



### Peer Review Defined

Peer review is an assessment by people who are experts in the subject under review. It is successful because of the knowledge, commitment and integrity of the professionals who conduct reviews in their fields of expertise.

### Peer Review in the Academic World

Applicable to all fields of study, peer review is a longstanding tradition in academic culture.

- Scientific journals use peer review to determine the rigor, accuracy, importance and substance of proposed articles
- Grant agencies use peer review to decide what research to fund
- Higher education institutions use peer review in determining faculty promotions

*Peer review is a critical element in the accreditation process, focused on ensuring fairness and objectivity in the pursuit of quality in higher education.*

### Peer Review in Government and the Private Sector

Peer review is not unique to the academic world. It is also used in the private sector as well as government. For example, no one wants to fly in an airplane that has not been checked by expert mechanics and pilots, and no one would willingly undergo surgery by a physician whose skills had not been certified by a board of expert practitioners.

Peer review ensures that quality is checked by experts, whether it's the airline industry, medical practice or higher education.

### Peer Review in the Accreditation Process

Peer review teams in specialized and professional accreditation are comprised of faculty experts in specific subject areas, as well as practitioners in those areas who are current in the field of practice and must follow well-defined and published standards, policies and procedures in evaluating quality.

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## Ensuring Fairness and Objectivity in Peer Review

The peer review process in accreditation contains rigorous systems of checks and balances. The process ensures objectivity and avoids conflicts of interest or any type of collusion between accreditors and the institutions and programs under review.

- **Formal written policies and procedures eliminate bias** among peer reviewers, decision makers, staff and academic institutions and programs.
- **Accreditation standards are developed in a collaborative and inclusive process** with input from educators, practitioners of specific disciplines, members of the public, students, employers and state regulators, among others.
- **Peer reviewers undergo extensive training** in accreditation standards and procedures, including any that are specific to their professional discipline. Briefings and advanced training are expected, especially for those conducting onsite visits.
- **Most peer reviewers are volunteers** who are dedicated to higher education or their specific field. Compensation is rarely provided, but when it is, amounts paid are typically inconsequential and fall far below usual academic consulting fees. Reviewers spend significant personal time reading and evaluating extensive documentation, visiting institutions and then collaborating to produce a report.

## Peer Review Promotes Trust and Credibility

Peer review is essential to producing evaluations that are trusted by experts in the field. The more advanced the level of work in any field, the more this is true. Since there are many different disciplines and professions, expert knowledge, skill and judgment matter. Without a basis in peer review, accreditation would have no credibility in the academic or professional worlds.

## A Note About ASPA

This Quick Reference was developed by the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA)—an advocate for quality in higher education through specialized and professional accreditation.



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