

TO: ACICS-Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties
 FROM: Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools
 DATE: July 31, 2012
 SUBJECT: Final Criteria and Other Information

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I. FINAL CRITERIA REVISIONS

In July 2012, 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 unless otherwise noted, have been accepted as **final, effective immediately** (new language is underlined, ~~deleted language is struck~~):

A. Program Compliance Warning

Explanation of Changes

The Council has approved final language to add to the actions it can take a “program compliance warning.” This new action would be utilized in connection with program-level standards. It would serve to notify an institution that it has one or more programs out of compliance with program-level standards and that the program(s) must be brought into compliance or be taught out and discontinued within the appropriate timeframe.

2-2-505. Program Compliance Warning. When the Council determines that a program at a campus of the institution has fallen below the compliance standard for retention, placement, or licensure pass rates, the institution will be provided in writing with a warning regarding the alleged deficiency. The warning will note that the program will have to come into compliance by meeting or exceeding the program-level standard prior to the expiration of the established timeframe or be taught out and discontinued or otherwise conditioned.

A program compliance warning is not a negative or conditioning action and is therefore not appealable. Rather, it is issued as an official notification to an institution that a program provided by the institution is out of compliance with agency standards. Following receipt of a program compliance warning, the institution must bring itself into compliance within the time frames specified in Title II, Chapter 3, or the institution will be subject to adverse action in the form of withdrawal of approval for inclusion of the program within the institution’s grant of accreditation. The time frames may be extended at the sole discretion of the Council for good cause, including evidence that there has been significant improvement in the deficient area(s) and the applicable time frame does not provide sufficient time to demonstrate full compliance, e.g., significant improvement in retention, placement or licensure pass rates.

2-2-506. Termination of Programs. The withdrawal of approval for a program following the issuance of a program compliance warning or A a decision by an institution to terminate any program voluntarily must be appropriately communicated to all interested publics. These publics include, but are not limited to, students, governmental agencies, the local community, and ACICS.

All institutions subject to the withdrawal of approval for a program will be directed to submit a program termination plan that conforms to the following requirements, which also apply in the case of voluntary termination of a program. New students may not be enrolled in any program which cannot be completed prior to the termination date for which public notice has been given. Moreover, the institution is obligated to continue to offer appropriate courses, including prerequisites, so that currently enrolled students will be able to complete the program and receive the credential which was their designated educational objective. For this purpose, the period of time need not extend beyond sufficient time for students already enrolled and maintaining normal academic progress to complete the program.

The withdrawal of approval for a program conditions the institution's grant of accreditation with respect to the inclusion of the program and therefore is appealable to the Council. Due to the limited nature and narrow scope of the withdrawal of program approval, the appeal to the Council may be in writing only.

To maintain approval, an institution must maintain enrollment in each program of study. If an approved program is inactive for at least three years, the program will be considered discontinued and will be removed from the institution's list of approved programs. To reinstate the program, the institution must submit an ACICS New Program Application.

2-1-809. 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 the institution to add an improvement plan within its 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, the Council will issue a compliance warning, 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. These time frames may be extended at the sole discretion of the Council for good cause, including evidence that there has been significant improvement in the deficient area(s) and the applicable time frame does not provide sufficient time to demonstrate full compliance, e.g., significant improvement in retention, placement or licensure pass rates. Institutions that are required to include a plan of student achievement improvement within their CEPs 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 those with campus- or institution-level plans are subject to additional requirements.

B. Review Board Panel Composition

Explanation of Changes

The Council has previously approved final language to ensure that the Review Board and its panels have the appropriate number of academic, administrative, public and member representatives, as required by the U.S. Department of Education. These changes to the Bylaws and other sections of the Accreditation Criteria are needed to ensure consistency across all sections of the document.

Bylaws, Article VII, Appeals Process, Section 1–Review Board for Appeals. A Review Board for Appeals shall be appointed by the Council. The purpose of the Review Board shall be to review, according to pre-established procedures and guidelines, appeals by members, of final negative actions by the Council and in each case either to affirm the action of the Council or to remand the case to the Council for further review, or to amend or

overturn the action. The Review Board shall consist of fifteen (15) persons, all of whom have had experience in accreditation. The Review Board ~~These members~~ shall include at least two academic representatives, ~~and at least two (2) administrative representatives,~~ and three (3) public members, as defined ~~as those terms are defined~~ in Article III, Section 1 herein. ~~At least three of the Review Board members will be public members, and~~ Review Board Panels will consist of a minimum of three (3) members and be comprised of at least one (1) public, one (1) member and one academic, and one (1) administrative representative member will serve on each Review Board panel. Members of the Review Board shall be appointed to terms of three years, with terms of initial appointees staggered so that one-third of the terms expire each year. A person appointed to the Review Board shall not have been a commissioner within one year prior to appointment. The Executive Director shall convene timely a panel of the Review Board when necessary.

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. ~~At least three (3) members shall be public members, as defined in~~ The Review Board shall include at least two (2) academic representatives, two (2) administrative representatives, and three (3) public members, as defined in Appendix A.

A Review Board panel of three to 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. ~~At least one (1) member of the panel shall be a public member.~~ A Review Board Panel will consist of at least one (1) public, one (1) administrative and one (1) academic representative as defined in Appendix A.

II. FOR INFORMATION

A. PROPOSED REVISIONS TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS

Explanation of Changes

The Council intends to use the occasion of its re-recognition by the U.S. Department of Education as an opportunity to establish, articulate and implement an enhanced and streamlined set of expectations for member institutions, specifically in the areas of student achievement and success. After careful consideration of member comments on the new standards proposed in June 2012, the Council has decided upon three sets of changes: (1) Benchmarks to encourage improvement of below-average institutions, (2) Compliance standards to ensure that a majority of students complete their programs, pass licensure exams (where applicable) and find employment in their fields, and (3) Mitigating factors and qualitative standards to serve as alternatives, when appropriate, for demonstrating satisfactory levels of student achievement.

1. Benchmarks – *Campus-level benchmarks for student retention and placement for the 2012 reporting year are set at 67%, and 64%, respectively. Program-level benchmarks for retention, placement and licensure pass rates, where applicable, are currently at 62%, 58% and 60%. For the 2013 reporting year, the Council intends to set each of the enhanced benchmarks at 70%, in order to encourage improvement among institutions whose student achievement is below average and to help ensure that they remain above the compliance standards. One exception will be the ACICS program-level benchmark for retention of students in programs that are more than one year in length, which will be set at 65%, in recognition of the additional risk of withdrawal associated with the longer programs. Campuses falling below the 70% (or 65%) benchmarks may be subject to routine monitoring and improvement planning requirements, but **no waivers will be required to apply for approval of new programs.** Workshops, consultations and other value-added opportunities may also be provided.*
2. Compliance Standards – *The minimum retention and placement standards for compliance at the campus level and retention, placement and licensure standards for compliance at the program level are currently set at 52%, 47% and 40%, respectively. However, the Council believes that ACICS accreditation should guarantee that a majority of students are retained, a majority of graduates are able to pass licensure exams, where applicable, and a majority of graduates are able to find employment related to their fields of study. To ensure this minimum level of student success, ACICS is setting each of these standards, for both the campus and program levels, at 60% for the 2013 reporting year. Campuses and programs whose performance falls below this level must come into compliance within established timeframes. Otherwise, after due consideration of mitigating circumstances,*

accreditation of the campus or approval of the program will be subject to withdrawal.

3. *Qualitative and Mitigating Factors* – ACICS recognizes that for evaluation of student success on a campus or in a program to be reasonably comprehensive, qualitative factors and mitigating circumstance must be taken into consideration. Therefore, beginning in 2013 as part of the annual Campus Accountability Reporting (CAR) process, members will be invited to submit information on Council forms describing local economic and demographic conditions, trends in institutional performance, operational constraints and circumstances, as well as qualitative indicators that provide a more complete demonstration of student success.

PROPOSED QUANTITATIVE STANDARDS

Proposed Student Achievement Standards To Be Implemented Based on the 2013 Campus Accountability Report				
Campus Level Standards				
	Retention		Placement	
Benchmark	70%		70%	
Compliance	60%		60%	
Program Level Standards				
	Retention		Placement	Licensure ^{1,2}
	Tier 1 - Program Length =<1 year	Tier 2 - Program Length >1 year		
Benchmark	70%	65%	70%	70%
Compliance	60%	60%	60%	60%

¹ Where licensure is required for employment.

² Programs must also meet any applicable state or national pass rate standards.

PROPOSED QUALITATIVE STANDARDS

The Council has expressed expectations regarding economic, demographic, operational and other mitigating circumstances under which institutions may be given additional consideration regarding their student achievement metrics. These circumstances include:

- Weak national economic conditions, such as during an economic recession or Depression
- Weak local or regional considerations, such as persistence of high unemployment, low economic rates of growth, or extended employer time-to-hire
- Demographic conditions, such as large numbers of students with multiple risk factors identified by the U.S. Department of Education in “Students Entering and Leaving Postsecondary Occupational Education 1995-2001. According to Berkner, Cuccaro-Alamin and McCormick, 1996, these factors include:
 - Delayed enrollment after high school graduation

- Lacking a high school diploma
- Enrolling on a part-time basis
- Financially independent
- Working full-time while enrolled
- Having children younger than age 19, and
- Being a single parent
- History of Student Achievement outcomes, such as a single episode of low rates compared to a sustained pattern of marginal or declining performance
- Having at least six months after graduation or licensure, where applicable, to search for employment
- Significance of program(s) for viability of the campus
- Numbers of students enrolled or graduated
- Other mitigating circumstances unique to the institution.

B. PUBLIC COMMENT

The Council encourages institutions to provide feedback regarding Council operations and procedures. This Memorandum describes no proposed changes, so no specific commentary is expected. **However, membership input will be solicited in the coming months to ensure that procedures, especially those for consideration of mitigating circumstances and qualitative standards, address institutional and student needs without adding to administrative burden.**

C. ACICS AWARE WEBINARS

Information regarding implementation of the new standards will be provided in the next AWARE webinar, which will be held following the Council meeting in August. The date will be announced in the Memorandum to the Field following the August Council meeting. 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 Sales at tsales@acics.org.
