

Coherent Vision for the Accrediting Review

The academy is a coherent whole whose purpose is to pursue truth through scholarly inquiry. Its coherency comes from its singular goal: to create a space where faculty and student learners can form a community that practices obedience to truth, thereby developing wisdom for the faculty, for the students, and for the academic community. Our vision for the accreditation review is based on this coherent academic vision, namely, that we celebrate inquiry, the asking of questions and the pursuit of and obedience to truth through the research process. We view capacity and educational effectiveness, respectively, as the space and the teaching/learning practices that provide means and end to the goal of scholarly inquiry.

The coherency of our accrediting review is delivered by the single element – our five year old process of the *program review as research*, whose evolution is described in section A.3, and whose ingredients are described by attachment to this section as “Program Review Ingredients”. We have seen how this approach to accreditation and to pursuing the goals of the academy at the program level builds community and conversation. Furthermore it has wide faculty buy-in, is sustainable, and it is teachable and transferable. The program review incorporates elements to both capacity and educational effectiveness: a) capacity is incorporated in our taking stock of our “space”: intellectual – faculty & students, curricular, co-curricular, staffing, domestic and international campus locations, physical plant, fiscal position, spiritual state, and our human demographics; whereas b) our educational effectiveness is each found in each curricular and co-curricular program’s pursuit of its student learning outcomes via its engagement with the disciplines of the academy. Out of this entire process grows our set of research questions, as enumerated in see section B.3.ii below.

Pepperdine’s research-based culture of evidence lies within the academic community itself, where students and faculty seek the truths offered through research and are transformed by those truths. The subject under inquiry in this research model is the academic process itself, where students and faculty are both mentors and protégés of the discipline in which they engage. Faculty teach in order to prepare students for a life of the mind, based on the ability to critically navigate their worlds—asking questions, formulating approaches to answering these questions, and reflecting on what they learn. In other words, the purpose is to teach so students learn deeply how to learn for their entire lives. And in turn, students assist faculty in becoming students of the teaching/learning process.

In the academic world, perhaps most especially in a school in which there is a focused mission and a sincere effort to maintain ties with the spiritual roots of the founder--autonomy and individuality have traditionally been highly prized. Assessment serves the valuable role of bringing all of the players together around the same table of inquiry, thereby creating community. Faculty members discuss student learning and course structure in order to make adjustments to curricula and syllabi. In the safety of focused discourse, both effective and ineffective approaches to pedagogy are identified. To capture faculty imagination and turn it into an intellectual inquiry, research questions are posed about the academic program, such as how well students are meeting the goals established

for each discipline. Using a research model to investigate courses allows us to rely on actual student learning and performance as evidence for the quality of our academic programs.

The purpose of building a culture of evidence is not the mere accumulation of data, but rather the honing of fruitful inquiry and ongoing dialogue about our academic community. Although we are accumulating many data-rich artifacts in our Institutional Portfolio (see the attachment entitled “Institutional Portfolio Table of Contents”), the most important part of this process is our ability to ask good questions and draw solid conclusions. A research-based culture of evidence has begun to flourish at Pepperdine University among students, faculty, staff, administration, and the Board of Regents who anticipate the WASC process as important in assisting the institution in increasingly becoming a reflective group of learners who rely on and utilize meaningful data.

Specific outcomes for the entire accrediting review

Our fundamental desired outcome for this accreditation review process is to build our reflective, academic research-based culture of evidence in order to enhance student learning. Specifically, we desire to achieve the following:

1. The development of and more effective use of indicators of institutional performance and educational effectiveness to support institutional planning and decision making;
2. Greater clarity about the institution’s educational objectives and criteria for defining and evaluating those objectives;
3. Improvement of the institution’s capacity for self review and of its systems of quality assurance;
4. A deeper understanding of student learning, the development of more varied and effective methods of assessing learning, and the use of the results of this process to improve programs and institutional practices;

Systematic engagement of the faculty with issues of assessing and improving teaching and learning processes within the institution, and with aligning support systems for faculty more effectively toward this end.