Proposal: Centralizing Specialized Accreditation

1. Background.

a. Idaho State University has approximately 80 undergraduate and graduate degree programs that require a specialized accreditation evaluation. Specialized accreditation councils, boards and associations serve as gatekeepers and have created standardized requirements that programs must achieve and maintain to remain in compliance. The timeline between evaluations by the accreditation organizations vary between five and ten years. The accrediting organization’s standards are used to evaluate a program’s framework, curriculum requirements, learning activities, and student learning outcomes, as well as other requirements.

b. Typically, a specialized accreditation evaluation cycle starts about one-year from the projected accreditation date. In most cases, it begins when the Program Manager/Director and the University President or Vice President of Academic Affairs receiving an official notification that a program will commence the evaluation process on a specific date. The Associate Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness has limited oversight of specialized accreditation, formal processes are lacking. Normally, the Program Manager/Director will conduct the self-evaluation. Once received by the accrediting organization, that accrediting organization will complete a paper review of the self-study and conduct a site visit. Based on the site visit, the accreditor will provide the College Dean a written report. The Program Manager/Director will then respond to the report’s findings.

c. Currently, Idaho State University does not centrally manage specialized accreditation. The Program Managers/Directors are independently responsible for completing the process. Some Colleges send their self-evaluations and final report responses to Institutional Effectiveness before being sent to their accreditors but there isn’t a standardized process in place. If this occurs, this step allows the Institutional Effectiveness staff the ability to provide recommendations to the Colleges, which could potentially avoid a program from receiving negative actions by the accreditor.

d. Over the last 90-day period, when Institutional Effectiveness has received the final report responses requiring review and approval, some have been received on the same day as the accrediting organization’s deadline. The issue with timeliness of the reports did not allow the IE staff time to recommend changes in areas that may have required additional clarification. It also did not leave time for the University President time to review the final document. In another instance, a College failed to respond to an accreditation organization’s final report by its deadline. As a result, the College was at risk of losing its accreditation, an action that would have adversely impacted students.
2. **Problem Statement.** The decentralization of specialized accreditation does not provide for adequate oversight by ISU’s administration. There is a potential of a missed step occurring in the process and it affecting a program’s accreditation and the students.

3. **Recommendations.**
   a. The IEAC sanctions the centralization of specialized accreditation and takes an active role by receiving updates on specialized program evaluations
   b. Each college creates a College Accreditation/Assessment Coordinator
   c. Intuitional Effectiveness’ role in the process is formalized by requiring colleges to send in their self-assessments and final-report responses 15-days prior to their accreditors’ due date
   d. Institutional Effectiveness establishes a link on the IEAC website and provides support documents to the colleges
   e. Institutional Effectiveness continues to refine the consolidated document containing program accreditation timelines and the fee requirements
   f. Institutional Effectiveness creates a list of Colleges’ Specialized Accreditation Officers and Program Managers who are responsible for specialized accreditation

4. **Roles.**
   a. **Institutional Effectiveness Program Manager:**
      1) Serves as Institutional Effectiveness’ specialized accreditation point of contact and tracks specialized accreditation requirements with the colleges
      2) Coordinates with the College’s Specialized Accreditation Officer to review the self-evaluation and the final-report response
      3) Coordinates with the Colleges Specialized Accreditation Officer when the accrediting organization requires administrative representation during a site visit
      4) Provides information to the IEAC on specialized accreditation requirements
      5) Serves as ISU’s primary point of contact for all specialized accreditation organizations
   b. **College Specialized Accreditation/Assessment Officer:**
      1) Each College establishes a College Specialized Accreditation/Assessment Officer who is responsible for managing the College’s accreditation and assessment programs. The College may select more than one representative depending on the number of accredited programs they supervise
      2) Coordinates directly with the Program Manager/Director and the accrediting organization for the report requirements and site visits
      3) Works with the Institutional Effectiveness Program Manager to track the accreditation fees, self-evaluation, final-report requirements and timelines
      4) Provides the Institutional Effectiveness Program Manager with site visit requirements for administration
c. **Institutional Effectiveness & Assessment Council:**
   1) Responsible for oversight of the Institution’s planning and assessment programs, of which, specialized accreditation is part of assessment
   2) Establishes policy and receives updates from the Institutional Effectiveness Program Manager on the status of the upcoming and completed specialized evaluations

5. **Conclusion.** By creating the Colleges’ Accreditation/Assessment Officers and formalizing processes and existing organizational structures, the outcome will be an increase in the visibility and understanding of the University’s specialized accreditation requirements.