

Content of the *Inquiry Brief* and *Inquiry Brief Proposal*

The *Inquiry Brief*

To be accredited, an eligible program submits a research monograph, called an *Inquiry Brief*, in which the faculty and administrators present the evidence supporting their claim that their program satisfies TEAC's three quality principles and standards for capacity:

- Evidence of their students' learning
- Evidence that their assessment of student learning is valid
- Evidence that the program's continuous improvement and quality control are based on information about its students' learning
- Evidence of the program's capacity for quality

Through the *Inquiry Brief*, the program faculty members present qualitative or quantitative evidence that their graduates are competent, qualified, and caring and that the institution has the capacity to offer a quality program.

The program faculty members document the evidence they possess about what their graduates have learned, the validity of their assessment of that learning, and the basis on which the program faculty makes its decisions to improve its program. To do this, the faculty members must show that they have a valid method for determining what their students have learned and accomplished. Then they must show that their students have learned the subject matter they will teach, the pedagogical subject mat-

ters of the field of education, and, most important, that their students can teach effectively.

The faculty members must also show that they use what they learn about their students' learning to both improve the program and the system they have in place for monitoring and ensuring the quality of the program. Finally, they must show that they have plans to undertake a systematic inquiry into the factors that affect the quality of the program and their students' accomplishments.

The *Inquiry Brief* focuses on what the program faculty wants and needs to know about the program's performance. It includes the claims a faculty makes about its graduates' knowledge and skill, a rationale for assessments of those claims, a description of the psychometric properties of the evidence that is presented to support the claims, the findings related to the claims, and a discussion of what the evidence means and what has been learned from it. In addition, the *Inquiry Brief* reports on the faculty's efforts to evaluate the rigor of its own quality control system and the adequacy of the program's capacity to offer a quality program.

The *Inquiry Brief* is based primarily on existing documents, such as reports of ongoing inquiry, other accrediting and state review reports, and institutional research and publications. It contains only information and analysis relevant to the case that the program prepares competent, caring, and qualified professionals. The *Inquiry Brief* is the length of a research monograph, about 50 pages.

The Inquiry Brief Proposal

Faculty members representing new programs or programs that are in the process of collecting evidence for their claims may submit for preaccreditation an *Inquiry Brief Proposal*, in which they propose the *method* by which they will find the evidence that will show that their graduates are competent, qualified, and caring, and that the program meets TEAC's three quality principles and standards for capacity.

The *Inquiry Brief Proposal* is appropriate for new programs or programs that have been significantly revised in recent years. The program faculty does not yet have sufficient evidence for its claims of student learning but has evidence of its capacity for program quality. The program also has evidence of a sound quality control system, evidence that the institution is committed to the program, and a plan and rationale for acquiring evidence over time to support its claims.

The *Inquiry Brief Proposal* is a research proposal, a scholarly work like a grant or dissertation proposal, in which the program faculty proposes the method by which it will find evidence (qualitative, quantitative, or both) to demonstrate that the program's graduates are competent, qualified, and caring. The program

faculty demonstrates that it has a reasonable basis for thinking (1) that the program's students have learned the subject matters they will teach; (2) that the students have solid pedagogical knowledge; and (3) that the students can teach effectively. In addition, the program faculty demonstrates that the methods proposed for determining what the students have learned and accomplished are credible.

The faculty members also show how they will use what they learn about their students' learning to improve both the program and the system they have in place for monitoring and ensuring the quality of the program. In addition, they present their plans to undertake a systematic inquiry into the factors that affect the quality of the program and their students' accomplishments. They also provide evidence that the institution has the capacity to offer a quality program.

The *Inquiry Brief Proposal* is based primarily on existing documents, such as reports of ongoing inquiry, other accrediting and state review reports, and institutional research and publications. It contains only information and analysis relevant to the case that the program will be able to bring forward evidence that it prepares competent, caring, and qualified professionals. The *Inquiry Brief Proposal* is about 50 pages.

Required elements of the *Brief*

As described below, TEAC makes three requirements for the *Brief*.

1. Verifiable authorship and faculty endorsement

The authors of the *Inquiry Brief* or *Inquiry Brief Proposal* must provide their names and roles in the institution and must identify themselves as having taken responsibility for the document.

In addition, the entire program faculty must formally endorse the *Inquiry Brief* or *Inquiry Brief Proposal*. Typically this is done in a footnote stating that the *Brief* was presented to, discussed, and approved by the faculty, and the date on which this occurred.

2. Brevity and linguistic precision

TEAC also requires that the *Brief*'s authors strive for brevity and linguistic precision:

- **Brevity** means using no more words than necessary to make the point. The *Brief*, as its name implies, is *brief* and is about *inquiry*. It should be no longer than 50 pages.
- **Precise language.** Producing an *Inquiry Brief* or *Inquiry Brief Proposal* calls for a kind of writing that is different from the usual self-study or program approval document. The language of the *Brief* must be precise and clear.

Why does precise language matter to TEAC? TEAC requires clear and precise language because of the kinds of claims and supporting evidence that TEAC asks of its candidates for accreditation. The program faculty's claims and the measures used to support them should be very specific. Vague, ambiguous, imprecise language obscures the goals and accomplishments of the program.

Checking the precision of the language and evidence is a key task in TEAC's formative evaluation and the audit of the *Brief*. TEAC staff and auditors focus on language and precision in order to determine the degree to which the *Brief* means exactly what the program faculty intends. To verify the statements in the *Brief*, the auditors must be able to determine precisely what the authors meant; imprecise language complicates the verification process.

3. Seven required components

TEAC requires that the *Brief* include the following seven components (see following page):

1. Program overview

Overall logic: guiding philosophy and orientation of the program

Program areas, levels, specialties, options

Brief history of the program

Program demographics

Table of enrollment trends, numbers and types of students, numbers of faculty and types, etc.

2. Claims and Rationale

Claims

Statement of the claims (consistent with all relevant claims in the program's literature)

Arguments to support the links between the claims and components of *Quality Principle I*:

1.1 Subject matter

1.2 Pedagogy

1.3 Teaching skill

Cross-cutting themes: learning to learn, multicultural perspectives, technology included in each

Rationale for the assessments:

Rationale for the assessments, justifying that they are reasonably and credibly linked to goals, claims, and program requirements

3. Method

Assessments used for the evidence

Detailed description of the assessments

Criteria for achievement or success

Published information about the reliability and validity of the assessments

Arguments for the content validity of the assessments

Sampling procedure and procurement of evidence

4. Results

Results of the investigation into the reliability and validity of the assessments

Evidence of stability and consistency of the measures

Evidence of relationship, convergence, triangulation with other measures or evidence

Results of the assessments

Presentation of the findings: issues

Significant digits

Range of the instrument and variance

Disaggregation

Accurate table headings

Sensitivity to insignificant differences

Full disclosure of available evidence (all of the program's cited evidence)

5. Discussion and Plan

Discussion

Meaning of the results: Were the claims supported?

Implications of the results for the program's design

Plan

Steps to be taken: modifications to the program, quality control system (QCS), new investigations based on the results and evidence of student learning

6. References

A list of any works cited in the *Brief*.

7. Appendices

Appendix A: Internal audit report

Introduction: Auditors; faculty approval

Description: Schematic and mechanisms of QCS

Procedure: Audit plan and trail

Findings: Discoveries about 4.1–4.7

Conclusions: How well does QCS work?

Discussion: Needed modifications in QCS or future audit procedures

Appendix B: Capacity

Evidence that the quality control system monitors and promotes the quality of 4.1–4.7

Evidence that the program is supported on a par with other programs at the institution

Evidence that the program's capacity is sufficient and adequate to satisfy 4.1.1–4.7.2

Appendix C: Qualifications of the faculty (table or chart)

Current academic rank and title

Terminal degree, institution, field, and date

Number of years of service

Scholarly publications (number, type)

Assigned courses in the program

Awards, public school teaching, boards

Appendix D: Program requirements (aggregation)

Admissions requirements

Course requirements and standards

Course titles and descriptions

Program standards and requirements

Graduation requirements

State license requirements

Appendix E: Full disclosure of all relevant and available evidence (including any evidence cited elsewhere in support of, or about, the program)

Grades

Standardized tests (entrance, exit, and license) about the graduates or the graduates' own students

Surveys of students, alumni, employers

Ratings of portfolios, work samples, cases

Basis for rates: hiring/promotion, certification, graduate study, professional awards, publications, etc.

Reasons for neglecting or rejecting certain categories of evidence

Plan for inclusion of new categories of evidence in a subsequent *Inquiry Brief*.