



# ACCREDITING COUNCIL FOR INDEPENDENT COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

## MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD

**TO:** ACICS-Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties  
**FROM** Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools  
**DATE:** February 25, 2014  
The Memorandum to the Field contains proposed criteria and other information for ACICS-Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties

### Table of Contents

<b>1. Proposed Criteria Revisions .....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS .....	1
B. STUDY ABROAD ACTIVITIES.....	2
C. CUMULATIVE GRADE POINT AVERAGE FOR GRADUATE PROGRAMS .....	8
<b>2. For Information Only .....</b>	<b>9</b>
A. ACICS WEB SITE.....	9
B. 2014 WORKSHOP SCHEDULE.....	9
C. PUBLIC COMMENT .....	10
D. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION .....	10
E. ACICS AWARE WEBINARS.....	11
<b>3. Comment Form-Proposed Criteria Revisions.....</b>	<b>12</b>

## 1. Proposed Criteria Revisions

At its February 2014 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. GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

#### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The Council proposes to modify language to clarify the number of credit hours required for the occupational associate's degree as compared to the academic associate's degree. The proposed language also allows for institution's to require 15 semester hours or equivalent or more if required by the state.*

#### **TITLE III Evaluation Standards**

#### **Chapter 3 Standards For Occupational Associate's Degree Programs**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In addition to the general standards in [Chapter 1](#), which apply to all institutions, the following standards apply specifically to institutions offering occupational associate's degree programs. Occupational associate's degree programs are those programs which award associate's degrees that contain less than a maximum of 15 semester hours, 22.5 quarter hours, or the equivalent of general education unless otherwise required by the state.

**3-3-202. Education Requirements.** The minimum number of credits required for the occupational associate's degree shall be 60 semester hours, 90 quarter hours, or 1800 clock hours, normally earned over a period of four semesters, six quarters, or the equivalent. Transfer and award of credit may be granted for appropriate work at other institutions.

There shall be a minimum of 10 semester hours, 15 quarter hours, ~~and a maximum of 15 semester hours, 22.5 quarter hours,~~ or their equivalent in general education or applied general education courses. The catalog must identify the courses that satisfy the general education requirements, and it must provide an explanation of the course numbering system.

#### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The Council proposes to modify language to strengthen the general education requirements by calling for courses to be taken in the major general education discipline: humanities, mathematics and sciences and the social sciences. If the proposed language is accepted, the Council will designate a future effective date to give institutions sufficient time to make curricular changes if necessary.*

## GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS

General Education. Those areas of learning which are deemed to be the common experience of all "educated" persons; including and must include subject matter from the humanities, mathematics and the sciences, and the social sciences.

## B. STUDY ABROAD ACTIVITIES

### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The Council proposes to modify language to create new appendix of the Criteria prescribing requirements for international education activities, including study abroad and international partnership agreements; revises definitions in the glossary pertaining to home institutions and host institutions; eliminates Section 2-2-507 that pertains only to international partnership agreements; and re-organizes Section 3-1-500 to enumerate the discrete set of education activities covered under the requirements of this section. As ACICS colleges and schools have responded to the demand for greater presence and service to international locations and students, legacy standards have proven to be insufficient to memorialize and articulate the Council's expectations regarding quality and integrity. Council has developed a new comprehensive set of standards that apply to international education activities and proposes to adopt it as Appendix J of the Criteria. The new appendix includes all of the requirements previously expressed by the Criteria in other sections regarding International Partnership Agreements; in addition, it contains new guidance regarding study abroad programs and activities. Finally, the proposed changes reflect conforming editorial revisions to other sections of the Criteria that are intended to reduce contradictory or duplicative language and provide consistent guidance throughout the standards document regarding international education activities.*

~~**2-2-507. International Partnership Agreements.** An ACICS-accredited institution may enter into an international partnership agreement with an institution of higher education in a geographic location other than that of the United States or its territories. At least 25% of the program must be delivered by the institution that awards the academic credential.~~

~~The ACICS-accredited institution must submit an international partnership agreement to the Council and provide the following information to ACICS for review and approval prior to the initiation of the partnership agreement:~~

**3-1-500 – EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

The major index of an institution's quality is the effectiveness of its educational program. The educational program must be consistent with the stated mission, be adequate in breadth and context to achieve it, and produce measurable results. Its educational activities, whether residential or otherwise and whether group or individually oriented, shall include definable instruction, interaction, and evaluation. A second index of institutional quality is the resources available to instructors and students.

The third index of an institution's quality is the competence of its faculty. The effectiveness of any institution depends upon contemporary teaching strategies and practices and upon the knowledge, ability, and commitment of its faculty. The selection, orientation, guidance, stimulation, and evaluation of the teaching staff is one of the most significant responsibilities of the administration. The faculty should actively participate in developing the total educational program of the institution.

**3-1-501. Faculty Involvement in Academic Governance.** The faculty shall have a clear responsibility, distinct from that of developing institutional policy, to participate in administering and implementing policy, especially as it pertains to academic affairs. The institution shall adopt and publish a policy on the responsibility and authority of faculty in matters of academic governance. At a minimum, the policy should address the role of faculty in:

- (a) the development of the educational program of the institution;
- (b) the selection of course materials, instructional equipment and other educational resources;
- (c) systematic evaluation and revision of the curriculum;
- (d) assessment of student learning outcomes; and
- (e) planning for institutional effectiveness.

**3-1-502. Programs Requiring Certification or Licensure.** For institutions offering programs in which state certification, licensing, or registration is mandatory in order to become employed in a specific career field, curriculums must contain the necessary course work to afford students the opportunity to obtain the minimum skills and competencies in order to become certified, licensed, or registered in that career field.

**3-1-503. Specialized/Programmatically Accredited Programs.** Where accreditation of a program by a specialized or programmatic accreditor is required for students to obtain entry-level employment in the state where the institution is licensed or otherwise approved, the institution must obtain such accreditation in a timely manner.

The institution must provide and document notification to students as to

- (a) which programs hold specialized or programmatic accreditation;
- (b) whether successful completion of a program qualifies a student to receive, apply to take, or take licensure exams in the state where the institution is located. For on-line

programs, this information must be provided for all states from which the institution enrolls students; and

(c) any other requirements that are generally required for employment.

The institution shall assess the curriculum and/or the need for specialized accreditation and update it as needed to reflect current requirements for employment.

**3-1-504. Study Abroad Activities.** An institution may enter into formal study abroad relationships with eligible institutions outside its home country in accordance with the requirements outlined in APPENDIX J. The institution must submit a proposed study abroad plan and proposed agreement with an international host institution and provide pertinent information to ACICS for review and approval prior to the initiation of a study abroad relationship.

### **Appendix J: Principles and Guidelines for Program Enhancement Study Abroad Activities**

International demands for post-secondary education provide opportunities for member institutions to expand the geographic footprint of their education delivery infrastructure, through on-line, on-ground and combinations of those and other modalities. Regardless of the education delivery infrastructure utilized at an international location, the institution is expected to operate in compliance with ACICS standards as demonstrated through direct monitoring of administrative operations, instruction, student services and the comparable full array of processes that apply to all institutions accredited by ACICS.

The standards and guidelines below will be applied to institutions that seek to offer study abroad activities at international locations under the ACICS grant of accreditation. They are designed to apply Council expectations for effectiveness and integrity to programs that primarily lead to employment in professional, technical and occupational fields, regardless of the geographic location of the education activity. Council acknowledges international study activities may serve to enhance the interpersonal and developmental aspects of the student, including an improved ability to relate to and work with people from different cultures and ethnic, linguistic and national backgrounds. Council also acknowledges that study abroad activities, as part of a comprehensive career education program, may be directly applicable to the workplace and contribute to a graduate's success in finding placement in an organization with a multinational employee profile that utilizes multinational vendors and suppliers. Finally, the Council authorizes the utilization of study abroad activities, under the parameters prescribed in this appendix, in recognition that structured study abroad may enhance the graduate's ability to compete for job placement with international employers.

*A key principle of ACICS standards regarding study abroad is that the accredited institution must demonstrate that the quality of the education derived from locations outside of a student's home country is comparable to that received at its domestic accredited locations. The burden of proof lies with the institution, regardless of the form of the agreement between the home institution and the host institution (Study Abroad agreement, International Partnership Agreement, or other agreements by different titles.)*

### **Definitions**

1. **Study Abroad.** An accredited study abroad activity is one in which a student enrolled in an ACICS-approved program may fulfill a portion of his or her education requirements through pre-approved education enhancement activities at an international location outside of a student's native country under the supervision of the accredited home institution and the host institution or an appropriate organization at the foreign location. The quality and integrity of the education activities at international locations are subject to the same standards and expectations as those applied to the activities of the student in a domestic setting.
2. **Home Institution.** (See definition in Glossary as amended to include Study Abroad).
3. **Host Institution.** (See definition in Glossary as amended to include Study Abroad).

### **Alignment with Mission, Purpose**

The study abroad activity, as described in institutional disclosures and publications, must clearly align with the educational goals and objectives of the institution and the specific program. Further, information about the program available to the public and students must faithfully represent the specific nature and purposes of the study abroad activity and explain how participation in the program relates to and enhances the curriculum of study. The disclosures should be explicit about how students are selected for participation in the activity based on interest and ability.

### **Assurance of Quality**

The Council expects study abroad activities conducted by students enrolled in member institutions to adhere to the same academic standards, operational integrity and be subject to the same institutional controls as those activities conducted at the home institution.

Education activities undertaken at a study abroad location may, at the Council's discretion, require a site-based review, including faculty, curriculum, facilities, student services, library resources and administrative capacity. In addition, the institution is required to seek and receive approval for each study abroad location through the submission of a written request prior to awarding students academic credit for study endeavors at the study abroad location. The institution shall provide the location of the activity, its educational

## ACICS MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD

February 25, 2014

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purpose, the programs offered, the number of students involved, and any additional information requested.

At a minimum, study abroad programs must meet the following requirements which will be subject to review by the Council:

1. *Monitoring of Educational Quality:* The content of the curriculum and educational programming is subject to the review and approval of the home institution's faculty for purposes of quality, rigor, and appropriate relevance to the credential program to which the credits will be applied.
2. *Eligibility of the Host Institution:* The study abroad host institution must be accredited by an agency recognized by the United States Department of Education or recognized by an equivalent government or educational approval agency. It is the responsibility of the home campus to maintain and provide appropriate documentation of such approval to the Council.
3. *Faculty Qualifications:* The instructional components of the program are taught by faculty with sufficient language proficiency, appropriate academic preparation and credentials that have been reviewed and certified as meeting Council standards.
4. *Evaluation of Student Achievement.* Student achievement in the study abroad activity is evaluated using methods and standards comparable to that applied to education activities at the home institution.
5. *Student Evaluations:* The home institution affords students participating in the study abroad activity an opportunity to evaluate its quality, and integrates student perspectives with a recurring evaluation of study abroad as an enhancement to the regular program of study.
6. *Disclosure of Financial Information:* The home institution clearly discloses the financial obligations of the student and defines the form of student financial assistance available to support the study abroad activities, if any. If U. S. federal financial aid under Title IV programs is offered to eligible students participating in study abroad programs, it is the responsibility of the home institution to meet the requirements specified by the United States Department of Education.
7. *Facilities:* The host institution provides facilities and accommodations that meet or exceed local health and fire safety standards.
8. *Safety and Security:* The home institution has sufficiently provided for the personal safety and security of the study abroad student while pursuing education at an approved study abroad location.
9. *Advertising:* The home institution's advertising, marketing and public disclosures regarding study abroad activities are factual, accurate and complete, including information about the non-transferability to international institutions of the ACICS grant of accreditation and any references to the transferability of academic credit between international and domestic institutions.

## ACICS MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD

February 25, 2014

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10. Student's Country of Origin: The home institution has policies to demonstrate that study abroad students are gaining an educational experience that is outside of their home country or country of residence.
11. Maximum of Length of Study Abroad Activity: No more than 25 percent of a program's coursework may be completed as study abroad activity. A study abroad program may not exceed an equivalent of two semesters in length.
12. Academic Residency: Students admitted to a study abroad program are those who have completed satisfactorily a minimum one full-time equivalent semester or quarter or trimester at the home institution. Additionally, study abroad students are required to complete a minimum one full-time equivalent semester or quarter or trimester at the home institution following completion of the study abroad activity and prior to completion of the credential.
13. Agreements with Host Institutions: A current agreement with the international host institution must be presented to ACICS for review and approval. At a minimum the agreement must address the list of items included under APPENDIX I International Partnership Agreements
14. Recording of Study Abroad Credits: Credits completed by students at a study abroad location must be clearly identified on student academic records as transfer credits from an approved study abroad institution.

### **Applying Study Abroad Activities to Home Institution Credential**

The purpose and utility of study abroad activities sponsored by ACICS colleges and schools is primarily as an enhancement, not replacement, to the core instructional and educational programming of the home institution. In that context and by definition, academic credit awarded for study abroad activities must involve some minimum amount of sustained effort, and cannot constitute more than a partial contribution toward the fulfillment of the required program of study.

At minimum, a study abroad activity must reflect a combination of time expended and completed assignments that equal at least one academic credit (semester hour or quarter hour, depending on the metric of the home institution<sup>1</sup>). Likewise, the institution may not apply more than 25% of the study abroad activities toward fulfillment of the student's academic program requirements. In no instance is the institution to award academic credit solely on the basis of the completion of an itinerary of travel.

### **GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS**

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<sup>1</sup> Overseas study activities that do not constitute at least one credit hour of stand-alone credit may be classified as augmentations or enhancements to a course that is part of an accredited program; in that regard, the faculty member has the discretion to decide (but must document) how much of the work required for that course was fulfilled by the study abroad activity – i.e., an extended field trip.

## ACICS MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD

February 25, 2014

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**Home Institution.** In a case where an institution collaborates with another entity for the delivery of on-ground and/or distance education courses, "home institution" is the campus through which the student enrolls for the course. The Home Institution is responsible for assuring that accrediting standards are met, for providing on-campus services, and for clearly demonstrating through a formal Consortium Agreement the roles and responsibilities of the Home Institution and the Host Institution, which may deliver on-ground or distance education courses and specified online services. The Consortium Agreement must be approved by ACICS and must provide for evaluation visits to the Host Institution as may be required by ACICS.

ACICS expects the Home Institution to offer a minimum of 25% of a program if courses are delivered under a Consortium Agreement with an approved institution accredited by agency recognized by the U. S. Department of Education, and to offer a minimum of 75% of a program if courses are delivered under a Consortium Agreement with an approved unaccredited entity.

In the case of a study abroad activity, the Home Institution is the main campus or additional location which holds the grant of accreditation from ACICS and awards the credential or degree to the study abroad student and directly provides the majority of the educational activities that lead to program completion.

**Host Institution.** The institution which collaborates with an accredited institution in delivering on-ground and/or distance education courses and specific online services as described in a formal Consortium Agreement approved by ACICS. The Consortium Agreement must provide for evaluation visits to the Host Institution as may be required by ACICS.

If the Host Institution is an approved unaccredited entity, it is subject to an evaluation visit once every three years as required by ACICS.

In the case of a study abroad activity, the Host Institution is an approved international entity that provides a physical location and resources for study abroad students at the approved site.

### C. CUMULATIVE GRADE POINT AVERAGE FOR GRADUATE PROGRAMS

#### *Explanation of Proposed Changes*

*The Council proposes to modify language to address professional graduate degree programs that meet CGPA or grading standards that are accepted by professional/programmatic accrediting agencies.*

**APPENDIX D Standards of Satisfactory Progress**

16. The institution has provisions that the student must have a minimum CGPA of 2.0, C, for undergraduate programs and 3.0, B, for graduate programs or their equivalent upon graduation. For approved professional graduate programs, which require attainment of specified competencies and a licensure or certification, the institution has published and consistently follows an appropriate SAP policy.

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**2. For Information Only**

**A. 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).

**B. 2014 WORKSHOP SCHEDULE**

<b><i>CEP/CAR WORKSHOP</i></b>		
<b>CEP/CAR Workshop</b>	September 4, 2014	ACICS Office
<b><i>INITIAL ACCREDITATION WORKSHOP</i></b>		
<b>Initial Accreditation Workshop</b>	February 26, 2014	ACICS Office

## ACICS MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD

February 25, 2014

Initial Accreditation Workshop	June 3, 2014	Seattle, WA
Initial Accreditation Workshop	October 14, 2014	Monterey, CA
<b>RENEWAL ACCREDITATION WORKSHOP</b>		
Renewal Accreditation Workshop	February 27, 2014	ACICS Office
Renewal Accreditation Workshop	February 28, 2014	ACICS Office
Renewal Accreditation Workshop	June 3, 2014	Aventura, FL
Renewal Accreditation Workshop	September 3, 2014	ACICS Office
Renewal Accreditation Workshop	September 5, 2014	ACICS Office
Renewal Accreditation Workshop	October 14, 2014	Monterey, CA
Renewal Accreditation Workshop	November 3, 2014	New Orleans, LA
<b>RETENTION AND PLACEMENT WORKSHOP</b>		
Retention and Placement Workshop	May 1, 2014	ACICS Office
Retention and Placement Workshop	May 2, 2014	ACICS Office
Retention and Placement Workshop	May 15, 2014	ACICS Office
Retention and Placement Workshop	May 16, 2014	ACICS Office

### C. PUBLIC COMMENT

The Council encourages institutions to provide feedback regarding Council operations and procedures. Comments on the proposed *Criteria* revisions are due by **Friday, March 28, 2014**.

### D. 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

## ACICS MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD

February 25, 2014

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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.

### E. ACICS AWARE WEBINARS

The AWARE webinar will be held on **Wednesday, February 26, 2014**. This webinar will focus on information presented in the January 2014 Memorandum to the Field and information from the Council's February 2014 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 King at [tking@acics.org](mailto:tking@acics.org).

**ACICS MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD**

February 25, 2014

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**3. Comment Form-Proposed Criteria Revisions**

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

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

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

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

Proposed *Accreditation Criteria* revisions:

- General Education Requirements  
[ ] Accept as Written [ ] Modify (please explain)
- Study Abroad Activities  
[ ] Accept as Written [ ] Modify (please explain)
- Cumulative Grade Point Average for Graduate Programs  
[ ] Accept as Written [ ] Modify (please explain)

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

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

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

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**Please respond by Friday, March 28, 2014 to:**

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