Mentor Handbook

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Updated April 2015

http://www.aacsb.edu/~media/AACSB/Docs/Accreditation/Handbooks/mentors-2013.ashx
This handbook focuses on the Mentor relationship and responsibilities with an applicant institution through the Initial Accreditation Process. The purpose of this handbook is to provide an understanding of the philosophy, procedures and guidelines for the Initial Accreditation Process and the duties and responsibilities of the Mentor in conducting a thorough and complete review. Where possible, the applicants and Mentors should follow these guidelines. 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 Initial Accreditation Initial Accreditation 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.

In an effort to provide additional assistance in all areas of the accreditation process AACSB has developed online Peer Review Training that is beneficial to the Applicant, Mentor and Peer Review Team. The training can be accessed through the following link: http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/volunteers/training/

Another useful source of information is the accreditation staff liaison. Each institution has an assigned accreditation staff liaison to assist with the business and accounting review process. This individual serves as the designated AACSB staff member for all accreditation related questions and is the liaison between the institution leadership and the volunteer network (mentors, peer review team members, accreditation committees, etc.). The staff liaison is available to assist with any questions regarding the Initial Accreditation Initial Accreditation Process.

Applicants and Mentors are encouraged to provide feedback on the Accreditation Process. This information is carefully considered for opportunities to further refine the Accreditation Process.
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I. ASSIGNMENT OF THE MENTOR

Assignment of the Mentor

After the accreditation eligibility application has been accepted, a Mentor is appointed by the Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC) Chair. Based on recommendations received from AACSB accreditation staff, the IAC Chair selects a volunteer Dean (accreditation unit head) or an experienced Associate Dean familiar with AACSB standards and processes to serve as Mentor. These individuals may continue to be assigned as mentors for five years after leaving their position (i.e. retirement, change in role, etc).

The Mentor’s Term

The Mentor can assist an applicant for up to two years to develop the Initial Self Evaluation Report (iSER). Once the iSER is developed, reviewed and accepted by the IAC (or AAC), the Mentor continues working with the applicant for up to three years to assist the school as it implements the actions outlined in the iSER.

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 iSER. The Mentor asks questions to stimulate a school to define its processes, activities and outcomes. The Mentor may also 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 and/or accounting administrator
- Visit the applicant school and provide feedback relating to the Initial Accreditation self-assessment and iSER development
- 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/Initial Accreditation Committee

- Consult with IAC/AACSB International when issues or processes need clarification
- Identify significant problems in the overall Initial Accreditation Process
• Provide the IAC liaison with periodic reports on progress toward developing the Initial iSER
• Identify and resolve all eligibility issues surrounding the scope of accreditation, social corporate responsibility, the collegiate environment of the school and expectations for ethical behavior
• Provide a iSER critique that discusses the feasibility of the iSER and the likely access to and commitment of resources necessary to achieve the iSER's goals
• Provide a recommendation on accepting the iSER using the iSER Review Template

Applicant Responsibilities to the Mentor and AACSB/Initial Accreditation Committee

• Be sincere about the institutional commitment of resources, time, money, energy, and change required for Initial Accreditation
• 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 iSER
• Work with the Mentor to prepare a campus visit agenda
• Take consultation seriously and be considerate of the Mentor's time
• 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 iSER
• Provide feedback on the quality of mentoring and the Initial Accreditation Process

II. THE MENTOR VISIT

After the Mentor is appointed, the applicant should contact the mentor to determine what information he/she needs to develop an understanding of the applicant and its current situation related to the accreditation standards. Additionally the applicant should provide the mentor with materials related to the Committee concerns and recommendations articulated in the applicant’s decision letter.

The visit should be scheduled as soon as possible. The objective of the first visit is to help the applicant get a better understanding of the accreditation standards, become familiar with AACSB’s terminology and assist the school with the development of a standard-by-standard gap analysis of its current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
Generally, the visit will occur during months two through four after the application is reviewed and accepted. The visit should be scheduled for up to two days. An initial meeting with the president and chief academic officer helps to establish the consultative nature of the visit and affirm the institutional commitment.

**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, and expectations for ethical behavior, sustainability, corporate and social responsibility and maintaining a collegiate environment)
- 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 raised in the eligibility application acceptance letter
- 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 IAC concerning the applicant’s perceived timetable for development of the iSER

**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 (and/or accounting) academic unit. Suggested information:
  
  - Eligibility Application
  - Catalogs
  - Brochures
  - Planning documents
  - Budget documents
  - Web site addresses

  - Reports (including annual reports)
  - Drafts of materials for the iSER, if available
  - Updated Faculty vitae
  - Assessment activities
  - Institutional and departmental organizational charts
  - 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, professional staff, 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 iSER

Following the Visit
The applicant should:

- Continue to develop a draft iSER
- Forward appropriate additional information to the Mentor
- Process Mentor's visit expenses in a timely manner

Mentor Reporting Requirements

[To the IAC (or AAC)]

Within 10 days of each visit, the Mentor drafts a summary report that includes a final recommendation on eligibility criteria (including any scope concerns); highlights areas of potential concern; and indicates the Mentor’s perceived timetable for applicant completion of the self-assessment and iSER. The summary report consists of three distinct sections: the standard-by-standard summary report, the eligibility criteria recommendation report and the Mentor visit schedule.

As the applicant develops their iSER, the mentor reviews on a regular basis sections of the iSER and has clarifying and advisory oriented conversations with the applicant either via telephone, email or in person. During this time, the Mentor continues to update the IAC liaison and AACSB staff liaison on the applicant’s progress toward completion of the iSER. The maximum time limit for the completion of the iSER is set at two years. However, with the right preparation and the correct guidance of a mentor the iSER can be developed in a much shorter period of time.

When the iSER is finalized it needs to be approved by the IAC (AAC). Before the iSER is submitted to the Initial Accreditation Committee it is reviewed by the Mentor who provides a recommendation to the IAC (AAC) and the designated accreditation staff liaison. The mentor provides his/her comments to the committee by using the iSER review template. When the iSER is accepted by the IAC (or AAC), the possible recommendations can be either; 1) move directly to appoint a team chair and start preparing the final Self Evaluation Report or 2)continue to implement the iSER and provide updates to the iSER to the committee on an annual basis or 3) return the iSER to the applicant for additional information. In the last two cases the mentor will continue to work with the school until the applicant has implemented all the action items noted in the iSER. During this time the mentor may, but is not obligated, visit the school. When the committee recommends that a team chair be assigned, the mentor’s work with the
school is completed and an information exchange between mentor and Chair should occur (the mentor will be provided with the Chair’s contact information by the AACSB accreditation staff liaison) so that no information is lost. As long as the mentor is involved with the accreditation efforts of the applicant, the mentor will keep the appropriate accreditation committee informed. A fourth, but less likely, recommendation can be made by the committee after review of the iSER. When the committee feels that the school is too far removed from meeting the standards that it will not be able to meet the standards in the maximum allotted time, the committee can recommend that the school withdraws from the process. At that time, the mentor will be released from the assignment.

III. SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Self-Assessment Process and Why It Is Important

The preliminary self-assessment process is the most critical step in determining the business (or accounting) academic unit's readiness to pursue AACSB International accreditation. The self-assessment process is a gap analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the applicant relative to each of the AACSB International standards for accreditation and relative to the applicant's unique mission and strategic management objectives. As a result, this systematic gap analysis of the business (or accounting) academic unit's mission, strategic management objectives, faculty, students, professional staff, curriculum, instructional resources, operations, intellectual contributions, and processes provides the basis upon which a realistic and comprehensive Self Evaluation Report can be developed.

Conducting the Self-Assessment and Involving Appropriate Stakeholders

The self-assessment process involves all stakeholders of the business (or accounting) academic unit including faculty, administration, professional staff, students, alumni, and business constituencies. There is no prescribed single approach to conducting the self-assessment. An applicant must develop a SER 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 Initial Accreditation. It is not expected that the gap analysis will be completed within this three-month 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 (or accounting) 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
- 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. 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 are consolidated, the results should be reviewed by various groups to ensure accurate interpretation. These groups might include: the faculty, a SER 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 the expectations of AACSB standards as well as what expectations of AACSB standards 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 Initial Accreditation Process and the responsibilities of an Initial Accreditation applicant.

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

IV. REVIEW OF THE INITIAL SELF EVALUATION REPORT

Role of the Mentor

The Mentor thoroughly reviews the applicant's Initial Self Evaluation Report (iSER) and submits a written recommendation to the IAC (or AAC) which includes a reflection on the applicant’s commitment to achieving AACSB International accreditation; its ability to provide evidence of stakeholder involvement (e.g., students, faculty, staff, community, university administrators) and the commitment of the applicant to the Initial Accreditation Process and AACSB International accreditation. Additionally, the recommendation should include a reflection on the following areas:

- The academic unit’s understanding of both the Initial Accreditation Process and AACSB International standards for accreditation
- Mission consensus demonstrated through stakeholder involvement
- Whether the mission is realistic, visionary, and focused 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. It is part of the Mentor’s responsibility to recommend that the applicant should withdraw if it has no reasonable chance to achieve accreditation
- Internal and external assessment processes for achieving quality and continuous improvement
- Evidence that processes are used to strengthen curricula, develop faculty and staff, improve instruction, and enhance intellectual activity and that these processes are appropriate and will result in improvement
- Evidence that the academic unit’s iSER 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.

- Any unique strengths or weaknesses that need to be observed and tracked during the Initial Accreditation Process and addressed in Updates to the iSER.

The Mentor’s recommendation must also include completion of the iSER Review Template.

**Criteria for Evaluating the Initial Self Evaluation Report**

To what extent will achievement of the actions outlined in the iSER 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 year.
- 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?*

**Initial Accreditation Committee Recommendations**

Each Initial iSER will be presented and reviewed by the IAC (or AAC). The Committee will take one of the following actions:

- Accept the iSER without further comments and with the recommendation to assign a team chair and develop iSER
- Accept the iSER, with comments outlining concerns of the Committee that should be addressed by the applicant in its Updates to the iSER
- Request that the iSER be revised and resubmitted to address specific issues and concerns identified by the Committee
- Reject the iSER
V. ACCEPTANCE OF THE INITIAL SELF EVALUATION REPORT

When the Initial Self Evaluation Report has been approved by the IAC (or AAC), the applicant is on track to accreditation. An applicant is allowed up to five years to implement the iSER with the final two years of implementation corresponding to the final phase of the Initial Accreditation Visit (the Final Self Evaluation year and the visit year). During the period, the applicant must submit Updates to the iSER to the IAC (or AAC). The IAC (or AAC) reviews the updates and provides its comments in the form of a decision letter to the applicant with a copy to the Mentor.

Role of the Mentor

Once the iSER 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 Updates to the iSER.

How Do We Know We Are on Track?

As discussed below, the Updates to the iSER 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.

VI. INITIAL ACCREDITATION UPDATES TO THE iSER

Each year or sooner, the applicant will prepare a report to the IAC (or AAC) on progress the applicant has made in meeting the objectives and action plan items addressed in the iSER. The original action plan summary table of the iSER 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 Update to the iSER. 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 update.

The IAC (or AAC) will review the updates to determine if acceptable progress is apparent.

The Update to the iSER should:

1. Include Tables 2-1, 15-1, and 15-2 (Tables A2-1, A9-1, and A9-2 for accounting).
2. Respond to concerns, issues, and/or recommendations requested by the IAC (or AAC) in the last Committee decision letter addressing the applicant’s accreditation process.
3. Explain how the applicant has met the objectives established for the past year of the iSER. 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 (or AAC) review of Updates to the iSER will focus on progress of process development, implementation, and outcomes.

4. Report any changes in the environment (internal or external) that affect the alignment of the school with the standards (e.g., a new mission, new president, new dean, changes in enrollment, or deviations from the projected number of faculty as described in the iSER).

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 iSER (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 iSER.

9. Include the signed approvals of the institution’s chief executive officer (president), chief academic officer (vice president or provost), and business (and accounting, if applicable) academic unit head indicating their certification and continuing commitment.

Updates to the iSER should be submitted electronically (IAC@aacsb.edu for business Initial Accreditation and/or AAC@aacsb.edu for accounting Initial Accreditation); please contact AACSB International for applicable guidelines.

VII. TRANSITION TO THE FINAL INITIAL ACCREDITATION PHASE

When two years remain on the implementation of the Initial Self Evaluation Report and assuming adequate progress has been demonstrated, the IAC (or AAC) 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 Aspirational Group
- The timeframe requested for the on-site review to take place, and the corresponding date that the applicant plans to submit the final Self-Evaluation Report.

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.), the Head of the Business School (Dean), and, if applicable, the Head of the Accounting Academic Unit. 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 (or AAC) will appoint a Team Chair. The Chair will replace the Mentor and monitor the applicant’s progress through the final two years of the accomplishment of the Final Self Evaluation Report. The transition from Mentor to the Chair should be facilitated by:

- The passing of relevant documents (Initial Self Evaluation Report, Strategic Management Plan, Updates to the iSER, applicant and IAC (or AAC) correspondence, and other relevant materials).
- A conversation between the Mentor and Chair to discuss issues and concerns.
- A conversation (meeting if possible) between the IAC (or AAC) liaison and Chair for an update regarding IAC (or AAC) issues and concerns.
- Finally, if possible, an introductory conversation between the Mentor, Chair, and applicant dean (may be at an AACSB function).

The IAC or AAC Chair will select additional team members that may or may not appear on the list of comparable schools submitted by the applicant.

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