



## October 2019 WSCUC Special Visit Frequently Asked Questions

### Overview of College Accreditation

#### What is Accreditation?

Accreditation is both a process and a status. According to the [Council for Higher Education Accreditation \(CHEA\)](#), accreditation means that a program or institution has gone through a rigorous review and evaluation process by experts in the field. American colleges, universities, and post-secondary institutions that participate in the accreditation process agree to be regularly evaluated against standards that set expectations for educational quality and effective institutional practices. Institutions that successfully demonstrate that they meet these standards are said to be “accredited,” or to have an “accredited status.” If an institution is accredited, it generally means that the institution meets and maintains standards of quality in its educational and institutional practices.

#### How Many Types of Accreditation Exist?

There are two different types of accreditation: institutional and programmatic/specialized. Institutional accreditation refers to the status conferred upon the entire school or university. Programmatic or specialized accreditation refers to the status conferred upon a program, department, school within a university, or certificate program, as examples.

An institution may be accredited but a particular program within that institution may not be. Some students may enroll in a specific program based on the accreditation status of the institution without realizing that the program is not accredited by the appropriate specialized accrediting organization. This is not the case for any degree program at Pacific Oaks College currently. All programs have required programmatic accreditations. Pacific Oaks has maintained WSCUC accreditation since it was originally accredited in 1959.

#### Why is Accreditation Important?

For prospective students and the general public, an institution’s accredited status signals that the institution meets and maintains standards of quality based on recognized practices in higher education. Accreditation status also has a direct impact on transfer of credits and financial aid. Reputable colleges and universities will **only** accept transfer credits from accredited institutions, and **only** accredited institutions are eligible to offer federal financial aid to students under Title IV. Pacific Oaks College is able to offer federal financial aid.

#### Who is Responsible For Accrediting Colleges and Universities?

In the U.S., private, nonprofit organizations known as **accreditation agencies** perform accreditation activities and actions. Accreditation agencies develop the criteria (also known as accreditation standards) used in institutional evaluations, conduct evaluations, determine the accredited status of individual institutions, and perform other administrative activities in support of the accreditation process.

[There are six regional accreditation agencies in the United States.](#) Colleges, universities, and other post-



## October 2019 WSCUC Special Visit Frequently Asked Questions

secondary institutions in each region belong to membership associations that work with the accrediting agencies on accreditation matters. Representatives from these member institutions (including faculty, staff, and administrators) participate on evaluation teams for other institutions in their region, which helps the accreditation agencies facilitate peer evaluation. Pacific Oaks College is located in California, and is accredited by the [WASC Senior College and University Commissions \(WSCUC\)](#).

### **What Does the Accreditation Process Involve?**

Each accrediting organization establishes its own standards, based on input from their communities of interest. In some cases, an internal and external review is conducted by experts in the field. The team may include peers who are faculty, administrators, practitioners, and/or members of the public.

The institution typically is required to undertake a self-assessment that results in preparation of a self-study document that presents evidence of compliance with the established accreditation standards. The WSCUC Special Visit report is available for faculty, staff, and students to review in the libraries of the Pasadena and San Jose campuses.

### **What are Accreditation Standards?**

Accreditation standards are a set of written criteria that provide a framework for demonstrating how effectively institutions fulfill their mission, achieve intended outcomes for student achievement and student learning, and maintain and improve the quality of educational offerings. The standards form the foundation of an accreditation review; institutions use them to conduct a self-review and structure their self-evaluation document; and evaluation teams and accreditation agencies use them to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of an institution.

Each of the regional accrediting agencies uses their own set of standards, developed in collaboration with the colleges, universities, and institutions in their region. While the exact wording and structure of the standards used by each regional agency vary slightly, the themes are similar and each set of standards reflects accepted practices in U.S. higher education. To maintain their accredited status, institutions are expected to be in compliance with their agency's accreditation standards at all times.

### **WSCUC's Four Standards of Accreditation**

Pacific Oaks College is located in California, and is accredited by the [WASC Senior College and University Commissions \(WSCUC\)](#). WSCUC has developed four accreditation standards, each with specific Criteria for Review (CFR).

[Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives](#)

[Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions](#)

[Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Quality and Sustainability](#)



## October 2019 WSCUC Special Visit Frequently Asked Questions

### [Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement](#)

The CFRs under each Standard provide more specific statements about the meaning of the Standard. The CFRs are grouped under headings that identify major aspects of institutional functioning. The CFRs are cited by institutions in their institutional report, by peer reviewers in evaluating institutions, and by the Commission in making decisions about institutions. Many of the CFRs are cross-referenced to allow for ease in identifying related and connected CFRs.

## Overview of the Upcoming Special Visit

### What's The Difference Between This Visit and Previous Visit?

- On its previous visit in 2016, WSCUC visited Pacific Oaks for its [Re-Affirmation Visit](#).
- All [4 Standards and 39 Criteria for Review](#) were reviewed.
- At that time The Commission granted 8 years of Accredited Status based on the Team Report.
- The Team reported on many Commendations and asked for a Special Visit to address **8 Recommendations**. The upcoming visit is that Special Visit.

### When Will the Visit Occur?

The Special Visit will occur from Monday, Oct. 21 through Wednesday, Oct. 23, 2019.

### Who is on the WSCUC Special Visit Team?

The Team includes faculty and administrators from peer institutions and PO's liaison from WSCUC staff:

- Tamela Hawley, *Vice President, WSCUC*
- Kay Llovio, *Associate Provost, Team Chair*
- Suzanne Bordelon, *Professor, Assistant Team Chair*
- Kimberly Renna, *Chief Financial Officer*



## **October 2019 WSCUC Special Visit Frequently Asked Questions**

### **How was the Special Visit Report Created?**

A Steering Committee of the Cabinet worked with eight groups of faculty, staff, and (occasionally) students to address how Pacific Oaks was responding to the improvements needed.

### **Can I Read the Special Visit Report?**

The report is available for faculty, staff, and students to review in the libraries of the Pasadena and San Jose campuses.

### **What Will Happen During the Visit?**

The Team of Peer Evaluators will come to the Pasadena and San Jose campuses and meet with individuals and groups to review, investigate, and verify that what we included in the Special Visit Report is, in fact, what we are doing.

### **What Should I Do If I'm Participating in One of the Special Visit Groups?**

- If you served on one of the eight working groups, let the visitors know as well as what role you played.
- Answer the questions as completely and specifically as possible. For example:
  - Staff/Faculty: "The work I do as a (insert your job title) directly addresses several of the recommendations (provide personal examples of how you are engaged with the curriculum/courses/services)."
  - Student:
    - "During my course work, I am made aware of what learning outcomes I will achieve through the course syllabus and through my program advising."
    - "I read through the Special Visit Report and realized that the (insert your own answer, such as 'Data I look at,' 'the Rubrics in my course assignments,' 'the changes I see in curriculum,' 'the Goals of the Strategic Plan,') are all a result of lots of planning and discussion and assessment."

### **What is the Pacific Oaks College Mission Statement?**



## **October 2019 WSCUC Special Visit Frequently Asked Questions**

- Grounded in its social justice heritage, Pacific Oaks College prepares students to be culturally intelligent agents of change serving diverse communities in the fields of human development, education, and related family studies.
- Guided by four core values—respect, diversity, social justice, and inclusion—Pacific Oaks College has helped graduates change the world.

### **What Should I Say If They Ask Me General Questions About the College?**

If asked for information regarding different programs, diversity of students, campus locations, connection to the Children's School, or other questions about the history of the College, please review the content of the [About section of the PO website](#).