




# UNIT 5: ACCREDITATION PROCESS

PREPARING FOR YOUR  
ACCREDITATION WORKSHOP

Welcome to Unit 5 of the CEA online preparation for your accreditation workshop. In this unit, we will discuss the accreditation process.

## PREPARING FOR THE WORKSHOP

- Watch the seven preparation unit slideshows
  1. CEA's Mission
  2. Scope of Accreditation
  3. CEA's Values
  4. Specialized Accreditation
  -  5. Accreditation Process
  6. The CEA Standards
  7. Planning and Review
- Complete the worksheet for each unit
- Bring your questions to the workshop

You have now got plenty of background information on CEA's mission and values, and on the purpose, scope, and types of accreditation.

For this unit, you will want to have access to the Accreditation Handbook and the Standards, both of which were emailed to you. You may also like to have the CEA website handy, and the CEA policies and procedures.

If you have not yet gathered these materials or downloaded the worksheet for Unit 5, please pause the slideshow and do that now.

You can use your worksheet to note any questions or thoughts you have – those related to the questions we'll ask in the unit, as well as any that we don't.

Are you ready to learn more about the accreditation journey you've started?

## GETTING STARTED

- Eligibility
  - Meet CEA requirements
  - Define scope of review
- Workshop participation
  - Self-study coordinator
  - Standards familiarization
  - Self-study process – plan and report
  - On-site visit

You began the accreditation process with an application for eligibility. Based on the information you submitted in the application, CEA staff established first that your program or institution met CEA's basic eligibility requirements. Do you remember them from Unit 2? You offer an intensive English program, with levels of instruction, at least 8 months a year, for post-secondary students, and operating for at least one year.

You then received an eligibility letter confirming that you met the basic requirements and noting any factors important to the scope of your program or institution's review. As we discussed in Unit 2, during the workshop we will meet with you regarding the details of your program or institution's scope and any special features to confirm what will be included in the self-study, how multiple locations or additional branches should be handled, if you have them, and so forth.

Your eligibility letter also included an invitation to the accreditation workshop, which is the mandatory next step in the process. At the workshop, we will focus heavily on the practical – how to plan for and accomplish a self-study. On this slide, you see several of the components of that practical guidance. We will talk about the responsibilities of the self-study coordinator and provide suggestions for identifying that person, if you haven't done so already. We will review the standards and focus especially on those that are frequently unmet or often raise questions for programs and institutions. We will walk you through the expected self-study process, including how to complete the self-study report using the self-study electronic template. And then we will help you look further ahead, anticipating the site visit

and what follows.

## ACCREDITATION PROCESS: OVERVIEW

- 
- Eligibility
  - Workshop participation
  - Plan for the Self-study
  - Self-study
  - On-site visit
  - Commission review, decision
  - Annual reporting
  - Re-accreditation

So, here is a snapshot of the complete accreditation process, which you will also find in Section 1 of your Accreditation Handbook. You are in the workshop stage, where we will discuss in detail the two next steps - the plan for getting the work done and the self-study report - and provide information about what you can expect when it comes time for the site visit and the accreditation decision.

Let's look briefly at each of the remaining steps in the process. If you have questions as we go along, please jot them down on your worksheet. If we have not answered them by the end of the slideshow, be sure to bring them up during the workshop.

## PLANNING THE PROCESS

- Identify the self-study coordinator
- Outline committees and timeline
- Submit plan within 2 months of the workshop



The self-study process is a multi-faceted project that involves all aspects of the program or institution, engages personnel from across the organization, and follows a specified timeline depending on if it is initial accreditation or re-accreditation. Therefore, CEA requires that you create a plan to accomplish the work. At the workshop we'll discuss the features of the plan, including the designation of a self-study coordinator who oversees the project and is CEA's contact throughout the process, creation of committees and subcommittees to focus on certain areas of the standards and involve all stakeholders, and the internal mileposts and external deadlines that shape the project.

Your plan is due to CEA two months after the workshop, along with a fee. CEA staff review it, provide guidance if necessary, and approve it. With the approval letter, you'll receive the materials you need to carry out the self-study process you've planned. A sample plan for conducting the self-study process is included in the appendices of your Accreditation Handbook; Section 3 also has a description of what makes a good self-study coordinator and what the coordinator's responsibilities are. You may like to flag the sample and the description for future reference.

Once your plan is approved, you are ready to move on to the next step, the self-study process itself.

## SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- Conduct the Self-study, responding to 44 standards
  - **Evaluate** instructional program, activities, and organization against standards
  - **Identify** strengths and areas for improvement
  - **Implement** needed changes
  - **Plan** for future improvements
- Report submitted in 12-16 months

CEA believes that planned, reflective self-study is critical to program improvement. The process itself is important, not just the report that results from it. Therefore, the self-study process we will be describing and practicing at the workshop has four steps:

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... evaluation against each standard ...



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... identifying strengths and necessary improvements ...

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... implementing improvements ...

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Each of these steps leads to information that will ultimately go into the self-study report.

Programs that have gone through the accreditation process have told us that there are many benefits of the self-study process itself, especially when the self-study was well-designed; when it involved faculty, staff, and administrators; and when it was undertaken with the goal of improvement. The process leads to organizational renewal and positive change. It is an opportunity to confront chronic problems and fix things, and it is a source of deeply engaging professional development.

You may be wondering how CEA views a site that identifies problems and makes changes during the self-study process. You will be glad to know that we expect that you will make changes during the process, and that doing so is a good thing.

Programs and institutions doing authentic, reflective self-study always find areas for improvement, whether to comply with the standards or carry out a needed program change. We even ask you to keep a list of changes made and include that in your report. In some cases, you will have to decide whether to make the change and then report that in the self-study, or to just make written *plans* for the change, and then report *that* in the self-study. At the workshop, we'll provide guidance about how to handle various kinds of changes.

Your findings from the self-study process are captured in a CEA-issued self-study report template. The report and its supporting documents will be submitted electronically. The workshop will provide detailed guidance on how to complete the template and submit the report. The completed self-study report is due to CEA

within 12 to 16 months of the workshop.

## ON-SITE VISIT



- 2-½ days
- Two trained reviewers and a CEA representative
- Class visits, interviews, document review
- Review Team Report based on visit



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Although it may seem far in the future at this point, a year-and-a-half from now your site will undergo a visit by a review team, so it is good to be aware of the frame of that now. The reviewers will conduct various activities designed to verify the information in your self-study report and establish whether each standard appears to be met. You will receive ample advance information from CEA about the visit and how to plan for it as the time comes nearer; Section 4 in the Accreditation Handbook provides some of this information if you are interested in knowing more about the visit and typical agendas now.

The visit is carried out by two volunteer peer reviewers, accompanied by a CEA staff member as representative. Reviewers are selected through an application and training process; they are mature professionals in the field who have expertise in various aspects of the standards. As we mentioned in Unit 3, they commit to carry out their CEA responsibilities in a confidential and unbiased manner, basing all of their work on the standards and CEA's policies. All have attended CEA reviewer training workshops and are guided by a Reviewer Manual. They may have experience in accredited programs and institutions or served as CEA commissioners, or have other deep knowledge of CEA standards and processes. Over the course of 2 1/2 days, the reviewers conduct interviews with personnel and students, review on-site documents, and observe classes. The CEA representative will assist them, and will answer any questions during the visit about CEA's policies.

It is important for you to know that the reviewers will verify your site's practices

and evaluate them relative to the standards, but the reviewers do not make accreditation decisions. We refer to them as the “eyes and ears” of the commission. So, during the visit, the reviewers prepare a report with their findings on each individual standard, indicating whether the site appears to meet, partially meet, or not meet each standard. Within 30 days of their visit (but usually much more quickly) you will receive their Review Team Report. Along with that report, you will receive a letter calling for your response to the team’s findings and outlining what you can include in your response.

## COMMISSION REVIEW

- Who are the Commissioners?
- What decisions do they make?
- If accreditation is granted, for how long?



The Review Team Report – and your response to it – go to the CEA Commissioners for an accreditation decision. The Commission comprises 13 members. 11 are your peers from the field, from both CEA-accredited and non-CEA accredited programs and institutions, and from a variety of kinds of programs and institutions. Two are public members, and as required by the USDE, they cannot be from the field, but are on the Commission to add perspective and knowledge from domains useful to Commission decisions and operations. You can find a list of current and past commissioners on the CEA website under About CEA.

The Commission's primary responsibilities are to govern CEA and to make accreditation decisions. Commissioners serve 3-year terms. They meet three times a year, typically in April, August, and December, and consider reports materials for a number of programs and institutions at each meeting.

Following a process of deliberation for each review being considered, the Commission makes an accreditation decision. The possible decisions – and their duration – are listed in the CEA Policies and Procedures available on the website under About CEA. You will also see them on upcoming slides in this unit.

In making decisions, as we mentioned in Unit 3, Commissioners follow a structured review process that ensures that all sites receive a well-rounded review. The Commissioners rely on the Review Team Report and the site's response to it, but also may consult the complete self-study.



## COMMISSION DECISION: INITIAL ACCREDITATION



- 5 years for sites that meet the CEA standards
- 1 year for sites that substantially meet the standards but have minor standards-related deficiencies
- 4 years continued accreditation after one year initial accreditation
- Deferred decision
- Denial

This slide lists the accreditation decisions that the Commission can make for programs and institutions that are undergoing initial accreditation. (We will look at reaccreditation decisions a little later.) Sites that meet the standards may be granted 5 years. It is possible for a site to achieve 5-year accreditation but still have a limited number of standards-related weaknesses, and so it is possible that even with 5-year accreditation, the Commission may issue reporting requirements to ensure that all standards are met. Reporting requirements are always specific and state what information must be provided in order to meet the standard in question.

When a site substantially meets the standards but has minor deficiencies that can be corrected within one year, a grant of 1-year accreditation is made. In this case, the Commission issues reporting requirements specifying what is necessary to come into compliance with the standards that are partially or unmet. Then, upon review of the one-year report, the Commission may accredit the site for an additional 4 years, bringing the total period of accreditation to 5 years. Note that one-year accreditation is not probationary. It is full accreditation, just time-limited.

The Commission can defer a decision when it needs specific additional information; note that a deferral is not granted to give a site time to come into compliance with standards.

The Commission can deny accreditation when a site fails to substantially meet the standards or a significant number of partially or unmet standards cannot be brought into compliance within one year.

There is no “magic number” of standards that can be partially met or unmet that links to 5-year or 1-year accreditation, or denial. It is the Commissioners’ responsibility to assess the overall accreditation-worthiness of the site, bringing their collective knowledge and professional wisdom to the decision, informed by the history of similar decisions.

# MAINTAINING ACCREDITATION



- Annual Reporting
- Other reporting
  - Reporting requirements
  - Substantive change
- Re-accreditation



If your program or institution is accredited, you will need to demonstrate continued compliance with the standards in several ways. In February of each year, you will submit an Annual Report to CEA that includes sustaining fees and responses to several standards-related questions. These questions relate to the quality of student achievement, evidence of continuous review and program improvement, and documentation of any changes related to regulatory matters.

In addition, you will need to respond to any reporting requirements that have been issued by the Commission by the dates specified. And you must report substantive changes to CEA in a number of areas. The list of areas is included in CEA's policies and procedures and is also sent to sites each year as a reminder to file such a report if any of the changes have occurred. Changes that require reporting to CEA include, for example, a change in ownership or control of the program or institution, significant changes in curricular structure, a change of location, or a significant change in the profile of students served by the site.

Two years prior to the end of the period of accreditation, CEA will initiate contact to begin re-accreditation, which requires a new self-study and site visit.

## COMMISSION DECISION: RE-ACCREDITATION



- 10 years for sites in compliance
- 1 year for sites that substantially meet the standards but have minor standards related deficiencies
- 9 year continued accreditation
- Withdrawal

*Note: More details are in the CEA Policies & Procedures at [www.cea-accredit.org](http://www.cea-accredit.org).*

If your program or institution is seeking re-accreditation, it is possible that the Commission will grant a 10-year accreditation. Note, however, that this grant goes only to sites which are in clear compliance with the standards. 10 years is a long time, and the Commission requires strong evidence that the site meets the standards if such a long period of accreditation is granted. For a site that has minor deficiencies that can be corrected within one year, just as with initial accreditation, the Commission can grant one-year accreditation and issue specific reporting requirements to bring a site into compliance with the standards. Then, upon review of that one-year report, the period of accreditation can be continued for an additional 9 years, for a total term of 10 years. Again, this one-year is not probationary, but is simply limited to one year.

And as with initial accreditation, both deferral and denial are also possible decisions.

There are some other possible actions for specific situations, such as withdrawal or expiration of accreditation, but the ones listed on the slide are the primary and typical possible decisions. If you want to know more about those other decisions, again, you can find them in the CEA Policies and Procedures available online.

Also, we should note that in the 5th year of the 10-year period of a re-accreditation, an Interim Report is required in place of the usual annual report. The Interim Report is substantial, calling for responses to about half of the standards, but no site visit is required.

For all accreditation decisions, once made, it is a USDE requirement that they be announced to the public; decisions are sent to federal and state agencies, posted online in News from CEA, sent to our professional associations, posted to the EdUSA list, and distributed through other outlets.

## REVIEW: ACCREDITATION PROCESS



- After the workshop, what is the next step in the accreditation process, and what is its purpose?
- Have you identified a self-study coordinator? Who else will be involved in your self-study process?
- What questions do you have about the site visit?
- What questions do you have about the Commission's decision-making process and possible decisions?

If you have not been using your worksheet already, you may want to pull it out now.

As you consider these review questions, write down your own questions and thoughts as well.

If you are not sure about the answers to any of these questions, you can review this unit or check the Accreditation Handbook and CEA Policies and Procedures.

## QUESTIONS AND THOUGHTS

Bring your questions and thoughts about the CEA accreditation process to the workshop. Or let us know in advance at [info@cea-accredit.org](mailto:info@cea-accredit.org).



We have covered a lot in this unit, and we expect you to have questions and thoughts on the accreditation process. We'll be prepared to discuss the process in detail at the workshop. And as always, you can contact us with questions in advance if that's useful for you.

Thank you for your participation! When you are ready, you can move on to Unit 6: The Standards.