

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FROM THE AWARE WEBINAR

Held on January 13, 2012

PROGRAM-LEVEL STANDARDS

QUESTION: Did the Council consider varying the cutoffs based on program length or credential? For example, the retention cut-off seems more daunting for longer programs, while placement seems easily achieved. Conversely for a short duration program, the retention rate seems easily achieved, but placement more challenging? **ANSWER:** When averages and standard deviations were examined by program length, the differences did not appear to be significant.

QUESTION: If the state requires the student to register in order for employment, but does not require the student to be certified for employment, does the pass rate policy apply to that program. **Answer:** No. The standard only applies to programs where a licensure examination is required.

QUESTION: How will schools current on reporting be affected by the new standards? **ANSWER:** The current campus-level standards and the new program-level standards have been applied to every school. Schools will be removed from reporting if they meet these standards.

QUESTION: Are licensure pass rates based on the entire graduating class or on the number of students who sit for the exam during the reporting period? **ANSWER:** The licensure pass rate should be based upon the number of students who sit for the exam during the reporting period.

QUESTION: Are the program-level compliance percentages supposed to act as a "floor" as compared to the campus-level compliance percentages? As I saw them, those minimum values appear to be the same for both campus-level and program-level standards. **ANSWER:** The minimum values are the same but the top-level standards for improvement are lower for programs than for the campuses.

QUESTION: What about the monitoring section of the campus level standards? **ANSWER:** A campus whose student achievement falls below monitoring standards, but above compliance standards will be placed on Student Achievement Review, and in addition to a Program Improvement Plan will be required to attend a workshop or participate in a consultation.

QUESTION: For programs that have an initial general education component and then the technical component, how is retention measured? **ANSWER:** Retention is measured annually and includes all students, regardless of the type of courses they are enrolled in.

QUESTION: Where can the definitions of what a placement is be found? **ANSWER:** Definitions of data elements collected in the Campus Accountability Report (CAR) may be found on the ACICS website under the Accreditation Tab through the link to the *CAR Guidelines and Instructions*.

QUESTION: If a school is above compliance but below standards for multiple years, is there any point where a program is in jeopardy? Unlike the current standards, the new standards do not include a penalty for remaining below the improvement standard. Evaluators will look for documentation that planned activities have been implemented and, when they fail to raise the rate, an analysis of the underlying problem and an attempt to address the problem in the next plan.

QUESTION: If an older program has less than 10 graduates, do the new standards apply? **ANSWER:** No, the standards will not be applied to any program with fewer than 10 graduates, for whatever reason,

QUESTION: What credential levels do the program standards apply to? **ANSWER:** Program standards apply to programs at all credential levels.

QUESTION: When is the licensure pass standard applied? **ANSWER:** The standard is applied only when licensure is required for employment in the state where the campus is located. Students located in other states taking online courses should be notified as to whether the program prepares them for licensure in that state.

QUESTION: How will you deal with programs that have programmatic accreditation from organizations like ABHES, ASHP, etc? **ANSWER:** Evaluators on the on-site team will accept the programmatic accreditor's judgment of the curriculum, will continue to evaluate the implementation of the program, and will add an evaluation of required homework as required by the U.S. Department of Education.

QUESTION: If the new campus standard will be implemented in 2013, does that mean based upon the 2013 CAR or based upon the 2012 CAR? **ANSWER:** The new campus standards will be implemented through decisions made by the Council at its December 2012 meeting based upon a review of the 2012 CAR. Campuses will be placed on Student Achievement Review for the 2013 calendar year.

QUESTION: CAMPUS RATE VS PROGRAMATIC RATE- I understand that we will be measured going forward programatically for retention and placement. Will you still be looking at campus total for retention and placement? **ANSWER:** Yes, campus standards as well as program standards will be evaluated each year.

QUESTION: How are improvement plans going to affect interim reports? **ANSWER:** Hopefully, as an effective Program Improvement Plan is implemented, it will raise the achievement of students who are completing programs as well as those who are just beginning the program. The interim reports on campus-level rates would then show more progress just as would the next year's outcomes.

QUESTION: Will on-site teams evaluate the content of the Improvement Plan or simply verify that it is in the CEP? **ANSWER:** Evaluators will verify that the plan is in the CEP and that it contains (1) relevant data, (2) an analysis of the problem(s) and (2) planned activities to address the problem(s) and, if previous activities were planned, documentation that these activities were implemented.

QUESTION: It appears to be possible to be in compliance for all programs, but below institutional standards. Is this consistent? **ANSWER:** It is consistent with the principle that programs may be below the campus standard so that there is now a floor below which any individual program may not fall. If program standards were identical with, or higher than, the campus standard, there would be no need for campus standards, which would be inconsistent with ACICS' status as an institutional accreditor.

QUESTION: What are the expectations of the Council after an institution is directed to discontinue a program? **ANSWER:** The institution must submit and implement a teach-out plan for the program.

QUESTION: Will all schools receive site visits or only those who have a visit currently scheduled? **ANSWER:** Only those currently scheduled.

QUESTION: How does the exception of new programs apply? **ANSWER:** Programs that do not yet have 10 graduates will not be subject to the new standards. As soon as a program has at least 10 graduates, the standards will be applied.

QUESTION: Is the time frame to come into compliance based on the length of the program, or is it based on the length of the LONGEST program at the campus? **ANSWER:** It is based on the length of the LONGEST program at the campus.

QUESTION: If a program is placed on student achievement review based upon the 2011 CAR data, what data must be raised to the standard in order to be in compliance? **ANSWER:** If a program is below the compliance or improvement standard for 2011, it must raise the corresponding rate in the 2012 CAR to be removed from review.

QUESTION: Can ACICS provide assistance in determining which programs are below which standards. **ANSWER:** Please contact Terron Sales, who will assist in identifying the affected programs. Starting next year, the CAR will include an automated notification as soon as the report is submitted.

QUESTION: When will Program Improvement Plans be required? **ANSWER:** Program Improvement Plans are required beginning in 2012. Implementation of the compliance standard, except for development of Program Improvement Plans, will begin in 2013.

QUESTION: If a Program Improvement Plan is required, when is the plan due? **ANSWER:** A required Program Improvement Plan should be developed as soon as possible in order to give the campus adequate time to implement the plan and raise student achievement above the required standard. If the campus is scheduled for an on-site evaluation visit, the plan should be prepared in time for the team to review it.

QUESTION: If there are certificate and degree options for a program, to which do the new standards apply? **ANSWER:** The new program-level standards apply to both programs.

QUESTION: If a program loses its accreditation, can that program ever be reestablished at the school? **ANSWER:** Replacing a substandard program immediately with another version of the same program would not be acceptable. However, if conditions related to the problematic area were to change significantly, an application to begin the same program at a later time would be considered.

QUESTION: Graduates in a program can get a temporary license for 18 months during which they can pass the licensure exam in "legs." How do we track and report successful passes if they occur over that time period? **ANSWER:** Please report the final, successful completion of this and any other exam that students can take multiple times within the CAR reporting period.

QUESTION: What did you mean by citations being "soft" in 2012 and "regular" in 2013? **ANSWER:** In 2012 a campus that does not develop a required Program Improvement Plan will be cited by the team and the Intermediate Review Committee. However, if that is the only citation by the time the file is reviewed by the Council, it will not affect the Council's decision regarding honor roll, the length of the grant, or deferral of Council action. In contrast, starting in 2013 (as determined at their meeting in December of 2012), the Council will treat these citations the same as any other citations. Therefore, they could result in removal of consideration for honor roll, shortening the length of the grant that is awarded, deferral of action regarding the grant and even denial of an application for a grant.

QUESTION: Rounding - How will ACICS round the rates to compare with standards? **ANSWER:** ACICS will round up, for example from 59.5 to 60%.

QUESTION: If a program is being taught out, can a similar program be initiated? **ANSWER:** It depends on how similar the programs are. If the second program would likely run into the same problems as the first, it would be not acceptable. If it differs in some way that might make it more successful, it would be acceptable.

QUESTION: Regarding job placement does the percentage consider the current economy? In this economy there is not so much colleges can do to meet these standards. **ANSWER:** The placement rate standard is based upon rates from the previous year's CAR, so it will go up and down with the ACICS average and standard deviation, which would reflect economic conditions.

QUESTION: What does it mean that prior approval of new programs is not required when programs fall below a standard? **ANSWER:** When a campus falls below a standard, it must seek prior approval from ACICS before it can submit an application for a new program. This is not required if the campus has one or more programs below a standard, as long as the campus itself does not fall below a campus-level standard.

QUESTION: What are the guidelines for programs that are not associate or bachelor programs? **ANSWER:** Graduate programs have no homework guidelines and homework is not evaluated by accreditors. Certificate and Diploma programs are only evaluated if they transfer to degree programs at the same institution. If they do not transfer but they convert clock to credit hours, any homework included in the clock hours is evaluated.

COMMENT: (Student) - These program-level standards should apply to all colleges. **RESPONSE:** The U. S. Department of Education regulations apply to all institutions (main campuses plus additional locations) that participate in Federal Title IV financial aid programs, and ACICS Standards apply to all campuses included within a grant of accreditation.

COMMENT: (Administrator) - Will ACICS make public the analysis that is done to determine retention and placement rates? **RESPONSE:** The analysis will be described in the Memorandum to the Field that is available on the website. However, the Council establishes standards based upon a number of factors including statistical analysis, so only the resulting standards will have a specific page on the ACICS website.

COMMENT: (Public) - Is the Licensure Pass Rate standard applied only to the state in which the campus resides or to online students in other states as well? **RESPONSE:** The standard applies to those states in which students reside that have specific pass rate standards.

COMMENT: (State Agency Administrator) - The Council should consider whether students who are incarcerated or have died during enrollment should count against the program's retention rate? **RESPONSE:** The Council currently regards death and incarceration as exceptions that will not affect placement rates, but they are both included within the 40% of students who can withdraw before the campus falls below the current retention standard.

COMMENT: (Administrator) - Given the current economic condition, is the placement rate realistic and is the expectation to place graduates in jobs within a narrow time frame also realistic? **RESPONSE:** The average placement rate of ACICS-accredited institutions is above 70%, so the Council believes that these minimum standards are realistic. The time frame within which graduates must be placed ranges from 2.5 months to 14.5 months for an average of just over 7 months.

COMMENT: (Administrator) Any thought to measuring placement on the basis of graduates eligible for placement (i. e. , excluding those who have not had time to pass required licensure exams) or allowing an update to the rates reported when all students have had the opportunity to pass the exams and have their license issued? Documentation might include graduation date, schedule of state licensure exams, and description of normal turnaround time for issuing the license. **RESPONSE:** Adding this exception to the definition of graduates available for placement could be considered.

COMMENT: (Administrator) Some of the new terms utilized in connection with placement standards and homework requirements should be added to an defined in the Glossary. **RESPONSE:** Definitions of new terms will be added to the Glossary.

COMMENT: (Administrator) - Recommend taking the current economy and unemployment percentages in each state into consideration in setting standards. **RESPONSE:** The impact of unemployment nationwide is factored into the overall placement rate statistics. Statewide variations in the economy as well as other local conditions are best accommodated by programmatic adjustments at schools in those states.

COMMENT: (Administrator) It would be helpful if there was clarification at some point of what counts as a placement "in field" or in a "related field". The definition of "related field" is vague and open to many interpretations. **RESPONSE:** The Council plans to consider the development of more specific definitions and requirements for documentation.

COMMENT: (Faculty) - Please consider developing a specific, separate standard for each individual program. **RESPONSE:** This approach was considered, but it was determined not to pursue it since it could result in thousands of different standards which would be overly complex to administer.