

# WASC Stakeholder's Survey Results Report

## *Executive Summary*

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior Commission (WASC) undertook a comprehensive review of its 2001/2008 Handbook of Accreditation. A central part of this review was a confidential survey to evaluate the validity and reliability of its standards and accreditation procedures. WASC contracted with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to conduct these surveys. Web-surveys were administered to chief executive officers (CEOs), chief academic officers (CAOs), and accreditation liaison officers (ALOs) at all WASC accredited institutions in January and February 2011; the overall response rate was 53.5%. Survey findings were positive and should be useful to future WASC planning.

Survey topics included reactions to WASC's approach to accreditation, near- and long-term challenges facing WASC, the Core Commitments, the three stages of the accreditation process (the Proposal Stage, the Capacity and Preparatory Review, and the Educational Effectiveness Review), and the accreditation process as a whole. In addition, CAOs and ALOs were asked to provide detailed reactions and feedback for each standard, criterion for review, and guidelines.

Respondent comments were mixed as to the role WASC should play in terms of consumer protection. Some survey respondents argued that WASC should actively seek to increase its efforts in this area, but others did not think that this was the responsibility of an accrediting agency. The majority of respondents indicated that WASC should and does encourage institutional integrity. Several additional comments were received from respondents about issues surrounding not-for-profit and for-profit institutions. The overall theme of these comments was, as one survey participant summed up, "WASC should be looking at the for-profit institutions closely." Other survey participants noted that there is the perception (real or imagined) that WASC is not scrutinizing the for-profits at the same level they scrutinize the public and private not-for-profit institutions.

The top three challenges facing WASC according to stakeholders are:

- Pressure to make accreditation a process which adds value to an institution. (3.59/4)
- Pressure to keep accreditation cost effective. (3.43/4)
- 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. (3.29/4)

WASC's Core Commitments generated a very positive response as did some items having to do with the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review, particularly those items that had to do with leading to positive change and better student learning outcomes.

Mean ratings on items about the Proposal Stage of the accreditation process ranged from 2.97 to 3.88 on a 5-point scale. The item with the lowest mean was "The purpose of the Proposal is well understood by institutions." The item with the highest mean was "The Proposal focused my institution on selected topics for improvement."

Mean ratings on items about the Capacity and Preparatory Review stage of the accreditation process ranged from 2.88 to 4.21 on a 5-point scale. The item with the lowest mean was "The Capacity and Preparatory Review is clearly distinguished from the Educational Effectiveness Review." The item with the highest mean was "The Capacity and Preparatory Review focused on appropriate elements of the academic infrastructure."

Mean responses to items about the Educational Effectiveness Review stage of the accreditation process ranged from 3.55 to 4.26 on a 5-point scale. The item with the lowest mean was "Adequate supporting materials are made available by WASC for the Educational Effectiveness Review." The item with the highest mean was "The Educational Effectiveness Review requires institutions to gather evidence about student learning outcomes."

The accreditation process overall had mean scores that ranged from 3.41 to 3.97 on a 5-point scale. The item with the lowest mean was "The accreditation process led to improved student learning." The item with the highest mean was "The accreditation process added value to my institution."

For the 28 items addressing Standard 1, overall means ranged from 3.60 to 4.41 (on a 5-point scale). Standard 2 was addressed by 42 items; overall means ranged from 3.70 to 4.17 (on a 5-point scale). Thirty-one items asked about Standard 3 had overall means ranging from 3.40 to 4.26 (on a 5-point scale). For the 22 items asked about Standard 4, total means ranged from 3.39 to 4.06 (on a 5-point scale). (These standard-by-standard findings and full comments can be found in the companion document, *WASC Stakeholder's Feedback Survey: Responses to Standard-by-Standard Questions*.)

Written comments provided were overwhelmingly about the amount of time, money and resources the WASC accreditation process takes. In addition, there were a variety of proposals for making the process quicker, more efficient, and less staff burdensome. WASC is encouraged to act on these findings and seriously consider the suggestions given by stakeholders.

# WASC Stakeholder's Feedback Survey

## Responses to Standard-by-Standard Questions

### *Executive Summary*

Standard 1 Summary. For the 28 numerical items asked about Standard 1, overall means ranged from a high of 4.41 to a low of 3.60 (on a 5-point scale). Four questions had standard deviations larger than or equal to 1.00; all of these questions had to do with evaluating the quality of education which means that the range of responses might have been caused by how the question was asked. In three cases where there is no specific guideline for a CFR, respondents replied that one was not needed. In a comparison of means, there were no statistically significant differences between the mean responses of chief academic officers (CAOs) and accreditation liaison officers (ALOs).

Standard 2 Summary. For the 42 numerical items asked about Standard 2, overall means ranged from 4.17 to 3.70 (on a 5-point scale). Eight questions had standard deviations larger than or equal to 1.00, which may indicate some range in the responses to a particular question. Only three of these eight questions were focused on the quality of education, the others were about the utility of guidelines and criteria for review to institutions. In ten instances where there is no specific guideline for a CFR, respondents replied that one was not needed. In a comparison of means, there were four statistically significant differences between the mean responses of chief academic officers (CAOs) and accreditation liaison officers (ALOs).

Standard 3 Summary. For the 31 numerical items asked about Standard 3, overall means ranged from 4.26 as a high to 3.49 at the low end (on a 5-point scale). No item had a standard deviation of 1.00 or greater. In all six cases where there is no specific guideline for a CFR, respondents replied that one was not needed. In a comparison of means, there were three statistically significant differences between the mean responses of chief academic officers (CAOs) and accreditation liaison officers (ALOs).

Standard 4 Summary. For the 22 numerical items asked about Standard 4, total means ranged from 4.06 to 3.39 (on a 5-point scale). Five questions had standard deviations larger than or equal to 1.00, which may indicate some range in the responses to a particular question. Three of these five were focused on the quality of education; the other two had to do with the utility of guidelines. In five instances where there is no specific guideline for a CFR, respondents replied that one was not needed. In a comparison of means, there were four statistically significant differences between the mean responses of chief academic officers (CAOs) and accreditation liaison officers (ALOs).