Redesigning WASC for 2012-2020

Presentation for the WICHE Commission, May 2011
Reasons for this Redesign

- Commitment to the region when the 2001 Handbook was adopted
- Follow-up to the 2006-07 External Review
- USDE requirement for periodic comprehensive review of the Standards
- Challenges to the effectiveness of accreditation
Changes in Higher Education requiring New Approaches to Accreditation

- Low graduation rates
- High student debt/high default rates
- Difficulty in transferring credit
- Dissatisfaction with quality of undergraduate education/low levels of learning
- Rapid growth of online education
- Practices of the for-profit industry
- Increased federal regulation
... More Changes in Higher Education

- Changing demographics, including older, working, more diverse students
- Swirl: majority of students attend more than one institution
- Open source and DIYer’s
- Growth of online programs/institutions
- Growth of the for-profit sector
- Shrinking support for publics and trend to privatize public universities
Perceptions about Accreditation

- Lack of oversight of the for-profit sector
- Emphasis on process, not results
- Inadequate attention to graduation rates and student learning outcomes
- "Pass-fail" nature of accreditation
- Lack of transparency about process and results
- Cost and labor-intensiveness of accreditation
- Long terms of accreditation
The Changing Roles of Accreditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Functions of Accreditation</th>
<th>Compliance Centered</th>
<th>Improvement Centered</th>
<th>Accountability Centered</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope of Review</strong></td>
<td>All standards applied to assure compliance</td>
<td>Key areas selected and approved by accreditor for improvement</td>
<td>Specific areas identified as part of all reviews to address common policy issues – e.g., retention/graduation rates, student learning outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Judgment</strong></td>
<td>Must demonstrate standards are met at least at minimum level</td>
<td>Simplified compliance review and primary emphasis on recommended improvements</td>
<td>External reference points reviewed and evaluated – by comparative indicators of institutional type</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Public Reporting</strong></td>
<td>Public announcement of grant of accreditation</td>
<td>Reports internally circulated for improvement; accrediting action publicly reported</td>
<td>Meaningful and clear public information about institutional performance and commission actions reported</td>
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Changes within the WASC Region

- 163 now accredited/candidates
- 24 institutions in eligibility
- Growth in national footprint and for-profit institutions
- Possible growth in community college baccalaureate degrees
- International institutions seeking WASC accreditation
- Growth in online offerings
Guiding Principles of the Redesign

- Student-centeredness
- Accountability and quality assurance
- Transparency of the process and results
- Efficiency in the process
- Heightened attention to learning and completion results
- New modes of oversight of for-profits
- Respect for institutional diversity and mission
- Support for innovation
Major Topics for Handbook Development

- Retention and graduation
- Levels of learning
- Degree qualifications profile
- Public reporting and transparency
- Changing ecology of learning
- Institutional review process
Retention/Graduation

- A WASC emphasis since 2008

- Creating a common template with overall and disaggregated data

- Establishing groups of comparable institutions in order to set target rates/timelines and share good practices
Degree Qualifications Profile/
Levels of Learning

- Considering how to integrate the DQP into WASC standards/policies
- Establishing core UG competencies and identifying methods for measuring student learning/external benchmarking
- Creating learning communities of institutions using the same methods of assessment
- Establishing level of achievement that is “good enough”
Public Reporting and Transparency

- Making explicit the information on student achievement that institutions must publish
- Making WASC more transparent by publishing Commission action letters
- Developing a more effective communications strategy so that accreditation is not so opaque
- Considering a publicly available key-indicator rating system
- Adding “public” members/students to the review processes
Changing Ecology of Learning

- Considering several “bundles” of change and how to address them in the Handbook
  - E.g., characteristics of learners, new delivery systems, globalization, new players and kinds of affiliations, outsourcing, open source
- Considering a research and development function for WASC
- Developing a pathway for institutions to innovate/pilot
Task Force on For-Profit Education

- Developing new expertise and new ways to evaluate:
  - Governance structures
  - Financial data
  - Recruitment and student services practices
  - Faculty models
Institutional Review Process Redesign

- Assure that progress to date is sustained
- Shorten the five-year three-stage process without reducing rigor
- Use of off-site reviews, existing data, and technology
- Allow adaptability graduated to the strengths of the institution
- Do regular off-site monitoring
- Create teams of evaluator “specialists”