A closer look at the Accreditation Standards

This is the second of a nine-part series highlighting each accreditation standard.

The latest Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities Accreditation Handbook begins with this rationale: “Accreditation is a process of recognizing educational institutions for performance, integrity, and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public.” By undertaking this voluntary effort, Linfield assumes responsibility for demonstrating how the college fulfills and achieves – or plans to achieve – expected levels of performance within the context of its mission.

As a community, then, we are tasked to report on and evaluate Linfield according to nine standards identified by the Northwest Commission. Each of those standards consists of related performance measures, some of which overlap. The various members of the Accreditation Steering Committee oversee the discussions and assessment efforts related to each standard. Since August 2006 the members have met among themselves and have also convened working groups to investigate college practice in their assigned areas.

Standard Two – Educational Program and Its Effectiveness

Standard Two speaks to the core of a college’s existence: the scope, quality, and management of its educational programs.

Reporting on Standard Two will comprise the longest section (nearly 50%) of the accreditation self-study. The co-chairs of this Standard, Barbara Seidman (Dean of Faculty) and William Millar (Chair of Religious Studies) have formed a number of working groups to ensure attention to the various academic units of the college encompassed under its provisions.

Standard II gets to its point immediately: it asks the college to speak to the expectation that it “offers collegiate level programs that culminate in identified student competencies and lead to degrees in recognized fields of study.”

Toward those ends, the undergraduate degree is presumed to rest on three interlocking components: general education, specialization via disciplinary or cross-disciplinary majors, and elective opportunities. Moreover, Standard II makes clear the institution’s obligation to integrate all facets of the academic program including but not limited to: faculty expertise; curricular design, delivery and administration; international study programming; to undergraduate advising and educational support. Standard II also stresses the importance of operating under common institutional policies and practices across all arms of the college, including continuing education, distance learning, and study abroad.

Those authoring the portion of the self-study dealing with Standard II must explain and document, through qualitative as well as quantitative means, how well Linfield is “achieving and maintaining” high quality programs via a deliberative, effective, ongoing feedback loop linking projected learning outcomes, evaluation of actual student learning, and planned improvements to address gaps between the two through revised pedagogy and curricular design.

Each academic department is currently developing the first draft of its own self-study, based upon completion of a template that poses all the academically-relevant questions raised across the nine Standards. By the time a department finalizes its report in spring 2008, it will have articulated its strengths, weaknesses, and plans for ongoing and future improvement.

Analysis based on evidence must inform every facet of our discussion of Linfield’s academic program. Central to such analysis will be each department’s articulation of the educational goals of its...
major(s) in tandem with assessment findings regarding actual student learning. A department’s contributions to general education will merit similar attention.

**General Education**

Standard II acknowledges that general education goals and programs vary since they necessarily reflect each institution’s unique educational aspirations and resource base. Still, national consensus around the mission of general education directs that it “introduces students to the content and methodology of the major areas of knowledge – the humanities and fine arts, the natural sciences, mathematics, and the social sciences – and helps them develop the mental skills that will make them more effective learners” (Policy 2.1).

These competencies are defined elsewhere in Standard II as involving demonstrable ability in “(a) written and oral communication, (b) quantitative reasoning, (c) critical analysis and logical reasoning, and (d) literacy in the elements of the program of study” (Standard 2.C).

The two-year-long effort of Linfield’s General Education Review Committee (GERC) and its recently approved revision plan for the Linfield Curriculum have provided a crucial foundation for this facet of the self-study. Faculty working groups will propose specific learning goals for adoption by the entire faculty in Fall 2007.

---

**Other Important Emphases within Standard II:**

- Policies for the transfer of credits must be clearly documented, as should articulation agreements guiding established transfer relationships with other institutions.
- Academic advising (also assessed under Standard Three – Students) must meet the needs of students, as well as effectively equip faculty and other advising personnel for their duties in this area.
- Continuing, distance, and off-campus education in all its forms must be compatible with the institution’s mission, and their policies and practices must be consistent with those guiding other arms of the college. Full time faculty in the relevant disciplines must be involved in these programs’ planning, evaluating, and administration.
- Electronically-mediated delivery systems must demonstrate ready access to appropriate learning resources, as well as sufficient interaction among students and faculty.

**Required Documentation (an incomplete list):**

- Instruments and procedures used to measure educational program effectiveness
- An inventory of materials demonstrating appraisal of educational outcomes of all educational programs
- Published statements, reports, curricular proposals and other written rationales for the Linfield Curriculum
- Number of degrees granted in each program for the last three years
- Organizational charts showing the relationship between continuing education and other academic units of the college
- Policies/procedures for approval of off-campus and special programs and courses

**Required Exhibits (an incomplete list):**

- Statements of degree objectives for each degree program
- Curriculum committee rules, procedures and recent minutes
- Complete departmental self-studies
- Evaluation forms and summary reports of student evaluations
- Policies regarding transfer of credit, including articulation agreements
- Materials used in the academic advising process
- Grade distribution studies
- Policies governing public service/service learning
- Self-study and evaluation committee reports from other external reviews and accreditation visits (athletic training, education, etc).
- A three year history of courses/programs using nontraditional instruction formats and comparison of outcomes with traditional formats.
Members of the Accreditation Committee

Chair: Barbara Seidman; co-chair Dan Preston

Standard I: Institutional Mission
Co-chairs: Planning Council members Bernie Turner (trustee) and Dr. Chris Keaveney (MLA)

Standard II: Educational Program
Co-chairs: Dr. Barbara Seidman (Interim Dean of Faculty) and Dr. William Millar (REL)

Standard III: Students
Chair: Dan Preston, Dean of Enrollment Services

Standard IV: Faculty
Co-chairs: Dr. Brenda DeVore Marshall (TCA) and Dr. Pam Wheeler (NUR)

Standard V: Library/Information Resources
Chair: Susan Whyte, College Librarian

Standard VI: Governance and Administration
Co-Chairs: FEC chair Dr. Amy Orr (SOAN) and Dr. Liz Atkinson, Associate Dean of Faculty

Standard VII: Finance
Chair: Greg Copeland, College Controller

Standard VIII: Physical Resources
Co-chairs: John Hall, Facilities Director, and Dr. Jeff Summers, Associate Dean of Faculty

Standard IX: Institutional Integrity
Chair: Pam Jacklin, J.D. (trustee)

Committee Staff
Jennifer Ballard, Assistant Registrar for Institutional Research

To learn more...

To learn more about the accreditation process, or to read the 1998 report, 1999 interim report or the 2003 visit report, or to see other materials that are available about the accreditation, go to: http://www.linfield.edu/accreditation/index.php and click on “Resources.”