

TO: ACICS-Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties  
FROM: Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools  
DATE: August 26, 2011  
SUBJECT: Final Criteria, Proposed Criteria and Other Information

<b><u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u></b>	<b><u>PAGE</u></b>
<b>I. FINAL CRITERIA REVISIONS</b>	<b>3-12</b>
<i>Effective Immediately</i>	
A. Definition and Review of Credit Hour Allocation	3
B. Transfer of Credit	7
C. Faculty Assignments	8
D. Independent Study Contracts	11
E. Monitoring of Excessive Substantive Changes	12
F. Providing Performance Information to the Public	12
 <i>Effective Date To Be Determined</i>	
G. Distributed Enterprise Institution	13
<b>II. PROPOSED CRITERIA REVISIONS</b>	<b>13-19</b>
A. Program-Level Standards for Student Achievement	14
B. Enrollment Agreements	16
C. Satisfactory Academic Progress	16
D. Admissions, Education Requirements and Transfer of Credit Policy for Doctoral Programs	19
<b>III. FOR INFORMATION ONLY</b>	<b>20-23</b>
A. Cohort Default Rates	20
B. ACICS Web Site	20
C. Workshops	21
D. Public Comment	22
E. Public Participation	22
F. ACICS Aware Webinar	22
<b>IV. COMMENT FORM – PROPOSED CRITERIA REVISIONS</b> (Please respond by Monday, September 26, 2011)	<b>23</b>



## I. **FINAL CRITERIA REVISIONS – EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY**

At its August 2011 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](http://www.acics.org). The *Accreditation Criteria* can be found in the **Publications** section of the Web site.

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

### A. **DEFINITION AND REVIEW OF CREDIT HOUR**

#### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*Because accreditors are now required by USDE to review each Title IV institution's policies and procedures and their application in assigning credit hours for purposes of federal financial aid, modifications to the Criteria include a requirement for institutions to have written policies and procedures in place and to reflect on course syllabi assignments for outside preparation that are subsequently included in the evaluation of student learning related to the achievement of course and program objectives.*

*Appendix G has also been modified to reflect a requirement that accreditors report to the Department any systematic or significant noncompliance with the Department's regulations regarding the assignment of credit hours. Any such reports will be provided only on direction by the Council, following a review of institution files.*

*Additionally, as previously announced in an ACICS Advisory, ACICS has implemented and will continue to provide as a service to its members a process to review and verify, upon request, out-of-class preparation where an institution seeks to include these hours of student work in the conversion of clock hours to credit hours for purposes of federal financial aid (see the Clock to Credit Hour Conversion Application under the Accreditation tab at [www.ACICS.org](http://www.ACICS.org)). The USDE has clarified in a communication to all accreditors that the course-by-course review of allowable hours of outside preparation, such as is utilized by ACICS, is the only acceptable approach and that a program-wide approach is not acceptable.*

*The Council will also consider the addition of information to the Criteria describing the Department's definition of a credit hour and equivalent conversion ratios for clock-to-credit hour programs, since these are the definitions that accreditors are required to use*

*in their review of each institution's definition and application of policies and procedures, relative to the assignment of credit hours for purposes of awarding federal financial aid.*

*ACICS will begin development this fall of procedures to implement these new requirements. Questions will be added to the self-study and team report templates, institutions will be asked to upload or provide access to related documentation, evaluators will be trained in a consistent method for evaluating outside preparation (most likely based upon a sample of syllabi and graded assignments plus information from students), and information on this process will be provided to member institutions in writing, in workshops, and through a special webinar.*

*Prior to the implementation of this new evaluation process sometime in 2012, it is expected that eligibility for federal financial aid on the part of ACICS-accredited institutions will not be at risk, since the Department has specifically verified in a Dear Colleague Letter that actions such as those being taken by ACICS will be considered to represent a "good faith effort" to implement the Program Integrity regulations that became effective on July 1, 2011.*

**3-1-516. Course and Program Measurement.** The Council recognizes that institutions must provide for their students a learning environment in which achievement is encouraged. It further recognizes the legitimacy of both traditional (e.g., lecture/laboratory/practicum) and nontraditional (e.g., distance education or independent study) educational delivery methods. A framework for transfer of credit and consistent application of academic credit awards should apply to all of these varied forms of educational delivery.

Institutions, therefore, must demonstrate in written policies and procedures for determining credit hours a knowledge of appropriate academic course and program measurement and correct application of the measurement.

(a) Credit in traditionally delivered programs measured in credit hours must be calculated based on one of the following attribution formulas:

(i) One quarter credit hour equals, at a minimum, 10 classroom hours of lecture, 20 hours of laboratory, and 30 hours of practicum. The formula for calculating the number of quarter credit hours for each course is:  $(\text{hours of lecture} / 10) + (\text{hours of lab} / 20) + (\text{hours of practicum} / 30)$ ;

(ii) One semester credit hour equals, at a minimum, 15 classroom hours of lecture, 30 hours of laboratory, and 45 hours of practicum. The formula for calculating the number of semester credit hours for each course:  $(\text{hours of lecture} / 15) + (\text{hours of lab} / 30) + (\text{hours of practicum} / 45)$ .

The syllabus for each course must provide appropriate content and out-of-class learning activities to support the academic credit awarded for the course. Many courses are a combination of lecture, lab, and practicum. Therefore, the institution should be very careful in allocating the number of hours of each in a particular course.

~~The definition of a~~ A “clock (contact) hour” ~~states that the~~ includes a minimum instructional time ~~is~~ of 50 minutes of supervised or directed instruction and appropriate break(s). Therefore, when calculating conversions from clock to credit hours or allocating credit for courses, institutions must take great care to ensure that scheduled breaks are educationally appropriate. Long periods of instruction with unusually short or no breaks are not acceptable. The institution has the burden of convincing the Council that the breaks are sufficiently long and frequent for the program being taught. Thus, it is rare for an institution to be able to divide by 50 in calculating the credit-hour equivalent of contact hours; usually, the denominator should be 60 or something between 50 and 60.

(b) Credit award rationales for nontraditional delivery of courses or programs (e.g., distance education or independent study) generally . . . .

## **GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS**

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**Syllabus.** A description of how the course will be taught with a planned arrangement of materials and activities. The minimum requirements for a course syllabus consist of the title and course description, course number, course prerequisites and/or corequisites, instructional contact hours/credits, learning objectives, instructional materials and references, topical outline of the course, instructional methods, out-of-class learning activities and assignments, assessment criteria, method of evaluating students, and the date the syllabus was last reviewed. A course syllabus should be reviewed to ensure that it reflects the most recent trends, developments, and instructional materials for the specific subject areas. A current syllabus prepared and utilized by instructors in guiding and directing the learning experience of the students is necessary to ensure the quality of instruction.

## **APPENDIX G. GUIDELINES ON DISCLOSURE AND NOTIFICATION**

These guidelines are designed to inform institutions of the policies of the Council and to guide staff in disclosing information and providing materials to third parties regarding an institution’s accreditation. Many policies are required by federal law and regulation.

The policies presented below are not intended to cover every situation, and the Council exercises considerable discretion in balancing the need for confidentiality in the

accreditation process with the need to disclose information to the public, including students and student applicants, and to other interested third parties, including government agencies. The Council will provide information requested by the U.S. Department of Education that may bear on an institution's compliance with federal student financial aid requirements. Please refer to Title II, Chapter 3 for additional information.

1. The Council maintains and makes available to member institutions, appropriate governmental agencies, and the public complete information regarding its accreditation criteria, policies, and practices; the institutions that it currently accredits, including the dates when the institutions are scheduled to be reviewed for new grants of accreditation; and the names, educational backgrounds, and professional qualifications of its commissioners and senior administrative staff. This information is provided in written documents available from the Council office or on the Council's Web site. These documents include an annual directory of accredited institutions and an annual report, copies of which are forwarded automatically to the U.S. Department of Education, state regulatory agencies, and other recognized institutional accrediting agencies.

2. The Council will notify the U.S. Department of Education, state regulatory agencies, other accrediting agencies, other interested third parties, and the public of all Council actions that affect an institution's grant of accreditation, institutional closings, and of the voluntary withdrawal or expiration of accreditation within 30 days.

In the case of the public, however, the Council will provide written notice of the decisions listed below within 24 hours of its notice to the institution:

(a) A final decision to place an institution on probation or equivalent status.

(b) A final decision to deny, withdraw, suspend, revoke, or terminate the accreditation of an institution. Deferral actions will include an explanation that the institution's application is pending and that additional information has been requested. Negative actions subject to appeal will be denoted with a statement that the action is subject to appeal and is not final unless the institution does not exercise its appeal rights or until the institution's appeal rights have been exhausted. The disclosure of Review Board decisions will be in accordance with the procedures described in Section 2-3-607. The Council retains the discretion and the responsibility to communicate other relevant accreditation information with appropriate agencies and regulatory bodies.

3. Within 60 days of a final negative action, the Council will also make available to the agencies above and the public upon request, a brief statement summarizing the reasons for the negative action determination and the official comments that the institution may wish to make with regard to the Council's decision, or evidence that the affected institution has been offered the opportunity to provide official comment.

4. The Council will inform the U.S. Department of Education of any institution which the Council believes fails to comply with Title IV law or regulations or is engaged in fraud

and abuse or demonstrates systemic noncompliance with respect to use of the Department's definition of credit hour or significant noncompliance regarding conformity with commonly accepted practice in the assignment of credit hours to one or more programs at the institution. The institution will then be given an opportunity to evidence why it is in compliance with Title IV requirements or commonly accepted practice.

5. The Council will notify the public through its Web site and other means, as appropriate, of the following:

(a) at least one year in advance of grant expirations, a listing of all institutions with current grants of accreditation due to expire; and

(b) as soon as practical, a listing of all institutions which have applied for initial grants of accreditation. This notification will include guidance on how third parties may comment on these institutions' qualifications for accreditation.

6. The Secretary of Education's grant of recognition constitutes a "grant of authority" to the Secretary to conduct site visits (both to ACICS and to the institutions) and to gain access to agency records, personnel, and facilities on an announced and unannounced basis.

7. The Council automatically will submit an annual report to the Secretary of Education.

8. The Council will provide information regarding debarment actions on request.

## **B. TRANSFER OF CREDIT**

### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The Council approved adding to its standard for transfer of credit a requirement to notify students regarding any articulation agreements and the transferability of credits in order to avoid charges of misrepresentation under new USDE regulations. Public disclosure of a list of articulation agreements has also been added to reflect the specific language of the USDE regulation.*

**3-1-413. Transfer of Credit.** An institution shall evaluate and consider awarding proper academic credit for credits earned at institutions accredited by agencies recognized by the United States Department of Education. The institution shall establish and adhere to a systematic method for evaluating and awarding academic credit for those courses that satisfy current program course requirements. Written policies and procedures must clearly outline the process by which transfer of academic credit is awarded. The institution shall make public its policies on transfer of credit, including a statement of the criteria established by the institution by which a determination is made with regard to accepting credits from another institution and if applicable, a list of institutions with which the institution has established articulation agreements.

In addition, the institution must provide notification to students as to these articulation agreements and the transferability of the credits in the programs that are offered.

## C. FACULTY ASSIGNMENTS

### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The Council approved language to differentiate between the faculty requirements to teach applied general education and general education.*

**3-3-302. Assignments.** During any academic term, a faculty member shall not be assigned to teach in more than three fields of instruction (e.g., medical assisting, business administration, information technology). Not more than five preparations in different subjects (e.g., Accounting I, Accounting II, Keyboarding I, Business Mathematics, and Business Law) shall be assigned to an instructor during one academic term. Instructors shall be assigned based on their major and minor academic preparation and/or related experience. The size of the faculty shall be appropriate to the total student enrollment.

The requirements for full- and part-time faculty members teaching in the referenced subject areas are as follows:

- (a) A bachelor's degree and appropriate coursework in the assigned subject are required for faculty members teaching applied general education ~~and other academic courses~~. Instructors at a minimum shall have earned 15 semester or equivalent hours of coursework through a combination of hours from associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's level coursework in the area of their teaching assignment.

(b) Instructors teaching general education shall hold a minimum of a master's degree. ~~and will be assigned based on their major and minor academic preparation~~. Instructors shall have a minimum of 18 semester or equivalent hours of coursework in their teaching discipline.

Instructors teaching courses other than general education shall hold bachelor's degrees at a minimum and shall be assigned based on their major and minor academic preparation and/or related experience. However, exceptions to the bachelor's degree requirement may be justified for instructors who have demonstrable current exceptional professional level experience in the assigned field, such as documented coursework in the field, professional certification(s), letters of recommendation or attestations from previous employer(s), letters attesting to this expertise from professional peers not connected to the college, real examples of previous success in the field such as published work, juried exhibits and shows, evidence of a professional portfolio accepted by the college and available for review, and other significant documented experience relevant to the courses to be taught. Minors or related degrees could be considered but will not be the sole determining factor. Duration of time associated with this alternative justification is dependent on the quality and significance of the work experience. The institution must be

able to justify the assignment of any instructor who does not hold a bachelor's degree in the assigned teaching field.

(b) (c) A bachelor's degree is required for faculty members teaching business and business administration courses. If the bachelor's degree is not in the assigned teaching field, at least two years of related work experience or evidence of specialized training or competency in the assigned teaching field is required. The burden is on the institution to demonstrate and justify the qualifications of the faculty to teach their assigned courses.

(e) (d) Faculty members teaching courses not referenced above must demonstrate competency in the assigned teaching field, such as academic or vocational training and credentials, related work experience, licensure, or certification. The burden is on the institution to demonstrate and justify the qualifications of the faculty to teach their assigned courses.

**3-4-302. Assignments.** During any academic term, a faculty member shall not be assigned to teach in more than three fields of instruction. The size of the faculty shall be appropriate to the total student enrollment.

Instructors teaching general education shall hold ~~a master's degree~~ at a minimum of a master's degree. ~~and shall be assigned based on their major and minor academic preparation.~~ Instructors at a minimum shall have earned 18 semester or equivalent hours of coursework in the area of their teaching discipline.

Instructors teaching courses other than general education shall hold bachelor's degrees at a minimum and shall be assigned based on their major and minor academic preparation and/or related experience. However, exceptions to the bachelor's degree requirement may be justified for instructors who have demonstrable current exceptional professional level experience in the assigned field, professional certification(s), letters of recommendation or attestations from previous employer(s), letters attesting to this expertise from professional peers not connected to the college, real examples of previous success in the field such as published work, juried exhibits and shows, evidence of a professional portfolio accepted by the college and available for review, and other significant documented experience relevant to the courses to be taught. Minor or related degrees could be considered but will not be the sole determining factor. Duration of time associated with this alternative justification is dependent on the quality and significance of the work experience. The institution must be able to justify the assignment of any instructor who does not hold a bachelor's degree in the assigned teaching field.

In addition to the degree requirements outlined above, at least one-half of the courses, including those core courses common to nonacademic degree or nondegree programs, shall be taught by faculty members holding graduate degrees, professional degrees such as J.D. or M.D., or bachelor's degrees plus professional certification. This calculation does not apply, however, to courses in fields in which graduate degrees, professional degrees, or professional certifications are not generally available.

**3-5-302. Assignments.** During any academic term, a faculty member shall not be assigned to teach in more than three fields of instruction and preferably in not more than two fields. The size of the faculty shall be appropriate for the total student enrollment.

Instructors teaching general education shall hold ~~a master's degree~~ at a minimum of a master's degree, ~~and shall be assigned based on their major and minor academic preparation.~~ Instructors at a minimum shall have earned 18 semester or equivalent hours of coursework in the area of their teaching discipline.

Instructors teaching courses other than general education shall should hold bachelor's degrees at a minimum and shall be assigned based on their major and minor academic preparation and/or related experience. However, exceptions to the bachelor's degree requirement may be justified for instructors who have demonstrable current exceptional professional level experience in the assigned field, such as documented coursework in the field, professional certification(s), letters of recommendation or attestations from previous employer(s), letters attesting to this expertise from professional peers not connected to the college, real examples of previous success in the field such as published work, juried exhibits and shows, evidence of a professional portfolio accepted by the college and available for review, and other significant documented experience relevant to the courses to be taught. Minor or related degrees could be considered but will not be the sole determining factor. Duration of time associated with this alternative justification is dependent on the quality and significance of the work experience. The institution must be able to justify the assignment of any instructor who does not hold a bachelor's degree in the assigned teaching field.

In addition to the degree requirements outlined above, at least one-half of all lower-division courses and all upper-division courses, including those core courses common to nonacademic degree or nondegree programs, shall be taught by faculty members holding graduate degrees, professional degrees such as J.D. or M.D., or bachelor's degrees plus professional certification. This calculation does not apply, however, to courses in fields in which graduate degrees, professional degrees, or professional certifications are not generally available.

## **D. INDEPENDENT STUDY CONTRACTS**

### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The Council approved language to mandate that independent study contracts be mutually signed by the student and institution.*

**3-1-513. Program Development.** The educational programs shall evidence a well-organized sequence of appropriate subjects leading to an occupational objective, an academic credential, or both. The following apply:

(a) The curricula shall be published in the institution's catalog and shall state objectives specific to each curriculum. Additionally, there shall be a detailed syllabus on file for each course in each curriculum that is made available to each student enrolled in the class. For independent study courses, institutions are required to develop a learning contract signed by the student and the institution that outlines the course objectives and procedures unique to this form of instruction. For practica, externships, and internships, institutions are required to develop a written and mutually signed agreement that outlines the arrangement between the institution and the practicum site, including specific learning objectives, course requirements, and evaluation criteria. The Council's expectations for detailed syllabi, independent study, practica, externships, and internships are outlined in the Glossary.

(b) The courses offered shall be available when needed by the student in the normal pursuit of a program of study. Prerequisites must be indicated. The prerequisite system must assure proper qualifications of students in any given class and provide an increasing level of difficulty as the student progresses.

Institutions may record student progress in clock hours or credit hours as defined in the Glossary. When appropriate, special consideration should be given to remediation and English as a Second Language programs. (For additional information, see Appendix F, Guidelines for English as a Second Language).

## **GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS**

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**Independent Study.** Independent study involves a high level of independence and self-direction on the part of the student to read, conduct research, and complete written examinations, reports, research papers, and similar assignments designed to measure the student's grasp of the subject matter. Under the supervision of a faculty member, a learning contract signed by the student and institution shall be developed which outlines specific learning objectives, texts, supplemental readings, course requirements, evaluative criteria, and examination dates. Because independent study classes are the exception and not the rule, the number of courses that a student will be allowed to take independently should be limited.

## **E. MONITORING OF EXCESSIVE SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES**

*Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The Council approved language to meet a USDE requirement through a combination of changes to the Accreditation Criteria and the addition of more specific procedures.*

### **Title II, Chapter 2—Institutional Changes**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

. . . . The Council shall be notified immediately of substantive changes at an institution, including changes in its mission or objectives, management, ownership, control, educational programs, mode of delivery, name, geographic location, and state or local authority to operate.

The Council shall conduct a new comprehensive on-site evaluation of the institution if proposed substantive changes that have been made or are proposed are sufficiently extensive that the institution's capacity to maintain compliance with accreditation standards requires an immediate assessment. Substantive changes are defined by Council as "extensive" when the types and/or number of changes are so substantial that the nature and scope of the accredited institution will no longer be the same since last evaluated and in its place a new institution has evolved.

## F. PROVIDING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC

### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The Council approved language requiring institutions to routinely provide reliable information to the public on their performance, including student achievement, effective October 1, 2011. This requirement is mandated by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and the language was approved as final since public disclosure of specific performance and student achievement measures is already required of all institutions participating in Title IV, HEA programs, by the USDE.*

*The specific performance measure(s) published in compliance with this requirement are to be chosen at the discretion of the institution. However, this requirement is fulfilled by either of the two student achievement disclosures required by the USDE, effective July 1, 2011: On-Time Graduation Rates or Job Placement Rates. In the Fall 2011 visit cycle, ACICS evaluation teams will evaluate compliance with the USDE requirement of all institutions participating in Title IV, HEA programs. For non-Title IV institutions, compliance with the more general ACICS requirement will be evaluated as of October 1<sup>st</sup>.*

### **3-1-700 – PUBLICATIONS**

It is important for institutions to recognize the value of "truth in advertising" when promoting their operations. Publications must be prepared and presented in a professional manner to reflect favorably upon the institution. Information published must be accurate and factual and reflect the current status of the institution. Only the Council can accept or reject an institution's catalog, and a final decision will not be made based on a draft.

**3-1-701. *Catalog.*** Each institution shall publish and provide to each enrolled student a catalog which complies with Appendix C, "Guidelines for Institutional Publications."

**3-1-702. *Multiple-School Catalog.*** All institutions utilizing a common catalog must be of common ownership. Photographs of the physical facilities of any of the institutions must be captioned to identify the particular institution or campus depicted. The faculty and staff of each institution and the members of the general administration exercising

supervisory responsibility for the group of institutions must be clearly identified with respect to each institution and the overall administration. Any information contained in the catalog that is not common to all institutions in the group should be presented in such a manner that no confusion, misunderstanding, or misrepresentation is possible. For further information, see Appendix C.

**3-1-703. Advertising.** Literature used by an institution must be presented in such a manner as to be factual with respect to services offered or benefits promised. An English translation for advertising that is in a language other than English must be available. For further information, see Appendix C.

If an institution publicly discloses incorrect or misleading information about its accredited status, the contents of an evaluation team report, or accreditation actions with respect to the institution, the institution must make a public disclosure of correction through the same media or means.

**3-1-704. Performance Information.** Institutions shall routinely provide reliable information to the public on their performance, including student achievement as determined by the institution.

## **FINAL CRITERIA REVISIONS – EFFECTIVE DATE TO BE DETERMINED**

### **G. DISTRIBUTED ENTERPRISE**

The Council reviewed and accepted a report on the beta test of its proposed criteria for classifying and accrediting an institution as a Distributed Enterprise. The Council also continued the beta test process by reviewing an application for classification and an application for a new grant of accreditation from institutions participating in the test process. Final action on these applications and acceptance of applications from other ACICS-accredited institutions will not be effective until additional information is reviewed and relevant sections of the *Criteria* are approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

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## **II. PROPOSED CRITERIA REVISIONS**

At its April 2011 meeting, the Council reviewed the specific areas of the ACICS *Accreditation Criteria* outlined in Section II and approved the revisions as **proposed** (new language is underlined, deleted language is struck). **Public comment on these revisions is requested on the Comment Form provided at the end of this memorandum.**

## A. PROGRAM-LEVEL STANDARDS FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*Although as an institutional accreditor, ACICS has for many years had specific, well-defined campus-level standards for student achievement, USDE requires that in order to be officially recognized, ACICS must immediately add program-level standards including standards for licensure pass rates, clearly distinguish the threshold below which an institution is out of compliance with these standards, and include an evaluation of all programs against these student achievement measures in a detailed written report provided to the institution.*

*The Council has proposed the changes below to existing sections of the Criteria to reflect these requirements, to specify the measures involved, and to describe the respective uses of the Campus Accountability Report (CAR) and the Campus Effectiveness Plan (CEP). This fall the specific standards for evaluating performance on these measures will be determined and announced, changes to Self-Study and Team Report Templates will be developed, evaluators will be trained, and institutions will be informed both in writing and through a special webinar.*

**2-1-808. ~~Interim Financial Review.~~** The Council reviews the Annual Financial Report, audited financial statements, and other relevant information to monitor each institution's financial condition. When this review indicates that an institution's financial condition may be weak or deteriorating, the Council may will require the institution to furnish Quarterly Financial Reports, a Financial Improvement Plan, or other interim narrative reports that demonstrate the actions the institution is taking to improve its financial condition. If the Council determines the institution no longer complies with the Council's requirements for financial stability, or it may will issue a show-cause directive due to the financial operation of the institution, or otherwise take adverse action and require the institution to demonstrate compliance within the time frames described in Title II, Chapter 3. Institutions that are required to submit interim financial reports or that are determined to be out of compliance with the Council's standards for financial stability are considered to be on financial review and are subject to additional restrictions regarding the initiation of non-main campuses additional locations and campus additions.

**2-1-809. ~~Retention and Placement Student Achievement Review.~~** The Council reviews the Campus Accountability Report (CAR) and Institutional Accountability Report (IAR) to monitor performance in terms of student achievement at both the campus and program levels. Measures will include retention; placement; and licensure, registration, or certification pass rates, if applicable. When this review indicates that the achievement of an institution's students is weak or deteriorating, the Council will require institutions add an improvement plan within their Campus Effectiveness Plan (CEP) and/or Institutional Effectiveness Plan (IEP). If the Council determines the institution no longer complies with the Council's requirement for student achievement, it will issue a show-cause directive or otherwise take negative action and require the institution to demonstrate

compliance within the time frames described in Title II, Chapter 3. Institutions that are required to include a plan of student achievement improvement within their CEP, or that are determined to be out of compliance with the Council's standards for student achievement are considered to be on student achievement review and are subject to additional restrictions regarding the initiation of new programs, including higher credential. ACICS will determine average retention and placement rates annually for each main and additional location of every accredited institution based on information collected in the Annual Accountability Reports and will provide these data to all accredited institutions. An institution with a campus that has retention of placement rates that are not keeping with the expectations of ACICS may require a consultation between ACICS and the institution, the submission of a corrective action plan, undergo an on-site evaluation, or be issued a show cause directive, a deferral or denial action related to the institution's application for a new or initial grant of accreditation, or directed another appropriate action.

**2-1-810. Student Loan Cohort Default Rates Review.** The Council will monitor an institution's student loan cohort default rates. An institution may be subject to additional reports or actions, if:

(a) its most recent cohort default rate is 20% or greater; or

(b) its default rate improvement plan failed to minimize student loan defaults adequately for those cohort years for which the plan was in effect.

## **B. ENROLLMENT AGREEMENTS**

### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The Council proposes to add language requiring the signature of the student and school representative on enrollment agreements.*

**3-1-414. Enrollment Agreements.** All institutions must use an enrollment agreement for each enrolled student which clearly outlines the financial obligations of both the institution and the student. The agreement must outline all program related tuition and fees, must be signed by the student and the appropriate school representative, and a copy provided to the student.

**3-1-432(c). Tuition and Charges.** The enrollment agreement or catalog used by an institution must clearly outline the financial obligations of both the institution and the student. When an enrollment agreement is used, the student must receive a copy.

## **C. SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS**

### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The USDE Program Integrity regulations that went into effect July 1, 2011, included a modification to the procedures that institutions may use to place students who are not*

*making satisfactory academic progress (SAP), into either a new status, called Financial Aid Warning, or into an existing but modified status, called Financial Aid Probation. The changes to Criteria proposed below would bring ACICS requirements for SAP into alignment with the new USDE regulations.*

## **Appendix D, Standards of Satisfactory Progress**

An essential element in providing appropriate instruction and support services to students is monitoring their satisfactory academic progress (SAP). The Council requires all institutions to develop a policy of satisfactory academic progress that measures whether students are maintaining satisfactory academic progress in their educational program. The policy must contain all of the elements required by the Council and federal regulations. The Council expects institutions to publish those standards for students enrolled in the institution's educational program(s). The Council also expects institutions to monitor whether a student meets the minimum qualitative and quantitative components of the standards.

The Council has determined that the institutional policy must include the following requirements, which are consistent with the regulations specified by the U.S. Department of Education for student eligibility for receiving Federal Title IV financial assistance.

Each of these requirements must be strictly observed:

1. The institution has written standards and a schedule of satisfactory academic progress for all students, which are published in the catalog and in appropriate institutional literature, and are consistently applied to all students.
2. The institution strictly adheres to its published standards of satisfactory academic progress and notifies students when satisfactory academic progress is not being made.
3. The standards of satisfactory academic progress provide for minimum qualitative standards, such as a grade point average or completion of work projects, which can be measured against a norm.
4. The policy defines a maximum time frame, not to exceed 150% of the normal program length, as defined by the institution, for all programs, in which the educational objective must be successfully completed (e.g., number of academic years, credit hours attempted, clock hours completed, months/weeks, terms or modules, etc. as appropriate), as opposed to simply setting a time limit on eligibility for Title IV financial aid.
5. The institution has provisions for an evaluation point at least by the end of each academic year (or at 50% of the normal program length if the program is one academic year or less) that determine whether the student has met the qualitative and quantitative components of the standards.

6. The institution has provisions for utilizing and publishing a schedule designating the minimum percentage or amount of work that a student must successfully complete at the end of each increment to complete the educational program within the maximum time frame.

7. The institution has provisions for determining at the end of each increment whether the student has met the qualitative and quantitative components of the standards. The qualitative and quantitative standards must be cumulative and must include all periods of the student's enrollment regardless of whether or not the student receives federal financial aid.

8. The institution's policies define the effect on satisfactory academic progress of course withdrawals, incomplete grades, repeated courses, and non-punitive grades. The institution's policies define the effect of non-credit or remedial courses on satisfactory academic progress.

~~9. The institution may allow a student to have a probation period for a specified period of time. The institution should state whether the student will remain eligible for federal financial aid during the probation period.~~

~~9.10.~~ The institution has provisions for an evaluation at the end of the second academic year and at the end of each subsequent academic year(s) where the student must have a minimum cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 2.0 on a scale of 4.0, C, or its equivalent, or has academic standing consistent with the institution's requirements for graduation. A student receiving federal financial aid who does not meet the CGPA standards at the end of the second year will no longer be eligible for financial aid, may not be placed on probation, and must be dismissed, unless the student wishes to continue without being eligible for federal financial aid. However, a student not meeting the CGPA standards at the end of the second year may remain as an enrolled student who is eligible for federal financial aid if there are documented mitigating circumstances (i.e., death in the family, sickness of the student, etc.).

10. If the institution places students on ~~financial aid~~ warning, or on ~~financial aid~~ probation, as defined in sections 11 and 12 below, the institution's policy must describe these statuses.

11. An institution that evaluates academic progress at the end of each payment period may assign ~~financial aid~~ warning status to a student who fails to make satisfactory academic progress. A student may be assigned to warning status without an appeal or other action by the student. A student ~~on financial aid~~ warning may continue to receive assistance under the ~~title IV, HEA~~ Federal Financial Aid Policy programs for one payment period despite a determination that the student is not making satisfactory academic progress.

~~11.~~ 12. 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 and the student's eligibility for financial aid will be reinstated. A student on financial aid probation may receive title IV, HEA program federal financial aid funds for one payment period. While a student is on financial aid probation, the institution may require the student to fulfill specific terms and conditions such as taking a reduced course load or enrolling in specific courses. At the end of one payment period on financial aid probation, the student must meet the institution's satisfactory academic progress standards or meet the requirements of the academic plan developed by the institution and the student to qualify for further title IV, HEA program federal financial aid funds.~~

## **D. ADMISSIONS, EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS AND TRANSFER OF CREDIT POLICY FOR DOCTORAL PROGRAMS**

### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The Council proposes to add language to mandate that independent study contracts be mutually signed by the student and institution. In addition, the transfer of credit standard has been modified to clarify the relationship between admission requirements and transfer of credit, in the case where a master's degree is required for admission.*

**3-7-403. Education Requirements.** The number of credits required for the doctorate degree shall be, at a minimum, 90 semester hours, 135 quarter hours, or their equivalent, of course work beyond the bachelor's degree. If a master's degree in the same field of study, earned at an institution accredited by an agency recognized by the U. S. Department of Education, is required as a prerequisite for admission to the doctorate degree program, the number of credits required for the doctorate degree shall be, at a minimum, 54 semester hours, 81 quarter hours, or their equivalent. This includes credit for the research project/dissertation or other required academic or professional activities.

**3-7-603. Transfer of Credit.** The institution shall make public its policies on transfer of credit, including a statement of the criteria established by the institution by which a determination is made with regard to accepting credits from another institution. If the prerequisites for admission to the doctorate program is a master's degree in the same field of study earned at an institution accredited by an agency recognized by the U. S. Department of Education, a maximum of 36 semester hours, or 54 quarter hours, or their equivalent may be granted as transfer credits according to the policy established by the institution. ~~Transfer of credit for appropriate master's or doctorate level course work from another institution may be granted according to the policy established by the institution. In all other cases, no more than 20% for the doctorate degree may be transferred from another institution.~~ Academic credit shall not be awarded for experiential learning activity.

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### 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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:ebiz@acics.org).

## C. 2011 WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

2011 ACICS WORKSHOP SCHEDULE		
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. PUBLIC COMMENT

The Council encourages institutions to provide feedback regarding Council operations and procedures. Comments on the proposed *Criteria* revisions are due by **Monday, September 26, 2011**. All other materials for review during the December 2011 Council Meeting should be submitted by **Friday, November 4, 2011**.

## E. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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](mailto:qdean@acics.org) and let him know the source of the information and when it appeared.

## **F. ACICS AWARE WEBINAR**

The AWARE webinar will be held on Friday, September 16, 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](mailto:tking@acics.org).

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**IV. COMMENT FORM – PROPOSED CRITERIA REVISIONS**

ACICS ID Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of  
Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

***Please check (as appropriate):***

Proposed *Accreditation Criteria* revisions:

- Program-Level Standards for Student Achievement  
[ ] Accept as Written [ ] Modify (please explain)
- Enrollment Agreements  
[ ] Accept as Written [ ] Modify (please explain)
- Satisfactory Academic Progress  
[ ] Accept as Written [ ] Modify (please explain)
- Admissions, Education Requirement and Transfer of Credit Policy for Doctoral Programs  
[ ] Accept as Written [ ] Modify (please explain)

Prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please respond by Monday, September 26, 2011 to:**

Ms. Terron King  
Manager of Policy & Institutional Review  
Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools  
750 First Street, NE, Suite 980  
Washington, DC 20002-4241  
FAX (202) 842-2593  
[fieldcomments@acics.org](mailto:fieldcomments@acics.org)