
Accrediting a New Offering in Higher Education



MINERVA[®]

Keck Graduate Institute (KGI) was founded in 1997 and granted accreditation by WASC Senior College and University Commission in 2004. WASC is the regional accreditor for California, Hawaii, and the Pacific Islands.

KGI has three schools: the original School of Applied Life Sciences, offering both master's and doctoral degrees and best known nationwide for innovating the Professional Sciences Master's degree; the School of Pharmacy started in fall 2014; and Minerva Schools at KGI, also started in fall 2014.

WASC accreditation is a rigorous quality assurance process that involves the submission of extensive and detailed self-evaluation reports by the accredited institution, visits conducted by experienced peer reviewers, and final decisions made by a governing body composed of both public members and highly regarded academics from a variety of institutions. Decisions are based on an institution's demonstrating that it has met the Standards of Accreditation, which reflect good practice in higher education and encompass both capacity (inputs such as financial resources, governance, and qualified faculty) and effectiveness (outcomes such as student achievement, learning, and completion rates). The processes are carefully designed and implemented to ensure deep examination of all aspects of the institutions and to verify compliance with these Standards.

KGI and Minerva Project entered into an affiliation in spring 2013, under which KGI would establish the Minerva Schools at KGI (MSKGI) and seek approval of the relationship between KGI and Minerva, as well as the programs that MSKGI would offer. The affiliation was based on the shared values of innovative educational programs, applied learning, and global importance and relevance. In summer 2013, KGI submitted two related proposals and extensive documentation to WASC, through the process called Substantive Change. The proposals set forth the establishment of MSKGI and asked for approval of both the relationship between KGI and Minerva Project and of the first of the five planned undergraduate degrees to be offered by MSKGI, the Bachelor of Science in Social Sciences.

In the six months leading to the first submission to WASC, the MSKGI team worked on the legal agreements and the two proposals, preparing hundreds of pages of documentation and supporting material. The proposal for the first degree — and each of the later proposals for the four additional degrees — included detailed information about the need for the program, its fit with KGI’s mission, the development and internal approval of the program, the philosophy underlying the program offering, the curriculum and student learning outcomes, the Minerva Active Learning Forum, assessment of student learning and program review, the qualifications and sufficiency of the faculty and staff, and the resources that support the program, including student services, library, residential life, and financial resources, and more.

The initial WASC approval process, covering the creation of Minerva Schools at KGI and the first degree, involved several stages:

1. Review by counsel and WASC staff of the legal agreement between KGI and Minerva, under which KGI has control and authority over the fiscal and academic elements of MSKGI. Approval by staff was given, permitting the process to move forward.
2. Submission of the two initial proposals in October 2013 and review by a team of three WASC peer reviewers, who studied the proposals and related documentation and held a two-hour conference call meeting with leaders of KGI and MSKGI to answer questions about the proposals.
3. A one-day visit, held in December 2013, in which the three WASC reviewers met at the offices of MSKGI to review documents and meet in person with the KGI president, representatives of MSKGI, and Minerva Project. This visit was documented in a detailed report submitted to the Commission’s Structural Change Committee and the full Commission.

4. Review by the Structural Change Committee of the WASC including examination of KGI proposals and the team report and a face-to-face meeting of the full committee with the KGI president and representatives of MSKGI at the Commission's February 2014 meeting.
5. Review and approval by the full Commission, which also included an appearance of the KGI president and other MSKGI representatives at the full Commission meeting held in February 2014.

Approval was granted by the Commission at its meeting on February 20, 2014. Following that approval, KGI submitted proposals for each of its additional undergraduate degrees. These included the BA in Arts & Humanities (approved March 12, 2014), the BS in Computational Sciences (approved March 12, 2014), the BS in Natural Sciences (approved May 15, 2014) and the BS in Business (approved April 8, 2015).

Each proposal was approved by the Commission after a full review by a panel of the Substantive Change Committee and a conference call between the panel and the KGI president and other representatives culminating in a report to the Commission and KGI. Finally, the Commission has mandated a follow-up visit to MSKGI to be held in Fall 2016 to evaluate how effectively these programs have been implemented.

Minerva Schools at KGI

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