Mentor Handbook
Business or Accounting
Initial Accreditation
AACSB International
Mentor Handbook

PREFACE

This handbook focuses on the mentor relationship and responsibilities with a school through the initial accreditation process. The purpose of this handbook is to provide mentors and schools pursuing accreditation with 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 school and mentor should follow these guidelines. However, mentors should remain flexible in conducting reviews to achieve the key objectives that (1) bring value to the school, (2) maintain the integrity of AACSB accreditation, and (3) provide a learning experience to effectively implement the initial accreditation process. Where the schools or the mentors find they must improvise to accomplish the purposes of the review, communication with AACSB staff is requested.

In an effort to provide additional assistance in all areas of the accreditation process AACSB has developed online accreditation volunteer training that is beneficial to the school, mentor and peer review team. To access the training, please email accreditation@aacsb.edu.

Another useful source of information is the AACSB 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 process.

Schools and mentors are encouraged to provide feedback on the accreditation process through an annual evaluation. This information is carefully considered for opportunities to further refine the accreditation process. The school and mentor may also contact AACSB staff with questions at any time.
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I. ASSIGNMENT OF THE MENTOR

Assignment of the Mentor
After the accreditation eligibility application is accepted, AACSB staff, in consultation with the respective committee chair [Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC) or Accounting Accreditation Committee (AAC)], appoints a mentor. Based on recommendations received from AACSB accreditation staff, the committee chair selects a volunteer dean (or equivalent) or an experienced associate dean familiar with AACSB standards and processes to serve as the school’s mentor. These individuals are eligible to serve as mentors for five years after leaving their position (i.e. retirement, change in role, etc.).

The Mentor’s Term
The mentor can assist a school 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 school 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 encourage 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 school. The mentor is a volunteer who receives no compensation from the school or from AACSB.

Mentor Responsibilities to the School
- Provide clarification of the philosophy and intent of the standards and their interpretations
- Be fully informed about AACSB accreditation standards and the accreditation process
- Review the accreditation eligibility application and the school’s website
- Be available regularly for the dean/equivalent and/or accounting administrator
- Advise the school on alignment issues with AACSB standards and possible actions to close the gaps
- Visit the school and provide feedback relating to the initial accreditation self-assessment and iSER development
- Provide a thorough evaluation of the school's iSER and any necessary revisions
- Be encouraging, but also honest and realistic
- Advise the school about possible culture change and the length of time required to accomplish the improvements envisioned by the school
- Help the school focus on the standards within the context of its mission
- Ask questions that stimulate the school to define its processes, activities and outcomes

Mentor Responsibilities to AACSB/IAC or AAC
- Consult with AACSB staff liaison, IAC or AAC when issues or processes need clarification
• Identify significant problems in the overall initial accreditation process and partnership
• Provide the IAC or AAC with periodic reports on progress toward developing the iSER
• Identify and resolve eligibility issues surrounding the Guiding Principles and scope of accreditation
• Provide a realistic assessment of the school’s alignment with AACSB standards
• Provide an 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 and timeline for potential accreditation
• Provide a recommendation on accepting the iSER in the form of mentor comments, which are housed in myAccreditation
• Act as the liaison between the school and the committee by providing feedback to the committee on the progress the school is making towards alignment with the standards

School Responsibilities to the Mentor and AACSB/IAC or AAC
• Initiate contact the mentor as soon as possible once the mentor accepts the assignment
• 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
• Engage the school’s faculty in the AACSB accreditation process
• Provide accurate data and information about the school, 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(s)
• 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 school should contact the him/her to determine what information he/she needs to develop an understanding of the school and its current situation related to the accreditation standards. Additionally, the school should provide the mentor with materials related to the committee concerns and recommendations articulated in the IAC decision letter. The mentor
may also utilize the introduction letter (See Appendix A), which explains the first mentor visit and expectations and items needed from the school for the visit.

A visit should occur within the first year of the mentor assignment. The objective of the first visit is to help the school 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. The first visit will also provide the mentor with an opportunity to learn more about the school. The visit is generally scheduled for up to two days, but the duration is at the discretion of the school. 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 school
- Identify and resolve eligibility issues (i.e., Guiding Principles and scope of accreditation)
- Provide clarification regarding the philosophy and intent of the standards
- Begin to form a judgment around the school’s alignment with AACSB standards
- Ensure consistent application of standards among faculty, staff and administration
- Analyze the school’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 school 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
- Advise the school of accreditation resources and learning and development opportunities based on observations about the breadth and depth of knowledge of the standards and accreditation processes at the school.
- Provide insight to the IAC or AAC concerning the school’s perceived timetable for development of the iSER

**Preparation for the Mentor Visit**
The school should:

- Initiate contact with the mentor
- Plan an agenda for the mentor to review (see sample mentor visit schedule in Appendix A)
- Provide the mentor, prior to the visit, information about the campus and school.

Examples of information include:
- **Gap analysis**  - Reports (including annual reports)
- Brochures  - Program exclusion data (if appropriate)
- Planning documents  - Drafts of materials for iSER, if available
- Budget documents  - Faculty vitae
- Web site addresses  - Internal Processes
- Electronic links to program information  - Institutional and departmental organizational charts

**During the Visit**

The school should:

- Provide an opportunity for the mentor to become familiar with the school’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 school should:

- Continue to develop a draft iSER in myAccreditation
- Forward appropriate additional information to the mentor
- Process mentor’s visit expenses in a timely manner

**Mentor Visit Reporting Requirements to IAC or AAC**

Within 10 days of each visit, the mentor submits, via myAccreditation, the Mentor Visit Report and indicates a timetable for completion of the iSER. The mentor visit report consists of four sections: observations from visit including the visit schedule, observations on adherence to the guiding principles, a standard-by-standard summary and conclusion with additional comments.

As the school develops their iSER, the mentor should review the document as it evolves. The purpose of regular reviews is to ensure the school clearly articulates their achievements and gaps in aligning with each standard. Communicating by email, video conferencing, face to face (conferences and subsequent visits to the school, etc.), and phone are tools to help with facilitating conversations. During this time, the mentor should continue to update the IAC or AAC and staff liaison on the school’s progress toward completion of the iSER. Normally, the iSER is submitted within two years although two one-year extensions can be granted when the appropriate approval is requested and received. However, with the right preparation and the correct guidance of a mentor the iSER can be developed in a shorter period of time, typically less than two years.
Before the iSER is submitted to the IAC or AAC, the mentor reviews the document and provides a recommendation to the IAC or AAC and staff liaison. When the iSER is finalized it needs to be approved by the IAC or AAC. When the iSER is reviewed by the IAC or AAC, the possible recommendations can be:

1) accept and move directly to appoint a team chair and start preparing the final Self-evaluation report, or
2) accept and continue to implement the iSER and provide progress reports on the iSER to the committee on an annual basis, or
3) revise and resubmit - return the iSER to the school for additional information.
4) not accept and request to withdraw.

In the last two cases, the mentor will continue to work with the school until the school 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 so that no information is lost. As long as the mentor is involved with the accreditation efforts of the school, the mentor will keep the appropriate accreditation committee informed.

The fourth recommendation, to not accept the iSER and recommend the school withdraw, is much less likely, but 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 withdraw 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 (also referred to as the gap analysis) is the most critical step in determining the business/accounting academic unit's readiness to pursue AACSBI accreditation. The self-assessment process is a gap analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the school relative to each of the AACSB standards for accreditation in relation to the school'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/accounting academic unit including faculty, administration, professional staff, students, alumni, and business constituencies. There is no prescribed single approach to conducting the self-assessment. A school must develop an iSER 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 entering the initial accreditation process. It is not expected that the gap analysis will be completed within this three-month period. 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/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 school 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 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

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 school.

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 school's initial self-evaluation report (iSER) and submits a written recommendation, via myAccreditation, to the IAC or AAC. This includes a reflection on the school's commitment to achieving AACSB accreditation; its ability to provide evidence of stakeholder involvement (e.g. students, faculty, staff, community, university administrators) and the commitment of the school to the initial accreditation process and ongoing accreditation. Additionally, the recommendation should include a reflection on the following areas:

- The school’s understanding of both the initial accreditation process and AACSB standards for accreditation
- Mission consensus demonstrated through stakeholder involvement
- Whether the mission is realistic and focused enough to serve as a guide for selection of alternatives and opportunities
- The likelihood that the school will meet AACSB standards and attain accreditation. It is part of the mentor’s responsibility to recommend that the school should withdraw if it is not reasonable that the school will achieve accreditation in the allotted time frame.
- 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, evidence 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 the progress report.

**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 function areas

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 year for the initial accreditation visit realistic? The school should be aware that programs in business or accounting shall satisfy the standards during the final self-evaluation 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 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 invite the school to apply for the initial accreditation visit
- Accept the iSER, with comments outlining concerns of the committee to be addressed by the school in its annual progress report
- Request that the iSER be revised and resubmitted to address specific issues and concerns identified by the Committee
- Do not accept the iSER and ask that the school withdraw

**V. ACCEPTANCE OF THE INITIAL SELF-EVALUATION REPORT**
When the iSER has been approved by the IAC or AAC, the school moves to the iSER implementation stage. The school is allowed up to five years to align with the standards, with the final two years of alignment corresponding to the development of the final self-evaluation report and the visit year. During this period, the school must submit progress reports (at least one per year) 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 school with a copy to the mentor.

Role of the Mentor
Once the iSER is accepted, the formal relationship between the mentor and the school continues for up to three additional years as the school implements its iSER and submits progress reports. The mentor will submit annually, or more frequently if necessary, feedback to the IAC or AAC on the progress the school is making towards alignment with the standards.

VI. INITIAL ACCREDITATION UPDATES TO THE iSER

Each year or sooner, the school will make a report to the IAC or AAC on the progress it is making towards meeting the objectives documented in the iSER. This progress report will be completed via myAccreditation. Action items that have fallen behind their scheduled completion dates should be discussed in the text of the progress report. Schools should follow the Progress Report Guidelines and Submission Instructions found on the AACSB website.

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

VII. TRANSITION TO THE FINAL PHASE OF THE INITIAL ACCREDITATION PROCESS

When the action items described in the iSER are implemented and adequate progress has been demonstrated, the IAC or AAC will direct the school to complete the application for an initial accreditation visit. The letter of application, submitted via myAccreditation, will include the following:

- Verification of Institution Information
- Confirmation of scope of programs offered by the school
- 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. The school must be in academic session during an accreditation visit.
- Nominations for peer review team chair.
- The application for initial accreditation information will need to be confirmed by the chief executive officer/president/chancellor, the chief academic officer, and the head of the business/accounting academic units (Dean/Equivalent and/or accounting academic chair).
Upon receipt of the application for initial accreditation, the school will be invoiced for the initial accreditation fee. See Appendix A to for a list of accreditation fees.

Handoff to the Peer Review Team Chair
Upon receipt of the application for the initial accreditation visit and full payment of the initial accreditation fee, the IAC or AAC will appoint a peer review team (PRT) chair. The PRT chair is generally a dean/equivalent from an accredited school with extensive experience serving on PRT’s, who is from a similar school and/or familiar with the type of school and/or education system in the country. The chair replaces the mentor to assist the school with the development of the final SER and the schedule for the initial accreditation visit. The transition from mentor to the chair should be facilitated by:

- A conversation between the mentor and chair to discuss issues, concerns and relevant information that is not available in myAccreditation.
- If possible, an introductory conversation between the mentor, chair, and host school Dean/Equivalent (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 school.

Simultaneously, the school works with the chair to prepare a final SER and refine the strategic management plan. The peer review process and the final self-evaluation report preparation are detailed in the Initial Accreditation Handbook or Initial Accounting Accreditation Handbook.
Appendix A – Resource Links

Mentor Resources

The following list of documents is available for both business and accounting accreditation, and may be downloaded or accessed from the AACSB website at:

https://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/volunteers/mentors

- Sample Introduction Letter
- Sample Visit Schedule
- Mentor Visit Report
- Standards Worksheet
- Gap Analysis
- iSER Review Template
- Progress Report Review Template

School Resources

The following list of required documentation is available for both business and accounting accreditation, and may be downloaded or accessed from the AACSB website at:

Initial Business Accreditation: https://aacsb.edu/accreditation/journey/business/initial

- Initial Business Accreditation Handbook
- iSER Outline Business
- Accreditation Standards Worksheet
- GAP Analysis
- Profile Sheet
- Progress Report Guidelines and Submission Instructions

Initial Accounting Accreditation: https://aacsb.edu/accreditation/journey/accounting/initial

- Initial Accounting Accreditation Handbook
- iSER Accounting Template
- Accreditation Standards Worksheet
- GAP Analysis
- Profile Sheet
- Progress Report Guidelines and Submission Instructions

Miscellaneous Accreditation Resources

Accreditation Policies & Procedures
Accreditation Terminology
Accreditation Volunteer Training
Initial Accreditation Process Overview
Accreditation Fees