Initial Accreditation Handbook

AACSB International
Initial Accreditation Handbook

PREFACE

This handbook is one in a series of three handbooks covering all aspects of the accreditation process. It should be read in conjunction with the other two handbooks covering   Continuous Improvement Review

This handbook focuses on the Initial Accreditation phase of the accreditation process. It provides a clear understanding of the philosophy, procedures and guidelines for the Initial Accreditation Process, which includes: the submission of the Eligibility Application, the determination of the scope of accreditation, the self-evaluation and alignment with standards, and an initial accreditation visit. Where possible, the School should follow these directions. However, Mentors and Peer Reviewers should remain somewhat flexible in conducting reviews to achieve the conceptual aims that (1) bring value to the School, (2) maintain the integrity of AACSB International accreditation, and (3) provides the type and level of learning experiences that mark an effective accreditation process. Where the Schools, Mentors or Peer Reviewers find they must improvise to accomplish the purposes of the review, documentation of any deviations must be provided.

The online volunteer training, accessible via the AACSB website, provides additional information and guidance for all areas of the accreditation process. The training is accessible at: http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/volunteers/training/.

Another useful source of information is the Accreditation Staff Liaison. Accredited institutions and those seeking accreditation have 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 committee, etc.). The staff liaison is available to assist with any questions regarding the Initial Accreditation Process.
found by logging onto myAccreditation (www.aacsb.edu/myAccreditation) or myAACSB (the icon can be found on the upper right at www.aacsb.edu then viewing the institution in the organization directory).

Throughout the rest of this document the accredited academic business unit is referred to as the (business) School. The term school is used to describe the entity that offers programs and is not meant to imply any particular organizational structure.

Submission Note:
 Please note that the myAccreditation platform referenced in the handbook is currently on hold. All initial accreditation documentation should be emailed to iac@aacsb.edu.

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I. THE INITIAL ACCREDITATION PROCESS OVERVIEW

Purpose of the Initial Accreditation Process

The purpose of the Initial Accreditation Process is to establish stable, constructive, ongoing, and helpful partnerships between AACSB International and Schools 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 Initial Accreditation Process for the School

Schools participating in the process are strongly committed to the goal of quality enhancement and continuous improvement. They possess the desire to secure accreditation. Schools benefit from the Initial Accreditation Process by receiving ongoing assistance that fosters continuous improvement and minimizes non-productive or misdirected efforts. Schools receive experienced counsel from a trained Mentor during the period and feedback through interactions with the Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC). The process culminates with an on-site visit in which the School is evaluated on its alignment with the accreditation standards and receives consultative advice from experienced Peer Reviewers.

Importance of Commitment

Overall responsibility for meeting the standards for accreditation lies with the School. Strong commitment by the central administration and the dean or equivalent is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for success; **stakeholder involvement is essential**. Accountability for execution of the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) lies with the School and is a critical element for success.

II. THE ELIGIBILITY PROCESS

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 accreditation:

- 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 School submits the Eligibility Application, written in English, via myAccreditation. A

http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/business/eligibility/.

Once notified that the Eligibility Application has been opened to the School, the designated representative(s) may co
Representative may submit the online application.

A non-refundable Eligibility Application fee of $1000 USD is required before the Eligibility Application can be reviewed by the Initial Accreditation Committee. The School will be invoiced for the $1000 USD fee.

When to Submit?

Eligibility Applications can be submitted at any time during the year. Following a preliminary review by staff, and if found complete and appropriate, the application is forwarded to the first regularly

Role of the Mentor

The Mentor serves as a key resource in advising the School on its self-assessment and alignment with the standards. 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 School. The Mentor is a volunteer who receives no compensation from the School or from AACSB International.

Mentor Responsibilities to the School

- Provides clarification of the philosophy and intent of the standards and their interpretations

- Is fully informed about AACSB International accreditation standards, and the accreditation process

- Commits time and availability for on-site visits and regular communication

- Provides feedback relating to the self-assessment, the development of the iSER and progress towards alignment with the standards

- Is encouraging, but also honest and realistic

- Advises the School about possible culture change and the length of time required to accomplish the improvements envisioned by the School

- Assists the School to develop an understanding of the intent of the standards within the context of its mission

- Asks questions that stimulate the School to define its processes, activities and outcomes

Mentor Responsibilities to AACSB / Initial Accreditation Committee

- Consults with the IAC/AACSB International when issues or processes need clarification

- Identifies opportunities for continuous improvement in the overall Initial Accreditation Process

- Provides the IAC liaison with periodic reports on the progress of the development of the iSER

- Identifies and resolves all eligibility issues surrounding the scope of accreditation, diversity and expectations for ethical behavior

- Provides an iSER critique that discusses feasibility of actions to be implemented to align with the standards and the commitment of resources necessary to achieve the goals. If challenges arise that delays the School   Initial Accreditation Process the mentor informs the committee (or AACSB Accreditation Staff Liaison) in a timely manner

- Provides a recommendation on accepting the iSER in the form of mentor comments, which are submitted in myAccreditation.

School Responsibilities to the Mentor and AACSB/Initial Accreditation Committee

- Is sincere about the institutional commitment of resources, time, money, energy, and change required for Initial Accreditation

- Reviews the accreditation standards and identifies areas of strengths and weaknesses prior to the Mentor's campus visit

- Identifies items in the standards that need clarification

- Provides accurate data and information about the School, its aspirations, commitment, systems, and processes; exhibits complete honesty and openness; provides information on options that could be applied in meeting the standards

- Regards the Mentor as a source of advice; take responsibility for conducting the self-assessment and preparing the iSER

- Works with the Mentor to prepare a campus visit agenda

- Takes consultation seriously and be considerate of the Mentor's time

- Provides feedback on the quality of the mentoring and mentoring process

- Makes timely payment of appropriate expenses (including airfare, hotel accommodations, meals, transportation, etc.) for the Mentor's campus visit

- Provides the Mentor with periodic reports on progress toward developing the iSER

- Submits the iSER to the IAC within two years after approval of the Eligibility Application

IV. THE MENTOR VISIT

After the Mentor has been confirmed, it is the School

- 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 the School 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 IAC concerning the School 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

- Provide the Mentor, prior to the visit, information about the campus and School. Suggested information:

  - Electronic links to program information
  - Brochures
  - Planning documents
  - Budget documents
  - Web site addresses
  - Internal Processes

  - Reports (including annual reports)
  - Program exclusion data (if appropriate)
  - Drafts of materials for iSER, if available
  - Faculty vitae
  - 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, 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:

- Prepare a draft of the iSER

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

Mentor Reporting Requirements

Once appointed by the IAC, the Mentor conducts an initial on-site advising visit. During the on-site review, the Mentor identifies, clarifies and resolves eligibility issues, challenges,

VI. SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Self-Assessment Process

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

Conducting the Self-Assessment and Involving Appropriate Stakeholders

The self-assessment process involves all stakeholders of the School including faculty, administration, students, alumni, and business constituencies. There is no prescribed single approach to conducting the self-assessment. A School 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 the Initial Accreditation Process. 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 School's programs and processes include:

- Regional/National/International accreditation reports
- Internal reports (e.g., program evaluations, outcomes reports, assessment results, exit surveys)
- External reports
- 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. The School should avoid the tSchool

VII.   INITIAL SELF-EVALUATION REPORT (iSER)

Philosophy and Expectations

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

A long-standing problem with many iSERs is that they focus solely on closing gaps between current conditions and the conditions necessary to satisfy accreditation standards. An internally generated iSER that is built on the School circumstances is most likely to yield sustained continuous improvement. One goal of the accreditation process is establishing a differentiated strategic planning process. The iSER should include plans for implementing the osing existing gaps with respect to the accreditation standards.

Objectives and Content

The iSER is an action plan showing how the School will address its areas for improvement during the period of initial accreditation and how the School will maintain continuous improvements in its program. The iSER outlines what gaps need to be closed to meet expectations of AACSB standards and how current activities meet the expectations of the standards, which ones, and how. The school will continually update the iSER during the Initial Accreditation process until alignment can be demonstrated. The iSER is an evolving document and ultimately transfers into the final SER used as the basis for the on-site peer review team visit.

The iSER 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 iSER 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 initial accreditation and for maintaining continuous improvement of strengths. The action plan must identify specific improvement activities and establish a timetable for the completion of each of these activities. The iSER should also address the resources, the individual(s) responsible for each activity, and an anticipated completion date.

The iSER, submitted via myAccreditation, contains three separate and distinct sections:

1. *Background information on the institution and the School:*

   - Location of the Institution, including all non-main campus programs offered by the School

   - Institution's Mission Statement

   - Structure of the School

   - Special Activities of the School

   - Confirmation of Scope

   - Number of Students

   - Mission development and refinement

2. *A standard by standard gap analysis of the strengths and areas for improvement of the School:*

   The iSER will include a gap analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the School in relationship to each of the standards. This section contains a self-assessment response to each standard. This 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 implementing the actions, the measures for assessing the implementation, the processes involved, the timetable for the completion, and the required resources are presented in a summary table. The gap analysis will also identify which expectations of AACSB standards are currently satisfied and which expectations of the standards remain to be met.

3. *Executive Summary:*

An uploaded three to five-page Executive Summary, which should include:

1. A one paragraph to one page statement and written description of your mission and objectives;
2. Written descriptions of the processes that support achievement, the outcomes and measurements associated with those processes, and how the processes and objectives may have changed as a result of your efforts;
3. A written summary of self-assessed strengths and weaknesses as they relate to

4. How your strategic plan relates to your mission development activities; and,
5. A written section listing up to five effective practices, which are unique or inherent to the success of your operations.

Relationship to the Strategic Management Plan

The iSER naturally represents a facet of the School
planning processes. As such, the School
presented as an appendix to the iSER, or the iSER should be depicted as a part of the Strategic Management Plan.

Submission of the iSER Report

iSERs are considered by the IAC several times during the year.

all documents will be submitted electronically via myAccreditation. Your iSER should be shared with, a function within myAccreditation, your Mentor prior to submission to the IAC. The Mentor will then submit a recommendation to the IAC. Involvement of the Mentor as drafts of the iSER are developed facilitates this evaluation and, more importantly, provides the School with an ongoing benefit from review and comment. Once completed, the iSER and Mentor recommendation will be presented to the IAC for review.

VIII.   REVIEW OF THE INITIAL SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

Role of the Mentor

The Mentor thoroughly reviews the School's iSER and submits a recommendation, via myAccreditation, to the IAC. The Mentor's recommendation should address:

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Criteria for Evaluating the iSER

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

2) 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

3) 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 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?

4) 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. The IAC will take one of the following actions:

- Accept the iSER 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 iSER update

- Request that the iSER be revised and resubmitted to address specific issues and concerns identified by the Committee

- Reject the iSER

IX. ACCEPTANCE OF THE iSER

When the iSER has been approved by the IAC, 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 iSER updates (at least one per year) to the IAC. The IAC reviews the updates and provides its comments in the form of a decision letter to the School with a copy to the Mentor.

Initial Self-Evaluation Report Implementation

Central to the iSER implementation phase is the ongoing assistance available to the School. This ongoing assistance includes:

- Networking (feedback sessions at the Annual Meeting)

- Review of the School's iSER updates

- Education (AACSB International seminars)

- Consultation involving a continuing relationship with the Mentor for up to three years during implementation of the iSER

- AACSB Staff Liaison to provide assistance with questions

With ongoing assistance, the School implements the goals and actions outlined in its iSER and communicates with the IAC on progress through the submission of iSER updates. The School is free to adjust its iSER as appropriate during this period; such adjustments must be described in the next update.

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. The mentor will submit annually, or more frequently if necessary, feedback to the IAC on the progress the School is making towards alignment with the standards.

How Do We Know We Are on Track?

The iSER update is the only formal contact with AACSB International, aside from the Mentor, Accreditation Staff Liaison and eventually the Chair, while preparing for accreditation. Business Schools are encouraged to seek advice and evaluation of their progress from the Mentor and the Accreditation Staff Liaison.

X.   iSER UPDATES

Each year or sooner, the School will make a report to the IAC on the progress it is making towards meeting the objectives documented in the iSER. This update will take place via myAccreditation. Action items that have fallen behind their scheduled completion dates should be discussed in the text of the iSER update.

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

The iSER update will include:

1. Tables 2-1, 15-1, and 15-2.

2. Explain how the School has met the objectives established for the past year of the plan. If the objectives have not been met, provide details. When outcomes or milestones are reported, Schools should support that these outcomes are the result of a continuous improvement process with appropriate stakeholder input.
   review of iSER updates will focus on process development, implementation, and outcomes.

3. Report any changes in the environment (internal or external) that affect the initial Self Evaluation Report (e.g., a new mission, new president, new dean/equivalent, changes in enrollment, or deviations from the projected number of faculty as described in the iSER).

4. Explain how existing strengths have been maintained or improved.

5. Report any new areas of necessary improvement that have emerged.

6. Report any other adjustments to the iSER (e.g., changes in the time frame leading to the self-evaluation for accreditation).

7. Explain how the School will have the necessary continuing support and resources from the administration to meet the objectives outlined in the iSER.

8. An uploaded three to five-page Executive Summary, which should include:

   a) A one paragraph to one page statement and written description of your mission and objectives;
   b) Written descriptions of the processes that support achievement, the outcomes and measurements associated with those processes, and how the processes and objectives may have changed as a result of your efforts;
   c) A written summary of self-assessed strengths and weaknesses as they relate

      objectives;
   d) How your strategic plan relates to your mission development activities; and,
   e) A written section listing up to five effective practices, which are unique or inherent to the success of your operations.

Committee review of iSER updates

The School   iSER update is submitted to the IAC via myAccreditation. Prior to the IAC 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 IAC meeting, both the liaison and reader will present their impressions. A discussion will focus on what the School has accomplished, as well as areas of concern. The key focus is on whether the School is making *acceptable progress* toward the accomplishment of alignment with the standards and preparation for accreditation. If a School is not making acceptable progress, the IAC will recommend that it withdraw from the process. This review process is depicted below.

The IAC decision will be one of four options:

1. Acceptance of the iSER update without issues or concerns.

2. Acceptance of the iSER update with issues to be addressed in the next update.

3. Non-acceptance of the iSER update due to inadequacy of information provided or a determination that evidence of acceptable progress toward accreditation is not apparent. In such cases, the IAC will outline its concerns and will request a supplemental update.

4. Rejection of the iSER update with a decision to remove the School 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

iSER updates provide feedback to the IAC on the School's progress. Schools should be clear and forthright so that the IAC can advise and assist. Representations of compliance by the School with the accreditation standards can be verified by the Mentor with subsequent on-site visits during the standards alignment phase. The Mentor submits, via myAccreditation, his/her report/feedback to the IAC to be reviewed simultaneously with the School s update. This practice ensures a continuous dialogue and facilitates the flow of accurate information between the School and IAC.

The accreditation decision will be based upon a direct assessment of continuous improvement and overall high quality. Therefore, the School must be in a position to justify its representations at the time of its 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 update will the School be best prepared for the initial accreditation peer review visit.

XI. TRANSITION TO THE INITIAL ACCREDITATION STAGE

When the action items described in the iSER are implemented and adequate progress has been demonstrated, the IAC 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

the initial accreditation visit. The transition from Mentor to the Chair should be facilitated by:

- The passing of relevant documents (iSER, Strategic Management Plan, iSER Updates, School and IAC correspondence, and other relevant materials) via myAccreditation.

- A conversation between the Mentor and Chair to discuss issues and concerns.

- If possible, an introductory conversation between the Mentor, Chair, and host School Dean/Equivalent (may be at an AACSB function).

Following assignment of the Chair, two additional team members will be selected based upon eligibility, experience, mission fit and availability. These individuals are also generally Deans / Equivalent of accredited schools. Peer Review Team members may continue to be assigned to peer review teams for three years after leaving their position (i.e. retirement, change in role, etc.). Potential conflicts of interest are also considered. Suggestions for team members will be considered but are not guaranteed.

The IAC Chair will select the team member(s) who may or may not appear on the list of comparable Schools submitted by the School.

Initial Accreditation Visit Overview

The School should begin to work with the Chair to finalize its SER. The School must submit the final SER to the PRT and the IAC for review at least 4-6 months prior to the on-site review visit. After the Peer Review Team reviews the final SER, the team drafts a pre-visit letter outlining the issues and concerns identified by the Team. The draft
-
for review. In the interest of time this review can be facilitated off-line involving the reader, liaison and chair and vice chair of the committee. If the IAC approves of the

visit, the chair finalizes the letter and forwards it to the School along with confirmation of the on-site visit dates. The School must be in academic session during an accreditation visit.

While the SER and other written materials provide the foundation for the visit, the PRT achieves greater understanding of the School through the on-site review. The pre-visit letter will point out specific issues to be addressed either before or during the visit. In addition, the pre-visit letter will also indicate areas of focus and requests for data and documents to be made available for the team during the visit.

Within 10 days following the on-site visit, the Peer Review Team submits to the School accreditation recommendation, via myAccreditation. The School has the option of submitting a response to the PRT report. The IAC reviews the following:

- Team visit report.
- .
- The School .

the recommendation to the PRT for reconsideration.

When concurrence is reached, the PRT and IAC recommendation for accreditation is forwarded for ratification to the AACSB Board of Directors. If the Board concurs, the School is awarded accreditation and joins the AACSB Accreditation Council, with a continuous improvement review to occur in year five.

XII. INITIAL ACCREDITATION REVIEW PROCESS SCHEDULE

The timeline shown below is a representation of Initial Accreditation Peer Review Visit and corresponding Initial Accreditation Committee (IAC) activity under normal circumstances. Changes to the normal visit timeline may be made on a case-by-case basis at
directed to your   .

Description	Timeline
School Deadline: Letter of application, team nominations, and potential visit dates submitted via myAccreditation	Upon receipt of IAC decision letter directing School to proceed to self-evaluation and being invited to apply
AACSB Staff: Invite team after review and approval of senior AACSB staff and IAC Chair	Within 45 days of application being submitted via myAccreditation
AACSB Staff: Send team and date confirmation to all once finalized	Upon confirmation of team members
School: Invite team chair to visit host campus (optional)	Chair visit (if necessary and time allows) generally takes place before submission of SER
School: Confer with review team (optional)	Annual Meeting or other convenient arrangement (Year of self-evaluation)
School Deadline: Submit final SER, executive summary and faculty profile to team and AACSB via myAccreditation	4-6 months prior to Visit
Team Chair Deadline: Submit draft pre-visit letter to AACSB for review by full or subcommittee of IAC recommending visit or no-visit and listing concerns (standard by standard analysis)	Normally 2 months prior to the visit date
Team Chair Deadline: Provide School with pre-visit letter	Normally 45 days prior to scheduled team visit date
Team Chair: Confer with host regarding visit schedule	45 days prior to scheduled team visit date
School Deadline: Submit response to pre-visit analysis (to team and to AACSB via myAccreditation)	As per date listed in pre-visit analysis
Team Chair: Submit Team Visit Report to School and IAC via myAccreditation	Within 10 days after the visit
School Deadline: Send optional response to Team Visit Report	
Initial Accreditation Committee: Review Board	As per scheduled committee meeting date
Board: Ratifies and sends letter to School	Ratification performed via electronic ballot to the AACSB Board of Directors
Official Recognition	Annual Meeting (Normally, in April following the Visit)

XIII. SCHOOL COMPARISON GROUPS

Processes to support the accreditation review include the selection of comparison groups to form a relevant context for judgments, inform strategic planning activities, and assist in the selection of Peer Review Team members. Reviewers from comparable institutions are better prepared to make evaluative judgments about the School, to understand the School and its aspirations, and to offer suggestions for the School improvement.

What is required?

The School submits three comparison groups selected from members of the Accreditation Council and submits this information with the letter of application for the initial accreditation visit. Comparison groups may be selected on the basis of institutional or program comparisons. It is important to note that the same school may be used in all three groups -- peer, competitor, and aspirant -- based upon the characteristics of the school and/or its program.

- *Comparable Peers:* A list of schools considered similar in mission and assumed appropriate for performance comparison. A minimum of six comparable schools must be provided. The schools should be chosen carefully to match key characteristics of the School. In addition to mission, some features that might be salient when choosing comparison schools include student populations served, size, degree levels, and primary funding source.

- *Competitive Group:* A list of schools so directly competitive that conflict of interest considerations exclude their personnel from the review process. The competitive school 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.

- *Aspirant Group:* A list of schools that provides a developmental goal for the School, represents management education programs or features that the School hopes to emulate, and place the vision and strategy of the School in context. The list of aspirant schools may be of any number, though a minimum of three schools is required to compile the statistical data reports. Statistical data reports are be pulled from DataDirect, upon request, to assist the school and Peer Review Team in establishing context of the school relative to its peer and aspirant schools.

Comparison groups do not imply categories or rankings of schools or members accredited by AACSB International. These lists are for the benefit of the School and the Peer Review Team in the accreditation review.

Although comparison groups include only AACSB International accredited schools of business, Schools are encouraged to look beyond academe for examples of best practices and potential Peer Review Team members. Processes for selecting Peer Review Team members strive to add value and support involvement from corporations and other appropriate persons.

AACSB has developed an on-line system to assist with identification of potential comparison schools. The on-line service, available at

https://datadirect.aacsb.edu/public/profiles/search.cfm, offers advanced search functions that produce institution lists based on optionally selected criteria.

The School should demonstrate in the review that it relates appropriately to the operational levels of the comparison school set. In some circumstances particular features of the School may make some of the data non-comparable.

Use of the Comparison Groups

The initial accreditation committee chair approves Peer Review Team members from the Peer Review Team Nomination Form. Sometimes for scheduling or other reasons, reviewers who are not on the Comparison Group list may be proposed.

XIV.   FINALIZING THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

When finalizing the SER, Schools are encouraged to seek the guidance of the Team Chair who can provide the following assistance:

1. Become familiar with the School and the institution as a whole, which is best achieved through an on-site campus visit (optional).

2. Identify areas in the existing SER that may be unclear, point out issues where further clarification may be needed, and single out other areas of possible concern. The Chair can provide answers to questions about the Initial Accreditation process, the standards and also assist the School in making a determination on the readiness for accreditation.

3. Encourage the School to submit materials as early as possible, via myAccreditation, to allow time for possible modifications.

4. Ensure continuous communication throughout this stage.

5. Provide illustrative guidance, not prescriptive guidance.

6. Work with the School to ensure their SER:

   -
   - Is well-written and understandable.
   - Includes faculty vitae as an appendix.
   - Includes summary data, retaining large information compilations on campus, as opposed to including in the report.
   - Limits appendices to those directly relevant, and includes a table of contents and cross-references.

The SER is due to the team members and the IAC between 4-6 months before the scheduled Peer Review Team visit. The SER is submitted electronically via myAccreditation. The PRT may download a copy of the SER and any attachments / appendices for their use from myAccreditation should they desire to work from paper copies.

XV.   PRE-VISIT ASSESSMENT

After the Peer Review Team reviews the final SER, the team drafts a pre-visit analysis outlining the issues and concerns identified by the Team. This analysis, including a

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-visit analysis is sent to
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recommendation it may remand the recommendation to the team for information, clarification, or similar reconsideration when an apparent inconsistency is noted. A conference call is convened with the committee chair and vice-chair, liaison, reader, Peer Review Team members, and AACSB International staff. The team may submit additional information or a revised pre-visit analysis recommendation following this conference call.

-visit analysis will point out specific issues to be addressed either before or during the visit. In addition, the pre-visit analysis will also indicate areas of focus, requests for data and documents to be made available for the team during the visit, and provides confirmation of the on-site visit dates.

IAC concurs with the

1. Pursue a visit as originally scheduled. The school must provide a written request for a visit within two weeks to the IAC (IAC@aacsb.edu).
2. Withdraw from the initial accreditation process.

XVI.   PEER REVIEW TEAM VISIT

The on-site review affords the best opportunity for the team to assess the School for initial accreditation. An important aspect of the on-site review is verification of data supporting the information presented in the final SER. Equally important i assessment of the qualitative dimension of the educational programs that only can be verified through face-to-face interaction.

The Team Chair will structure the on-site review schedule and team member assignments to ensure a reasonable balance between information gathering/verification and information analysis/synthesis. Under certain circumstances the IAC chair may require that, at the cost of the School, a senior AACSB accreditation staff member accompanies the team during the visit. This is done for the purpose of providing guidance and consistency. The staff member is part of the team, but does not have any voting rights with respect to the accreditation recommendation.

Planning the Visit
1. Prior to the visit, the Team Chair will work with the School to clarify the itinerary and appointments for the visit. This step enables the School to make necessary arrangements and appointments with appropriate representatives.

2.

Faculty

- Faculty files for all participating and supporting faculty teaching during a recent term, including faculty CVs.

- Files on promotion and tenure cases for the prior five-year period.

- Research output, including samples of output or access to output for the previous five-year period.

- Faculty professional development plans.

- Updated faculty data sheets, as appropriate.

▪ **Programs**

- Course syllabi for all business courses used to satisfy the curriculum standards.

- Copies of articulation agreements with other institutions.

- Curriculum descriptions for any new programs to be introduced.

- Final exams for all core business courses taught during a recent term.

- Outcome assessment information, such as learning goals, measurements, and results.

▪ **University/School**

- Copies of all institutional catalogs, promotional brochures and recruitment information.

- Copies of any additional documents, handbooks, policy manuals, and other relevant materials.

The following meetings and discussions may be requested:

The Peer Review Team may find that meetings and discussions with entities such as those listed below can provide additional opportunities for the team to understand and processes, and outcomes:

- Key administrators or staff in the business unit, such as department chairs, associate deans, assistant deans, program directors, center directors, advisors, and others.

- Chief executive and chief academic officers of the institution, e.g., president, chancellor, provost, academic vice-president, etc.

- Other university deans/equivalent.

- Key committees, such as promotion and tenure, strategic planning, curriculum, assessment, and research.

- Faculty representatives, e.g., senior faculty representatives, junior faculty representatives, clinical faculty representatives, part-time and adjunct faculty

representatives; participating and supporting faculty representatives, tenured and untenured faculty representatives.

- Student service directors, e.g., graduate admissions, academic support and advising, career services and placement, information technology.

- Students such as class visits, students assembled by School, and student advisory board.

- Facilities such as the library, computer labs, classrooms, other campus sites.

The School

overall high quality. The report should set forth clearly the deficiencies that led to the recommendation.

- Identification of areas that must be addressed prior to the first continuous improvement review *or* during the deferral review*.

- Relevant facts and assessment of strengths and weaknesses on a standard-by-standard basis in support of the team accreditation recommendation.

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  innovation, and impact outcomes.

- Commendations of strengths, unique features and effective practices.

- Opportunities for continuous improvement relevant to the accreditation standards.

- Summary of visit.

**If a team member is not in agreement with the majority of the team, that team member has the option to file a minority report along with the official team report.

Optional Response to the Peer Review Team Report

Within 10 days of receipt of the Peer Review Team Report, the School has the option to respond to the PRT report clarifying any of the comments and/or factual information noted within the report. The School may submit that response within the respective area of myAccreditation.

XVIII.   REVIEW OF THE TEAM RECOMMENDATION

Initial Accreditation Committee

The IAC will normally review the team visit report and any response from the School at its next scheduled meeting. Their review will result in a decision to:

- Concur with the Team recommendation.

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  o The committee may remand the recommendation to the team for information, clarification, or similar reconsideration when an apparent inconsistency is noted. A conference call is convened with the committee chair and vice-chair, liaison, reader, Peer Review Team members, and AACSB International staff. The team may submit additional information or a revised recommendation following this conference call.
  o Based on additional information or an updated team recommendation, the committee concurs with the recommendation or refers the case to a panel.
    1. A panel consists of three individuals: one from the original team; one from the committee; and an outside member who is an experienced accreditation reviewer. The outside member serves as chair.
    2. The panel must reach agreement on recommendation

- Panel decision to achieve initial accreditation or denial is forwarded to the Board of Directors for ratification consideration.
- Deferral decisions do not require ratification by the Board of Directors.

Board of Directors

The IAC concurrence to accredit or deny initial accreditation is forwarded to the AACSB Board of Directors for ratification. When the Board of Directors ratifies, the institution is accredited and joins the AACSB Accreditation Council, with a continuous improvement visit in year five. The Board will send official notification to the institution and provide formal recognition at the AACSB International Annual Meeting, usually held in April of the visit year.

The Board may remand the recommendation to the IAC for further information.

School Options

The institution may withdraw its application for initial accreditation any time prior to consideration by the Board of Directors. In the case of a decision to deny accreditation, the School may submit an appeal to the Chair of the Board of AACSB International. An Appeal Panel will be formed to hear the appeal and make a judgment. The decision of the Appeal Panel is final.

XIX. DEFERRAL REVIEW

If, during the initial accreditation review, the Peer Review Team finds standards-related deficiencies that can be resolved within one year, the team will recommend a one-year deferral review. The Peer Review Team identifies these deficiencies in the Peer Review Team Visit Report and states the expectations for the deferral review. A deferral team will be determined and the school is provided with a due date for the submission of the deferral report. The School submits its response to the specific concerns cited by the Peer Review Team via myAccreditation.

Deferral Review Team

The Deferral Team selected by the IAC normally includes one member from the original Peer Review Team and one member from (or appointed by) the IAC.

The Deferral Team focuses on the issues noted in the decision letter from the accreditation committee chair. The original Peer Review Team Visit Report may be referenced for further information relating to the issues detailed in the decision letter.

Review of Deferral Report from School

In the year following the original Peer Review Team visit, the School will submit a report to the Deferral Team and the IAC via myAccreditation. This report details the progress made to address the issues noted in the original Peer Review Team Report. After review of the deferral review the team conducts an onsite visit to determine if the concerns have been satisfactorily addressed. Ordinarily, the deferral Team conducts a

one and a half day on-site review within one year following the original Peer Review Team visit.

Review of Team Recommendation

The process for committee review of the Deferral Review Team Report is the same as that one outlined for Peer Review Team Recommendations.

The IAC concurrence with the deferral team to accredit or deny initial accreditation is forwarded to the AACSB Board of Directors for ratification. When the Board of Directors ratifies a recommendation for initial accreditation, the institution is accredited and joins the AACSB Accreditation Council, with a continuous improvement visit to occur in year five. The Board will send official notification to the institution and provide formal recognition at the AACSB International Annual Meeting, usually held in April of the visit year. AACSB does not publicize the names of institutions to which the Board denies accreditation.