

Overview of the TEAC audit

One defining feature of the TEAC accreditation process is the academic **audit**: a team of auditors visits a campus to examine and verify on site the evidence that supports the claims made in the professional education program's *Inquiry Brief* or the *Inquiry Brief Proposal*.

The team of two to four TEAC-trained auditors visits the campus for two to four days. In some cases, the visit may be extended and the team enlarged if the audit challenge is especially complex or broad.

It is TEAC's philosophy that throughout all stages of the accreditation process, TEAC and program faculty maintain open and frequent communications on any and all relevant matters. Maintaining communication is especially important during the audit process, as is understanding the process and the responsibilities of each party involved.

Scope of the audit

The audit process does not address the basic accreditation question of whether or not the evidence is compelling, persuasive, sufficient, or convincing. Instead, the audit, with the exception of the case for institutional commitment, determines only whether the descriptions and characterizations of evidence in the *Brief* are accurate. The auditors' question is no more or no less than *Are the statements in the Brief accurate?*

In designing and conducting the audit, TEAC staff and auditors use as a guide the general instructions laid out in TEAC's annotated template of principles and standards (see Appendix 2 of this guide).

Responsibilities

Before the audit, TEAC staff, the auditors, and the program faculty should review the responsibilities of all involved, described directly below, and the details of the TEAC audit process described in this sec-

tion. The program faculty and TEAC staff members share responsibilities for supporting the work of the auditors both before and during their visit, and the auditors have very specific responsibilities before, during, and after their time on site.

The program's responsibilities

In addition to the audit fee (\$1,000 per *Brief*), the institution defrays the expenses for travel, meals, and lodging incurred by auditors; and pays the auditors' fees (\$1,500 per auditor) and any other administrative or secretarial costs related to the auditors' execution of their on-site responsibilities.

The program faculty under review is responsible for the logistical aspects of the audit visit, outlined below. TEAC requests that the program designate an audit coordinator to make all arrangements and communicate directly with TEAC:

- Make provisions for lodging, meals, transportation, and the handling of expenses.
- Develop a schedule for the auditors and arranging for a working/meeting room so that they can make the best use of their time on site; prepare a written schedule for the audit visit that includes times and locals for all activities, including time to work alone as a team and time for looking at facilities. (TEAC suggests that the program coordinator designate a conference room for the auditors to work in. The auditors should be able to review all documentation and meet with program and campus representatives here.)
- Assemble all information, documentation, and other evidence necessary for the auditors. The auditors will need *all* documentation the program faculty used to develop and write the *Brief*: files, data, references, program and institution materials, and all documentation related to the internal audit. These materials should be gathered in the auditors' working room.)

- Schedule all interviews and meetings. The auditors will need to visit at least two classrooms; interview a sample of the senior administrators, including a group of chairs of other professional schools or departments; interview a sample of the program's students; interview and consult with the program's regular and adjunct faculty. Interviews should be held in the auditors' designated conference room.
- Provide administrative support such as access to telephones, a fax machine, computers, photocopiers, and secretarial services.
- Distribute to all specified parties a letter from TEAC's president, soliciting comments about the program from all the parties with a stake in the program.
- Ensure that the program's responses to any pre-audit tasks (questions about parts of the *Brief* that the auditors find unclear or ambiguous) are sent to TEAC before the audit visit.
- Send any materials the auditors may request before the visit (for example, the auditors may request catalogs or brochures, copies of policies, documentation of state program approval).

TEAC's responsibilities

Before the audit visit, TEAC staff will be responsible for the following:

- Scheduling the audit, assigning auditors, sharing auditors' cv's with the program for review.
- Posting the call for comment on TEAC's Web site and preparing a letter, soliciting comments, for the program to distribute.
- Communicating with the audit coordinator to assure that all logistical arrangements have been made satisfactorily.
- Communicating with the auditors to discuss logistical arrangements, the visit schedule, the ethical obligations of auditors, and other audit policies and concerns.
- Preparing, with the auditors and the chair of the Accreditation Panel, the initial audit tasks, with reference to any matters in the *Brief* that

seem of particular interest or show signs of being problematic.

- Sending any pre-audit tasks to the program for response and materials.
- Reviewing the auditors' summary of the case and sending it to the program for review and approval.
- Communicating with the program's audit coordinator about the schedule and details of the auditors' time on site, pre-audit tasks, and any other audit policies or concerns.
- After the audit, sending the audit report to the program for review.

Auditors' responsibilities

TEAC auditors have five interrelated responsibilities:

- **Understand.** At the outset of the audit, the auditors must understand the local contexts about which the *Brief* is written. This understanding helps build a sense of rapport and confidence among the parties, thereby avoiding the tense and confrontational relationship that sometimes characterizes audits in other circumstances.

TEAC auditors base their judgments solely on the evidence and not on preconceived ideas or biases, no matter what their source. The auditors therefore make every effort to fully understand the contexts in which they are operating and to treat all persons they meet with respect and comity.

- **Verify.** The text of the *Inquiry Brief* or the *Inquiry Brief Proposal* and the selected evidence are the *targets* of the audit.

The auditors verify the text of the *Brief*, and they do this by examining the *referents* of the text to be sure that the text is accurate with respect to language, data, and evidence. The auditors examine and probe the accuracy of the language of selected formal statements of the program's goals, claims, rationale, and the TEAC quality control system. These probes are meant to verify that the language is precise, trustworthy, and means exactly what it seems to say.

The auditors also verify evidence dealing with all elements of the accreditation system and their components, but principally with the evidence pertaining to the quality principles, the capacity components for program quality (reported in Appendix B of the *Brief*), and the internal audit report (reported in Appendix A of the *Brief*).

- **Corroborate.** Sometimes the verification purposes of the audit lead the auditors to examine evidence that was not cited in the *Brief* but nevertheless has a direct bearing on their verification of the evidence and the precision of the language in the *Brief*. The auditors, in fact, sometimes seek evidence that was not in the *Brief* to corroborate, reinforce, or disconfirm the evidence that is in the *Brief*.
- **Judge.** The auditors come to a conclusion about whether the errors found in the evidence advanced by the faculty in support of the TEAC quality principles, the capacity components, and internal audit mean that the evidence was not in fact verified.

To do this, the auditors distinguish between errors in the *Brief* that are of no significance or consequence to the meaning of the text and errors that change the meaning of the text and make a difference in the verification of the evidence.

In addition to verifying the evidence in the *Brief*, the auditors also make a determination of whether the evidence is sufficient to support the claim that the institution is committed to the program.

- **Represent TEAC.** Auditors represent TEAC as an organization and as the embodiment of a new idea about specialized accreditation in higher education. As such, the TEAC auditors answer questions, grant interviews, and present TEAC positions in informal and formal occasions.

It is expected that during the visit to the campus, auditors may, at the discretion of the program faculty, meet with campus leaders to exchange greetings, to answer any questions about TEAC and the TEAC processes, and to corroborate evidence and argument found in the *Brief*. The training program that TEAC provides for auditors prepares them to answer questions that can be anticipated and gives them procedures for responding to questions that have not been anticipated and which challenge the auditors' knowledge.

In all exchanges, it is important that the auditors acknowledge their own limited roles, and that the campus representatives respect the limits of the auditors' roles. With the exception of the evidence about institutional commitment, auditors do not make evaluative decisions about accreditation, nor should they be asked to. Also, they are not on campus to suggest how programs might be improved or to offer personal positions about accreditation issues in higher education.