

Archived Information

University of Northern Colorado Accreditation Facts Sheet

This facts sheet is intended to provide an overview of accreditation at the University of Northern Colorado. Included is information about the University of Northern Colorado, the history and types of accreditation at UNC, the approximate costs of accreditation, and its benefits and challenges.

The University of Northern Colorado

The University of Northern Colorado, located in Greeley, Colorado, is a comprehensive baccalaureate and specialized graduate research university with a continuing commitment to its historical role in the preparation of educators. Designated by the Carnegie Foundation as a Research Intensive Institution, UNC enrolls approximately 12,000 students, 85% of whom are undergraduates, with a total budget of 130 million for fiscal year 2005/2006. In 2005, the university's Monfort College of Business became the first business school to receive the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

History of Accreditation at UNC

In 1916, UNC earned its first accreditation with the North Central Association of Colleges. The university has been reaccredited at each decennial review, most recently in 2004. During the 1994 campus review, the NCA evaluation team recommended a focused evaluation in 1998, and, at that time, a second focused visit was recommended for 2000. Initiatives to address the issues raised in these reviews strengthened UNC's planning and institutional assessment and led to an increased focus on student learning outcomes.

UNC is required through a performance contract with the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) to maintain national accreditation of its teacher education programs. Currently, UNC is fully accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The most recent reaccreditation with NCATE occurred in 2002. The university will apply for reaccreditation again in 2008. In addition to accreditation through NCATE, CCHE and the Colorado Department of Education conduct site visits as a component of the state's authorization process for teacher preparation programs. Their next site visit is scheduled to occur in 2007.

Types of Accreditation at UNC

- Regional – UNC is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.
- Institutional – UNC is one of 602 colleges of education accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.
- Specialized/Professional – UNC is accredited by several specialized professional organizations:
 - American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business

- American Chemical Society*
- American Psychological Association
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- Colorado Department of Education*
- Colorado State Board of Accountancy*
- Colorado State Board of Nursing*
- Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education
- Commission on Allied Health Education and Accreditation for Athletic Training
- Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
- Council for Education of the Deaf
- Council on Education for Public Health
- Council for Exceptional Children
- Council on Rehabilitation Education
- National Association of Schools of the Arts (proposed)
- National Association of Schools of Music
- National Association of Schools of Theater (proposed)
- National Association of School Psychologists
- National Association for Sport & Physical Education
- National University Continuing Education Association
- Society for Public Health Education*

Costs

Costs of accreditation encompass both annual membership fees and cyclical expenses related to onsite reviews from the accrediting organizations. While some costs of accreditation can be easily identified and assessed, it is more difficult to estimate the opportunity costs accrued when faculty and administrators' time and energy are diverted to accreditation tasks. A breakdown of UNC's accreditation costs is presented below. It should be noted that preparation for regional and institutional accreditation review is generally carried out over a span of two to three years prior to the review team visit.

- Annual Dues/Fees – UNC pays approximately \$32,000 annually in membership fees to regional, institutional, and professional/specialized accrediting organizations.
- Regional Accreditation Self Study and Site Visits – The cost of the 2004 NCA Higher Learning Commission self-study and campus visit was approximately \$303,000. The focused visits that occurred during 1998 and 2000 cost approximately \$130,000 each. Thus between 1994 and 2004, costs associated with regional accreditation were approximately \$563,000. This estimate includes release time for faculty and staff.
- Institutional Accreditation Self Study and Site Visit – UNC's most recent accreditation from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education occurred in 2002. Preparation for the 2002 accreditation began in 1999, and the total cost was \$264,475. The university will apply for reaccreditation again in 2008.

* No costs for affiliation.

Costs are anticipated to be similar to those incurred during the 2002 process. Total costs for NCATE accreditation between 1999 and 2008, then, are expected to be approximately \$528,950. This estimate includes release time for faculty and staff.

- Specialized/Professional Accreditation Site Visits – Direct costs for specialized/professional accreditation site visits range from \$2000 to \$7200, depending on the organization. Also, the time frame for site visits varies from five to ten years. Not all of the organizations require periodic on-site reviews for reaccreditation. The estimated direct cost for one cycle of all specialized/professional accreditation site visits is approximately \$40,000, and does not include release time for faculty and staff.
- Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award – The process for attaining the Baldrige award occurred over a three year period from 2002-2005. Direct costs associated with the process were approximately \$40,115. Although release time was not provided for faculty and staff, it is estimated that the six faculty dedicated to this project spent over 250 hours each on the project.

Benefits of Accreditation

While accreditation requires a substantial investment of institutional resources, there are benefits to maintaining the various types of accreditation.

- Fiscal Benefits – Regional accreditation ensures continuing eligibility for Title IV funds. Likewise, NCATE accreditation satisfies the terms of UNC's performance contract with the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. Specialized/professional accreditation allows students in certain professional degree programs to bypass costly requirements for licensure and/or certification. For example, UNC masters students in counseling may waive the 3000 hours of post-MA experience required for National Certified Counselor certification because of UNC's accreditation by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
- Educational Benefits – Curricular improvements tied to accreditation standards have fostered an increased emphasis on student learning outcomes. Also, professional accreditation standards have resulted in program alignment with professional standards, increasing the level of preparation received for entry into students' chosen fields.

Benefits of Baldrige

Several direct benefits can be attributed to the attainment of the Baldrige Award.

- Freshman enrollment in business was up 31% for Fall 2005.
- Private donations to the Monfort College of Business increased by 87% for 2005/2006 as compared to 2004/2005.
- Student learning results on a national standardized test in business moved from the top 10% in the nation to the top 5% in the nation for 2005/2006 as compared to 2004/2005.
- Overall graduating student satisfaction is now in the top 1% in the United States for three straight years based on implementation of the Baldrige processes.

- 97.4% of current Monfort College of Business students would now recommend the business program to a close friend or relative (a 13.4% increase from four years ago).

Challenges of Accreditation

Accreditation plays an important role in providing public assurance of the quality of UNC's academic programs, ensuring continued eligibility for federal and state funding, and enhancing institutional effectiveness. Notwithstanding these important benefits, accreditation brings with it a unique set of challenges as well. Some of these challenges are described below.

- Shrinking resources for higher education require careful evaluation as to whether the costs of maintaining accreditation are balanced by the benefits.
- Although accreditation can be an effective process for improving the professional preparation of students, it can also be used to make demands on instructional resources, faculty workload, and/or student-to-faculty ratios that do not always align with the larger institutional mission.
- A need to participate in multiple accreditation processes for national, state, and/or professional program accreditation can result in duplication and overlap of accreditation activities (for example, UNC will experience site reviews of its teacher education programs in 2007 and 2008, one for national accreditation and one for state approval).
- A lack of flexibility in the ways that institutions can meet certain accreditation requirements also can result in duplication.