# **Revised Accreditation Cycle**

NWCCU (Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities)

The new accreditation cycle reduces the review process from ten years to seven years. Currently, an institution conducts a comprehensive self study in the last two years of the ten-year cycle. The purpose of the self study is to address all standards at one time. Under the seven-year accreditation cycle, the equivalent effort of the two years of intense self study is amortized over seven years and conducted in progressive stages of institutional self reflection and peer evaluation. Like a dissertation, the institution addresses all standards, but in a more continuous, cumulative manner that builds on its previous findings and regular feedback from peer evaluators and the Board of Commissioners.

In the first stage of the septennial process, the institution prepares a report to address Standard One. Two years later, the institution expands its report on Standard One to include a response to Standard Two. In doing so, it reviews and updates, as necessary, its previous response to Standard One. Two years thereafter the institution expands its report on Standards One and Two to include a response to Standards Three and Four. Once again it reviews and updates, as necessary, its previous response to Standards One and Two. Two years after that, the institution expands its report on Standards One, Two, Three, and Four to include a response to Standards Five. In preparing its report the institution reviews and updates, as necessary, its previous response to Standards One, Two, Three, and Four.

The self-study report, constructed throughout the seven-year cycle is the same as the self-study report produced at the end of the ten-year cycle—a current and comprehensive response to all accreditation standards. However, the seven-year process of cumulative self study ensures the institution's response to previously addressed standards remains current and relevant throughout the accreditation cycle. Moreover, the schedule of events at two-year intervals is intended to reduce substantially, if not eliminate, interim reports and visits which are commonly requested under the current review process.

## Year One

In the first year of the new cycle, the institution submits a Year One Report to address Standard One. This initial report establishes the foundation for all subsequent reports and evaluations. There is no visit associated with the Year One Report, but a panel of evaluators reviews the report and prepares a report of findings and a confidential recommendation. The Board of Commissioners considers the institution's report and the evaluator panel's report of findings and confidential recommendation. The Board's action and feedback are provided in writing following the meeting.

#### Year Three

In the third year of the seven-year cycle, the institution expands its Year One Report to include a response to Standard Two. In doing so, it reviews and updates, as necessary, its response to Standard One to ensure the cumulative Year Three report is current and internally consistent with regard to Standards One and Two. A committee of evaluators conducts an onsite visit to evaluate the institution with regard to Standards One and Two and prepares a report of findings and a confidential recommendation. The Board of Commissioners considers the institution's and the evaluation committee's report of findings and confidential recommendation. Institutional representatives and the chair of the evaluation meet with the Board via audio conferencing when the matter is considered. The Board's action and feedback are provided in writing following the meeting.

#### Year Five

In the fifth year of the septennial cycle, the institution expands its Year Three Report to include a response to Standards Three and Four. In doing so it reviews and updates, as necessary, its response to Standards One and

Two to ensure the cumulative Year Five Report is current and internally consistent with regard to Standards One, Two, Three, and Four. There is no visit associated with the Year Five Report, but a panel of evaluators reviews the report with respect to Standards Three and Four and prepares a report of findings and a confidential recommendation. The Board of Commissioners considers the institution's report and the evaluator panel's report of findings and confidential recommendation. The Board's action and feedback are provided in writing following the meeting.

### Year Seven

In the seventh year of the oversight cycle, the institution expands its Year Five Report to include a response to Standard Five. In doing so it reviews and updates, as necessary, its response to Standards One, Two, Three, and Four to ensure the comprehensive Year Seven Report is current and internally consistent on all five standards. A committee of evaluators conducts an onsite visit to evaluate the institution with regard to Standards Three, Four, and Five and prepares a report of findings and a confidential recommendation. The Board of Commissioners considers the institution's report and the evaluation committee's report of findings and confidential recommendation. Institutional representatives and the evaluation committee chair meet with the Board when the matter is considered. The Board's action and feedback are provided in writing following the meeting.

## Recursion

In the first year following completion of the seven-year accreditation cycle, the institution begins the cycle anew with the submission of a Year One Report. That report builds upon its continuously updated response to Standard One throughout the previous cycle and its findings in monitoring its environments in response to Standard Five of the Year Seven Report from the prior year. Subsequent reports follow in a similar manner. Thus, the first cycle under the seven-year cycle sets the foundation for a recursive process of monitoring and maintenance designed to enhance continuous improvement and assure quality and effectiveness in a regular ongoing manner, rather than an intermittent episodic manner.

## **Comparison of Institutional Effort and Cost**

Two events are regularly scheduled under the current ten-year cycle: 1) comprehensive self-study report and onsite visit conducted in the tenth year; and 2) regular interim report and onsite visit conducted in the fifth year. However, institutions are often required to submit progress reports (without onsite evaluations) and/or focused interim reports (with onsite evaluations) at various times during the cycle.

Four events are scheduled during alternating years of the septennial cycle. Two of those events are reports without visits and the other two events are reports with visits by small committees of evaluators. The first visit is conducted in the third year of the cycle and the second visit is conducted in the seventh year of the cycle. A total of five evaluators, regardless of the size and complexity of the institution, will conduct the first visit which evaluates the institution with respect to Standards One and Two. The size of the second committee, which visits the institution in the seventh year of the cycle to evaluate the institution with respect to Standards Three, Four, and Five, is determined by the number of core themes identified by the institution. Specifically, the committee consists of the chair of the committee and one evaluator for each core theme. Thus, if the institution identifies four core themes, a total of five evaluators will conduct the visit. The same evaluator will not serve on both the third-year committee and the seventh-year committees.

A study was conducted to compare the number of events and amount of costs experienced under the current cycle and projected for the new cycle. An event is defined as a progress report, focused interim report, special report, regular interim report, or self-study report. To determine the associated costs to institutions, an analysis was done on the number of evaluators for these events.

Accredited institutions that completed their ten-year cycles with comprehensive self-study visits in 2007 and 2008 were selected for this study. A total of 32 institutions (21% of the membership)—representing a cross-section of accredited institutions—satisfied that criterion. In addition to their regular interim reports and comprehensive reports, those institutions submitted an average of 2.0 progress reports and 1.8 focused interim reports during the ten-year cycle. On average, 13.3 evaluators participated in visits associated with those events. By comparison, four events are scheduled for institutions under the seven-year cycle. The number of evaluators associated with these events is equal to six plus the number of the institution's core themes. On an annualized basis, the total number of events under the new cycle is virtually identical to the average number of events under the current cycle for institutions in this study. Further, on an annualized basis, an institution with four core themes would experience virtually the same cost under the revised cycle as the average cost under the current cycle for institutions included in this study. Table 1 summarizes these findings.

**Table 1 Summary Comparison** 

	Ten-Year Cycle			Seven-Year Cycle	
	<sup>1</sup> Total	<sup>2</sup> Total		Total	Total
	Reports	<b>Evaluators</b>		Reports	Evaluators
*Average	5.8	13.3	Expected	4	6+Themes
Annualized	0.58	1.33	Annualized	0.57	<sup>3</sup> 1.43

<sup>\*</sup>Average ten-year total for institutions with comprehensive visits in 2007 and 2008.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Combined progress, focused, regular, and comprehensive reports for institutions with comprehensive visits in 2007 and 2008.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Combined focused, regular, and comprehensive visit evaluators for institutions with comprehensive visits in 2007 and 2008.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Expected number of evaluators based on four (4) Core Themes