Quick Reference

Fundamentals of Specialized and Professional Accreditation

Who/What/Why? Higher education programs in colleges and universities that are committed to quality performance undergo an intensive review by subject matter experts against standards established by the profession (e.g., nursing, architecture):

1. Evaluation Request
   Program formally invites Accreditor to conduct a review.

2. Internal Review
   Program conducts self-study based on accreditation standards to assess effectiveness, strengths and areas for potential improvement, and prepares report.

3. External Review
   Expert reviewers from outside the Program analyze self-study report and conduct on-site review to validate information in the self-study report.

4. Report
   Findings from the internal and external reviews are presented to Accreditor’s decision-making body.

5. Review and Decision
   Accreditor’s decision-making body makes the accreditation decision based on the findings and any additional comments from the Program.

6. Monitoring and Re-accreditation
   Accreditor requires periodic reports with indicators of Program compliance. At end of accreditation term, Program requests a new accreditation review.

The Public
Public comments and formal complaints about programs are considered in the evaluation process and ongoing monitoring.

Who sets accreditation standards? Designed to protect the public interest, standards are developed in collaboration with educators, students, practitioners, employers and the general public. To promote accuracy, fairness and integrity, the accreditation process includes systems of checks and balances, documentation of compliance and opportunities for program response to evaluation results.

What do accreditors review? Accreditors review program outcomes that demonstrate students have the appropriate skills for employment and student learning consistent with the program mission. Also examined are various inputs that contribute to achieving those outcomes: curriculum, financial and learning resources, that the educational environment is effective for the program mission, faculty qualifications, and student support services.

How long does accreditation last? Programs are monitored throughout the accreditation term (for example: 7 – 10 years) to ensure quality standards are maintained. Re-accreditation reviews are done at the end of the accreditation term. Moreover, standards are continuously improved through input from practitioners, educators, employers and other communities of interest. If there are complaints or problems that need to be addressed, the program or institution must resolve these quickly. Programs that fail to meet requirements will have accreditation withdrawn.

Accreditation assures that students who complete higher education programs have essential skills for professional practice.

ASPA (Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors) advocates for quality in higher education. Visit us at www.aspa-usa.org.