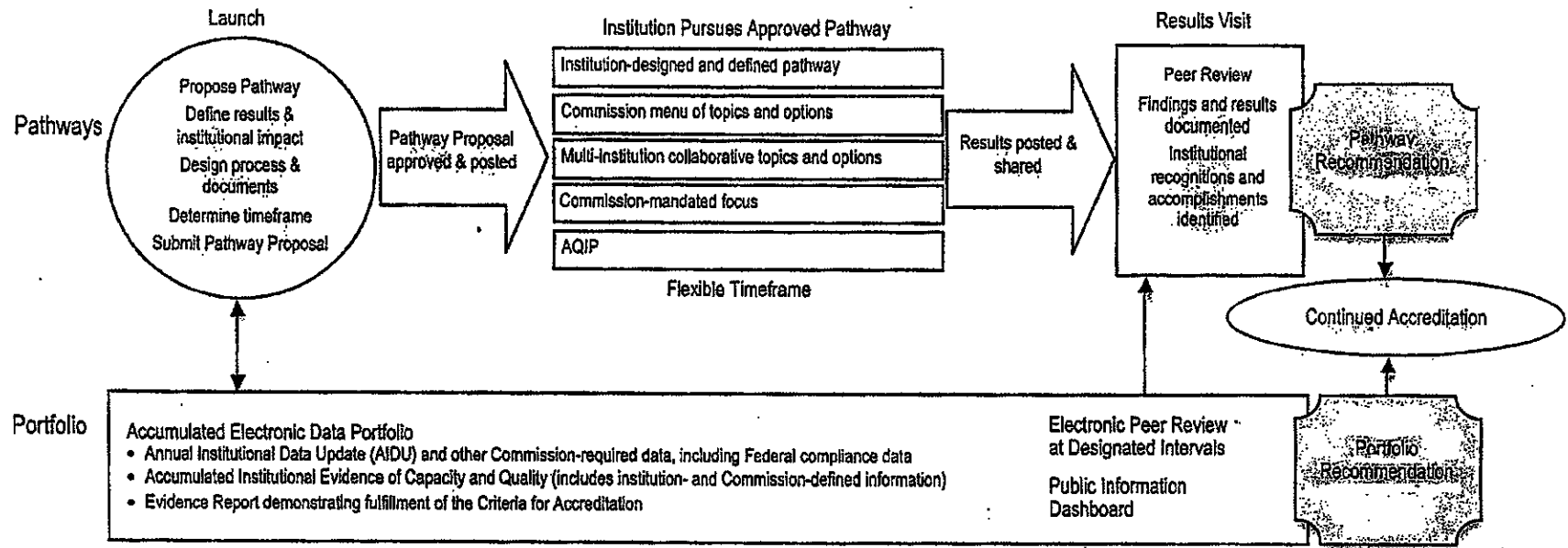


# Rethinking Accreditation: A Proposed Process for Continued Accreditation

*Add Value, Reduce Burden, Ensure Rigor*



## Process Goal

The goal is threefold: (1) to ensure rigor in the compliance part of accreditation, (2) to reduce the paperwork burden on institutions, and (3) to create sufficient flexibility in the Pathways that institutions will readily be able to make the process valuable to them. Hence, "Add Value, Reduce Burden, Ensure Rigor."

We ensure rigor by making the compliance dimension more frequent, with the annual data update and periodic assessments of a compliance portfolio. Yet we minimize the burden by including the annual data update in the portfolio and accepting other documents for the portfolio that exist outside of our process, such as accreditation reports from specialized agencies.

We add value and create flexibility by converting a single, fixed pathway between the start of the cycle and reaffirmation into multiple possibilities for pathways with some degree of flexibility in timing. In most instances, institutions either propose their own pathway design or propose a pre-set pathway or focus from a Commission-established menu of options. An approval process follows. One pre-set pathway is essentially what we know as the standard process focused on the Criteria for Accreditation (PEAQ); another is AQIP. Both would evolve to align with this proposed new accrediting process.

## Overview

**Pathways:** Designed to enhance the value of accreditation to institutions, the multiple Pathways shift the focus to serve the institution's agenda and to suit the institution's timeframe. An institution may design and propose its own pathway, may propose to pursue one or more Commission-defined options, or may propose to join a Commission-facilitated pathway (such as AQIP, the traditional comprehensive self-study, or the Academy for Assessing and Improving Student Learning). In addition, institutions may propose to collaborate with other institutions to achieve a common goal. A small percentage of institutions will take a Commission-mandated Pathway. With its Pathway approved, the institution pursues its related goals and strategies. The process culminates in a Results Visit that reviews goals achieved, documents good practice, and perhaps recognizes centers of excellence. In a brief report of findings and accomplishments, a portion or version of which is made public at the discretion of the institution, the visiting team makes a Pathway Recommendation. From plan to completion, the Commission and institution work to embed other accreditation-related requirements seamlessly into the Pathway plan (change requests, multi-site visits, follow-up monitoring, etc.).

**Portfolio:** Designed to ensure rigor and consistency, the Electronic Data Portfolio consists of three sets of information accumulated over time and reviewed electronically at designated intervals (to be defined). The data include (1) the Commission-required Annual Institutional Data Update (AIDU); (2) institution-provided evidence of capacity and quality, including Federal Compliance data; and (3) a 50-page, evidence-based report that demonstrates fulfillment of the Criteria for Accreditation and for which much of the primary evidence is the information and data accumulated in (1) and (2). At designated intervals, a peer panel conducts a rigorous, electronically mediated review without a team visit, produces a short, electronic report and makes a Portfolio Recommendation that could include follow-up monitoring. A future goal may be to align the data collected with the requirements of other state and accrediting agencies. Finally, a subset of the Portfolio, perhaps a dashboard report, becomes public information. The Pathways and Portfolio processes inform, but do not impede or burden each other.

**Accreditation Cycle:** The proposed accreditation model sustains the ten-year boundary for continued accreditation; however, the Pathways and Portfolio processes operate on more flexible and continuous cycles within this timeframe. Both the Pathways and the Portfolio are necessary to continue accreditation. To ensure continuity of both the quality assurance and quality improvement aspects of the accreditation relationship, the Commission and institution plan for an electronic review of the Portfolio within an acceptable time period before the institution completes its Pathway and thus, the accrediting cycle. As a result, the Portfolio and Pathway processes continue on a consistent time cycle.

*The Higher Learning Commission of NCA  
April 8, 2009*

## Timeline

- 2009 – 2010: Gather reaction from constituencies on rethinking accreditation and the proposed new process. Develop the Accumulated Electronic Data Portfolio. Continue planning and designing the Pathways.
- 2010 – 2011: Pilot and refine the Accumulated Electronic Data Portfolio. Pilot a small number of Pathway designs. Continue refining Pathways process.
- 2011 – 20xx: Refine Portfolio and Pathways processes. Begin phased-in implementation of the new continued accreditation process aligned with institutions' current accrediting cycles.

Note: Institutions with comprehensive evaluations for continued accreditation before August 31, 2012 will continue to use current accrediting processes.

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## Benefits of Proposed Process

- All institutions find value
- Flexible process and areas of focus linked to the context, goals, and initiatives of the institution. Activities and documents adapted to institution
- Compliance and quality improvement reviews conducted separately, allowing the institution to align the Pathway and its timeline with institutional goals and needs
- Electronic data portfolio accumulates evidence of institutional capacity and quality, incorporates a record of professional and specialized accreditations, and ensures accrediting threshold rigor
- Flexible timeframe
- Process allows for inter-institutional and other collaborations and partnerships

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## Send Comments...Access Information...Get Involved

- Download the project overview on the Commission's Web site: [www.ncahlc.org](http://www.ncahlc.org)
- Access detailed information: Download all related documents and link to the results of the fall surveys on accreditation: <https://ncahlc1.sharepointspace.com/pathways>  
USER ID: education0 (this last item is a zero, not the letter "o")  
PASSWORD: education
- Provide additional comments: Send an e-mail to [pathways@hlccommission.org](mailto:pathways@hlccommission.org)
- Join an electronic response group or future E-task force: Send an e-mail to [pathways@hlccommission.org](mailto:pathways@hlccommission.org)