Working Draft

Situating WASC Accreditation in the 21st Century: Redesign for 2012 and Beyond
A Web of Values and Concerns
WASC’s Role in an Ecosystem
Working Draft

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Preface

A hallmark of US higher education in the 21st century is the enormous diversity of its institutions and missions, ranging from flagship public universities serving 50,000 or more students, to private, church affiliated academies enrolling fewer than 100. Within this remarkable diversity, however, exists a widespread understanding that across the full reach of its many forms and activities American higher education represents both a public good and a private benefit. This understanding sees higher education both fostering individual development and betterment and serving the larger needs of our society and nation. In particular, higher education has created the conditions and possibilities for improving quality of life, solving problems, and enabling hope, including providing a skilled work force and engaged citizenry. Both are essential to supporting economic prosperity and sustaining American democracy.

Higher education accreditation today has grown out of this shared engagement with both its public and private aspects. Within the American context accreditation is a voluntary activity, undertaken through negotiated understandings between the institutions themselves and government, and engaged in and supported by these institutions through regional associations. Overall, accreditation has been committed to creating and assuring standards of performance and dedicated to the realization that ensuring quality, irrespective of the different purposes of individual institutions, was in itself a contribution to the public good.

Higher education accreditation has changed in form and substance as it has adapted to continuous changes in the nature of American society and its population, the effects of increased global interdependence, and dramatic developments in information and communication technology. Increasingly, higher education accreditation has been charged by its various constituencies—students, families, businesses, higher education institutions themselves, the non-profit sector, and government—to assure the quality of the higher education sector amidst these and many other changes and influences on our landscape. The revision of the WASC process described in this document occurs within the context of these and other factors and the responsibility to ensure processes and outcomes of high clarity and integrity that detail and document how quality is achieved, maintained, and improved.

Students and their success stand at the center of the concerns for higher education accreditation. Today the many processes that make up accreditation seek to establish standards and measurements for quality that assure that the degrees earned by students are achieved in a timely manner and have demonstrable meaning and currency within the society at large, including, but not limited to, the ability of students to experience both meaningful employment within a rapidly changing economy and to achieve viable pathways to civic engagement. Of increasing importance is the ability of higher education institutions in our society to recognize and provide relevant learning for the continuously changing demands of the 21st century. No less than the future health and shape of American society depend in very large measure on our ability to achieve these outcomes.

Perhaps as never before and certainly stimulated by these accelerated levels of change occurring in society, higher education accreditation is being asked to move beyond what has been its primary and focused activities over the past few decades. Elements in the current governmental and economic environment, most especially the fact that the federal government currently has expended and guaranteed over $150 billion in student loan and support monies, have both broadened the quasi-regulatory functions that accreditation has come to play within the higher education sector, and extended its reach even farther into issues such as how students move through the process, their costs of doing so, and the relative success rates that characterize such movement. These concerns, commonly framed as matters of
accountability and transparency in higher education accreditation, have become central to how the overall processes of accreditation are conceived and carried out. The document that follows seeks to continue our decade long work in focusing on student learning and outcomes and speaks clearly and directly to these issues of accountability and transparency in the name of and in pursuit of the values and outcomes detailed above.

The Changing Context for Accreditation

The 2001 WASC Handbook of Accreditation and Standards plus the revised accreditation process put the entire WASC region on a journey towards focusing more heavily on educational effectiveness that increasingly became defined by the region’s commitment to learning outcomes and program review. Enormous progress has been made in those areas during the last decade by all institutions in the region. WASC accreditation has evolved since the last comprehensive Handbook Revision in 2001, and the revision in 2008. The swiftly changing social, economic, environmental, and political landscape has altered the way in which higher education is conceived and delivered. The region is now faced with greatly increased expectations for institutional accountability and consumer protection, as well as demands for improved academic standards and student performance (as measured by graduation rates). Additionally, new fiscal realities have made cost-effectiveness a paramount issue for WASC and its constituent institutions.

A summary of the challenges for both higher education and accreditation includes:

- 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 programs/institutions
- Practices and growth of the for-profit industry
- Shrinking support for publics and a trend to privatize public universities
- Increased federal regulation
- Changing demographics, including older, working, more diverse students
- Swirl: The majority of students attend more than one institution
- Assuring quality around the emergence of open source and Do-It-Yourselves

Coupled with these challenges are the institutional and public perceptions of accreditation, which includes a lack of understanding of what accreditation is and its value; that accreditation does not provide adequate oversight of the for-profit sector; that accreditation emphasizes process, not results; that accreditation shows inadequate attention to graduation rates and the actual proficiencies of graduates; that the nature of accreditation is only a binary “pass-fail”; that accreditation lacks transparency about process and results; that accreditation is cost-, time-, and labor-intensive; and that the terms of accreditation are too long.

Historically, accreditation has focused on compliance with minimum standards and quality improvement. Increasingly, however, accreditation has been called to evaluate institutions against higher standards of quality assurance and to assure that degrees awarded have meaning and value. The following chart summarizes the changing role of accreditation.
Background on the Proposed New Framework

During April 2010, a group of Commissioners gathered together at WASC’s Academic Resource Conference (ARC), “…to consider the kinds of changes that might be needed in WASC’s Standards and review processes in the next Handbook revision.” They revisited the core values that guided the 2001 Handbook revision process and discussed goals for the process. In the summer of 2010, the Commission invited international and national experts in the field of higher education (Peter Ewell, Arthur Levine, Kevin Carey, Pat Hutchings, Brice Harris, Graham Leicester and Maureen O’Hara) to prepare papers on the future of regional accreditation. http://www.wascsenior.org/redesign/conceptpapers

In the fall 2010, the WASC staff created a comprehensive plan for the accreditation redesign process, including the establishment of a widely-representative Steering Committee and Task Forces, whose members represent institutions throughout the region. “Listening Sessions” were launched in October and the Steering Committee met in November 2010 for the first time. At this meeting, the Steering Committee devised a set of goals for the accreditation redesign that was then accepted by the Commission:

1. Shorten and/or focus the institutional review process and create multiple, adaptive approaches to review.
2. Develop a clear public accountability and quality assurance role that moves beyond minimum standards.
3. Increase transparency in the accreditation process.
4. Explore core competencies, graduation proficiencies, and the possible applications of the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) within the accreditation process.
5. Identify levels of accreditation, moving beyond merely being “accredited” or not.
6. Bridge senior-level institutions with community colleges more effectively.
7. Clarify what can be taken off the table in the review process, so that institutions with long histories of compliance with our Standards are not required to demonstrate repeatedly that they meet minimum thresholds.
8. Explore alternative models and new approaches to education and credentialing and the role of WASC in that effort.
9. Increase oversight of for-profit institutions, especially those that are publicly traded.
10. Develop a public advocacy role to communicate about issues of quality and effectiveness in higher education.

Task Forces met in January 2011 through August 2011. The Redesign Process Task Forces were formed around specific areas of exploration and charged to

1. Repurpose accreditation to be a robust and visible voice and agent for public accountability and quality assurance,
2. Create a credible, but adaptive evaluation process that meets federal obligations, focuses on key issues, and builds on the previous work of institutions undertaken as part of reviews under the 2001/2008 Handbook.

The Task Force recommendations were then synthesized by a small group of leadership into one comprehensive framework. These recommendations were reviewed by the Task Force chairs for their approval and then given to the Steering Committee for their October 2011 meeting. At that meeting, further consolidation and changes were made to respond to both external and internal calls for reform.

The proposed framework is being presented for discussion at regional forums in Southern California on October 13, Hawaii on October 18, and Northern California on October 21. A webinar will be held on October 26 at 11 a.m. and is open to anyone in the region. In addition, you can provide comments through our website, www.wascsenior.org.
Gathering Feedback for Accreditation Redesign

The Commission conducted its own research and undertook a study of team reports and team evaluations of institutions under the Educational Effectiveness Framework. This confirmed that even with the 2008 Handbook revisions, significant variations and inconsistencies continued to be found in reviews of retention and graduation, and that after ten years, institutions were still heavily focused on the structures and processes of assessment, but had not made significant progress in evaluating or benchmarking learning results. While there was considerable support for the goals of the three-stage process as a means to add value and customize the accreditation review to each institution, many institutions found the proposal stage to be confusing and the capacity and effectiveness stages to overlap and not be clearly delineated. Concern was also expressed about the length of the process from proposal preparation to Commission action on reaccreditation and the ability of institutions to sustain the review over a period of more than five years.

WASC contracted with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to conduct web surveys of institutional Chief Executive Officers (CEO), Chief Academic Officers (CAO), and Accreditation Liaison Officers (ALO) in January and February 2011, evaluating both the overall accrediting process and each of the Standards. According to the respondents, the top three challenges facing WASC were pressure to make accreditation a process that adds value to an institution; pressure to keep accreditation cost-effective; and the transformation of collegiate learning that is occurring through new modes of instructional provision, including distance and asynchronous learning modalities made possible by new technologies and the application of cognitive science to improve learning effectiveness.
WASC also conducted a survey of ALOs at the 2011 ARC. The ALOs encouraged WASC to pay attention to institutional differences and then customize the review; to promote, provide guidance, and facilitate partnerships/collaboration; to role model being the next generation; to define best practices; to ask institutions to make sure their learning outcomes are appropriate for all degree levels; to provide a careful definition of graduation rates (where do transfer or non-fall matriculating students come into count?); and to assist institutions in benchmarking their data.

The Proposed New Framework

The proposed new framework consists of three key elements. The core elements of this system are its focus on public accountability and quality assurance, transparency, and significant changes to the institutional review process.

Public Accountability and Quality Assurance

One of the most significant issues facing higher education and accreditation is concerns about low levels of retention and graduation rates at some institutions or with some subgroups. Serious questions have been raised whether a single standard needs to be established for continued accreditation or eligibility for financial aid. The Commission focused on retention and graduation rates with the 2008 revisions, but has found that Teams and the Commission itself have been inconsistent in assessing whether retention and graduation rates are appropriate for each institution given its mission and student characteristics. The Commission also does not wish to impose a single indicator for all institutions but to review and require external validation (benchmarking) of each institution’s graduation rates through a newly designed offsite review process.

Starting in 2013, specially-trained panels will be conducting offsite reviews of all institutions’ associate’s and bachelor’s levels retention and graduation rates (graduate retention and graduation rates will be reviewed starting in 2014) with opportunity for institutions to submit contextualizing narratives and plans for improvement that will provide a foundation for the comprehensive institutional review and Commission follow up. As further described below, the Commission will also focus on key graduation proficiencies and the meaning of the degree to assure greater accountability.

With the 2001/08 Handbook, the Commission’s emphasis was on student learning outcomes and program review. In response, institutions throughout the region have made significant progress that will be sustained as a foundation for future reviews. Still, concerns abound that today’s graduates are not adequately prepared, that too many degrees lack currency and relevance for the rapidly changing world, and that accreditation is not focusing on key elements of quality and rigor. The Commission too has found that much work has already begun within the region to discuss learning results within the context of each institution’s distinctive characteristics, and that the accreditation dialogue with institutions now needs to shift from a focus on assessment process to understanding the meaning of assessment results. Further, that in today’s world quality assurance has moved to requiring that there be a greater demonstration of achievement of learning that can be externally validated. In response, the Task Forces and Steering Committee recommended that the next stage of WASC accreditation include institutional demonstration that graduates have achieved expected levels of proficiency in each of the areas already established in CFR 2.2 (written and oral communication, quantitative skills, critical thinking, information literacy and appreciation of diversity) at the time of graduation and that at least two of these proficiencies be externally validated through external measures, use of rubrics or other forms of benchmarking. In addition, institutions are encouraged to demonstrate achievement of other key outcomes distinctive to that institution’s mission, consistent with at least two competencies identified in CFR 2.2. Such an emphasis also builds on existing CFR 2.6.
Chronology of Accreditation Redesign
Phase 1: Developing the Framework

2010

Meeting to set strategic vision for redesign
Steering Committee Meeting
Commission adopts goals for redesign process
For-profit Task Force Meeting
Listening Session in Hawaii with Presidents, ALOs and Public Representatives
Retention and Graduation Task Force Meeting
Meeting with CSU Senate Executive Committee

Meeting to set organizational design for redesign
Listening Sessions in California with Faith-based Institutions, Provosts and ALOs
AICCU Executive Committee

2011

Steering Committee Call
Changing Ecology Task Force Meeting
Levels of Learning/Degree Profile Task Force Meeting
Commission reviews progress of Task Forces
Meeting with UC Academic Senate

Transparency Task Force Meeting
Commission reviews progress of Task Forces

Steering Committee Meeting
Regional Forums: -Southern California, -Hawaii & the Pacific, -Northern California -Webinar

Changing Ecology Task Force Call
Task Force Chairs Call
Meeting with CSU Senate Executive Committee
Presentation to Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates

Meetings at ARC:
-ALO forum
-CEO forum
-Conversation w/ the President
-CAO forum

Levels of Learning/Degree Profile Task Force Meeting
Institutional Review Process Task Force Meeting
Synthesizing meeting—special group assembled to synthesize all Task Force recommendations
In addition, with the increasing swirl of students who attend multiple institutions and multiple new types of institutions now seeking accreditation, the Commission is placing increased emphasis on the definition of the degree, already reflected in the first paragraph of CFR 2.2. This continues the emphasis already established in CFR 2.2 that the outcomes of each degree be identified beyond the accumulation of credit and a minimum GPA.

To assist institutions, the Task Forces, Steering Committee and the Commission have reviewed the Degree Quality Profile (DQP) and have found it to be potentially a valuable tool for identifying key elements of associate, bachelors and masters degrees at a sufficiently high level to provide for both common and distinctive elements to all such degrees. WASC has agreed to pilot the DQP and to convene Learning Communities to explore the multiple ways the DQP can be used and to determine in what ways the use of the DQP might be incorporated into the accrediting process. (See FAQs about the DQP at the end of this document for more information.)

**Transparency**

One of the most frequently cited concerns about accreditation is its opaqueness and lack of transparency. For many years, public institutions have been required to make accrediting reports and Commission action letters publicly available and the Commission has expected all institutions to circulate widely within institutions the team report and commission action letter, which in turn, are often made public. The Task Force on Transparency and the Steering Committee have weighed the pros and cons of publishing team reports and action letters on the WASC website and has concluded that there is a need to demonstrate the quality of institutional engagement in the accrediting process and the effectiveness of accrediting reviews by making these materials public and transparent. To that end, the recommendation to the Commission is that all team reports and action letters would be published prospectively effective June 2012. If the institution wishes to prepare a response to the Commission action or team report, the Commission will also provide a link to that response on its website.

**Structure and Cycle of the Institutional Review Process**

The accreditation review process has been redesigned in very significant ways to build on the work already accomplished in the institution’s last cycle of review, focus the goals of the process to assuring and improving student success and student learning, and rely, to the extent possible, on institutional data and evidence with a single institutional report and review process. As a consequence, the new process will

1. Shorten the length of time to complete the entire accreditation review from five to less than three years;
2. Create a single review process (with a single report) with two key elements: a substantive offsite review leading within one to two semesters to a single site visit focusing on clearly identified issues of quality assurance and improvement.
The Institutional Review Process (IRP)

Offsite Review
The timing of the Offsite peer review is the date set by the Commission in its last action for the Capacity and Preparatory Review. The Offsite is the first component in the Institutional Review Process. In order to prepare for the Offsite Review, institutions will be expected to complete a set of data elements and an institutional narrative, typically focusing on four key components (in a maximum of 75 pages):

1. Response to previous Commission Action
2. Response (as needed) to the Offsite Finance Review
3. Response (as needed) to the Offsite Retention and Graduation Review
4. Core Essays on:
   - The meaning and rigor of degrees offered
   - How the institution assures the achievement of the five undergraduate degree outcomes specified in CFR 2.2 (with two of these areas externally benchmarked) and other areas identified by the institution
   - How the institution defines and assures student success (both through academic and co-curricular support) within the distinctive elements of the institution’s mission and goals
   - How the institution assures, through planning and improvement efforts, the sustainability of its operations and responds to the changing ecology of learning.

As with our current process, the institutional report is due to the Team and to WASC 12 weeks before the scheduled Offsite Review.
During a full-day Offsite Review, the Team—comprised of a Chair, Assistant Chair, and other experts as needed—will review all of the materials sent by the institution. The Team will conduct a video conference call with the institution to clarify any components or data exhibits. The findings of the team will then inform the Onsite Review, which will take place the following semester (or, if additional time is needed, no more than two semesters later).

**Onsite Review**
The Onsite Review is designed to focus on key issues of quality assurance relating to student success and student learning defined through the findings of the Offsite Review. There are no additional institutionally-prepared reports for this visit, unless the Offsite Team needs anything for further clarification or additional evidence. The Onsite Review Team will be comprised of the Chair and Assistant Chair from the Offsite and others who will be selected consistent with the issues being addressed. The length of the Onsite Review will be determined by the needs of the institution, but will typically fall within a one and a half to three day range.

Consistent with the existing WASC policy, the draft Team report will be sent to the institution for review of errors of fact, and then the Team will send its report along with its confidential recommendation to the Commission. At its next meeting, the Commissioners take action on the Team reports and any institutional response.

**Benefits of the Redesigned Institutional Review Process (IRP)**
Some of the major differences between the existing IRP and the revised IRP include:
- No mandatory Proposal Workshop
- No proposal
- Only one institutionally-prepared report
- Only one onsite review (unless the institution is new or on sanctions)
- Shortened length of the review process (to approximately three semesters)
- Shortened length of time for each stage (1-day; 1.5 to 3 days—Onsite Review length determined by institution needs)
- No Capacity onsite visit
- Institutions won’t need to address every issue every re-accreditation cycle
- Reduced costs due to fewer site visits and Team expenses
- One point of Commission Action (unless the institution is new, on notice of concern, or on sanctions)

**Things that have been added to or emphasized in the new process:**
- An Offsite Review of retention and graduation with findings incorporated into the new review cycle
- Offsite review of finances triennially and within six months of the offsite review
- Increased focus on the meaning of the degree, academic rigor, and quality assurance
- Pilot consideration of the Degree Qualifications Profile as a possible basis for discussions of degree level outcomes

**Additional Elements**
Variations from the aforementioned cycle would occur under certain circumstances as determined by the Commission and/or the institution. If during the offsite visit the institution is found to have major compliance issues (such as with integrity, finances, or governance) the institution may be required to submit an expanded report or longer visit.

Institutions who are seeking candidacy or undergoing initial accreditation will continue with the existing institutional review process. For institutions on Sanction, visits will continue as scheduled by the Commission.
The Offsite Retention and Graduation Review will be before the Offsite Review so the feedback can be incorporated into the Offsite Review.

Proposed Timelines

Institutions with Next CPR Visit in Spring 2011

- Offsite Review
  - Annual Report
  - Offsite Review of Retention and Graduation Narrative and Numbers (Undergraduate Students)

Institutions with Next CPR Visit in Fall 2011

- Offsite Review
  - Annual Report
  - Offsite Review of Retention and Graduation Narrative and Numbers (Undergraduate Students)

1 The Offsite Retention and Graduation Review will be before the Offsite Review so the feedback can be incorporated into the Offsite Review.
Where Do We Go From Here?

These recommendations are presented to the region in three public forums and webinars for clarification and feedback. We are most interested in knowing: What is not clear? Is there an adequate rationale for these steps? How can we improve these recommendations and/or assure their adaptive implementations across the wide diversity of institutions within the WASC region. The Policy and Planning Committee of the Commission will review the feedback from these meetings and from the comment section on the WASC website, and determine if revisions should be proposed. The Commission will hold a public hearing on November 3rd and immediately following, move into a public meeting where it will review these changes and take action on them. Based on the Commission action at its November meeting, the next steps will focus on building the infrastructure to implement the accreditation redesign. In addition, a review of the Standards of Accreditation and Commission Policies will be undertaken from January to June 2012. Implementation of the revised IRP and offsite review of retention and graduation will begin in 2013.

Summary

Throughout this entire process, the Commission has been dedicated to evolving a model of accreditation that will be effective for 2012 and beyond. This has meant a fundamental review of what is needed now in light of the rapidly changing environment for higher education. The accreditation redesign and changes to the Institutional Review Process are intended to be responsive to the concerns of the region, the public, and the Department of Education.

The Commission invites and encourages your active involvement in reviewing and commenting on the redesigned process.
Chronology of Accreditation Redesign
Phase 2: Implementation and Evaluation

- **2012**
  - Creation of learning communities around the DQP
  - Review of the Standards of Accreditation and Commission Policies
  - Resource Fair on graduation proficiencies
  - Preparation of materials for multiple meetings at the ARC
  - Organize offsite retention and graduation process

- **2013**
  - Make team reports and action letters publicly available on WASC website
  - Prepare guidelines and training materials for institutions & teams
  - Implementation of the offsite review in retention and graduation (2013–2014 on associate’s and bachelor’s level; 2014–2015 on graduate level)
  - Ongoing implementation of workshops and support for institutions
  - Ongoing evaluation

- **2014**
  - First round of Offsite Reviews begin
  - Train institutions in the revised IRP model
  - Assessment of the DQP pilot

- **2015**
  - Development of Offsite and Onsite Review panels, and training of teams
FAQs About Institutional-level Degree Outcomes and the Piloting of the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP)

1. Why is WASC focusing on institution-level degree outcomes?

Like all accreditors, WASC is under increased pressure to articulate how accreditation assures the quality of degrees awarded. Employers, parents, government agencies, and others are asking what degrees from accredited institutions mean. That is, they want to know what knowledge and skills students have acquired, and at what level of proficiency recent graduates can be expected to perform. This is a legitimate demand, given the rising cost of higher education and the role education is expected to play in the nation’s security and economic competitiveness. The WASC initiative on degree outcomes, which includes piloting of the DQP, is intended to preserve institutional distinctiveness while providing a common reference point for assuring the meaning and quality of degrees at WASC-accredited institutions. This initiative also offers all of us a common framework and language for communicating with our many publics.

Why the emphasis on the institution level? WASC accredits institutions, in contrast to professional accrediting associations that focus on specific disciplines or programs. The degree a student earns from an institution is an expression of the student’s total educational experience—at the institution and very possibly beyond it: the major, but also general education and electives as well as co-curricular and extra-curricular experiences, work, community service, and so on. With the increasing swirl of students attending more than one institution prior to graduation and the development of new degree formats (accelerated, online, etc.) the emphasis on the totality of outcomes and proficiencies at the time of graduation has become critical. Thus the Commission believes it is essential to place more emphasis on assuring that outcomes for the degree have been met, regardless of where or how the student has attained them. (See also CFR 1.2, which calls for learning outcomes to be established at the institutional level.)

The DQP is new, but WASC’s focus on institution-level outcomes is not. The 2001 Standards of Accreditation, particularly CFRs 2.2 and 2.6, were framed to shift the focus of review from individual components or inputs of the degree, e.g., the major, general education, etc., to expected learning outcomes upon graduation, especially at the bachelor’s level. Piloting the DQP will mean building on the foundation that member institutions have laid over the past decade, as they developed program review and assessment processes to document and improve student learning. The DQP is the logical next step.

2. What role does the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) play?

In focusing on institution-level degree outcomes, the Commission has lacked a common reference point for commonly accepted outcomes for the bachelor’s degree. It learned of the effort by the Lumina Foundation to develop a statement defining common outcomes across the associate, baccalaureate, and master’s degree levels. The Commission and the Task Force found that the DQP, which encompasses intellectual skills, specialized knowledge, applied learning, integrated learning, and civic learning, offers an appropriate framework for review and a useful reference point for CFRs 1.2 and 2.2. Thus the Commission agreed to pilot its use. Over a period of 18 months, the Commission and member institutions will review the language of the DQP, reflect on its relevance, and explore ways to use it in the accrediting process. The results of the pilot will be discussed at Commission meetings and at the Academic Resource Conference in 2012 and 2013.

3. Will the DQP take away faculty autonomy?

No. The DQP provides very broad descriptions of the different kinds of knowledge and levels of proficiency that students completing a degree should achieve. It does not dictate specific content or levels of achievement. Each institution is still responsible to define its own degree outcomes and create a curriculum that supports those outcomes. The DQP is intended to serve as a reference point for discussion within institutions regarding 1) the common elements of different degrees awarded by the institution, and 2) the characteristics that distinguish each degree level.

A reference point is not a requirement; it is a way to describe a phenomenon in relation to something else, noting similarities and differences. Institutions with different missions will be free to highlight those outcomes that align most closely with their particular missions.
4. Will the text of the DQP be adopted verbatim as a new set of WASC Standards?
No. Principles and practices from the DQP pilot may be adopted by WASC, but we will retain our own Standards of Accreditation. The Task Force on Degree Profiles reviewed the language of the DQP at both of its meetings, found it appropriate for most institutions, and urged that the DQP be piloted and eventually applied adaptively—not as a rigid text, but as a flexible framework for review.

The DQP is a draft document. As such, its language is in flux. WASC is one of many organizations whose institutions are piloting the DQP. The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association and the Council of Independent Colleges each have projects underway, and AAC&U is launching a major initiative across several states. In addition, many institutions across the country have begun to use the DQP to generate conversations about the meaning and quality of their degrees. All these efforts are likely to lead to suggestions for revising and improving the DQP.

5. Will institutions be expected to assess graduation proficiencies of each of the outcomes identified throughout the DQP?
No. As described below, WASC is piloting the DQP to learn, with our institutions, whether it offers an appropriate framework or reference point for understanding degrees holistically. Separately, the Task Force is recommending that all institutions be expected to demonstrate that:
- For undergraduate degree programs, graduates have acquired proficiency in at least two core competencies specified in CFR 2.2 (i.e., writing, critical thinking, quantitative skills); and
- Learning results have been externally calibrated and validated as appropriate in light of the institution’s mission and context.

6. How will WASC pilot the DQP?
We invite any institution in the region to pilot the DQP on its own or in a cohort that the institution may create. Already, two groups—a set of California institutions and the University of Hawai’i system have volunteered to work with the DQP. The goal will be to learn from one another what is useful and what is not; to develop suggestions for improving the statement itself; and to explore ways of applying it within institutions.

A second dimension of the pilot will be to explore the DQP as a framework for accreditation. All institutions undergoing review after June 2012 will apply the DQP as a profile or point of reference against which degree requirements at the associate, baccalaureate, and master’s level are reviewed. In addition, these institutions will be invited to consider how the DQP can be operationalized, along with the existing WASC Standards and supporting materials. WASC will create a learning community to share information and suggestions, and institutions will be invited to report on their experiences at the 2012 and 2013 ARC meetings.

7. What are the advantages to WASC and the region of using the DQP?
The Levels of Learning/Degree Profiles Task Force and those institutions already working with the DQP have identified a number of advantages:
- The DQP offers common language for conversations between campus educators and external audiences, e.g., the public, policy makers, employers, etc.
- Within the higher education community, the DQP provides a common vocabulary for intra-institutional conversations about outcomes across degree levels, as well as for inter-institutional alignment.
- The DQP gives students a clear statement of what their degrees mean and what is expected of them.
- The DQP can serve as a mechanism for bringing institutions together in learning communities and cohorts to increase their educational effectiveness and share best practices.
- The DQP offers WASC a frame of reference for review of non-traditional degrees.

8. Where can we get copies of the DQP?
The DQP can be found online at http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/The_Degree_Qualifications_Profile.pdf or you can order hard copies online at the Lumina website or call 800.834.5756.

9. How can my institution join a learning community?
For more information, contact WASC Director of Organizational Change, Jill L. Ferguson at jferguson@wascsenior.org
Notes