

Handbook for
**PERIODIC
REVIEW
REPORTS**

Eighth Edition



Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Published by the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
3624 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104
Telephone: (215) 662-5606
Fax: (215) 662-5501
<http://www.msache.org>

© 2000 by the Commission on Higher Education,
Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools.

All rights reserved.

First edition September 1982
Second edition July 1984
Third edition March 1988
Fourth edition January 1989
Fifth edition January 1990
Sixth edition January 1995
Seventh edition February 1998
Eighth edition March 2000

This edition supersedes all previous editions.

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

	Page
Introduction	v
I. The Commission's Standards	1
Eligibility for Accreditation	1
Characteristics of Accredited Institutions	3
II. Guidelines for Institutional Reports	6
Goals and Objectives	7
When PRRs Are Due	8
The Contents of a Report	8
Steps in Preparing a Periodic Review Report	15
Sample Cover Page for the PRR.	20
III. Guidelines for External Reviewers	21
Reviewing Materials.	22
Preparing the Report.	23
Submitting the Report and Recommendations	24
Attending the PRR Committee Meeting.	25
Sample Cover Page for the Reviewers' Report	26
IV. The Institution's Response and Commission Review.	27
Commission Review.	28
Deadlines	39

This manual should be read in its entirety in conjunction with the Commission's primary document, *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*.

Introduction

Accreditation is the educational community's means of self-regulation. The accrediting process is intended to strengthen and sustain the quality and integrity of higher education, making it worthy of public confidence and minimizing the scope of external government control. The extent to which each educational institution accepts and fulfills the responsibilities inherent in that process is a measure of its concern for freedom and quality in higher education.

Middle States accreditation is an expression of confidence in an institution's mission and goals, performance, and resources. It attests the judgment of the Commission on Higher Education, based on the results of an internal institutional self-study and an evaluation by a team of outside observers assigned by the Commission, that an institution is guided by well-defined and appropriate goals; that it has established conditions and procedures under which its goals can be realized; that it is accomplishing them substantially; that it is so organized, staffed, and supported that it can be expected to continue to do so; and that it meets the standards of the Commission. Accreditation rests on the integrity with which institutions conduct their educational endeavors and the policies they have established for ensuring their quality.

One of the principles of voluntary accreditation is that no institution accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education will be permitted to go longer than five years without reporting to the Commission or longer than 10 years without an evaluation visit.

The Periodic Review Report (PRR), due five years after the decennial self-study and reaffirmation of accreditation, is a retrospective, current, and prospective analysis of the institution. As an essential phase of the accreditation cycle, the PRR should demonstrate that the institution meets the standards by which the Commission reaffirms or denies accredited status.

The current revised edition of the *Handbook for Periodic Review Reports* is designed to assist institutions and reviewers in understanding the purpose of the PRR and its place in the accreditation cycle, as well as to provide guidance to those on campuses who are entrusted with preparing the final document. A section of this booklet also is addressed specifically to the external reviewers appointed by the Commission to analyze and report on the status of institutions that have PRRs under consideration.

The Commission staff stands ready to be of assistance and should be called upon if further information or clarification is needed.

I

The Commission's Standards

To be eligible to apply for accreditation, Institutions must meet the Commission's eligibility requirements, as outlined in the handbook, *Candidacy for Accreditation*. In addition to these threshold requirements, institutions also must meet the Commission's accreditation standards, which are discussed in *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*, in order to become and to remain accredited.

Eligibility for Accreditation

To be eligible for initial or continued accreditation, an institution must:

- have a charter and/or formal authority from an appropriate governmental agency to award academic degrees in every jurisdiction in which the institution operates;
- have a clearly stated mission, with goals and objectives consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education;
- have a governing board which includes a diverse membership, broadly representative of the public interest and reflecting the student constituency. A governing board should include individuals who have no current involvement in a professional or proprietary capacity with any educational institution or organization, private or governmental, and whose services on that board can be subject in no way to current or potential conflicts of interest or loyalty. Members representing the public

interest should be numerous enough to assure that they have an effective—though not necessarily a majority—voice in the affairs of the governing body. The chief executive officer may not be the presiding officer of the board;

- devote all, or substantially all, of its gross income to the support of its educational purposes and programs;
- have established a financial base of funding commitments adequate to fulfill programmatic needs and have available externally audited financial statements with management letters for the past two years;
- have a chief executive officer as well as a functioning administrative and organizational structure;
- have sufficient faculty in terms of number, background, and experience to support programs offered, including a core of faculty whose primary responsibility is to the institution;
- offer one or more postsecondary degree-granting educational programs equivalent to at least one academic year in length, with clearly defined and published objectives and a statement of the means for achieving them;
- require, in addition to study of the areas of specialization proper to its principal educational programs, some work in general education and liberal arts or related areas, either as a prerequisite to or as clearly defined elements in those programs;
- provide sufficient library/learning resources to support the nature, scope, and level of the program offered;
- provide appropriate student services and student development programs consistent with student profiles;
- maintain adequate and appropriate physical facilities for administration, faculty, students, and programs and services;

- administer equitable admissions requirements and nondiscriminatory employment policies compatible with stated institutional objectives; and
- make freely available to the Commission accurate, fair, and complete information on all aspects of the institution and its operations.

Characteristics of Accredited Institutions

While the characteristics of accredited educational institutions depend largely on the type of institution, all accredited institutions possess important common attributes. These common characteristics of excellence are the standards by which the Commission on Higher Education determines an institution's accreditation. While institutions should be thoroughly familiar with *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Standards for Accreditation*, the capstone paragraphs of the 1994 edition are repeated here for emphasis.

- integrity in the institution's conduct of all its activities through humane and equitable policies dealing with students, faculty, staff, and other constituencies
- clearly stated mission and goals, appropriate to the institution's resources and the needs of its constituents
- clearly stated admissions and other student policies, appropriate to the mission, goals, programs, and resources of the institution
- student services, appropriate to the educational, personal, and career needs of the students
- faculty whose professional qualifications are appropriate to the mission and programs of the institution, who are committed to intellectual and professional development, and who form an adequate core to support the programs offered

- programs and courses which develop general intellectual skills, such as the ability to form independent judgment, to weigh values, to understand fundamental theory, and to interact effectively in a culturally diverse world
- curricula which provide, emphasize, or rest upon education in the arts and sciences, even when they are attuned to professional or occupational requirements
- library/learning resources and services sufficient to support the programs offered and evidence of their use
- policies and procedures, qualitative and quantitative, as appropriate, which lead to the effective assessment of institutional, program, and student learning outcomes
- ongoing institutional self-study and planning, aimed at increasing the institution's effectiveness
- financial resources sufficient to assure the quality and continuity of the institution's programs and services
- organization, administration, and governance which facilitate teaching, research, and learning and which foster their improvement within a framework of academic freedom
- a governing board, actively fulfilling its responsibilities of policy and resource development
- physical facilities that meet the needs of the institution's programs and functions
- honesty and accuracy in published materials and in public and media relations
- responsiveness to the need for institutional change and renewal appropriate to institutional mission, goals, and resources

Characteristics also notes the following:

A major index of quality is the astuteness with which the institution has identified its task. The basic necessity is a clear definition of mission and goals. The educational program must be consistent with that definition, effective in producing results, and appropriate to the scope of available resources. Students should be admitted on the basis of their potential, motivation, and willingness to assume an active role in the learning process.

Effective teaching, research and scholarly activity, and public service are often interrelated dimensions of institutional excellence. An educational institution will best achieve the fundamental prerequisites for excellence when it has substantial support through its governing board, administrative leadership and management, and participation by the faculty in developing the total program of the institution.

Accreditation is a continuing status which, once conferred, is not removed except for cause and then only with scrupulous observance of due process. A responsible accrediting program necessarily includes the periodic review of accredited institutions, both for their benefit and for the fulfillment of the Commission's accountability to the academic community and to the public.

II

Guidelines for Institutional Reports

As a retrospective, current, and prospective analysis of an institution, the Periodic Review Report is a detailed progress and planning report required of an institution that has had its accreditation reaffirmed by means of self-study and team evaluation within the past five years. The preparation of a PRR, like that of a self-study document, should provide opportunities for constructive discussion involving a large, representative group from the academic community, bringing various points of view to the consideration of recent institutional developments and current institutional issues.

At its best, the periodic review of accredited institutions is a creative means of assisting in the continuous assessment of the institutions' educational mission, goals, and objectives. Ideally, self-review should be an integral and ongoing activity on every campus, only incidentally related to calendars and accreditation but constantly keyed to the natural relationship between self-study and educational planning. The more self-study and evaluation are seen as directly related to institutional viability and quality, the more productive the self-study and evaluation process will be. The resulting report should serve as a useful planning and development document for the institution.

The timing of periodic reviews varies in accord with the circumstances of a given institution and with the Commission's judgment as to how it can best serve the institution's needs, while simultaneously meeting its broader accountabilities.

No more than five years may elapse without each institution in the Middle States region making some type of report to the Commission. Moreover, if an institution undergoes significant change or if its educational effectiveness is seriously questioned, the Commission reserves the right to review that institution's accreditation without regard to any previously indicated time frame.

Goals and Objectives

The PRR is intended to achieve the following goals and objectives:

Goals

- 1) To help institutions gauge their progress in achieving their goals and objectives
- 2) To enable the Commission to assess the current status, as well as the future prospects, of institutions
- 3) To fulfill the Commission's accountability to the academic community and to the public

Objectives

- 1) To determine the extent to which institutions have implemented ongoing self-study and planning processes
- 2) To assess the impact of significant developments and changes subsequent to the last evaluation
- 3) To assess the institution's response to recommendations resulting from the previous evaluation. (*Of particular importance is the response to recommendations concerning the institutional mission statement and the need for institutional improvement in academic and financial areas.*)
- 4) To review the institution's enrollment trends, financial status, and enrollment and financial prospects

- 5) To assess the institution's projections for the next five-year period
- 6) To assess the relationship between planning and budgeting priorities
- 7) To judge the effectiveness of outcomes assessment and its relationship to institutional decision-making

When PRRs Are Due

An institution will receive notification on several occasions about the due date of its PRR:

- 1) when formal action letters on accreditation status are sent by the Commission following:
 - a) reaffirmation
 - b) review of follow-up reports
 - c) review of reports related to special visits
- 2) when notice is sent to all institutions due to submit PRRs in the next year.

It is the responsibility of each institution to allow sufficient time for adequate preparation of a useful PRR. The experience of the Commission is that one year from initiation of the process to submission of the report is needed. In the spring of each year, the Commission offers PRR workshops for institutions whose reports are due in the subsequent two-year period.

The Contents of a Report

While there is no fixed format for organizing the contents of a Periodic Review Report, the institution must ensure that all requested areas of coverage are adequately presented. In some instances, the Commission may have directed that the Periodic Review Report provide an update on progress with specified topics. However, the report is expected to be an analytical document which includes the following:

1) An executive summary of no more than five pages which succinctly and accurately summarize the contents of the report (*One copy of the executive summary should be bound or stapled with the PRR, and 15 additional copies should be provided to the Commission office.*)

2) An introduction with a current general overview of the institution

3) Significant developments and/or changes since the previous evaluation, including documentation of responses made or actions taken with respect to self-study and evaluation team recommendations

4) Evidence of outcomes assessment, continuous institutional self-study, and planning to include:

a) outcomes assessment, including a plan for institution-wide assessment clearly tied to planning and decision-making

b) the nature and scope of institutional research

c) 5-year enrollment and graduation trend data (supported by comparative analysis)

d) 5-year fiscal trend data (supported by comparative analysis)

e) projections of enrollment and finance for the next five years (supported by assumptions)

f) detailed institutional plans (academic, facilities, etc.) for the next five years, based upon systematic, participatory processes

g) demonstrable relationship between planning and budgeting (i.e., setting priorities and allocating resources)

Sections 3 and 4 are of equal importance and should be treated as such in the preparation of the report.

Following is a more detailed examination of the contents of each of the sections listed above.

An Executive Summary

This important summary should be prepared after the entire PRR has been completed, but it should appear as a preface to the document. It should provide a careful abstract of the highlights of the Periodic Review Report in narrative form. **FIFTEEN ADDITIONAL COPIES ARE REQUIRED AND SHOULD BE SENT TO THE COMMISSION OFFICE AS PART OF THE PRR PACKAGE.**

Introduction

The introduction should acquaint the reader with the institution's approach to the preparation of the PRR, including objectives, format, and methodology; provide brief highlights of the narrative and further explain the relevance of appendices and exhibits; and describe the representative character of the groups involved in its preparation. The introduction also should present a current general overview of the institution, including references to mission, programs, off-campus sites and alternative offerings, organization and administration, faculty, admissions and student services, resources, the library/learning center, the governing board, plant and equipment, financial operations, and other pertinent aspects of the institution (for example, research activities or distance education initiatives, when appropriate).

Significant developments and changes since previous evaluation, including documentation of responses made, or action taken, with respect to recommendations

This area of coverage is designed to allow the institution maximum opportunity to record and analyze its chief accomplishments and any significant obstacles or challenges. Among these developments could be changes in mission,

programs, institutional effectiveness (outcomes), student services, facilities and other institutional resources, administrative organization, governing board composition, governance structures, personnel and management, institutional research capability, policies and procedures, admissions policies, enrollment management, retention and attrition, and financial condition

Particular attention should be given to any substantive changes, such as the addition of new degree levels; new branch campuses or additional locations; distance delivery constituting 50 percent or more of a degree program. Substantive changes since the institution's last comprehensive evaluation must be approved in advance by the Commission. However, while substantive changes must be addressed within the PRR, please note that the PRR is not the proper means for notifying the Commission or requesting approval of such a change.

Because developments and changes occur partially in response to recommendations resulting from the previous evaluation, it is expected that all major self-study and evaluation report recommendations be reviewed and analyzed thoroughly in order to provide a critical appraisal of actions or decisions taken. Institutions may find it useful to include an index of recommendations in chart form. While it is not intended that all recommendations of the evaluation team be accepted, all should be carefully considered. In some cases recommendations may be rejected, but the rationale for taking such action should be included in this section of the report.

Evidence of Continuous Institutional Self-study and Planning

This area embraces several interrelated topics under the rubric of institutional self-study and planning, including outcomes assessment, management information systems, institutional research, program review, internal and external assessment, retrospective analysis of enrollment and fiscal data, and long-range projections of enrollment and finance as well as

anticipated changes in academic programs or services and other institutional developments.

The PRR must present the institution's current plan for outcomes assessment. The plan should include:

- 1) detailed information on assessment measures currently in place and how these relate to institutional mission, program goals and objectives, etc.
- 2) evidence that assessment results are being utilized as part of planning and decision-making to strengthen programs and services; and
- 3) plans for enhancing outcomes assessment in the next five years.

See the next section, "Outcomes Assessment and the PRR," for further discussion of the Commission's expectations.

In addition to describing the existing planning process or one being developed by the institution, coverage should include a discussion of the databases as well as the nature and quality of institutional research that is used as a foundation for self-study, planning, the assessment of institutional effectiveness, and ultimately institutional improvement.

If the institution regularly uses reports to assess its status, such reports may substitute for descriptions of the databases and institutional research conducted by the campus.

Institutions that have developed effective strategic or long-range master plans may meet this requirement by making reference to such documents in the PRR and by including the planning documents as attachments. Because the materials which demonstrate these processes usually are extensive, brevity in this narrative section will be greatly appreciated.

Trend analyses of enrollment and fiscal data should cover the five-year period since the last evaluation. Projections for the next five years should be included and should be accompanied by underlying assumptions.

In addition to describing the status and projections of enrollments and finance through a narrative, charts, and diagrams, it is expected that the projections will be accompanied by appropriate assumptions or other evidence to demonstrate their plausibility. When presenting the enrollment data for the last five years or for the projected five years, it is useful to categorize the data by programs and/or levels (i.e., undergraduate versus graduate) and to relate these data to current and future fiscal information. Fiscal information applies to both operational and capital accounts. All of this information will be viewed in relation to the audited financial statements (or equivalent fiscal accountability data) and management letters accompanying the Periodic Review Report.

Outcomes Assessment and the Periodic Review Report

Institutions of higher education increasingly are being challenged by their various internal and external stakeholders to demonstrate, in meaningful ways, that the institutions are effective in accomplishing their goals and objectives, especially with regard to teaching and learning. As one of these stakeholders, the Commission on Higher Education requires colleges and universities preparing their PRR to discuss the institution's progress in outcomes assessment retrospectively, in its current context, and prospectively.

The Commission has identified certain basic characteristics of an institution's outcomes assessment activities that underlie all of the three perspectives required in the PRR. Although the Commission does not prescribe specific methods or approaches for assessment, it offers general guidelines on outcomes assessment in *Characteristics of Excellence*, the Commission's primary statement of standards; in its 1995 policy statement on outcomes assessment; in its 1996 handbook, *Framework for Outcomes Assessment*; and in its 1998 guidelines, *Outcomes Assessment Plans*.

For example, each institution is expected to have an institution-wide plan for outcomes assessment. To accomplish this objective, institutions should:

- ensure that the collection of data is part of a coherent strategy, developing guidelines and procedures to demonstrate overall institutional effectiveness in relationship to the institution's mission, goals, and objectives, giving primary attention to assessing student learning outcomes;
- provide evidence that assessment is an ongoing activity, integrated throughout the institution from the classroom to the institutional planning and resource allocation processes;
- involve faculty, administrative staff, and others in the process so that they have a sense of ownership of the overall program, as well as the specific areas in which they have expertise;
- choose an appropriate balance of quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as direct and indirect measures, making specific suggestions that are discussed more fully in *Framework*;
- utilize both formative assessment, designed to improve programs and services as they are being conducted, and summative assessment, which examines the institution and its various parts at the end of a fixed reporting period. The latter is particularly useful for the purposes of accountability, when the institution is expected to report to its various constituencies.
- ensure that all assessment efforts lead to improvements in teaching and learning, in their specific classroom and co-curricular contexts, and also lead to overall institutional effectiveness.
- develop realistic goals and a timetable, supported by an appropriate investment of resources; and
- evaluate the assessment program.

The role of PRR reviewers, like that of decennial evaluation teams, is to determine whether the outcomes assessment activities are:

- reasonable, coherent, and institution-wide;
- in fact being implemented; and
- resulting in improvement in programs, services, and overall institutional effectiveness.

The PRR should address any changes in goals, instruments, or strategies that may have been introduced since the institution's previous decennial self-study report, comparing the past with the present. It also should look prospectively at the institution's needs, through the next decennial self-study and even beyond, especially as identified by the institution's long-range strategic planning process. This prospective review should consider how assessment might best serve those long-range goals.

Steps in Preparing a Periodic Review Report

There are 10 essential steps that institutions follow in developing the Periodic Review Report.

Step 1: Organize for the task

For most institutions, organizing for the PRR involves the appointment of a committee to coordinate the effort and write the final document. The preparation of a PRR, just like a self-study, should involve the board of trustees and various campus constituencies, including the long-range planning committee, the self-study steering committee, the institutional research office, administrators, faculty, and students. Prior to submitting the PRR to the Commission, these groups should have adequate opportunity to discuss and respond to the draft PRR.

Step 2: Review documents relating to previous evaluation

- a) the self-study document
- b) the report of the visiting team
- c) the institution's response
- d) the Commission's action letter
- e) any follow-up report required by the Commission

At this point, approximately four years have elapsed between the institution's last evaluation and preparations for developing the PRR. Review enough background so that the significance of current developments is clear to people who are not closely involved in the daily affairs of the institutions or who were not directly involved in the previous self-study process.

Step 3: Collect other essential data

Develop an annotated and chronological inventory of all institutional reports, evaluations, data collections, and other information.

Step 4: Analyze and interpret data

Step 5: Write the draft report

In writing the Periodic Review Report, give thought to such matters as:

- a) A context for the materials presented (see Step 2 above).
- b) The components of the report. An institution has flexibility in organizing the body of the report and may find merit in developing its own distinctive format, particularly if the self-study followed a format other than the comprehensive self-study. In working through the materials, keep in mind the several audiences the PRR will reach. This PRR should not be simply a response to a

Commission requirement for reporting but, instead, should be used for the benefit of the institution itself. The internal audience should be very much in the minds of those preparing the final report.

c) In determining the length of the report, work for brevity, but be as explicit and precise as the nature of the material permits. Discuss subjects fully enough so that readers are able to assess the situation at the institution. Cite and interpret figures, as necessary, to strengthen and clarify the report. The PRR is not intended to duplicate a self-study report and is not expected to be as lengthy. Most Periodic Review Reports are well under 150 pages of narrative, and many require fewer than 100 pages to fulfill their goals.

d) A functional cover page (example follows) should include the institution's name and location, the date, and the chief executive officer's name and title.

e) The report should be securely stapled together or bound, not placed loosely in a folder.

Step 6: Conduct an institutional review of the content of draft report

Just as a self-study report should accurately represent the entire institution, so should the PRR. The institution should take appropriate steps to assure involvement in and awareness of the PRR process.

Step 7: Edit the final report

Step 8: Prepare the executive summary

Step 9: Submit, by June 1, the following PRR package to the Commission office

- a) Two copies of the Periodic Review Report, including the executive summary and the most recent “Annual Institutional Profile”
- b) Fifteen *additional* copies of the executive summary
- c) Current catalog(s)
- d) Current faculty handbook
- e) Current student handbook(s)
- f) Audited financial statements and management letters (or their equivalents) for the two most recently completed fiscal years. *(The Commission is aware that not all institutions—for example, units of some public systems—are permitted to submit “equivalents.” If your institution falls into this category, please contact your Commission staff liaison to discuss what kind of financial information may be substituted.)*
- g) Institutional planning documents (e.g., strategic, long-range, master plan) or equivalents
- h) Collective bargaining agreements (if applicable)

Include the following items only if they will add substantially to an understanding of the institution's status:

- i) Special studies or reports
- j) Annual reports
- k) Other (brochures, etc.)

Step 10: Submit, by June 1, the following PRR package to each of the two external reviewers appointed by the Commission (Commission staff will provide the names of the reviewers by April 1.)

- a) Periodic Review Report, including its executive summary and most recent "Annual Institutional Profile"
- b) Current catalog(s)
- c) Current faculty handbook
- d) Current student handbook
- e) Audited financial statements and management letters (or their equivalents) for the two most recently completed fiscal years [see Step 9, item f]
- f) Institutional planning documents (e.g., strategic, long-range, master plan) or equivalents
- g) Collective bargaining agreements (if applicable)

Include the following only if they will add substantially to an understanding of the institution's status:

- h) Special studies or reports
- i) Annual reports
- j) Other (brochures, etc.)

Sample Cover Page for the Periodic Review Report

Periodic Review Report

Presented by: (Name of Institution)

(Date)

Chief Executive Officer:

Commission action which preceded this report:

Date of the evaluation team's visit:

III

Guidelines for External Reviewers

The task you have agreed to perform as an external reviewer is closely akin to that of an on-site evaluator following an institutional self-study, although in this case there is no campus visit involved. As an external reviewer, you will be part of a group of people assigned to analyze and evaluate the Periodic Review Reports submitted by two institutions. Each institutional report will be reviewed by two external reviewers, a member of the Commission's professional staff, and a special finance associate. You will be designated "First Reviewer" on one report and "Second Reviewer" on the other.

The special responsibility of the first reviewer will be to prepare the report, utilizing the contribution of the second reviewer in a manner which produces a document that both reviewers can accept and for which they can be advocates. Finally, based on their own report and that of the finance associate, the external reviewers develop a confidential brief which includes the recommendation to the Commission regarding the institution's accreditation.

External reviewers should keep in mind that the Periodic Review Report is not a self-study, but it should be as analytical as it is descriptive, it should be candid and forthright, and it should provide an accurate and current picture of the institution. In general, the Periodic Review Report is a retrospective,

current, and prospective appraisal of an institution, subsequent to its last evaluation. It is a detailed progress report required of all institutions whose accreditation has been reaffirmed within the past five years and is intended to achieve the goals and objectives listed earlier in this manual.

The Commission relies on the personal and professional integrity of individuals to refuse any assignment where even the slightest potential for conflict of interest exists. Do not accept an invitation to be an external reviewer for a Periodic Review Report if you have been an active candidate for employment in the institution involved, if you have been a recent employee or are related to an employee of that institution, or if you are a graduate of that institution.

Reviewing Materials

On or about June 1, you will receive a packet of materials from each of the institutions to which you have been assigned. Make certain that all of the following are included:

- 1) The Periodic Review Report (including an executive summary and the current "Annual Institutional Profile")
- 2) Current catalog(s)
- 3) Current faculty and student handbooks
- 4) Audited financial statements and management letters for the two most recently completed fiscal years
- 5) Institutional planning documents or their equivalents
- 6) Collective bargaining agreements (if applicable)

Some institutions may elect to send more than these required items, such as annual reports or reports of special studies.

At about the same time, the Commission office will send you pertinent file materials to facilitate your tasks. These materials will always include at least the Commission letter communicating its most recent accreditation action and the report of the last evaluation team.

Should any of these materials be missing, contact the Commission office or institution. Soon after receiving the materials, you may find it useful to be in touch with the reviewers with whom you have been paired so that you can set deadlines for your consultation. Remember, you will be writing a report on an institution for whose PRR you have been named as "First Reviewer." Make certain that the person named as "Second Reviewer" knows your schedule for report preparation. The Second Reviewer should respect and follow the schedule set by the First Reviewer.

Review the major sections in this manual that apply specifically to the institution's responsibilities in PRR preparation. This will enable you to understand what the Commission's expectations are and allow an opportunity to skim the PRR to ensure that all major areas have been covered.

Read all documents carefully with special attention to the Periodic Review Report itself and to the report of the last evaluation team.

If you feel that the PRR is inadequate, notify the Commission staff liaison at once. The institution will be informed by the Commission itself and allowed an opportunity to provide additional information or, if necessary, revise the report.

Preparing the Report

Prepare your report, keeping the following things in mind:

- Aim for brevity, but brevity with substance. Most PRR reviewer reports require five to 10 single-spaced pages to cover all of the issues adequately and well.
- You have two distinct audiences: the institution and the Commission on Higher Education.
- Although all financial documents will be provided to you, there will be a separate analysis of the institution's fiscal status prepared by a specialist. A report from that person will be forwarded to you and to the institution.

- Comment on the adequacy of the PRR. For example, are there appropriate responses to all suggestions or requirements (recommendations), and are plans and projections provided? (*The Commission does not anticipate that all suggestions will be accepted by the institution, but all those that are reasonable should be considered and some rationale given if any are rejected.*)
- Comment on the usefulness of the PRR. For example, does it provide a suitable assessment of status for the Commission's purposes, and will it be beneficial to the whole campus?

It is appropriate to identify areas of progress and areas of concern that you may have. However, your major attention should be given to:

- Suggestions.** You may make suggestions for institutional improvement, based on your professional experience and on the Commission's non-binding recommendations in its various published guidelines which have been developed with peer input.
- Requirements.** You should specify separately the aspects of the institution where improvement is required to meet the Commission's standards in *Characteristics of Excellence*. State specifically in what ways the institution fails to meet the standards and, when appropriate, specify any particular steps that should be taken.

Submitting the Report and Recommendations

Your report should be in the mail no later than August 1. Send 15 copies to the Commission office and one copy to the institution.

Following their receipt of the finance associate's report, the external reviewers then will need to develop a confidential brief which includes the recommendation regarding accreditation. The

brief is a short statement which summarizes the external reviewers report and incorporates key findings from the finance associate's report. The brief speaks directly to the committee and the Commission itself. Because the committee members will read the executive summary of the PRR as well as the external reviewers' report and the report of the finance associate, there is no need for extensive repetition. The brief should not be longer than one page in length and will be the basis for the external reviewers' oral report to the PRR committee.

The recommendation regarding accreditation should be worded in keeping with the language of the policy statement, "*Range of Commission Actions*." If follow-up reporting is suggested, the reasons should be stated clearly and made part of the recommendation. The recommendation should not be communicated to the institution; it should be sent to the Commission office as part of the confidential brief.

Attending the PRR Committee Meeting

The person designated as first reviewer is expected to attend the meeting of the Committee on Periodic Review Reports at which the institution you have reviewed will be discussed. If you find you cannot attend, notify the Commission office at once.

You will be expected to provide a short, summary of key findings and observations regarding the PRR for which you were the first reviewer. Because all committee members will have copies of your written report, there is no need to read it aloud at the meeting. As part of that presentation, you should include your recommendation to the Commission regarding accreditation.

Once the PRR committee meeting is completed, all documents related to your role as external reviewer should be destroyed, and complete confidentiality must be maintained.

Sample Cover Page for the External Reviewers' Report

Report to

Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students

of

Phil's College

Punxsutawney, PA 12345

**Prepared following analysis of the institution's
Periodic Review Report**

First Reviewer:

(Name, title, and affiliation)

Second Reviewer:

(Name, title, and affiliation)

(Date Prepared)

IV

The Institution's Response And Commission Review

Each institution is required to submit a response to the reports provided by the external reviewers and the finance associate. The response should be brief and forthright, addressed to specific issues, such as a disagreement with perceptions and/or interpretations, but it should avoid nitpicking over minutiae. If the institution finds no major disagreement with the overall report, the response needs to state only that the institution accepts the report as written. The response will become part of the packet of materials reviewed by the PRR committee.

The institution's response should be in the form of a letter, addressed to the Commission on Higher Education, in care of the executive director, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-2680. The original and 14 copies should be received by the Commission no later than September 1.

Commission Review

The Committee on Periodic Review Reports, chaired by a member of the Commission, will convene in October, reviewing approximately eight institutions at each session. To ensure consistency in applying the Commission's standards, institutions of the same type (community college, four-year public, etc.) will be reviewed on the same day.

The materials made available to committee members will include: the executive summaries of the PRRs, the external reviewers' analyses, the financial analyses, and the institutional responses.

Each committee presents specific recommendations to the Commission with regard to each institutional report. These recommendations range from full acceptance of the report and reaffirmation of accreditation to the extreme of issuing a show-cause order, as discussed in the policy statement, "Range of Commission Actions."

Deadlines

To ensure timely consideration of a PRR, all parties should meet the following deadlines:

- 1) Two copies of the PRR and all accompanying institutional materials should be sent to the Commission office no later than June 1 (See Step 9).
- 2) The institution will send the two previously designated external reviewers all materials by June 1 (See Step 10). The Commission staff will provide all appropriate background materials at approximately the same time. External reviewers are encouraged to be in contact with the institution in the event additional materials or further clarification are needed.
- 3) Finance associates will come to the Commission office during July to evaluate the institutional materials, and they will submit a written analysis to the staff, who will transmit the analysis to the external reviewers and to the institution.
- 4) The external reviewers will be asked to submit a succinct analysis of the materials by no later than August 1. The person designated as first reviewer will send copies of the reviewers' analysis to the institution as well as to the Commission office.
- 5) The external reviewers submit their confidential brief to the Commission by September 1.
- 6) The institution will submit its response by September 1.
- 7) PRR committees will convene during October.

The Commission reviews the PRR committee's report and communicates its decision to the institution, stating the precise action taken.

h:\prman00