

Accreditation Review Overview for Graduate Programs

Proposed, July 15, 2015

Passed by Graduate Council, February 4, 2016

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) requires that all degree programs assigned a CIP code be reviewed at least once every eight years (see “Guidelines for Review of Existing Units of Instruction, Research, and Public Service at Public Institutions,” revised 5/22/2009). This requirement concerns degree- and discipline-specific accreditation reviews, which the IBHE accepts in lieu of its own review process at the institution level. Because of this accreditation substitution for program review, SIU Carbondale assumes responsibility for the oversight of all reviews, not just those that it undertakes under the terms of the “Program Review Overview,” as approved by both the Faculty Senate and the Graduate Council (dated June 1, 2012). Both processes – accreditation review as well as program review – are required by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools as a means of ensuring quality control over one of the university’s principal functions, the awarding of academic degrees.

Besides these state and accreditation mandates, the peer-review of academic programs is foundational to their proper operation. SIU Carbondale regards the accreditation of its degree programs as a widely recognized hallmark of their quality, which the HLC requires the university to post publically on its webpage and in its academic catalogs. In fact, what affects one program or unit on campus affects directly many others; NCATE/CAEP accreditation of teacher education programs in the College of Education and Human Services, for example, has an immediate impact on the reputation of degree programs in no fewer than three other colleges (Liberal Arts, Science, and Agricultural Sciences). It is not solely up to the faculty of one program or unit to sustain this commitment, it is up to the entire university. The university’s many stakeholders regard as critically important the sum total of all accreditations that the institution attains.

Consequently, the Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs participates in the administration of accreditation review just as it does program review, even though the responsibility of meeting the criteria and paying the costs of the accrediting body remains the individual program’s or unit’s to bear. The appropriate faculty has the expertise to judge how best to meet the standards set by their profession or discipline through the accreditation process. And it is the faculty and its students who benefit most immediately from accreditation. So while the Provost supports the process, the faculty is best positioned to carry it out – under the auspices of the university. To this end, the Provost office works to see that all accreditations are successfully maintained by and through the program faculty.

Because the college Dean is the administrative leader most immediately responsible for accreditation oversight, the Provost must work with the Dean to ensure that the programs in the college are prepared to meet accreditation criteria. This is especially true for the program’s staffing by qualified faculty. Similarly, the Dean

must see that the program and student learning are assessed on a regular basis in keeping with accreditation criteria. The self study for accreditation review is also conducted under the Dean's direction. For these reasons, the Provost office does what it can to support these responsibilities, working closely with the Dean to ensure that the accreditation review process follows a reasonable timetable, step by step, to a successful outcome. The Provost's participation in accreditation review is thus necessary but not sufficient in itself. Here the Dean, with the Provost's assistance, takes the leading role.

The Provost's assistance is defined here by the following activities to be undertaken by the Associate Provost for Academic Programs (APAP) in cooperation with the college Dean and the academic unit whose program is under re-accreditation review. The primary interest is to work with the faculty to help them stay on track towards a successful accreditation review. The Associate Provost will

1. Notify the appropriate Dean's office of the academic programs in his or her college that are up for re-accreditation within two years. The Dean and the APAP will determine how best to work with the programs.
2. Meet with the program faculty to review its plans for re-accreditation a full two years (or earlier, as appropriate) before the estimated date of the site visit. Among the items for planning are the accrediting body's review criteria; the faculty staffing levels, as discussed by the Chair/Director, Dean, and Provost; the assessment of student learning outcomes; and the assignment of individual faculty roles and responsibilities reflected in a mutually agreed-upon timeline;
3. Receive brief (no more than one page), regular (once a semester) progress reports from either the academic unit's Chair/Director and/or the faculty accreditation coordinator of the tasks accomplished and those still underway (in addition to an updated assessment plan and an annual report of student learning outcomes data);
4. Meet again with the program faculty to review its work towards re-accreditation a full year before the estimated date of the site visit. Remaining tasks, such as the data collection, documentation, analysis, and drafting of the self-study, will be identified and assigned to the appropriate members of the program faculty;
5. Review with the academic unit's Chair/Director and Dean the latest draft of the self-study no later than six weeks before the self-study is due to be submitted;
6. Cooperate with the academic unit to prepare the itinerary of the site visit team and coordinating the information that the team will likely be seeking at each meeting during the visit;
7. Meet with the site visit team, as appropriate;
8. Maintain a separate file (besides the program's) of official correspondence with the accrediting body, including the site visit team report, responses of the program faculty, and the official notification of the program's accreditation status; and

9. Plan with the faculty for any follow-up reports, subsequent visit by accreditation reviewers, and/or tasks to be undertaken in preparation for the next re-accreditation.

If the program faculty and the Dean, in consultation with the Provost, feel that the APAP's support role in any one accreditation review either is unnecessary or needs to be redefined in any way, these activities will be revised, as appropriate. Some programs may show evidence of good progress without APAP assistance; others may feel that they require more guidance and training, which the Associate Provost office can provide, for a successful outcome to the accreditation process. Such changes shall be requested by the program faculty and approved by the Dean.

Reporting the results of the accreditation review to the SIU President's office and to the IBHE will be the responsibility of the Provost office. Any changes in program accreditation status must be reflected in undergraduate and/or graduate catalogs, student recruitment materials, departmental and college webpages, the university's official listing of accreditations, as maintained by the Office of Institutional Research and Activities and required by the Higher Learning Commission.