

ACCREDITATION FAQ's

Q. What is accreditation?

A. Accreditation by nationally recognized agencies provides assurance to the public, in particular to prospective students, that an organization has been found to meet the agency's clearly stated requirements and criteria and that there are reasonable grounds for believing that it will continue to meet them.

Q. Who are the nationally recognized agencies that accredit school and universities in the United States? And, more specifically, which organization is responsible for accrediting UNM?

A. There are six regional associations that accredit schools and colleges in the United States: the North Central, Middle States, New England, Northwest, Southern and Western Associations. All schools and colleges in New Mexico, including UNM, are accredited by the North Central Association (NCA). Although most of the institutions that the NCA accredits are in the upper Midwest, its geographical range extends from West Virginia to Arizona. UNM has been continually accredited through the North Central Association since 1922.

Q. What is the Higher Learning Commission (HLC)? How is it different from the North Central Association (NCA)?

A. The Higher Learning Commission is the re-named corporation affiliated with the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools that is responsible for the accreditation of colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher learning. The full title used to be North Central Association Commission on Institutions of Higher Education and most people referred to the accreditation process as "NCA accreditation." The new name reflects the shift in higher education toward accountability for student learning. More information about the HLC can be accessed on the [Commission's](#) web site.

Q. What is the difference between institutional accreditation and program accreditation?

A. Institutional accreditation speaks to the overall quality of the organization without making judgments about specific programs. Institutional accreditation is accreditation of all programs, sites, and methods of delivery. The accreditation of individual programs, such as those preparing students to practice a profession, is carried out by specialized or program accrediting bodies that apply specific standards for curriculum and course content. A current list of UNM's programmatic accreditations can be found in the [UNM Fact Book](#).

Q. Who evaluates the Higher Learning Commission (HLC)?

A. The HLC is recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation ([CHEA](#)) and the [United States Department of Education](#) . CHEA is a national, non-governmental organization that provides recognition of accrediting bodies. The United States Department of Education maintains a list of accrediting agencies determined to be “reliable authorities as to the quality of training offered by educational institutions and programs.” The list serves as one of the bases for the federal government’s determination of institutional eligibility for participation in federally funded programs, including Title IV student financial aid.

Q. When was UNM’s last re-accreditation visit from the HLC and what was the result? When will UNM’s next re-accreditation visit take place?

A. UNM’s last re-accreditation visit took place in January 1999 under the “old” criteria system. UNM received re-accreditation for 10 years, with no interim reports or additional visits required. UNM’s next visit is scheduled for April 6-8, 2009 using the “new” criteria system.

Q. What is the difference between the “new” and “old” accreditation criteria?

A. The HLC adopted it’s new set of criteria for evaluation in 2004. As of January 2005 all institutions were required to use the “new” criteria. The evaluation criteria were revised to provide more focus on organizational effectiveness and performance. The “old” criteria consisted of a set of criteria and General Institutional Requirements (GIR’s) that emphasized institutional inputs. In other words, institutions were asked to describe and provide data on how each of the elements of the criteria and GIRS were being met. The “new” criteria requires an institution to show not only that it meets the criteria, but to also demonstrate evidence that it meets the criteria and is continually trying to improve efforts.

Q. What are the HLC’s “new” criteria for evaluation?

A. The five new criteria headings are:

- Mission and Integrity
- Preparing for the Future
- Student Learning and Effective Teaching
- Acquisition, Discovery and Application of Knowledge
- Engagement and Service

Each criterion consists of:

- a criterion statement, which provides a descriptive and definitive characteristics of the criterion
- a set of 4-5 core components, which are subcategories of the criterion that are reviewed in order to determine whether an organization meets the criterion.

UNM must demonstrate how it meets the criteria by providing examples of evidence for each of the core components. Need more information? Click on one of these links . . .

[List of Criteria](#)

[HLC Policy Manual](#)

Q. What is a Special Emphasis self-study?

A. A special emphasis self-study allows an institution to focus in-depth attention within the self-study on a select group of issues critical to its pursuit of continuous improvement and educational excellence. The institution must still address the evaluation criteria and provide evidence that it meets the five accreditation criteria. UNM has been approved to conduct a special emphasis self-study on the topic of providing access and success to our diverse student body. Overall, we want to focus on ways we can improve our efforts for providing access and ensuring success to our undergraduate, graduate, and professional student.

Q. How is the UNM preparing for the re-accreditation visit in 2009?

A. The Provost has appointed a steering committee to manage the self-study process and prepare for the site visit. In addition, committees have been formed around each of the criteria and the special emphasis to help draft the self-study. A list of the committee members is available on the [accreditation website](#) . For more information, contact the Nancy Middlebrook, University Accreditation Director and Self-Study Coordinator, or Wynn Goering, Vice Provost and Steering Committee Chair at accred@unm.edu .

Q. What units and departments will be included in the self-study?

A. The institutional accreditation applies to all units, campuses, academic programs, and non-academic programs of the University of New Mexico. The institutional accreditation covers the Albuquerque campus, the health sciences, the four branch campuses, continuing education, extended university activities, athletics, and all other educational sites affiliated with UNM.

Q. Who will be on the HLC's site visit team?

A. The campus will be visited by a Peer Review Team of 15 trained Consultant Evaluators made up of a set of college/university administrators, staff, and faculty who have been accepted to the Peer Review Corps by the HLC. All will have gone through training for such visits and will be familiar with the new Criteria.

Q. What will the HLC team do during the visit?

A. The purpose of the team's visit is threefold:

- (1) to evaluate UNM and ascertain the extent to which it fulfills the accreditation criteria,
- (2) to provide consultation relative to the ongoing improvement of the institution for both the accreditation criteria and the special emphasis, and
- (3) to recommend the affiliation status that UNM should have with the HLC.

The team will receive a copy of UNM's self-study report a few months before the site visit and will be provided with or have electronic access to a variety of documents before and during their visit. During their visit, team members will have meetings with key individuals and groups from across the entire university (including the branches) and will have open meetings that are less structured. The agenda for these meetings is set by the Team Chair with input from the team. In addition, the team will provide an Exit Report for the university outlining their preliminary findings.

Q. How will the findings be reported?

A. The HLC team will write a report of their visit which includes the following:

- (1) an Assurance Section that addresses the Criteria and Core Components for accreditation in which the team will note the Components that have been met, any that have not been, and any qualifications or concerns regarding them
- (2) an Advancement section to offer consultative advice to the campus about issues that might be of concern and ways in which UNM might seek to approach or address those issues.

The President should receive a draft of the written report within 6 weeks of the visit. UNM representatives will have a chance to correct any errors in fact if needed, and the final report will be submitted to the HLC no more than 9 weeks after the visit.

Q. What kinds of recommendations might the team make?

A. In the best case scenario, the team may simply recommend continued accreditation with no recommended follow-up activities before the institution's next scheduled visit in 10 years. In the worse case scenario (which would only apply to an institution in serious financial or administrative trouble), the team could recommend probation or even withdrawal of accreditation. In between there is a range of possible actions, including required progress reports on how the institution is dealing with particular issues, monitoring reports dealing with specific issues that require careful and ongoing attention, and contingency reports dealing with changes taking place that affect the mission or nature of the institution. Under the new criteria, HLC staff estimate that 85% of institutions will have some kind of follow-up activity recommended, usually in the form of a progress report. Because UNM has chosen to undergo a special emphasis self-

study which will outline goals for the future, UNM has agreed to additional consultative visits and follow up with the HLC.

Q. What will happen after UNM receives the official report and what if anything will be done with it?

A. Copies of the report will be made available to the UNM community for review. The report will be used as a guide to validate the areas that UNM has major strengths in as well as to determine action steps for making improvements in areas that are not as strong. UNM is committed to reporting and receiving consultation from the HLC as part of the special emphasis self-study, but may also need to respond to any follow-up action recommended by the team. The Provost's Office has created and staffed several full-time ongoing positions to coordinate and support the ongoing activities for institutional accreditation, academic program review, and student outcomes assessment.

Q. What do we hope to learn from this process?

A. The self-study process is a unique opportunity to examine the entire university to in an effort to continually improve and provide the best educational opportunities to our students. In addition, the process of conducting a self study develops networks across units, departments, colleges, and campuses that can be used to more effectively achieve the overall mission of the university.