

A Primer for UH West O’ahu’s Institutional Report for Reaffirmation (IRR)

This brief narrative overview is intended to help provide context for the draft Institutional Report for Reaffirmation (IRR) that has been made available for your review. If you are wondering, “What is this 84-page document and why should it be important for me?” this is the best place to start.

What is accreditation?

Accreditation is essentially a quality-control process that compels educational institutions to meet established standards. Earning and maintaining accreditation serves as an important indicator to the larger public that the college in question provides its students with a high-quality education and a meaningful degree. Accreditation is extremely important for most college students, since the federal government only provides financial aid to students who are attending accredited institutions. College graduates will also be far more marketable when their degrees come from accredited institutions. The process of accreditation in American higher education is somewhat unusual in that the federal government delegates the responsibility to a series of non-governmental commissions rather than manage the process itself.

What is UH West O’ahu’s current accreditation status?

UH West O’ahu is fully accredited by the [WASC Senior College and University Commission \(WSCUC\)](#). This is the primary accrediting body for colleges and universities in California and Hawai’i. Those who wish to learn more about UH West O’ahu’s accreditation status can visit the [accreditation webpage](#) that WSCUC manages for us. The short story is that UH West O’ahu received seven years of renewed accreditation from WSCUCs in March 2015, which means that our current accreditation cycle is nearing its conclusion.

Where does the Institutional Report for Reaffirmation (IRR) fit in?

The Institutional Report for Reaffirmation, or IRR, is a major self-study that each college/university submits to WSCUC as part of its petition for renewal of its accreditation status. The report is composed according to a specific format mandated by WSCUC. There are eight essential sections, or “components,” of the report, as determined by WSCUC, plus one optional component that UH West O’ahu elected to include. The official IRR components are—in abbreviated format—as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Compliance with (WSCUC) Standards
3. Degree Programs
4. Educational Quality
5. Student Success
6. Quality Assurance and Improvement
7. Sustainability – Financial Viability
8. Institution-Specific Theme (optional)
9. Conclusion

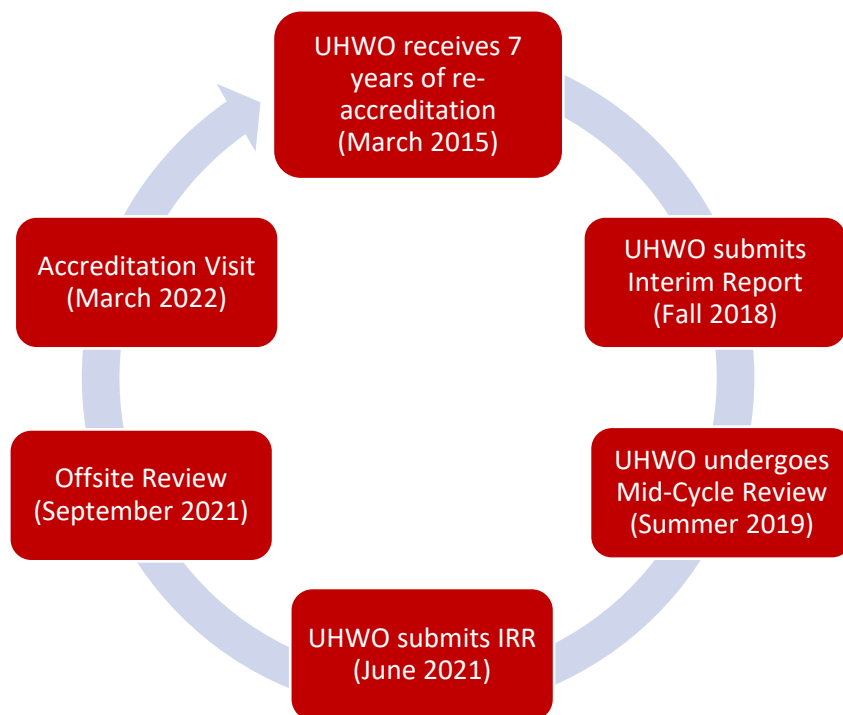
Since UH West O’ahu elected to include an optional component examining its impact on the microeconomy of Leeward O’ahu, our IRR has a total of nine components. You can approach the IRR as a collection of essays, and you may elect to focus in on the one or two that interest you the most. It is not even necessary for you to read them in order.

The IRR is being distributed to the entire campus community—faculty, staff, and students—and you are being invited to provide your feedback via an anonymous survey tool: [IRR Feedback Survey](#). Your feedback will help our drafting hui to revise and improve the report before the final submission to WSCUC in June. The survey allows you to review each component separately, so don’t worry if you are unable to digest the entire 84-page report. You may simply hone in on the areas that interest you.

What happens next?

We are now six years into a seven-year cycle, which will culminate in an official WSCUC Accreditation Visit to our campus in March 2022. Shortly after that, the WSCUC Visit Team will issue a report and then the WSCUC commissioners will render an official decision.

Here is a depiction of the various stages of the process:



In addition to the six core phases of the cycle illustrated here, UH West O’ahu is required to submit annual reports to WSCUC every year, so there is a constant process of evaluation and improvement.

The best outcome possible next spring would be ten years of renewed accreditation. Last time around, the campus received seven years, which is still a solid result. Possible negative

outcomes include a notice of concern, sanctions, a warning, probation, or even the withdrawal of accreditation. In other words, there is a lot at stake here, but the leadership at UH West O‘ahu is confident that the institution is in very good standing overall. Of course, there are areas that need improvement—and your survey feedback will help to identify them—but there is much to celebrate at UH West O‘ahu. Our faculty, staff, and students have risen to the occasion, despite the challenges of the pandemic, to produce amazing accomplishments. Many of those success stories are captured in the content of our draft Institutional Report. For example, fall 2020 saw UH West O‘ahu set new records for (1) student enrollment, (2) incoming student transfers, and (3) fall semester graduates!

What can I do to help?

First of all, you can read the draft Institutional Report for Reaffirmation! Then, you can complete our [IRR Feedback Survey](#). You can also attend a Virtual Town Hall event on Friday, April 23 at 11:00 am to ask questions and learn more about the process. In fact, this is one of eight question-and-answer sessions that the drafting team will be holding in April. Please see the accompanying “Reaffirmation Infographic” for a complete list.

Since this is a draft document, you will notice that there are a few sections (e.g., learning outcome assessment, credit hour policy study) that are not yet complete. Also, some of the capitalization or punctuation choices might appear odd to you, depending on what style guide you are used to in your academic discipline. In this case, the drafting hui followed the rules of the WSCUC Style Guide. (Yes, they actually produce their own style guide!) The draft is also written to be current as of the final submission in June, so you will notice that items and events scheduled to occur between now and June—such as our April Q&A sessions—are described using the past tense.

Remember, this is a draft of the IRR and there is still time for revisions. Nothing is written in stone! It is important for the self-study process to engage the campus community and invite a wide range of perspectives, so your voice matters! If you have any questions, you can direct them to uhwoirr@hawaii.edu and a member of our drafting hui will try to respond as soon as possible.

Pūpūkahi i Holomua (Unite to Move Forward)!