

## FOLLOW-UP REPORT FROM THE PLANNING ACCREDITATION BOARD

February 15, 2017

In October 2016 the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) submitted its first interim report as required pursuant to its October 2013 recognition by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CHEA reviewed the report in November 2016, and requested a follow-up report on three standards: 12.B.5; 12.C.4; and 12.E.3.

Report key:

- excerpts from the October 2016 PAB interim report
- **excerpts from CHEA's response dated December 2, 2016**
- **PAB's 2017 response addressing CHEA's concerns**

12B. DEMONSTRATES ACCOUNTABILITY. The accrediting organization demonstrates public accountability in two ways. It has standards that call for institutions to provide consistent information about academic quality and student achievement and thus to foster continuing public awareness, confidence, and investment. Second, the accrediting organization itself demonstrates public involvement in its accreditation activities for the purpose of obtaining perspectives independent of the accrediting organization.

Representatives of the public may include students, parents, persons from businesses and the professions, elected and appointed officials, and others. To be recognized, the accrediting organization provides evidence that it has implemented:

5. policies or procedures, developed in consultation with institutions or programs, to inform the public of the basis for final decisions to grant or reaffirm accreditation and, in the case of denial or withdrawal of accreditation, to provide specific reasons for the decision accompanied by a response, related to the final decision, from the institution or program

PAB went through recognition under the 2006 CHEA Recognition Policy and Procedures, which did not include this requirement. In 2014 PAB compiled and reviewed this information for all then-CHEA recognized accreditors. Based on this review, PAB developed a policy and procedure for publishing the basis for its accrediting decisions and implemented the policy concurrent with its October 2014 meeting. The most current information can be found on the PAB homepage under [The Summary of Recent Actions](#).

The committee notes that the information provided with the interim report shows recent (April and June 2016) accreditation actions and that accreditation decisions for previously considered programs do not appear on the PAB Website. The committee also notes that PAB does provide a list of its accredited programs on the Website; however, this listing does not include information on the bases or reasons for its accreditation decisions or status. The committee would like to see information regarding the reasons and bases for all PAB accreditation decisions and not limit the public information to only those programs recently reviewed. PAB is

asked to provide information to show that it fully meets the requirements and expectations of CHEA Standard 12.B.5.

***In response to CHEA's request, PAB has modified its website. A history of PAB's decisions since the adoption of the 2014 policy has been added to the [Summary of Recent Actions](#) webpage. Going forward the history document will be updated concurrently with the recent actions after the Board's fall and spring meetings.***

12C. **ENCOURAGES, WHERE APPROPRIATE, SELF-SCRUTINY AND PLANNING FOR CHANGE AND FOR NEEDED IMPROVEMENT.** The accrediting organization encourages, where appropriate, ongoing self-examination and planning for change. Such self- scrutiny and planning entail thoughtful assessment of quality (especially student achievement) in the context of the institution's mission. Encouragement of such self- scrutiny and planning should not be confused with solely a demand for additional resources, but rather should enable institutions and programs to focus on effective ways to achieve their institution and program goals. Such self-scrutiny and planning are means to enhance the usefulness of accreditation to institutions and programs. To be recognized, the accrediting organization provides evidence that it has implemented standards or policies that:

4. require the accrediting organization to distinguish clearly between actions necessary for accreditation and actions that are considerations for improvement.

Concurrent with the implementation of its 2012 standards, PAB revised the templates for the Self-Study Report as well as the Site Visit Report (SVR – attached as Exhibit D). Part 3 of the SVR (Assessment and Recommendations) includes the team's recommendations for each criterion assessed as partially-met or unmet. In Part 5 of the SVR (Furthering Excellence) the team will provide suggestions for general improvement generally and/or those that focus on excellence as it relates to the mission and goals of the Program or Institution.

The impact of the redesigned SVR has been very positive – as expressed by both the Site Visit Teams and the program administrators. Consistency among teams and the Board in its granting of terms, has increased as supporting detail is now required for all assessments, including “met,” as opposed to just for “partially-met” or “unmet” assessments. The format also allows for simple cutting and pasting in the event a program is required to submit an interim report to document progress on any specific criterion/a.

The interim report materials did not clearly describe how PAB accounts for the differences between those actions necessary for accreditation and actions that are considerations for improvement. While the committee acknowledges that PAB updated its self-study and site visit reports, the committee could not determine how PAB-accredited programs distinguish between accreditation actions necessary for accreditation and actions that are considerations for improvement. PAB is asked to provide how the recent changes to its reports and site review process meet the requirements of CHEA Standard 12.C.4.

***As with all accreditors, the Site Visit Report is the output of the Site Visit Team (SVT) that went to campus. In this report there are both recommendations for improvement [toward compliance with the standards] and suggestions for furthering excellence. However, this report does not represent either findings or communications by the decision-making body. PAB communicates with programs only via formal written communication.***

***PAB, in its decision letters following an accreditation review, references only accreditation standards and citations for compliance thereto. Each criterion cited by the SVT in its report is listed, accompanied by the reasons for that assessment. The Board then shares its findings: it either concurs with the SVT, or disagrees – for better or worse. In the event of a disagreement the letter specifies the reasons therefor. In rare instances the Board may also cite a compliance issue with criterion which the SVT assessed as “met.” In all instances where the Board finds compliance to be either “partially-met” or “unmet,” there will be reasons for that assessment and a statement as to expectations for the Program’s actions regarding future compliance and the timeframe for achieving it.***

***Attached as Exhibit A is a redacted decision letter which demonstrates PAB’s communications are limited to actions necessary for accreditation.***

12E. *DEMONSTRATES ONGOING REVIEW OF ACCREDITATION PRACTICES.* Even as higher education institutions and programs undertake ongoing self-scrutiny to maintain and improve quality, accrediting organizations need self-scrutiny of their accrediting practices. Such review should also include examination of the accreditor’s impact on institutions and responsiveness to the broader accreditation and higher education community. To be recognized, the accrediting organization provides evidence that it sustains ongoing:

3. review of its value to the institution in its entirety and to the higher education community

Site Visitors and program administrators complete an online survey immediately after a Site Visit. Results for the past 3 academic years (attached as Exhibit F) indicate a steadily increasing overall value of the Site Visit to the program, and a steadily increasing value of the Site Visit as a learning experience. These surveys also provided feedback on the implementation of the new standards as well as suggested changes regarding the Site Visit process itself. This feedback was considered when changes were made to the Self-Study Report template, the Site Visit schedule, and the in-process amendment to the accreditation standards.

In the 2015 Annual Report, required of all accredited programs, PAB added survey questions regarding both the value and impact of its accreditation activities. In 2016 PAB adopted a policy whereby review of these items would take place no less frequently than every 5 years, which is the timeframe for comprehensive review of accreditation standards. A regular and periodic assessment of this information will enable PAB to identify any trends or material changes that warrant further investigation and potential action.

On the following page is a table with a general overview to the value and impact of PAB accreditation, generated from results of the 2015 Annual Report. Generally speaking, individual programs agreed or strongly agreed that the accreditation process provided value and impact to their individual programs.

Value and Impact of Accreditation	
	<b>RESULTS</b>
The accreditation process fulfilled the function of providing public assurance of the quality of my program	1.6
The accreditation process fulfilled the function of promoting quality at my institution	1.8
The recommendations of the Site Visit Team were valuable	1.8
The standards are achievable	2.0
The PAB accreditation process motivates my program to focus more on assessment of student learning	2.2
The quality of planning programs nationally would deteriorate if the accreditation process were to end	2.2
The benefits of the accreditation process are more readily seen in the long-term than in the short-term	2.4
The quality of my planning program would deteriorate if the accreditation process were to end	2.6
	1 Strongly Agree
	2 Agree
	3 Not Certain
	4 Disagree
	5 Strongly Disagree

In addition to these multiple choice questions, the survey contained an open-ended question regarding the benefits of PAB accreditation to a program. Exhibit G summarizes the 115 responses into topics. The most commonly cited benefits of PAB accreditation were:

- justification/leverage for or maintenance of resources – 17% of responses;
- Self-assessment of key factors/goals and objectives – 17% of responses;
- Enhanced program reputation/quality/prestige, both internally and externally – 16% of responses; and
- Improved student recruitment/quality assurance to prospective students – 16% of responses.

The PAB interim report narrative described the practice for site visitors and program administrators to complete an online survey immediately after an on-site evaluation. PAB reported that the survey results for the past three academic years show “a steadily increasing value of the Site Visit as a learning experience.” The committee notes that “PAB added survey questions regarding both the value and impact of its accreditation activities” and provided survey results in this regard. The committee is concerned that the survey results show low percentages of reported satisfaction. The committee asks for PAB to provide an update for its ongoing work regarding the survey results and to further address how PAB meets CHEA Standard 12.E.3.

***PAB has been engaged in efforts to ensure operational procedures are efficient and effective, and outcomes / output relevant both before it became a specific goal in its 2011 strategic plan and the 2015 annual report survey results (available February 2016) were generated.***

***One recent example of these efforts include a summer 2016 benchmarking exercise with other specialized accreditors regarding agendas for Site Visits. One goal of this exercise was to reduce the***

*length of the visit, thereby reducing the burden on programs both administratively and financially. Twenty-four accreditors participated. As a result of the benchmarking, PAB made material changes to its Site Visit Agenda, including: introducing formal pre-work for all Site Visit Teams; consolidating faculty interviews; consolidating alumni/employer/American Planning Association Chapter meetings; removing the library from the tour of facilities; removing interviews with other Department Chairs and career services; and making the introductory meeting with the Provost optional. The new agenda is being tested spring 2017 (which will allow for feedback) prior to fall 2017 implementation.*

*PAB in recent years has retained a consultant (a former PAB Board member, Department Chair, and retired Provost) to develop and conduct training of Site Visitors. Surveys of trainees have been increasingly positive, as have been surveys of Site Visit Teams and Program Administrators after accreditation visits. The consultant has most recently worked with PAB staff to develop PAB's first online training module, an introduction to the Purpose and Process of Accreditation. Two webinars were conducted in late 2016 as part of finalizing the presentation. The module was recorded in January 2017 and will be on PAB's website shortly. PAB has a 3-year plan for the development of 5 other training modules, 2 of which will also be available online. These online modules will reduce the burden on visitors to participate in in-person sessions conducted solely at the annual national conferences of both planning educators and planning practitioners.*

*PAB staff has also introduced pre-Site Visit conference calls with program administrators and their assistants to discuss in detail Site Visit scheduling and answer questions in advance of the visit.*

*PAB is currently working with a Chicago-based software developer to explore a move to online submission for Self-Study Reports, which will streamline the development and dissemination process and reduce costs for programs seeking accreditation. It is anticipated that 2 or 3 programs will serve as "beta testers" of the new software using soon-to-be released amended standards for fall 2017 SSR submission and spring 2018 Site Visits.*

*Finally, PAB will be engaged in a strategic planning retreat in May 2017 as its current strategic plan expired December 2016. At this time we anticipate that a goal related to the topic of "reducing the burden/enhancing the value of accreditation" will be a part of the new plan. To that end, PAB staff and PAB's new Chair will be attending the April 2017 Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) conference to participate in the professional development session on "Program Outcomes and Communicating the Value of Accreditation."*

DATE

NAME

PRESIDENT

UNIVERSITY NAME

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear Dr. Ballard:

On behalf of the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB), I am pleased to inform you that the Board acted at its DATE meeting to accredit the *DEGREE NAME* degree at University NAME for a four-year term, effective January 1, 20XX to December 31, 20XX. A certificate designating this accreditation term will be mailed under separate cover.

In its report the Site Visit Team noted many areas of excellence; the Program should be proud of its accomplishments. More specifically, the Site Visit Team found: a well-recognized program with strong ties to the local community of practicing planners as well as conscientious student advising and mentoring.

Given this action, the Program will be scheduled for its next accreditation review during the 20XX – 20XX academic year; the Self-Study Report will be due in 20XX. PAB reserves the right to change this to an earlier time as a result of new or additional information, changes in the activities of the Program, or changes needed in the accreditation review schedule. The Program will be notified of any change in advance of the time of the next review.

This accreditation term carries a condition that the Program submit a Progress Report on May 1, 20XX, detailing updated information on the areas of accreditation outlined below. If the Board finds sufficient evidence in that Progress Report to bring those areas into substantial compliance with the standards, the accreditation period may be extended by an additional two years. This would affect the schedule outlined above. The maximum term of accreditation is seven years.

In its future Progress Report, the Program should provide clear evidence of compliance with the following standards and criteria.

**Standard 1 / Mission and Strategic Plan**

**Criterion 1C / Program goals**

**“The goals shall identify the Program’s future aspirations in the context of its mission and that of the university. Goals must be meaningful in the sense that they aim toward excellence beyond that which may already exist, while taking into account the particular characteristics of a program, including its opportunities and constraints. Goals must be inclusively developed with participation of members of the Program's community.”**

The Site Visit Team assessed this criterion as partially-met, citing the preponderance of goals focused on present issues with little explicit reference to the future.

The Board concurs with this assessment. In its future Progress Report the Program should provide evidence of goals that identify future aspirations which aim toward excellence beyond that which may already exist.

#### **Standard 1 / Mission and Strategic Plan**

##### **Criterion 1D / Measurable objectives**

**“Each goal must have concrete objectives for goal attainment. The objectives should be measurable and framed in a way that can be easily evaluated by PAB and the Site Visit Team.”**

The Site Visit Team assessed this criterion as partially-met, citing the absence of specific measurements in the strategic plan and the absence of baselines that could be used to gauge effectiveness.

The Board concurs with this assessment. In its future Progress Report the Program should provide evidence of goals with quantifiable measurements wherever possible, to track progress over the long term.

#### **Standard 2 / Students**

##### **Criterion 2C/ Size of student body**

**“The number of students enrolled in the Program shall be sufficient to constitute a community of inquiry that fosters each student’s educational and professional development. Graduate programs shall have a student body of 20 or more full-time equivalent (FTE) students. Similarly, undergraduate programs shall have a total of 20 or more FTE students in their third and fourth years of study.”**

The Site Visit Team assessed this criterion as partially-met, citing as an anomaly a student body below the PAB minimum requirement of 20 at the time of the Site Visit.

The Board concurs with this assessment while noting the Program’s plans to change the degree name and the added involvement of alumni in recruitment efforts. In its future Progress Report, the Program should provide evidence of thoughtful and deliberative actions to increase and maintain student enrollment above the PAB minimum.

#### **Standard 4 / Curriculum and Instruction**

##### **Criterion 4A2f / Leadership**

**“The Program shall offer a curriculum that teaches students the essential knowledge, skills, and values central to the planning profession [including] tools for attention, formation, strategic decision-making, teambuilding, and organizational/community motivation.”**

The Site Visit Team assessed this criterion as partially-met, citing leadership skill development limited to group project work.

The Board concurs with this assessment. In its future Progress Report the Program should provide evidence that the required curriculum has been modified to address developing the students' leadership potential.

#### **Standard 5 / Governance**

##### **Criterion 5 A/ Program autonomy**

**"In accordance with customary university procedures, the planning faculty shall have responsibility for the design of its curriculum and shall have an independent voice in the appointment, promotion, tenure, and evaluation of its faculty, and the admission and evaluation of its students."**

The Site Visit Team assessed this criterion as partially-met, citing a departmental-level committee within a multi-disciplinary department with decision-making responsibility for these functions, in which the Program Director has no presence or vote.

The Board concurs with this assessment. In its future Progress Report, the Program should provide evidence that the Program has "an independent voice" in the appointment, promotion, tenure, and evaluation of its faculty, as required by the criterion.

#### **Standard 5 / Governance**

##### **Criterion 5B / Program leadership**

**"The administrator of the degree program shall be a planner whose leadership and management skills, combined with education and experience in planning, enables the Program to achieve its goals and objectives. The administrator shall be a tenured faculty member with an academic rank of associate professor or higher."**

The Site Visit Team assessed this criterion as met.

The Board, however, has assessed this criterion as partially-met given the recent resignation of the Program Director, whose role had been filled with an Interim Director at the time of the meeting in Houston. In its future Progress Report the Program should provide evidence that the current void in permanent program leadership has been satisfactorily addressed.

#### **Standard 7 / Progress**

##### **Criterion 7A / Progress towards goal attainment**

**"The Program shall demonstrate its progress since the last accreditation review in meeting program goals and objectives as measured by performance on the outcomes identified in Standard 6."**

The Site Visit Team assessed this criterion as partially-met, citing the absence of baseline measurements from which to gauge achievement.

The Board concurs with this assessment. In its future Progress Report the Program should provide evidence of quantifiable measures for assessing progress towards goal attainment.



If an accredited program undergoes a substantive change, it is obligated to provide written notification thereof to PAB. Substantive changes are defined in the PAB Policies and Procedures Manual, are typically reported via the Annual Report, and include, but are not limited to: a new degree offering, a significant change in curriculum requirements, credit hours, and/or the method of delivery of courses; a significant change in enrollment or faculty count or demographics; or the appointment of a program administrator who does not have an educational background or substantial experience in planning. The Board may, at its discretion, request additional information. If PAB determines that a program may no longer be in substantial compliance with any accreditation standard, it may initiate an interim review to re-consider the Program's accreditation status. Additional information about substantive changes is available on our website ([www.planningaccreditationboard.org](http://www.planningaccreditationboard.org)).

PAB appreciates the commitment and dedication to quality planning education demonstrated by your participation in the accreditation process. If you have questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact PAB Executive Director Shonagh Merits.

Sincerely,

Copies:

NAME, Provost

NAME, Dean, COLLEGE NAME

NAME, Professor and Chair, Department of NAME

NAME, Professor and Director, Planning Program NAME