



## Accreditation Panel

### Role of the Accreditation Panel

After the auditors have determined that the evidence in the *Brief* is sufficiently accurate and trustworthy, the Accreditation Panel reviews the case. The panel's charge is to address three questions, and, based on the findings, make a recommendation to the Accreditation Committee:

1. Does what the program's students have learned with regard to their subject matter, pedagogy, and teaching skill satisfy *Quality Principle I*?
2. Does what the faculty has learned from its monitoring and inquiry into the program's quality satisfy *Quality Principle II*?
3. Does the evidence in Appendix B, as documented by the auditors, satisfy *Quality Principle III*?

To answer these questions, the panel examines and evaluates the evidence about each element and component of the TEAC system (1.0–3.0) to see (1) if there are other plausible interpretations of the evidence, and (2) if the evidence presented is sufficient to satisfy TEAC's requirements.

In their deliberations, the Accreditation Panel members consider the following documents, all prepared in advance of the meeting: the *Brief*, the Audit Report; any responses to the Audit Report from program faculty; reports from any consulting reviewers; and a Case Analysis prepared by the lead auditor and the lead panelist (which sets out the case for accreditation and notes the evidence that is consistent and inconsistent with TEAC's principles and any rival explanations of the evidence).

On the basis of its findings, the panel recommends to the Accreditation Committee one of the categories of TEAC accreditation – initial accreditation for two or five years<sup>1</sup> or accreditation for two, five, or ten years. The Accreditation Committee, a subcommittee of the TEAC Board of Directors, then reviews the Accreditation Report and all the materials related to the case, and makes the accreditation decision.

### Composition and responsibilities

The director of the Accreditation Panel, assisted by a staff liaison to the panel, manages the Accreditation Panel's work and supervises and directs panel functions and meetings. The director serves as chair of all Accreditation Panel meetings and is an *ex-officio* voting member. The director also assists TEAC's president in recruiting and training members of the Accreditation Panel.

The panel's members are appointed by TEAC's president for their experience and expertise in the evaluation of evidence and include at least one professional educator, one faculty member from an educator preparation program, and the lead auditor (*ex officio*).

At least one member of the Accreditation Panel is someone who is familiar with institutions similar in size, mission, and context to the one offering the program.

In addition, so that they may be fully aware of the issues and reasoning that played roles in the panel's recommendations for the program's accreditation, representatives of the program are entitled to attend (in person or by video- or teleconference) the session of the meeting of the Accreditation Panel at which their program is considered for accreditation. They are invited to observe, without comment, the panel's deliberations and voting process. They also answer any remaining questions the TEAC staff and panel members may have about the *Brief*. They do not present their *Brief* or debate their case; nor do they introduce new unaudited evidence, but before the panelists vote, the representative(s) are asked to correct any errors or misstatements they have heard in the panelists' deliberations.

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<sup>1</sup> If the first *Inquiry Brief Proposal* earned a two year term, a second proposal may also earn a two year term. If the second proposal earned a five year term, however, it could only have the term for three years before an *Inquiry Brief* would be required. This is because initial accreditation can only be awarded for a total of five years.

Any or all of the panelists may participate in a meeting of the panel by conference telephone or by e-mail or video conferencing. As long as everyone participating in the meeting is able to hear or read one another's messages, the panelist is considered present.

**Terms of service on the panel.** The panel is assembled from a pool of about a dozen persons. The members of the pool are appointed to an initial three-year term and may be reappointed for one additional term of up to three years. No member serves in the pool for more than two consecutive terms (i.e., consecutive terms cannot exceed six years).

**Training for the panelists.** All members of the Accreditation Panel pool receive initial and periodic training in the TEAC system and operational policies and participate in an orientation and review of the policies at the outset of each panel meeting.

**Frequency of panel meetings.** The Accreditation Panel convenes on an as-needed basis, but usually no more than three times a year.

Any action required or permitted to be taken by the panel may be taken without a meeting if a written consent, setting forth the action to be taken, is signed by all the panelists authorizing the action. The panelists' consent has the same force and effect as their unanimous vote would in a meeting.

**Voting protocol.** Accreditation recommendations require no less than four affirmative votes. This means that a four-person quorum must provide a unanimous recommendation for an accreditation recommendation to be forwarded to the TEAC Accreditation Committee. Similarly, five- and six-member panels must achieve at least four affirmative votes to advance a recommendation.

## **Accreditation Panel Process**

### **Before the meeting**

At least two weeks before the meeting, all participants receive the *Briefs* and supporting materials. The panelists are expected to study the materials thoroughly, review the lead auditor's and panelist's analysis of the program's case for accreditation, and be prepared to make and defend a recommendation about each *Brief* in accordance with TEAC's principles and requirements.

The panel director, assisted by a staff liaison to the panel, assures that all necessary materials for the meeting are assembled, and that rules related to the meeting quorum and composition are satisfied. Any supporting documents not mailed to panelists are made available for review prior to the beginning of the opening panel session.

**Order of business for the panel's meeting.** During its meetings, the Accreditation Panel follows Roberts Rules of Order. A simple majority vote is required to affirm all procedural motions.

### **During the meeting**

At the opening session, the director reminds panelists and observers of the guidelines for the meeting, provides an orientation, and reviews pertinent information, including the availability of materials and the schedule. The panel's deliberation of each program will conform to the following format.

**Introductions.** The panelists and the program representatives introduce themselves to each other, giving their affiliations and a brief summary of their experiences related to the panel's work.

**Motion.** To open the panel's deliberations, the director of the Accreditation Panel enters a formal motion for the accreditation status requested by the program faculty and seeks a *pro forma* second from members of the Accreditation Panel.

**Review of materials.** The lead panelist for the case presents and reviews the case analysis, which is followed by a discussion among the panel members about the documents pertinent to the case, particularly the findings in the Audit Report and the Case Analysis. During this open discussion, the panelists may query the auditors and staff about these documents and any matters relating to them.

**Questions for the program representatives.** When they are ready, the panelists formulate any questions they have for the program's representative(s).

**Review of questions.** If there are questions, the director of the Accreditation Panel then reviews with the panel the questions that have emerged during this discussion and indicates which will be asked of the program representative(s).

**Responses by the program representatives.** The program representative(s) responds briefly to each question, which is posed by the director of the Accreditation Panel on behalf of the panel. The answer must be limited to the question asked and should not be a response to other issues heard during the panel's opening discussion, except to correct an error of fact. The purpose of this part of the meeting is only the clarification of points of fact pertinent to an accreditation recommendation. It is not an occasion for debate, presentation, or the introduction of new evidence and information.

**Panel's deliberation.** After the program representative(s) has responded, the panel members move on to consider the lead auditor's and lead panelist's recommendation for an accreditation status and whether the record warrants the citation of any weaknesses and stipulations.

The director of the panel reviews any possible stipulations and weaknesses with the panelists, both those that were noted in the Case Analysis, and any new ones that emerged during the discussion. Following a discussion, the director notes any weaknesses and stipulations for inclusion in the Accreditation Report.

**Panel's judgment.** After the panel has set aside any plausible rival explanations for the evidence, determined that the evidence is of a sufficient magnitude, noted any areas of weakness and potential stipulation, and determined whether the program makes the case for satisfying each TEAC principle, the director turns the panel's deliberations to the opening accreditation motion or one modified by the panelists.

If the evidence for a *subcomponent* is insufficient and inadequate, the panel formally considers and cites a **weakness** in the subcomponent.

If the deficiency is in the evidence for a *component*, the panel considers and cites a **stipulation** in the component.

The citations of weaknesses and stipulations may be voted on separately or collectively and before, after, or with the accreditation motion.

Before the panel votes, the panel director asks the program representatives if they have heard the panelists make any errors and how, if they have, the error should be corrected.

**Voting.** The motion must be voted on and passed with a minimum of four votes (a meeting quorum consists of four voting Accreditation Panel members).

If the motion does not receive at least four positive votes, the chair enters a substitute motion. A second to this motion is, then, secured from members of the Accreditation Panel.<sup>2</sup>

At the conclusion of this portion of the meeting, any program representatives are excused from the room, with the panel's appreciation and presumably with its congratulations.

**Accreditation justifications.** After the panel approves the final accreditation recommendation and any formal stipulations and weaknesses, its deliberations are concluded. The panelists now discuss their reasons for their

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<sup>2</sup> *Protocol for an unlikely scenario.* Should the motion for accreditation, weakness, or stipulation fail, another motion is made until one is passed by at least four votes. In the event of a tie, the president of TEAC will cast a tie-breaking vote and enable a majority report. In the unlikely event that four votes cannot be found for any motion, the members in majority write an accreditation report and the members of the minority write a minority report in which they explicate their contrary recommendation. The two reports are sent to the Accreditation Committee for a decision.

The program is able to appeal the lack of a single panel recommendation if there are adequate grounds. If there are no qualifying grounds, the two reports are sent to the Accreditation Committee.

decision for the purpose of giving the panel director guidance with regard the panel's report, which must provide written justification and feedback to the program about student achievement and the accreditation recommendation.

**Debriefing.** After each case, the Accreditation Panel members also rate their confidence in their individual decisions and in the panel's recommendation. The panelists offer the director suggestions for improving the quality and efficiency of the review and deliberation process.

**Accreditation report and follow-up activities.** The director of the Accreditation Panel writes an Accreditation Report, drawing on the panel's deliberations, findings, and debriefing comments. The Accreditation Report contains:

1. The time and place of the panel meeting and the names and affiliations of the members of the panel, the program representatives, and the TEAC staff members who were present;
2. The vote and the accreditation recommendation;
3. The panel's justification for the recommendation;
4. Feedback to the program about the program's performance with respect to student achievement (this feedback reiterates the case analysis evidence which is consistent and inconsistent with the program's claims about student achievement);
5. Recommendations about any weaknesses that must be addressed in the program's annual report or subsequent *Inquiry Brief* to TEAC; and
6. Recommendations for any stipulations that must be addressed and removed within two years.

The director submits the report to TEAC's president within five business days of the panel's decision. The president of TEAC, in turn, sends the Accreditation Report to the program faculty for comment. The program faculty then has two weeks to respond in writing to the arguments and findings in the Accreditation Report.

## **Guidelines for the Accreditation Panel's deliberations**

### **The charge to the panel**

In evaluating the program's evidence for each component of the TEAC system, the panel has two tasks: (1) to eliminate, if possible, the plausible rival hypotheses for the interpretation of the evidence; and (2) to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to support the claim that the program satisfies the system's requirements.

In this respect, TEAC panel members are like jurors in the American judicial process who must determine whether the evidence rises to a level that satisfies a legal standard. Whereas the legal standard may require, for example, evidence of the defendant's *intent*, the evidence that supports the claim of *intent* resists a clear-cut standard in the traditional sense of some bright line between *intention* and *no intention*. TEAC Accreditation Panel members, like these jurors, must weigh the evidence and decide if the evidence is sufficient to certify that the program merits accreditation for ten, five, or two years, or does not merit accreditation at all.

TEAC defines the standard for each element and component of its system as the point, as determined by the Accreditation Panel, at which competing and rival claims can be ruled out, the point at which the evidence is conclusive, clear, and convincing, and the point below which the evidence is insufficient, flawed, or inconsistent.

In practice, given the current state of scholarship in education, the TEAC standard of evidence is met when the evidence cited in the *Brief* is consistent with the claims made about student learning *and* when there is little or no credible evidence that is inconsistent with the claims and supportive of a competing rival explanation.

### **How the panel makes its decision**

Although TEAC's quality principles suggest the characteristics of a quality program, they do not offer sure rules or algorithms to follow that would determine whether or not the evidence that a program has these characteristics is trustworthy and sufficient.

For this reason, to establish that a program has met TEAC's principles, TEAC employs *heuristics* to guide the accreditation decision making and judgment about whether or not the evidence of student learning is *trustworthy* (determined by the audit team) and *sufficient* (determined by the Accreditation Panel and Accreditation Committee).

TEAC's audit and panel heuristics guide the determination of whether or not the cited evidence of candidate learning, for example, is accurate and trustworthy; is, in fact, evidence of what it purports to be; and is sufficient to support the program faculty's claims for candidate learning.

**Ruling out rival hypotheses.** The panel members represent several roles in the profession because their diversity makes it more likely that they can bring forward alternative explanations of the evidence presented in the *Brief*. Based on the evidence in the record, the panel conceptually tests the evidence in the record to see if these alternatives can be ruled out, or shown to be inconsistent with the claims made in the *Brief*. The panelists, however, are not at liberty to consider just any possible rival hypothesis, but only ones that can be supported with evidence in the record. Usually any credible rival hypotheses are cited in the Case Analysis, which the program has also seen.

**Determining sufficiency of the evidence.** The panel then determines whether the evidence that survives these tests is of sufficient magnitude. It does this, in the absence of any other guidance, by applying a heuristic of 75 percent.

The 75 percent heuristic is a guide to assist the panel in its determination of evidentiary sufficiency in cases where there are no other guides provided in the TEAC principles or by research standards or findings from the scholarship and practices in education.

The 75 percent heuristic is applied to the evidence that is presented in the *Brief*. It is applied, in other words, to the evidence the faculty truly relies upon. It is also applied to corroborating, or disconfirming, evidence that was uncovered by the auditors and presented in the Audit Report.

**TEAC elements.** The panel must determine whether or not the program satisfies TEAC's quality principles. For this decision, TEAC has adopted a *part/whole* heuristic. This heuristic calls for the panel to consider the components of each element, make a decision about each, and move on successively to the consideration of each element in the TEAC system until the panel can determine by vote the program's conformity to one of the TEAC accreditation categories.

The sections that follow describe in detail the heuristics that the panel uses to determine the sufficiency of evidence, to determine that the program meets TEAC's quality principles, and to make the accreditation recommendation.

### **Ruling out rival hypotheses and determining sufficiency of evidence**

The panel begins its work by attempting to reduce the credibility of the obvious rival hypothesis of chance—that the evidence the program presents in the *Brief* is simply what would have been expected by chance, and not by what the program faculty claims. Generally, the role of unsystematic or random factors and “noise” can be reduced, or substantially eliminated, when the *Brief* has evidence supporting the reliability of the assessment procedures used to generate the evidence in the first place. This is the logic behind *Quality Principle 1's* component 1.5.

### **Threats to reliability**

The panel considers several threats to the reliability and validity of the evidence in the *Brief*. One threat is from *unsystematic* factors that introduce errors that plague much of the evidence in education.

For example, if a program faculty were to claim that 20 percent of the board-certified teachers in its state are graduates of its program, the panelists would wonder whether or not this was merely what would be expected by chance. If the program had prepared 60 percent or more of the teachers in the state, 20 percent or more could be expected by chance alone to become board-certified. Had only 1 percent of the teachers in the state graduated from the program, it would be unlikely that the 20 percent board-certified teacher rate could be dismissed as just what would have been expected by chance. Had the program faculty missed this point, incidentally, the formative evaluation or the audit could be expected to have examined it by way of corroborating the evidence in the *Brief*.

Regression to the mean is a statistical artifact associated with the retesting of those who had extremely high or low scores. These retested scores can be expected to shift by chance towards the group's average or mean

score as a consequence of the statistical error properties of extreme scores, and not as a consequence of what might be claimed by the program faculty.

### **Ruling out rival hypotheses**

The next step in the deliberation calls for the panelists to attempt to rule out rival hypotheses that are rooted in *systematic* errors that might be embedded in the evidence cited in the *Brief*. Campbell and Stanley<sup>3</sup> have identified several sources of systematic error that could reduce the validity of the evidence cited in a *Brief*. Those potentially related to a *Brief* are recounted below.

For every data point (mean, count, frequency, etc.) reported to advance the credibility of a claim associated with *Quality Principle I*, the panel members should ask themselves the following questions.

1. **Representative data.** *Are the measures reported truly representative of the program's students and graduates?* At least two rival hypotheses or factors come into play in deliberating on this question and each needs to be ruled out:
  - a. *Is there a "selection" factor?* Is the evidence in the *Brief* about only a select and unrepresentative group of students and graduates? If a program reports 100 percent pass rate on a license examination, or an average score at the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile, but it is only for some of its students, the panelists cannot easily rule out the rival hypothesis that evidence may have more to do with the selection of the students than with accomplishments of the entire group about which the claims are made. It may be that the evidence cited in the *Brief* is only about full-time students when the majority of students are part-time attendees, or it may be about only those who work in state when most of the graduates work elsewhere, or it may be about only the in-state residents, when substantial portions were out-of-state enrollees, or it may exclude transfer students, or it may exclude dual majors, etc. The auditors should have investigated this possibility so the panel can set the possibility aside or credit it as a legitimate rival hypothesis.
  - b. *Is there a "dropout" factor?* This question is quite similar to the selection factor, because it refers to the possibility that the evidence is restricted to a particular select group—in this case, those who secured a teaching position. This factor might show itself in gain score evidence. Here a rival hypothesis for the gains reported in an *Inquiry Brief* would be that the gains in average scores, for example, were not really gains in accomplishment on anyone's part, but only evidence that the weaker students were not hired as teachers and were not counted. Or it might be the case that the evidence of accomplishment of the program's graduates might only be based on the more able graduates who gained employment immediately upon graduation. It might not be evidence that was representative of all of the students who completed the program. Here again the auditors should have investigated this possibility so the panel can set the possibility aside or credit it as a legitimate rival hypothesis.

The panel determines that the statistics and findings are relevant to the populations about which the claims are advanced and not just some part of the population that does not truly represent the population of students or graduates.

2. **Measurement errors and influence.** *Are the procedures and assessments used by the program faculty to collect the evidence reported in the Brief themselves a factor in the evidence? Do these rival the claims the faculty seeks to make about the evidence?* Again, the panel members should take at least three factors into consideration.
  - a. *Is the assessment itself a factor?* Do raters get tired as they rate large numbers of students, so their discriminations become less accurate over time? Is there "*observer bias*"? Is care taken to shield raters and observers from having a bias (positive or negative) toward the program or toward its graduates? Are the reviewers "blind"? Are they disinterested parties? Do they have the opportunity to rate students in the program and those not in the program? Do they have the opportunity to rate students near the finish of their program as well as those just beginning?

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<sup>3</sup> D. Campbell & J. Stanley. (1963). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research on teaching*. In N. L. Gage (Ed.) *Handbook of Research on Teaching*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Is there variation in the calibration of the assessment instrument from one time to another so that a score gain is nothing more than a recalibration effect (as in the new SAT, for example)? Has the cut-score, or the scale range, been changed so that gains in pass rate, or even absolute scores, are meaningless? Is the true zero score known? A score of 170 out of 190 may look impressive if the zero score is truly zero, but not if the zero score (as in some Praxis tests) is set at 150. Has there been grade inflation over the period of the program's reporting? Are grades given for reasons other than academic accomplishment, such as attendance, punctuality, honesty, effort, or extra work?

The results from surveys, as noted earlier, are known to be affected by the order in which questions were presented, the context in which questions appeared, whether the questions weed out those with no opinion (filtering), the range and order of choices, whether middle categories were provided, whether the format was open or closed, and so forth. As above, the auditors should have investigated this possibility so the panel can set the possibility aside or credit it as a legitimate rival hypothesis.

- b. *Is there a testing factor?* Testing itself is a factor, for example, when the students taking the test, or being rated with a checklist, have experienced the ratings and received feedback many, many times prior to the occasion reported in the *Brief*. Repeated testing, while perhaps a component of an effective evaluation system, renders the measures hard to interpret because the reported effects may be more parsimoniously accounted for as *practice* effects, i.e., the result of the student's experience or practice with the test. Related to the testing factor is the Hawthorne effect, namely the finding that testing or observation itself, independently of what is being tested, is a factor that affects the results of the test or observation (i.e., the mere looking or measuring itself has an effect on what is being measured). Once again, the auditors should have investigated this possibility so the panel can set the possibility aside or credit it as a legitimate rival hypothesis.
- c. Next, drawing on their professional expertise, the panel members consider (and, presumably, reject) any other *rival hypotheses*. For example, any number of events, and the interaction of events, that could have intervened between one measurement and another. Many of these events are candidates for hypotheses that rival the one the faculty has advanced in its *Brief*, and the panel members should bring them forward in the discussion and deliberations so that they may be eliminated.

### **Determining sufficiency**

The final step in the deliberation comes after the panel has satisfied itself that there are no surviving plausible rival hypotheses. At this stage, the panel would also have concluded that the TEAC standard of evidence is met because the evidence is consistent with the claims, and there is little credible evidence in the *Brief* or in the audit report that is inconsistent with the claims. The question that remains, however, is whether the evidence, which has survived the challenges cited above, is *sufficient* to support the claims that TEAC requires to satisfy the quality principles.

To determine sufficiency, the panel applies a 75 percent heuristic to the evidence as a guide. This heuristic is applied in instances where there is no other guide provided by TEAC or by the state-of-the-art practices and standards of contemporary scholarship.

### **Why use the 75 percent heuristic?**

The field has established very few metrics for magnitude, but it has some, like the universally used, although not uncontested, criterion for statistical significance:

1. A probability less than .05 is the research standard used to establish that an event probably happened for some reasons other than chance.
2. Satisfactory reliability coefficients for individually administered standardized tests are found generally in .90 range and in the .80 range for group administered standardized tests.
3. The best validity coefficients are about .50 (e.g., between IQ and school grades).
4. Universities and colleges typically require a 2.0 minimum index out of 4.0 for graduation.
5. States have set the Praxis I cut scores around 170 out of 190 (where the zero score is 150).
6. The academic major is typically 30 credits, the academic minor is usually 15 credits, the semester is 14 to 15 weeks, the BA or BS degree is rarely less than 120 credits, the master's degree is about 30 graduate credits, and so forth.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> There is, however, no consensus about the number of credits for the doctoral degree.

By and large, however, the field has not committed itself to a minimum magnitude for the measures it uses, and it has rarely validated the few minimums it has set. So, the question remains for the panelists: how much is enough to support the claim that *Quality Principle I* has been satisfied, or how much stability or consistency is enough to support the claim that a measure is reliable, or how large does the association need to be between two measures to support the claim that they are measuring more or less the same thing, and so forth?

Therefore, in areas where there is no other guidance, TEAC employs a 75 percent heuristic as a guide to solve these problems; that is, 75 percent of whatever measure is cited in the *Brief* is a good guide to the amount or magnitude that would be sufficient to meet TEAC's standard. The panel applies the 75 percent heuristic to whatever measure the program cites as evidence.

**When to use the 75 percent heuristic.** The panel should apply the 75 percent heuristic to the *empirical* maximum, not the theoretical maximum.

For example, one Praxis test has a top score of 990, but, in fact, no one out of 27,000 test takers scores higher than 790. The panelists would apply the 75 percent heuristic to the 790 score, not to the 990 maximum score. Because the highest reliability coefficients in the literature are about .90, the TEAC heuristic would accept .68 as the lowest index of reliability and about .38 for the lowest index of validity as the best validity coefficients are about .50. The lowest mean grade index on a four-point scale would be 3.0 by the heuristic, but only if there were a reasonable number of 4.0 scorers, for example. The empirical maximum, if it is not otherwise known, may be established by determining the average score (frequencies, counts, etc.) of the top 10 percent of scorers.

If the program reports the mean score on a standardized test, the 75 percent heuristic would be applied to the maximum empirical score. For example, if the program reported a mean score of 170 on a test which ranges from 150 to 190, the panelists would take 75 percent of the 40 point spread (i.e., 30 points) and be guided not to accept mean scores less than 180 as sufficient evidence (not 75 percent of 190 or the much lower score of 142). If, however, the program reported only pass rates (as currently required under Title II), and not the mean score, then the panel would determine sufficiency by considering 75 percent of the pass rates for the top 10 percent of programs. Thus, if the average pass rate of the top 10 percent of programs were 95 percent, a program's 71 percent pass rate would be sufficient. In many cases, the state has provided guidance on the tests it requires for the license by establishing passing scores and passing rates for the programs in the state and these trump TEAC's 75% heuristic because the TEAC heuristic is only applied in cases where there is no other standard in the field.

It would also be appropriate for the panelists to apply the 75 percent heuristic to the *preponderance of the evidence* standard, as TEAC has left the judgment of what constitutes "preponderance" to the panel's judgment. The panel, using the 75 percent heuristic, would accept as sufficient evidence of commitment a case where at least 75 percent of the program's parity measures meet the parity standard (no appreciable difference between the norms of the program and the institution with regard to the standards of capacity).

**When not to use the 75 percent heuristic.** The panel employs the 75 percent heuristic only in the absence of any other guidance with regard to the magnitude of what would constitute a sufficient or adequate amount for TEAC's principles and standards.

TEAC requires, for example, the program faculty to address in its *Brief* all the components of the TEAC system (1.0-2.3.6), not just 75 percent of them.

TEAC requires that the preponderance of evidence for commitment show *no* appreciable differences between the institutional norm and the program norm. Because the field has established procedures for determining if differences are trivial or significant, it would not be appropriate for the panelists to apply the 75 percent heuristic to the parity itself. The panel would not accept as evidence of commitment a case where the program norm was 75 percent of the institutional norm in place of TEAC's requirement of it being only trivially different from it.

Because the 75 percent heuristic is not a rule or an algorithm, it is only a guide to assist the panel in determining the sufficiency of the evidence with regard to any claim made in the *Brief*. It cannot be a rule or algorithm because if it were applied automatically to all the evidence, it could lead to serious errors. For example:

1. Some regions of the country have such teacher shortages that nearly 100 percent of graduates who wish to teach will find teaching positions. In such a region, a 75 percent hiring rate might actually indicate a significant weakness in the program, not the strength that the program faculty may be alleging. Employers may have significant doubts about the competence of the program's graduates. If a program in a region with teacher shortages were to base a claim of program quality on hiring rates, the panel would need to be free to consider a more demanding standard than 75 percent. If the panel did, it would insure that it applied its logic even-handedly to all programs during the period in which there was a teaching shortage in a region.
2. If there were evidence of grade or score inflation, the panel would need to be free to consider a higher magnitude than 75 percent of the top grade or score as a measure of sufficient evidence. On the other hand, the panel needs to be free to consider a lower magnitude for programs that have resisted grade inflation pressures and held to an older standard in which the modal grade at the institution and program for satisfactory work is a C or 2.0. In other cases, the 75 percent guideline may not reflect the grade index a program may have actually determined through careful studies of predictive and concurrent validity.

### **Heuristics for the quality principles**

TEAC has adopted a *part/whole* heuristic for guiding the next stage of the panel's decision-making. This heuristic calls for the panel to consider the components of each element, make a decision about each, and move on successively to the consideration of each element in the TEAC system until the panel can move to the "whole" and determine by vote the program's conformity to one of the TEAC accreditation categories.

By this time in its deliberations, the panel would have determined whether or not there is sufficient evidence for the claims associated with each component in the system and whether there were grounds for awarding weaknesses and stipulations. Once that is determined, the panel takes up the major elements of the TEAC system (1.0 and 2.0) in accordance with the guidance provided in heuristic below.

#### ***Quality Principle I***

The dimensions that the panel considers in its evaluation of whether the evidence of student learning is at or above standard are:

1. *Consistency*: The preponderance of the evidence is consistent with the claim that students had subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching skill, and the preponderance of the measures for each component are consistent with each other.
2. *Sufficiency*: The preponderance of evidence for each component is of sufficient magnitude.

The panel finds the program below standard for *Quality Principle I* when the preponderance of the evidence is inconsistent with the claims and is of insufficient magnitude. With regard to the evidence for reliability and validity, the panel finds the program below standard when the preponderance of the measures is inconsistent with each other and when the preponderance of the measures of reliability and validity is of insufficient magnitude.

The *above standard* rating defines a goal and band of achievement, which means that some programs may be well above the threshold for meeting the standard while others may be just above the *below standard* mark.

An *Inquiry Brief* that is well above the standard has compelling and persuasive evidence, from several mutually consistent and valid sources, about each component and has received a clean opinion in the audit for the principle.

A *Brief* that is at the standard might have received a qualified audit opinion on element 1.0 and had evidence that was, if not compelling, at least sufficient for, and consistent with, its claims of student learning on each component of *Quality Principle I*.

It is possible, for example, that the empirical evidence for reliability and validity (1.5) could be weak, but that overall the rationale (2.1) for the assessments is compelling. *Authentic assessment* approaches sometimes fit this case where the rationale is persuasive, but the usual evidence for reliability and validity, if acquired at all, is lacking.

Or, it could be the other way around. The program could be found to satisfy 1.5 if the panel determines that the program provides compelling and persuasive empirical evidence that the assessments were valid, but its

rationale (2.1) for the assessments is relatively weak. This might happen in the case of some standardized tests: they have sound reliability and validity statistics, but the faculty's rationale does not make a credible connection between the test and the program's goals, the faculty's claims for the program, or the program's requirements. For example, the faculty might cite an aptitude test as evidence of subject matter knowledge or pedagogical knowledge.

*Note:* In the *Inquiry Brief Proposal*, the citation of pilot evidence about the *Quality Principle I* components is considered as evidence for the program's rationale, not *Quality Principle I*, which is not addressed in an *Inquiry Brief Proposal*. The faculty's experience with the pilot evidence, and analysis of it, is what gives them confidence that their proposed assessments may prove to be reliable and valid.

### **Quality Principle II**

The panel bases its evaluation of *Quality Principle II* on the evidence of institutional or faculty learning. The dimensions for evaluation of whether institutional learning is at or above standard are:

1. *Rationale:* There is a coherent argument for why the particular assessments were selected that entails a case for their reliability and validity and explains how the standard set by the program for success is appropriate.
2. *Grounded in scholarship:* The rationale contains an accurate and balanced interpretation of the scholarly literature on assessment.
3. *Basis for past decisions:* Where appropriate and feasible, some program decisions were informed by evidence.
4. *Functioning quality control system:* The internal audit provides evidence that the system functions as it was designed.
5. *Plan for inquiry:* There is a plan to investigate whether the activities of the faculty, as described in the quality control system, improve the program's quality.

Evidence that is below standard for *Quality Principle II* would entail a rationale that was merely assertion unsupported by argument and/or contained misstatements, showed no instances of decisions based on evidence when the evidence was available, showed a preponderance of failures in the quality control system's operation, and showed no plan to improve the program.

The evidence that supports *Quality Principle II* is found in the program's internal audit report. The internal audit report shows that the program has addressed the quality of the curriculum, faculty, students, and resources, and if it did not address one, other elements in the quality control system compensated for the absence. A program, for example, might have an open admissions policy (no evidence of selection for quality), but also evidence that other elements in the quality control system (e.g., student support services) enhanced quality and compensated for the weakness or absence of admission standards.

A quality control system (QCS) is also successful when it also identifies factors, issues, and problems that the program faculty should address to improve the program. These problems and issues are documented in the record of decisions the faculty has made over the years, and in the faculty's plans to undertake the inquiries needed to improve the program.

When the QCS identifies problematic areas in the program, the faculty is expected to consider ways to remedy the problem and formulate a plan to improve the program. The principal test of whether a modification in the program is an improvement, and not simply a change, is its link to the subsequent evidence of greater student learning that enhances the faculty's claim that the program's graduates are competent, caring, and qualified.

Over time, the faculty members' ongoing inquiry and research efforts, called for in *Quality Principle II*, should be able to uncover important links between *Quality Principle III* and appropriate levels of student learning. *Quality Principle II* requires that there is a plan to undertake these investigations as a part of the normal workings of the program's QCS.

### **Quality Principle III: Capacity for program quality**

The factors that contribute to the panel's conclusion about whether the program has sufficient capacity to offer a quality program are found in two tables in the Audit Report, the table on parity and the table on capacity.

TEAC's standard for this quality principle is that the preponderance of the evidence for the requirements was verified and documented by the auditors.

### Issues in evaluating capacity for quality

One key indicator that the program has the capacity for quality is if the program is either superior to, or indistinguishable from, other programs in the institution with regard to the components of capacity. Because all accreditors recognized by the U.S. Department of Education have capacity standards that align with the components of *Quality Principle III*, the institution's accreditation by a regional accreditor in good standing, or the equivalent, is required by TEAC because it signifies that the institution overall has the capacity for quality.

The capacity of a teacher education program for quality, while rarely investigated directly by a regional accreditor, can be established in the *Inquiry Brief* when the program faculty can show that the program conforms to, or exceeds, the institutional norm on each of the dimensions of program quality that are shared by the program and the institution's other programs.

On this line of reasoning, TEAC requires evidence that the institution is committed to providing sufficient capacity for program quality. This commitment is shown by the fact that the institution's investment in the program with regard to the curriculum, faculty, facilities, fiscal and administrative support, student services, and respect for student views conforms to the overall institutional standards in each of these areas. Each of these institutional standards, having been evaluated by a regional accreditor, of course, satisfies, as TEAC's standards do, the standards for recognition by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. The details of the metrics associated with the components of capacity are left to the institution to craft with the obvious provision that they be applied uniformly across all programs the institution offers.

TEAC's interest in the institutional commitment to the capacity of the program for quality extends beyond TEAC's standards on capacity, however. TEAC seeks to assure itself and others that the institution is serious about preparing educators, and that it is committed to the continual improvement of the quality of the programs it offers. The institution can be said to be committed to the program when it supports the program at the same level as, or better than, its support of the institution's programs as a whole.

The program faculty also needs to provide evidence that the capacity the program enjoys, even when on a par with the capacity of the institution overall, is sufficient for a quality professional education program. For this reason TEAC's capacity standards include subcomponents, in addition to those devoted to parity, which specifically address the evidence of the sufficiency and adequacy of the program's capacity for quality.

### Heuristics for the accreditation recommendation

The table below provides a continuation of the *part/whole* heuristic of decision-making that the panel uses to come to one of the accreditation recommendations.

**Table 7**  
**Guidelines for TEAC's accreditation status designations based on whether the evidence for the three *Quality Principles* is above or below TEAC's standards**

| I. Candidate learning | II. Faculty learning | III. Capacity & commitment | Accreditation status designations |
|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Above                 | Above                | Above                      | Accreditation (10 years)          |
| Above                 | Above                | Above                      | Accreditation (5 years)*          |
| Above                 | Below                | Above                      | Accreditation (2 years)           |
| Below                 | Above                | Above                      | Accreditation (2 years)           |
| Above                 | Above                | Below                      | Accreditation (2 years)           |
| IB Proposal**         | Above                | Above                      | Initial Accreditation (5 years)   |
| IB Proposal**         | Above                | Below                      | Initial Accreditation (2 years)   |
| IB Proposal**         | Below                | Above                      | Initial Accreditation (2 years)   |

|               |       |       |      |
|---------------|-------|-------|------|
| IB Proposal** | Below | Below | Deny |
| Below         | Below | Above | Deny |
| Below         | Above | Below | Deny |
| Above         | Below | Below | Deny |

\* For the initial *Inquiry Brief* \*\*For the *Inquiry Brief Proposal*, which does not require evidence of candidate learning apart from pilot data.

The heuristic, one of several that could be employed, calls for the separate evaluation of each element of the system (I, II, III) as a way of guiding the decision about the whole system. The table shows how the evaluations of the elements of the TEAC system are combined to inform and guide the panel to making an overall accreditation recommendation (shown in the fourth column).

*Initial accreditation* is based upon the soundness of the quality control system, the claims and assessment rationale, and the evidence of commitment and capacity. The expectation in any case is that the program faculty can develop research standard evidence supporting the claims of student learning, and the validity of the measures within five years.

On logical grounds it would also seem that programs without the capacity for quality (i.e., below standard in 3.0) could not have compelling evidence to support the other quality principles. The theoretical and empirical links between capacity and quality, however, are confused and uncertain in the field of education. As a result, it is possible that a program could satisfy TEAC's *Quality Principles I* and *II* and still fail to satisfy all, or even the preponderance, of TEAC's *Quality Principle III*. It could do this through exploitation of heroic efforts on the part of students and faculty, for example. For this reason the heuristic table indicates that programs below standard in their capacity for quality can still be accredited, but only for two years.

## The panel's accreditation recommendation

### ***Inquiry Brief***

A recommendation to accredit for five or ten years is made when, guided by the factors in the heuristic table, the panel finds that the *Inquiry Brief*, coupled with the auditors' findings, indicates that the program faculty's claims about the quality principles are fully warranted and justified, or that the evidence in support for the claims is at least consistent with evidence derived from contemporary research practices. A five year term is given for the first *Inquiry Brief* and the ten year term is usually given for each succeeding one.

A recommendation to grant accreditation for two years is made when the panel finds that the *Inquiry Brief*, coupled with the auditors' findings, indicates that the program faculty's claims about all but one of *Quality Principles I, II* and *III* are warranted and justified and on the strength of the evidence that the program faculty can remedy the weaknesses in the principle within two years.

### ***Inquiry Brief Proposal***

A recommendation to grant initial accreditation for two or five years is made when the panel finds that the *Inquiry Brief Proposal*, coupled with the auditors' findings, indicates that there is evidence of a sound rationale, commitment and capacity, and a functioning quality control system and that the evidence for *Quality Principle I* will be forthcoming within five years. The recommendation for two years is made when the evidence of *Quality Principle II* or *III* is below standard, but when both are above standard the term for initial accreditation is five years.

### **Length of terms and resubmissions of the *Inquiry Brief* or *Inquiry Brief Proposal***

Programs are required to submit their next *Brief* and have an audit visit concluded before their current accreditation term expires. Those with initial accreditation for two years may submit another *Inquiry Brief Proposal*, and it could earn a two year term. If, however, it earned a five year term, the program would be awarded initial accreditation for only three years at which time it would need to submit an *Inquiry Brief*. This is because there is a maximum five year term for initial accreditation. Alternatively, if they are ready after their two-year term, they can submit an *Inquiry Brief*, which can earn a two or five year term depending on its quality.

### **Accreditation denied**

A recommendation to deny accreditation is made when the panel finds that the *Inquiry Brief* or the *Inquiry Brief Proposal*, coupled with the auditors' findings, fails to support the program faculty's claims and there is little likelihood that additional evidence and analysis would indicate the faculty's claims about the quality principles could be supported.

A *denied* decision usually indicates a weak quality control system and a program faculty that has not been able to react productively at the current time to the weaknesses uncovered in the *Inquiry Brief* or *Inquiry Brief Proposal*. Accreditation must be denied in these circumstances. The program has the option of terminating its bid for accreditation in TEAC or returning to candidate status and the eventual formulation of a plan that would lead to accreditation.

### **Panel's consideration and designation of stipulations and weaknesses**

In their evaluation of the evidence for and against each quality principle, the panelists may find that the evidence for a particular component or subcomponent of the principle is insufficient, but that overall there is other evidence that is sufficient to adequately support the quality principle. In these cases, the panel formally notes the deficiencies in evidence for parts of a quality principle. It does so in one of two ways, depending on whether the deficiency is in a subcomponent or a component of the quality principle.

A **weakness** is a deficiency in the evidence for a subcomponent that is *not* so serious that it causes the panel to find one of the components below standard. A **stipulation** is a deficiency that is serious enough to place a component below the standard, but not so serious that it causes the panel to find one of the elements below standard.

If the *evidence for a subcomponent* is insufficient, the panel formally cites a *weakness* in the quality principle and cites the subcomponent as weak.

A **stipulation** is a deficiency in the *evidence for a component* in which case the panel cites a stipulation for a component of the quality principle and states that the quality principle is supported, but with the stipulation that the evidence for the component must be made sufficient and remedied within a two year period.

For example:

The panelists' consideration of weaknesses and stipulations follows the part/whole heuristic and is analogous to the auditors' following an audit trail insofar as the panelists' consideration of strengths and weakness in one area may lead the panel to the discovery of weaknesses and strengths in other areas. A panelist might notice, for example, that the program's graduates reported that they did not use technology in their teaching because they were poorly prepared in that area. The weakness in this cross-cutting theme (1.4.3) would cause the panelists to look at the evidence for teaching itself (1.3), for pedagogy (1.2), the evidence about the adequacy of resources (2.3.4), the rationale (2.1) for the program's assessment of technology, the quality control system (2.3) for its capacity to uncover any issues with technology, and so forth. It might be that the panelists, upon examining the evidence in these other areas, could find related weaknesses there as well. If it were the case, that some components (e.g., 1.2 or 1.3) were so weakened by the inadequate preparation in technology that the evidence for them was insufficient, the panelists might cite a stipulation in 1.2 or 1.3. Or, the panelists might see that the problem was in 2.1 and 2.3 insofar as the quality control system was so inattentive to the technology issue that it had also missed other areas of weakness and a stipulation would be warranted in 2.3 on that account.

To take some other examples:

If the program does not publish an academic calendar (as required in 3.2.6) but there is sufficient other evidence for 3.2, this circumstance would lead the panel to cite the failure to publish a calendar as a weakness in the evidence for one subcomponent of capacity.

If the evidence for multicultural competence in the subject matter was insufficient, but the rest of the evidence for subject matter knowledge were sufficient, the weakness in subject matter attributed to multicultural competence would be formally noted as a weakness in the evidence in 1.4.2.

It might be the case that the evidence shows more student complaints for the program than other programs at the institution (3.1.6), but the evidence for the 3.1 and 3.2 might also be implicated insofar as the higher level of complaining could indicate both a weaker faculty, curriculum, facilities, support services, administration than

other programs (3.1) and/or insufficient capacity in these same areas (3.2). The panel could stipulate that 3.2 or 3.1 was deficient and would need to be remedied in two years or it could conclude that all of *Quality Principle III* was problematic and recommend that accreditation be given for only two years owing to *Quality Principle III* being below standard.

Or, it might be the case that the evidence for pedagogical knowledge (1.2) was insufficient, but that the evidence for 1.1 and 1.3 and the cross-cutting themes was so strong that the panel concluded that *Quality Principle I* was satisfied. In that case, the panel would recommend accreditation but cite a stipulation in pedagogical knowledge (1.2). In other words, the panel would find that the evidence for *Quality Principle I* was sufficient but with the stipulation that deficiencies in evidence for pedagogical knowledge be remedied within two years.

Or it might be the case that the program has insufficient evidence for the reliability of its assessments (1.5), but has a particularly persuasive and comprehensive rationale for the assessments it had selected (2.1). The panel might find that overall *Quality Principle I* was satisfied, but with the stipulation that the deficiencies in the empirical evidence of reliability and validity be remedied within two years.

### **Weaknesses, stipulations, and the panel's accreditation recommendation**

In summary:

- Problems with the program's evidence for subcomponents are noted as *weaknesses*, but the program is accredited for at least five years.
- Problems with the program's evidence for components are noted as *stipulations* and the program is accredited for at least five years.
- Problems with the program's evidence for an element (1.0-3.0) results in a recommendation that the program be awarded accreditation for two years.
- Problems with the program's evidence for two or more elements result in a recommendation to *deny* accreditation.

After the panel meeting, the TEAC staff sends the panel's Accreditation Report, which contains its accreditation recommendations, to the program's head, who has two weeks in which to respond in writing to the recommendations in the report. In anticipation of the next meeting of the Accreditation Committee, the TEAC staff collects, reviews, and distributes the appropriate documents from the accreditation process to the committee members.