

Society for Range Management
University Accreditation Program Handbook

Revised 05 May 2009

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INTRODUCTION

Accreditation of university degree programs is a proven and accepted approach used by many professional societies to achieve the following objectives:

- establish recognized minimum standards that address the educational needs of students preparing to enter the profession,
- provide constructive guidance to institutions that are currently providing or are planning to provide instruction in the discipline, and
- identify programs that meet or exceed the accreditation standards.

Rangeland ecology and management programs are identified using a variety of different terminologies. For this document the acronym (REM) will be used to represent all these programs.

Role and Responsibility of the Society for Range Management

The responsibility for accreditation of professional REM education programs is accepted by the Society for Range Management (SRM) to further its stated mission “to promote the professional development and continuing education of members and the public and the stewardship of rangeland resources.”

Procedures for accrediting institutions were originally adopted by the SRM Board of Directors (BOD) in July 1977. Several minor modifications were subsequently approved by the BOD prior to the major revision in 2006. The SRM accreditation criteria and the list of university programs that have been accredited are available through the SRM web site at:

http://www.rangelands.org/education_universities.shtml .

Printed brochures on REM education opportunities also identify the SRM accredited REM programs.

Role and Responsibilities of the University Seeking Society for Range Management Accreditation

A university desiring to have its REM program considered for accreditation should start the process by contacting the SRM Executive Vice President. The request for evaluation for program accreditation will usually be initiated by the REM program leader. The leader of the program being evaluated will coordinate all aspects of the review process with the Executive Vice President (EVP) of SRM. The EVP will coordinate with the chair of the Program Accreditation Committee (PAC). As part of the evaluation, a visitation team (VT) impaneled by the PAC will review the program through an on-site visit. In preparation for the arrival of the VT, the program must develop a self-evaluation report which includes a thorough presentation of how well the program meets the SRM accreditation standards. The university representative will coordinate the meeting agenda with the VT to assure that key university administrators, faculty, students, alumni, and employers are available to meet with the VT.

This handbook includes the following information:

- SRM accreditation standards and examples of the types of information that should be included in the self-evaluation report to illustrate the degree to which each of the standards is met.
- Procedures associated with the accreditation review process.
- Criteria guiding composition of the VT and PAC and instructions to guide their activities during the review process.

SOCIETY FOR RANGE MANAGEMENT ACCREDITATION STANDARDS FOR UNDERGRADUATE RANGELAND ECOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

The following accreditation standards describe the features of an undergraduate REM program that is equipped to provide the depth and breadth of instruction necessary to achieve SRM formal education goals. The accreditation standards reflect a mix of quantitative and qualitative goals, therefore they are necessarily described throughout the text in somewhat general terms. Consequently, the accreditation standards are open to some interpretation and evaluation must depend on the judgment of VT, PAC, and BOD members. To aid the review process, the self-evaluation report should be organized to specifically address how each of the seven accreditation standards (below) is fulfilled by the program. Indented bullets suggest some of the types of information that should be provided to address whether each of the standards has been achieved.

Accreditation Standard I. Rangeland Ecology and Management Unit Characteristics

The Rangeland Ecology and Management (REM) Program may exist as a traditional department or as part of an inter-disciplinary academic unit (e.g. department or school). The leader of the REM program must be acknowledged by the university and should have sufficient autonomy to formally represent the interests of the REM program to the most immediate superior administrative level during deliberations about hiring, tenure, promotion, budgetary allocations and resource distribution, and the curricular content, scheduling frequency and instructor coordination of the REM courses. Mechanisms for formal representation by the REM program leader are especially critical in programs, departments or schools which contain multi-disciplinary faculty and curricula.

To aid in assessment of this standard the self-evaluation report could include such items as:

- A brief history of the REM program within the institution.
- A current statement of the goals, missions, and objectives of the REM program. In particular, these statements should reflect:
 - ♦ Explicit expressions of the education results to be achieved.
 - ♦ Sensitivity to the expanding role of the REM professional in meeting the increasingly diverse needs of society.
 - ♦ Responsiveness to the evolving needs of the constituencies which can benefit from interaction with REM professionals.
 - ♦ Awareness of the contribution of other disciplines to the REM discipline.
 - ♦ A commitment to education that will not in any way discriminate among students (e.g., demonstrate a sensitivity to age, race, color, sex, creed, religion, or physical disability).
- An organization chart showing the REM program in the academic administrative structure of the university.
- Description of the formal mechanism for the REM program leader to contribute to deliberations made at the most immediate superior level of the administration.
- An organization chart showing the relationship of the REM program with other environment and natural resource programs within the institution.
- Description of recent changes in program objectives and/or organizational structure. If changes have occurred, explain how and why the program has changed.
- Evaluation of the progress of the program toward achieving its objectives.
- Indication of anticipated program changes (budgets, resources, and staffing) during the next five to ten years. Explain the reasons for these anticipated changes. Evaluate the problems expected in meeting these changes, including the prospects for adequate resources to make these changes.

- Copies of the portions of the university catalog and links to the university and departmental web sites that provide information about the REM program.

Accreditation Standard II. Degree Credential

A formal credential (e.g., B.S. degree, minor, option, certificate, concentration) that includes the word “range” or “rangeland” in the title of the credential must be offered in association with the REM program. There are many employers who have a specific need for individuals with a strong education foundation in rangeland ecology and management. The goal of this accreditation standard is to be responsive to consistent requests to the SRM from representatives of private enterprise and government that SRM work with universities to clearly identify individuals with an accredited range education by including the word “range” or “rangeland” in the title of the credential.

To aid in assessment of this standard the self-evaluation report could include such items as:

- Documentation from the university registrar office indicating how the range credential is formally acknowledged in transportable student records (e.g., diploma and/or official transcript).
- Documentation from the university catalog and web site explicitly stating that a formal credential in REM is available and specifying the course of study necessary to obtain the REM credential.

Accreditation Standard III. Curriculum and Advising

Education to prepare a REM professional requires **both** depth and breadth of insight into numerous concepts and issues. The following breadth of categories must be addressed in the curriculum. To address the issue of depth, semester credits (1 semester-system credit = 1.33 quarter-system credits = 15 or more instructor contact hours to accommodate laboratory or field experiences) are listed to provide guidance as to the minimum suggested time of in-class and/or laboratory instruction devoted to coverage of the material. To preserve the integrity of the breadth and depth objectives, a minimum of 66 semester credits, partitioned to fulfill each of the bulleted categories listed below, need to be achieved by students receiving a formal “range” credential from an accredited REM program.

Many of the credits listed in the curriculum will likely be required by or applicable to other programs that a university might offer. It is anticipated that the REM credit requirements will often be able to be simultaneously applied to those other programs of study in the context of either electives or required courses. The objective of Accreditation Standard III is to ensure that students participating in an accredited REM program have been taught the depth and breadth of knowledge represented in the required curriculum categories.

Curriculum

The subject matter that should be covered within an accredited REM program include the following:

General Concepts

- Biology (4 credits)
- Chemistry (4 credits)
- Soil Science (4 credits)
- Plant Taxonomy (3 credits, should include elements of both sight identification, plant classification and keying)

- Quantitative Concepts (9 credits)
 - Examples:
 - Mathematics (college algebra or higher)
 - Statistical Methods
 - Geographic Information Science
 - Remote Sensing
 - Natural Resource Modeling
- Integrated Natural Sciences (9 credits)
 - Examples:
 - Ecology
 - Plant Physiology
 - Animal Physiology/Nutrition/Behavior
 - Biogeochemistry/Environmental Chemistry
 - Soil Genesis and Classification
 - Conservation Biology
 - Hydrology
 - Environmental Chemistry
- Resource Management (9 credits)
 - Examples:
 - Watershed Management
 - Forestry Management
 - Wildlife Management
 - Wildland Recreation Management
 - Farm/Ranch Management
 - Fire Management
 - Integrated Pest Management
- Economics (3 credits)
- Communication (3 credits)
 - Examples:
 - Speaking
 - Writing
 - Listening

Rangeland Ecology and Management Specific Concepts

(18 REM specific credits that are in addition to the General Concept instruction described above)

The REM specific credits are expected to compliment and build upon the general concept credit categories listed above. The following subject categories should be covered:

- Introduction to Rangeland Ecology and Management
- Applied Rangeland Ecology (including developing an appreciation of the spectrum of considerations that are part of recognizing healthy rangeland communities, maintaining healthy rangeland {including all elements determining sustainable use targets} and an awareness of the structure and function dynamics of rangelands {e.g., multiple state-and-transition succession ecology considerations}).
- Inventory and Assessment Methods (quantitative and qualitative assessment of plant communities, land management units, application of spatial analytical skills (e.g., mapping/GPS/GIS/remote sensing, application of mathematics and statistics to quantify trends and sustainable use targets).

- Vegetation/Habitat Management Techniques (instruction to provide a “tool box” of methods based on scientific insights that can be used to craft solutions responsive to unique challenges (e.g., fire and grazing management; restoration practices; weed management; watershed management; riparian management)).
- Rangeland Management Planning and Problem Solving (including elements of team projects and should assess the mastery of the process of solving natural resource problems, taking into account ecological, social, government policy, and economic contexts, and the use of inquiry, analytical, integrative/synthetic, and communication skills).

Woven throughout the REM specific coursework there should be evidence that instruction is cultivating professional development (including elements devoted to ethics/professionalism), consideration of relevant environmental laws and policy (including, for example, awareness of the rangeland management implications of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act), and an appreciation of, human dimension considerations to management (development of collaborative management/negotiation skills). Technical writing skills should be consistently strengthened throughout the REM specific coursework.

To aid in assessment of this standard the self-evaluation report could include such items as:

- A syllabus for each of the courses that are commonly used to meet the General Concepts curriculum standards.
- A syllabus and a sample of previous year’s tests and/or assignments for each of the courses used to meet the Rangeland Ecology and Management Specific Concepts curriculum standards. The VT, PAC and BOD will rely on the syllabi/outlines of courses to determine depth of coverage of material, therefore the syllabi/outlines should specify the number of instructor contact hours devoted to the various materials covered by the class.

Advising

Each student pursuing the REM program should have an assigned academic advisor.

To aid in assessment of this standard the self-evaluation report could include such items as:

- Discussion of the advising protocol.
 - ♦ How are students matched with advisors?
 - ♦ How do advisors keep abreast of new information germane to the progress of the student?
 - ♦ What criteria are used to guide advisors regarding course substitutions and/or decisions about which courses fulfill the intent of the General Concepts curriculum categories? For example, many courses may not explicitly express a Resource Management or Integrated Natural Science emphasis even though they provide substantive content relevant to these considerations. Coursework flexibility, facilitated by guidance provided by advisors to students, is a very important element of the General Concepts curriculum goals of REM accreditation. Therefore, advisors should have some shared approach for how they decide which courses meet the intent of these broad concept categories.
 - ♦ What is the mechanism in place to ensure that each student meets with their advisor at least twice a year to discuss academic progress and professional development?

Accreditation Standard IV. Rangeland Ecology and Management Educators

The number and caliber of the faculty is fundamental to the delivery of a quality education. It also reflects the emphasis placed by the institution on rangeland ecology and management education. The instructors of the REM-specific courses should have career records that demonstrate an active involvement in the development of the rangeland management profession through 1) their record of membership/service to the SRM and 2) their record of expanding the scientific and/or education capability of the profession as evidenced by periodically publishing articles in peer-reviewed venues that specifically target communication with members of the profession, in particular the Rangeland Ecology and Management journal or Rangelands.

The 18 REM credits (Accreditation Standard III) must be taught by at least 3 different Ph.D. faculty members. This purposely does not say anything about FTE, funding source, official appointments, or where faculties are located administratively within the institution. The basic idea is that there is value in receiving instruction from different people who will offer students different insights and viewpoints. This also does not preclude some of the 18 REM credits being taught by someone with less than a Ph.D. under supervision of a Ph.D.

Qualifying faculty are defined as persons having all of the following:

- a) Possessing a doctoral degree in range management/science or other applied science disciplines directly related to rangeland ecology and management.
- b) Having teaching assignments under the administrative control or oversight of the REM program leader or under the oversight of a program leader assigned by the university to conduct an interdisciplinary REM program.
- c) Having substantive teaching assignments in courses contributing to the five rangeland ecology and management specific areas within the curriculum, as specified under Standard III.

Qualifying faculty may be appointed in academic units of the parent institution other than that housing the REM program if they meet the above requirements, but in all cases must hold at least partial or adjunct appointments in the latter unit and be subject to appropriate administrative oversight from the range teaching program leader for their contributions to the five professional areas of the range curriculum. *The goal is that of offering quality education in relevant subject areas by an appropriate number and diversity of qualified faculty.*

Faculty teaching REM courses should exhibit (1) a diversity of backgrounds, (2) substantial professional experience in range management, (3) terminal degrees from a variety of institutions, (4) competence in the assigned areas of specialization, (5) enthusiasm, ability and effectiveness in teaching, (6) aptitude for working closely with students and stimulating independent thinking, (7) close and continuing liaison with the range profession, and (8) efforts to stay abreast of new developments. Participation by the faculty in appropriate professional, scientific, and scholarly endeavors is essential.

The program should demonstrate that it attaches a high priority to quality teaching by its appointments and promotions, by its responsiveness to changes within the profession and in teaching methods, by its provision of a positive and effective environment for learning, by recognizing, valuing, and supporting human diversity, and by profiting from student evaluation of faculty performance. Faculty members who have achieved excellence in teaching should be recognized and rewarded.

Workloads and responsibilities should be allocated according to the interests and competence of individual faculty members and should be such that quality of instruction can be maintained at a high

level. Work assignments should take into account the time needed by the faculty for student counseling, institutional and professional activities, and self-improvement.

Class sizes and student:teacher ratios within courses should be structured and adjusted as appropriate to specific subject matter taught, with a view of enhancing the learning process of students. Similarly, quality counseling and mentoring of undergraduate students should be provided through student: advisor ratios that are not excessive and through assurance of student counseling by faculty who are qualified to provide competent, dedicated advisement in rangeland ecology and management.

To aid in assessment of this standard the self-evaluation report could include information on the credentials of the REM-specific instructors including:

- Curriculum Vitae of the faculty teaching the REM-specific courses and who advise REM program students. These CV's should at minimum include the following sections:
 - ♦ Degree titles/dates/awarding universities.
 - ♦ Brief summary of past experience.
 - ♦ Summary of current formal job appointment identifying the percentage of time assigned to teaching, research, extension, service, advising, and administration. The titles of the courses and the frequency that courses are taught should be specified. The number of undergraduate advisees should be listed.
 - ♦ Honors/Awards.
 - ♦ List of teaching responsibilities (e.g., course titles, frequency that courses are taught, enrollment for each time each class was taught over the last five years, number of student advisees by year over the last five years)
 - ♦ List of selected refereed scientific journal publications and indicate the total number.
 - ♦ List of selected other publications and indicate the total number.
 - ♦ Summary of graduate student advisees.
 - ♦ Summary of extension and outreach activities.
 - ♦ List of service activities.
- A summary table listing faculty teaching, mentoring, and advising responsibilities for all teaching participants of the REM program.
- Description of the role of administrative policies/practices in cultivating excellence in education. In particular:
 - ♦ Discuss policies/practices designed to keep professional educators in touch with practicing rangeland managers and employers of range managers (e.g., professional consulting, participation in professional and scientific meetings, participation in extension/outreach efforts, participation in multi-disciplinary team research).
 - ♦ Discuss policies/practices/programs designed to enhance teaching skills (e.g., specialized instruction for teachers) or enhance/develop new perspective (e.g., sabbatical leave). Evaluate the level of participation, adequacy, and effectiveness of these programs for the current faculty.
- A list of other faculty categories (e.g., affiliate and adjunct professors), provide a brief CV for each and explain how these individuals are used to contribute to program goals, objectives, and teaching.
- A list of the number of teaching assistants and/or lecturer positions normally available, and explain how they are used.
- A list of vacant positions now authorized and for which funds are available. Indicate the dates that current open positions were vacated and the dates when the vacated positions were authorized to be filled and, if applicable, the current status of the searches.
- Description of how the research, extension/outreach, service appointments of the range faculty are used to compliment the teaching and advising objectives of the program.

Accreditation Standard V. Extracurricular Professional Development

Each program should have a student organization, advised by a faculty member, which focuses on professional development of future rangeland scientists/managers (e.g., range club). Participation in section and international SRM meetings should be encouraged and to some degree financially supported by the program.

To aid in assessment of this standard the self-evaluation report could include such items as:

- Summary of the on-campus club structure, student membership, and activities by year over the last five years.
- Summary of the last five years the number of undergraduates who attended annual section and national meetings and the mode of their participation in the meetings (attendance of technical sessions, participation in Plant ID, URME, speaking contest).
- Description of the amount and mechanism of financial support obtained by REM students to help undergraduates participate in professional society meetings.
- Description of how information about professional development is conveyed to students, including the values of membership in a professional society such as SRM. List the membership of REM students in SRM and on campus academic societies (e.g., Sigma Xi, Gamma Sigma Delta, Alpha Zeta).
- Description of the mechanisms in place by which students are informed/aided in pursuit of seasonal or permanent job advertisement (include the efforts of the REM program, the College and the University in assisting students with job placement).
- Summary of the resources available for aiding recruiting efforts and professional development (include the efforts of the REM program, the College, and the University).
- Explanation of how internship opportunities are cultivated with employers and advertised to students.
- Explanation of how research opportunities are cultivated with faculty and advertised to students.

Accreditation Standard VI. Assessment of Courses/Program Effectiveness

The REM program leader will be responsible for coordinating periodic assessment of effectiveness of the courses and the overall program. The REM program leader will also be responsible for coordinating how this feedback is used to strengthen/refine the program.

Documentation associated with these assessment efforts is required by the accreditation review panel to assess the above curricular issues. The suggested assessment activities that should be periodically tracked by the REM program leader in close consultation with the range faculty, and summarized in the self-evaluation document should include:

- A curriculum map showing how key concepts/skills acquired in the “general concept” and “rangeland ecology and management specific concept” coursework build upon each other in a complimentary way as the student progresses through the program.
- Student questionnaire evaluation summaries of the effectiveness of delivery of information for each of the REM-specific courses.
- A qualitative summary of annual exit interviews with graduating seniors conducted to determine their overall perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program. A summary of what the students will be doing upon graduation should also be provided (e.g., broad employment categories, graduate school).
- Survey results of students at different stages of their degree program (this need not be surveyed every year, but should be structured to be conducted a couple times a decade). These surveys should be designed to obtain feedback on advising, complimentary of courses progression, skill development.

- Survey results of alumni with regard to their assessment of what was particularly valuable, what was not, and what they wish they had more preparation through their education experience (this need not be surveyed every year, but should be structured to be conducted a couple times a decade).
- Survey results of employers of alumni with regard to their perceived strengths and weaknesses of the products of the undergraduate education program (this need not be surveyed every year, but should be structured to be conducted a couple times a decade).
- Mechanisms outlined and examples provided by the program leader as to how the feedback from the students and other constituent groups are tangibly integrated into operation of the program.
- Description of student recruitment activities.
- Description of academic standards for admission, retention, and graduation from the REM program.
- Summary of the patterns of student progress through the program (e.g., average length of time to degree, the percentage of students who enter the REM that graduate, what is the net increase/decrease to the program associated with students transferring programs).
- Summary of the analyses of students' academic records (GPA of range graduates compared to GPA of college graduates in other programs).
- Identification and evaluation of the relative importance of the sources of ideas for progress in the educational program (e.g., administration, faculty, students, alumni, employers).
- Total current enrollment by curriculum and class in the REM program. Include graduate students and identifiable pre-REM students.
- A table or graph indicating the number of REM graduates, by major or option, for at least the last five years.
- Summary of the employment record for recent REM graduates.
- Information on non-majors taking REM courses.

Accreditation Standard VII. University Credentials and Support

The SRM accreditation process does not examine the total university; however, it does require that the institution be accepted by its regional accrediting agency. Also, there must be evidence that the institution has the capacity/commitment to provide consistent base support for a quality education program.

To aid in assessment of this standard, the self-evaluation report could include such items as:

- Documentation that the institution is accepted by its regional accrediting agency.
- Description of how the institutional capacity/commitment is sufficient for providing consistent base support for a quality education program. In particular, the report should address the adequacy of:
 - ♦ library services (e.g., paper and electronic access to scientific publication resources relevant to range education)
 - ♦ classroom, laboratory, and field instruction facilities
 - ♦ hiring and retention of core REM faculty (salary competitiveness may be illustrated by comparing with a national/regional summary of salary for faculty grades in similar disciplines, e.g., the annual national survey entitled “Oklahoma State University Faculty Salary Survey” tracks salary information in universities by discipline, region, and employment title),
 - ♦ use of tenure of and promotion criteria with feedback loops that support excellence in education
 - ♦ offices
 - ♦ staff support

PROCEDURES FOR ACCREDITING INSTITUTIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF PROFESSIONAL RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

The first step in the process associated with making an initial application for accreditation (1a) is slightly different than for re-accreditation (1b). After the first step, the accreditation procedures are the same.

1a) Procedure for an initial application for accreditation:

A program is eligible to make an initial application for accreditation if it:

- Offers a curriculum which meets standards set forth in this document and
- Has offered a similar curriculum for five years.

If these criteria have been met, the REM Program Leader sends a letter to the EVP at least six (6) months prior to a proposed on-site visit indicating that, having studied the current STANDARDS and PROCEDURES and consulted with the appropriate members of the University Administration; the institution desires an accreditation examination and is ready to prepare the confidential self-evaluation report. The Chairman of the PAC and the EVP are available to answer questions/provide advise regarding preparation of the report. In response, the EVP will write a letter to the institution's identified administrative officer (sending a copy of the letter to the REM Program leader) advising of the time necessary to prepare self-evaluation reports and the costs associated with the review (accreditation fee and VT travel costs). The letter will include the web address through which the Accreditation Standards can be accessed. The SRM recommends that the on-site review by the VT should be scheduled while classes are in session. The letter shall request that the institution's identified administrative officer respond to the EVP four (4) months prior to the on-site review. The letter shall also specify that the costs of the review will be an application fee set by the Board of Directors (\$1,000 US), the actual travel expenses of the VT, and any costs associated with preparing the documentation for the VT review.

1b) Procedure for re-accreditation:

If an institution is already accredited, the first re-accreditation review normally occurs five years after the initial accreditation. Subsequent re-accreditation reviews normally follow at 10-year intervals. The BOD may request an interim examination if there is a unique change at the institution (e.g., drastic downsizing of faculty numbers) that brings into question whether the program is still capable of meeting the Accreditation Standards. This review would follow re-accreditation procedures outlined below.

At least one year before a re-accreditation decision is due, the SRM EVP shall write the current REM program leader of the institution to remind the leader that a re-accreditation deadline is approaching. If the program leader indicates they would like to proceed, the EVP writes to the institution's chief administrative officer (sending a copy of the letter to the program leader) advising of the time necessary to prepare self-evaluation reports and the costs associated with the review (accreditation fee, VT travel, and other costs). The letter will include the web address through which the Accreditation Standards can be accessed. The letter shall request that the institution's identified administrative officer respond to the EVP as to the general time frame during the academic year when a re-accreditation review would be convenient for the on-site visit. The letter shall also specify that the costs of the review will include an application fee set by the Board of Directors (\$1000 US), the actual travel expenses of the VT, and the costs associated with preparing the documentation for the

VT review. The letter should also ask if any circumstances might warrant postponement of the re-examination. If a postponement by the program leader or identified administrative officer is sought, the EVP is empowered to postpone the re-accreditation review if extenuating circumstances warrant. The EVP should keep the BOD and the PAC apprised regarding the postponement and rationale for the decision. Normally, postponement will not be considered beyond two (2) years.

- 2) At least four (4) months prior to the proposed on-site visit, the institution's identified administrative officer writes to the EVP formally requesting an accreditation review.
- 3) A VT is appointed by the PAC Chair in consultation with the EVP and the PAC members and the REM Program Leader of the institution being reviewed.
- 4) The VT Chair advises the REM Program Leader on the details of the on-campus visit including persons to be interviewed (students, faculty, administrative officers, alumni, and employers of alumni). The VT Chair and the REM Program Leader will set dates that permit the VT to spend at least two full days on campus while the institution is in session. To accommodate the review process, the timing of the VT meetings should not conflict with major events that would inhibit the VT's need to visit with students, faculty, administrative officers, alumni, and employers of alumni.
- 5) One month before the on-campus visit, the REM Program Leader provides the EVP with 12 paper and a digital (pdf format) copies of the self-evaluation report for distribution to the PAC and the VT. The Program Leader marks the report "CONFIDENTIAL", and it is treated as such by all parties involved.
- 6) Before leaving the campus, the VT will provide a preliminary report to the University administrator(s), REM Program leader, and REM Faculty. The facts of the report will be checked with representatives of the program as necessary. It must be recognized by all that the VT report reflects the evaluation, synthesis, and judgment of the VT only (i.e., the BOD speaks for the SRM on accreditation decisions, with the VT and PAC offering their perspectives to help the BOD have the full range of information it needs to make an accreditation decision).
- 7) Within one month after the visit, the VT Chairman submits the draft report to the identified administrative officer of the institution being reviewed, with copies to the REM Program Leader, VT, PAC Chair, and EVP.
- 8) The identified administrative officer is requested to provide written comment on the report's factual accuracy within two weeks after receiving the draft report.
- 9) In the week following receipt of the identified administrative officers comments (or after the two week window has elapsed for response by the identified administrative officer) the EVP will send copies of the VT report and comments from the identified administrative officer to the PAC members and BOD.
- 10) Within 30 days after receiving the final VT report, the PAC meets with the VT chair to review and discuss the VT report, the comments of the identified administrative officer and the school's self-evaluation report. The REM Program Leader should be available in the later stages of this group's deliberation to clarify issues that may arise during this meeting. At the end of this meeting the PAC votes to recommend to the BOD that the accreditation application be granted or denied. The PAC member who was on the VT drafts a Report to the Board with a supporting summary and the specific recommendations for BOD consideration.

- 11) The PAC chair presents an oral and written recommendation to the BOD at its next scheduled meeting.
- 12) The BOD votes to grant or withhold accreditation. If the accreditation application is approved the BOD sets the effective dates in accordance with SRM bylaws, namely: “In establishing effective dates of accreditation, the initiation date shall coincide with the date of the BOD decision, and the terminating date shall be of June 30 of the terminal year as set by the Board.” The normal period for accreditation is five years after the first time a program has been accredited and ten years after subsequent accreditations. However, the BOD may request a shorter-than-normal interval for re-examination to monitor progress on deficiencies that were not enough to prevent accreditation but were identified as items that needed to be rectified. This review would follow all specified re-accreditation procedures.
- 13) As soon as possible after the BOD decision, SRM President provides verbal notification of the BOD decision to the program leader. As soon as possible after this courtesy notification, the SRM President will send by registered express mail a formal letter providing notification of the BOD accreditation decision to the identified administrative officer of the institution. Copies of the letter are sent to the REM Program Leader and the regional university accrediting association, as well as to the PAC and VT. Notice of a positive accreditation decision is provided to the public in the next available edition of *Rangeland News*.

Appeal of accreditation decision

If an institution is denied accreditation, it may appeal the decision of the BOD by writing to the SRM President and requesting a review. The request for the review must be made within 30 days after the institution receives formal written notice of the denial. The institution then has 15 days to file with the BOD a written statement of the grounds for its request. The review will be conducted at the next scheduled BOD meeting after receipt of the appeal letter specifying the grounds for reconsideration. The institution will receive a notice at least one month before the date of the BOD review and an accompanying invitation to be present for input during part of the review process.

During the review, the institution may present testimony, written documents, and any other appropriate evidence and argument. It may not be represented by an attorney. It may request the VT chair and the PAC Chair to explain items of concern in the VT report and the recommendation of the PAC. The request for clarification from either or both of the chairs shall be made in the Statement of Grounds for review. The Institution’s expenses at the review are its own responsibility. The Society’s expenses of the review are its own responsibility.

In addition to considering the evidence introduced at the review by the applicant institution, the BOD considers the institution’s self-evaluation report, the VT’s report and any other material upon which the PAC based its recommendation. The BOD shall issue a written statement of its decision in the review, including the facts and reasons that are the basis for its decision, within 30 days after the review. The BOD’s statement shall be published in the next available issue of *Rangeland News* regardless of the outcome.

Re-application for accreditation after denial

If an institution is denied accreditation, the institution must remedy the deficiencies identified by the VT, PAC, and BOD before reapplying for re-accreditation. When the REM Program leader feels that they have addressed the deficiencies, they may reapply for accreditation by writing to the EVP expressing their

desire for an accreditation review (i.e., reinitiating the process beginning at 1a above).

If less than five years have elapsed, the initial letter to the EVP from the REM Program leader should also explain how the deficiencies identified by the previous VT report and BOD letter of decision have been remedied. The PAC will evaluate the new request for accreditation and may recommend that the accreditation review not take place before the five years since the last review have elapsed if the extent and/or sustainability of the identified remedies are deemed to have insufficient merit. In such a case, the EVP would convey the decision of the PAC to the REM Program leader. If the REM Program leader still desires to proceed with an accreditation review, the EVP will write to the institution's identified administrative officer with information about the request by the REM Program leader for an accreditation review and expressing the concerns of the PAC with regard to the extent and/or sustainability of the remedies enacted by the program. The decision of whether then to continue toward accreditation is the responsibility of the institution.

PROGRAM ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE AND VISITATION TEAM CRITERIA

Program Accreditation Committee Appointment Criteria

The PAC shall consist of nine members. Each year three members are appointed for a three-year term by the SRM First Vice-President. Accreditation of university range management programs can be successful only if the process and procedures are carried out by recognized peers. For this reason the panel shall have a composition of at least five members of university faculty with the rank of associate professor or higher from accredited REM programs. Two members of the PAC will be from a federal land management or research agency, or non-governmental organization. Two members of the PAC will be from a non-accredited university with a rangeland or natural resource program. It is recommended that the incoming president seek advice from current PAC members for new appointees. Appointments to the PAC shall be made on a staggered basis so that three members are appointed annually depending on the year. In the case of an unfinished term of office, the SRM president will appoint a successor who will complete the term. A panel member may serve for more than one term.

The chair of the PAC is appointed by the SRM president; the incoming chair must have at least one year of experience as a PAC member. The chair may serve for more than one year if that is the desire of the successive SRM presidents.

Visitation Team Appointment Criteria

The VT shall be composed of four SRM members appointed by the PAC chair in consultation with the PAC members and the leader of the program to be reviewed. The composition of the VT shall include two associate or full professors from an REM Program (at least one of those from a SRM Accredited Program), one non-academic with knowledge and interest in academic range management programs, and the EVP (or a representative named by the EVP) who shall serve as a non-voting member of the VT. At least one member of the PAC must be part of the four-person VT. The PAC chair will designate who will serve as the VT chair. The VT chair must have had previous VT experience. It is strongly recommended that at least one of the other VT members should also have had previous VT experience.

Members of the visitation team do not receive honoraria, although charges to cover travel expenses are made against the school for the visitation. The Chairman of the visitation team should provide each member with expense account forms regularly used by the SRM, and these should be submitted to the Society as soon as practicable following the visit. The EVP will then bill the institution for the total travel expense of the VT.

Instructions for the Visitation Team

The primary role of the VT is to develop a report to the PAC on the strengths and weaknesses of the program. This report will be based on 1) the self-evaluation report prepared by the program being reviewed and 2) the on-campus visit by the VT. The purposes of the visit are to:

- Create a review environment where there is an opportunity for an exchange of ideas and experience among the VT and program participants, with the discussion targeted at providing an ultimate benefit for the visited institution.

- Help the institution and the program to constructively assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats relating to the current and future prospects for the REM program.
- Verify the accuracy of the materials presented in the self-evaluation reports relative to the accreditation standards.
- Assess, both quantitatively and qualitatively, factors that cannot be documented in the written reports but can nonetheless have an important role in the success of the program for good or bad. Some of these items are: intellectual atmosphere, the morale and professionalism of the faculty and staff, the caliber of the student body, the culture of the interaction/attitudes between administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni and potential employers of students.

Discussions should always maintain a friendly, constructive, professional demeanor (i.e., the visit is never to have the tone of a prosecutorial inquisition).

A necessary element of any successful accreditation program is that the review process be conducted with consistency and transparency. Therefore, each member of the VT will read the accreditation standards outlined in this document prior to initiating the review and will strongly adhere to making oral and written comments in light of how well the applicant program meets the accreditation standards in this document. It is **not** the role of the VT to offer comment on whether the program should be accredited! Rather, the VT provides to the PAC a verification of the self-evaluation report and corroborative insights gleaned from the site visit as to what the program is doing and how well the program is doing it.

Procedures During the Visitation Team Campus Visit

Each member of the VT should receive the self-evaluation report and all supporting documents at least two weeks in advance of the campus visit. Each member of the visitation team should assume the responsibility of reading these materials prior to the start of the site visit. Analysis of the self-evaluation report prior to the visit should be useful in helping to fine-tune the itinerary for the visit. The VT chair should use the initial impressions of the VT to advise the program leader as early as possible in advance of the visit which topics the VT wishes to look at in most detail and the priority and approximate amount of time to be spent on the various elements of the review.

The VT customarily spends two to three days at the institution. An example itinerary for a typical VT visit to campus follows:

Evening prior to campus meetings

The visitation team should try to meet the evening before the on-campus appointments to discuss final visit itinerary and logistics. A tentative work plan should be developed and, if desirable, assignments should be made regarding specific tasks to members of the committee to aid efficient fulfillment of the VT responsibilities. During parts of the coming to days the team may split up if the team chairman finds that necessary to accomplish the visitation tasks.

The morning of the first day

The members of the team should meet early with the REM program leader to review logistics and be briefed on any unique sensitivities that may come up during the course of the visit. If logistics allow this brief introductory meeting could be followed by a brief introduction to key administrators within the university (these introductory visits have often been handled effectively at a breakfast meeting).

Events scheduled for the first day or morning of the second day

- Meet alone with the program leader.
- Meet individually (or in small subgroups depending upon the size of the program) with REM faculty.
- Meet with faculty from units providing general concept classes in support of REM program.
- Tour the support facilities (e.g., library, computer facilities, laboratories)
- Visit alone with the REM students (this is often best done if the meeting occurs over lunch with free food to the students to encourage attendance and a more relaxed atmosphere).
- Meet alone with staff.
- Meet alone with teaching assistants/lecturers.
- Meet alone with recent graduates (if possible).
- Meet alone with employers (if possible).

The evening of the first day

The VT should meet either for dinner or immediately thereafter so that individual members can review/cross-check their findings in the context of perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the program. Any perceived discrepancies between the self-evaluation report and the information gleaned from the various meetings during the day should be discussed.

The second day

The agenda for the morning and early afternoon of this day should have more flexibility built into than on the first day, so that the team has the latitude to follow-up on issues that may have emerged the previous day. Time should be scheduled for the afternoon of this day for the team to begin to draft the items that will go into the VT report.

The morning of the third day

Meet with program leader, REM faculty, and upper administrators of the university to review the VT perceptions of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It has been the experience of past VT's that these exit meetings are more productive if the VT meets with each of these groups separately.

The visit should conclude no later than noon of the third day.

The Visitation Team Report

For directions and details, see items 6-9 under Procedures for Accrediting Institutions for the Teaching of Professional Rangeland Management, subsection 1b) Procedure for re-accreditation.