PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS GUIDE

In July 2013, WASC issued the 2013 Handbook of Accreditation, in which institutions are asked to demonstrate their contributions to the public good. This focus on public good is included in the Core Commitments, the Standards (Standard 1, CFR 1.1, CFR 2.2a) and in component 1 of the institutional report.

This guide is intended to be a collection of ‘good practice’ resources for colleges and universities. It describes some of the key concepts and good practices implicit in demonstrating contributions to the public good in an effort to assist institutions with understanding the WASC’s expectations.

INTRODUCTION

While it is commonly acknowledged that higher education is more important than ever before, the role and value of higher education is subject to criticism that institutions and programs are not adequately preparing students to lead meaningful lives, serve the needs of society, and engage in fruitful employment. The public, via federal and state government, provides considerable investments through direct allocations and grants to institutions, tax-exempt status for non-profit institutions, research and economic development grants, and financial aid offered to students attending an accredited institution. Higher education’s compact with society to serve the public good is affirmed through the trust delegated by the federal government to the regional accreditors through peer review. While concern for the public interest has long been an aspect of WASC Standards, the Commission is placing greater emphasis in the 2013 Handbook of Accreditation on evaluating how effectively institutions’ activities and preparation of graduates contributes to the larger public good.

At the core of the WASC accrediting process stands the application of Commission Standards to the mission of the institution. The diversity of institutions and their missions is a distinguishing hallmark of American higher education in the 21st century. Within this remarkable diversity, however, there exists a widespread understanding that across the full reach of its many forms and activities, higher education in the United States represents both a public good and a private benefit. The WASC accrediting process requires that institutions clearly state their mission, apply the Standards of accreditation within the context of that mission, and demonstrate how the institution meets society’s needs for an educated citizenry based on their mission, the students they serve, and the programs they offer.

There is a clear relationship between the public interest in the mission and activities of institutions (in no small measure because of the public investment in most institutions) and in the accreditation process itself. Institutions and accreditors both operate within the public space, and increasingly the public has heightened its interest in accountability for the public good as the value of higher education has grown in importance as a part of public discourse. While the most direct statement of a shared responsibility to the public good is found in Standard 1, it is also clearly present in Standard 2 with regard to expected learning objectives and outcomes that ensure that graduates are prepared for life, work, and citizenship, and in Standard 4 with regard...
to an institution’s need—as a learning organization—to reflect on its mission and attainments in
the context of meeting its responsibility to society.

The WASC accreditation process requires an institution to define its own sense of its
responsibility to society and the public good within the context of its overall mission, values, and
character. Once defined, this institutionally-determined purpose needs to be incorporated in the
institution’s self-study in ways that best fit its purposes. This may occur as a reflection on
mission (Standard 1), on learning objectives (Standard 2), on the institution’s own processes for
continued improvement (Standard 4), as a special theme, or as a combination of these
approaches. For some institutions, the principal manifestation of its contribution will occur
through education. For others, the public good will be served more clearly by the institution’s
engagement with its communities—whether local, global, or some combination.

In brief, the institution itself must give guidance to WASC and the institution’s review team
about how it wishes to be evaluated with regard to its commitment to the public good, first by
how it characterizes this commitment within its institutional review and second by the evidence
it provides. Because the opportunity to document contributions to the public good is inherent in
at least three of the Standards, the institution is asked to provide a contextualizing statement
within the introduction to its institutional report and then to provide elsewhere in the report
information sufficient for a review team to assess the contributions set forth by the institution
itself.

There are many ways to measure and to assess contributions to the public good, and the
institution has a responsibility to set forth the way in which it wishes to be assessed. Beyond
listing activities, economic impact, and awards, commendations, or testimonials, the institutional
statement should make clear—succinctly—representative ways in which it has fulfilled this
responsibility to society in a form that can be considered by the institutional review team. As
may be requested by the institution itself or as determined through the off-site review, the on-site
review may explore the institution’s response in greater depth. Unless the institution has made its
contribution to the public good a theme or otherwise indicated that it wishes to be included in the
on-site review, however, the institutional statement itself should provide sufficient information
for a review team to conclude that this important responsibility has been met.

DEFINITIONS

There is no commonly agreed upon definition of “public good” or how it should be approached
in higher education. Below are a few commonly used terms that come across in the literature and
practical work by institutions and organizations. It is not an exhaustive list, but an attempt to
organize and clarify the conversation.

Public Good

1. A commodity or service that is provided without profit to all members of a society, either
   by the government or a private individual or organization
2. The benefit or well-being of the public.
   (Oxford Dictionaries http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/public+good?region=us)
The term “public good” speaks to the commitment to civic and social responsibility, to serving and protecting the social welfare. It implies a moral obligation on the part of individuals and institutions to attend to social problems. - *Higher Education for the Public Good: A Report from the National Leadership Dialogues*

Universities are almost everywhere understood to have public missions. They offer education that equips citizens for occupations traditionally centered on public service – the model of the learned professions – or at least in principle needed by the public for economic development or other purposes. They advance social mobility. They produce new technologies and other innovations. They contribute to both the continuity and creativity of culture. They directly inform the public sphere and also prepare citizens to participate in it. - *The University and the Public Good*

**Community Engagement**
Building and sustaining university partnerships and other forms of outreach and engagement; creating opportunities to engage the public for substantive dialogue and collaboration to take place between institutions and the surrounding community; serving as a venue for dialogue, deliberation, and collective action; giving voice to those publics that are poor, weak, or otherwise afflicted. - *Higher Education for the Public Good: A Report from the National Leadership Dialogues*

**Civic Engagement**
Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. - *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*

**Economic Development**
The institution stimulates the local, national and international economy by providing jobs, investing in community projects and research, expanding opportunities for minority and underprivileged youngsters, stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship as well as a host of other economic advancement activities. - *Higher Education for the Public Good: A Report from the National Leadership Dialogues*

**APPROACHES**

The approaches to demonstrating a commitment to the public good are as diverse as the higher education institutions that work to implement them. There are varying component parts within the definition of “public good,” and higher education institutions can incorporate a “public good” approach in a variety of ways. Some approaches, like the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), focus heavily on the positive externalities. Institutions, including the California State University System, use the VSA College Portrait to report on degrees granted, including a breakdown by ethnicity; regular and internship credentials; economic diversity, access, and completion; sticker and net tuition fees; loan debt; and salaries of BA recipients.
Other widely used approaches focus on one or more of the following areas. While these are clearly delineated here, each approach will typically overlap and support another approach.

- **The Institutional Structure**: Infuse practices, systems, and structures that support the “public good” in the institutional mission, values, culture, policies and practices, academic reform, leadership practices, rules governing promotion and tenure, what is accepted as scholarly work, funding streams, etc.

- **Student Learning**: Academic and student life programs actively work to help individuals understand what it means to be members of a public and strive to inculcate civic values and practices and foster a strong sense of social responsibility. Curriculum teaches democracy in a democratic fashion, promotes dialectical thinking and knowledge-in-use rather than simply knowledge-acquisition, respects and incorporates a diversity of perspectives, embraces multiple types of intelligence, and is participatory and engages students in the types of issues and challenges that are likely to encounter in the real world (http://www.thenationalforum.org/Docs/PDF/oxnard_dialogue2.pdf). In addition, students will be required or encouraged to engage in the community through service learning projects, internships, volunteering, research, and other community or civic engagement projects.

- **Public Research and Scholarship**: Directing academic resources toward applied and “engaged” research and scholarship that addresses societal needs. - Higher Education for the Public Good: A Report from the National Leadership Dialogues

- **Civic Engagement**: The “Dimensions of Engagement” framework on the next page identifies several purposes and responsibilities entailed in a commitment to civic engagement.
Dimensions of Engagement

The public purposes and responsibilities entailed in a commitment to civic engagement are the following:

1. **Access to Learning**: to assure the highest quality undergraduate, graduate, and lifelong learning opportunities to students regardless of age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, income, or disability as part of connected learning experiences that extend from K-12 schooling to collegiate education, professional training and throughout a lifetime;

2. **Enhanced Diversity**: to promote the inclusion and participation throughout the university and in the larger community of people with diverse backgrounds and voices, nourishing a vigorous pluralism in American society;

3. **Civic Learning**: to develop among all students the civic competence and critical thinking that empower them as effective citizens in their localities, states, nations and in a global environment, and to develop among people from varied backgrounds the capacity for responsible leadership in private, associational, and public organizations and institutions;

4. **Public Scholarship**: to foster new knowledge and creative expression in the arts, sciences, and humanities as vital manifestations of an active life of the mind and spirit, and to encourage faculty research and other professional work concerned with the conditions and problems of public life;

5. **Social Well-Being**: to contribute through the discovery, dissemination, and application of knowledge to the economic and social well-being of communities locally, regionally, nationally and internationally;

6. **Trusted Voice**: to provide citizens and leaders with dependable knowledge and reliable information for reaching responsible public judgments and decisions, and so to serve as a trusted voice in public debates over controversial issues;

7. **Public Spaces**: to provide accessible sites and intellectual leadership for public deliberation about the meaning and importance of civic values and civic participation;

8. **Community Partnership**: to collaborate with diverse groups, organizations, institutions, and communities as mutually helpful partners in furthering shared democratic purposes;

9. **Self-Governance**: to maintain the collegial self-governance and autonomy from special interests as necessary for the accomplishment of public purposes;

10. **Public Accountability**: to remain accountable for serving the public well by pursuing actively the full range of the institution’s public purposes.

Adapted from “Civic Engagement: Renewing The Land Grant Mission,” the final report of the University of Minnesota’s Civic Engagement Task Force [http://www1.umn.edu/civicreps/pdf/final_report.pdf]
CURRENT INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES

This section provides examples of some of the various approaches in practice. This is by no means an exhaustive list. The institutions and organizations highlighted in this section were selected due to their relevant nature to WASC. Each provides potential definitions, measures or metrics, and ways to approach the topic of “public good.”

California State University System
The CSU system intentionally focuses on the “public good” in at least two system-wide ways. As mentioned above, the CSU system is part of the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). Each campus in the CSU system posts data about the undergraduate student experience online as part of a “College Portrait.” The portrait includes data on:
  • Degrees granted including a break down by ethnicity
  • Regular and internship credentials
  • Economic diversity; access and completion
  • Sticker and net tuition fees
  • Loan debt
  • Salaries of BA recipients

Contributions to the Public Good: http://www.calstate.edu/value/public-good/index.shtml

The CSU’s Value to Students: http://www.calstate.edu/value/systemwide/

The CSU system has also created and supports the Center for Community Engagement (CCE). CCE’s vision states that “the CSU Chancellor's Office Center for Community Engagement is a full partner in the California State University's service to the public good through the work of its 23 campuses and its local and global communities.” Each campus has the freedom to select a definition of community engagement that represents the culture of that campus. Examples of community engagement activities include, but are not limited to:
  • service-learning
  • voter registration drives
  • community-based research
  • community-centered forums
  • alternative spring breaks
  • community based internships
  • community service

CSU’s Center for Community Engagement: https://www.calstate.edu/cce/

If your institution would like to contribute to WASC’s collection of current practices, please contact your institution’s WASC staff liaison.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Association of American Colleges and Universities: Civic Learning
Through its many projects and publications, AAC&U builds national awareness of civic and democratic learning and supports campus capacity for those outcomes that are essential for life, work, and citizenship in the 21st century.
http://www.aacu.org/resources/civicengagement/index.cfm

A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy’s Future
This report from the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement calls on the nation to reclaim higher education’s civic mission. Commissioned by the Department of Education and released at a White House convening in January 2012, the report pushes back against a prevailing national dialogue that limits the mission of higher education to workforce preparation and training while marginalizing disciplines basic to democracy.
http://www.aacu.org/civic_learning/crucible/

Lumina Foundation’s Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP)
The DQP is a framework for defining and ultimately measuring the general knowledge and skills that individual students need to acquire in order to earn degrees at various levels, such as associate, bachelor’s and master’s degrees. The Degree Profile is intended to help define generally what is expected of college graduates, regardless of their majors or fields of study.

The DQP identifies five basic areas of learning, one of which is Civic Learning, defined as follows:

Preparing students for responsible citizenship is a widely acknowledged purpose of higher education. Like other forms of application, civic inquiry requires the integration of knowledge and skills acquired in both the broad curriculum and in the student’s specialized field. But because civic preparation also requires engagement — that is, practice in applying those skills to representative questions and problems in the wider society — it should be considered a discrete category of learning.

Higher education is experimenting with new ways to prepare students for effective democratic and global citizenship. Virtually all of these efforts use experiential or field-based learning as a means to develop civic insight, competence in public affairs and the ability to contribute to the common good. By definition, field-based learning about civic issues is likely to immerse students in public debate about contested positions.

In developing civic competence, students engage a wide variety of perspectives and evidence and form their own reasoned views on public issues. Civic Learning — which is related to but goes beyond the Intellectual Skill we have labeled “Engaging Diverse Perspectives” — also involves active engagement with others. Exposure to these different perspectives helps students develop their own responses to social, environmental and economic challenges at the local, national and global levels.
Lumina Foundation DQP:
http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/The_Degree_Qualifications_Profile.pdf

DQP Resources at the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment:
http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/DQPCorner.html

**Campus Compact**
Campus Compact is a national coalition of more than 1,100 college and university presidents—who are committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education. As the only national higher education association dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement, Campus Compact promotes public and community service that develops students’ citizenship skills, helps campuses forge effective community partnerships, and provides resources and training for faculty seeking to integrate civic and community-based learning into the curriculum. Campus Compact’s membership includes public, private, two- and four-year institutions across the spectrum of higher education. http://www.compact.org/

**Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement**
The classification for Community Engagement is an elective classification that recognizes important aspects of institutional mission and action not typically represented in national data. The elective classification involves data collection and documentation of important aspects of institutional mission, identity and commitments, and requires substantial effort invested by participating institutions.

The classification is not an award. It is an evidence-based documentation of institutional practice to be used in a process of self-assessment and quality improvement. The documentation is reviewed to determine whether the institution qualifies for recognition as a community engaged institution.

Classification Definition:

*Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.*

*The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.*

Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement:
http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php

**Education Commission of the States: National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement**
The National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement (NCLCE) seeks to support state policymakers in establishing civic learning and engagement programs for pre-K through
postsecondary students. The NCLCE promotes the ideal that citizenship must be taught to the nation’s young people and that all students should be prepared for a lifetime of civic engagement. The NCLCE works to further this goal by equipping state policymakers with the research and data needed to support the creation of civic education programs.

http://www.ecs.org/html/ProjectsPartners/nclc/nclc_main.htm

**A New Paradigm for Economic Development**

The report “A New Paradigm for Economic Development: How Higher Education Institutions Are Working to Revitalize Their Regional and State Economies” highlights key areas where HEIs are playing a role in economic development. The report details how higher education institutions and systems are working to become key drivers of economic development and community revitalization.

Key findings show that HEIs are:

- Putting their research power to work by developing new ideas that will strengthen the country’s competitive edge in the new economy — and then by helping to deploy those innovations into commercial use.
- Providing a wide range of knowledge-focused services to businesses and other employers, including customized job-training programs, hands-on counseling, technical help, and management assistance.
- Embracing a role in the cultural, social, and educational revitalization of their home communities.
- And, most fundamentally, educating people to succeed in the innovation age.


**SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY**


