

Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-College/Multi-Unit Districts or Systems

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Background

Almost half of the member institutions are part of larger systems, either by being part of a multi-college district/system or by being owned by a larger corporate entity. Institutions must work closely with the district/system to ensure that Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies are met and quality is sustained. The district/system's role is to facilitate and support the successful implementation of the institutional mission and institutional effectiveness. This necessitates dialogue between the institutions and district/system and among the institutions within the district/system.

The Commission evaluates based on the Standards regardless of organizational structure. In single-college districts/systems all functions are carried out by the same entity. For multi-college districts/systems, key functions that relate to the Standards may be distributed among the institutions and the district/system in various patterns. In order for the Commission to evaluate institutions in single-college and multi-college organizations fairly, institutions must inform the Commission about their functional organization and involve district/system and college personnel responsible for the functions in accreditation activities.

The integrity of the district/system programs and services falls within the scope of the institution's accreditation. The district/system auxiliary programs and services are subject to review if the program or service is executed in the name of the district/system or institution, or if the district/system administers or the board authorizes the program or service. The delineation and distribution of responsibilities among the district/system and the institution must be articulated clearly.

Policy

The Commission assures the equitable evaluation of all institutions regardless of organizational structure and clarifies the Commission's expectations regarding the conduct and outcomes of comprehensive institutional evaluations and other reviews in multi-college districts/systems.

Policy Elements

1. While the Commission accredits individual institutions, the district/system holds a fundamental role and responsibility in the analysis and evaluation of district/system structures and how these structures assist the institutions to achieve and adhere to all the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies and gain and sustain accredited status.
2. Institutions have the responsibility to describe and delineate clearly the particular way functions are distributed in their unique multi-college organization. The distribution of these functions is to be evaluated. There must be evidence of ongoing communication between the institution and the district/system regarding the distribution of these

functions. The Commission will use this evidence to identify the locus of responsibility for the institution's ability to meet Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies.

3. When serious inadequacies in a district/system function are verified, such deficiencies may jeopardize the accreditation of one, some, or all of the district/system institutions. Both the district/system and the impacted institution(s) are responsible for correcting the identified deficiencies.
4. The Commission reserves the right to initiate direct interaction with district/system officers regarding the ability of institutions to demonstrate that they meet or exceed the Accreditation Standards. When district/system officers are contacted regarding an institution, the institution(s) will receive the same communication.
5. A district/system may make a special request to evaluate the effectiveness of its central functions in conjunction with scheduled educational quality and institutional effectiveness reviews (formerly comprehensive reviews). This activity is limited to issues related to the ability of institutions to demonstrate that they meet or exceed the Accreditation Standards. The outcome of this activity does not result in any "accredited" status for the district/system.

Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-College/Multi-Unit Districts or Systems

A. Institutional Self Evaluation

1. As part of the institutional self evaluation process (formerly self study process) and in consultation with the district/system, the institution must specify through an organizational "map," which is a description of the delineation of district/system and college functions, whether the institution or district level holds the primary responsibility for all or parts of a specific function.

Moreover, the Commission recognizes that institutions in a multi-college system may have lateral relationships with other institutions in the district/system which should be included in the map. For example, police services may be a district/system service for all institutions in a multi-college district/system, yet located at one institution in the district/system.

2. Individuals responsible for key functions of the district/system, must be actively involved with the institution in developing the Self Evaluation Report of Educational Quality and Institutional Effectiveness. The level of involvement will be based upon who has responsibility for the institutional function(s) addressed in the Standards. Close cooperation between and among the institutions and the district/system office is expected as a part of the preparation of the Institutional Self Evaluation Report.
3. In the Institutional Self Evaluation Report, institutions are expected to include a discussion of how the identified district/system functions and decisions affect the institutions' ability to meet Accreditation Standards. For example, the governing board's role in adopting the institutional mission statement is addressed in the Standard dealing with mission; the district/system office responsibility for personnel is discussed in the Standard appropriate to faculty and staff; the district/system

financial allocation system should be included in the Standard in which financial resources are addressed. The organizational map will provide guidance for this discussion. The effectiveness of the map's delineation of functions includes analysis, evaluation, and subsequent planning for organizational improvement.

4. The district/system chief executive officer and governing board are expected to be involved in the process of developing the Institutional Self Evaluation Report. The governing board must review the final Institutional Self Evaluation Report and certify its involvement in the institutional self evaluation process.

B. Evaluation Team Composition

Just as for institutions in single-college districts, evaluation team composition for institutions in multi-college districts/systems is shaped by the institution being accredited. Evaluation teams visiting institutions in multi-college districts/systems will have the range of expertise appropriate for the institution and also individuals with multi-college district/system perspectives.

C. District/System Evaluation Team Visit Organization

The Commission organizes site visits to institutions in multi-college districts/systems simultaneously or in clusters of institutions.

Prior to simultaneous site visits taking place in the institutions of a district/system, the Commission President will name a coordinating chair. This coordinating chair, in consultation with institutional evaluation team chairs, will form a small district/system evaluation team which may be drawn from all of the evaluation teams visiting the institutions. It will consist of all of the evaluation team chairs and such members of the respective evaluation teams as are needed to address the district/system issues identified in the Institutional Self Evaluation Reports and by the evaluation teams.

The purposes of the coordinating chair and district/system evaluation team are to:

- evaluate the evidence provided in the Institutional Self Evaluation Report to confirm that the functions provided by the district/system enable the institutions to meet the Standards,
- identify issues pertaining to the Standards that are related to district/system functions,
- ensure commonality and comparability of evaluation team recommendations across External Evaluation Reports (formerly Team Reports) when accreditation issues have district/system implications, and
- support the work of the teams evaluating each institution.

This evaluation team will meet with the district/system administration before the site visit to discuss prior district recommendations and will review evidence to evaluate adherence to the Standards.

The coordinating chair may have a separate evaluation team assistant available to him/her solely for the purpose of supporting the district/system evaluation team and for performing organizational tasks related to this part of the evaluation visits. Evaluation team chairs on the special district/system evaluation team will receive the Institutional Self Evaluation Reports, the previous External Evaluation Reports, and Commission

action letters from every institution involved and will make the materials available to institutional evaluation team members on the district/system evaluation team.

D. Reports by the Institutional Evaluation Teams and the District/System Evaluation Team

The district/system evaluation team will develop conclusions about any major issues pertaining to the district/system. Recognizing that some district/system observations may pertain to all institutions, and others only to particular institutions, the institutional evaluation team chair, working in conjunction with the coordinating chair and the members of the district/system evaluation team, will incorporate appropriate conclusions within the Standards in the individual institutional External Evaluation Reports of Educational Quality and Institutional Effectiveness. When the district/system evaluation team determines that a recommendation pertaining to the district/system as a whole is in order, that same recommendation will appear in each of the institutions' External Evaluation Reports.

At the end of each site visit, the evaluation team chair meets with the college chief executive officer to discuss major findings. The evaluation team chair will then make a presentation of the evaluation process and findings at a meeting open to the entire college community. The coordinating chair shall meet separately with the district/system chief executive officer and with the college chief executive officer and present district/system findings. This discussion is limited to the district/system functions identified in the organizational map and the issues related to them which are identified in the Institutional Self Evaluation Reports and the findings of the institutional evaluation teams.

Although the district/system policies may affect the accredited status of the institution(s), the district/system evaluation team will not make recommendations on the accredited status of the institutions. Confidential recommendations, submitted to the Commission, on the accredited status of the institutions will come from each of the institutional evaluation teams.

E. Commission Actions and Public Disclosure

The Commission will receive the following items from each institution in preparation for Commission action: the Institutional Self Evaluation Report, the Institutional External Evaluation Report, the catalog, and other pertinent documents. The Commission, using its reader system, will consider each institution separately in relation to the district/system and take the appropriate action for each institution.

The Commission will discuss the district/system and develop a consensus on any matters to be communicated to the district/system Chief Executive Officer. In its action letters to the institutions, the Commission will comment on important district/system matters that significantly enhance or impinge on institutional quality.

In a case where one or more accreditation concerns, relating to the district/system are identified, the Commission may request a written response from the district/system itself and may also specify a site visit, by Commission representatives, to evaluate any such response.

The Commission will make clear that significant inadequacies in district/system functions can jeopardize the accreditation of one, some, or all of the district/system institutions.

When correspondence is sent to the district/system Chief Executive Officer, copies will be sent to the appropriate institution(s).

Should the Commission decide that a district/system response and site visit are in order, the district/system evaluation team will normally include the coordinating chair, a member of the Commission, and additional persons with special expertise, as needed. The purpose of the site visit is to evaluate the response from the district/system. This response could be the basis for subsequent Commission action, relative to the accredited status of one or more of the institutions, in the district/system.

F. Follow-up Activities

The district/system Chief Executive Officer is required to share the External Evaluation Report and Commission action letter of any site visit related to district/system functions with the governing board and appropriate staff at the district/system and at the institutions.

The Commission may issue special communications to college Chief Executive Officers on particular leadership issues. When the institution involved is a member of a district/system, the district/system Chief Executive Officer will be copied on this correspondence.

G. Cost

The costs associated with the additional activities of a district/system site visit may be billed directly to the district/system involved on an actual cost basis.