



PREACCREDITATION HANDBOOK



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AACSB International PreAccreditation 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 Initial Accreditation Process”, “The Accounting Accreditation Process” and “The Maintenance of Accreditation Process.”

This handbook focuses on the PreAccreditation phase of the Accreditation Process. It provides a clear understanding of the philosophy, procedures and guidelines for the PreAccreditation Process, which includes the submission of the eligibility application, development of the Standards Alignment Plan and the determination of the scope of accreditation. Where possible, the applicant should follow these directions. However, Mentors should remain somewhat flexible in conducting reviews to achieve the conceptual aims that (1) bring value to the applicant, (2) maintain the integrity of AACSB International accreditation, and (3) provide a learning experience to effectively implement the PreAccreditation Process. Where the applicants or the Mentors find they must improvise to accomplish the purposes of the review, documentation of any deviations must be provided.

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://aacsb.ekpondemand.com/ekp_intelladonu/servlet/ekp/login?getnews=Y&TEMPLATE=aacsb.wm).

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.).

Please note that following acceptance of the eligibility application, each institution is assigned an accreditation staff liaison. This individual serves as the designated AACSB staff person for all your accreditation related questions and needs, and also functions as the liaison between your institution and the volunteer network (peer review team members, accreditation committee, mentor, etc.).

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I. THE PREACCREDITATION PROCESS

Purpose of the PreAccreditation Process

The purpose of the PreAccreditation Process is to establish stable, constructive, ongoing, and helpful partnerships between AACSB International and applicants working toward AACSB accreditation. To assure the quality of this assistance program, policies and procedures have been developed that outline the expectations and commitments for each partner.

Benefits of the PreAccreditation Process for the Applicant

Applicants participating in the process are strongly committed to the goal of quality enhancement and continuous improvement. They possess the desire and capacity to secure accreditation. Applicants benefit from the PreAccreditation Process by receiving ongoing assistance that fosters continuous improvement and minimizes non-productive or misdirected efforts. Applicants receive experienced counsel from a trained Mentor during the period and feedback through interactions with the PreAccreditation Committee (PAC) and the Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC).

Importance of Commitment

Overall responsibility for meeting the standards for accreditation lies with the applicant. Strong commitment by the central administration and the dean is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for success; **stakeholder involvement is essential**. Accountability for execution of the Alignment Plan lies with the applicant and is another critical element for success.

II. THE APPLICATION PROCESS

PreAccreditation Eligibility Application Process

AACSB International membership is a pre-requisite for entering the accreditation process.

AACSB International members are eligible for the following types of PreAccreditation:

- Business Accreditation
- Business Accreditation concurrent with Accounting Accreditation
- Accounting Accreditation for schools already holding Business Accreditation

For information regarding the Accounting Accreditation process, please refer to the Accounting Accreditation Handbook.

What is Required?

The applicant submits one set of each of the following items (written in English).

- PreAccreditation Eligibility Application
- An organizational chart specifying the structure of both the institution (if applicable), as well as the business academic unit
- Current documents that show the financial condition of the institution and the absolute and relative amount of monetary resources allocated to its business programs
- A non-refundable PreAccreditation eligibility application fee of \$1,000 USD

When to Submit

PreAccreditation Eligibility Applications can be submitted at any time during the year. Once a month the newly received applications will be reviewed and a staff recommendation regarding acceptance or denial will be forwarded to the Chair of the PAC for his/her consideration.

How to Submit

The applicant submits one hard-copy set of the above mentioned items to the PreAccreditation Committee Chair in care of the AACSB International headquarters:

Chair, PreAccreditation Committee
AACSB International
777 S. Harbour Island Boulevard
Suite 750
Tampa, FL 33602-5730
USA

The applicant also submits the set of items electronically to the PreAccreditation Committee Chair at PAC@aacsb.edu. The electronic file(s) should be in Adobe PDF or Microsoft Word format.

III. ASSIGNMENT OF THE MENTOR

Assignment of the Mentor

Upon acceptance of the eligibility application, the PAC appoints a Mentor. The mentor is generally a Dean from a similar school or a Dean who is familiar with the type of school and/or education system in the country. It is a requirement that the proposed mentor is familiar with AACSB standards and processes. The proposed Mentor needs to be approved and accepted by the applicant school. If the school does reject the mentor, AACSB will continue to work with the school until a suitable mentor has accepted the assignment.

The Mentor's Term

The Mentor can assist an applicant for up to two years to develop a Standards Alignment Plan (SAP). If after two years the SAP is not completed, the school can request an extension from the PAC as long as the school has concurrence from the mentor for this request. The extension is granted for one year and can be requested a total of two times. Once the plan is developed, reviewed and accepted by the PAC and IAC, the Mentor continues working with the applicant for up to three years during the implementation of the Plan.

Role of the Mentor

The Mentor serves as a key resource in advising the school on the self-assessment process and the development of the Standards Alignment Plan. The Mentor may ask questions that will stimulate a school to define its processes, activities and outcomes, as well as present various options to help develop a better understanding of the standards and what they mean for an individual applicant. The Mentor is a volunteer who receives no compensation from the applicant or from AACSB International.

Mentor Responsibilities to the Applicant

- Provide clarification of the philosophy and intent of the standards and their interpretations
- Be fully informed about AACSB International accreditation standards, and the accreditation process
- Be available regularly to the dean
- Visit the applicant and provide feedback relating to the PreAccreditation self-assessment and the Standards Alignment Plan
- Be encouraging, but also honest and realistic
- Advise the applicant about possible culture change and the length of time required to accomplish the improvements envisioned by the applicant
- Assist the applicant to focus on the standards within the context of its mission
- Ask questions that stimulate the applicant to define its processes, activities and outcomes

Mentor Responsibilities to AACSB /PreAccreditation Committee

- Consult with the PAC/AACSB International when issues or processes need clarification
- Identify significant problems in the overall PreAccreditation Process and partnership
- Provide the PAC liaison with periodic reports on progress toward developing the Standards Alignment Plan
- Identify and resolve all eligibility issues surrounding the scope of accreditation, diversity and expectations for ethical behavior
- Provides a Standards Alignment Plan critique that discusses feasibility of the plan and the likely access to and commitment of resources necessary to achieve the plan's goals. If a Standard Alignment Plan is not developed within one year, the mentor submits a report providing feedback on the school's progress towards the development of the Standards Alignment Plan.
- Provide a recommendation on accepting the Standards Alignment Plan in the form of the *SAP Review Template*

Applicant Responsibilities to the Mentor and AACSB/PreAccreditation Committee

- Be sincere about the institutional commitment of resources, time, money, energy, and change required for PreAccreditation
- Review the accreditation standards and identify areas of strengths and weaknesses prior to the Mentor's campus visit
- Identify items in the standards that need clarification
- Provide accurate data and information about the applicant, its aspirations, commitment, systems, and processes; exhibit complete honesty and openness; provide information on options that could be applied in meeting the standards
- Regard the Mentor as a source of advice; take responsibility for conducting the self-assessment and preparing the Standards Alignment Plan
- Work with the Mentor to prepare a campus visit agenda
- Take consultation seriously and be considerate of the Mentor's time
- Provide feedback on the quality of PreAccreditation mentoring
- Make timely payment of appropriate expenses (including airfare, hotel accommodations, meals, transportation, etc.) for the Mentor's campus visit
- Provide the Mentor with periodic reports on progress toward developing the Standards Alignment Plan
- Submit Standards Alignment Plan or Progress Report to the PAC within one year after receipt of eligibility acceptance letter (development of Alignment Plan may take up to two years).

Role of the PreAccreditation Committee Liaison

A member of the PAC is assigned as the committee liaison for the applicant school. The role of this liaison is to:

- Facilitate communication with the PAC
- Become familiar with the programs of the applicant
- Act as a resource for clarifying issues with Mentors
- Review and present the Standards Alignment Plan or Progress Report to the PAC

IV. THE MENTOR VISIT

After the Mentor has been confirmed, it is the applicant's responsibility to contact the mentor to schedule the first on-site visit. Materials that can be shared with the mentor at that time are: course catalog(s), web site addresses, curricula, budget, faculty vitae, and other descriptive materials are helpful. The applicant should also provide materials that are related to the concerns and recommendations specified in the correspondence of the PreAccreditation Committee.

Although the visit should be scheduled early on in the accreditation process, it is advisable to schedule the visit after the applicant has conducted a preliminary self-assessment. Generally, the visit occurs in the third month after the eligibility application was accepted.

Purpose of the Mentor Visit

Once appointed, the Mentor will conduct an initial on-site visit to:

- Gain familiarity with the applicant
- Identify and resolve eligibility issues (i.e., scope of accreditation, diversity, expectations for ethical behavior)
- Provide clarification regarding the philosophy and intent of the standards
- Ensure consistent application of standards among faculty, staff and administration
- Analyze the applicant's achievement relative to the standards
- Identify issues that may help or hinder potential accreditation
- Confirm the existence of functioning processes and controls that ensure continuous improvement and accomplishment of the mission
- Assist applicant in responding to issues identified during the review of the application
- Review measurable outcomes of achievement and functioning of processes designed to produce stated outcomes
- Begin formulating recommendations for quality enhancement and continuous improvement
- Provide insight to the PAC concerning the applicant's perceived timetable for development of the Standards Alignment Plan

Preparation for the Mentor Visit

The applicant should:

- Initiate contact with the Mentor
- Plan an agenda for the Mentor to review
- Provide the Mentor, prior to the visit, information about the campus and business academic unit. Suggested information:

Eligibility Application	Reports (including annual reports)
Catalogs	Drafts of materials for Alignment Plan, if available
Brochures	Faculty vitae
Planning documents	Assessment activities
Budget documents	Institutional and departmental organizational charts
Web site addresses	Internal processes

During the Visit

The applicant should:

- Provide an opportunity for the Mentor to become familiar with the applicant's facilities
- Provide opportunities for the Mentor to talk with stakeholder groups (faculty, students, central administration, employers, alumni) about mission and objectives, processes, and resources
- Allow for open discussion of strengths and areas for improvement, role of faculty, and preparation for the Standards Alignment Plan

Following the Visit

The applicant should:

- Prepare a draft of the Standards Alignment Plan for completing the Accreditation process
- Forward appropriate additional information to the Mentor
- Process Mentor's visit expenses in a timely manner

Mentor Reporting Requirements

Once appointed by the PAC, the Mentor conducts an initial on-site advising visit. During the on-site review, the Mentor identifies, clarifies and resolves any eligibility issues. The Mentor provides his or her verification of and final recommendation on Eligibility Criteria to the appointed PAC liaison and AACSB accreditation staff liaison. The Mentor's Eligibility Criteria recommendation is included as a section of the Mentor Summary Report.

Within 10 days of each visit, the Mentor drafts a summary report that includes a final recommendation on eligibility criteria, highlights areas of potential concern and indicates a timetable for completion of the Standards Alignment Plan. The summary report consists of three distinct sections: the standard-by-standard summary report, the eligibility criteria recommendation report and the Mentor visit schedule.

The applicant has up to two years to develop the plan. However, generally the plan is developed in one year. If the Standard Alignment Plan is not developed in one year, the applicant is required to submit a progress report no later than one year from the date the eligibility application was approved. This progress report should indicate the following:

- Timeline for completion of the Standard Alignment plan
- An analyses of the deficiencies between the school's current situation and the standards
- A report of the actions undertaken so far.
- Any challenges and/or other developments that delay the completion of the Standards Alignment Plan.

The mentor reviews the progress report and submits his/her review to the PAC for consideration along with the applicant's progress report. If necessary, the Mentor conducts a second on-site visit to assist the applicant in the continued development of the Standards Alignment Plan. If the applicant requires additional time for the submission of the Standards Alignment Plan, the school can request a one year extension. Extension requests need to have the support of the mentor and are approved by the PreAccreditation Committee. In total the PAC can approve two one-year extensions. The mentor continuous to update the PAC liaison and AACSB accreditation staff liaison on a regular basis on the progress the applicant is making

Once the Standards Alignment Plan is submitted, the Mentor reviews the plan, completes the SAP Review Template and provides a recommendation report to the PAC and AACSB accreditation staff liaison. When the Standards Alignment Plan is accepted by both the PAC and IAC, the Mentor conducts annual on-site visits for up to three years as the applicant works to implement the Plan. The Mentor provides regular updates to the IAC liaison on the applicant's progress.

V. MISSION CONSENSUS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Relationship to the Standards Alignment Plan

Developing a Standards Alignment Plan begins with the preparation of a clear statement of the applicant's mission, vision, and objectives. The mission should:

- Include a commitment to high quality and continuous improvement.
- Identify the level of programs (e.g., undergraduate, master's, and/or doctoral).
- Include the objectives of each degree program offered and should describe the characteristics of the constituents for whom the programs are designed.
- Indicate clearly the applicant's commitment to and relative emphasis on teaching, intellectual contributions, and service.
- Be consistent with the overall mission of the institution of which it is a part.

A strategic planning process for review and revision of mission and goals should be in place. This process should include inputs from relevant stakeholders and adequate resources should be budgeted for its attainment.

How should the applicant go about preparing the initial statement of mission, vision, and objectives?

Most applicants will have existing documents (catalog copy, internal documents, etc.) that already identify aspects of its mission. Statements need to be reviewed to assure they are presented in a fashion that facilitates self-evaluation and peer review.

Determining the mission and strategic management objectives should be a dynamic process that periodically, if not constantly, is subject to review and leads to consensus among stakeholders.

VI. SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Self-Assessment Process

The preliminary self-assessment process is the most critical step in assessing the business academic unit's readiness to pursue AACSB International accreditation. It is a gap analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the applicant relative to each of the accreditation standards and relative to the applicant's unique mission and strategic management objectives. As a result, this systematic gap analysis of the business academic unit's mission, strategic management objectives, faculty, students, curriculum, instructional resources, operations, intellectual contributions, and processes provides the basis upon which a realistic and comprehensive Standards Alignment Plan can be developed.

Conducting the Self-Assessment and Involving Appropriate Stakeholders

The self-assessment process involves all stakeholders of the business academic unit including faculty, administration, students, alumni, and business constituencies. There is no prescribed single approach to conducting the self-assessment. An applicant must develop a plan that meets its specific needs and guides it through a rigorous self-assessment process.

The plan for conducting the self-assessment should be developed within the first three months of PreAccreditation. It is not expected that the gap analysis will be completed within this three-months time frame. However, the plan of study should be established noting key questions to be answered, key participants, responsible parties, time frames, and appropriate study methods. Data collection should be conducted to support the objectives of the self-assessment and to assist in answering the self-assessment questions.

Sources of Information to Guide the Self-Assessment

Once the self-assessment plan has been developed, all data should be collected, organized, and analyzed. Possible sources of information that can be used to evaluate the business academic unit's programs and processes include:

- Regional accreditation reports;
- Internal reports (e.g., program evaluations, outcomes reports, assessment results, exit surveys);
- External reports (e.g., reports to state boards of regents, state-wide program evaluations);
- Surveys;
- Interviews;
- Focus group results; and
- Other applicant or university reports.

Characteristics of an Effective Self-Assessment and Gap Analysis

Systematic

The self-assessment should be systematic and well planned to ensure that it is thorough and comprehensive. The applicant should avoid the temptation to use whatever data is already available and force answers to a set of pre-determined questions. Clearly identify the areas to be addressed, the questions to be answered, and the best ways to secure the most valid and reliable information.

Objective

Avoid overstating the results of the gap analysis or focusing only on the weaknesses or limitations that are identified. The weaknesses need to be remedied and the strengths need to be maintained or enhanced.

Multiple sources of input

The standards should provide guidance, but should not be used as a laundry list against which to answer "Yes, we do" or "No, we don't". Use multiple sources of input. Consider which groups are in the best position to provide input on key issues.

Multiple data collection devices

Use multiple data collection devices. Using only reports or the results of one survey will not provide the scope and depth of input that is needed. Use data collection methods best suited to the questions needing answers. For example, the quality of student services, teaching, and interaction with the business community should all be addressed in different ways by different groups.

Multiple reviewers to provide objectivity

Use multiple reviewers to provide a "reality check". Once the self-assessment data is consolidated, the results should be reviewed by various groups to ensure accurate interpretation. These groups might include: the faculty, a planning committee, a student advisory committee, or members of a business advisory council.

Realistic representation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

- Conduct a realistic assessment of strengths, areas for improvement, opportunities, and threats.
- Continue to realistically assess these within the context of the AACSB International standards (i.e. What gaps need to be closed to meet AACSB standards expectations as well as what AACSB standards expectations are currently met and how.)
- Determine the changes, additions, or modifications that may need to be made in programs and processes.

Communicating the Outcomes of the Self-Assessment Process

During the self-assessment, communication should be ongoing with all stakeholders and participants. These include the faculty, staff, students, alumni, and business constituencies. All parties need to understand the PreAccreditation Process and the responsibilities of a PreAccreditation applicant.

The results of the gap analysis should be shared with the Mentor and should become the basis for the Standards Alignment Plan.

VII. STANDARDS ALIGNMENT PLAN

Philosophy and Expectations

The best Standards Alignment Plan is a strategic management plan that is also attentive to satisfaction of accreditation standards. The process of creating the Plan should naturally flow from, and be part of, the ongoing strategic management process.

A long-standing problem with many Plans is that they focus solely on closing gaps between current conditions and the conditions necessary to satisfy accreditation standards. An internally generated Plan that is built on the applicant's particular circumstances is most likely to yield sustained continuous improvement. The goal of the accreditation process regarding strategic management is a differentiated mission based on strategic thinking, and a Plan for implementing the mission while closing existing gaps between conditions at the institution and the accreditation standards.

There is a 100 page limit for the Standards Alignment Plan excluding Tables and Appendices.

Objectives and Content

The Standards Alignment Plan is an action plan showing how the PreAccreditation applicant will address its areas for improvement during the period of PreAccreditation and how the applicant will maintain continuous improvements in its program. The Plan outlines what gaps need to be closed to meet AACSB standards expectations and how current activities meet the expectations of the standards, which ones, and how.

The Standards Alignment Plan should:

- Lead to a performance level that satisfies AACSB International accreditation standards.
- Demonstrate that the resources necessary to satisfy the standards will be available.
- Show how these resources will be managed to reach that performance level.

The Plan should reflect two levels of analysis. The first level should identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in each standard.

The second level should formulate an action plan for addressing weaknesses during the period of PreAccreditation and for maintaining continuous improvement of strengths. The action plan must identify specific improvement activities and establish a timetable for the completion of each. It should also address the resources, the individual(s) responsible for each activity, and an anticipated completion date.

In general, most Standards Alignment Plans contain four separate and distinct sections:

1. *Background information on the institution and the business academic unit/program*

- Location of the Institution, including all non-main campus programs offered by the business academic unit
- Institution's Mission
- Structure of the Business academic unit
- Special Activities of the Business academic unit
- Types of Degrees Awarded
- Number of Students
- Number of Faculty and Qualifications

2. *The mission statement*

The Plan should contain the business academic unit's mission/vision statement. This section should include a discussion of the process(es) utilized for mission development and the process(es) that will be utilized for ongoing review and refinement of the mission. Opportunities for stakeholder involvement in these processes should be noted.

3. *A gap analysis of the strengths and areas for improvement of the business academic unit/program*

The Plan should include a gap analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the business academic unit in relationship to each of the standards: Strategic Management, Participants, and Assurance of Learning. This self-assessment should begin with a description of the processes that were followed in the development of the self-assessment and that will be used for monitoring and assessing continuous improvement with regard to the standards. The gap analysis should also identify which AACSB standards expectations are currently satisfied and which standards remain to be met.

4. *An action plan*

The fourth section of the Plan should outline the plan for continuous improvement, especially those improvements needed to satisfy the accreditation standards. The above self-assessment is translated into detailed actions necessary to satisfy the standard and to ensure continuous improvement. The person(s) and/or group(s) who will be responsible for taking the required action, the measures for assessing performance of those actions, the processes involved, the timetable for taking the action, and the required resources should be presented in a summary table. See a sample action plan below.

Standards	Identified gap	Improvement Activity	Resources Needed	Completion Date/ Individual(s) Responsible	Measures of Performance	Process(es) Involved
Standard 10	Need for leadership in accounting department	Recruit chairperson for the Accounting Department with a record of scholarly achievement and a record of leadership	\$110,000 additional budget	June 20xx/ Dean, Search Committee	Position filled; starting date; individual's record of scholarly achievement and leadership	Faculty utilization and scheduling process; faculty recruiting process; minority faculty recruiting program; faculty orientation process
	Low percentage of AQ faculty in Finance	Add one new Finance faculty member	\$90,000 additional budget	August 20xx/ Search Committee	Position filled; faculty member's vita	Faculty utilization and scheduling process; faculty recruiting process; minority faculty recruiting program; faculty orientation process
	Too many PQ faculty and not enough AQ faculty in light of the mission of the school	To reduce use of adjuncts and to reduce teaching loads, increase the size of selected business classes (from 25 to 30 or slightly higher)	None	Fall 20xx through Spring 20xx/ Dean, Associate Dean and Department Chairs	Actual teaching loads and class sizes	Faculty utilization and scheduling process

Relationship to the Strategic Management Plan

The Standards Alignment Plan naturally represents a facet of the applicant's overall strategic management planning processes. As such, the applicant's Strategic Management Plan should either be presented as an appendix to the Plan, or the Plan should be depicted as a part of the Strategic Management Plan.

Submission of the Standards Alignment Plans

Standards Alignment Plans are considered by the PAC three times during the year. Contact the Accreditation Staff or email PAC@aacsb.edu for corresponding submission deadlines.

Submitted Plans should be signed by the institution's chief executive officer (president), chief academic officer (vice president or provost), and business academic unit head indicating their approval and commitment. Alignment Plans should be submitted electronically and in hard copy format (one complete set). Please contact AACSB International for applicable guidelines (pac@aacsb.edu). The page limit for the Plan is 100 pages not including tables and appendices.

A copy of the Plan should be provided to the Mentor prior to submission to the PAC. The Mentor will submit a recommendation to the PAC. Involvement of the Mentor as drafts of the Plan are developed facilitates this evaluation and, more importantly, provides the applicant with an ongoing benefit from review and comment. Once completed, the Plan and Mentor recommendation will be presented to the PAC for review.

Extension for Submission of Standards Alignment Plan

Standards Alignment Plans are to be submitted to the PAC no later than two years following the acceptance of the eligibility application, however, are generally submitted within one year following that date. If the Standards Alignment Plan is not submitted within one year following the acceptance of the eligibility application, the applicant is required to submit a progress report to the PAC detailing the progress the applicant is making towards the development of the Plan.

Requests for exceptions to the submission deadline policy for Standards Alignment Plans will be reviewed and determined by the PAC on a case-by-case basis. Requests for extensions must be in writing, must be endorsed by appropriate PreAccreditation applicant institutional officials, must clearly explain the extenuating circumstances for the requested extension, must present a specific action plan/timeline for the submission of the Plan, and should be supported in writing by the Mentor. The request must be received by the PAC no later than two weeks prior to the expected submission date.

VIII. REVIEW OF THE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT PLAN

Role of the Mentor

The Mentor thoroughly reviews the applicant's Progress report towards the development of the Accreditation Plan and/or the Standards Alignment Plan itself and submits a written recommendation to the PAC and the IAC. The Mentor's recommendation should address:

- commitment to achieving AACSB International accreditation; evidence of stakeholder (e.g., students, faculty, staff, community, university administrators) commitment to the PreAccreditation Process and AACSB International accreditation;
- the academic unit's understanding of both the PreAccreditation Process and AACSB International standards for accreditation;
- mission consensus demonstrated through stakeholder involvement (e.g., students, faculty, staff, community, university administrators);
- whether the mission is realistic, visionary, and detailed enough to serve as a guide for selection of alternatives and opportunities;
- the likelihood that the applicant will meet AACSB International standards and attain accreditation; the Mentor may recommend that the applicant should withdraw since it has no reasonable chance to achieve accreditation;
- internal and external assessment processes for achieving quality and continuous improvement;
- evidence that processes used to strengthen curricula, develop faculty and staff, improve instruction, and enhance intellectual activity are appropriate and will result in improvement;
- evidence that the academic unit's Plan accurately projects the current situation and future direction and activities to be taken by the academic unit, and that the action steps listed and the corresponding completion dates and assigned responsibilities for each step appear to be realistic, and that these plans enable the academic unit to meet accreditation requirements; and
- any unique strengths or weaknesses that need to be observed and tracked during the PreAccreditation Process and addressed in the plan implementation report.

The Mentor's review of the Standards Alignment Plan must, besides a recommendation, also include the completion of the SAP Review Template.

Role of the PreAccreditation Committee Liaison

The PAC liaison has primary responsibility to present the Standards Alignment Plan or the Progress Report and to lead discussion on it, including the recommendation of the Mentor.

The ability of the liaison to explain the progress of the applicant is enhanced by involvement with the Mentor prior to the committee meeting.

Criteria for Evaluating the Standards Alignment Plan

To what extent will achievement of the actions outlined in the plan result in attaining a level of quality appropriate for accreditation?

Does it include these important elements?

- Clearly identified objectives and outcomes
- A schedule for progress checkpoints and completion
- Measurements of progress
- Accountable individuals or functions

Is it?

- **Specific:** does it focus on the issues, outcomes, and processes identified in the self-assessment?
- **Quantifiable:** can progress and achievement be tracked and measured?
- **Realistic:** are overall and specific outcomes and objectives consistent with the mission and level of resources? Is the targeted self-evaluation year for accreditation realistic? The academic unit should be aware that programs in business shall satisfy the standards during the self-evaluation and visit years.
- **Comprehensive:** does it cover all standards? Is the emphasis on overall quality and continuous improvement?

Does it explain which AACSB standards expectations are currently met and how?

PreAccreditation Committee Recommendations

Review of progress report:

Each progress report is reviewed by the committee with a focus on timeline and the response to the issues stated in the committee decision letter following the acceptance of the eligibility application. The Committee will take one of the following actions:

- Accept the report and provide recommendations for further development of the SAP if appropriate
- Not accept the report and advise the applicant to withdraw from the process because alignment with the standards is not likely to be achieved within the maximum time allotted.

Review of Standards Alignment Plan:

Each Standards Alignment Plan will be presented and reviewed by the PAC. The Committee will take one of the following actions:

- Accept the Plan

- Accept the Plan, with comments outlining concerns of the Committee that should be addressed by the applicant in its annual reports
- Request that the Plan be revised and resubmitted to address specific issues and concerns identified by the Committee
- Reject the Plan

Guidelines for the Coordination of PAC and IAC Review of Standards Alignment Plans

Once the Standards Alignment Plan is accepted by PAC, the Plan, SAP Review Template, and any relevant correspondence between the Mentor and PAC liaison and reader is forwarded to the designated IAC (liaison and reader) for review. This review process is depicted below:

Guidelines (Process) for the Coordination of PAC and IAC Review of Standards Alignment Plans (SAP)

PAC approves SAP



AACSB staff posts SAP and SAP Review Template on IAC resource site for review by the IAC liaison and IAC reader



If needed, PAC liaison/reader, IAC liaison/reader, and mentor review SAP and SAP Review Template in preparation for discussion via conference call or email



If there are issues/concerns, or clarification is needed, these are provided by the PAC liaison/reader and/or the mentor communicates with the applicant.



IAC considers SAP and reaches recommendation**

- accept SAP and PAC recommendation regarding timeline
- Accept SAP, but not PAC recommendation regarding timeline
- request additional information
- return to PAC for appropriate action

* Mentor, liaisons, and readers should focus on an examination of the SAP's strengths and weaknesses, identify any areas of potential improvement and verify the feasibility of the timeframe for SAP implementation

** IAC discussions on the SAP are led by the designated liaison and reader

IX. ACCEPTANCE OF THE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT PLAN

When the Standards Alignment Plan has been approved by the PAC and IAC, the applicant is on track to accreditation. An applicant is allowed up to five years to implement the Plan with the final two years of implementation corresponding to the Initial Accreditation Process (the Self Evaluation year and the visit year). During this period, the applicant must submit plan implementation reports to the IAC. The IAC reviews the report and provides its comments in the form of a decision letter to the applicant with a copy to the Mentor.

Standards Alignment Plan Implementation

Central to the Standards Alignment Plan implementation phase is the ongoing assistance available to the applicant. This ongoing assistance includes:

- Networking (feedback sessions at the Annual Meeting);
- Review (of the applicant's annual report);
- Education (AACSB International seminars);
- Consultation involving a continuing relationship with the Mentor for up to three years during implementation of the Plan;
- AACSB Staff Liaison to provide assistance with questions.

With ongoing assistance, the applicant implements the goals and actions outlined in its Plan and communicates with the IAC on its progress through the Plan Implementation Reports. The applicant is free to adjust its Standards Alignment Plan as appropriate during this period; such adjustments must be described in the next plan implementation report.

Role of the Mentor

Once the Standards Alignment Plan is accepted, the formal relationship between the Mentor and the applicant continues for up to three additional years until a Peer Review Team Chair is appointed. The mentor will provide an evaluation of the information and outcomes reported by the applicant in its plan implementation report to the IAC.

How Do We Know We Are on Track?

The plan implementation report is the only formal contact with AACSB International, aside from the Mentor and eventually the Chair, while preparing for accreditation. Applicants are encouraged to seek advice and evaluation of their progress from their Mentors and the accreditation staff liaison.

X. PREACCREDITATION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS

Each year or sooner, the applicant will make a report to the IAC on progress the applicant has made in meeting the objectives and action plan items discussed in the Standards Alignment Plan. The original action plan summary table of the Plan should be included, with the present status of each action item indicated. Action items that have fallen behind their scheduled completion dates should be discussed in the text of the plan implementation report. Those action items that are no longer relevant, due to changes in either the internal or external environments of the applicant, also should be highlighted for discussion in the text of the report.

The IAC will review the report to determine if acceptable progress is apparent.

The plan implementation report should:

1. Include a completed current-period Applicant Profile Sheet and Tables 2-1, 2-2 (Optional), 9-1, 10-1, and 10-2. Report should not exceed twenty pages excluding Tables.
2. Respond to concerns, issues, and/or recommendations requested by the IAC in its last review of the program, if any.
3. Explain how the applicant has met the objectives established for the past year of the plan. If the objectives have not been met, provide details (attach a copy of the action plan time frame originally submitted and any subsequent revised time frames). When outcomes or milestones are reported, applicants should support that these outcomes are the result of a continuous improvement process with appropriate stakeholder input. IAC review of plan implementation reports will focus on progress of process development, implementation, and outcomes.
4. Report any changes in the environment (internal or external) that affect the Plan (e.g., a new mission, new president, new dean, changes in enrollment, or deviations from the projected number of faculty as described in the Standards Alignment Plan).
5. Explain how existing strengths have been maintained or improved.
6. Report any new areas of necessary improvement that have emerged.
7. Report any other adjustments to the Standards Alignment Plan (e.g., changes in the time frame leading to the self-evaluation for accreditation).
8. Explain how the applicant will have the necessary continuing support and resources from the administration to meet the objectives outlined in the Plan.
9. Include the signed approvals of the institution's chief executive officer (president), chief academic officer (vice president or provost), and business academic unit head indicating their certification and continuing commitment.

Plan implementation reports should be submitted electronically (IAC@aacsb.edu); please contact AACSB International for applicable guidelines.

Criteria for Evaluating the Plan Implementation Reports

The applicant's progress should be sent to the IAC for review. The review will consist of a copy of the Standards Alignment Plan, Committee correspondence, and previous plan implementation

reports, along with accompanying mentor updates which may take the form of a revised SAP Review Template. A copy of the report is forwarded to the Committee for review. Prior to the Committee meeting, the liaison and reader, along with mentor input, develop perceptions and compare notes. If there are differences or if clarification is needed, the liaison will contact the Mentor for more information. At the Committee meeting, both the liaison and reader will present their impressions. A discussion will focus on what the applicant has accomplished, as well as areas of concern. The key focus is on whether the applicant is making *acceptable progress* toward the accomplishment of alignment with the Standards and preparation for accreditation. If an applicant is not making acceptable progress, the Committee will recommend that it withdraw from the process. This review process is depicted below.

The Committee decision will be one of four options:

1. Acceptance of the report without issues or concerns.
2. Acceptance of the report with issues to be addressed in the next plan implementation report.
3. Non-acceptance of the report due to inadequacy of information provided or a determination that evidence of acceptable progress toward accreditation is not apparent. In such cases, the Committee will outline its concerns and will request a supplemental report.
4. Rejection of the report with a decision to remove the applicant from the process. This option would follow a prior warning that acceptable progress had not been made with the specific concerns to be addressed.

Validation of Progress

Plan Implementation reports provide feedback to the Committee on the applicant's progress. Applicants should be clear and forthright so that the Committee can advise and assist. Representations of compliance by the applicant with the accreditation standards can be verified by the Mentor with subsequent on-site visits during the Standards Alignment Plan implementation phase. The Mentor will provide an evaluation of information and outcomes reported by the applicant in the form of updates on the applicant's plan implementation reports to the IAC liaison. This practice ensures a continuous dialogue and facilitates the flow of accurate information between the applicant and IAC.

The accreditation decision will be based upon a direct assessment of continuous improvement and overall high quality. Therefore, the applicant must be in a position to justify its representations at the time of its self-evaluation and the Peer Review Team visit. Only by gaining confidence that the standards are being met, obtaining continuous Mentor input on questions and concerns, and being as realistic as possible when preparing its annual report will the applicant be best prepared for the self-evaluation and peer review visit for accreditation.

The process for Committee review of the Plan Implementation Report is depicted below:

Guidelines (Process) for the IAC Review of Plan Implementation Reports (PR)

Applicant submits PR

- Copy to: IAC (IAC@aacsb.edu)
(e-copy + 1 hard copy)
- Mentor (e-copy)



Request update from mentor to include an evaluation of information and outcomes reported by the applicant in the PR*



Mentor forwards (annual) update to IAC liaison and reader in preparation for discussion.



Mentor, IAC liaison and reader hold discussion via conference call or email and reach consensus on whether the applicant is making acceptable progress toward the accomplishment of its Standards Alignment Plan



If issues, concerns, or clarification are needed, mentor communicates with applicant



IAC considers PR and reaches recommendation**

- accept PR without concerns
- accept PR with concerns to be addressed
- non-acceptance with requested supplemental report
- reject with recommendation for applicant to withdraw

* This may take the form of a revised SAP Review Template

** IAC discussions on the PR are led by the designated liaison and reader

XI. TRANSITION TO THE INITIAL ACCREDITATION PROCESS

When the Standards Alignment Plan appears to be implemented and adequate progress has been demonstrated, the IAC will direct the applicant to file a letter of application for initial accreditation. The letter of application will include the following:

- The list of degree programs offered by the applicant.
- The list of degree programs that have been approved for exclusion from review (if applicable) or current requests for exclusion of specific programs.
- The list of Comparison Groups, including Comparable Peer Group, Competitive Group, and Aspirant Group.
- The timeframe requested for the on-site review to take place, and the corresponding date that the applicant plans to submit the Self-Evaluation Report (submission of the Self-Evaluation Report is generally at least 4 months before the tentatively scheduled visit date).

The letter of application for initial accreditation should be signed by the Chief Executive Officer (President, Chancellor, etc), the Chief Academic Officer (Provost, Vice-President/Chancellor for Academic Affairs, etc.), and the Head of the Business School (Dean). Submission of the letter of application should be accompanied by full payment of the Initial Accreditation Fee.

Handoff to the Peer Review Team

Upon receipt of the letter of application for initial accreditation and full payment of the Initial Accreditation Fee, the IAC and applicant will concur on the appointment of a Team Chair. The Chair replaces the Mentor. The Chair assists the school with the development of the Self Evaluation Report and the schedule for the initial accreditation visit. The transition from Mentor to the Chair should be facilitated by:

- The passing of relevant documents (Standards Alignment Plan, Strategic Management Plan, Plan Implementation reports, applicant and IAC /PAC correspondence, and other relevant materials).
- A conversation between the Mentor and Chair to discuss issues and concerns.
- If possible, an introductory conversation between the Mentor, Chair, and applicant dean (may be at an AACSB function).






The applicant may select one additional team member from its list of comparable or aspirant schools. The IAC Chair will select the additional team member(s) who may or may not appear on the list of comparable schools submitted by the applicant. Consensus must be reached between the business school and the IAC Chair on the composition of the peer review team as a whole.

Simultaneously, applicant works with the Chair to prepare a Self-Evaluation report and refine the Strategic Management Plan. The Peer Review Process and Self-Evaluation report preparation are detailed in the *Initial Accreditation Handbook*.



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

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

PreAccreditation Eligibility Application

-  Business Eligibility Application
-  Accounting Eligibility Application





Faculty Sufficiency & Faculty Qualifications Tables *(to be completed and submitted with first year Progress Report, Standards Alignment Plan, and PreAccreditation 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

Sample Mentor Visit Report

-  Sample Visit Report
-  Eligibility Criteria Template
-  Sample Visit Schedule

Standards Alignment Plan Development

-  A Self-Assessment Primer for PreAccreditation
-  Business Accreditation Standards Worksheet
-  Accounting Accreditation Standards Worksheet
-  Sample Standards Alignment Plan

Mentor Standards Alignment Plan Review Template

-  Business Standards Alignment Plan Review Template
-  Accounting Standards Alignment Plan Review Template

PreAccreditation Plan Implementation Reports

-  Plan Implementation Report Guidelines
-  Business PreAccreditation Applicant Profile Sheet
-  Accounting PreAccreditation Applicant Profile Sheet

APPENDIX B: ACCREDITATION TERMINOLOGY

Accreditation	Recognition by AACSB International that an institution commits to fulfill its mission, and continues to sustain and improve educational quality of its undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degree programs according to the standards of AACSB International as interpreted by its Peer Review Team(s), accreditation committees, and the Board of Directors.
Accreditation Coordinating Committee (ACC)	Coordinates the work of the operating committees (AAC, IAC, MAC, PAC) and authorizes improvements to the processes and procedures supporting accreditation activities. The ACC also reviews satisfaction of the Eligibility Criteria for schools in all stages of the accreditation process and determines the scope of an institution's accreditation review.
Accreditation Council	Members who have achieved AACSB International accreditation.
Accreditation Quality Committee (AQC)	Reviews the accreditation standards and processes for continuous improvement changes.
Accreditation Recommendation-Initial	Peer review team recommendation to the Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC). The peer review team can recommend accreditation, a one-year deferral, or denial of accreditation. The team recommendation consists of a written team visit report that includes the recommendation and a standard-by-standard analysis and evaluation. Recommendations for initial accreditation and denial of accreditation must be considered for ratification by the Board of Directors.
Accreditation Recommendation-Maintenance	Peer Review Team recommendation can be extension of accreditation or sixth year review. Sixth Year Review Team recommendation can be extension of accreditation or continuing review. Continuing Review Team recommendation can be extension of accreditation or suspension. The appropriate accreditation committee must review all team recommendations for concurrence. Immediate suspension of accreditation can result for cause at any time. Recommendations and concurrence for extension of accreditation and suspension of accreditation must be considered for ratification by the Board of Directors.
Accreditation Statistical Reports	Reports provided (upon request) to the applicant and Peer Review Team members for use as background information in the accreditation review.
Applicant	The department, school, or program unit that is responsible for the degree programs under review. AACSB International accreditation is achieved and awarded to the member institution

for all degree programs in business that it offers (except specifically excluded programs).

Aspirant Group	A list of schools that provides developmental goals for the applicant, represents management education programs or features that the applicant hopes to emulate, and places the vision and strategy of the applicant in context. The list may be of any number.
Business School Questionnaire (BSQ)	Request for annual data from AACSB International to all accreditation council members. Some of these data are included in the accreditation statistical reports.
Comparable Peers	A list of schools considered similar in mission and assumed to be appropriate for performance comparison. A minimum of six comparable schools must be provided.
Comparison Groups	Three types of comparison groups are involved in the accreditation process: comparable peers, a competitive group, and an aspirant group. Comparison groups provide relevant context for judgment, and inform strategic planning activities. Schools within the comparable peer group or aspirant group may be selected as PRT members.
Competitive Groups	A list of schools so directly competitive that conflict of interest considerations exclude their personnel from the review process of the applicant. The 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.
Consultative Feedback (PreAccreditation)	Mentors are encouraged to provide consultative advice relevant to the expectation of continuous improvement. This advice is separate from the Standards Alignment Plan recommendation.
Consultative Feedback (Initial Accreditation)	Peer review teams are encouraged to provide consultative advice relevant to the expectation of continuous improvement. This advice is separate from the accreditation recommendation.
Consultative Report	Report included in the Peer Review Team Visit Report. The report consists of consultative advice that is not relevant to the accreditation recommendation.
Continuing Review	Additional review for up to two years beyond the sixth year review.
Continuing Review Team	Mutually agreed upon team consisting of one member from the

Sixth Year or Peer Review Team and one from (or appointed by) the relevant accreditation committee. The Continuing Review Team evaluates progress and resolution of specific standards-related quality items identified by the Sixth Year Review Visit Report.

Degree Programs

Undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and other equivalent degrees awarded by an institution.

Diversity

In its mission, a school should define the populations it serves, consider its role in creating opportunities for under-served groups, and show how it endeavors to make sure that a variety of perspectives are included in all educational activities.

Effective Practices

Exceptional practices that demonstrate leadership and high quality continuous improvement in management education, noted by the Mentor in his/her summary report and/or the Peer Review Team in its Visit Report.

Eligibility Application

Application submitted to AACSB to establish whether an institution meets the criteria to be eligible for accreditation by AACSB International.

Exclusion of Program(s)

Programs excluded from the accreditation review as described in the eligibility section of the accreditation standards.

Executive Summary

Background information provided by the applicant, which can be up to five pages in length, including a list of self-proposed effective practices.

Fifth Year Maintenance Report

Report includes materials to inform the Peer Review Team before and during the fifth year maintenance review.

Gap Analysis

A systematic analysis of the applicant's strengths and weaknesses relative to each of the AACSB standards for accreditation and relative to the applicant's unique mission and strategic management objectives.

Initial Accreditation

Accreditation granted for a five-year period with a review in the fifth year.

Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC)

Oversees the initial accreditation process, to include but not limited to, appointment of peer review teams and the review and acceptance of plan implementation reports, draft pre visit letters and the initial accreditation recommendation.

Initial Accreditation

A member of the IAC who serves as the principal point of contact

Committee Liaison	and communication between the Initial Accreditation Committee and the PreAccreditation Committee, Mentor, and/or Peer Review Team.
Institution	The member organization of AACSB International. Usually a larger academic organization than the business school being reviewed.
Maintenance of Accreditation	The process or set of activities and results required to maintain accreditation. This process is not a standard-by-standard review. It is an ongoing review which emphasizes continuous improvement to maintain the accreditation status. Accreditation is extended for six years with a review in the fifth year.
Maintenance of Accreditation Committee (MAC)	Appoints a Peer Review Team to assist the applicant in the maintenance of accreditation process, and reviews the maintenance of accreditation recommendation.
Maintenance Review Application (MRA)	The set of documents required for participation in the maintenance of accreditation process.
Maintenance Review Visit Report	The report written by the Peer Review Team for the applicant and for review by the appropriate accreditation committee.
Mentor	Individual assigned to assist an applicant during the PreAccreditation Process. The Mentor reviews the Eligibility Application and facilitates development of the Standards Alignment Plan and provides comments and recommendations to PAC. During implementation of the Plan, the Mentor provides comments to the IAC.
Mentor Recommendations	The mentor's recommendations to the IAC based on the plan implementation report submitted by the applicant.
Mentor Summary Report	A summary report drafted by the Mentor subsequent to the on-site visit to the applicant institution. The report consists of three distinct sections: the standard-by-standard summary report, the eligibility criteria recommendation report and the Mentor visit schedule.
Peer Review Team (PRT)	Mutually agreed upon team, normally chosen from the submitted Comparable Peer or Aspirant Groups. The PRT performs the accreditation review and makes a recommendation to the appropriate accreditation committee.
Peer Review Team Chair (Initial Accreditation)	Chosen from the applicant's submitted Comparable Peer or Aspirant Groups about two years in advance of the on-site review.

The Chair assumes the responsibility of the mentor as the school develops the Self Evaluation Report and prepares for the initial accreditation visit.

**PreAccreditation
Committee (PAC)**

Reviews the PreAccreditation Eligibility Applications for business and assigns a Mentor to assist the applicant in the PreAccreditation Process. The PAC also reviews and approves Standards Alignment Plans.

**PreAccreditation
Committee Liaison**

A member of the PAC who serves as the principal point of contact and communication between the PAC and Mentor.

Previsit Letter

Letter written by the PRT to the applicant based on the Self-Evaluation Report recommending whether or not a visit should take place. The letter typically includes requests for information to be submitted before a visit takes place as well as information that should be available during the visit. The previsit letter typically includes a standard-by-standard analysis of the Self-Evaluation Report.

**Plan Implementation
Reports
(PreAccreditation)**

Plan implementation report to the Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC) on the progress the applicant has made on its Alignment Plan.

Scope of Accreditation

The degree programs that are included in the accreditation review.

Self-Assessment

A systematic analysis of the business academic unit's mission, faculty, students, curriculum, instructional resources, operations, intellectual contributions, and processes, which provides the basis upon which a realistic and comprehensive Standards Alignment Plan can be developed.

**Self-Evaluation Report
(SER)**

Report submitted to the PRT detailing how the applicant meets the standards for accreditation by AACSB International.

Sixth Year Review

Additional review conducted in the sixth year on those standards-related issues specifically identified as problematic in the maintenance of accreditation review.

Sixth Year Review Team

Mutually agreed upon team consisting of one member from the Peer Review Team and one from (or appointed by) the appropriate accreditation committee. The team evaluates resolution of specific standards-related quality issues.

**Standards Alignment Plan
(SAP)**

A plan that establishes the agenda for meeting the AACSB standards for accreditation and achieving the mission and objectives of the applicant seeking accreditation.

Standards Alignment Plan Recommendation (PreAccreditation)	Mentor recommendation to the PreAccreditation Committee (PAC). The Mentor can recommend acceptance or non-acceptance of the Alignment Plan by the PreAccreditation and Initial Accreditation Committees. The Mentor recommendation consists of a written report in the form of the SAP Review Template.
Strategic Management Plan	The systematic planning and implementation for the prioritized use of resources to accomplish the stated mission.
Suspension of Accreditation	Loss of membership in the Accreditation Council.
Withdrawal of Application by Applicant	Action available to applicant any time prior to consideration by the Board of Directors. In the case of an accredited school in the maintenance of accreditation process, withdrawal from the process is also withdrawal from the Accreditation Council.