by the NWCCU Board of Commissioners. All reports should be submitted by the institution's assigned ALO.

Timeframe: The time an institution spends in the Inquiry stage can vary from a few weeks to a couple of years. Note that if the institution does not complete its initial application process within 24 months to demonstrate it meets NWCCU's Eligibility Requirements, it will be required to pay the application fee again unless granted an extension, as determined by the NWCCU Staff Liaison.

Process to Advance from Inquiry to Applicant

These steps are sequential, unless noted otherwise. If an institution has questions or concerns about the order or content of steps, they should contact their NWCCU Staff Liaison.

1. The institution contacts NWCCU, either through the NWCCU president, NWCCU information email, or NWCCU Staff Liaison to express an interest in pursuing membership with NWCCU. There may be initial meetings or email correspondence between an institutional representative and NWCCU Staff Liaison to answer introductory process questions before advancing with more formal meetings.
2. An introductory phone conversation is scheduled with the institutional CEO and NWCCU president, typically joined by a potential accreditation liaison officer (ALO) and NWCCU Staff Liaison. The purpose is for NWCCU to learn about the institution and for the institution to learn about NWCCU and if the mission and goals align between NWCCU and the institution.

3. With the NWCCU president's approval to proceed, if the institution decides it would like to continue the process and pursue Applicant status, the institution is invoiced for an application inquiry fee ([NWCCU dues and fees](#)) and is assigned an NWCCU Staff Liaison as their primary point of contact.
4. The institution prepares a draft written response to the NWCCU Eligibility Requirements for initial NWCCU Staff Liaison feedback.
5. When the institution and the NWCCU Staff Liaison concur there are adequate responses to the Eligibility Requirements and other information as outlined below (e.g., Catalog, audited financials, proof of state authorization to offer degrees), the institution submits the Application for Consideration of Eligibility.
6. The institution is invoiced for the Application for Consideration of Eligibility fee.
7. The NWCCU Staff Liaison conducts an onsite visit to meet with institutional leadership, faculty, and staff, and review the responses and supplementary materials in the Application for Consideration of Eligibility. Please see the [NWCCU Dues and Fees page](#) for fees and travel costs.
8. At least 60 days prior to the Commission meeting, a review of the Application for Consideration of Eligibility is placed on the agenda for Board of Commissioner review.
9. The NWCCU Staff Liaison reviews and evaluates the progress on each component of the Application, including each Eligibility Requirement. This information is provided to the Commissioners along with a recommendation on the institution's readiness for Applicant status at least 30 days prior to the Commission meeting.
10. At the Commission meeting, the Commissioners review the materials and take one of the possible actions below.

Application for Consideration of Eligibility Contents

These documents constitute the Application for Consideration of Eligibility:

- Letter of Application, signed by the CEO
- Application for Consideration of Eligibility Fee, plus a fee to cover the travel costs for onsite visit by the NWCCU Staff Liaison [[NWCCU Dues and Fees](#)]
- Written responses to each Eligibility Requirement (staff analysis will be appended by NWCCU)
- Current academic catalog (link to online catalog)
- Current budget and most recent audited financial statement
- Articles of incorporation and bylaws, or charter if the institution is independent, and proof of authority to operate within the state to grant educational degrees

Commission Actions: The Board of Commissioners may take one or more of the following actions when considering an Application for Consideration of Eligibility, leading to the corresponding institutional status with NWCCU.

Board of Commissioners Action	Resulting Institutional Status with NWCCU
Accept the Application for Consideration of Eligibility and award Applicant status	Granted Applicant status, effective on the date of the Letter of Action by the Commission
Defer action on the Application for Consideration of Eligibility	Institution remains in Inquiry stage
Reject the Application for Consideration of Eligibility and deny Applicant status	Remove the institution from Inquiry status. The institution has no standing with NWCCU

The decision regarding the status of the institution is made solely by the Board of Commissioners. A decision by the Board of Commissioners to reject or remove an Application for Consideration of Eligibility is not an adverse action subject to appeal. An institution may voluntarily withdraw its Application for Consideration of Eligibility at any time prior to action by the Board of Commissioners.

If the institution is granted Applicant status, it is noted in the Commission’s records.

If the Board of Commissioners rejects or removes an institution’s Application for Consideration of Eligibility, the institution must wait at least two years before submitting a new Application for Consideration of Eligibility.

Stage 2: Applicant

Purpose: During the Applicant stage, the institution prepares for the Application for Candidacy, typically completed between one and three years following the award of Applicant status. The institution works with its NWCCU Staff Liaison on the requirements of the NWCCU Standards to support the institution’s preparation to meet the Standards. It is common during this stage for an institution to refine governance structures, build assessment structures, begin assessment processes, and pull together institutional data for review.

Costs: As the institution prepares for Candidacy stage, there is a cost associated with the initial candidacy visit, as outlined in the [Dues and Fees section](#), which includes a fee for the evaluation and travel costs for the evaluator and NWCCU Staff Liaison.

Benefits: As described in the Inquiry to Applicant stage, institutions in the Applicant stage preparing for Candidacy stage receive the support of the NWCCU Staff Liaison to guide them through the process. The initial candidacy visit also provides feedback from institutional peers.

Institutional Expectations and Responsibilities: Once awarded Applicant status, the institution must continue to meet Eligibility Requirements. In preparation for the application for Initial Candidacy, the institution must:

- Provide evidence of elementary or initial development and implementation structures, processes, and operations that meet the NWCCU Standards at a minimum level.

- Demonstrate achievement of each of the Standards at a sufficient level to support continued institutional development.

The institution should continue to work with the NWCCU Staff Liaison to demonstrate progress toward the above expectations.

Timeframe: An institution may request the Initial Candidacy Visit after one year in Applicant status and may remain an Applicant for up to three years. Institutions that do not achieve Candidate status within three years from the date of becoming an Applicant lose that status. The period of Applicant status may be extended by the Commission for good cause.

Process to Advance from Applicant to Candidate

These steps are sequential, unless noted otherwise. If an institution has questions or concerns about the order or content of steps, they should contact their NWCCU Staff Liaison.

1. Upon the award of Applicant status, the institution begins preparation to demonstrate that it still meets all Eligibility Requirements and also that it has the initial development and structures in place to meet most NWCCU Standards at a level sufficient to support continued institutional development, and it has the potential to fully meet all Standards within five years of the award of Candidacy.
2. Between the effective date of Applicant status and in a time frame that allows for an institutional self-evaluation and a peer evaluation team visit prior to three years after the effective date, the institution may request an Initial Candidacy visit. This is a comprehensive visit covering Eligibility Requirements and Standards One and Two.
3. NWCCU schedules a date for the Initial Candidacy date with the institution and identifies a peer evaluation team.
4. The institution submits an *Initial Candidacy Self-Evaluation Report* eight weeks prior to the date of the Initial Candidacy visit.
5. The institution is invoiced for the cost of the visit (charge for each evaluator and the NWCCU Staff Liaison).
6. A peer evaluation team (typically consisting of a chair and at least two evaluators each for Standards One and Two) visits the institution and develops a peer evaluation report.
7. Following the visit, the peer evaluation team shares the draft peer evaluation report with the institution to review errors of fact.
8. Following review by the institution, the peer evaluation team chair submits the *Initial Candidacy Peer Evaluation Report* and Confidential Recommendations to NWCCU. The *Initial Candidacy Peer Evaluation Report* usually includes Commendations and Recommendations for institutional improvement related to the Standards. The peer evaluation team makes a recommendation on the institution's status based on the extent to which the institution is meeting NWCCU Standards.
9. The Board of Commissioners will review the recommendation at the next scheduled Commission meeting. The Board may take one of several actions below.

Commission Actions: The decision to move an institution to Candidate status lies solely with the Board of Commissioners. Possible actions are shown below.

Board of Commissioners Action	Resulting Institutional Status with NWCCU
Accept the Application for Initial Candidacy and award Candidacy	Granted Candidate status, effective with the date of the Letter of Action by the Commission
Award initial accreditation, only if the institution demonstrates they already meet the Standards at the Accreditation level	Granted Accreditation and NWCCU member status, effective with the date of the Letter of Action by the Commission
Defer action on the Application for Initial Candidacy	Institution remains in Applicant Status
Reject the Application for Initial Candidacy and deny Candidacy	Institution remains in Applicant Status or has status with NWCCU removed

If the Commission decides to defer a decision or reject the Application for Initial Candidacy but leave the institution in Applicant status, the institution has up to three years from the effective date of Applicant status to repeat any steps necessary, as determined by the Commission, to be awarded Candidate status. If the institution is not awarded Candidate status within three years of the award of Applicant status, the institution loses Applicant status unless this status is extended by the Commission for good cause.

Stage 3: Candidate

Institutions receiving Candidate status (USDE uses the term “pre-accreditation” status) have achieved a significant milestone. Candidate status makes a U.S. institution eligible for participation in Title IV programs and their students are eligible for Federal Financial Aid programs. Candidate institutions are also required to pay annual dues and submit Annual Reports.

The NWCCU [Substantive Change policy](#) applies to institutions in Candidate status and requires such institutions to notify NWCCU and obtain approval for Substantive Changes at the institution.

Purpose: Candidate institutions have been found to meet all Eligibility Requirements, and are moving towards full compliance with the NWCCU Standards. The purpose of the period of Candidacy is to provide time for the institution to develop the policies, processes, and data needed to meet the NWCCU Standards. To be considered for transition to Member status, the institution must be in compliance with all Eligibility Requirements, be fully compliant with the majority of Standards, and meet all Standards at a level of at least “substantially in compliance, but in need of improvement.” The institution must demonstrate progress that is sufficient for the Commission to determine there is a high likelihood that the institution can come into full compliance with the Standards within the seven-year period of the Member’s accreditation cycle.

Costs: There are two types of cost during this stage.

- Annual Dues: Candidate institutions are required to pay annual dues according to the [Dues and Fees Schedule](#).

- **Initial Accreditation Visit:** Includes onsite evaluation fees for each member of the evaluation team and travel costs for the evaluators and NWCCU Staff Liaison. Additional locations will require visits and incur additional fees.

Benefits: The major additional benefit for U.S. institutions in Candidate status is eligibility for Title IV programs, which allows students at these institutions to be eligible for federal student financial aid. In accordance with *34 CFR § 602.23(f)(2)*, all credits and degrees earned and issued by an institution in Candidacy status are considered by USDE to be from an accredited institution.

Institutional Expectations and Responsibilities: Candidate institutions have three additional requirements as they make progress toward Member institution status and the regular and cyclical reporting, review, and evaluation activities for accredited institutions.

1. *Interim Candidacy Report(s).* These reports documenting continued progress are required every 18 months during Candidacy status.
2. *Annual reports.* Annual Reports include information on finances, enrollment, student achievement, and other metrics. A full description is available in the Member Institution section and guidelines are available in Section 3 of the *Handbook*.
3. *Substantive Change.* Changes of substance, including new sites and degrees are not automatically included under the accreditation status of the institution and must follow the procedures outlined in the [Substantive Change Manual](#). The NWCCU Staff Liaison is a valuable resource in determining changes requiring Substantive Change requests and submissions.

Timeframe: An institution may remain in Candidate status for up to five years. Institutions that fail to progress to Member status within five years will lose their Candidate status (*34 CFR § 602.16(a)(2)*).

Interim Candidacy Reports: At least once every eighteen months after being awarded Candidacy status, an institution must submit an Interim Candidacy Report describing actions it has undertaken and progress being made towards compliance with all Eligibility Requirements and meeting all Standards.

Process to Advance from Candidate to Accredited Member Institution

Note that these steps are sequential, unless noted otherwise. If an institution has questions or concerns about the order or content of steps, they should contact their NWCCU Staff Liaison.

1. Upon the award of Candidacy, the institution begins preparation to demonstrate that it continues to meet Eligibility Requirements and also that it substantially meets the Standards for Accreditation, Policies, and applicable federal regulations.
2. The institution must develop and submit a Teach-Out Plan to NWCCU within 60 days of the award of Candidate status. The Teach-Out Plan must demonstrate criteria outlined in NWCCU's [Policy on Procedures to Close a Program, Branch Campus, or Institution](#).

3. Candidate Institutions will submit Annual Reports each year, as required by NWCCU of all member and Candidate institutions. Candidate institutions pay annual dues in accordance with NWCCU’s Dues and Fees schedule, but are not yet voting members.
4. *Interim Candidacy Self-Evaluation Reports* must be submitted every 18 months after Candidacy.
5. Prior to five years after the effective date of Candidacy, the institution must complete an *Initial Accreditation Report* to be followed by an initial accreditation peer evaluation visit.
6. The institution submits an *Initial Accreditation Self-Evaluation Report*, addressing Eligibility Requirements and Standards One and Two, eight weeks prior to the date of the Initial Accreditation visit. If the institution has submitted this report, they do not need to submit an *Interim Candidacy Self-Evaluation Report*.
7. The institution is invoiced for the cost of the visit, per the NWCCU [Dues and Fees](#) schedule.
8. A peer evaluation team (typically consisting of a chair and at least two evaluators each for Standards One and Two) visits the institution and develops an *Initial Accreditation Peer Evaluation Report*.
9. Following the visit, the peer evaluation team shares the draft peer evaluation report with the institution to review for errors of fact only.
10. Following review by the institution, the peer evaluation team chair submits the *Initial Accreditation Peer Evaluation Report* and Confidential Recommendations. The report usually contains Commendations and Recommendations for institutional improvement related to the Standards. The peer evaluation team may recommend to the Commission that the institution be awarded Initial Accreditation status, denied Initial Accreditation Status, or defer a decision.
11. The Board of Commissioners will review the peer evaluation team report at the next scheduled Commission meeting.

Commission Actions: The decision to move an institution to Accredited status lies solely with the Board of Commissioners. Alternatively, the Commissioners may decide to leave the institution in Candidate status, move the institution back to Applicant status, or remove all standing with the Commission from the institution. Possible actions are shown below.

Board of Commissioners Action	Resulting Institutional Status with NWCCU
Accept the Application for Initial Accreditation and award Initial Accreditation	Granted Accreditation and Member institution status
Defer action on the Application for Initial Accreditation	Institution remains in Candidacy Status
Reject the Application for Initial Accreditation and deny Initial Accreditation or withdraw Candidate status	Institution remains in Candidate status or has status with NWCCU removed

If the Commission awards Initial Accreditation status, the effective date of that status is the effective date of Candidacy.

If the Commission decides to defer a decision or reject the Application for Initial Candidacy but leave the institution in Applicant status, the institution has up to five years from the effective date of Candidacy status to repeat any steps necessary, as determined by the Commission, to be awarded Accredited status. At the discretion of the Commission subsequent accreditation visits during the period of Candidacy may be focused visits in which a smaller team of evaluators reviews and assesses the institution primarily on progress on any outstanding Recommendations from the previous visit(s).

If the institution is not awarded Accreditation status within five years of the award of Candidacy, the institution loses Candidacy status and must wait at least two years before resubmitting for Applicant status.

If accreditation is denied to a Candidate institution, the Commission may maintain the institution's Candidate status for currently enrolled students until the institution has had a reasonable time to complete the activities in its teach-out plan to assist students in transferring or completing their programs, but for no more than 120 days unless approved by the Commission for good cause (34CFR 602.23(f)(1)).

Denial of Initial Accreditation is an appealable action, per NWCCU's [Appeals Procedure Policy](#).

If the Commission deems that Candidacy status should be removed, a Show-Cause order will be issued requesting that the institution respond to the stated concerns of the Commission within a specified period of time. The burden of proof rests with the institution to demonstrate why its Candidacy should be continued.

Stage 4: Member

After a successful transition from Candidate status and the award of Accreditation, an institution becomes a Member institution, at which point the institution is accredited and continues on the seven-year accreditation cycle.

Purpose: Member institutions are identified as accredited by NWCCU, and they are part of a network of institutions with a demonstrated commitment to student learning and achievement responsible for upholding NWCCU standards. As such, they are eligible for the benefits resulting from federally recognized institutional accreditation. Accreditation is periodically reaffirmed on a seven-year cycle, and egregious actions by an institution may result in the loss of accreditation (and loss of Member status) at any time.

Costs: Ongoing accreditation costs primarily fall into the categories of annual dues, costs for evaluation visits, and fees for Substantive Changes. All costs can be found at the [NWCCU Dues and Fees](#) page and are updated annually. Institutions should plan for associated costs in visit years and contact their staff liaison with questions to support institutional financial planning.

Benefits: NWCCU Member institutions in the U.S. are eligible to participate in Title IV programs, and their students are eligible for Federal Financial Aid programs. Member institutions have the

right to elect members of the NWCCU Board of Commissioners and to vote on changes to the Standards for Accreditation and Eligibility Requirements. Member institution representatives may participate in NWCCU educational opportunities and ALOs have regular NWCCU support through their assigned NWCCU Staff Liaison. Member institutions may appropriately publicize their accreditation status per NWCCU's [Public Disclosures Required by an Institution Policy](#) as an indicator of quality.

Institutional expectations and responsibilities: Member institutions have opportunities for self-evaluation and peer-led feedback on institutional strengths and recommendations for continuous improvement in the pursuit of institutional effectiveness, mission, and goals. Member institutions are expected to continue to demonstrate compliance and adherence to NWCCU Eligibility Requirements, Standards, and Policies. These are periodically reviewed and evaluated through the cycle of reports outlined in this section, and it is the institution's responsibility to meet the associated deadlines that allow for effective NWCCU and peer review. Updated responsibilities are found on the [Institutional Responsibilities section](#) of the NWCCU website.

Federal regulations and NWCCU policies require prior approval of institutional substantive changes in degree programs, methods of delivery, organizational changes, and addition of branch campuses and/or locations. The NWCCU [Substantive Change policy](#) applies to Member institutions and requires institutions to notify NWCCU and obtain approval for Substantive Changes at the institution.

Timeframe (Seven-Year Cycle of Accreditation)

Member institutions enter the Seven-Year Cycle of Accreditation, consisting of the following reports and visits, which guide reporting to and interactions with NWCCU:

- Each year – Annual Report
- Any time during the cycle - substantive change communication of one of three types
 - Portal Update
 - Minor Changes
 - Major Changes
- Year 3: Mid-Cycle Evaluation
- Year 6: Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR)
- Year 7: Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE)
- As needed – Ad Hoc, Special, or other reports requested by the Commission for specific purposes

Typically, regularly scheduled reports and visits (i.e., Mid-Cycle, PRFR, EIE) during the accreditation cycle are conducted in either fall or spring. For example, if in the seven-year accreditation cycle of an institution, the Mid-Cycle (Year Three) visit is scheduled in the fall of a particular year, the PRFR (Year Six) then would occur three years later in the fall and the EIE

(Year Seven) would occur in the fall one year later. This makes it easier for institutions to anticipate deadlines for report preparation and submission years in advance.

Substantive Changes. Per the 2022 USDE regulations, all major Substantive Changes are approved by the Executive Committee acting on behalf of the NWCCU Board of Commissioners

Before undertaking any major Substantive Changes, ALOs should contact their NWCCU Staff Liaison with questions regarding requirements, processes, and timelines for the same. Substantive Change Proposals may be submitted at any time, with appropriate advance notice to allow for review and approval prior to implementation. Upon NWCCU approval, the Substantive Changes are then included under the institution’s accreditation. For more information, see the [Substantive Change Manual](#).

Institutional reports and visits. The following descriptions identify the purpose and schedule for institutional reports and visits. Further detail, including guides and templates, is available on NWCCU’s website.

Annual Report: Per USDE 34CFR Section 602.19 — *Monitoring and reevaluation of accredited institutions and programs* — the Annual Report provides a mechanism for institutions to identify and report progress on recommendations and emerging changes to enrollments, outcomes, and financial health. Institutions with Candidate or Member status are required to submit Annual Reports.

The following describes the timeline, content, review process, and feedback to institutions.

Date(s)	Action
August 1	Annual Report due from institutions
September – October	NWCCU Staff Liaisons review Annual Reports, noting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress on recommendations - Financial indicators - Enrollment, particularly identify sharp enrollment declines that could impact fiscal health and significant growth (50% or more increase in headcount) - Other items of significance - Data submitted by institutions are used to create dashboards to be used as decision support tools for onsite visits and PRFR and FRR reviews
November	NWCCU Staff Liaisons compile a list of institutions that have demonstrated significant growth for USDE reporting
November – December	NWCCU Staff Liaisons meet to collectively discuss respective institutions. The discussion acts as a norming exercise to gain cross-perspectives and verify we are covering all aspects of the Annual Report. This meeting also informs any changes to the Annual Report for the subsequent year

Date(s)	Action
December – January	NWCCU Staff Liaisons send feedback to institutions regarding their Annual Reports. Feedback confirms receipt, identifies any missing or inaccurate elements that need to be completed with a timeline for completion (may be in the following year’s report), and identifies any areas of concern resulting from the report and whether any additional information is required from the institution
February	Any changes to the Annual Report for the subsequent year are finalized
March – June	Any support resources, including webinar trainings, if applicable, are offered to institutions to support the accurate completion of the Annual Report
May	Notification to institutions to submit Annual Report

Year Three: The Mid-Cycle Evaluation. The Mid-Cycle Evaluation, undertaken during the third year of the accreditation cycle, is a formative evaluation focused on Standard One of NWCCU’s Standards for Accreditation, including mission fulfillment, planning, and program assessment. It is designed to assist institutions in determining whether their efforts to promote student achievement and learning, assess student learning and institutional effectiveness, and reduce equity gaps will result in a successful Year Seven Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE). Note that occasionally, institutions may be reviewed for progress on particular Standard Two items, which may have been surfaced during the previous EIE decision by the Board of Commissioners.

The Mid-Cycle Evaluation includes:

- A self-evaluation report submitted during the third year of the accreditation cycle.
- An evaluation team visit to the institution.

Note: For institutions that had a virtual Year Seven (EIE or Mission Fulfillment) visit between 2020 and 2022 because of the Covid pandemic, the Mid-Cycle visit will also include the required, in-person follow-up on several items that may have been surfaced during the virtual visit.

Significant dates for the Mid-Cycle evaluation

Date	Activity or action
Six (6) weeks prior to the mid-cycle visit	Institution submits Mid-Cycle self-evaluation to NWCCU
Prior to visit	Institution and peer evaluation team finalize visit schedule, in consultation with NWCCU Staff Liaison
Seven (7) days after the visit concludes	Peer evaluation team submits draft confidential evaluation report to institution

	to provide an opportunity to review for errors of fact only
Seven (7) days after draft is sent to institutions	Institution returns draft confidential evaluation report, noting any errors of fact
Seven (7) days after draft is returned to peer evaluation team chair	Peer evaluation team chair submits final report and confidential recommendation to NWCCU
Following submission of report by peer evaluation team chair	Final report sent to institution for optional opportunity for comment
NWCCU Commission Meeting	Board of Commissioners takes action on report
Thirty (30) days following NWCCU Commission Meeting	Letter of Action sent to institution

Mid-Cycle self-evaluation reports may include institutional responses to outstanding Recommendations as addenda to the report.

Guidelines and a template for the preparation of Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Reports are available on the NWCCU website.

Commission actions resulting from a Mid-Cycle report and visit include acceptance or rejection of the report, and determining whether or not to ongoing recommendations are fulfilled. While outstanding recommendations are reviewed through Ad Hoc reports with or without a visit or as additions during Mid-Cycle or EIE visits, new recommendations are typically identified during EIE visits, as the focus is on conducting a comprehensive review of Standards. It is possible, however, that a recommendation could surface and be approved by the Commission as a result of mid-cycle review.

Year Six: The Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR).

The Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR) addresses elements of NWCCU’s Standard Two (Governance, Resources, and Capacity) and [NWCCU Policies](#) and enhances the comprehensive nature of the institutional evaluation process.

The PRFR is an virtual, peer-review that occurs in Year Six of an institution’s accreditation cycle. The PRFR is part of NWCCU’s ongoing cycle of continued monitoring of institutions to fulfill its obligations to the US Department of Education and to support institutional continuous improvement. The PRFR provides an opportunity for institutions to gather and provide applicable evidence to all Standard Two criteria, with the review process and feedback supporting a more thorough examination of an institution’s ability to meet the Standards during the comprehensive Year Seven Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE).

The PRFR self-evaluation report created by the institution is reviewed by the PRFR Team, as described below. As a result of the review, the PRFR Team identifies two types of Findings, Type 1 and Type 2, both of which institutions must address in the Year Seven EIE report.

Type 1: Standards substantially in compliance but in need of improvement

Type 1 Findings are cited for Standard criteria (e.g., 2.A.1; 2.D.2) in which the PRFR Committee identifies a need for improvement in the institutional practices or in the evidence provided. A written response to each identified Standard criterion is required in the EIE report, and the EIE team may determine that the written response satisfies the area for improvement or may ask additional clarifying questions at the time of the visit. A significant number of Type 1 Findings may lead to the assignment of an additional evaluator(s) for the EIE visit.

Type 2: Standards in need of onsite evaluation

Type 2 Findings are cited for Standard criteria (e.g., 2.A.1; 2.D.2) in which the PRFR Committee identifies significant issues, or where the Committee was unable to adequately assess compliance with the criteria, and recommends the EIE peer evaluation team include evaluator(s) with relevant experience. A written response to each identified Standard criterion is required in the EIE report, and the EIE team will ask clarifying questions during the visit.

Within 30 days of the Commission meeting, following the review of the institution's PRFR Self-Evaluation Report, a letter will be sent to the institution identifying any Type 1 and/or Type 2 Findings along with the PRFR Peer Evaluation Report.

Contents of the PRFR Report

The institution's Year Six, Standard Two, PRFR Self-Evaluation Report should include the following:

1. A description of mission fulfillment
2. An attestation that the institution remains compliant with Eligibility Requirements
3. Written responses with supporting evidence for Standard Two criteria
4. A description of the institution's planned progress
5. Any required addenda or responses to information previously requested by the Commission

PRFR Team and PRFR Panels

NWCCU constitutes a team of experts that includes institutional representatives with expertise and knowledge of institutional policies, regulations, and/or finances. Each member, who will serve a three-year term, will be drawn from a roster of individuals who serve at or are recently retired from NWCCU member institutions. PRFR Team members may not serve more than two terms, excluding a partial term served filling the term of an unexpired vacancy. NWCCU staff will select one member to serve as PRFR Chair. The PRFR Chair will serve for a two-year term. NWCCU staff may extend the term of the PRFR Chair for an additional two

terms. The PRFR Team will include a NWCCU Staff Liaison who serves and supports the review in an *ex officio* capacity.

The PRFR Team is convened for a virtual one-day meeting in May or November of each year. PRFR Team members are assigned to different institutional reviews, typically constituting a PRFR panel of three to four reviewers for each institutional PRFR Self-Evaluation Report.

PRFR Submission and Review Process

In Year Six of the evaluation cycle, institutions are required to submit their PRFR Self-Evaluation report, including all of the supplemental information, such as audit reports, financial reports, updates to policies and regulations, and other pertinent information.

The PRFR Team Chair and designated NWCCU Staff Liaison discuss assignments of the team members to review institutional reports in March or September. Assignments will be made to ensure alignment with size and missions of the institutions to be reviewed. Individual PRFR Team members will be assigned only to panels in which they do not have a conflict of interest, in accordance with [NWCCU's Conflict of Interest Policy](#).

At least two PRFR Team members, each with background in finance, policies, and regulations, are assigned to each PRFR Panel to review the PRFR Self-Evaluation reports. Additional members will be added as needed for governance, student affairs, technology infrastructure, and library resources.

In April or October, for spring or fall reports, PRFR panels determine if there is a need for additional materials to address gaps in evidence or for additional clarification. The NWCCU Staff Liaison will contact the institution to identify the required additional materials and timeline for submission.

PRFR Team members submit individual, written summaries of their Findings and observations on the report.

NWCCU convenes the meeting virtually in May (for the review of spring reports) or November (for the review of fall reports). At this time the PRFR chair facilitates discussion among all PRFR Team members by asking each member or Panel to summarize their Findings and observations for the entire PRFR Team to enhance consistent decision-making.

The PRFR Chair asks other members with the relevant background if they have any additional observations. The NWCCU Staff Liaison may also be asked to provide any other information of relevance to the discussion. The final PRFR Peer Evaluation Reports for each institution are sent to the NWCCU President for review and approval. The NWCCU Staff Liaison serving as the *ex officio* member of the PRFR Committee sends the PRFR letter with Findings and the PRFR Peer Evaluation Report to the Institution within 30 days of the Commission meeting.

The PRFR Peer Evaluation Report is provided to the Year Seven EIE peer evaluation team along with the EIE materials. Institutions must address all Findings in their EIE report. Type 2 Findings may lead to the inclusion of peer evaluators with specific and relevant expertise for

review. A significant number of Type 1 or Type 2 Findings may lead to additional evaluator(s) being assigned to the peer evaluation team.

When the EIE peer evaluation team submits its Peer Evaluation Report, it includes review of the PRFR Findings. Findings which are not resolved may lead to Recommendations in the EIE peer evaluation report, for consideration and action by the Commission at the Commission Meeting.

Timetable for Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review

Timeline (spring / fall)	Responsible Party	Detail
March 1 / September 1	Institutions	PRFR Self-Evaluation Report submitted via NWCCU provided Box folder
March/September	NWCCU Staff Liaison	PRFR Team alerted about institutions to be reviewed
March/September	NWCCU Staff Liaison	Conflict of interest forms collected
March/September	PRFR Chair and NWCCU Staff Liaison	Assignments of PRFR Team members to panels for which they do not have conflicts
April/October	NWCCU Staff Liaison	Per analysis by committee, contact institutions with requests for additional information
April/October	NWCCU Staff Liaison	Inform institutions whether they will need to be available for virtual appearance at PRFR meeting
May/November	NWCCU Staff Liaison	Convene PRFR team virtual meeting review of institutional reports
May/November	PRFR Chair and NWCCU Staff Liaison	Finalize PRFR Peer Evaluation Reports, including identification of Findings
May/November	NWCCU President	Review PRFR Peer Evaluation Reports
July/February	NWCCU Staff Liaison	Send PRFR Letter and Peer Evaluation Report to each institution within 30 days of Commission meeting
Year Seven of Cycle	Institutions	Submit responses to Findings as addenda in EIE report for review by EIE Peer Evaluation Team
June/January	NWCCU Commissioners	Take action on institutional accreditation as part of EIE, including fulfillment of Findings
July/February	NWCCU President	Letter of Action on accreditation, including fulfillment of Findings, sent to institutions

Year Seven: The Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE): The Year Seven EIE Self-Evaluation Report, the final year of the accreditation cycle, is a comprehensive evaluation of institutional performance on all Standards and Eligibility Requirements. Prior to the campus

visit, the institution conducts a comprehensive self-evaluation of all Standards and attests to its continued compliance with the Eligibility Requirements. The institution is expected to update its response to Standards One and Two and Commission Policies, including any required responses to the PRFR report. The institution is also expected to address any recommendations from previous cycles scheduled for review at the visit.

Timetable for Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness

Date	Activity or action
Eight (8) weeks prior to visit	Institution submits EIE self-study report to NWCCU
Prior to visit	Institution and peer evaluation team finalize visit schedule, in coordination with NWCCU Staff Liaison
Seven (7) days after the visit concludes	Peer evaluation team submits draft confidential evaluation report to institution to provide an opportunity to review for errors of fact only
Seven (7) days after draft is sent to institutions	Institution returns draft evaluation report, noting any errors of fact
Seven (7) days after draft is returned to peer evaluation team chair	Peer evaluation team chair submits final report and confidential recommendation to NWCCU
Following submission of report by peer evaluation team chair	Final report sent to institution for optional opportunity for comment to the Commission within 10 days of receipt of final report
NWCCU Commission Meeting	Board of Commissioners takes action
Within 30 days of the NWCCU Commission Meeting	Letter of Action sent to institution

Guidelines for preparation of EIE Self-Evaluation Reports are available on the NWCCU website.

The peer evaluation team report following the EIE visit is reviewed at the next upcoming Commission meeting and the Commission decision is made available to the institution within 30 days of the decision.

Commission Actions: Following the Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness, the following Commission actions are possible:

- Reaffirm Accreditation
- Request an Ad Hoc or Special Report (with or without an onsite evaluation) to address specific areas of concern, including areas of non-compliance
- Defer action on Reaffirmation of Accreditation
- Issue, impose, or continue a Sanction (Warning, Probation, or Show-Cause)
- Remove a Sanction

- Revoke Accreditation

If the Commission determines that Accreditation status should be removed, the Commission will follow the procedures and requirements in the NWCCU [Accreditation Actions Policy](#).

Commission Letter of Action

NWCCU sends the Letter of Action within 30 days of completion of the Commission Meeting to the institutional CEO, ALO, Chair of its Governing Board, the head of the system (if the institution is part of a system), the head of the state's regulatory agency, members of the peer evaluation team, and the USDE's [Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs](#) (DAPIP). The Commission also posts the Letter of Action on its Membership Directory webpage.

The Commission encourages widespread distribution of the Letter of Action and team report within the campus community, including publication on the institutional website. Commission policy requires that the institution should avoid selective quoting of portions of the report that are favorable to it.

The institution is expected to address the recommendations in the Letter of Action during the next interaction with NWCCU and visits and/or reports that may be required in its accreditation cycle.

Accreditation Actions for Member and Candidate Institutions

In the event a Member or Candidate institution is determined to be noncompliant with one or more Eligibility Requirements, Standards, Policies, or applicable federal regulations, the Commission will take actions in accordance with applicable federal regulations and NWCCU's Accreditation Actions Policy.

An institution will be notified it is out compliance in a Letter of Action and provided a timeline for coming into compliance not to exceed the maximum allowed by *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(2)* of the lesser of four years or 150 percent of the length of the longest program at the institution. Such a timeline may include intermediate checkpoints for demonstrating compliance. A compliance and/or monitoring report by the institution is required when accreditation is reaffirmed but with a determination of non-compliance.

The Commission may also issue three types of sanctions to institutions that are out of compliance: Warning, Probation, or Show-Cause. Sanctions are an expression of heightened Commission concern related to compliance and must be publicly disclosed by the institution. The sanctions are not sequential and are issued based on the severity of the identified issue of non-compliance.

An institution placed on Probation or Show-Cause must develop a teach-out plan and possibly teach-out agreements in accordance with the [Policy on Procedures to Close a Program, Branch Campus, or Institution](#).

Show-Cause is the most serious sanction available to the Commission. NWCCU may require an Accredited or Candidate institution to Show-Cause and note its accreditation is in jeopardy when it does not appear to be in compliance with Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations, and there is evidence the non-compliance is sufficiently egregious such that it raises concerns the institution: has not made sufficient progress toward achieving compliance; does not appear to demonstrate capacity to comply with Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or applicable federal regulations under the timeframe set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(2)*; is in imminent danger of closing; has demonstrated a lack of integrity, truthfulness, or responsibility, and the Commission determines students may be harmed; or information from monitoring activities suggests serious concerns related to student achievement, viability and capacity, or financial health.

A Show-Cause action requires the institution to present evidence why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. A Show-Cause action will identify Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, Policies, or federal regulations that must be addressed in a Show-Cause report, the due date, and require a Show-Cause visit. For accreditation to be reaffirmed, the institution's Show-Cause report must provide evidence that it made all necessary improvements and meets the Standards for Accreditation, Policies, and applicable federal regulations. An onsite Show-Cause visit will follow submission of the Show-Cause report to verify the information submitted. The Board of Commissioners may move an institution from a Sanction of Show-Cause to a Sanction of Probation or Sanction of Warning with continued monitoring, if the institution has made marginal progress, but not enough to be reaffirmed for accreditation.

NWCCU may continue an institution's non-compliance status and extend for good cause beyond the timeframe set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR § 602.18(d) and § 602.20(a)(2)*. A decision to grant an extension for good cause is done only under exceptional circumstances, is not a right, is made at the discretion of the Commission, and is not subject to appeal. An extension is not available to Candidate institutions. The Commission may continue to accredit an institution in non-compliance status, including those issued a sanction, for good cause beyond the timeframe set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(3)*. NWCCU will set the length of the extension not to exceed one year.

NWCCU will take an adverse action (denial, withdrawal, suspension, revocation, or termination of Accreditation or Candidacy) when an institution has not demonstrated compliance, and/or the timeframe set by the Commission pursuant to *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(2)* for noncompliance plus good cause extension, if any, has expired.

NWCCU may limit the adverse or other action to particular programs that are offered by the institution or to particular additional location(s) of an institution, without necessarily taking action against the entire institution and all of its programs, provided the noncompliance was limited to that particular program or location(s), pursuant to *34 CFR § 602.20(d)*.

In the event an adverse action is taken against an institution to remove its accreditation, the Commission may not move the institution back to Candidacy status unless the

institution re-applies for status and is awarded Candidacy status under the new application and process (*34 CFR § 602.23(f)(1)(iv)*).

Further details regarding accreditation actions, including negative and adverse actions, are found in NWCCU's [Accreditation Actions Policy](#).

Actions by the Board of Commissioners to impose Probation, issue a Show-Cause order, or terminate Accreditation status may be [appealed](#). For Accredited institutions, the Accredited status remains in effect during the appeal.

Report Types

Various reports are expected or requested for institutions in the accreditation review cycle and as a result of accreditation actions. Common report types include the following.

Self-evaluation report: A scheduled report prepared by the institution that is specific to a given point in the accreditation cycle, such as Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness Self-Evaluation Report, Mid-Cycle report, etc.

Peer evaluation report: A report prepared by a peer evaluation team or peer evaluator in response to a self-evaluation report and/or visit that is specific to the accreditation activity, such as a Mid-Cycle Peer Evaluation Report, Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness Peer Evaluation Report, etc.

Ad hoc report: A report prepared by the institution in response to a request by the Commission to respond to specific Recommendation(s) or as a follow up to an approved Substantive Change. An ad hoc report is outside of the regular schedule of accreditation activities with a focused topic and typically includes notice of one to three years to prepare. Ad hoc reports may or may not be associated with a visit.

Special report: A report prepared by the institution in response to an emergent issue identified by the Commission. A special report is outside of the regular schedule of accreditation and is focused on specific issue(s), typically with a short time period of less than one year for response in order to demonstrate progress, alleviate concern regarding the specific issue, or demonstrate compliance with a Standard. Special reports may or may not be associated with a visit.

Monitoring report: A report or sequence of reports prepared by the institutions in response to a request from the Commission to address either a Standard that is in need of improvement but not out of compliance or to provide a regular and periodic heightened monitoring of an issue when a Sanction has been issued.

Compliance report: A report prepared by the institution requested by the Commission when an institution is found to be non-compliant with an Eligibility Requirement, Standard, Policies, or applicable federal regulations and consequently issued a timeline for responding to the issue of non-compliance in accordance with *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(2)*.

Financial Resources Review (FRR): Financial Resources Reviews may be requested for the institution to respond to financial issues raised by the Board of Commissioners. Evaluation visits are not required.

Stage 5: Loss of Accreditation

An institution may voluntarily surrender accreditation at any time. If the surrender of accreditation is associated with closure of the institution and will leave students without completing their academic programs, there are strict federal regulations on requiring a Teach-Out Plan. See applicable Federal Regulations [34 CFR 600.2 and described in 602.24 (c) (3)] and NWCCU policy on [Procedure to Close a Program, Branch Campus, or Institution](#).

For cause, the NWCCU Board of Commissioners may determine that an institution should no longer be accredited. A Show-Cause order will be issued requesting that the institution respond to the stated concerns of the Commission within a specified period of time. The burden of proof rests with the institution to demonstrate why its accreditation should be continued. An institution for which its accreditation has been terminated must wait a minimum of two years following the date of that action before resubmitting a new Application for Consideration of Eligibility.

Section 3: Institutional Resources

This section provides specific links to information and report templates to provide institutions and evaluators support and resources to successfully navigate all stages of the accreditation process. Most of these resources are also found on the [NWCCU website](#), where they are updated regularly, as needed. Where applicable, direct links to resources are provided.

This section provides the guidelines and resources needed for the institution to successfully navigate the Lifecycle of Accreditation described in Section 2 of the *Handbook*.

General Resources

These resources apply to multiple stages of the accreditation cycle.

Requirements

- [Eligibility Requirements](#). All NWCCU accredited, candidate, and applicant institutions must meet NWCCU Eligibility Requirements.
- [2020 Standards for Accreditation](#). There are two Standards: Standard One is about student success and institutional mission and effectiveness; and Standard Two is about governance, resources, and capacity. Candidate and accredited member institutions must demonstrate their compliance and improvements through the reporting, evaluation processes, and timelines described within this *Handbook*.
- [NWCCU Policies](#). NWCCU policies guide the Commission's practices and institutional requirements in alignment with USDE regulations. Member institutions are responsible for abiding by NWCCU policies and should contact their respective staff liaison with questions regarding policies.

Handbooks and Manuals

- [ALO Handbook](#). Aligned with the [Accreditation Liaison Officer Policy](#), the ALO Handbook provides critical information for ALOs regarding their roles and responsibilities related to communication, submission of reports, and peer evaluation visits.
- [Peer-Evaluator Handbook](#). This handbook is intended to serve as a resource for members of NWCCU's peer evaluation teams.
- [Substantive Change Manual](#). Aligned with the [Substantive Change Policy](#), this manual is provided as a resource to support institutions intending to add degrees, locations, branches, and undertake other major changes.

Resources for Institutions Preparing for Visits and Reports

Institutions are expected to prepare visits and reports on a regular cycle and as requested as Section 2 of the Handbook. In order to support institutional preparation, resources may be found on the NWCCU website under information for institutions and forms and guidelines.

The information includes overall information for institutions and institutional representatives, including, but not limited to:

- Access to the institutional portal for updating institutional information and making substantive changes.
- Direct links to relevant handbooks, manuals, and policies.
- Direct links to Standards and Eligibility Requirements.

In addition, information is provided for each type of evaluation report and visit, such as Mid-Cycle; Policies, Regulations, and Finances Review; and the Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness. For each type of review, guidance for preparing reports and submitting evidence are provided. Templates for visit schedules and focused requests are also provided. Rubrics to assist institutions and evaluation teams in evaluating progress on Standards are also provided to support critical self-reflection and enhanced consistency in the report development and peer evaluation process.

Resources for Peer Evaluators Preparing for Visits and Reports

To support an effective review process, NWCCU provides evaluators with extensive training and support prior to each visit. Trainings are offered for chair and evaluator roles and for different report and visit types (e.g., EIE, Mid-Cycle, Ad Hoc). In addition to the training and support each evaluator and peer evaluation team is provided, resources are available on NWCCU's website under evaluator resources and [forms and guidelines](#).

In addition to the same general resources provided to institutions, there are specific resources for each visit type and for some specific institution types (e.g., Tribal institutions, faith-based institutions).

For each visit type, evaluators are provided with sample visit schedules and directions for addressing special items of focus. Teams are required to follow a specific format in drafting reports. The directions and templates for the reports are provided and contain detailed explanations of the format for each type of visit.

Handbook of Accreditation Glossary

Ability to Benefit

The use of a standardized test approved by U.S. Department of Education to determine the ability of a student to benefit from the instruction available from an institution. The test must be independently administered in accordance with U.S. Department of Education regulations.

Academic Calendar

A chronology of dates for a scheduled period of instruction which includes an institution's dates for class registration, additions and deletions to course schedules, beginning and ending for the term of instruction, institutionally-scheduled examinations, and deadline for applications for graduation.

Academic Credit

Credit applicable toward a degree or credential at the institution awarding it, accepting it on transfer, or acknowledging equivalency from learning experience adequately substantiated. See Credit, Unit of.

Academic Year

Instruction equivalent of two semesters of approximately 15 weeks each or 3 quarters of approximately 10 weeks each, either of which may include examination days. (See Credit, Unit of.)

Accreditation

The process by which a private, non-governmental body evaluates an educational institution or program of study and formally recognizes it as having met certain predetermined criteria or standards. The process involves initial and periodic self-study and evaluation by peers. Accreditation implies stimulation toward quality improvement beyond the minimum standards specified by the accrediting body. The essential purpose of the accreditation process is to provide a professional judgment as to the quality of the educational institution or program offered and to encourage continual improvement thereof.

Accreditation Association or Commission

A recognized and voluntary nongovernmental body established to administer accrediting procedures. An accrediting body is formally acknowledged, or recognized, as being a reliable authority concerning the quality of education or training offered by educational institutions or programs by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education and/or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. It is a voluntary organization and not established by the federal or state governments or any agency, department, or office thereof. An accrediting body may be identified by scope as institutional, national, or specialized program.

Accreditation – Institutional

A status of affiliation with a recognized accrediting body that accords accreditation to an entire institution, indicating that each of its parts is contributing to the achievement of the institution's objectives, although not necessarily all on the same level.

Accreditation – Specialized or Programmatic

A status of affiliation accorded a unit or program by a recognized specialized accrediting body. The unit accredited may be a school, department, program, or curriculum. It may be a part of a total educational institution or may be an independent, specialized institution.

Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)

An individual selected by the chief executive officer of an institution to work with appropriate individuals or agencies on matters of accreditation.

Accreditation Status

Formal recognition given an institution or specialized program for meeting established standards of educational quality, as determined by regional, national, or specialized nongovernmental accrediting bodies.

Additional Location

A facility that is geographically apart from the main campus of the institution and at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of a program and may qualify as a branch campus.

Admission Policy

The rationale which determines the applicants who shall be admitted to an institution. Consideration is given to the role assigned to the institution by its governing body; the programs, resources, and facilities of the institution; and the qualifications and goals of the applicant.

Adverse Accrediting Action

The denial, withdrawal, suspension, revocation, or termination of accreditation or candidate (preaccreditation) status, or any comparable accrediting action, by a recognized accreditation association or commission.

Appeal

A petition for reconsideration of a negative decision by a recognized accreditation association or commission in accordance with due process as described in the appeal procedures.

Approval

The official act of a state department of education or other recognized agency having official authority certifying that a unit of educational organization (a school, institute, college, university, or specialized program of studies) complies with the minimum legal requirements of such units. Official approval, granted by governmental agencies or the governing body of a

school system, is distinguished from accreditation, which is accorded by voluntary nongovernmental accrediting agencies.

Branch Campus

A location of an institution that is geographically apart and independent of the main campus and (1) is permanent in nature; (2) offers at least 50% of the courses of an educational program leading to a degree, certificate, or other educational credential; (3) has its own faculty and administrative organization; and (4) has its own budgetary and hiring authority (34 CFR 600.2).

Candidate for Accreditation

Candidate for Accreditation is a pre-accreditation affiliate status with the Commission following a specified procedure for application, institutional self-study, and onsite evaluation. Candidacy is not accreditation and does not ensure eventual accreditation. It is an indication that an institution complies with the Eligibility Requirements and is progressing toward accreditation.

Catalog

The official bulletin or publication of a higher education institution stating admission and graduation requirements, majors, minors, current offerings, costs, faculty, and all other significant information necessary for an accurate understanding of the institution.

Certification

A process by which an agency or association grants recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications specified by that agency or association.

College

Generic term to denote any of the postsecondary educational institutions (including universities) eligible for accreditation or accredited by the Commission and does not refer to a specialized unit of a university. It is used as a synonym for "institution."

Commission

Refers to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU).

Commissioners

Refers to the individuals elected by NWCCU member institutions to serve up to two, three-year terms on the decision-making Board of Commissioners.

Community Service

See Public Service.

Competency-Based Education

Competency-Based Education (CBE) focuses on student mastery of content rather than seat time. Typically, students progress at their own pace, the curriculum is built around

competencies even if course designations are used. CBE programs may or may not use direct assessment.

Complaint

A written complaint to the Commission against a member or candidate institution. (See Complaints Regarding Member or Candidate Institutions Policy.)

Conflict of Interest

A real or perceived circumstance that compromises an individual's capacity to render a fair and impartial decision regarding the accreditation status of an institution.

Consultant

A person who gives professional or technical advice and assistance. The services may or may not be performed under contract.

Continuing Contract

A contract which continues automatically from year to year without action on the part of the governing board but may be terminated through appropriate action on the part of the parties involved.

Continuing Education Unit (CEU)

A unit of measure for non-credit activities.

Cooperative Education

A combination program of study and practice – conducted on an alternating schedule of half days, weeks, or other period of time – providing employment for students with organized on-the-job training and correlated higher education instruction.

Correspondence, Instruction by

Instruction approved through appropriate institutional channels, which provides for the systematic exchange of course materials, by mail, between the instructor and student.

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

A national voluntary membership organization representing institutional and specialized accrediting agencies and the general public.

Course

A single instructional subject commonly described by title, number, credits, and expected learning outcomes in the college catalog or bulletin.

Credentials

(1) A certificate stating that the student has been graduated from a certain curriculum or has passed certain subjects; (2) a statement signed by proper authority certifying that a person is

authorized to perform certain functions or has been designated as an official representative; (3) a detailed record of an applicant for a position, usually including transcripts of academic records and testimonials relative to previous experience, performance, and character; (4) the confidential file of an applicant sent to prospective employers.

Credit, Unit of

A quantification of student academic learning. One unit represents what a typical student might be expected to learn in one week (40-45 hours including class time and preparation) of full-time study. Thus, a six-week summer session might, if full-time, equate to six units. An alternative norm is one unit for three hours of student work per week (e.g., one hour of lecture and two of study or three of laboratory) for ten weeks a quarter or 15 weeks a semester. A full-time undergraduate student program is usually about 15 units but not less than 12; a full-time graduate program is usually 10 to 12 units. Considerable excess allowed on ground of student ability should be subject to special analysis and approval.

Degrees and Program Length

Associate of Arts (A.A.), Associate of Science (A.S.), Applied Associate of Science (A.A.S.). A lower division undergraduate degree normally representing about two years (60 semester or 90 quarter units) of college study or its equivalent in depth and quality of learning experience. The A.A. degree implies more liberal education orientation, the A.S. degree implies a more applied education orientation, and the A.A.S. implies a highly applied educational orientation.

Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Science (B.S.), Bachelor of Applied Science (B.A.S.). An undergraduate degree normally representing about four years (120 semester or 180 quarter units) of college study, or its equivalent in depth and quality of learning experience. The B.A. degree implies a more liberal education orientation, the B.S. degree implies a more applied educational orientation, and the B.A.S. implies a highly applied educational orientation.

Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Science (M.S.). A first graduate degree, representing about one year (30 semester or 45 quarter units) of post-baccalaureate study, or its equivalent in depth and quality. The distinctions between M.A. and M.S. are similar to those between B.A. and B.S. Some M.A. and M.S. degrees are merely continuations at a higher level of undergraduate work without basic change in character. Some degrees emphasize research while others emphasize practical application of knowledge in the field. M.B.A., M.P.A., M.S.W., etc. Professional master's degrees requiring up to two years or equivalent of coursework beyond the baccalaureate level.

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.). A research-oriented doctoral degree which indicates the recipient has done, and is prepared to do, original research in a major discipline. Usually requires three years or more of graduate-level coursework requiring an original research thesis or project. Ed.D., Psy.D, M.D., J.D., etc. are professional doctoral degrees with

emphasis on application of knowledge in the field. Normally requires three or more years of carefully prescribed graduate-level coursework.

Direct Assessment

Direct Assessment programs are described in 34 CFR 688.10 (a) as follows:

1. A Direct Assessment program is an instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilizes direct assessment of student learning or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others. The assessment must be consistent with the accreditation of the institution or program utilizing the results of the assessment.
2. Direct Assessment of student learning means a measure of a student's knowledge, skills, and abilities designed to provide evidence of the student's proficiency in the relevant subject area.
3. An institution must establish a methodology to reasonably equate each module in the Direct Assessment program to either credit hours or clock hours. This methodology must be consistent with the requirements of the institution's accrediting agency or State approval agency.

Disclosure and Confidentiality of Information

Every institution seeking candidacy, accreditation, or reaccreditation is obliged to provide any information with respect to the institutional affairs pertinent to determination of the institution's accreditation status. It is the obligation of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities to maintain the confidentiality of the institutional self-study and report of the peer evaluation team.

Distance Education

Education that uses one or more of the technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction (see USDE definition) between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously.

Educational Auditing Standards

Measures of an acceptable level of quality, as determined by an independent auditor (who is expert in accounting principles and practices and in auditing methods). The objective of the audit process is an opinion upon the fairness of the presentation of results of operations for a given period of time and upon the fairness of the presentation of the financial position at the end of the given period of time.

Eligibility, Federal Government

A status granted by the federal government indicating that an institution qualifies for consideration as a participant in a federal funding project.

Eligibility Requirements, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

The characteristics of an institution and the conditions required by the Commission for consideration as a Candidate for Accreditation, for initial accreditation, and for continued membership.

Evaluation

A process periodically and jointly conducted by the institution and the accrediting agency, which may take a number of forms. It will include the following, regardless of form: 1) the institution's self-study report; 2) the peer evaluation team's report; 3) the institution's response to the peer evaluation team report; 4) the accrediting commission's action; 5) the institution's follow-up action to the self-study, the peer evaluation team's report, and the accrediting commission's action.

Experiential Learning

Learning acquired from work and life experiences, mass media, and independent reading and study.

External Degree Program

A course of study different from traditional degree programs, which may or may not require on-campus study or residence, and which often relies heavily on independent study and examination.

Faculty

As used here, refers to instructional faculty, not librarians, administrators, counselors, etc., who may have faculty rank.

Full-time faculty: those employed by the institution, the majority of whose assignment is class or course instruction, but which may also include institutional non-class-related faculty responsibilities such as academic advisement, curricular development and review, faculty selection and evaluation, and the like. Those performing these functions may also be considered full-time faculty if a portion of their assignment is research, service, or academic administration.

Part-time or Adjunct Faculty: Faculty whose major responsibility is not related to the institution in question; customarily assigned one or two classes with class-related responsibilities only.

Full-time Student

Full-time status is usually computed as 15 credits per term for undergraduate and 10 to 12 credits per term for graduate students.

General Education

An essential collegiate-level component of associate and baccalaureate degree programs designed to foster effective independent lifelong learning by introducing students to the content and methodology of the major domains of knowledge.

General Education Development (GED)

A battery of tests taken by adults who did not graduate from high school, to measure the extent to which their past experiences have contributed to their attaining the knowledge, skills, and understandings ordinarily acquired through a high school education.

Guidelines

Explanatory statements which amplify the criteria for accreditation or which provide examples of how the requirements may be interpreted to allow for flexibility, yet remain within the framework of the standards or criteria.

Higher Education

Postsecondary education emphasizing degrees and credentials rather than training limited to skill development within a specific trade.

Hybrid

An educational program or course that includes both face-to-face and distance education. Also known by the name “blended” and, sometimes, other terms.

Independent College

College or university with self-perpetuating, or otherwise not publicly chosen, board, and little, if any, direct tax support.

Institution

Educational institutions which have a core of full-time faculty, a separate student body, and a resident administration, and which offer programs comprising a totality of educational experience. (See “College.”)

Institution – Operationally Separate

An institution that is under the general control of a parent institution or a central administration in a multi-unit system. It has a core of full-time faculty, a separate student body, a resident administration, and it offers programs comprising a totality of educational experience as defined by the appropriate regional accrediting body.

Institution – Community and Technical Colleges

Institutions that grant an associate degree. Some community and technical colleges may also grant baccalaureate degrees.

Institution – Senior Colleges and Universities

Institutions that grant a baccalaureate degree and/or graduate degree.

Institutional Integrity

The pursuit of knowledge governed and administered with respect for individuals in a nondiscriminatory manner while responding to the educational needs and legitimate claims of the constituencies it serves, as determined by its mission and goals.

Level

Refers to placement of students at a certain level of college work, i.e., lower division (first two years) or associate degree, upper division (last two years) or bachelor's degree, first level graduate or master's degree, terminal professional degree or Ph.D.

Licensure

The process by which an agency of the government grants permission 1) to persons meeting predetermined qualifications to engage in a given occupation and/or use of a particular title, or 2) to institutions to perform specified functions.

Member Institution

An institution that has met the conditions of eligibility and standards and has been granted accreditation status by an accrediting body.

Mission and Goals Statement

The statement in which an institution identifies its mission and goals. It reflects institutional values and encompasses the intellectual and affective development of the student, the pursuit of knowledge, the study of values and attitudes, and public service. The institution's statement of mission describes its particular philosophic stance and serves as a guide for educational planning. It also operates as a frame of reference for decisions about such practical matters as student admission and retention, the curriculum, the faculty, and allocation of funds.

Negative Action

An action by a recognized accreditation association or commission to deny or withdraw candidacy or accreditation, issue or continue a Show-Cause order, or issue or continue Probation.

Planning

The process by which the mission and goals of an institution are determined and the means to achieve them are specified. Institutional planning incorporates the institution's statement of purpose and comprehensive self-study with plans that take into account the possible need for modification of goals, clientele served, programs offered, educational methods employed, and modes of support utilized.

Peer Evaluation Report

A report prepared by a peer evaluation team or peer evaluator in response to a self-evaluation report and/or visit that is specific to the accreditation activity, such as a Mid-Cycle Peer Evaluation Report, Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness Peer Evaluation Report, etc.

Peer Evaluation Team

A group comprised chiefly of personnel from an accrediting association's member institutions and chosen specifically for competencies relevant to the institution being evaluated, which conducts an onsite evaluation based upon the institution's self-study document and supporting documentation. The team's major assignment is to make a considered group judgment, as informed colleagues, on the institution's educational effectiveness, viewed in the light of its stated mission and goals. Peer evaluation team visits usually last three days. Before leaving the campus, the chair reports orally on the committee's view of the institution, presenting in summary form the substance of the written committee report which will be produced.

Postsecondary Education

Education offered by institutions primarily to individuals 18 or older; admission may or may not require a high school diploma or equivalent credential.

Postsecondary Institutions, Types of

A Common Language for Postsecondary Accreditation: Categories and Definitions for Data Collection, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) and Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA), 1985.

Baccalaureate or Higher. Institutions or subsidiary elements whose primary purpose is the provision of postsecondary education and that confer at least a baccalaureate or higher degree in one or more programs. The categories within this group are characterized by type of award, number of programs, and number of awards conferred.

Doctoral Granting. Characterized by a significant level of activity in and commitment to doctoral-level education as measured by the number of doctorate recipients and the diversity in doctoral program offerings. These institutions must grant a minimum of 30 doctoral-level degrees in three or more doctoral-level program areas on an annual basis. Included in the counts of doctorate degrees are the first-professional (M.D., D.D.S., D.O., D.V.M.).

Without a Medical School. Institutions that meet the criteria for doctoral-granting institutions but do not grant any of the following first-professional degrees: M.D., D.D.S., D.O., or D.V.M.

With a Medical School. Institutions that meet the criteria for doctoral-granting institutions and that grant any of the following first-professional degrees: M.D., D.D.S., D.O., or D.V.M.

Comprehensive. Characterized by a strong, diverse postbaccalaureate program (including first-professional) but not engaged in significant doctoral-level education. Specifically, this category includes institutions not considered specialized schools in that the number of doctoral-level degrees granted is less than 30 or in that fewer than three doctoral-level programs are offered.

In addition, these institutions must grant a minimum of 30 postbaccalaureate degrees and grant degrees in three or more postbaccalaureate programs.

General Baccalaureate. Characterized by their primary emphasis on general undergraduate, baccalaureate education. They are not significantly engaged in postbaccalaureate education. Included are institutions not considered specialized institutions and in which the number of postbaccalaureate degrees granted is less than 30 or in which fewer than three postbaccalaureate-level programs are offered, but that grant baccalaureate degrees and grant degrees in three or more baccalaureate programs. Additionally, over 25% of the degrees granted must be at the baccalaureate level or above.

Specialized. These baccalaureate or postbaccalaureate institutions are characterized by a programmatic emphasis in one area (plus closely related specialties). The programmatic emphasis is measured by the percentage of degrees granted in the program area. An institution granting over 60% of its baccalaureate degrees in one program area, or granting over one-half of its degrees in one program area and granting degrees in fewer than five baccalaureate programs, is considered a specialized institution. These schools include divinity, medical, other health, engineering, business and management, fine arts, law, education, and U.S. service schools.

Two-Year. Institutions or subsidiary elements whose primary purpose is the provision of postsecondary education and that confer at least a two-year formal award (certificate or associate degree), or have a two-year program in one or more program areas. These institutions cannot award a baccalaureate degree.

President

A generic term signifying the chief executive officer of an institution.

Prior Experiential Learning (credit for)

Credit granted toward the award of a certificate or degree for prior learning experiences that can be shown through various means of assessment to be the equivalent of learning gained through formal collegiate instruction.

Private College

See Independent College

Probation

A negative sanction indicating that a candidate or accredited institution fails to respond to the concerns (including Warning) communicated by the Commission, or when it deviates significantly from the Commission's standards, policies, or eligibility requirements, but not to such an extent as to warrant the issuing of a Show-Cause order or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation, the institution may be placed on Probation for a specified period of time. While on Probation, the institution may be subject to monitoring by the Commission, which may

include a requirement to submit periodic prescribed reports and to receive visits for evaluation by representatives of the Commission. In addition, during the period of Probation, any new site or degree program initiated by the institution will be regarded as a major substantive change. (See Substantive Change Policy). The Candidate or Accredited status of the institution continues during the probation period.

Program

A postsecondary educational program offered by an institution of higher education that leads to an academic or professional degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential.

Public College

College or university with governing board elected or appointed by elected officials and supported by public funding.

Public Representative

A public member of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities is any individual who represents the public interest and is not:

An employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to, an institution that applied for accreditation or is currently accredited or pre-accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities;

A member of any trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities; or

A spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in paragraph (1) or (2) above.

Public Service

Service of a practical nature to the external (non-academic) community – local, regional, national, or international. Often includes public lectures and performances, various forms of applied research, non-credit courses, and agricultural or other similar forms of extension.

Quality – Educational

The achievement of student learning outcomes as described either in terms of a level of intellectual proficiency or amount of cognitive growth.

Reapplication

The procedure used when an institution that had not been granted accreditation because of deficiencies noted in the evaluation report again seeks accreditation after correcting the deficiencies.

Reasonable Assurance

An indication by a regional association that an unaccredited institution appears to have the potential and to be making appropriate progress which, if continued, will result in its meeting accreditation requirements on a normal schedule. See Candidate for Accreditation.

Recommendation

May refer either to the evaluation team's final statements or its confidential advice to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities regarding an institution's accreditation or candidacy status.

Recommendation, Confidential

An evaluator's private non-binding recommendation to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities regarding the accreditation of an institution.

Related Instruction

A recognizable body of instruction in program-related areas of communication, computation, and human relations for applied or specialized associate degree or certificate programs of 30 semester credits or 45 quarter credits in length.

Reports Requested by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

Annual Report: This is a brief form made available each spring to candidate and member institutions to be completed and returned to the Commission office. The purpose of the form is to help the Commission be informed of significant changes taking place at institutions, such as substantive changes, serious budget deficits, crucial enrollment changes, etc.

Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report: An Accredited institution's thorough self-evaluation report submitted in the third year of the accreditation cycle. It is intended to ascertain an institution's readiness to provide evidence (outcomes) of mission fulfillment and sustainability and assist institutions in determining if the process of outcomes assessment will lead them to a successful Year Seven self-evaluation and peer evaluation.

Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR): In the sixth year of the accreditation cycle, the institution provides a self-study reflecting upon the elements of Standard Two. The report is reviewed by the PRFR Team, which provides an evaluation of the materials which is shared with the institution and the peer evaluation team for the Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness.

Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) Report: In Year Seven of the seven-year accreditation cycle, the institution conducts a comprehensive self-evaluation on all Standards and attests to its continued compliance with NWCCU Eligibility Requirements. The EIE may also address any deficiencies or areas of inquiry from the PRFR Committee Report from the prior year.

Candidacy Self-Evaluation Report: An Applicant institution's comprehensive self-evaluation report institution that addresses all NWCCU Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation. The Candidacy Self-Evaluation Report is submitted to the Commission for consideration of Candidacy.

Interim Candidacy Self-Evaluation Report: A Candidate institution's comprehensive self-evaluation report that addresses all NWCCU Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation. The Interim Candidacy Self-Evaluation Report is submitted to the Commission for consideration of continuation of Candidacy.

Accreditation Self-Evaluation Report: A Candidate institution's comprehensive self-evaluation report that addresses all NWCCU Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation. The Accreditation Self-Evaluation Report is submitted to the Commission for consideration of Accreditation.

Ad Hoc report: A report prepared by the institution in response to a request by the Commission to respond to specific Recommendation(s) or as a follow up to an approved Substantive Change. An Ad Hoc report is outside of the regular schedule of accreditation activities with a focused topic and typically includes notice of one to three years to prepare. Ad hoc reports may or may not be associated with a visit.

Special report: A report prepared by the institution in response to an emergent issue identified by the Commission. A special report is outside of the regular schedule of accreditation and is focused on specific issue(s), typically with a short time period of less than one year for response in order to demonstrate progress, alleviate concern regarding the specific issue, or demonstrate compliance with a Standard. Special reports may or may not be associated with a visit.

Monitoring report: A report or sequence of reports prepared by the institutions in response to a request from the Commission to address either a Standard that is in need of improvement but not out of compliance or to provide a regular and periodic heightened monitoring of an issue when a Sanction has been issued.

Compliance report: A report prepared by the institution requested by the Commission when an institution is found to be non-compliant with an Eligibility Requirement, Standard, Policies, or applicable federal regulations and consequently issued a timeline for responding to the issue of non-compliance in accordance with *34 CFR § 602.20(a)(2)*.

Financial Resources Review (FRR): Financial Resources Reviews may be requested for the institution to respond to financial issues raised by the Board of Commissioners. Evaluation visits are not required.

Research

May refer to collection of institutional data useful for self-analysis or planning (institutional research), to that carried on by teacher-scholars in order to remain current in their fields of

expertise, or to that which expands the field of knowledge or its application (“pure” or “applied” research).

Sanctions

May be applied to an institution when the Commission concludes that the institution is in serious non-compliance with one or more Commission standards, policies, or eligibility requirements. The intent of a sanction is to highlight the immediate need for an institution to bring itself into compliance. NWCCU has three sanctions: Warning, Probation, and Show-Cause.

Scholarship (Scholarly Activity)

Commitment to the pursuit of truth or knowledge. All faculty in institutions of higher education are expected to devote continuing study to their respective fields of knowledge or professions in order that they may be aware of the most recent developments and information in their fields and thus be prepared to perform their teaching function at an appropriate level.

Show-Cause

When the Commission finds that an institution has not taken satisfactory steps to address identified concerns or when an institution is found to be in serious non-compliance with the Commission’s accreditation criteria, it may require the institution to Show-Cause why its candidacy or accreditation should not be terminated. In such cases, the burden rests with the institution to demonstrate why its candidacy or accreditation should be continued. The candidate or accredited status of the institution continues during the period of Show-Cause, and the institution will be subject to Commission monitoring, which may include a requirement to submit prescribed reports and to receive visits for evaluation by Commission representatives.

Standards (or Criteria) for Accreditation

The criteria, consisting of Eligibility Requirements, Standards, and related Policies, developed by the membership of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities by which an institution is evaluated and admitted for initial and continuing membership.

Substantive Change

A change that significantly alters an institution’s objectives or the scope of its offerings; alters its autonomy, sponsorship, or the locus of control over it; embarks on offering off-campus academic programs for credit; changes the geographic area(s) served; or offers programs or courses for academic credit on a military base. (See Substantive Change Policy.)

Teach-Out

Provision by an institution for the equitable treatment of students if the institution closes or discontinues an educational program before all students enrolled in that program complete it.

Telecommunications

Instructional. Instruction which provides for the systematic exchange of course materials between the instructor and student by electronic communication.

Tenure

The employment status of a faculty or staff member whose employment is not subject to termination by the governing board, except in stipulated circumstances.

Terminal Contract

A contract agreement setting beginning and ending dates of employment of a faculty or staff member with no legal obligation that the expiration of the contract is to be followed by another contract agreement.

Unfunded Student Financial Aid

Refers to that portion of total student financial aid that is purely institutional assistance. It is the total amount of tuition scholarships that is awarded but is not covered by endowment earnings and annual contributions designated for tuition scholarships, federal, state, or local funding, or monies an outside group contributes for student tuition. It is the amount of total tuition generated from enrollments the institution foregoes to attract and retain students.

University

A large, multi-purpose institution with extensive graduate degree offerings, library, and other resources, and/or several schools with graduate offerings.

Vocational Education

Organized educational programs offering courses or instruction in a sequence or aggregation of competencies that are directly related to preparation for employment in occupations requiring other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree. These programs must include competency-based applied learning that contributes to an individual's academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills, necessary for economic independence as a productive and contributing member of society.

Warning

When the Commission finds that an institution has pursued a course that, if continued, could lead to more serious sanctions, it may issue to the institution a Warning to correct its deficiencies, to refrain from certain activities, or to initiate certain activities within a stated period of time. A Warning is a public sanction and does not affect the candidate or accredited status of the institution.