

Chapter III

Steps in the Evaluative Process

Overview

Institutional evaluations take one of two forms, comprehensive, in which the institution is reviewed for the degree of its fulfillment of all the standards of the Commission, and focused, in which, at the special request of the Commission, fulfillment of certain designated standards is examined. An overview of and procedural outline for the focused evaluation are found as appendix i. Although the difference in scope and purpose leads to substantive differences between the two, the procedures for each are essentially the same.

Types of Evaluation Reviews

In preparation for a comprehensive evaluation, which accredited New England institutions of higher education must undergo at least once every ten years, an institution is required to prepare a self-study report in which the standards serve as a basis for self-analysis. An institution applying for initial accreditation or candidacy must also undergo a comprehensive evaluation. In addition to providing a foundation for the Commission's evaluation of an institution against its *Standards for Accreditation*, the process of self-study encourages institutional self-improvement. That is, a member institution accepts the obligation of a periodic self-study designed to clarify its specific objectives, to assess realistically its success in attaining them, and to develop means of increasing its educational effectiveness. The Commission's *Self-Study Guide* contains detailed information about this process and the format in which the report is to be presented.

A focused evaluation, as its name indicates, focuses on particular topics. It is undertaken at the request of the Commission and provides a means of monitoring specific developments or concerns within an institution between comprehensive evaluations. Consequently, the focused self-study is much more limited in scope than that prepared for a comprehensive evaluation. Similarly, the visiting team is smaller, comprising only those needed to review and assess the institution's fulfillment of those standards and policies upon which the visit is focused. Team reports therefore differ markedly from

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those prepared for a comprehensive review. Specific circumstances calling for a focused evaluation are described below in Appendix i of this manual. Despite their differences, nearly all steps in the process of preparing for and conducting the visit are applicable to both comprehensive and focused evaluations; where dissimilarities exist, they will be noted.

Summary of the Accreditation Process

This *Manual* provides detailed information about the accreditation process, the steps of which may be summarized as follows:

“The Commission staff selects, proposes, and invites prospective team members.”

Approximately two years before a scheduled comprehensive site visit or eighteen months before a focused visit, the Commission staff reminds the institution of the evaluation and asks that it select the specific dates for the team visit.

The Commission staff visits the institution to assist in its preparation for the evaluation by endeavoring to assure that Commission policies and procedures are understood and to otherwise provide help and direction to the institution.

Approximately one year in advance of the site visit, the staff proposes to the institution an individual who will chair the evaluation team. Shortly after being selected, the chair arranges a visit to the institution, in order to become familiar with it and to make necessary arrangements for the evaluation.

During the semester preceding the evaluation, the Commission staff selects, proposes, and invites prospective team members, making replacements, if necessary, and then sends the final team list to the institution’s president and to all team members. The Commission staff mails evaluator materials to team members.

Sufficiently in advance of the visit to allow for the team’s preparation, the chair corresponds with team members about such things as the schedule, accommodations, and individual areas of responsibility during the visit.

Six weeks prior to the visit, the institution mails a copy of its self-study and related materials to each team member and four paper copies and an electronic copy to the Commission office.

On the previously scheduled dates, the team visits the campus; it conducts its evaluation, develops a rough draft of a report with its findings, including a list of the institution's significant strengths and the team's concerns based on the degree to which the institution fulfills Commission standards, and prepares a confidential recommendation to the Commission; before leaving campus, the chair gives an exit interview, i.e., an oral report of the team's evaluation.

By the fourth week after the visit, the chair sends a first draft to team members and Commission staff, who suggest necessary changes and corrections; at the same time, team members submit their confidential evaluation of the chair to the Commission office.

By the sixth week following the visit, the chair sends a draft to the institution's president or, if different, chief executive officer, for review of *factual* accuracy.

By the seventh week after the visit, the chair receives the president's comments.

By the ninth week following the visit, the chair sends the final report to the institution for duplication and also sends thirty-five (35) copies of the confidential recommendation along with a confidential evaluation of team members to the Commission office and an electronic copy of the evaluation report.

By the tenth week subsequent to the visit, the institution sends one (1) copy of the report to each member of the evaluation team and thirty-five (35) copies (three-hole punched) to the Commission office.

One week later, the Commission staff seeks the institution's official response to the report; when received, the institutional response is provided to the chair as well as the Commission.

The following semester, the chair and president meet with the Commission at one of its meetings; after the meeting, the Commission notifies both the institution and the team of its action on the institution's accreditation.

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