Commission Guide for Writing the Team Report:

Comprehensive Visit

Effective: January 1, 2005

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Introduction

Types of Team Reports

Following an evaluation visit, the team writes a report that serves as a record of the visit and makes the team's recommendation on the accreditation relationship. The team report is the primary document used in the decision-making processes that follow the visit. Because there are many different types of visits, there are different types of reports. The most common are

- Team report for a comprehensive evaluation visit
- Team report for a Commission-mandated focused visit
- Team report for a focused visit for an organization's change request
- Team report for a candidacy visit
- Team report for an initial accreditation visit
- Team report for a customized visit
- Team report for an advisory visit
- Team report for a joint visit

This guide focuses on the team report for a comprehensive evaluation visit. It provides general information on report writing responsibilities, style guidelines, and timelines. Guidelines and templates for other types of visits appear elsewhere in this manual or are in development. For any that are missing, team chairs should contact the staff liaison for the visit.

Report Overview

After completing a comprehensive visit, the team prepares and submits to the Commission a two-part team report that includes an Assurance section and an Advancement section.

The **Assurance section** documents the evaluation of an organization's fulfillment of the Commission's standards and provides the team's recommendation regarding the status of the organization with the Commission, including any recommendations pertaining to the organization's requests for change. In addition to the organization and Commission staff, the audiences for the Assurance section include Readers Panels, Review Committees, the Institutional Actions Council, future visiting teams, and in some circumstances the Commission's Board of Trustees.

The **Advancement section** speaks directly to the organization. In this section, the team provides consultation and observations focused on future improvement, on topics requested by the organization, on topics raised in the Assurance section, or on topics identified by the team.

The relationship between the two sections of the report is key. The Assurance section presents the team's evaluation, providing the record of the visit, the evidence, and the rationale for the accrediting relationship. In addition, the Assurance section introduces topics of consultation that might be addressed in the Advancement section. The Advancement section provides the organization with the team's observations and consultation on the accreditation issues that were raised in the Assurance section, on areas deserving or requiring organizational attention raised in the Assurance section, on areas of accomplishment, and on other areas as defined by either the team or the organization.

Report Writing Responsibilities

All team members should contribute to the writing of the team report. An effective team report is meaningful to the organization, provides cogent information for accreditation decisions, and accurately reflects the outcomes of peer evaluation and consultation. Therefore, all team members should

- Understand the nature of the team report, its different sections, its audiences, and its purposes
- Provide substantive, useful information for the report
- Complete assigned portions by the deadlines
- Read the draft report with care, and provide the team chair with edits and corrections

The team report should accurately reflect the consensus views of the team, should include all major points made in the oral report at the exit session, and should convey the rationale for each aspect of the team's recommendation. If the team does not reach consensus on its recommendation, the team chair should contact the staff liaison to discuss the next steps.

Timeline

In many instances, portions directly related to the accreditation relationship (such as the Assurance section of the comprehensive visit team report) may be completed by the end of the visit. A team chair may request that an outline of any consulting information for the Advancement section be provided by the end of the visit. Team members should plan to submit their contributions to the report within one week following the visit, which should allow adequate time for reflection about consultative portions of the report.

The primary responsibility for compiling a final cohesive and cogent report rests with the team chair. The team chair is also responsible for (1) ensuring that team members and the staff liaison have opportunities to review drafts of all parts of the team report, (2) sending a draft report to the organization for correction of errors of fact, and (3) submitting the final report to the Commission within the required deadlines.

Appendix A specifies the timeline for submitting reports.

Appendix B includes style guidelines.

Appendix C has information on writing evidence-based evaluative statements.

Appendix D provides examples of the cover and contents pages.

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Writing the Assurance Section

The content of the Assurance section relates directly to accreditation issues.

Part I: Context and Nature of Visit

The statements in this first part of the team report should be concise and descriptive. They provide the context for understanding the visit and the team's recommendations.

A. Purpose of Visit

Write a single sentence that confirms the scope of the evaluation visit as stated in the last official action of the Commission and as specified on the Evaluation Summary Sheet (ESS). Be sure to reference any change request, if such a request is a part of the comprehensive visit. You will also identify the change request under section C, below.

B. Organizational Context

Provide one or two paragraphs that capture the recent past and current dynamics in which the organization has been operating, as well as any key activity since the last evaluation visit. This section should present an overview or profile of the organization, the salient points of its current operation, and other factors that set the context for the visit, such as student demographics, organizational history, and governance. This section should not present the accreditation history of the organization except for recent events and/or issues that affect the current visit.

C. Unique Aspects of Visit

Describe distinctive aspects about the visit that are related to accreditation. Add-ons and variations from a typical or standard comprehensive visit may include customized visits, change requests, reviews of degree-completion programs, interregional visits, virtual visits, and chair visits.

D. Sites or Branch Campuses Visited

List the sites that were visited. If applicable, explain why these sites were selected.

E. Distance Education Reviewed

Indicate the scope, number, and type of programs offered through distance education, including all modalities. You should include any evaluation of distance education under the appropriate Criteria in Part IV of the team report.

F. Interactions with Constituencies

Provide a numbered list of the groups and individuals met with and/or interviewed during the team visit. List all formal meetings by title of group, role, or position; do not use individual names. Estimate the approximate number in each group.

G. Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed

Provide a numbered list of the principal documents, Web resources, and other materials reviewed that directly support the team's evaluation and recommendation on continued accreditation.

Part II: Commitment to Peer Review

A. Comprehensiveness of the Self-Study Process

In a paragraph, briefly evaluate the comprehensiveness, breadth, and scope of the organization's self-study process. Discuss the process based on the "Hallmarks of an Effective Self-Study Process" (*Handbook of Accreditation,* Third Edition, 5.2), which have been designed to promote an honest evaluation and to involve the whole organization in the appraisal.

B. Integrity of the Self-Study Report

In one or two paragraphs, briefly evaluate the effectiveness of the self-study report in terms of its accuracy, validity, and credibility; its value to the organization in supporting continued improvement; and its usefulness in providing evidence to demonstrate fulfillment of the Criteria and Core Components.

C. Adequacy of Progress in Addressing Previously Identified Challenges

In evaluating the organization's commitment to peer review, take into account the quality of attention given to challenges identified by previous evaluation teams. In this section, evaluate the organization's efforts to address challenges previously identified by an evaluation team and to complete any monitoring, contingency, and progress reports required by the previous team or by the Commission staff.

The organization addresses a previously identified challenge in one of several ways: it may have resolved the challenge; it may be currently working on the challenge; or it may have determined that the challenge is no longer relevant. The team members should agree on the organization's progress in addressing the challenge(s), then select and insert into the report one of the following two statements.

> **Statement One**: The team considers the response of the organization to previously identified challenges to be adequate.
>
> **Statement Two**: The team considers the response of the organization to previously identified challenges to be inadequate.

If you insert Statement Two, also indicate which challenges have been inadequately addressed, and include a reference to the Criterion or Criteria where the challenges will be explained.

Do not state your team's evaluation of the challenges here. Instead, include it in Part IV of the report.

D. Notification of Evaluation Visit and Solicitation of Third-Party Comment

After verifying that third-party comment was solicited (see *Handbook of Accreditation,* Third Edition, 5.4-5) and that the appropriate notification of the evaluation visit was made, insert one of the following statements into this section of the report.

> **Statement One**: Requirements were fulfilled.
>
> **Statement Two**: Requirements were not fulfilled.

Comments are optional and may be added beneath the statement.

If you identify serious areas of concern in the third-party comment relevant to the organization's ability to meet the Commission's standards, contact the Commission staff liaison.

Part III: Compliance with Federal Requirements

After reviewing the organization's responses to the federal compliance areas and student complaint information, include this statement.

The team reviewed the required Title IV compliance areas and the student complaint information.

Refer to the *Handbook of Accreditation,* Third Edition, 8.2, and to the Commission Web site for additional information. Comments are optional and may be included beneath the statement.

Part IV: Fulfillment of the Criteria

The evidence-based evaluative statements that you write for this section provide the judgment of the team and document the evidence on which it was based (see Appendix C, "Writing Effective Evidence-Based Evaluative Statements"). The statements should be based on the team's review of the organization's evidence for the Core Components and should provide the rationale for the team's recommendation(s) (including the organization's change request, if applicable). Within each Criterion, four categories of salient evidence may be documented.

1. **Evidence that the Core Components are met.** In this category, provide evidence-based evaluative statements that clearly and definitively show fulfillment of the Core Components.

2. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention.** In this category, provide evidence-based evaluative statements that identify the Core Components that need organizational attention. The next comprehensive evaluation team will review the organization's progress in addressing these areas as part of their evaluation of commitment to peer review and organizational improvement.

3. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.** In this category, provide evidence-based evaluative statements that identify concerns specifically related to each Core Component that your team has concluded requires interim Commission follow-up (progress report, monitoring report, focused visit, contingency report, scheduling of the next comprehensive visit). Identify the Core Component(s) to which you are referring.

4. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)** Team judgment is critical in agreeing that a Core Component has not been met. If your team agrees that a Core Component has not been met, this may lead to a recommendation for sanction or adverse action. If this is the case, the team chair should discuss the situation with the staff liaison.

Please include the headings for all four categories in your team report. Insert *None* under headings for which you do not have evidence-based evaluative statements. Under the relevant Criterion statement(s) and under headings 1, 2, and/or 3, you should also provide statements to explain your recommendation regarding a change request, if applicable.

Recommendation of the Team

In reviewing the evidence for the Core Components and the Criterion, your team should arrive at consensus on whether the organization has demonstrated its fulfillment of the Core Components and, thus, the Criterion. Once you agree on fulfillment of the Core Components, the Criterion, and on the substantiating evidence, insert one of the following three statements as the Recommendation of the Team.

Statement One: Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

Insert Statement One if the team concurs that the evidence demonstrates fulfillment of the Core Components and the Criterion (either with strong examples of evidence or with examples that need organizational attention) and if you are not recommending any form of interim Commission follow-up for this Criterion.

Statement Two: Criterion is met; Commission follow-up recommended.

Insert Statement Two if you included evidence-based evaluative statements under heading 3, "Evidence that demonstrates that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up." Then list the type, focus, and due date of that follow-up using this format.

Progress report on assessment of student learning 11/01/2008

Do not explain the follow-up requirements or provide the rationale statement here. These will be included in Part V.

Statement Three: Evidence warrants Commission sanction or adverse action.

Insert Statement Three if you have concluded that the evidence does not demonstrate sufficient fulfillment of the Core Components and the Criterion.

If you are considering Statement Three, the team chair should discuss this recommendation with the staff liaison. In selecting Statement Three, be sure to identify the type of sanction *(*probation, on notice*)* or adverse action (denial or withdrawal of status*)* you are recommending. Follow the format below for listing your recommendation.

The team recommends ____________________.

Do not provide the rationale and expectations for the recommendation here. These will be included in Part V.

Part V: Statement of Affiliation Status

In this part of the report, the team makes its recommendations regarding the accreditation relationship with the Commission and supports the recommendations with succinct rationale statements that explain any changes or Commission follow-up being recommended.

A. Affiliation Status

The affiliation status of the organization is candidate, initial accreditation, accredited, sanction, or adverse action. If no change in affiliation status is recommended, insert No change. If your team recommends a sanction (on notice, probation) or adverse action (denial or withdrawal of accreditation) contact the Commission staff liaison to discuss the rationale for the recommendation and to review Commission policies and procedures that relate to the recommendation being considered. Complete section D below.

B. Nature of Organization

Report any change(s) your team recommends in the legal status or in the level of degrees awarded. Support each change with a rationale statement. Using the current Statement of Affiliation Status (SAS) as a guide, follow this format.

1. **Legal status.** If your team is recommending a change in status *(*public, private for-profit, or private not-for-profit), state the change and write a rationale for the recommendation. If you are recommending a sanction (on notice or probation) or an adverse action *(*denial or withdrawal of status*)*, contact the Commission staff liaison to discuss the rationale for the recommendation and to review applicable Commission policies and procedures. Do not provide your rationale for a sanction or adverse action in this section. You will provide it in Section D on "Commission Sanction or Adverse Action," below. If no change in legal status is being recommended, insert *No change*.

2. **Degrees awarded.** If your team is recommending a change in degree level, identify the change and write a one- or two-paragraph rationale for it. Make sure you have included evidence-based evaluative statements supporting your recommendation in the appropriate Criterion in Part IV. If there is no change in the level of degrees awarded, insert *No change*.

C. Conditions of Affiliation

Report the specific conditions of the organization's affiliation status, including stipulations on the relationship, permission (or lack thereof) for off-campus expansion, initiation of distributed learning endeavors, and any recommended follow-up. Make sure you have included evidence-based evaluative statements supporting your recommendation in the appropriate Criterion in Part IV. In Section 6, your team will summarize its recommendation and rationale on the organizational change request(s) addressed during the visit.

1. **Stipulation on affiliation status.** State any addition, deletion, or modification to the organization's existing affiliation status.

   - If your team recommends limiting accreditation to specific programs and/or degrees, state the limitation and the rationale for the recommendation.

   - If your team recommends limiting accreditation to specific sites (including, if appropriate, programs at specific sites), state the limitation and the rationale for the recommendation.

   - If your team recommends deleting the existing stipulation on affiliation, insert *None* and state the rationale for the recommendation.

   - If your team recommends making no change in the existing stipulation on affiliation status, insert *No change.*

2. **Approval of degree sites.** State any additions, deletions, or modifications to the organization's existing degree site approvals.

   - If your team recommends giving the organization approval to open degree sites and/or offer site-specific programs without prior Commission approval, insert *No prior Commission approval required* and state the rationale for the recommendation.

   - If your team recommends that the organization seek Commission approval to open degree sites and/or offer site-specific programs, insert *Prior Commission approval required* and state the rationale for the recommendation.

   - If your team recommends giving the organization approval to open specific degree sites, offer site-specific programs, and/or initiate programs or sites in a specific geographical range without prior approval, insert *No prior Commission approval required for* [specific sites, programs, geographical area] and state the rationale for the recommendation.

   - If your team recommends no change in the existing requirements on degree sites, insert *No change.*

3. **Approval of distance education degree.** State any additions, deletions, or modifications to the organization's existing distributed learning approvals.

   - If your team recommends approving the organization to offer its degree programs by distance delivery without prior Commission approval, insert *No prior Commission approval required* and state the rationale for the recommendation.

   - If your team recommends that the organization seek Commission approval to offer its degree programs by distance delivery, insert *Prior Commission approval required* and state the rationale for the recommendation.

   - If your team recommends approving the organization to offer specific programs by distance delivery without prior approval, insert *Prior Commission approval required to offer distance education programs other than* [programs] and state the rationale for the recommendation.

   - If your team recommends no change in the existing wording on distance education degree programs, insert *No change*.

4. **Reports required.** Refer to the *Handbook of Accreditation,* Third Edition, 7.1-1, to determine the appropriate choice of Commission follow-up: progress report, monitoring report, or contingency report. Follow the format below. If you do not recommend any reports, insert *None.*

   Progress Report
   Topic(s) and Due Date (month-date-year)
   Rationale and Expectations

   Monitoring Report
   Topic(s) and Due Date (month-date-year)
   Rationale and Expectations
   Conditions (if . . . then)

   Contingency Report
   Topic(s)
   Rationale and Expectations

5. **Other visits scheduled.** Refer to the *Handbook of Accreditation,* Third Edition, 7.1-2, for visit information. Follow this format.

   Type of Visit
   Topic(s) and Timing (academic year - xxxx-xxxx)
   Rationale and Expectations

6. **Organizational change request.** State the team's recommendation and rationale for any change request(s) addressed during the visit. (See *Handbook of Accreditation,* Third Edition, 7.2-3, for more information.)

D. Commission Sanction or Adverse Action

Include this section in your report only if you are recommending a sanction or adverse action.

Sanctions and adverse actions are used only in exceptional circumstances. If you are recommending a sanction (on notice, probation) or an adverse action (denial or withdrawal of status), follow this procedure.

- Refer to the *Handbook of Accreditation,* Third Edition, 7.3-2, and to Commission policy I.B.4 at http://www.ncahlc.org/resources/policies.

- Contact the Commission staff liaison to discuss the rationale for the recommendation and to review related Commission policies and procedures.

- Identify the sanction or adverse action and provide a rationale. Follow this format.

  On Notice
  Due Date for the Report
  Rationale and Expectations
  Areas That Must Be Addressed

  Probation
  Next Evaluation Visit
  Rationale
  Requirements for Removal of Probation

  Denial or Withdrawal of Status
  Rationale

E. Summary of Commission Review

If your team recommends continued accreditation, indicate the academic year proposed for the next comprehensive visit and provide the rationale statement for this recommendation. Follow this format.

Timing for next comprehensive visit (academic year - xxxx-xxxx)
Rationale for the recommendation:

Part VI: Additional Comments and Explanations

This part is optional. Use it if your team believes that the succinct reporting has limited its opportunity to explain an issue fully. Discussion of any such item should be limited to one or two paragraphs.

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Writing the Advancement Section

The Advancement section is written in the format and style that best serves the purposes of your team and the organization. This section includes two or three parts.

Part I: Overall Observations about the Organization

In this part, the team has the opportunity to comment holistically on the overall context, environment, capacities, and general operation of the organization in light of its mission, vision, purposes, and priorities. Comments are intended to be broad, to capture crosscutting patterns, to set the organization within a larger picture, and to link the present work of the organization with its past and its future. This summation and rationale may include strong points, risks, threats and opportunities, recurrent themes, and common patterns.

Part II: Consultations of the Team

The format of this part is determined by the content of the consultation. The consultation may cover areas identified by the organization, build upon topics raised in the Assurance section, or provide broad commentary on areas related to the Criteria, the Core Components, or the core values of higher learning as reflected in the organization's mission and vision.
New accreditation issues that require organizational attention or Commission monitoring should not be introduced in this section.

This section has no prescribed format or length. Instead, team members should share their own expertise and observations, providing an external perspective intended to assist the organization in its continued improvement.

- Provide observations and consultations within the context of the organization's mission, vision, purposes, and goals. Choices of accomplishments, consultations, and observations should be made based on what would be of most benefit to the organization's continued improvement.
- Draw on the expertise of team members when determining the areas in which to provide consultation, recognition, and observations.
- Maintain an objective, nonprescriptive style. Consultation, recognition, and observations should be objective, not prescriptive or narrow in approach.

Part III: Recognition of Significant Accomplishments, Progress, and/or Practices

Part III is optional and is not required in all reports.

In this part of the Advancement section, your team has the opportunity to note any accomplishments of the organization that are worthy of recognition by the organization and its community and/or worthy of recognition and learning by other organizations.

This part is not meant to be a list of strengths, but rather a summary of actual accomplishments or truly innovative practices from which other organizations and the Commission might learn for the broader improvement of higher learning organizations.

Appendix A

Timeline for Submitting Reports

Staff Liaison and Team Chair Partnership

The Team Chair should send the draft team report to the assigned staff liaison for comment and feedback before sending it to the organizational representative for corrections of errors of fact. Should the draft report reflect the team's misinterpretation of Commission policy or practice, consideration should be given to modifying the report as appropriate. If a change is made in the report under these circumstances, or if a change is made in the report because of clarifying information provided by the institution, the team chair will confer with team members before sending the final report to the Commission.

The timeline below outlines the schedule and responsibilities for writing, revising, and submitting the drafts of team reports.

- **On-Site or within One Week after Visit**

  Team members send final contributions for the report to the team chair within one week of the visit. (Team chair may require some submissions on-site.)

- **Four Weeks after Visit**

  Team chair completes first draft of the team report and e-mails it to team members and the Commission staff liaison.

  Note: When sending an e-version of the draft report to the staff liaison, include the following in the subject line: Team Report, [organization's short name], [staff liaison's last name]. For example: Draft Team Report, Dewey U., Breslin. The formula for staff email addresses is first initial+last name@hlcommission.org. For example: mbreslin@hlcommission.org.

- **Five Weeks after Visit**

  The Commission staff liaison contacts the team chair to discuss the team report.

  Team members e-mail comments about the team report to the team chair.

- **Six Weeks after Visit**

  Team chair completes revised draft of the full team report and sends a hard copy to the chief executive officer of the organization. A cover letter states the two-week deadline for submitting corrections of errors of fact. If comments from the chief executive officer suggest substantive changes in the draft, the team chair may need to confer with the staff liaison and team members before preparing the final report.

- **Eight Weeks after Visit**

  Chief executive officer of the organization sends corrections of errors of fact to the team chair.

- **Nine Weeks after Visit**

  Team chair makes final corrections and sends e-version of full team report, to the Commission at finalreport@hlcommission.org. (Note: this is a <u>different</u> email address from the one used for the draft report.) The Commission will send the team report to the organization and to all team members.

  Note: When sending an e-version of the final report to the Commission, include the following in the subject line: Final Report, [organization's short name], [staff liaison name]. For example: Final Report, Dewey U., Breslin.

Appendix B

Style Guidelines for the Team Report

Both sections of the team report should follow these style guidelines.

- Use Microsoft Word or a compatible word-processing program.
- Use 12-point type. Do not use boldfaced type in the report except for major headings, as illustrated in the sample report.
- On the Contents and subsequent pages, include a header that identifies the report section, the organization's name, and the visit number.
- On each page that contains a header, include a footer that indicates the page number and submission date.
- Single-space within paragraphs and evidence-based evaluative statements.
- Double-space between paragraphs, bullets, and evidence-based evaluative statements.
- Do not indent the first line of a paragraph, bullet, or evidence-based evaluative statement.
- Right and left justify the type, so that type forms a straight line next to the margins.
- Identify evidence-based evaluative statements by letter and evidence-based evaluative substatements by number.
- Include cover pages for both sections of the report, as illustrated in Appendix D.
- Delete all bracketed instructions in the report templates.

Note: The visit number is composed of the following:

- The year of the visit
- The visit code (use CE for continued accreditation, F for focused visit)
- The identification number (found in the upper left corner of the ESS)

A sample visit number would look like this: 04CE1879

Appendix C

Writing Effective Evidence-Based Evaluative Statements

The Assurance section presents a clear, cogent argument for the Commission decision-making groups and provides feedback to the organization. Statements written for this section are effective when they are evidence-based and evaluative, when they substantiate the team's conclusions and recommendations, and when they directly relate to Core Components and Criteria.

You can evaluate the quality of statements and overall writing of this section by asking questions such as these.

- Do the statements provide a succinct, cogent argument that is consistent with the recommendation and rationale for continued accreditation?
- Are the statements focused, useful, and relevant to the organization's mission, context, and future action for improvement?
- Are the statements aligned with accreditation Criteria and their Core Components?
- Are the statements evidence-based and evaluative, written with an effective balance of content and supporting detail?
- Are the statements objective, based on sound judgment, and reflective of current good practice (rather than prescriptive, based on subjective feeling, and extraneous)?

Effectively written statements should be straightforward and relevant to the Criteria and Core Components, primarily address one area, be expressed in three or four sentences, and contain content that is self-explanatory.

Weak statement (judgment without evidence or context)

The organization has a sound plan for assessment; however, recent cutbacks have occurred in the office responsible for assessment.

The result? Therefore? The comment is not self-explanatory, nor is the reason for its statement self-evident. Multiple interpretations are possible.

Improved statement (judgment and evidence)

The organization's 1999–2002 assessment program plan is comprehensive, realistic, and reflective of good practice. Recent cutbacks in the office of assessment, however, indicate it may not have the support necessary for implementation.

Improved, but multiple 'so what?' interpretations are possible.

Cogent statement (judgment, context, and evidence)

Documents, formal meetings, and interviews confirm that the organization has a strong commitment to student learning. Faculty administration and staff speak the language of assessment. Conversations focus on classroom and program learning and on the use of assessment results to make curricular and pedagogical changes to improve student learning.

In creating evidence-based evaluative statements for each Criterion

- Write evidence-based evaluative statements in one or more categories of evidence that are salient and relevant to that category and to the Criterion and Core Component(s).
- Include only evidence-based evaluative statements that deal with the accreditation issues directly related to the Criteria and Core Components, that are relevant and important to the organization, and that support the team's evaluation and judgment.
- Limit the number of evidence-based evaluative statements in each category of evidence. A Criterion may require only three or four evidence-based evaluative statements for substantiation, while another many require more. It is good practice not to exceed twelve statements in support of a Criterion. Each Criterion must have evidence-based evaluative statements, but not every Criterion needs to have evidence-based evaluative statements in all three categories of evidence.
- Use letters (a, b, c) to identify each evidence-based evaluative statement within a category of evidence. Identify any substatements by bullet or by number.
- Include evidence-based evaluative statements addressing an organizational change request as a part of the appropriate Criterion in Part IV. The summary, recommendation, and rationale for the change should be included in Part V.
- Include in the discussion of the Criterion an evidence-based evaluative statement on any inadequately addressed challenges you identified in Part II. Before deciding whether Commission follow-up is required on an inadequately addressed challenge, your team should judge whether the organization is responding to the challenge in good faith, if the challenge is beyond the control of the organization to resolve, or if other factors are affecting the organization’s ability to address the challenge. Evidence-based evaluative statements on inadequately resolved challenges should be stated under either (2) “Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention” or (3) “Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.”
- Avoid descriptive narratives or other elaboration. See strategies for writing evidence-based evaluative statements and what constitutes well-written statements on the following pages.

Criteria for Effective Evidence-Based Evaluative Statements

Content Criteria

- Use a single, complete thought to clearly specify the evidence. Balance content and detail.
- Address issues directly related to the Criteria, and do not go beyond this scope.
- Provide information relevant to the organization’s mission, context, and priorities.
- Provide information relevant and useful to organizational improvement or to enhancing or reinforcing organizational strengths and accomplishments.
- Draw linkages between patterns of evidence, the Criterion, the organization’s mission and context, and the self-evaluation in the organization’s self-study.
- Do not contradict other statements found elsewhere in the Assurance or Advancement section.
- Clarify and support the recommendation for the accreditation relationship.
- Be nonprescriptive, and do not base statements on subjective feelings—either in praise or criticism. Evidence-based evaluative content should be based on objective observations and sound rationale.
- Focus on actual accomplishments, impact, or results rather than on activities. Provide a succinct evaluation, not description.

- Evaluate crosscutting patterns of evidence instead of individual or isolated characteristics, events, resources, processes, or outcomes.

Language and Tone

- Use a polite, professional, and positive tone.
- Use consistent language in referring to the organization, its staff and stakeholders, its departments, divisions, programs, and so on.
- Use terminology aligned with the *Handbook of Accreditation,* Third Edition.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms, except when previously defined.
- Use present tense and active voice whenever possible.
- Provide a judgment and summary evidence to support the judgment.
- Take a three-sentence approach: context/background, evidence, judgment.

Sample Evidence-Based Evaluative Statements

The university demonstrates that it utilizes decision-making processes that are appropriate to its stated mission, vision, and values. Based on many interviews and interactions with community stakeholders, the team verifies that the organization's constituencies understand the mission, vision, values, and stated purposes of the organization.

The enrollment management section is aggressively seeking ways to improve student retention and to identify new student markets. Although this approach has potential for the future, there appears to be a critical need to analyze enrollment data and the motivating forces that lead to persistence and attrition decisions when employing intervention strategies.

Though the college has made progress in assessment since beginning the self-study process, its newly created assessment program is still in its infancy and still in development. The assessment program has generated very little data on the extent to which students are achieving the stated course- and program-level goals. As a result, the college cannot yet document what changes in curriculum, methods of instruction, academic services, and academic resources have occurred as a result of the assessment of student learning.

Our reviews of the documents and interviews with faculty and administration indicate the lack of a clearly defined statement of philosophy regarding general education requirements as agreed upon by the faculty. In addition, we found no identification and articulation of expected competencies to be attained by students within each area, no method of assessment and measurement of those areas of importance, few stated career program outcomes, and no current process for including the results in instructional improvement and the organization’s annual budgeting.

The organization has made deliberate, thoughtful, and often successful attempts to reallocate faculty positions to growing programs. Such efforts give evidence of the organization's ability to plan and to improve its academic programs.

Policies and practices for dispute resolution, equitable treatment, and nondiscrimination are in place and are being followed. The team's interaction with students of various ages, interests, and cultural backgrounds indicates that the campus environment is socially healthy.

Appendix D

Sample Cover Pages and Tables of Contents

A. Assurance Section

Title Page

ASSURANCE SECTION

REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE VISIT

TO

JOHN DEWEY COLLEGE
Chicago, Illinois

January 28–30, 2005

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

William Gibbs, Professor of Physics, Oppenheimer University, Los Alamos NM 87105

Elizabeth Peabody, President, Curtis College, Madison WI 53703

Charles Pierce, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Fitzgerald College, St. Paul MN 55422

Emma Willard, Dean of the College of Education, Hutchins University, Aspen CO 80303 (Chairperson)

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REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE VISIT

TO

JOHN DEWEY COLLEGE
Chicago, Illinois

January 28 –30, 2003

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

William Gibbs, Professor of Physica, Oppenheimer University, Los Alamos NM 87105

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