

TEAC's Standard of Quality

The evidence is trustworthy, consistent with the program's claims and TEAC's requirements, and is of sufficient magnitude.

A program meets the TEAC standard of quality when the evidence cited in the program's self-study document, called the *Inquiry Brief*, is consistent with the claims made about the graduates' accomplishments and when there is little or no credible evidence that is inconsistent with the claims. TEAC uses a system of heuristics to arrive at its accreditation decision and judgment about whether the program's evidence of the students' and graduates' accomplishment and other matters is *trustworthy* and *sufficient*.

To establish that a program meets TEAC's principles and standards, TEAC first determines whether or not the cited evidence of the graduates' learning is accurate. This is accomplished through the academic audit. TEAC's Accreditation Panel and Accreditation Committee then determine whether or not the evidence is sufficient to support the program faculty's claims for the graduates' accomplishments.

The quality of evidence and the quality of the system that produced it are the two key factors in the TEAC accreditation process.

Four principles guide TEAC's accreditation process:

1. It leads to program improvement, which is a continuous process in which each step helps define the next one and moves it forward.
2. It is inquiry driven, starting from the faculty's own questions and curiosity about the program's accomplishments.
3. It examines the trustworthiness and adequacy of the evidence the faculty relies on to support its claims about its students, and it examines the effectiveness of the system the faculty has in place to control and monitor the program's quality.
4. It is frugal, not burdening the program and institution with unnecessary activities or costs in paperwork, personnel, time, and money.

Throughout all stages of the accreditation process, TEAC and program faculty maintain open and frequent communication on all relevant matters.

Process principle one: continuous improvement to advance quality.

The three TEAC quality principles – candidate learning, faculty learning, and institutional capacity – constitute a dynamic cycle in which the program formulates goals for student achievement, allocates needed resources, assesses student performance, and uses the evidence from the assessment to improve program quality.

TEAC's quality principles are complemented with an accreditation process that incorporates practices of continuous improvement. TEAC's approach to accreditation relies on the following ideas from the continuous improvement literature:

- Create constancy of purpose for improvement
- Balance constancy of purpose and continual improvement, short- and long-term results, and knowledge and action
- Link program improvement to student learning
- Improve every system in the program to enhance the quality of teaching, learning, research, service activities, and outcomes
- Eliminate misleading and superficial numerical quotas and indicators of "quality"

TEAC does not assume a single model or template for education programs. Rather, TEAC's approach reflects an understanding that continuous improvement is a process that leads to many different paths to excellence in professional teacher education.

Process principle two: inquiry-driven accreditation.

Institutions of higher education justifiably take pride in their record of thoughtful and scholarly approaches to their work. TEAC believes that accreditation of professional educator preparation programs should be grounded in exactly the same kind of scholarly inquiry.

The questions driving the inquiry should be interesting and important to the program faculty and should address the relationship between teaching and student learning, both important indicators of quality. Rather than being designed simply to comply with the external demands of accrediting bodies and state agencies, the program faculty's questions should reflect the unique mission of the program and the goal of preparing competent, caring, qualified professional educators.

Process principle three: audits to ensure quality.

An audit provides an external verification of the program's internal quality assurance mechanisms and the evidence they produce. An *academic audit* is an investigative review of the way a professional education program is producing student learning, assessing the outcomes of instruction, making improvements in the program, and gaining institutional support for the program. An academic audit does not evaluate quality itself; instead, it verifies the *processes* that are intended to produce quality. (Note: the quality of the evidence, once its trustworthiness has been assured, is assessed in the accreditation decision process of which more is found below.) TEAC's approach to the audit emphasizes both the quality processes *and* the evidence of student learning and accomplishment that flow from it. TEAC's approach requires the program faculty to live up to its publicly proclaimed promises about its program. This is accomplished when the institution and program demonstrate accountability through the display of solid evidence of student achievement.

Process principle four: frugality.

The accreditation process is weakened when a program faculty takes steps *solely* for the purpose of satisfying an external accreditation requirement. The TEAC accreditation process is designed to be efficient and use the minimum resources necessary to reach timely decisions. The process should be a part of the normal quality control system the program employs.

The document that the program produces to provide evidence of its quality, the *Inquiry Brief* or *Inquiry Brief Proposal*, is a research monograph of about 50 pages. It is based primarily on existing documents, such as reports of ongoing inquiry, state program review, and institutional research and other publications. It focuses on what the program faculty wants and needs to know about the program's performance.