

*Staff from accredited postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disability at Western Carolina University, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, and Virginia Commonwealth University shared lessons learned from their experience going through the program accreditation process in a webinar broadcast in Spring 2025. Here are their top 10 recommendations to other programs that are considering pursuing accreditation.*

1

### Start Early and Get Organized

The panelists emphasized beginning the self-study and accreditation process well in advance. Using Think College’s [evidence checklist and self-assessment tool](#) can help programs evaluate their readiness.

2

### Engage Institutional Leadership and Other Key Colleagues

Securing administrative support and understanding your institution’s internal accreditation requirements are crucial steps before beginning the process.

*“We definitely reached out to our dean... to talk to her about accreditation and what processes we needed to go through.”*  
—Jaclyn Camden

3

### Ensure Staff Readiness and Buy-in

Staff involvement is essential. Programs should provide training, assign responsibilities, and ensure all team members understand accreditation expectations.

4

### Save Everything: Documentation is Key

Keeping thorough records of policies, student outcomes, and program data will help streamline the self-study process.

*“Start to save everything. Save every slideshow, every email, every handbook version, every piece of raw data... You will end up needing them for your evidence.”* —Christi Kasa

5

### Develop Formal Policies and Procedures

Accreditation requires programs to have clear, written policies in areas such as academic participation, independent living, and student supports.

*“We needed to write more formal policies. We had a lot of practices, but they weren’t written into a policy.”* —Christi Kasa

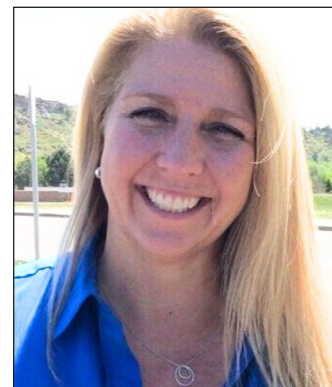
6

### Prepare for the Site Visit with Thoughtful Planning

Programs should secure space, schedule meetings, and ensure students, faculty, and partners are well-informed about the visit.



**Kelly Kelley, PhD**  
Western Carolina University



**Christi Kasa, PhD**  
University of Colorado at Colorado Springs



**Jaclyn Camden, MEd NCC**  
Virginia Commonwealth University

# 7

## Provide Clear Information for Students and Families

Accreditation helps refine policies, expectations, and program details, improving accessibility and communication for students and families.

*“We really revamped and redid our student handbook... and the manual now lives on our website.”* —Jaclyn Camden

# 8

## Use Accreditation to Strengthen Program Quality and Sustainability

Accreditation validates program quality and can support funding opportunities, long-term sustainability, and institutional recognition.

*“I always am thinking, what can I do to really legitimize the work we do and to put some backing behind it that will help it stay in existence long after me?”* —Christi Kasa

# 9

## Be Prepared for the Time Commitment

The self-study, site visit, and accreditation process require significant time and effort. Planning and delegating tasks can help manage the workload.

# 10

## Embrace Accreditation as a Growth Opportunity

Accreditation is not about perfection but about continuous improvement. Programs should view it as an opportunity to reflect, enhance quality, and gain recognition.

*“Tangibly, we had gone for the Program of Excellence award at our university several years in a row. We were awarded that right after accreditation. So, it does provide value at the university level and really builds awareness across the board—not just at your university, but everywhere.”* —Kelly Kelley

## Final Thoughts

While accreditation can be a rigorous and time-intensive process, it offers immense benefits, from strengthening program quality and sustainability to increasing institutional recognition. By starting early, engaging key colleagues, and maintaining thorough documentation, programs can navigate accreditation more smoothly and use it as a tool for long-term sustainability. As the panelists highlighted, accreditation is not just about meeting requirements—it’s an opportunity to showcase excellence and commitment to inclusive higher education.

For additional information on accreditation, visit our [Accreditation Resources by Topic page](#).

Learn more about these programs’ experiences; [access the recording and transcript of the “Accreditation Insights” webinar](#).



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