



## The TEAC audit

### Before the audit

TEAC's process of formative evaluation includes reviewing the *Brief* to ensure that it (1) is complete, (2) addresses the appropriate elements and components of the TEAC system, and (3) is written clearly and precisely. When TEAC is satisfied that the *Brief* meets all requirements, then it declares the *Brief* "auditable."

Once the program's *Brief* has been accepted as auditable, TEAC staff and the program faculty schedule and plan the audit visit. TEAC will assign a team of auditors and schedule the audit.

Once selected, the audit team members insure that there are no undeclared conflicts of interest surrounding their participation in the audit. In this initial period of planning for the auditors' visit, program faculty members have an opportunity to review the resumes of the members of the audit team to identify any potential conflicts of interest that may exist and that the match between the auditor's qualifications and the program is appropriate. TEAC officers and program faculty will negotiate claims of conflicts of interests.

After their study of the *Brief*, the auditors will propose audit tasks (see "Constructing audit tasks," below) and review the audit tasks proposed by others. Some audit tasks can be conducted without an on-site analysis; in those cases, the auditor may conduct the analysis before arriving on site.

Then, TEAC and the program faculty will determine what evidence the program must make available to the auditors, the interviews that need to be scheduled, and the observations that are required. In some instances, TEAC and program faculty may agree that some data records can be sent to the auditors prior to the visit to make more efficient use of their on-site time.

Next, the auditors prepare a **summary of the case**. The summary of the case explicates the case the program has made to support its claims; it tells the program's story, but in the auditors' words. The purposes of the summary are at least fourfold: (1) to convey to the authors (and to others) that the auditors' fully understand the *Brief's* meanings and contexts; (2) to facilitate the construction of the final audit strategy; (3) to provide the members of the Accreditation Panel and Accreditation Committee with an accurate summary of the case the *Brief* makes; (4) to inform the public of the program's case for accreditation via posting the summary on the TEAC website.

The auditors' summary of the case generally has the following parts:

1. The auditors briefly describe in one or two paragraphs the salient characteristics of the institution and program (type, location, age, number of faculty and students, mission, relevant demographic information and any unique and distinguishing features).
2. The auditors restate, in their own words, the claims advanced in the *Brief* related to TEAC's *Quality Principle I*, the categories of evidence the program cites supporting the claims, the nature of the evidence the program is presenting, and the program's evidence related to the reliability and validity of the measures used to assess the claims.
3. The auditors summarize the principal results of the program's internal audit and the findings reported in Appendix B related to institutional commitment to the program.
4. Finally, because the auditors are *telling the program's story*, they do not comment about aspects of the case for accreditation that they may think are weak or problematic. Nor do they make the case stronger than the program faculty made it. The summary is *about* the program's case, not the case the auditors would have made or could have made.

The lead auditor prepares the initial draft of the summary of the case; other members of the team review it, and once the team accepts the summary, TEAC sends it to the program head, who corrects any errors the auditors may have made.

## Constructing audit tasks

The audit is a series of tasks, each assigned to an aspect of the *Brief* that is also associated with one of the principles of the TEAC system.

Before the auditors arrive at a campus, the TEAC staff and the auditors will have created a set of initial audit tasks that are directed at the parts of the *Brief* that are relevant for one or another of the TEAC principles. They are called *initial* tasks because the auditors may also employ follow-up tasks and new tasks that they create during the audit or that they draw from the larger set of potential audit tasks TEAC has created. The auditors may also have created a set of questions (called **clarification tasks**) about any aspects of the *Brief* that were unclear to them or puzzling to which the program faculty respond in writing at a time that is convenient for them, but preferably before the audit visit.

An audit task is composed of a **target** and a **probe**. The *audit task* is constructed by selecting some aspect of the *Brief* text (the *target*) and *probing* it.

A *target* is what the auditors are seeking to verify in the *Brief*. A target can be a particular sentence, claim, statistic, number, or piece of evidence. Each target is linked to an element, component, or subcomponent of the TEAC system.

A *probe* is a specific action taken by the auditor to establish whether the portrayal of the evidence for a target is accurate. If the result of the probe of a target is ambiguous or in cases where the outcomes of a probe are variable or uncertain with regard to the accuracy of the evidence for a target in the *Brief*, the auditors probe further until a stable pattern is uncovered or until a probe's result is unambiguous.

A target is verified if the auditor determines that the evidence, statistic, or claim, representing the target is accurate. This judgment can be made even if there are slight and inconsequential inaccuracies in the targeted text of the *Brief*.

The following are examples of possible audit task probes that would be directed at the verification of some target in the *Brief*. Some audit task probes are also designed to corroborate targets in the *Brief* but with evidence that may not have been cited in the *Brief* but is available on site to the auditors.

1. Check records, such as minutes of meetings or memos on file of faculty actions in making program decisions claimed in the *Brief*.  
students with regard to *Quality Principle 1* components.
2. Review notes taken of interviews with focus groups and with students at their exit from the program from which summaries are prepared or generalizations included in the *Brief* are induced.
3. Inspect the responses received from stakeholders who were surveyed by the program about the program and whose responses are summarized in tables or in narrative in the *Brief*.
4. Re-compute percentages, means, standard deviations, and correlations, etc., reported in the *Brief* from the original spreadsheets and check the accuracy of the spreadsheet entries from raw data.
5. Use institutional records to re-compute the means and standard deviations of grade point averages, license test scores, admission test scores, etc., reported in the *Brief*.
6. Survey students, faculty, and cooperating teachers about the accomplishments of the  
7. Have raters re-apply the coding schemes used to draw inferences from qualitative data to see if the results can be reproduced.
8. Interview senior administrators to uncover evidence of the institution's commitment to the program.
9. Pose teaching scenarios and dilemmas to students and faculty to determine if their responses align with the description of the program's mission, goals, and claims in the *Inquiry Brief*.
10. Check reports concerning the reliability of multiple observers by asking the observers to rate a video-taped student teaching event, a portfolio, or some other artifact and computing the appropriate coefficients of agreement.
11. Tour the campus to verify cited evidence about claims concerning facilities, resources, and services available to program candidates, the availability of computers, faculty office space, and other capacity-related issues.

12. Check brochures, catalogs, and websites to make sure the information found in the *Brief* is consistent with the information found in these sources.

13. Examine both the data (video tapes, transcripts, field notes) and the procedures for coding the data for evidence used to support claims.

14. Examine data sets (also institutional and state reports where those same data are provided) to verify evidence of parity of funds, space, full-time faculty equivalent per student enrollment of the program with other programs on campus.

15. Interview faculty who participated in the deliberations leading to program change, examine minutes of meetings, and inspect the copies of proposals that were taken to the faculty or administration for action to determine if the *Brief* claims that changes were made in the program

after considering data generated by the quality control system.

16. Visit class sessions to see if the facilities, pedagogical values, and substance of the lesson(s) align with descriptions found in the *Brief*.

17. Interview faculty who conducted the internal audit probes and inspect their records to determine that the audit was undertaken as described.

18. Interview students and faculty who were the focus of the internal audit probes to ascertain that the characterizations found in the internal audit report in Appendix A are accurate.

19. Interview faculty with regard to any errors they found in the *Brief* with regard to the portrayal of the program and its characteristics.

20. Examine files and archives describing actions taken by the faculty to improve the program to document the accuracy of the characterizations of these actions in the *Brief*.

Of course, situations will vary from site to site. Claims and the sources of data for claims that have not been anticipated may arise, and auditors may need to consider additional kinds of probes to use in their efforts to determine if the statements and evidence found in the *Brief* are accurate.

TEAC prescribes the following features for some of the audit tasks. At least one audit task must meet each of the following conditions:

1. The auditors must observe a session of at least two regularly scheduled courses that the program offers.
2. The auditors must interview the students in the program's sample for its internal audit or for the evidence cited for *Quality Principle I*.
3. The auditors must interview a sample of cooperating teachers.
4. The auditors must select four facilities cited in the *Brief* and tour each to verify their existence and similarity to their description in the *Brief*.
5. The auditors must verify the program's plan to investigate, or an investigation, of a link between student learning and any program factor.
6. The auditors must interview members of the administration to verify their commitment to the program, their allocation of resources to the program, and their qualifications for their positions.
7. The auditors must verify that the call for comment from third parties was distributed to the parties required by TEAC policy.
8. The auditors must verify that the raters were trained and the rating forms and instruments exist.

The auditors must note any discrepancies between characterizations of the institution described in the *Brief* and the experience of the site visit, particularly facts at variance with what is reported in Appendix E.

### **On-site audit activities**

The auditors' verification process entails the review of relevant documents and interviews with representatives of the institution, faculty, staff, and students associated with the program. The sorts of activities the auditors might undertake, and the data to which the auditors need to have access, are described below.

### **Review of the pre-visit audit tasks**

The auditors *tell the story* of the program seeking accreditation so that the program faculty can be assured that the auditors have understood the *Brief* in the manner intended by the program faculty. The *story* (summary of the case) will have been sent to the program faculty before the audit so the faculty members can respond with

corrections and amendments. The point is to ensure that the auditors and program faculty can conduct the rest of the audit from a common basis of understanding of the *Brief*.

**Understanding the local context.** During this first meeting with program faculty, after the introductions are complete, the discussion turns to the summary of the case prepared by the TEAC staff and auditors and sent to the program faculty before the audit visit.

The auditors seek the program faculty's reaction to the summary of the case: Does it hit the mark? Is it complete? Has it distorted any elements of the *Brief*? The auditors should receive feedback from the faculty without argument or debate. When the auditors write their report, they will also amend the summary, based on these comments from the program faculty.

Having determined that the auditors understood the *Brief* at a level acceptable to the program faculty, the auditors move to clarifying their own understanding, or misunderstanding, of the *Brief*.

**Clarification.** Before the audit visit, the auditors may have asked the authors and endorsers of the *Brief* to clarify any language used in the *Brief* that may be unclear to the auditors. This effort is critical because it is essential that the program faculty believe that the auditors understand the *Brief*. TEAC believes that this feature of the audit process helps to build the rapport between the audit team members and the program faculty that comes when one party feels the other party understands its positions.

Before the audit visit, the auditors sample from a pool of statements in the text that may have been unclear to them and ask the program faculty to put in writing their explanation and clarification of the text. The auditors need to probe assertions made in the *Brief* to determine if the referents exist and mean exactly what they seem to mean. The purpose of these probes is to verify that the match between the referent and the language in the *Brief* is accurate and precise. The auditors can verify the program's assertions only if the language is clear and precise.

The audit tasks focused on language are designed to clarify text that is ambiguous or that, when explained, may be particularly revealing of the program faculty members' thinking about matters related to the quality principles. Through this process, the auditors provide the Accreditation Panel members with a basis for determining the degree to which the language and evidence in the *Brief mean exactly what they seem to*.

### **Review of on-site audit tasks**

The main purpose of the audit is to verify the evidence the program faculty has cited in support of its claims with respect to the quality principles. From a pool of audit targets, the auditors select a sample that is particularly revealing and representative of the totality of the evidence the program faculty has presented in the *Brief*. The auditors divide some tasks among themselves, and others, such as interviewing students, administrators, and faculty or observing classes, together as a full team. Throughout the entire visit, the auditors are alert and sensitive to unobtrusive information that may have a bearing on the targets of the audit.

While the auditors are on site, they use the evenings and team meals as opportunities for debriefing. The auditors make mid-course corrections in the audit tasks, modify the agenda and schedule as needed, develop new audit trails, and review preliminary impressions and observations.

**Verifying the evidence related to specific claims.** The *Brief* includes the evidence the faculty uses to support its claims related to the program's goal of preparing *competent, qualified, and caring* professionals as well as to support the claim that the institution has the capacity to offer a quality program. The auditors do *not* judge whether the claims are true or even credible. The auditors do not judge, for example, whether or not the program's graduates understand pedagogy or whether the evidence is persuasive or weak. They judge only whether or not the evidence cited in support of the graduate's understanding of pedagogy is in fact what is reported in the *Brief*. For example, if the program faculty relies on a mean score on a standardized test to advance and support its claim that the program's graduates understand pedagogy, the auditors will check to see if, in fact, the score the program's graduates earned on the test is as the program faculty reports in the *Brief*. They will not express an opinion about whether the score actually shows the graduates understand pedagogy.

**Corroborating evidence.** Throughout the audit the auditors are alert to the discovery of evidence that was not cited in the *Brief* but has a direct bearing (positive or negative) on the verification of the evidence and the clarity

and precision of the language in the *Brief*. The auditors are charged with assuring the Accreditation Panel that there is evidence behind the claims made in the *Brief*. There are two kinds of errors the auditors need to avoid: (1) false positive errors (concluding the evidence is present and accurate when it is not); and (2) false negative errors (concluding there is no evidence for a claim when in fact there is).<sup>1</sup>

**Errors.** The auditors must also determine whether any errors they find in the *Brief* are trivial or are of some consequence to the meaning of the text. When a misstatement is trivial and of no consequence, the targeted text is not misleading in spite of the error and the statement means more or less the same thing with the error as without the error.

For example, if the auditors had recalculated a mean score and found it was 3.16 instead of the 3.06 reported in a table or in some text, it is probably the case that the targeted text would have the same meaning whether the mean is one or the other value. If the faculty claimed they are *constructivists* and it turns out in response to the auditors' probes that they meant only that they are *Piagetians*, the statement is still acceptably accurate.

The errors, or misstatements, that are *of consequence* are those that alter the meaning of a targeted statement in the *Brief* in such a way that the statement could mislead the reader and as result it is not verified. If the *Brief* asserts, for example, that the program students have two faculty advisors, one in arts & science and one in education, and the auditors find in their review of student files, that only 10% of the students had two advisors, the auditors would be unable to verify the program's assertion. In this instance the auditors would attempt to verify the assertion in other ways – perhaps interviewing a sample of students about the number of advisors they had, interviewing the arts and science faculty about whether they advised education students, or asking the program's administrators why their student files were incomplete and what other place might have the information, etc. If these additional probes yielded more or less the same outcome, the program's claim of two advisors cannot be relied upon. If on the other hand 95% of the students had two advisors, the program's assertion, while in error, is acceptably accurate and no reader would be misled appreciably by believing it. The auditors would score the target as verified with error and state what the error was (viz., 5% of the students did not have two advisors).

If the recalculated mean (to take the example above) differed by more than 25 percent of the standard deviation from the reported mean, the misstatement of the mean is probably *of consequence* and the auditors would conclude that the reported and misstated mean was not confirmed and verified.

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<sup>1</sup> False negative errors are somewhat less likely than false positive errors as the former would surely be noted in the program faculty's response to the audit report while the latter might not be mentioned.