



## Redesigning WASC

### Summary of Task Force Findings and Recommendations

The Handbook Steering Committee is responsible to oversee the organization of the redesign process. It has charged a number of Task Forces, comprised of Steering Committee members and institutional representatives, to review the Commission’s goals in these areas: Retention and Graduation; Changing Ecology of Higher Education; Levels of Learning/Degree Qualifications Profile; and Public Reporting and Transparency. A fifth Task Force will meet in May to begin the process of incorporating recommendations into a new evaluation process. In addition, there has been a Task Force on For Profit Institutions and another on Financial Reporting and Evaluation. Additional notes, task force members and further details of the work of each of the Task Forces are posted at <http://www.wascenior.org/handbook/taskforce>.

The following summaries focus on key findings and recommendations, and the follow up that has occurred:

| Task Force   | Findings and Recommendations   |
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| <b>Retention and Graduation</b><br>(1/13/2011)             | <p><b>Charge: Should the Commission goal of requiring external validation and benchmarking of graduation rates be adopted? If so, how would this be done?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An internal study by WASC found that teams and the Commission did not consistently address graduation rates in reports and accrediting actions, although this has been an expectation since 2008. These study results, along with increased national attention to defining more appropriately and improving retention/graduation rates, warrants the approach the Commission is taking.</li> <li>▪ The issue is one of great importance to the region and the nation, and should be addressed with some urgency.</li> <li>▪ Any consideration of “rates” needs to take into account institutional context and the types of students the institutions serves – providing “numbers with narratives.”</li> <li>▪ WASC should develop a common template for reporting aggregated and disaggregated rates along several common dimensions by degree level: racial-ethnic background, gender, SES, transfer status, and outcomes – overall rates, time to degree, etc.</li> <li>▪ WASC should organize a region-wide learning community to support cohorts of institutions dealing with similar issues as well as sharing of best practices.</li> <li>▪ In the first years of implementation, specially trained panels should review institutional reports, and where acceptable rates are found, provide for minimal reporting thereafter. For those needing improvement, plans for improvement would be developed.</li> </ul> <p><b>Follow Up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A subcommittee has been formed to work on common definitions and a possible reporting format that builds on available institutional data</li> <li>▪ Meetings have been held with the Center for Evidence Based Change, developers of the Cal-PASS and Hi-PASS systems, how their existing databases could be used to support this initiative</li> <li>▪ A committee of CAIR is being formed to assist with the implementation of reporting.</li> <li>▪ Funding to support this initiative is expected to be received through a major grant from one or more foundations.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Changing Ecology of Higher Education</b><br>(2/11/2011) | <p><b>Charge: What are the current and emerging trends that WASC should address in its new Handbook? How can WASC stay open and innovative in the face of increasing regulatory pressures?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Task Force developed an extensive array of changes already underway, and organized them into eight categories for further expansion and revision.</li> <li>▪ Given the extensiveness and accelerating pace of change, the Handbook redesign process should include a focus on these changes and their potential impact for WASC.</li> <li>▪ WASC can play a leadership role through its new Handbook and a series of activities facilitating institutional engagement with the changing ecology.</li> </ul>  |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ WASC should consider developing an ongoing research and development capability that can provide “windows onto these change processes” for all members.</li> <li>▪ WASC’s role should not be to mandate how institutions should deal with change dynamics, but rather to provide whatever resources are possible to allow them to create conversations about change and bring them into their own institutions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Follow Up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gather feedback at the Open Learning Lounge of the ARC on the major trends impacting the ecology of learning in higher education</li> <li>▪ Identifying those elements in the changing ecology that seem most directly relevant to the Handbook revision</li> <li>▪ Identify ways WASC can continue to engage its constituencies on the changing ecology through interactive web tools, discussions, workshops, conferences, etc., including sharing of innovative practices.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Degree Qualifications Framework &amp; Levels of Learning</b><br/>(2/15/2011)</p> | <p><b>Charge: How can WASC develop external reference points to validate that the level of learning graduates achieve is “good enough” for the degree awarded, taking into account institutional mission and context? Should WASC move beyond a minimum number of credit hours to define degrees by a commonly accepted set of expectations, such as that developed in the proposed Degree Qualifications Profile?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Task Force reviewed CFR 2.2 and 2.6 and the current state of institutional progress with assessment as well as the significantly increased national concern about the effectiveness of accreditation in assuring appropriate levels of learning for graduates.</li> <li>▪ The Task Force affirmed the Commission goal of addressing these issues directly by establishing a process for external validation of the level of learning in key competency areas, such as those enumerated in CFR 2.2 for the bachelor’s degree.</li> <li>▪ The Task Force also reviewed the proposed Lumina Degree Qualification Profile (DQP) and found it to represent a useful and flexible framework that could guide both institutional conversations and accrediting reviews, especially in dealing with new institutions and new delivery modes. It recommended adopting the DQP in November 2011, after discussions with institutions throughout the spring and summer, so that it could be used adaptively and flexibly as a guide to implementing CR 2.2.</li> </ul> <p><b>Follow Up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A sub-group of the Task Force will work on identifying core competencies that could be externally benchmarked, and propose multiple approaches for each that could be used by institutions.</li> <li>▪ Another sub-group will continue to explore the application of the DQP to explore its value and possible application in the accrediting process and linkage to existing Criteria for Review.</li> <li>▪ WASC will work with NCHEMS to develop a list of possible approaches currently being used by institutions to validate the level of learning, and with AAC&amp;U on developing cross-institutional application of rubrics in key areas already in use.</li> <li>▪ WASC should consider developing one or more learning communities to continue the dialogue with institutions how to move assessment forward from a focus on process to external validation of learning results.</li> <li>▪ Institutions coming up for WASC review should be invited on a voluntary basis to explore the value of the DQP.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Public Reporting and Transparency</b><br/>(3/18/2011)</p>                        | <p><b>The Task force engaged three questions: 1) Should institutions be expected to make more information public beyond the current expectations of CFR 1.2? 2) Should WASC make reports and action letters public and issue some type of report card on the outcomes of its institutional evaluations? and 3) What kinds of public reporting might WASC do to promote better understanding of quality issues and sharing of good practices?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Task Force supported the Commission goal for greater transparency. It</li> </ul>  |

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|  | <p>recommended that action letters, but not self studies or team reports, be made publicly available by WASC on its website along with a link to any institutional response. Confidential communications would be permitted under limited circumstances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ That a report card or some additional reporting mechanism that might include: i) a rating (not met, needs improvement, met, developed, exemplary) for each CFR; ii) for a more select set of categories under the WASC Standards; or iii) or making public a scoring on the Framework for Evaluating Educational Effectiveness.</li> <li>▪ That CFR 1.2 be expanded so all institutions make public within 2 clicks on their website four- and six-year graduation rates with disaggregated data and learning outcomes.</li> <li>▪ That each institution propose a list of comparable institutions for its benchmarks, to be reviewed and accepted by WASC.</li> <li>▪ That WASC develop groupings or categories of institutions for comparisons of graduation rates (and possibly learning outcomes).</li> <li>▪ WASC should give positive recognition to institutions, such as establishing categories of distinction, with institutions applying for recognition based on a set of criteria (like the Leadership in Energy &amp; Environmental Design -- LEED – program or Carnegie's elective Community Engagement classification).</li> <li>▪ WASC should develop a proactive program of communication including an improved website, Op-Ed pieces and periodic reports to educate and explain what accreditation means and to highlight issues on quality and institutional effectiveness.</li> </ul> <p><b>Follow Up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sub-groups will work on filling out the details of these results</li> <li>▪ Sample models of possible report cards will be circulated for comment</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>For-profit Institutions</b><br/>(11/27/2010)</p> | <p><b>Charge: Are there areas where WASC should develop special approaches to dealing with for profit institutions, especially those publicly traded or with large amounts of venture capital money?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ WASC needs a better understanding of the business models of the different kinds of for profit institutions, and develop special approaches, or protocols, where appropriate.</li> <li>▪ Two key areas were identified for immediate follow up: finances and recruitment practices. Other areas, such as governance or faculty roles, should be addressed in the revision of the Standards of Accreditation</li> <li>▪ Institutional integrity needs to be more clearly defined to address consumer protection issues in areas where abuses have been found.</li> <li>▪ Financial practices need to be reviewed by those with sufficient expertise and confidentiality, especially where information may be confidential or proprietary</li> </ul> <p><b>Follow up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Commission has approved the development of a contract with an independent auditing firm to review the financials of publicly traded or large venture capital funded institutions based on protocols of review we will develop.</li> <li>▪ One publicly traded for profit institution has agreed to serve as a pilot for this approach</li> <li>▪ Special guidelines are under development to address recruitment, admissions and financial aid practices that will be circulated for comment in the next 45 days.</li> </ul>   |