

Accreditation Overview

When is it?

The North Central Association of colleges will visit NCMC in the academic year 2011-2012. Prior to this visit, NCMC is required to perform a self study which is typically a two-year process.

What is it?

Accreditation is a voluntary peer review process that provides colleges and universities with the impetus to critically evaluate their purposes and whether those purposes are being achieved. Voluntary accreditation ensures quality and institutional improvement.

Who is responsible?

North Central Missouri is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA).

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools is one of six regional agencies that accredits educational institutions in the United States. The North Central region includes Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, New Mexico, South Dakota, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Why is it important?

Accreditation:

- Ensures the quality and integrity of NCMC's programs and services.
- Allows students to transfer credits to other accredited colleges and universities.
- Enables students to obtain financial aid and veteran's services.
- Allows the college to participate in projects funded by federal grants.
- Ensures that the college can recruit and retain quality faculty and staff.

How does it happen?

Following an initial accreditation, colleges and universities are evaluated every 10 years and/or periodically as necessary. It involves conducting a Self-Study which will begin shortly at NCMC. Following this process, a report is submitted to the HLC identifying strengths and challenges at the College.

NCMC then will host a visiting team of peer consultant-evaluators representing the NCA. According to the HLC, these consultant-evaluators have two primary responsibilities: to offer advice to institutions to help them improve the quality of the education they provide, and to evaluate and confirm the quality of an educational institution. The team visit is scheduled to visit during the 2011-2012 academic year at NCMC.

The HLC currently offers institutions to choose one of two approaches to seek accreditation. One approach is referred to as the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). The second approach is called the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality or PEAQ.

AQIP is a new approach that involves a continuous improvement approach to accreditation on a seven-year cycle. It involves the institution's identification of three projects focused on the five criteria. In addition, three to five institutions would be identified by the NCA to work as a team with the AQIP institution to develop and implement the identified projects.

PEAQ is the more traditional approach with a 10-year cycle of review which NCMC will use. It includes the development of a self-study and a site visit. The institution must demonstrate that it is focused on improving its programs and services. It too, has been updated and will require substantially more support data and a greater focus on institutional improvement than in the past.

After an examination by the Faculty and Administration of strengths and weaknesses of these two approaches, the College decided to use the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) approach to prepare for the upcoming NCA team visit.

College Goals for the Self Study:

The self-study plan shall:

- Establish a self-study calendar and timetable.
- Identify goals for the self-study process.
- Determine how the Criteria Statements, Core Components, and Patterns of Evidence will be addressed in the self-study process and report.
- Identify how the institution will respond to and report on concerns expressed by previous HLC Evaluation Team visits.
- Include a preliminary outline of the Self-Study Report

Criteria Overview

An overview of the accreditation process can be found on the *Higher Learning Commission* <http://www.ncahlc.org/index.php>. A direct link to the document appears below:

[Institutional Accreditation: An Overview](#) (PDF: 11 pages, 240K)

Since Web sites change from time-to-time, the direct link above may not work. You should still be able to find the document by going to the main site and searching for the title above.

Criteria for Accreditation

- [Criterion One – Mission and Integrity](#)
- [Criterion Two – Preparing for the Future](#)
- [Criterion Three – Student Learning and Effective Teaching](#)
- [Criterion Four – Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge](#)
- [Criterion Five – Engagement and Service](#)

Through exploration of the five new criteria, four primary themes may emerge. These overarching and fundamental themes highlight the primary attributes of an organization valued by the Commission, establish broad benchmarks for evaluation, indicate the interrelatedness of the criteria, and suggest plans for self-study processes and reports.

The four emerging themes are orientation to the future, focus on learning, connectedness (internally and externally), and distinctiveness.

1. The future-oriented organization

- *engages in planning.*
- *is driven by the mission.*
- *understands social and economic change.*
- *focuses on the futures of constituents.*
- *integrates new technology.*

2. The learning-focused organization

- *assesses student learning.*
- *supports learning.*
- *supports scholarship.*
- *creates the capacity for lifelong learning.*
- *strengthens organizational learning.*

3. The connected organization

- *serves the common good.*
- *serves constituents.*
- *creates a culture of service.*
- *collaborates.*
- *engages in healthy internal communication.*

4. The distinctive organization

- *has an unambiguous mission.*
- *appreciates diversity.*
- *is accountable.*
- *is self-reflective.*
- *is committed to improvement.*

Frequently Asked Questions About Self-Study

What does NCA – HLC stand for?

The Higher Learning Commission (**HLC**) is part of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (**NCA**). The NCA is one of six regional institutional accreditation agencies in the United States. It was founded in 1895. The North Central region includes **Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, New Mexico, South Dakota, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Wyoming**. The **NCA – HLC** is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

What is the NCA self-study and why is it important to the College?

The self-study is a process of comprehensive, institution-wide self-examination that evaluates what the College learned and proposes what it intends to do with the knowledge. It is required by NCMC that we satisfy the criteria for accreditation and is a formal application to the Higher Learning Commission for reaccreditation.

Who are the members of the NCA Steering Committee and what is their role in the self-study process?

The members of the Steering Committee are leaders chosen by the College Leadership for their expertise, leadership, process management and strong team skills. They advise the Self-Study Coordinators and Sub Committees in reference to the self-study process. Most of them are co-chairs or major resource people on one of the seven Criterion/Section Teams.

Who are the leaders for each criterion and how were the Criteria Leadership Groups formed?

The Criterion/Section Team Leaders will be chosen from the Steering Committee or nominated by the college President. The teams consist of co-chairs and writing coaches, who are given the charge to define, discover, demonstrate, and develop the accreditation criteria as they are realized at NCMC. They are creating the various parts of the self-study document. They work with NCMC resource people who either were nominated by College leaders or volunteered because of their special expertise.

What is meant by "evidence" in the self-study process, and who is responsible for gathering it?

Evidence is any kind of supporting data to be used in the Self-Study: hard facts and statistics, numbers, records, survey results, expert opinion, examples, explanations, reasoning, predictions, experience, and even history. Evidence is the proof or confirmation that supports a claim as to how well NCMC is addressing a component of the criterion or section.

All the Criterion/Section Team Leaders, Writing Coaches, and Resource Team Members assist in data collection, information gathering, and drafting responses to the questions that arise from the HLC criteria for accreditation.

Is participation in the Self-Study voluntary?

Yes, participation is completely voluntary. However, participation is an integral part of the accreditation process and because of the small size of NCMC will involve or affect every employee to some degree. It is important that a majority of employees participate in some department, division, campus, or district activity of the Self-Study.

Glossary of NCA Terms

This glossary provides brief, basic definitions of some of the terms used in the [*Handbook of Accreditation*](#). Readers should refer to the appropriate sections of the handbook for a more extensive discussion of the terms. The definitions apply to the work of the Higher Learning Commission.

Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) - program for maintaining affiliation with The Higher Learning Commission based on the principles of continuous improvement.

accreditation association or commission - a nongovernmental body established to administer accrediting procedures.

accreditation, institutional - accreditation that evaluates an entire educational organization and accredits it as a whole.

accreditation, national - a type of institutional accreditation primarily for religious colleges and universities, private trade and technical schools, private business colleges, and colleges focusing on health-related fields, as well as organizations offering programs primarily through distance delivery and home study.

accreditation, regional - a type of institutional accreditation provided by seven recognized accrediting commissions of

the six regional accrediting associations.

Accreditation Review Council (ARC) - decision-making body consisting of 60 or more experienced consultant-evaluators and public members who participate in the review processes of the Commission.

accreditation, specialized (also called **program accreditation**) - accreditation of units, schools, or programs within a larger educational organization or for the sole program or area of concentration of an independent, specialized institution.

accredited status - status that indicates that an educational organization meets the Commission's criteria for accreditation.

Annual Report on Organizational Information and Operational Indicators - Online report completed annually by affiliated organizations.

AQIP - see Academic Quality Improvement Program

Association - the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

Board of Trustees - the governing body of the Commission, made up of 15-21 members of the Commission and representatives of the public.

candidacy - pre-accreditation status, which does not carry membership in the Commission.

Commission - see the Higher Learning Commission

Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI) - the Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools that accredits elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools that do not award degrees, the Department of Defense Schools operated overseas for the children of American military and civilian personnel, and the Navajo Nation schools.

comprehensive visit - team visit to an organization seeking accreditation or continuation of accreditation.

consultant-evaluators - members of the Commission's peer review corps who serve in the evaluation processes of the program to evaluate and advance quality.

contingency report - Report required when pending changes may have a significant effect on an organization.²

core components - subcategories of the criteria for accreditation that are reviewed in order to determine whether an organization meets the criteria.

criteria for accreditation - the framework for determining an organization's accreditation.

eligibility process - the process by which the Commission determines whether a non-affiliated organization is ready to begin the candidacy process.

Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet (EVSS) - a document prepared for an educational organization undergoing evaluation that includes basic information about the visit or evaluators panel and identifies the team members.

evaluators panel - panel made up of three peer reviewers to consider an organizational change request.

examples of evidence - illustrative examples of the types of evidence an organization might present in addressing a core component of a criterion for accreditation.

focused visit - a team visit that occurs between comprehensive evaluations to examine specific aspects of an organization.

The Higher Learning Commission - the Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools that accredits degree-granting higher education organizations.

Institutional Action Council (IAC) - Decision-making body of the Commission made up of 20 experienced peer reviewers and six representatives of the public.

legal authorization - the official act of a state department of education or other recognized agency having official authority certifying that a school, institute, college, university, or specialized program of studies complies with minimum legal.

monitoring report - report that signals that a situation at an organization should change.

obligations of affiliation - the responsibilities that organizations affiliated with the Commission are required to fulfill in order to retain their affiliation.

operational indicators - data on an organization that form the basis of the organization's annual report.

Organizational Profile (OP) - demographic information, program information, student performance data, and information on campus sites and distributed education offerings that take the place of the Statement of Institutional Scope and Activity.

PEAQ - see Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality

Peer Review Corps - the group of professionals who serve in accreditation processes.

preliminary information form (PIF) - documentation of an organization's ability to meet the eligibility requirements submitted by an organization considering affiliation with the Commission.

probation - a public status signifying that conditions at an accredited organization that jeopardize its ability to meet the criteria for accreditation.

professional data form - Summary of basic information about the background and experience of a consultant-evaluator.

Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) - the traditional program for maintaining accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission.

progress report - report that provides specific information from an organization, monitors its progress in coping with changes or challenges, or gives evidence that institutional plans came to fruition as expected.

public disclosure notice - a public notice that the Commission may prepare to explain a particular situation at an affiliated organization.

self-study process - a formal, comprehensive, institution-wide process of self-examination in preparation for a scheduled comprehensive evaluation.

self-study report - a document prepared by an organization that describes the process used to conduct the self-study, evaluates what it learned, and proposes what it intends to do with the knowledge. The report functions as the formal argument that the organization satisfies the criteria for accreditation.

site visit - A team visit to an off-campus site.

staff liaison - Commission staff member who serves as resource person for and liaison to an organization.

Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) - an official document that summarizes the status of the organization with the Commission

team report - report that documents the findings.

Abbreviations

AQIP - Academic Quality Improvement Program

ARC - Accreditation Review Council Association, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

CASI - Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement

C-E - consultant-evaluator

CAO - chief academic officer

CEO - chief executive officer

CHEA - Council for Higher Education Accreditation Commission, the Higher Learning Commission

C-RAC - Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions

EVSS - Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet

HLC - Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association

IAC - Institutional Actions Council

NCA - North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

OP - organizational profile

PEAQ - Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality

PIF - Preliminary Information Form

SAS - Statement of Affiliation Status

SHEEO - State Higher Education Executive Officers

USDE - United States Department of Education