

Accrediting Council

On Education in Journalism and Mass Communications

August 2017

Site team leaders:

At our spring Council meeting and in subsequent conversations this summer, concern was expressed about both slippage in commitment to Standard 3 by reviewed schools and in its application by site teams.

This letter is intended to help you deal with the complexity of that standard. For the purpose of this letter, diversity primarily means domestic minorities and women, but it is not limited to solely those two descriptors.

We have always given units leeway on Standard 3 based on individual school situations. Our purpose here, while acknowledging that may be true, is to make site-team judgment on the standard more consistent.

As you know, Standard 3 has three primary elements:

- Does the school have a diversity plan?
- Is diversity integrated into the curriculum?
- Is the school successfully diversifying its faculty and student body?

Lack of a diversity plan is grounds for non-compliance on the standard. There have been rare instances where units were prevented from writing a plan by university direction. Verify that if so with senior administrators and make sure there is some sort of university policy or approach governing diversity.

On curriculum, there have been examples of schools that rely on an upper-division diversity-related course to make the case. Examine that carefully. Is it required? Is enrollment significant? Some units have a required diversity-themed course. Other units address diversity topics in designated courses. Either approach is fine. Is it clearly in syllabi? Make sure to ask students if diversity is a significant part of their academic experience. If the answer is a shrug, probe deeper. If they say yes, ask how that happens. Students must be wrestling with contemporary issues related to diversity throughout their academic experience.

On faculty and students, it is fair to say there are as many reasons for lack of movement on faculty and student numbers as there are accredited schools. It is not uncommon for units to not have enough faculty hires during the six-year period to make a difference. But it should be a major factor in your deliberations if there were a significant number of faculty searches and no progress was made.

As you know, the Council has an emphasis on domestic diversity, and we ask units to distinguish between domestic and international faculty. Do not hesitate to test how the unit has done those counts.

When circumstances prohibit faculty hires, look carefully: Is the unit aggressively seeking ways to bring diverse voices into the student experience. Are there regular guest speakers of color either in person or using Skype and other technologies?

In student enrollment, if a unit is not growing its percentage of minority students or lags far behind their service area percentages, look deeply to find out why. Are the reasons logical? Are they doing all the outreach possible to students of color? Are they holding summer camps or working with the university to create scholarship programs to attract students from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Please share this letter with your teammates. The Council will always respect the work and judgment of its site teams. Our purpose here is more rigor in the judgments on Standard 3.

STANDARD 9: A reminder that last year we also asked for more rigor in the examination of Standard 9. We said non-compliance should be considered if any of the key elements of the standard were missing: an assessment plan, direct and indirect measures (including alumni/professional input), and loopback using assessment to improve curriculum.

This is still the case. The assessment plan, of course, should have been implemented in time for demonstrable data gathering and feedback. Please also keep in mind that there is no “magic number” of curricular or course improvements that should be directly tied to the assessment process. You need to use your informed judgement to ascertain whether the assessment process has a built-in mechanism that leads to curricular review and improvement. That may be one key change during an assessment cycle or a series of smaller changes, for instance. You need to witness that improvement through discussions with faculty and review of relevant documents, such as syllabi or course assignments.

Finally, if a unit is out of compliance on both 3 and 9, we suggest that you consider no more than provisional reaccreditation. This is not to say 3 and 9 are more important than other standards, but given the higher numbers of non-compliance we are experiencing, a more consistent treatment of 3 and 9 is appropriate.

As always, we rely on and respect the judgment of site teams on campus. The intent here, again, is not to diminish that work, but rather to bring more consistency to it.

Thank you.

Peter Bhatia
President, ACEJMC

c: Members of the Accrediting Committee and Council