WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES
ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SENIOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

Replacement for the Institutional Proposal Section of the 2001 Handbook*

* These changes are to pages 37 – 40 of the 2001 Handbook of Accreditation. Graphical inserts from the original text have been removed and will be revised upon approval of the content. They were approved by the Commission for at its February 2004 meeting, and will be incorporated in a reprinting of the Handbook in summer 2004.
Stage 1. The Institutional Proposal

**Purposes:** The Institutional Proposal is the first stage in the accreditation review cycle and guides the entire accreditation review process. It establishes a framework for connecting each institution’s context and priorities for accreditation review with the Standards of Accreditation. Once accepted, the Proposal serves as the primary basis for both institutional self-review and team evaluation, and is given to each evaluation team and the Commission as the basis upon which the evaluation of the institution should occur.

The Proposal plays a key role in the accreditation process, by enabling the institution to:

1. Establish the context for its accreditation review cycle;
2. Define specific goals and outcomes for the accreditation review (see outcomes identified by the Commission for the review process on p. 36);
3. Identify key issues of Institutional Capacity to be addressed in the Preparatory Review;
4. Develop strategies for assessing and improving student and organizational learning in the Educational Effectiveness Review;
5. Conduct a preliminary evaluation of itself under the Standards of Accreditation;
6. Evaluate the effectiveness of its data gathering and analysis systems; and
7. Develop for each review a framework for a Portfolio of evidence and exhibits that can serve the institution beyond the review process.

**Timing:** The Proposal is submitted two-and-a-half years prior to the Preparatory Review in order to be finalized two years prior to the Preparatory Review. The date of its submission is set by the Commission.

**Format and Required Elements:** The Proposal represents a plan of work for the entire multi-stage accreditation review cycle. As a result, considerable thought needs to be given by each institution to what it intends to accomplish through the accreditation review process, and how different institutional constituencies will be engaged in developing, approving and implementing the Proposal and in later phases of effort. The Proposal has several key characteristics: it represents an institutional research/inquiry design, a formal plan of action for each stage of review, and a framework for addressing the Standards of the *Handbook of Accreditation*. All institutional Proposals are to include the following elements:

1. **Institutional Context Statement.** This key section of the Proposal lays the foundation for why a particular set of issues and approaches is being proposed by the institution for its accreditation review. Drawing upon institutional data, this section should briefly describe the institution’s background, strengths and challenges, and current state of the institution’s approaches to identifying and assessing student learning outcomes across the institution. In addition, the institution should identify how the Proposal is related to issues emerging from its preliminary self-evaluation under the Standards of Accreditation, as well as how it is responding to issues raised by the most recent Commission action letter and,
where relevant, issues identified by the Substantive Change or Interim Report Committees.

2. **Description of Outcomes.** The institution should describe the plan of work to be undertaken in each stage of review and identify specific, concrete outcomes that will result from the plan of work. These outcomes should be consistent with those identified by the Commission for the accreditation review process on page 36. The institution’s outcomes for the review process should be more than a statement of activities or identification of emphases for review. The institution is expected to identify clear and verifiable outcomes for each stage and from the entire review process.

3. **Constituency Involvement.** It is expected that key institutional leaders, especially the chief executive officer, the chief academic officer, and faculty leadership, will be significantly involved in the design and implementation of the Proposal and are demonstrably committed to its success. This section should indicate how these leaders and other representatives of the institution’s constituencies were involved in the development and internal approval of the Proposal and the processes by which they will be involved subsequently in the implementation of the Proposal.

4. **Approach for the Preparatory Review.** This section should describe how the institution intends to address the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity. Flowing from the institution’s stated outcomes for this stage of the Review, this section should explain the approach the institution intends to use to conduct its self-review under the Standards of Accreditation (including, as appropriate, the Criteria for Review and Guidelines), and identify any special issues or areas of emphasis with respect to Institutional Capacity.

5. **Approach for the Educational Effectiveness Review.** This section should describe how the institution intends to address the Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness. Flowing from the institution’s stated outcomes for this stage of review, the institution should describe and explain why it has proposed a particular approach to engage issues of Educational Effectiveness, including how it will address student and organizational learning. This section should also identify any areas of emphasis arising from the institution’s preliminary self-review under Commission Standards (including, as appropriate, the Criteria for Review and Guidelines), and the specific research/inquiry methods to be used to engage these issues. This section should include how the institution will review and evaluate actual student work and learning results and other key indicators that will be used to support its Educational Effectiveness Review. Areas where institutional systems of quality assurance are to be reviewed and improved (e.g., program review processes, capstone courses, portfolio reviews) should also be identified and incorporated into the Proposal. The prescribed inventory on Educational Effectiveness is to be included (see #8, below).

6. **Workplan and Milestones.** Either in this section or as part of the sections above, the Proposal should indicate for each stage how the work will be conducted, the organizational structures and processes to be used, and the key evidentiary indicators and exhibits that are likely to be included in the Institutional Presentation. Milestones and a statement of what will be accomplished by the time of the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews should be provided.

7. **Effectiveness of Data Gathering and Analysis Systems.** This section should review the effectiveness of the institution’s data gathering and analysis systems and how they will be used, and as necessary, improved, to support internal institutional dialogue and a “culture of evidence.”
8. **Proposal Data Tables.** Include the prescribed set of Data Exhibits for the Proposal, available on the WASC website (www.wascweb.org/seni or/Data-Exhibits.pdf) for downloading. All data should be presented in the form of five-year historical trends.

9. **Off-Campus and Distance Education Degree Programs.** List all degree programs where 50 percent or more of the program is offered off-site (more than 25 miles from the home campus) or by distance learning. Describe how evaluation of these programs will be incorporated into the review process.

10. **Institutional Stipulations.** Provide an Institutional Stipulation Statement signed by the Chief Executive Officer that establishes:

   a. That the institution is using the review process to demonstrate its fulfillment of the two Core Commitments, that it will engage in the process with seriousness and candor, that data presented are accurate and that the Institutional Presentation will fairly present the institution.

   b. That the institution has published and publicly available policies in force as identified by the Commission (See Appendix 1, p. 126). Such policies will be available for review on request throughout the period of accreditation. Special attention will be paid to the institution’s policies and recordkeeping regarding complaints and appeals.

   b. That the institution will abide by procedures adopted by the Commission to meet United States Department of Education (USDE) procedural requirements (See Section VI).

   d. That the institution will submit all regularly required data, and any data specifically requested by the Commission during the period of Accreditation (or Candidacy).

   e. That the institution has reviewed its off-campus programs and distance education degree programs to ensure that they have been approved as required by the WASC Substantive Change process.

**Length of Proposal.** Exclusive of Data Exhibits and Stipulations, the Institutional Proposal should not exceed fifteen (15) pages in length.

**Proposal Review Process:** Following submission, the Institutional Proposal is reviewed by a panel of the Proposal Review Committee (PRC), a peer review committee comprised of institutional and Commission representatives. The PRC is authorized to accept proposals that it believes will result in a review that can effectively demonstrate that an institution fulfills the two Core Commitments required for accreditation. In cases where the PRC has doubts that the Proposal will result in a review process that is capable of making such a determination, the Committee may request further information from the institution and/or may require revision and re-submission of the Proposal itself. At the conclusion of the review process, Commission staff will inform the institution that its Proposal has been accepted and that it can proceed with the review. The final copy of the Proposal is distributed for use to evaluation teams and the Commission.

**Changes After Acceptance.** Once accepted, the Proposal may be further refined or modified during the accreditation process by mutual consent, or by the Commission following the Preparatory Review. This can occur, for example, once the institution is underway with implementation of the Proposal design, or upon the recommendation of the evaluation team following the Preparatory Review.