FAQs for Accreditation – for more information go to http://accreditation.nmsu.edu

Q: What is accreditation?
A: Accreditation is a process whereby an institution, college or program completes a comprehensive reflection (self-study) on their own strengths and weaknesses, followed by an evaluation by peers from other institutions of higher education. The primary driver of accreditation is accountability – for systematic self-reflection, continuous improvement and assurance of quality. Much of the work of regional (institutional-level) and specialized (college- and program-level) accreditation is accomplished through peer review. At its best, accreditation is the quintessence of shared governance, and demonstrates the strength of such to assure to external audiences (students and the public) that their investment in higher education is worthwhile.

Q: What is the purpose of accreditation?
A: Regional accreditors often get a bad wrap, but the truth is that their primary focus is the same as ours – students! Specifically, accrediting agencies exist to protect students. They ensure institutions are financially stable, fiducially responsible, and are capable of sustaining and delivering the quality education they promise.

Q: What is the difference between regional accreditation and specialized accreditation?
A: Regional accreditation is comprehensive and affirms the standing of the institution as able, ethical and responsible in its practices and delivery of quality education. Specialized accreditation focuses on specific disciplines. Beyond affirming the ability of program(s) to operate in ethical and effective ways, these accreditors uphold standards of practice that are deemed essential to the profession.

Q: What is NMSU's regional accrediting agency?
A: NMSU is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), one of 6 regional accrediting agencies.

Q: Does NMSU really need to be accredited, or does it just 'look good'?
A: Every individual on any NMSU campus has a stake in our accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). In fact, regional accreditation is required by the US Department of Education for an institution to receive Title IV funding (i.e. student financial aid). Without Title IV funding, NMSU would not be able to operate. Although they are completely independent of the federal government, regional accrediting bodies are increasingly relied upon by the federal government to ensure institutions are in compliance with federal regulations regarding financial aid, student rights, safety, etc.

Q: What is my role/responsibility in NMSU's regional (HLC) accreditation?
A: Your role in accreditation is twofold. 1) Notify the Dir. of Accreditation any time you are considering programmatic or degree changes (including new programs, phasing out old programs or changes to existing programs), collaborations/articulation with other campuses/institutions, or any time you plan to be or are in communication with a specialized accreditor. 2) Pay attention to communication about HLC accreditation and support accreditation efforts as they are identified. Inform your department/college about accreditation and when asked to provide information or participate in activities, do so, and encourage those that report to you to do the same.

Q: My department/college undergoes specialized (professional) accreditation, but I don’t know much about it. What should I do?
A: Go to http://accreditation.nmsu.edu and/or contact the Director of Accreditation.

Q: What do I do if I am contacted by our specialized accreditor, have a report due, or have a site visit coming up?
A: Inform the Director of Accreditation immediately for any of these situations; The Director should be copied on all correspondence, must review all formal documents before they are submitted to the accreditor, and will provide assistance and guidance as needed.
FAQs for Outcomes Assessment – for more information go to http://assessment.nmsu.edu

Q: What is outcomes assessment of student learning?
A: Outcomes assessment is a process that helps us determine (and substantiate with evidence) whether or not students are learning what we want them to learn, and that they can actually apply their learning in real-life situations.

Q: What are the differences between Departmental Assessment, Program Review and Specialized Accreditation?
A: Departmental Assessment is overseen by the institution, is the ongoing assessment of student learning in academic departments and is reported annually to the Provost. Annual assessment reports are one of many inputs to the program review and specialized accreditation processes. Program Review is overseen internally, is a comprehensive review of overall program effectiveness and is conducted periodically. http://plan.nmsu.edu/adpr/program-review/. Since program review is similar in nature to specialized accreditation, only those programs not externally accredited undergo program review. Specialized Accreditation is overseen by external entities, affirms the program’s ability to operate in an ethical and effective manner and is conducted periodically.

Q: What is the purpose of assessing learning outcomes?
A: The whole point of assessing learning is to identify where students are succeeding and struggling (mostly this part!), and using real data (not anecdotal stories) to identify actions the department can take to ensure that students can demonstrate the skills, knowledge and abilities your faculty have determined are critical to a well-educated individual and professional in your field.

Q: What are the requirements for Departmental Assessment [ADA]?
A: Every academic department must engage in and document ongoing assessment of student learning for undergraduate and graduate students. Indicators that the department is doing assessment effectively? Assessment results are foundational to faculty discussion and decision-making aimed at improved learning. Keep in mind, many departments are doing assessment but don’t recognize it as such: Look around – you may be doing more than you think!

Q: Who is responsible for the Departmental Assessment?
A: Departmental faculty are ultimately responsible for assessing student learning. It is faculty who determine what knowledge, skills and abilities graduates in their programs should possess, and it is faculty who are responsible for ensuring the curriculum is structured so that students have optimal opportunities to achieve the appropriate level of accomplishment on each. It is the Department Head’s responsibility to ensure assessment is active and ongoing in the department, and College Deans are accountable for the oversight of departmental assessment in their college.

Q: Is there a template for annual reporting? How do I submit my annual report?
A: NMSU uses WEAVE software to maintain documentation/reporting of outcomes assessment. Various aspects of the report (including goals, planning, results, etc.) can be entered throughout the year. Suggested due dates for completing various aspects of the report are posted on our WEAVE website. Colleges may establish internal deadlines. The institutional deadline is Oct. 15 each year (e.g. reports for 2014-15 assessment activity are due fall 2015). For more information and/or to gain access to WEAVE go to http://assessment.nmsu.edu/weave.

Q: Where can I get information about General Education outcomes assessment, the Baccalaureate Experience, the Quality Initiative, and other assessment related information?
A: Go to http://assessment.nmsu.edu and click on the appropriate tab(s) at the top of the page.