

TO: ACICS-Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties
FROM: Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools
DATE: December 22, 2010
SUBJECT: Final Criteria, Proposed Criteria and Other Information

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I. FINAL CRITERIA REVISIONS

At its December 2010 meeting, the Council reviewed specific areas of the ACICS *Accreditation Criteria* outlined in Section I. The language contained in Section I was previously reviewed by ACICS constituents or reflects a clarification of previously approved criteria.

The Council has updated the respective sections of the *Accreditation Criteria* to reflect all final criteria revisions. To obtain a current copy of the *Accreditation Criteria*, please visit our Web site at www.acics.org. The *Accreditation Criteria* can be found in the **Publications** section of the Web site.

The following criteria were previously reviewed and have been accepted as **final, effective immediately** (new language is underlined, ~~deleted language is struck~~):

Explanation of Changes

The Department released final regulations implementing accreditation provisions of the Higher Education Act in November 200, effective July 1, 2010. Provisions regarding due process and authority of the ACICS review board were reviewed by Council and were approved as proposed in August 2010 and as final Criteria in December 2010.

A. REVIEW BOARD APPEALS PROCESS

2-3-600 - REVIEW BOARD APPEAL PROCESS

For those institutions that appeal to the Review Board a denial action as described in Sections 2-3-301 and 2-3-304 or a suspension action as described in Sections 2-3-402 and 2-3-404, the Council has established procedures designed to provide due process.

2-3-601. Purpose and Authority of Review Board. The Review Board is a separate, independent appeals body established by the Council for the purpose of hearing appeals by institutions for actions specified in Sections 2-3-301, 2-3-304, and 2-3-402.

2-3-602. Appointment of Members. The Review Board shall consist of fifteen (15) persons, all of whom have had experience in accreditation, who are appointed to

three-year terms. A person appointed shall not have been a commissioner within one year prior to appointment.

A Review Board panel of three to ~~five~~ seven persons, depending on the scope and complexity of the matter or institution being reviewed, will be designated by the Council from the entire Review Board to hear an appeal from an institution. The Council also will designate one member of the Review Board panel to serve as chair. The selection and actions of the panel are subject to ACICS conflict of interest policies.

2-3-603. *Jurisdiction and Authority.* The Review Board is empowered to review, upon notice of appeal timely filed, actions specified in Sections 2-3-301, 2-3-304, and 2-3-402. The Review Board panel has the authority to:

- (a) affirm the decision of the Council; ~~or~~
- (b) amend the decision of the Council;
- (c) reverse the decision of the Council; or
- ~~(d)~~ remand the case to the Council with recommendations for further consideration.

The Review Board panel may amend or reverse the decision of the Council or remand the case to the Council for further consideration only ~~It may remand the case~~ if it finds the decision was:

- (i) arbitrary, capricious, or otherwise in substantial disregard of the Accreditation Criteria, or
- (ii) not supported by substantial evidence in the record on which the Council took the negative action.

The Review Board panel cannot amend or reverse the decision of the Council or remand the decision based on argument by the appellant that the Council action was disproportionate to the violations cited. The Review Board panel is further limited in that it has no jurisdiction or authority concerning the reasonableness of the Accreditation Criteria.

A determination by the Review Board panel to affirm the Council's decision is effective immediately upon the Review Board panel's action. A determination by the Review Board panel to amend, reverse, or remand the Council's decision will be referred to the Council for implementation and further action.

Except as noted below, Review Board panels will not consider any evidence that was not in the record before the Council. Documents reviewed by or available to evaluation teams are not considered to be part of the record unless they are appended to the team report or the institution submits them to the Council as part of the institution's response to the evaluation team report.

An exception to the policy on evidence will be made where a final adverse action is based solely on the failure of an institution to comply with the standards of financial stability. In that case, the institution on one occasion may seek review of significant financial information that was unavailable to the institution prior to the determination of the adverse action and that bears materially on the financial deficiencies identified by the Council. The Financial Review Committee will determine if the new financial information submitted by the institution is significant and material. If these criteria are met, the Financial Review Committee will provide a report of its review to the Council, which then will reconsider its adverse action in light of the new information. If the Council reaffirms the adverse action, the Financial Review Committee report and the result of the Council's recommendation will become part of the record under review before the Review Board.

The panel acts on behalf of the entire Review Board. Therefore, a decision of a Review Board panel is final and will not be considered further by the full Review Board. In cases remanded to the Council for reconsideration, ~~any recommendations of the Review Board panel, except the directive to reconsider, shall not bind or limit the Council in any way~~ the appeals Review Board panel will identify specific issues that the Council must address. ~~In~~ With respect to a Review Board panel decision that is implemented by or remanded to the Council, the Council will act in a manner consistent with the Review Board panel's decisions or instructions.

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Explanation of Changes

The Council approved a change to prohibit an institution that is not yet accredited by ACICS from making any statement regarding its application for accreditation.

B. APPENDIX C- STATEMENT OF ACCREDITATION

An institution is not permitted to use such statements as “fully accredited” or “accredited” without including the name of ACICS. An institution will not use or publicize the term “accredited” unless it is in fact accredited by ACICS or another recognized agency, or it has affirmative authority under state law. Any reference to stated authority for status as “registered”, “approved”, or “accredited” must include the name of the state extending the approval and must accurately identify the state agency. An applicant for ACICS accreditation may not disclose this fact in any manner. ~~that implies that accreditation is imminent or guaranteed.~~

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Explanation of Changes

The Council approved that an institution may approve an appeal and allow a student to exceed 150% of the standard time frame for a program, provided that the student is not charged additional tuition or fees of any kind.

C. APPENDIX D- STANDARDS OF SATISFACTORY PROGRESS

The institution must have an appeal process for students who do not meet the requirements of the institution's satisfactory academic progress policy. When an institution grants a student's appeal for mitigating circumstances, the student will be placed on a specified period of probation and will be considered making satisfactory academic progress during that period.

If a student is not making satisfactory academic progress, the institution may place the student in an extended enrollment status. A student placed in an extended enrollment status is not eligible for financial aid. However, all credits attempted count toward the 150% of the normal program length even if the student is on extended enrollment. Grades may be replaced if that is the institution's written policy. At the discretion of the institution, a student with an approved appeal who ~~In no case can a student~~ exceeds one and one-half times the standard time frame as defined by the institution either as a regular student or in an extended enrollment status ~~and~~ may receive the original academic credential for which he or she enrolled, provided that there are no additional financial obligations to the student.

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Explanation of Changes

The Council approved changes in the Accreditation Criteria to clarify the process of reaccreditation and self-study submission.

D. 2-1-300 - NEW GRANT OF ACCREDITATION

~~Before December 31 of the last year of the period for which accreditation has been granted, it is the responsibility of the institution to file an application for a new grant of accreditation. The institution is invited to reapply 18 months prior to the expiration of an existing grant. It is the responsibility of the institution to file an application and remit the appropriate fees for a new grant of accreditation by October 31st of the year prior to last year of the grant of accreditation. This also involves submission of the institution's Self Study, with supporting documents. The accreditation previously granted to an institution expires automatically with the passage of time unless extended by an action taken by ACICS. An extension of the previous grant cannot exceed one year, and not more than one extension may be given except for extraordinary circumstances over which the institution has no control. The Council, at its discretion, may direct an unannounced visit to occur at an~~

~~institution about which it has received adverse information or when general operations of the institution may be called into question. Procedures for unannounced visits are described in Appendix B.~~

II. PROPOSED CRITERIA REVISIONS

Explanation of Changes

The Council proposes modifications to Criteria to strengthen and clarify doctoral program standards.

A. DOCTORAL DEGREE

INTRODUCTION

In addition to the general standards in Chapter 1, which apply to all institutions, the following standards apply specifically to doctoral degree programs. Institutions may confer only professionally-oriented doctoral degrees. Unlike academic doctoral degrees that prepare students to work in academia or research, professional doctoral degrees are designed to make students experts in their fields and in the workplace. As such, the outcomes for those earning a professional doctoral degree involve using knowledge and techniques to purposefully address problems and opportunities in their workplace. These include degrees such as the J.D., Ed.D., DFA, DBA, etc., but excluding the Ph.D.

3-7-100 - NATURE OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION

The awarding of a professional doctoral degree signifies that, in the judgment of the faculty, the student has attained specialized and practical competence which qualifies the recipient for opportunities and additional responsibilities beyond the master's degree level.

The doctoral degree is to be professionally oriented and must include the following:

(a) coursework which heightens the level of professional expertise in the area or field of study sought.

(b) an understanding of appropriate research methods relevant to the area or field of study sought. Original research, however, is not necessary. The goal of the research is to apply technologies, knowledge, or concepts in a new way to a workplace problem. This provides the student an opportunity to apply knowledge to a high-level issue in the same way he or she might operate at work.

(c) evidence that the coursework enables graduates to function/perform in the area or field of study sought.

To make a doctoral program distinctive, a component shall be designed to include practical research or a ~~capstone-research~~ project, or thesis, or other required academic activities. A doctoral degree program is further designed to provide the mastery of a subject, theory, and methodology in a specific field of study. The program shall have a strategic plan that describes the purpose of the program, provides guidance about its future, and identifies measures used to define its success.

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3-7-300-ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

3-7-301. *Committee Oversight.* The responsibility for developing, modifying, and maintaining the doctoral degree program shall be carried out by a qualified designated committee to include, but not restricted to, faculty and administrators who, at a minimum, possess a doctoral/terminal professional degree in a related subject area. ~~In addition, the committee shall include other professionals or practitioners (between three and five individuals) with similar qualifications not directly employed or affiliated with the institution.~~

3-7-302. *Program Administration.* The administration of the doctoral degree program shall be the responsibility of a qualified individual with appropriate administrative and educational background and experience related to a doctoral degree program. These qualifications must include a doctoral/terminal professional degree in a related subject area. The duties of this individual should be full-time with adequate staff support. The program must require students to work with a well-qualified and credentialed committee knowledgeable in methods of research and in the subject matter, chaired by an appropriately credentialed individual with expertise in the program area.

3-7-303. *Program Advisory Committee.* A program advisory committee, comprised of individuals from similar accredited doctoral programs and representatives of the employers that would be hiring graduates, shall meet at least annually with program administrators and faculty. The committee shall provide advice and guidance about the program, the currency and content of its curriculum, admissions criteria, and internship/practicum opportunities. Members of this committee may also provide information regarding the validity and rigor of the program and the quality of the graduates.

3-7-400 EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

3-7-401. *Objectives.* The objectives of a doctoral degree program reflect the application of an institution's mission to its constituencies. An institution applying for the inclusion of a doctoral degree program shall demonstrate that its programs,

courses, and services are appropriate to its mission and to its specific goals and objectives. Doctoral degree programs should emphasize both mastery of subject matter and an understanding of related research and research methodology. Specific program objectives must be clearly stated.

The practical application of research methods must be emphasized in professional doctoral degree programs. This emphasis implies development of the student's ability to integrate and apply ~~original (if appropriate) and practical~~ research ~~into the subject matter to~~ issues related to the discipline and its knowledge base as used in industry.

~~Doctoral degrees must emphasize the practical application of the research methods conducted and specific program objectives must be clearly stated.~~

3-7-403. Education Requirements. The number of credits required for the doctoral degree shall be, at a minimum, 90 semester hours, ~~120~~135 quarter hours, or their equivalent, of course work beyond the bachelor's degree, ~~plus a~~ This includes credit for the ~~capstone~~ research project/thesis or other required academic or professional activities.

The doctoral degree normally is earned over three to five years or the equivalent for full-time students. Limitations on the time to degree for part-time students need to be clearly outlined. Statutes of limitations for program completion and course work must be clearly disclosed to students and included in the institutional catalog, as well as on the enrollment agreement.

For certain first-professional degrees whose structure differs from that of other professional doctoral degrees, the required credit hour total and expected time to degree shall conform to what is typical for the field.

The catalog must provide a detailed explanation of the required courses in the program, as well as a description of the required activities and research elements necessary to complete the program.

3-7-404. Curriculum. The curriculum shall quantitatively and qualitatively approximate the standards at other institutions offering comparable degrees. Instructional procedures, texts, materials, and technology shall be appropriate to the purposes, curriculums, and standards of collegiate institutions. Evidence shall be provided that curricular offerings require the appropriate use of research and library resources.

The program must be designed for each student to accomplish specified goals and objectives and contribute to competence in the subject area or profession at an advanced level. Such activities and requirements must be approved by a designated individual and at least two additional individuals within the respective field of study with appropriate credentials.

The ~~capstone~~ research project or other required academic or professional activities must be reviewed, evaluated, and assessed by a committee as described above. At least one individual on the committee must be from another appropriately accredited institution within the subject area.

For programs that include the following components, credit hours shall be part of the total credits required for program completion and shall be allocated as follows:

- a. Research project or thesis – Credit hours shall not exceed 15 semester hours (22 quarter hours) for the research project.
- b. Independent and directed studies – Credit hours shall not in total exceed 9 semester hours (14 quarter hours) and must consist of an experience(s) that directly relates to and complements the student’s program of studies.
- c. Internship or practicum – An internship or practicum shall be required of students with no or limited experience in the work environment they are be prepared to enter. Credit hours shall not exceed 6 semester hours (9 quarter hours). Credit shall not be awarded for work experience that occurred before the student entered the program or as part of current job

3-7-600 ADMISSIONS

3-7-602. *Evaluation of Applicants.* Institutions should use appropriate techniques to evaluate applicants and to determine whether they have the academic qualifications to ~~benefit from doctoral degree study~~ successfully complete introductory doctoral-level coursework.

International students should have English skills to effectively communicate with faculty, staff, and other students. For non-English speaking students, a TOEFL score of 550 or an equivalent score on an internationally recognized test is required to enter a program offered at a U.S. located institution.

3-7-603. *Transfer of Credit.* Transfer of credit for appropriate master’s or doctoral-level course work from another institution may be granted according to the policy established by the institution. No more than 20% of the credits required for the doctoral degree may be transferred from another institution. Where the institution’s policy allows for transfer of a master’s degree whose content is directly related to that of the doctoral degree, no more than 50% of the required credits for the doctoral program may be transferred. Academic credit shall not be awarded for experiential learning activity.

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Explanation of Changes

The Council proposes clarification that an institution must evidence both in-service training and professional growth to be completed for all faculty.

B. FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PLANS

3-1-543. Faculty Development. Institutions are required to establish faculty development plans including both in-service and/or professional growth activities to enhance faculty expertise. There shall be documented evidence on an annual basis of these development plans and their implementation. For those faculty who are trained in teaching methodology on the postsecondary level and who possess limited related outside employment, the plan should concentrate on content update, e.g., new software, equipment, techniques, etc. ~~For those faculty who are practitioners trained in content rather than teaching methodology, the plan should concentrate on curriculum concepts, new theories and techniques of instruction, and new educational media.~~ Institutions are responsible for demonstrating that these plans are appropriate given each faculty member's training, education, and related work experience and that they provide the proper mix of in-service training and/or professional growth based on the academic and experiential background of the faculty.

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C. DISTRIBUTED ENTERPRISE

Explanation of Proposed Changes

In the March, May and September 2010 Memoranda to the Field, the Council proposed to introduce into the Accreditation Criteria a new type of institution, to be called the distributed enterprise. The proposal is to introduce the distributed enterprise as a new classification of institution in Chapter 3 of Title I, General Policies; explain how an institution qualifying as a distributed enterprise would gain and maintain accreditation in Title II, General Procedures; and ensure the consistent use of terms in Title III, Evaluation Standards.

*Comments from the field have been received and are being reviewed. There were no changes made to the proposed language in the Accreditation Criteria during the December Council Meeting. However, the Council will continue to receive comment. In addition, the Council did approve the fee schedule for the distributed enterprise. The fee schedule can be found in **Section III. For Information Only.***

III. FOR INFORMATION ONLY

A. COHORT DEFAULT RATES

As a result of the most recent reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act 2008, changes were made to the time frames used to calculate institutions' cohort default rates (CDR). In the past, the U.S. Department of Education has used a two-year time frame in its calculation. However, under the new provisions an institution's CDR is calculated as the percentage of the borrowers in the cohort who default before the end of the second fiscal year following the fiscal year in which the borrowers entered repayment. This represents a one year extension of the current default monitoring period. The FY 2009 cohort (borrowers who entered repayment between October 1, 2008 and September 30, 2009) will be the first CDR calculation using the new standard. Thus, an institution's FY 2009 three-year CDR will be the percentage of its borrowers who were included in the 2009 cohort who subsequently default on or before September 30, 2011. Draft rates will be provided to institutions in February of 2012 with official rates released in September of 2012. For more information, visit the U.S. Department of Education's Web site at www.FSADataCenter.ed.gov.

In anticipation of having to comply with the new three-year cohort default standard, the Council reviewed options and strategies to help ACICS institutions remain in compliance. The Council has requested all institutions with cohort default rates approaching thresholds of non-compliance to submit Default Improvement Plans this spring. Institutions are also encouraged to review the informational resources and default prevention and management strategies available from ACICS and the U.S. Department of Education. The Council will closely monitor CDR rate changes, and continue to develop and deliver resources on default prevention. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Sarah Sober ssober@acics.org.

B. ACICS WEB SITE

Please visit the ACICS Web site. It continues to be revised and updated based on Council activities. The site contains revised and detailed information about accreditation, accredited institutions, applications, publications, workshops and special events. New features are now available.

NOTE: All institutions were mailed eight digit IDs and passwords to access the new ACICS website. The information was sent via U.S. postal mail and addressed to the campus director or president of each institution. The institution and corporate username (unless changed by the account holder) is the eight-digit ID. This ID should be used on all future correspondence to and from ACICS. If you have questions about your ID code or our new website, please send an email to ebiz@acics.org.

C. 2011 WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

2011 ACICS WORKSHOP SCHEDULE		
Workshop/Webinar	Date	Location
AWARE Webinar	January 21	Online
Accreditation Workshop	January 27	Florida
Adding Value (IEP) Workshop (hosted)	January 28	Florida
Evaluator Webinar	January 28	Online
AIR/IEP Webinar	January 31	Puerto Rico
Deferral Workshop	February 11	ACICS Office
Retention/ Placement Workshop	February 18	ACICS Office
Initial Applicant Workshop	February 24	ACICS Office
Accreditation Workshop	February 25	ACICS Office
Retention/ Placement Workshop	March 4	ACICS Office
AWARE Webinar	March 18	Online
Evaluator Webinar	March 25	Online
Accreditation Workshop	April 29	ACICS Office
Accreditation Workshop	May 9	Illinois
Accreditation Workshop (hosted)	May 10	Illinois
AWARE Webinar	May 18	Online
Evaluator Webinar	May 25	Online
Initial Applicant Workshop	June 2	Grapevine, TX
Accreditation Workshops (2) Adding Value Workshop (TBA) Evaluator Training Workshop	June 3	Grapevine, TX
Annual Meeting	June 4-5	Grapevine, TX
Deferral Workshop	June 10	ACICS Office
Accreditation Workshop	June 15	Northwest region (TBA)
Adding Value Webinar (TBA)	July 9	Online
Evaluator Webinar	July 29	Online
Accreditation Workshop	August 24	ACICS Office
AIR/IEP Workshop	August 25	ACICS Office
Accreditation Workshop	August 26	ACICS Office
Adding Value Webinar (TBA)	September 9	Online
AWARE Webinar	September 16	Online
Professional Development Meeting	September 29-30	South Carolina
Accreditation Workshop	October 4	Horseshoe Bay, TX
Deferral Workshop	October 7	ACICS Office
Initial Applicant Workshop	October 11	California

Accreditation Workshop	October 12	California
Adding Value Webinar (TBA)	November 4	Online
IRC Training	November 13	ACICS Office
Chair Training	November 18	ACICS Office
Commissioner Training	December 6	ACICS Office

D. DISTRIBUTED ENTERPRISE FEES

Distributed Enterprise Classification Eligibility Application \$500

The processing of this application will involve staff time in examining all the information submitted by the institution; verification of all data; applying ACICS Criteria in determining eligibility of the institution to apply for DEI classification; establishing Personify data; examining historical Council actions, complaints/adverse, and other relevant information on each campus; and communicating with the primary DEI contact person.

Campus Consolidation and Realignment Application (per campus) \$150

This is not a new fee. The designation of the fee may be changed in the Schedule of Fees. Processing will involve intensive review of the eligibility of each campus to be reclassified; verify current and proposed grant expiration dates; accept or decline a preliminary or contingency plan for consolidation and realignment; communicate with the institutions involved; and reassess the consolidation and realignment plan for the final action.

Distributed Enterprise Classification Application \$5,000

This application is accepted from those institutions which were invited to apply following review of the Distributed Enterprise Classification Eligibility Application. Review will involve an intensive analysis of all pertinent information concerning the proposed Academic Administrative Center, the Main Campus, and each Additional Location. The entire consolidation plan will be reviewed for any changes from the original plan submitted by the institution; institution may submit other Additional Location applications. The review will also involve the development of visit planning to the Academic Administrative Center, the Main Campus, and a selection of Additional Locations. A Conditional Approval Pending Classification Evaluation Visits will be developed and sent to the institution. In case of questions, the application may be processed through the Council for an action.

Distributed Enterprise Accreditation Application

Distributed Enterprise Academic Administrative Center \$5,000

Distributed Enterprise Main Campus \$5,000

Distributed Enterprise Additional Location (Each Location) \$2,500

Qualitative and intensive review of the Self-study submitted for the Academic Administrative Center, for the Main Campus, and for each Additional Location. Criteria and administrative rationale will be applied in determining how many and which campuses will be visited. Visit planning will include the size and nature of the on-site visiting teams.

Distributed Enterprise Classification and Accreditation Visits

Fees for all classification and accreditation visits will use the standard ACICS rates for evaluation team visits.

E. PUBLIC COMMENT

ACICS has given high priority to promoting and defending ACICS accreditation, and the quality of education delivered by member institutions. Schools play an important role acting as the eyes and ears of ACICS: that is, looking and listening for opportunities to promote ACICS accreditation, and to correct misinformation that may lead to negative perceptions and attitudes among policy makers, the post-secondary education community and the general public. As you identify those opportunities in communities where you operate, please let us know about them. Send an email to Mr. Quentin Dean at qdean@acics.org and let him know the source of the information and when it appeared.

F. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Council encourages institutions to provide feedback regarding Council operations and procedures. All materials for review during the April 2011 Council Meeting should be submitted by **Friday, February 25, 2011**.

G. ACICS AWARE WEBINAR

The AWARE webinar will be held on Friday, January 21, 2011. If there are any topics of interest in addition to those in this memorandum that you would like to be addressed during the webinar, please send an email to Ms. Terron King at tking@acics.org.

IV. COMMENT FORM – PROPOSED CRITERIA REVISIONS

ACICS ID Code: _____ Date: _____

Name of
Organization: _____

Address: _____

Please check (as appropriate):

Proposed *Accreditation Criteria* revisions:

- Doctoral Degree

Accept as Written Modify (please explain)

- Faculty Development Plans

Accept as Written Modify (please explain)

- Distributed Enterprise

Accept as Written Modify (please explain)

Prepared by: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Please respond by Friday, February 25, 2011 to:

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