

# Thoughts on Accreditation

By Doris Gordon

**A**n accreditation evaluation is usually conducted once every five, seven, or 10 years. The evaluation involves compliance with a set of educational standards that covers all aspects of a program's curriculum. The process is an opportunity for faculty, students, and administrators to assess student outcomes and reflect on a program's past, present, and future. To accomplish this, the procedural steps below are followed.

## Self-Study Document

Preparation for a self-study begins about a year before it is due, and it is natural to assume the process is onerous. This perception is based on two factors—(1) that the document takes an enormous amount of time to complete and (2) it is for the benefit of gatekeepers.

True, it is for gatekeepers. It is good to be accountable to peers, but also, it is one of the best evaluative experiences and learning tools for programs. A self-study is exactly what it states, a dimensional look at goals, objectives, assessments, purpose, and mission. It is an opportunity to reflect candidly on accomplishments and shortcomings of past years, evaluate the present state of affairs, and propose plans for the future. A curriculum takes stock of itself and examines where it is going.

## On-Site Evaluation

Before an actual site visit, the faculty, students, and administrators should

be able to answer any question from the accreditation on-site team with ease. The team visits an institution for two to three days verifying, validating, and determining if a program complies with the standards. They present recommendations to members of the program at the end of the visit and, subsequently, to the board of directors, who make the final decision.

## Publication of a Program's Status

At the conclusion of the process, the program's status is listed in an official publication of the accrediting agency. In addition, a program publishes its full status in one or more of its institutional publications. When programs are granted accreditation, these announcements are proud moments, not only for the stamp of approval but for the comprehensive understanding they have about their own program.

## Monitoring

Between cycles, a program is monitored on an annual or biennial basis. This review verifies that it continues to meet the agency's standards. If a program cannot meet these standards, the accrediting agency has the prerogative to investigate, ask for reports, or send a team back to the campus on a fact-finding visit.

## Reevaluation


The program is reevaluated periodically to ascertain whether

continuation of its accredited status is warranted.

## Conclusion

ACAE has developed a Web-based online system that easily allows a program to go through the entire process up to the on-site visit. The faculty enter data, save it, and develop narratives for the self-study document. They dialogue with site evaluators in the virtual interactive evaluation before the physical on-site visit and ultimately experience many benefits of the Computerized Accreditation Program (CAP). Two such benefits are the retrieval of information for accreditation/internal reviews, and the ability of a program to evaluate its analyzed data against aggregate data from other programs.

CAP was designed to assist programs with the assignment of complying with standards by using technology of the 21st century.

For more information, visit ACAE's Web site at [www.acaeaccred.org](http://www.acaeaccred.org). 

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