

Frequently Asked Questions

What is accreditation? Why should a university be accredited?

Accreditation is a voluntary, peer review process. It serves 4 main purposes: (1) to assure quality to the public, (2) to ease student transfer between institutions by signaling quality, (3) provides institutions with access to federal financial aid, and (4) certifies a graduate's credentials to employers.

An "accredited" university meets the Standards for Accreditation established by an accrediting agency. The Standards ensure that an institution has appropriate and clear goals, sufficient resources to achieve them, is fulfilling its objectives, and will continue to do so.

The process provides colleges and universities with an opportunity for reflection, honest assessment of strengths and weaknesses, along with a chance to develop strategies for continued improvement.

Who accredits Harvard?

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges' (NEASC) Commission on Institutions of Higher Education accredits Harvard University. NEASC is one of six regional accrediting organizations in the United States. More information can be found at www.neasc.org.

In addition to the University's overall accreditation by NEASC, many of Harvard's professional and graduate schools and programs also hold specialized accreditation from other accrediting organizations. A list of these accreditations is below.

School	Accrediting Organization
Business School	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
Divinity School	Association of Theological Schools
Graduate School of Design	National Architectural Accrediting Board
	Landscape Architectural Accreditation Board
	American Institute of Certified Planners
Kennedy School	National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration
Law School	American Bar Association
Medical School	Liaison Committee on Medical Education
School of Dental Medicine	Commission on Dental Accreditation
School of Engineering and Applied Sciences	ABET
School of Public Health	Council on Education for Public Health

Who accredits the accreditors?

Accreditors, such as NEASC, are organizations federally recognized through the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), a bipartisan committee established under the Higher Education Act Amendments of 1992. NACIQI recognition indicates that an accreditor can adequately determine whether an institution is of sufficient quality to qualify for federal funds for financial aid and other programs.

In addition, NEASC is recognized through the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, which has 5 standards for accreditors: (1) They are required to advance academic quality, (2) They demonstrate accountability, (3) They encourage purposeful change and needed improvement, (4) They employ appropriate and fair procedures in decision-making, and (5) They continually reassess accreditation.

How does reaccreditation work? What is the process?

According to NEASC, a university typically spends 12-18 months producing a self-study report, approximately 100 pages long, which addresses all of the Standards for Accreditation. After reading the self-study, a committee consisting of faculty and administrators from similar institutions visits campus to meet with the university president, faculty, students and staff. The committee provides recommendations to NEASC, which then makes its determination regarding accreditation.

What are the Standards for Accreditation?

The Standards for Accreditation examine “institutional quality” in 11 areas, which are:

- 1: Mission and Purposes
- 2: Planning and Evaluation
- 3: Governance
- 4: The Academic Program
- 5: Faculty
- 6: Students
- 7: Library and Other Information Resources
- 8: Physical and Technological Resources
- 9: Financial Resources
- 10: Public Disclosure
- 11: Integrity

More detailed information about the Standards for Accreditation can be found on the NEASC website.

What is the purpose of the self-study?

Self-study serves as an opportunity for an institution to engage in “institutional improvement through self-analysis” and to present the quality of its educational programs to external audiences.

More specifically, the self-study report must address how an institution is striving to meet the 11 standards. In addressing these, NEASC recommends a three part framework:

- (1) **Description:** A concise discussion of the current status of the institution with respect to each standard
- (2) **Appraisal:** An analysis and evaluation of the extent to which an institution meets each standard
 - a. Assessment of the institutional practices related to the standard
 - b. Discussion of the use of evidence to identify strengths and areas for improvement
- (3) **Projection:** An outline of an institution's commitments to
 - a. Preserve and enhance its strengths
 - b. Address areas of concern
 - c. Deal with future change

Lastly, NEASC asks that an institution's response to each standard include an "institutional effectiveness" section that addresses the systems, structures and mechanisms used to evaluate how the institution is meeting that standard on an ongoing basis.

More information on the self-study can be found in NEASC's Self-Study Guide 2008 on the NEASC website.

When was Harvard last reaccredited, and is that report available?

Harvard's last comprehensive review was in fall 1997, with an interim report submitted in 2003.

When will Harvard be reviewed for reaccreditation?

Harvard will be reviewed for reaccreditation in October 2009. In preparation for the review, Harvard began planning, initial drafting of the self-study, and revisions over the summer and fall of 2008. Committee review of the draft and further revisions will take place during winter and spring 2009, with a draft available for comment from the entire Harvard community and the public in summer 2009. After the evaluation team's visit in the fall, the team Chair will prepare a report for NEASC, with NEASC's final decision on Harvard's accreditation made during spring 2010.

How is Harvard involving faculty, students and staff in the reaccreditation process?

Harvard has involved faculty, students and staff in a variety of ways. Drafts for each of the 11 Standards were produced by teams of administrators and, as appropriate, faculty with special expertise or authority in those areas. In addition to successive revisions by chairs and co-chairs of each standard, drafts are submitted for review by established

committees at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences whose membership includes faculty, staff, and students.

These committees include:

- Committee on College Life
- Committee on House Life
- Committee on Undergraduate Education
- Education Policy Committee
- Graduate Policy Committee
- Undergraduate Council
- Faculty Council

In addition, the self-study will be shared with the full faculty of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for review and feedback.

While the self-study traditionally focuses on Harvard College, feedback will be solicited from Harvard's professional and graduate schools through the Council of Deans and Administrative Council, which includes representatives from each of Harvard's faculties. Once committee review is complete, a draft will be posted for community review and feedback.

Where should I direct comments or questions about Harvard's NEASC accreditation?

You can submit questions or comments to accreditation@harvard.edu.

In addition, NEASC welcomes public comments, which can be emailed to cihe@neasc.org or sent through the mail to the following address:

Public Comment on Harvard University
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
209 Burlington Road
Bedford, MA 01730-1433