



COOPERATIVE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAM  
*at the* HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE AT UCLA

## **Accreditation Guide: Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)**

### **2010 CIRP Surveys**

#### **Introduction**

*Effective assessment doesn't just happen. It emerges over time as an outcome of thoughtful planning, and in the spirit of continuous improvement, it evolves as a reflection on the processes of implementing and sustaining assessment, suggests modifications.*

--Banta, T. W., Jones, E. J., and Black, K. E. (2009). *Designing effective assessment*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA.

For more than forty years, CIRP surveys have helped institutions understand and demonstrate the impact of college, particularly the impact of student involvement and the college environment. Part of our mission is to provide tools and resources to help institutions use data, and we hear from our users about the importance of CIRP survey results in accreditation. This accreditation guide offers suggestions on how you might think about using CIRP surveys in this process.

CIRP surveys are comprehensive in that they cover a wide variety of topic areas that are related to student growth and development. Used together, CIRP surveys measure outcomes, and tie those outcomes to activities that students engage in, the behaviors and attitudes they have concerning academics, their perceptions of the environment, and the characteristics they bring with them to college. Putting these together longitudinally can help institutions illustrate complex issues on campus and improve the student experience. Our survey program asks students for information as they begin college in the CIRP Freshman Survey (TFS) at the end of their freshman year in the Your First College Year (YFCY) survey and at the end of their senior year in the College Senior Survey (CSS). Faculty are asked for their perspective on many of the same outcomes every three years in the HERI Faculty Survey.

#### **How Can CIRP Surveys be Useful in NWCCU Accreditation?**

CIRP survey results can be used in several ways in the NWCCU accreditation process to address student learning outcomes and the processes that support them.

- CIRP surveys are comprehensive instruments that provide information on aspects of a broad range of curricular and co-curricular experiences that may be of interest for accreditation

purposes. They do not just focus on one topic, but allow for assessment of multiple issues as well as the ability to connect across issues.

- Used longitudinally, CIRP survey results illustrate that an institution has a well-integrated plan for demonstrating the extent to which it is meeting its goals, and the extent to which various aspects of the college experience are contributing to the growth and development of students.
- Institutions have the ability to compare their performance with comparison groups and national norms on individual items and relevant CIRP Constructs.
- Results from CIRP surveys can be used to examine assumptions about the student experience and how students use the institution's resources for learning, growth and development.
- Institutions can benchmark against themselves over time to examine trends or longitudinally to assess growth and development.
- The use of CIRP survey results over time demonstrates a commitment to institutional improvement and to meeting accreditation standards.

This guide provides suggestions for utilizing CIRP surveys in NWCCU accreditation processes and products. A detailed table aligning CIRP survey results with NWCCU standards, elements, and criteria for evaluation and examples of how to use CIRP survey results in NWCCU accreditation processes are provided.

### **CIRP in NWCCU Timelines**

Results from CIRP surveys are well-suited to the iterative cycle of the NWCCU accreditation process, including:

- Self-Evaluation Report
- Both Off-and On-Site Review by peers/commission staff
- Response to a decision by NWCCU Review Team

When and how often to gather evidence for use in accreditation are decisions each institution must make for itself. The answers to these questions will vary depending on the needs of a given institution and how they intend to use the results as evidence in their accreditation cycle. Some institutions will want to use CIRP results to establish a baseline for programs or initiatives on campus. Generally speaking, baseline data from three years preceding a visit gives an institution ample time to analyze, interpret and disseminate results for the broad-based institutional process required as part of the self-evaluation. This also allows an institution to follow up at appropriate times to demonstrate whether actions and programs are having their intended effect.

Many institutions will have data from longitudinal administrations of CIRP surveys. Examining the results longitudinally allows institutions to compare results over time and examine areas in which the student experience is changing. Results may also be used as evidence that the institution has set appropriate institutional goals, is carefully monitoring its student learning outcomes and has integrated data into institutional decision-making.

Each institution will establish its own timeline to meet its own accreditation needs. Some schools administer CIRP surveys in a rotation with other institutional or authentic measures of student learning. A planned and intentional administration of surveys maximizes the utility of the results for accreditation. The table below provides a sample of how CIRP surveys fit in a typical NWCCU accreditation cycle addressing Standard One in year one, Standard Two in year three, Standards Three & Four in year five,

and Standard Five in year seven. This cycle ensures that the institution has data in which to continue to integrate information and analysis relevant to previously addressed standards, and update, modify, or expand as necessary to contribute to a holistic examination of the institution.

<b>Standard 1</b>	<b>TFS</b>	<b>YFCY</b>	<b>Standard 2</b>	<b>CSS</b>	<b>Standards 3 &amp; 4</b>	<b>HERI Faculty</b>	<b>Standard 5</b>
2011	Fall 2011	Spring 2012	2013	Grad 2015	2015	2013-14	2017
2012	Fall 2012	Spring 2013	2014	Grad 2016	2016	2013-14	2018
2013	Fall 2013	Spring 2014	2015	Grad 2017	2017	2013-14	2019
2014	Fall 2014	Spring 2015	2016	Grad 2018	2018	2014-14	2020

For some institutions, an upcoming focus on a particular standard, peer review, or response to a decision from NWCCU might not allow for a seven-year planning cycle. Results from CIRP surveys can still provide valuable information. Registration and participation in CIRP surveys are flexible and institutional results are available quickly and can be used to demonstrate educational outcomes and supplement institutional evidence. Subsequent administrations of CIRP surveys can be used to establish a longitudinal approach, which will provide the most meaningful evidence of the impact of institutional efforts and strengthen the institution’s ability to provide reliable and valid information upon which to make decisions that improve the student experience.

### **Using CIRP Surveys as Evidence for NWCCU Standards, Elements, and Criteria**

Every institution approaches accreditation differently, taking into account the mission, goals, programs and policies in place on their campus. An important part of the accreditation process is to understand how practices and evidence currently in use on campus can be linked to NWCCU standards and the elements and criteria that undergird them. This document is intended as a guide for aligning CIRP survey results with NWCCU Accreditation Standards.

In preparing this guide, CIRP staff, working in conjunction with colleges and universities in the NWCCU region, reviewed NWCCU standards, elements, and criteria and aligned CIRP survey items that closely corresponded. The goal is to facilitate the use of data and CIRP survey results not only as evidence for accreditation processes, but as one component in systematic assessment activities that promote institutional improvement and decision making.

This guide is not a toolkit or a comprehensive codebook for mapping CIRP surveys to NWCCU Accreditation Standards. It is a guide to aid institutions in organizing information they already have, and to facilitate future planning. Looking systematically at CIRP survey results aligned with NWCCU standards, elements, and criteria provides an opportunity for discussion about what the results mean on campus, what other evidence can be brought to bear, and what additional information is necessary to further improvement efforts as the institution plans for the future. Both individual survey items and CIRP Constructs can be used to demonstrate and document institutional effectiveness efforts on campus, but when they are presented in context with additional measures of student learning these results will be most meaningful to your campus improvement efforts and most persuasive to a visiting team in demonstrating a sustained commitment to student learning.

### NWCCU Standards

NWCCU completed a major revision of its standards in 2010. Many items from CIRP surveys offer data supporting criteria undergirding Elements A-“Assessment” and B-“Improvement” in Standard 4-Effectiveness and Improvement, and these data apply across multiple accreditation standards.

Standard 2, Element C: Education Resources-Participation in CIRP surveys and analysis of institutional results may offer evidence of support for several criteria under 2.C that focus on the development of course and program content to support student learning outcomes. Criteria 2.C.9-11“Undergraduate Programs” for example, outlines the criteria for general education.

Standard 4-Effectiveness and Improvement-Participation in CIRP surveys is evidence that “the institution engages in ongoing systematic collection and analysis of meaningful, assessable, and verifiable data...as appropriate to its indicators of achievement-as the basis for evaluating the accomplishment of its core theme objectives” (Criteria 4.A.1). Other CIRP items and constructs may offer data relevant to a multiple criteria under elements 4.A- “Assessment” and 4.B- “Improvement”.