



INITIAL ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK



“Serving management education for over ninety years”

AACSB International Initial Accreditation Handbook

PREFACE

This handbook is one in a series of four handbooks covering all aspects of the Accreditation Process. It should be read in conjunction with the other three handbooks covering the preaccreditation process, the accounting accreditation process and the maintenance of accreditation process.

The *Initial Accreditation Handbook* describes the philosophy, procedures, and guidelines for the development of the Self Evaluation Report and the actual on-site peer review initial accreditation visit. When possible, the applicant should follow the guidelines associated with the Initial Accreditation process. The Peer Review Team may determine that some flexibility is necessary to ensure that the process (1) brings value to the applicant, (2) maintains the integrity of AACSB International accreditation, and (3) provides the type and level of learning experiences that mark effective accreditation processes. In situations where the applicant or Peer Review Team must improvise to accomplish the purposes of the review, documentation of deviations must be provided to the appropriate accreditation committee by the Peer Review Team.

The online peer review training, accessible via the AACSB website, provides additional information and guidance for all areas of the accreditation process. The training is accessible at: http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/PRT_default.asp

In addition to the written documentation, each institution in the accreditation process is assigned an accreditation staff liaison. This individual serves as the designated AACSB staff person for all the applicant school's accreditation related questions and needs and is the liaison between the institution and the volunteer network (peer review team members, accreditation committee, mentor, etc.)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	The Initial Accreditation Process	1
	Transition to the Peer Review Team	1
II.	The PreAccreditation and Initial Accreditation Timeline	3
III.	Applicant Comparison Groups	4
	What is required?	4
	Use of comparison groups	5
IV.	The Self-Evaluation Report (SER)	5
V.	Peer Review Team Visit	6
	The planning of the visit	6
	Possible documentation/meeting requests from the Team	7
	Meetings and discussion requested	8
VI.	The Team Report	9
	Elements for the peer review team report	9
	Optional response to the peer review team report	10
VII.	Review of the Team Recommendation	10
	Initial Accreditation Committee	10
	Board of Directors	10
	Applicant Options	10
VIII.	Deferral Review	11
	Deferral Review Team	11
	Review of deferral report from Applicant	11
	Review of team recommendation	11
Appendices:		
	A. Supporting Documents for Download	12

I. THE PROCESS

The initial accreditation phase starts when the Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC), the applicant school and their mentor feel that the school is aligned with or close to alignment with the standards. At that time the IAC will invite the applicant to file a letter of application for initial accreditation. The letter of application should include:

- A list of the degree programs offered by the applicant.
- A list of the degree programs that have been approved for exclusion from review (if applicable).
- A list of Comparable Peer Schools, Competitive Schools, and Aspirant Schools.
- A preferred time period for hosting the onsite Peer Review Team visit including the date that the applicant plans to submit the Self-Evaluation Report (SER). The SER is generally submitted 4-6 months prior to the visit.

The letter of application for initial accreditation should be signed by (as appropriate) the:

- Chief Executive Officer (President, Chancellor, etc.),
- Chief Academic Officer (Provost, Vice-President/Chancellor for Academic Affairs, etc.),
- Head of the Business School (Dean).

Upon receipt of the letter of application for initial accreditation, the applicant will be invoiced for the Initial Accreditation Fee.

Transition to the Peer Review Team

Upon receipt of the full payment of the Initial Accreditation Fee, AACSB will start assembling the peer review team. The Team Chair is selected first with input from the IAC Co-Chairs and the applicant. Once the Chair has been agreed upon, he or she will replace the Mentor and will guide the applicant's progress during the last phase of the preaccreditation process, which includes the development of the SER and the actual on-site initial accreditation visit. Following the assignment of the Team Chair the two other team members are selected and come, if possible, from the applicant's list of comparable or aspirant schools. See policy for selecting team members at <http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/resources/policies.asp>

Once the Team Chair has been assigned, the applicant should begin to work with the Team Chair to prepare the Self-Evaluation Report (SER). The applicant must submit the SER to the PRT and the IAC for review at least 4 to 6 months prior to the on-site review visit. After the Peer Review Team reviews the SER, the team drafts a previsit letter outlining the issues and concerns identified by the Team. The draft letter includes a "visit" or "no-visit" recommendation. The draft is forwarded to the IAC for review. In the interest of time this review can be facilitated off-line involving the reader, liaison and chair and vice chair of the committee. If the IAC approves of the letter and agrees with the team's recommendation concerning the continuation of the visit, the chair finalizes the letter and the pre-visit letter is sent to the applicant school along with confirmation of the on-site visit dates.

While the SER and other written materials provide the foundation for the visit, the PRT achieves greater understanding of the applicant through the on-site review. The pre-visit letter will point out specific issues to be addressed either before or during the visit. In addition, the pre-visit letter

will also indicate areas of focus and requests for data and documents to be made available for the team during the visit.

Within 10 days following the on-site visit, the Peer Review Team submits to the applicant and the IAC a team visit report with the Team's accreditation recommendation. The applicant has the option of submitting a response to the PRT report. The IAC reviews the following:

- Team visit report
- The team's accreditation recommendation
- The applicant's written response, if one is submitted.

The IAC can either concur with the Team's accreditation recommendation or remand the recommendation to the PRT for reconsideration.

When concurrence is reached, the PRT and IAC recommendation for accreditation is forwarded for ratification to AACSB's Board of Directors. If the Board concurs, the applicant is awarded accreditation and joins the AACSB Accreditation Council. Accreditation will be valid for five years, with a maintenance visit to occur in year five.

II. INITIAL ACCREDITATION REVIEW PROCESS SCHEDULE

The timeline shown below is a representation of Initial Accreditation Peer Review Visits and corresponding Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC) activity under normal circumstances. Changes to the normal visit timeline may be made on a case-by-case basis at the IAC's discretion. All questions regarding your institution's timeline should be directed to IAC@aacsb.edu.

Description	Visit Season 1 (Sept. 1 – Dec. 31)	Visit Season 2 (Jan. 1 – April 30)	Visit Season 3 (May 1 – Aug. 31)
Applicant Deadline: Send letter of application and team nominations	Upon receipt of IAC decision letter directing applicant to proceed to self-evaluation		
<i>IAC Co-Chairs:</i> Propose team for mutual approval	Within 45 days of application		
AACSB International: Invites individual team members	Following IAC approval of team composition		
AACSB International: Set review team visit date	Upon confirmation of team members		
Applicant: Invite team chair to visit host campus	Chair visit (if necessary and time allows) generally takes place before submission of self-evaluation report		
Applicant: Confer with review team (Recommended)	Annual Meeting or other convenient arrangement (Year of self-evaluation)		
Applicant Deadline: Submit self-evaluation report, executive summary and faculty profile to team and AACSB	4-5 months prior to Visit	4-5 months prior to visit	4-5 months prior to Visit
<i>Team Chair Deadline:</i> Submit draft pre-visit letter to AACSB for review by subcommittee of IAC recommending visit or no-visit and listing concerns (standard by standard analyses) for IAC review (review conducted electronically)	Normally 2 months prior to the visit date		
<i>Team Chair Deadline:</i> Send previsit letter to applicant	Normally 45 days prior to scheduled team visit date		
<i>Team Chair:</i> Confer with host regarding visit schedule	45 days prior to visit		
Applicant Deadline: Submit response to previsit letter (to team and to AACSB)	As per date listed in previsit letter		
<i>Review Team Chair:</i> Send Team Visit Report to applicant and IAC.	Within 10 days after the visit		
Applicant Deadline: Send optional response to Team Visit Report	Within 10 days of receiving team's report		
Initial Accreditation Committee: Review team's recommendation and send to Board	As per scheduled committee meeting date		
Board: Ratifies and sends letters to applicant	Ratification performed via electronic ballot to the AACSB Board of Directors within 1 week of IAC meeting		
Official Recognition	Annual Meeting (Normally, in April following the Visit)		

III. APPLICANT COMPARISON GROUPS

Processes to support the accreditation review include the selection of comparison groups to form a relevant context for judgments, inform strategic planning activities, and assist in the selection of Peer Review Team members. Reviewers from comparable institutions are better prepared to make evaluative judgments about the applicant, to understand the applicant and its aspirations, and to offer suggestions for the applicant's improvement.

What is required?

The applicant submits three comparison groups selected from members of the Accreditation Council and submits this information with the letter of application for initial accreditation. Comparison groups may be selected on the basis of institutional or program comparisons. It is important to note that the same school may be used in all three groups -- peer, competitor, and aspirant -- based upon the characteristics of the school and/or its program.

- **Comparable Peers:** A list of schools considered similar in mission and assumed appropriate for performance comparison. A minimum of six comparable schools must be provided. The schools should be chosen carefully to match key characteristics of the applicant. In addition to mission, some features that might be salient when choosing comparison schools include student populations served, size, degree levels, and primary funding source.
- **Competitive Group:** A list of schools so directly competitive that conflict of interest considerations exclude their personnel from the review process. The competitive school list may be of any number. Only those schools should be included where the direct competition for students, faculty, or resources is so compelling that the appearance of a conflict of interest is present.
- **Aspirant Group:** A list of schools that provides a developmental goal for the applicant, represents management education programs or features that the applicant hopes to emulate, and place the vision and strategy of the applicant in context. The list of aspirant schools may be of any number, though a minimum of three schools is required to compile the statistical data reports.

Comparison groups do not imply categories or rankings of schools or members accredited by AACSB International. AACSB International will not publish or otherwise make available comparison group listings beyond the accreditation process. These lists are for the benefit of the applicant and the Peer Review Team in the accreditation review.

Although comparison groups include only AACSB International accredited schools of business applicants are encouraged to look beyond academe for examples of best practices and potential Peer Review Team members. Processes for selecting Peer Review Team members strive to value and support involvement from corporations and other appropriate persons.

The applicant should demonstrate in the review that it relates appropriately to the operational levels of the comparison school set. In some circumstances particular features of the applicant may make some of the data non-comparable.

Use of the Comparison Groups

The appropriate accreditation committee chair selects, and proposes to the applicant for acceptance, Peer Review Team members from the Comparable Peers and Aspirant Group. Sometimes for scheduling or other reasons, reviewers who are not on the Comparison Group list may be proposed.

IV. THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

When developing the Self- Evaluation Report (SER), applicants are encouraged to use the Self- Evaluation Report Template provided by AACSB which can be found at: (http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/business/initial_accrreditation.asp). While in the initial accreditation period, the Team Chair can provide the following assistance:

1. Visit the campus to become more familiar with the applicant and the institution as a whole (optional).
2. Identify areas in the draft SER that may be unclear, point out issues where further clarification may be needed, and single out other areas of possible concern. The Chair can provide answers to questions about the Initial Accreditation process, the standards and also assist the applicant in making a determination on the readiness for accreditation.
3. Encourage the applicant to submit draft materials as early as possible to allow time for possible modifications.
4. Ensure continuous communication throughout the self-evaluation period.
5. Provide illustrative guidance, not prescriptive guidance.
6. Encourage the applicant to develop a SER that:
 - Tells the institution's story.
 - Is no more than 100 pages in length, or less, depending on size and complexity of the degree offerings.
 - Is well-written and understandable.
 - Includes faculty vitae as an appendix.
 - Includes a summary for each section of the SER to help guide the reader through the material.
 - Includes summary data, retaining large information compilations on campus, as opposed to including them in the report.
 - Limits appendices to those directly relevant, and includes a table of contents and cross-references .

The SER is due to the team members and the IAC 4-5 months before the scheduled Peer Review Team visit and should be sent as follows:

- Electronic copies of the SER and appendices to all members of the team with a copy to the Chair of the IAC at IAC@aacsb.edu

- Two hard copies of the SER to the Co-Chair, Initial Accreditation Committee, c/o AACSB International, 777 South Harbor Island Blvd., Suite 750, Tampa, FL, 33602-5730, UNITED STATES.

V. PEER REVIEW TEAM VISIT

The on-site review affords the best opportunity for the team to assess the applicant's case for initial accreditation. An important aspect of the on-site review is verification of data supporting the information presented in the SER. Equally important is the team's assessment of the qualitative dimension of the educational programs that only can be verified through face-to-face interaction.

The Team Chair will structure the on-site review schedule and team member assignments to ensure a reasonable balance between information gathering/verification and information analysis/synthesis. Under certain circumstances the IAC chair may require that, at the cost of the applicant school, a senior AACSB accreditation staff member accompanies the team during the visit. This is done for the purpose of providing guidance and consistency. The staff member is part of the team, but does not have any voting rights with respect to the accreditation recommendation.

Planning the Visit

1. Prior to the visit, the Team Chair will work with the applicant to clarify the itinerary and appointments for the visit. This step enables the applicant to make necessary arrangements and appointments with appropriate representatives.
2. Prior to the visit, the Team Chair will inform the applicant of on-campus needs such as housing, workroom, meeting rooms, computers, printers, and word processing support. A workroom should be established on campus for the team to review records and information. The hotel should include a working area for the team.
3. The team meets with the applicant early in the visit to confirm schedules and discuss any last minute information needs or itinerary changes.
4. During the initial phase of the visit, the Peer Review Team will be focused on fact gathering/verification. This process will allow the Team to further explore the qualitative implications of the facts and concerns previously identified. Early fact gathering/verification allows the Peer Review Team sufficient time to discuss these concerns with the applicant.
5. Generally the Peer Review Team will meet with the President and Provost both at the start of the visit to discuss the purpose of the on-site review and at the conclusion of the visit to provide the team recommendation.
6. The Team Chair will make time each day to speak with the host dean to report on any issues that have been uncovered. The host Dean will then have the opportunity to clarify or provide additional information for accuracy.
7. The applicant should expect a visit of at least two and a half days. The visit may be shortened or lengthened with the mutual agreement of the applicant and Team Chair. Team members generally arrive in the late afternoon or early evening prior to the first full day.

8. At the conclusion of the visit, the Team will share its impressions and concerns and make its recommendation first to the host dean and then to the president. The Peer Review Team will make every effort to have a draft of the report completed before leaving campus. The final report is due to the applicant and the IAC (IAC@aacsb.edu) within 10 days of the visit.

Possible document/meeting requests from the Team:

The following records may be requested:

Students

- Official graduation lists for the most recent commencement. The team will review the lists and may request a sample of transcripts.
- Records/folders for students enrolled during a recent term and class rolls/lists, including faculty names for all business courses taught during a recent term.
- Probation and dismissal lists for the most recent academic year.
- List of transfer students for a recent term and records relating to the assurance of learning accepted toward meeting degree requirements.
- Information regarding student employment for recent graduates.
- Student usage of the library and computer technology.

Faculty

- Faculty files for all participating and supporting faculty teaching during a recent term, including faculty CVs.
- Files on promotion and tenure cases for the prior five-year period.
- Research output, including samples of output or access to output for the previous five-year period.
- Faculty professional development plans.
- Updated faculty data sheets, as appropriate.

Programs

- Course syllabi for all business courses used to satisfy the curriculum standards.
- Copies of articulation agreements with other institutions.
- Curriculum descriptions for any new programs to be introduced.
- Final exams for all core business courses taught during a recent term.
- Outcome assessment information, such as learning goals, measurements, and results.

University/School

- Copies of all institutional catalogs, promotional brochures and recruitment information.
- Copies of any plan implementation reports, handbooks, policy manuals, and other relevant materials.

The following meetings and discussions may be requested:

The Peer Review Team may find that meetings and discussions with entities such as those listed below can provide additional opportunities for the team to understand and assess the applicant's mission, processes, and outcomes:

- Key administrators or staff in the business unit, such as department chairs, associate deans, assistant deans, program directors, center directors, advisors, and others.
- Chief executive and chief academic officers of the institution, e.g., president, chancellor, provost, academic vice-president, etc.
- Other university deans.
- Key committees, such as promotion and tenure, strategic planning, curriculum, assessment, and research.
- Faculty representatives, e.g., senior faculty representatives, junior faculty representatives, clinical faculty representatives, part-time and adjunct faculty representatives; participating and supporting faculty representatives, tenured and untenured faculty representatives.
- Student service directors, e.g., graduate admissions, academic support and advising, career services and placement, information technology.
- Students such as class visits, students assembled by applicant, and student advisory board.
- Facilities such as the library, computer labs, classrooms, other campus sites.

The applicant should understand its obligation to the team and must bear the responsibility in making its case and demonstrating that processes are in place to assure quality and continuous development and improvement. The applicant must explain its mission and objectives in terms of accreditation standards application.

When meeting with the dean and president, the team chair should emphasize that the recommendation is subject to change, either positively or negatively, to reflect consistency of decisions across applicants with similar missions. **No public announcement should be made until official notification is given by AACSB and the team recommendation has been ratified by the Board.**

VI. THE TEAM VISIT REPORT

In preparing the applicant's Team Report, the Peer Review Team will assimilate the relevant information, constructively assess and perform a micro and macro analysis to (1) assess the applicant's performance relative to each standard; (2) determine how the applicant's policies and practices, in relation to each standard, affect achievement and continuity of overall high quality; and (3) consider whether or not the applicant's processes lead to outcomes that are consistent with its mission and objectives. The Team performs a standard by standard review of the school's situation. Additionally, the report notes the processes utilized by the applicant to ensure achievement of the standards, as well as those processes that may inhibit achievement of the standards.

Elements of the Peer Review Team Report:

- Statement of Team Recommendation**

For initial business accreditation the options include:

1. **Accreditation.** The Team concludes that the applicant fulfills its mission and achieves overall high quality with processes in place that assure continuous improvement. An appropriate strategic plan is in place to guide activities to the first five-year maintenance review.
 2. **A one-year deferral.** The Team indicates specific deficiencies that can be resolved within one year, but precludes immediate accreditation. The Team should set forth issues to be addressed in the applicant's deferral report. Normally a visit will follow review of the report.
 3. **Denial.** The Team indicates that the applicant has deficiencies that cannot be remedied within one year and that preclude a favorable assessment of overall high quality. The letter should set forth clearly the deficiencies that led to the recommendation.
- Identification of areas that must be addressed prior to the first maintenance review *or* during the deferral review.
 - Relevant facts and assessment of strengths and weaknesses on a standard-by-standard basis in support of the team accreditation recommendation.
 - Commendations of strengths, innovations, and unique features.
 - Opportunities for continuous improvement relevant to the accreditation standards
 - Summary of the peer review visit.

**If a team member is not in agreement with the majority of the team, that team member has the option to file a minority report along with the official team report.

Optional Response to the Peer Review Team Report

Within 10 days of receipt of the Peer Review Team Report, the applicant has the option to respond to the PRT report clarifying any of the comments and/or factual information noted within the report. A copy should also be sent to the IAC Co-Chair in care of the AACSB International office, or electronically to IAC@aacsb.edu.

VII. REVIEW OF THE TEAM RECOMMENDATION

Initial Accreditation Committee

The IAC will normally review the team visit report and any response from the applicant at its next scheduled meeting. Their review will result in a decision to:

- Concur with the Team recommendation.
- Remand the team's recommendation.
 - The committee may remand the recommendation to the Peer Review Team for information, clarification, or similar reconsideration when an apparent inconsistency is noted. In this case the committee convenes a conference call with the committee chair, team chair, liaison, reader, PRT members, and AACSB staff to clarify information and reach agreement on the recommendation.

Board of Directors

The IAC concurrence to accredit or deny initial accreditation is forwarded to the AACSB Board of Directors for ratification. The Board of Directors will ratify or remand the IAC recommendation within one week of receiving the information from the committee. When the Board of Directors ratifies, the institution is accredited and joins the AACSB Accreditation Council. Accreditation is valid for five years, with a maintenance visit in year five. The Board will send official notification to the institution and provide formal recognition at the AACSB International Annual Meeting, usually held in April of the visit year.

The Board may remand the recommendation to the IAC for further information.

Applicant Options

The institution may withdraw its application for initial accreditation any time prior to consideration by the Board of Directors. In the case of a decision to deny accreditation, the applicant may submit an appeal to the Chair of the Board of AACSB International. An Appeal Panel will be formed to hear the appeal and make a judgment. The decision of the Appeal Panel is final.

VIII. DEFERRAL REVIEW

If, during the initial accreditation review, the Peer Review Team finds standards-related deficiencies that can be resolved within one year, the team will recommend a one-year deferral review. The Peer Review Team identifies these deficiencies in the Peer Review Team Visit Report and states the expectations for the deferral review. A deferral team will be determined and the school is provided with a due date for the submission of the deferral report. The applicant distributes to the Deferral Team and IAC its response to the specific concerns cited by the Peer Review Team.

Deferral Review Team

The IAC selects, and proposes to the applicant for approval, the Deferral Team. This team normally includes one member from the original Peer Review Team and one member from (or appointed by) the IAC.

The Deferral Team focuses on the issues noted in the decision letter from the accreditation committee chair and more detailed in the original Peer Review Team Visit Report.

Review of Deferral Report from Applicant

In the year following the original Peer Review Team visit, the applicant will submit a written report to the Deferral Team and the IAC. This report details the progress made to address the issues noted in the original Peer Review Team Report. The Deferral Team reviews the response from the applicant and confers with the appropriate accreditation committee to determine if the concerns have been satisfactorily addressed. Ordinarily, the deferral Team conducts an on-site review within one year following the original Peer Review Team visit. The deferral visit is generally 1.5 days.

Review of Team Recommendation

The process for committee review of the Deferral Review Team Report is the same as that outlined for Peer Review Team Recommendations.

The IAC concurrence to accredit or deny initial accreditation is forwarded to the AACSB Board of Directors for ratification. The Board of Directors will ratify or remand the IAC recommendation within one week of receiving the information from the committee. When the Board of Directors ratifies a recommendation for initial accreditation, the institution is accredited and joins the AACSB Accreditation Council. Accreditation is valid for five years. A maintenance visit will occur in year five. The Board will send official notification to the institution and provide formal recognition at the AACSB International Annual Meeting, usually held in April of the visit year. AACSB does not publicize the names of institutions to which the Board denies accreditation.

APPENDIX A: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS FOR DOWNLOAD

The following documents referenced within this Handbook may be downloaded from the AACSB International website at <http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/process.asp>.

Accreditation Process Flowcharts, Timelines, and Terminology

-  Business Accreditation
-  Accounting Accreditation – Institutions Holding Business Accreditation
-  Accounting Accreditation – Institutions Also Pursuing Business Accreditation
-  Maintenance of Accreditation Timeline
-  Accreditation Roles and Responsibilities
-  Accreditation Terminology

Letter of Application for Initial Accreditation

-  Letter of Application for Initial Accreditation Template

Self Evaluation Report (SER)

-  SER Guidelines – Business
-  SER Guidelines - Accounting

Faculty Sufficiency & Faculty Qualifications Tables *(to be completed and submitted with Eligibility Application, Standards Alignment Plan, and Plan Implementation Reports)*

-  Table 2-1 - Five-Year Summary of Intellectual Contributions
-  Table 2-2 - Five-Year Summary of Peer Reviewed Journals (Optional)
-  Table 9-1 - Summary of Faculty Sufficiency
-  Table 10-1 - Summary of Faculty Intellectual Contributions and Qualifications
-  Table 10-2 - Calculations Relative to Deployment of Qualified Faculty

Applicant Profile

-  Applicant Profile Sheet

Initial Accreditation Reviews

-  PreVisit Letter and Standard by Standard Analysis – Business and Accounting
-  Sample Visit Schedule – Business and Accounting
-  Initial Team Report Sample – Business
-  Initial Team Report Sample – Accounting

Deferral of Accreditation Reviews

-  Deferral of Accreditation Review Template – Business
-  Deferral of Accreditation Review Template – Accounting