



El Camino College Compton Educational Center

What is Accreditation and How Does an Institution Become Accredited?

Definition of Accreditation

"Institutional accreditation is public certification that institutions meet defined standards of quality and responsibility. It is granted by accrediting associations, which are private, non-governmental associations formed by educational institutions to provide standards for excellence, a process of quality review and certification, and impetus for institutional and educational improvement. There are three kinds of accrediting associations recognized by the U.S. Department of Education – regional accrediting agencies, national accrediting agencies, and professional and specialized programmatic accrediting bodies.

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) is one of six regional accrediting associations in the United States. It has responsibility for accrediting qualified educational institutions in California, Hawaii, and areas of the Pacific which are formally affiliated with the United States."¹

Benefits of Accreditation

"Accreditation serves the public interest by certifying that the institution meets or exceeds specific standards of quality. This certification is also used by the federal government and other entities to determine whether an institution and its students are eligible for participation in federal financial aid programs or other forms of financial assistance to institutions. The peer-based nature of accreditation helps to maintain the values of higher education, particularly the values associated with academic freedom. Finally, the process of periodic self-examination and external peer review is a positive force in sustaining the quality of higher education and improving the effectiveness of accredited institutions."²

Description and Scope of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) is one of three commissions comprising WASC and has the responsibility for accrediting institutions that offer one or more higher education programs of two academic years in length leading to the Associate's Degree. The Commission only accredits colleges; it does not accredit programs, college districts, or community college systems."³

¹ Eligibility, Candidacy and Initial Accreditation Manual, A Publication of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Summer 2009

² Ibid

³ Ibid

This communication summarizes information relative to the accreditation process, and is intended to serve as a guide only. A more detailed outline with timelines for the myriad of activities associated with applying for accreditation eligibility and the accreditation process will be released within the month.

El Camino College Compton Community Educational Center Background

In fall 2006 when the El Camino Community College District entered into an agreement with the Compton Community College District and the Chancellor's Office to establish the El Camino College Compton Community Educational Center, the first order of business was to stabilize the Center. In the succeeding years, El Camino College has established the Center's academic and student support programs, as well as most of the administrative services needed to support Center operations. El Camino College and its Center continue to make significant progress toward offering a comprehensive curriculum and providing services to new and returning students. During the past four years, our programs and services have continued to develop. Additionally, our enrollment has increased considerably each year since 2006.

Today, El Camino College Compton Center is making strides for achieving the minimum standards for accreditation eligibility. Our next phase will include a focus on improving student achievement and proficiency in areas including: planning, program review and evaluation, and linking program review to the planning process. El Camino College's Center must also focus on developing student learning outcomes (SLOs) for all courses and programs.

Steps in Establishing Eligibility for Accreditation

The following benchmarks are intended to assist El Camino College in establishing goals throughout the accreditation eligibility process for the Compton Center.

Step 1- Getting Started

2010-11: El Camino College Compton Center will establish an Accreditation Committee. Faculty members and administrators will participate in accreditation workshops, training and accreditation site visits to colleges to gain a better understanding of the accreditation standards. The Accreditation Liaison Officer and the Vice President of ECC Compton Center, through the ACCJC (Commission), will coordinate the training and site visits.

El Camino College will ensure that all governance committees are established, and/or that current committees are restructured to improve their effectiveness. Additionally, all appointed members must participate in the committees on a regular basis; and accurate agendas and minutes must be published on the Compton.edu website in a timely manner.

Faculty development workshops throughout the year will include training for faculty and staff relative to the standards, themes and purpose of accreditation. Workshops will emphasize the importance of creating a culture of evidence based on data to improve decision making and information sharing.

Step 2 – Applying for Eligibility

2011-12: El Camino College Compton Center will evaluate and prepare responses to the twenty-one eligibility criteria which demonstrate readiness to apply for eligibility for accredited status. Additionally, the ECC Compton Center must meet the Standards for Accreditation as part of realizing the 21 criteria for eligibility. Once El Camino College has concluded that the Compton Center has successfully met the 21 criteria for eligibility for accreditation and the Standards for Accreditation, El Camino College will submit an application for eligibility to the ACCJC. Upon review, ACCJC may grant or deny accreditation eligibility.

An assessment of the El Camino College Compton Center's proficiency in each of the following 21 criteria for eligibility is required, along with a description and relevant evidence.

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| 1. Authority | 10. Student Learning and Achievement | 17. Financial Resources |
| 2. Mission | 11. General Education | 18. Financial Accountability |
| 3. Governing Board | 12. Academic Freedom | 19. Institutional Planning and Evaluation |
| 4. Chief Executive Officer | 13. Faculty | 20. Public Information |
| 5. Administrative Capacity | 14. Student Services | 21. Relations with the Accrediting Commission |
| 6. Operational Status | 15. Admissions | |
| 7. Degrees | 16. Information and Learning Resources | |
| 8. Educational Programs | | |
| 9. Academic Credit | | |

Step 3 – Applying for Candidacy When Commission Approves Eligibility Application

Once eligibility is granted by the ACCJC, El Camino College will prepare to apply for candidacy status of its Center. El Camino College will complete and submit a Self Study Report documenting how the Center meets the Standards of Accreditation and other ACCJC policies. The ACCJC will establish timelines for El Camino College to prepare and submit a Self Study Report, which usually takes approximately 18 to 24 months.

Following acceptance of the Self Study Report, the ACCJC will send a team to visit El Camino College Compton Center to determine whether their standards, policies and eligibility criteria have been met. The ACCJC may grant the Center candidacy or extension, deferral, denial, or termination of candidacy. If candidacy is granted, El Camino College's Center must remain in compliance with the standards of accreditation throughout the entire candidacy period, which is at least two years. If denial occurs, the institution must start over and submit another application for eligibility to the ACCJC.

Step 4 – Completing Candidacy and Applying for Initial Accreditation

El Camino College will apply for initial accreditation for its Compton Center. This process includes submission of a second Self Study Report using the Standards of Accreditation, the Self Study Manual, and other ACCJC policies and resources. The Self Study Report must be supported by evidence that the Center continues to meet the eligibility requirements as well as the ACCJC's standards and policies.

Once the report has been submitted to the ACCJC, a site team will visit the Center to determine whether it has continually met all standards and policies of the ACCJC. After the review of the Self Study and site visit team reports, the ACCJC will either grant initial accreditation to approve a new college, extend the period of candidacy, or deny initial accreditation.

Step 5 – Sustaining Accreditation

"If initial accreditation is granted, the institution begins a six-year cycle of periodic review for reaffirmation of accreditation which has several parts. These include a six-year comprehensive evaluation, a midterm evaluation in the third year, annual reports and annual fiscal reports to the Commission, and other progress and substantive change reports and visits as deemed necessary by the Commission."⁴

⁴ Eligibility, Candidacy and Initial Accreditation Manual, A Publication of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Summer 2009