

# COHORT

A Newsletter from Washington and Lee University's  
Office of Institutional Research

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## About Accreditation

As we end one school year and head into another in the next several months, thoughts in the IR Office are turned towards reaffirmation of accreditation. W&L holds institutional accreditation through the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The Law School, Williams School, journalism program, and chemistry program all hold area accreditations as well. Part of the function of IR is to provide data and resources for the cyclical reaccreditation process. The following facts about accreditation are from the US Department of Education:

“The United States has no Federal Ministry of Education or other centralized authority exercising single national control over postsecondary educational institutions in this country. The States assume varying degrees of control over education, but, in general, institutions of higher education are permitted to operate with considerable independence and autonomy. As a consequence, American educational institutions can vary widely in the character and quality of their programs.

In order to ensure a basic level of quality, the practice of accreditation arose in the United States as a means of conducting non-governmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs. Private educational associations of regional or national scope have adopted criteria reflecting the qualities of a sound educational program and have developed procedures for evaluating institutions or programs to determine whether or not they are operating at basic levels of quality.

### Some Functions of Accreditation

1. Verifying that an institution or program meets established standards;
2. Assisting prospective students in identifying acceptable institutions;
3. Assisting institutions in determining the acceptability of transfer credits;
4. Helping to identify institutions and programs for the investment of public and private funds;
5. Protecting an institution against harmful internal and external pressure;
6. Creating goals for self-improvement of weaker programs and stimulating a general raising of standards among educational institutions;

7. Involving the faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning;
8. Establishing criteria for professional certification and licensure and for upgrading courses offering such preparation; and
9. Providing one of several considerations used as a basis for determining eligibility for Federal assistance.

### The Accrediting Procedure

1. Standards: The accrediting agency, in collaboration with educational institutions, establishes standards.
2. Self-study: The institution or program seeking accreditation prepares an in-depth self-evaluation study that measures its performance against the standards established by the accrediting agency.
3. On-site Evaluation: A team selected by the accrediting agency visits the institution or program to determine first-hand if the applicant meets the established standards.
4. Publication: Upon being satisfied that the applicant meets its standards, the accrediting agency grants accreditation or preaccreditation status and lists the institution or program in an official publication with other similarly accredited or preaccredited institutions or programs.
5. Monitoring: The accrediting agency monitors each accredited institution or program throughout the period of accreditation granted to verify that it continues to meet the agency's standards.
6. Reevaluation: The accrediting agency periodically reevaluates each institution or program that it lists to ascertain whether continuation of its accredited or preaccredited status is warranted.”

### *Just For Laughs*

A stats major was completely hung over the day of his final exam. It was a True/False test, so he decided to flip a coin for the answers. The stats professor watched the student the entire two hours as he was flipping the coin...writing the answer...flipping the coin...writing the answer. At the end of the two hours, everyone else had left the final except for the one student. The professor walked up to his desk and interrupted the student, saying: “Listen, I have seen that you did not study for this statistics test, you didn't even open the exam. If you are just flipping a coin for your answer, what is taking you so long? The student replied bitterly (still flipping the coin): “Shhh! I'm checking my answers!”

**Focus on Staff:  
Katherine McGuire**

**K**atherine McGuire, Assistant Director of Institutional Research, joined Washington and Lee in 2002, when the IR Office was first opened. "It has been a challenge to get a new office up and running; we have had to create policy and formulate standards as the need arose. I am very proud of the job we have done, in particular, with our web site. My mentor, Dr. Bobby Sharp at Appalachian State, always used to say, 'If you're going to do it, you need to publish it somewhere. Data aren't any good unless they are used.'"

Katherine is in charge of coordinating and analyzing assessment surveys and tests, completing federal and state-mandated reports, completing surveys for the data sharing consortia that W&L belongs to, and generally overseeing the daily operation of the IR Office. Katherine holds Master's degrees in music performance and biomedical sciences, and a bachelor's degree in psychology.

Katherine enjoys singing, teaching voice, and gardening in her spare time. She is married to Clint McGuire and they have a three year-old son, Ian.

**A Sampling of Winter/Spring '07 IR Office Projects**

Your First College Year Freshmen Survey:  
<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/yfcy/>

Higher Education Research Institute College Senior Survey:  
<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/css.html>

State Coordinating Board for Higher Education in Virginia Tuition and Fees Survey:  
<http://research.schev.edu/>

National Center for Educational Statistics /Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System Enrollment Survey:  
<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/pas/>

**IR Quote**

"...institutional assessment efforts should not be concerned about valuing what can be measured but, instead, about measuring that which is valued."

-- Banta, Trudy, et al. *Assessment in practice: Putting principles to work on college campuses*

**Transportation Survey Summary**

This Spring, Washington and Lee University worked with Rockbridge Area Communities Services (RACSB), the Rockbridge Area Occupational Center (RAOC), the Maury River Senior Center (MRSC), and the Rockbridge Area Transportation System (RATS) to assess transportation needs in Rockbridge County. All W&L students (except for graduating seniors) were asked to take a survey of their transportation use and needs. Some of the results were:

- 65% of students get to campus by walking; 29% drive their own car to campus

- 70% of students traveled to destinations within 90 minutes of Lexington one or fewer times a month; the most popular reasons for regional travel were entertainment (61%); shopping (61%); going to the airport (61%); or visiting a friend (31%).

- Students' most popular local dining and shopping destinations were Wal\*Mart (79%); Kroger (42%); Don Tequila (19%); Applebee's (19%); and Ruby Tuesday (14%).

- On average, students made between one and two one-way car trips per day

- If public transportation were available from Rockbridge County to nearby towns, towns students would most like to see transportation available to are Roanoke (97%), Charlottesville (85%), Staunton (53%), and Lynchburg (24%).

**Institutional Research Office Staff:**

Scott Dittman, IR Director and University Registrar  
Katherine McGuire, Assistant Director  
Kristen Gould, Administrative Assistant

Summer Research Assistant:  
Allan Kisoma, '09

***If you have any comments or suggestions regarding our newsletter, please e-mail Katherine McGuire at [kmcguire@wlu.edu](mailto:kmcguire@wlu.edu)***

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