



Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) Orientation Materials

2018 Edition

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

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www.nwccu.org

Congratulations on your selection as your institution's Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO). In this role you will serve as the primary contact with the staff of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) and will be an important resource to your institution on accreditation issues.

Official correspondence between the Commission and an institution's president is typically copied to the ALO. Other types of communications (emails, faxes, phone calls, letters) may occur directly between the Commission staff and the ALO. In such instances, you, as the ALO, should ensure that your president is appropriately informed.

The effective ALO is carefully selected by the president and has the time, knowledge, and authority to engage in regular communication about accreditation-related issues with the institution's president, other offices and individuals on campus, and with the Commission. As the ALO you should be in regular and direct communication with your president. In addition, to be an effective ALO you should have adequate time and resources to focus on accreditation issues, and should have appropriate status, visibility, authority, knowledge, access to data, and support from the senior administration to fulfill the responsibilities of being the ALO. ***To learn more about the role and responsibilities of the Accreditation Liaison Officer, [click here to view the Commission's official policy statement.](#)***

About the Commission

In your role as ALO it is important that you understand the nature of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

It is incorporated as a legally established, private 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation for the expressed purpose of accrediting higher education institutions in the seven-state Northwest region which includes Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. The Commission also recognizes higher education institutions internationally, including Canada. Membership and organization of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities is set forth in its Bylaws.

The Commission oversees regional accreditation for 162 institutions. Its decision-making body consists of up to twenty-six Commissioners who represent the public and the diversity of higher education institutions within the Northwest region.

NWCCU is a voluntary, nongovernmental organization for the improvement of educational institutions founded in 1917. Originally known as the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Colleges and Universities, the connection between the association of secondary schools and the Commission on Colleges and Universities was severed in 2002, and the Commission was renamed the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities and its predecessors have been listed since 1952 by the U.S. Department of Education as a nationally recognized accrediting agency to conduct accreditation and pre-accreditation (Candidacy status) activities for institutions offering programs of at least one academic year in length at the postsecondary level. The Commission's recognition was most recently reaffirmed by the Department in 2016.

Additional information regarding NWCCU can be found by clicking below:

[History of Accreditation and NWCCU](#)

[About NWCCU](#)

NWCCU has produced several publications that will prove very helpful to you in your role as ALO. The [Accreditation Handbook](#) contains the fundamental accreditation standards that NWCCU expects every institution to comply with at all times. You should read the Accreditation Handbook carefully and be prepared to be a resource on it for your institutional colleagues. The current version contains detailed descriptions of the Commission's accreditation standards and their fundamental elements. Also included are the 24 Eligibility Requirements.

[Standards for Accreditation and Eligibility Requirements](#)

During 2009 and 2010, the Commission spent considerable time and effort reviewing and revising its Standards for Accreditation, Eligibility Requirements, and Policies. This effort was led by a dedicated steering committee that conducted extensive research, sought input from member institutions, and then reviewed drafts of proposed revisions with member institutions through several series of town hall meetings, sessions during annual conferences, and electronic communications. The revised Standards, Requirements, and Policies were approved by member institutions during 20110-2011.

[Accreditation Process](#)

This web page contains useful information not only for staff at institutions seeking their initial accreditation, but also for newcomers to accredited institutions. Of special use are the initial sections that define accreditation and the role of accreditors.

[Application](#)

The initial step in applying for accreditation with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities is to seek recognition as a Candidate for Accreditation. Only accredited institutions are members of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. Candidate for Accreditation is a pre-accredited affiliate status with the Commission. It is a status of recognition by the Commission that the institution meets the eligibility requirements and is progressing toward accreditation. It does not, however, imply or ensure eventual accreditation by the Commission.

[Self-Evaluation](#)

Once authorized by the Commission to proceed with self-evaluation, the institution is to prepare a comprehensive analytical self-analysis. Although a Candidate for Accreditation institution will not be expected to have the maturity and stability of an accredited institution, the Standards and Guide for Self-Evaluation provides a good basis for the institution to document how it is organized, staffed, and supported to accomplish its purposes and to demonstrate its potential to attain accreditation within five years, the maximum allowed under U.S. Department of Education regulations.

[Candidacy](#)

Additional information may be found in Candidate for Accreditation, Accreditation Handbook, pages 9-13.

[Guidelines for Preparation of Reports](#)

The Commission requires every institution to undertake a comprehensive Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability self-study and host an evaluation team visit at least once every 7 years. A Mission and Core Themes Report is required 18 months after the completion of the comprehensive evaluation. In addition,

the Commission requires every institution to undertake a Mid-Cycle Evaluation and host a team visit 3 years after the comprehensive evaluation.

Team Visits: Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Visit

The [Handbook for Peer Evaluators](#) guides both evaluators and institutions through the steps that are recommended to ensure a smooth and successful team visit. It includes useful guidelines on how to plan the team visit that will follow submission of the institutional self-study.

During onsite visits by evaluation committees, the ALO is the primary contact between NWCCU, the team, and the institution. If someone other than the ALO is responsible for overseeing the visit, the ALO is responsible for keeping that person updated and forwarding on any information sent by NWCCU to the ALO. Team members serving on reviews will also communicate with the ALO on matters related to visit logistics.

Representation of Accredited Status

When acknowledging their accreditation, institutions should include the following information in appropriate publications and in electronic communications such as websites: (Name of Institution) is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, 8060 165th Avenue NE, Suite 100, Redmond, WA 98052, (425) 558-4224.

Note: the mailing address and telephone number of the Commission are required by federal regulation to be included in all public references to an institution's accreditor(s).

The following statement, in its entirety, must be used when an institution includes within its website, catalogue or other material a statement which will give the public a better idea of the meaning of regional accreditation:

_____ College (University) is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities indicates that it meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality evaluated through a peer review process. An accredited college or university is one which has available the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs, is substantially doing so, and gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Institutional integrity is also addressed through accreditation.

Accreditation by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities is not partial but applies to the institution as a whole. As such, it is not a guarantee of every course or program offered, or the competence of individual graduates. Rather, it provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the institution.

Accreditation Status provides information on an institution's recent accreditation history. It includes notations about degree levels, branch campuses, additional locations, and other instructional sites included within the scope of the institution's accreditation; whether the institution has been approved to offer distance education programs; and information on the years the institution's next key accreditation events are due. Your institution's Accreditation Status, including a recent history of Commission actions involving your institution, is available by visiting the [Member Institutions](#) section of www.nwccu.org. Click on the state in which your institution is located and then scroll down until you see your institution's name. Click on Institution's Name. The information regarding your institution will expand.

Using the NWCCU Logo

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) allows member institutions to use the Commission logo in publications and on institutional websites. Certain restrictions apply. To request permission to use the logo, please contact Elsa Gossett, the Commission's Coordinator for Communications and Public Relations, at egossett@nwccu.org. Please note that under federal regulation, whenever an institution acknowledges its accreditor in print or electronic form, the institution is required to provide the accreditor's full name, mailing address, and telephone number.

Your NWCCU Liaison

One of the central responsibilities of an ALO is to maintain contact with the NWCCU vice president who is assigned as your institution's liaison. A current list of NWCCU liaison assignments is listed on the NWCCU website. You should communicate with your NWCCU vice president as needed and respond promptly when contacted by that individual.

Policies

The Commission's policies are either elaborations of the standards for accreditation or describe procedural requirements for institutions and for the Commission. Guidelines are based on best practices and provide advice to members for implementing the accreditation standards. To view all of the Policies [click here](#). Of special interest to ALOs are the following documents:

[Substantive Change Policy and Substantive Change Manual](#)

Certain institutional changes must be approved by the Commission before they are implemented. Failure to follow this process could impact an institution's federal Title IV student financial aid. As ALO you should be aware of the policy and processes, and should ensure that all substantive changes are submitted in a timely manner to the Commission for review and approval.

[Credit Hour Policy](#)

The Commission's Requirements of Affiliation stipulate that accredited institutions comply with all applicable federal, state, and other relevant government policies, regulations, and requirements, which generally include requirements and expectations for degrees and credits. These guidelines provide an overview of federal and state definitions.

[Accreditation Actions](#)

As your institution's ALO, it is important for you to understand the types of Affirming, Monitoring, Procedural, and Non-Compliance actions the Commission may take. A description of each of these actions can be found throughout [Accreditation Handbook](#).

Follow-Up Reports and Visits

The Commission typically takes periodic accreditation action periodically based upon an institutional self-study and an on-site evaluation or periodic review reports. Follow-up reports and visits may be requested when the Commission is concerned about current or future institutional compliance with one or more of the accreditation standards. This set of guidelines provides valuable information for an ALO whose institution is preparing for a follow-up report or for a follow-up visit.

Public Communication in the Accreditation Process

The Commission has an obligation to share with the public essential information about its accreditation standards, its procedures, and the accreditation status of its member institutions. The information reported in the [Member Institutions: Directory](#) reflects the information NWCCU is required to share.

Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status Policy

This policy describes in detail the key information that institutions are required by the Commission to include in their publications, whether in print or online. It also provides the framework for the advertising or promotion of the institution's accreditation status and acceptable terminology.

Procedures for Appeals

This set of procedures describes in detail the steps to be taken if an institution wants to appeal an adverse accrediting action, including timelines, required documentation, and costs.

Professional Development Opportunities

Throughout the year NWCCU offers professional development opportunities for representatives of member institutions. These include one and two-day workshops, the annual conference, the annual Chairs and Evaluators workshop, the Mission Fulfillment and Sustainability Report workshop, and the Mid-Cycle Report workshop and the ALO workshop. [To view the current schedule for these activities, click here.](#)

The Higher Education Opportunity Act

In August 2008, the United States Congress passed the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA). The HEOA contained new requirements for accreditors and the institutions they accredit. These involve distance education, monitoring of enrollment growth, substantive change reporting, and transfer of credit policies.

For additional details on the HEOA, visit the U.S. Department of Education's website at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/hea08/index.html>

Recent Commission Actions

The Commission meets two times per year in, June, and January. The Commission revised its website so it is now easier to access information regarding actions taken during the meetings of the full Commission. [You can view recent actions of these groups by clicking here.](#)

Frequently Asked Questions About Accreditation

The Commission has developed an online list of frequently asked questions and a glossary of terms. They can be accessed by clicking on [FAQs](#) and [Glossary](#).

Complaints and Third-Party Comments

Federal regulations require accrediting organizations to review and respond to complaints and third-party comments regarding member and candidate institutions. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities has specific policies and procedures for such situations. If the Commission determines that a complaint or third-party comment requires a response from an institution, a letter will be sent to the institution's Chief Executive Officer with a copy of the complaint or third-party comment and a list of information the Commission will need to complete its review. For further details, view the following:

[Policy on Complaints Involving Member and Candidate Institutions](#)

[Policy on Third-Party Comment](#)



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