

# U. S. Department of Education

## 34 CFR Part 602 -- The Secretary's Recognition of Accrediting Agencies

---

### Subpart A -- General

Sec.

- 602.1 Why does the Secretary recognize accrediting agencies?
- 602.2 How do I know which agencies the Secretary recognizes?
- 602.3 What definitions apply to this part?

### Subpart B -- The Criteria for Recognition

#### BASIC ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- 602.10 Link to Federal programs.
- 602.11 Geographic scope of accrediting activities.
- 602.12 Accrediting experience.
- 602.13 Acceptance of the agency by others.

#### ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS

- 602.14 Purpose and organization.
- 602.15 Administrative and fiscal responsibilities.

#### REQUIRED STANDARDS AND THEIR APPLICATION

- 602.16 Accreditation and preaccreditation standards.
- 602.17 Application of standards in reaching an accrediting decision.
- 602.18 Ensuring consistency in decision-making.
- 602.19 Monitoring and reevaluation of accredited institutions and programs.
- 602.20 Enforcement of standards.
- 602.21 Review of standards.

#### REQUIRED OPERATING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- 602.22 Substantive change.
- 602.23 Operating procedures all agencies must have.
- 602.24 Additional procedures certain institutional accreditors must have.
- 602.25 Due process.
- 602.26 Notification of accrediting decisions.
- 602.27 Other information an agency must provide the Department.
- 602.28 Regard for decisions of States and other accrediting agencies.

### Subpart C -- The Recognition Process

#### APPLICATION AND REVIEW BY DEPARTMENT STAFF

- 602.30 Activities covered by recognition procedures.
- 602.31 Agency submissions to the Department.
- 602.32 Procedures for Department review of applications for recognition or for change in scope, compliance reports, and increases in enrollment.
- 602.33 Procedures for review of agencies during the period of recognition.

## REVIEW BY THE NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY AND INTEGRITY

602.34 Advisory Committee meetings.

602.35 Responding to the Advisory Committee's recommendation.

## REVIEW AND DECISION BY THE SENIOR DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL

602.36 Senior Department official's decision.

## APPEAL RIGHTS AND PROCEDURES

602.37 Appealing the senior Department official's decision to the Secretary.

602.38 Contesting the Secretary's final decision to deny, limit, suspend, or terminate an agency's recognition.

## Subpart D-- Department Responsibilities

602.50 What information does the Department share with a recognized agency about its accredited institutions and programs?

AUTHORITY: 20 U.S.C. 1099b, unless otherwise noted.

## Subpart A -- General

### §602.1 Why does the Secretary recognize accrediting agencies?

(a) The Secretary recognizes accrediting agencies to ensure that these agencies are, for the purposes of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA), or for other Federal purposes, reliable authorities regarding the quality of education or training offered by the institutions or programs they accredit.

(b) The Secretary lists an agency as a nationally recognized accrediting agency if the agency meets the criteria for recognition listed in subpart B of this part.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

### §602.2 How do I know which agencies the Secretary recognizes?

(a) Periodically, the Secretary publishes a list of recognized agencies in the Federal Register, together with each agency's scope of recognition. You may obtain a copy of the list from the Department at any time. The list is also available on the Department's web site.

(b) If the Secretary denies continued recognition to a previously recognized agency, or if the Secretary limits, suspends, or terminates the agency's recognition before the end of its recognition period, the Secretary publishes a notice of that action in the Federal Register. The Secretary also makes the reasons for the action available to the public, on request.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

### §602.3 What definitions apply to this part?

The following definitions apply to this part:

Accreditation means the status of public recognition that an accrediting agency grants to an educational institution or program that meets the agency's standards and requirements.

Accrediting agency or agency means a legal entity, or that part of a legal entity, that conducts accrediting activities through voluntary, non-Federal peer review and makes decisions concerning the accreditation or preaccreditation status of institutions, programs, or both.

Act means the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended.

Adverse accrediting action or adverse action means the denial, withdrawal, suspension, revocation, or termination of accreditation or preaccreditation, or any comparable accrediting action an agency may take against an institution or program.

Advisory Committee means the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity.

Branch campus means a location of an institution that meets the definition of branch campus in 34 CFR 600.2.

Compliance report means a written report that the Department requires an agency to file to demonstrate that the agency has addressed deficiencies specified in a decision letter from the senior Department official or the Secretary.

Correspondence education means:

(1) Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor.

(2) Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student.

(3) Correspondence courses are typically self-paced.

(4) Correspondence education is not distance education.

Designated Federal Official means the Federal officer designated under section 10(f) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, 5 U.S.C. Appdx. 1.

Direct assessment program means an instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilizes direct assessment of student learning, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others, and meets the conditions of 34 CFR 668.10. For title IV, HEA purposes, the institution must obtain approval for the direct assessment program from the Secretary under 34 CFR 668.10(g) or (h) as applicable. As part of that approval, the accrediting agency must--

(1) Evaluate the program(s) and include them in the institution's grant of accreditation or preaccreditation; and

(2) Review and approve the institution's claim of each direct assessment program's equivalence in terms of credit or clock hours.

Distance education means education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (4) to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include--

(1) The internet;

(2) One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;

(3) Audioconferencing; or

(4) Video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3).

Final accrediting action means a final determination by an accrediting agency regarding the accreditation or preaccreditation status of an institution or program. A final accrediting action is not appealable within the agency.

Institution of higher education or institution means an educational institution that qualifies, or may qualify, as an eligible institution under 34 CFR part 600.

Institutional accrediting agency means an agency that accredits institutions of higher education.

Nationally recognized accrediting agency, nationally recognized agency, or recognized agency means an accrediting agency that the Secretary recognizes under this part.

Preaccreditation means the status of public recognition that an accrediting agency grants to an institution or program for a limited period of time that signifies the agency has determined that the institution or program is progressing towards accreditation and is likely to attain accreditation before the expiration of that limited period of time.

Program means a postsecondary educational program offered by an institution of higher education that leads to an academic or professional degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential.

Programmatic accrediting agency means an agency that accredits specific educational programs that prepare students for entry into a profession, occupation, or vocation.

**Recognition means an unappealed determination by the senior Department official under §602.36, or a determination by the Secretary on appeal under §602.37, that an accrediting agency complies with the criteria for recognition listed in subpart B of this part and that the agency is effective in its application of those criteria. A grant of recognition to an agency as a reliable authority regarding the quality of education or training offered by institutions or programs it accredits remains in effect for the term granted except upon a determination made in accordance with subpart C of this part that the agency no longer complies with the subpart B criteria or that it has become ineffective in its application of those criteria.**

Representative of the public means a person who is not--

- (1) An employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to, an institution or program that either is accredited or preaccredited by the agency or has applied for accreditation or preaccreditation;
- (2) A member of any trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with the agency; or
- (3) A spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in paragraph (1) or (2) of this definition.

Scope of recognition or scope means the range of accrediting activities for which the Secretary recognizes an agency. The Secretary may place a limitation on the scope of an agency's recognition for Title IV, HEA purposes. The Secretary's designation of scope defines the recognition granted according to--

- (1) Geographic area of accrediting activities;
- (2) Types of degrees and certificates covered;
- (3) Types of institutions and programs covered;
- (4) Types of preaccreditation status covered, if any; and
- (5) Coverage of accrediting activities related to distance education **or correspondence education**, if any.

Secretary means the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education or any official or employee of the Department acting for the Secretary under a delegation of authority.

Senior Department official means the senior official in the U.S. Department of Education who reports directly to the Secretary regarding accrediting agency recognition.

State means a State of the Union, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, the United States Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau. The latter three are also known as the Freely Associated States.

Teach-out agreement means a written agreement between institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students **and a reasonable opportunity for students to complete their program of study if an institution, or an institutional location that provides one hundred percent of at least one program offered, ceases to operate** before all enrolled students have completed their program of study.

**Teach-out plan means a written plan developed by an institution that provides for the equitable treatment of students if an institution, or an institutional location that provides one hundred percent of at least one program, ceases to operate before all students have completed their program of study, and may include, if required by the institution's accrediting agency, a teach-out agreement between institutions.**

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

## Subpart B -- The Criteria for Recognition

### BASIC ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

#### **§602.10 Link to Federal programs.**

The agency must demonstrate that--

- (a) If the agency accredits institutions of higher education, its accreditation is a required element in enabling at least one of those institutions to establish eligibility to participate in HEA programs; or
- (b) If the agency accredits institutions of higher education or higher education programs, or both, its accreditation is a required element in enabling at least one of those entities to establish eligibility to participate in non-HEA Federal programs.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

#### **§602.11 Geographic scope of accrediting activities.**

The agency must demonstrate that its accrediting activities cover--

- (a) A State, if the agency is part of a State government;
- (b) A region of the United States that includes at least three States that are reasonably close to one another; or
- (c) The United States.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

#### **§602.12 Accrediting experience.**

(a) An agency seeking initial recognition must demonstrate that it has--

(1) Granted accreditation or preaccreditation--

- (i) To one or more institutions if it is requesting recognition as an institutional accrediting agency and to one or more programs if it is requesting recognition as a programmatic accrediting agency;
- (ii) That covers the range of the specific degrees, certificates, institutions, and programs for which it seeks recognition; and
- (iii) In the geographic area for which it seeks recognition; and

(2) Conducted accrediting activities, including deciding whether to grant or deny accreditation or preaccreditation, for at least two years prior to seeking recognition.

(b) A recognized agency seeking an expansion of its scope of recognition must demonstrate that it has granted accreditation or preaccreditation covering the range of the specific degrees, certificates, institutions, and programs for which it seeks the expansion of scope.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

#### **§602.13 Acceptance of the agency by others.**

The agency must demonstrate that its standards, policies, procedures, and decisions to grant or deny accreditation are widely accepted in the United States by--

- (a) Educators and educational institutions; and
- (b) Licensing bodies, practitioners, and employers in the professional or vocational fields for which the educational institutions or programs within the agency's jurisdiction prepare their students.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**ORGANIZATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS**

**§602.14 Purpose and organization.**

(a) The Secretary recognizes only the following four categories of agencies:

The Secretary recognizes...	that...
(1) An accrediting agency	(i) Has a voluntary membership of institutions of higher education;  (ii) Has as a principal purpose the accrediting of institutions of higher education and that accreditation is a required element in enabling those institutions to participate in HEA programs; and  (iii) Satisfies the <u>separate and independent</u> requirements in paragraph (b) of this section.
(2) An accrediting agency	(i) Has a voluntary membership; and  (ii) Has as its principal purpose the accrediting of higher education programs, or higher education programs and institutions of higher education, and that accreditation is a required element in enabling those entities to participate in non-HEA Federal programs.
(3) An accrediting agency	for purposes of determining eligibility for Title IV, HEA programs--  (i) Either has a voluntary membership of individuals participating in a profession or has as its principal purpose the accrediting of programs within institutions that are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency; and  (ii) Either satisfies the "separate and independent" requirements in paragraph (b) of this section or obtains a waiver of those requirements under paragraphs (d) and (e) of this section.
(4) A State agency	(i) Has as a principal purpose the accrediting of institutions of higher education, higher education programs, or both; and  (ii) The Secretary listed as a nationally recognized accrediting agency on or before October 1, 1991 and has recognized continuously since that date.

(b) For purposes of this section, the term separate and independent means that--

- (1) The members of the agency's decision-making body--who decide the accreditation or preaccreditation status of institutions or programs, establish the agency ' s accreditation policies, or both--are not elected or selected by the board or chief executive officer of any related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization;
- (2) At least one member of the agency's decision-making body is a representative of the public, and at least one-seventh of that body consists of representatives of the public;
- (3) The agency has established and implemented guidelines for each member of the decision-making body to avoid conflicts of interest in making decisions;

(4) The agency's dues are paid separately from any dues paid to any related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization; and

(5) The agency develops and determines its own budget, with no review by or consultation with any other entity or organization.

(c) The Secretary considers that any joint use of personnel, services, equipment, or facilities by an agency and a related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization does not violate the "separate and independent" requirements in paragraph (b) of this section if--

(1) The agency pays the fair market value for its proportionate share of the joint use; and

(2) The joint use does not compromise the independence and confidentiality of the accreditation process.

(d) For purposes of paragraph (a)(3) of this section, the Secretary may waive the "separate and independent" requirements in paragraph (b) of this section if the agency demonstrates that--

(1) The Secretary listed the agency as a nationally recognized agency on or before October 1, 1991 and has recognized it continuously since that date;

(2) The related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization plays no role in making or ratifying either the accrediting or policy decisions of the agency;

(3) The agency has sufficient budgetary and administrative autonomy to carry out its accrediting functions independently; and

(4) The agency provides to the related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization only information it makes available to the public.

(e) An agency seeking a waiver of the "separate and independent" requirements under paragraph (d) of this section must apply for the waiver each time the agency seeks recognition or continued recognition.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.15 Administrative and fiscal responsibilities.**

The agency must have the administrative and fiscal capability to carry out its accreditation activities in light of its requested scope of recognition. The agency meets this requirement if the agency demonstrates that--

(a) The agency has--

(1) Adequate administrative staff and financial resources to carry out its accrediting responsibilities;

(2) Competent and knowledgeable individuals, qualified by education and experience in their own right and trained by the agency on **their responsibilities, as appropriate for their roles, regarding the agency's standards, policies, and procedures, to conduct its on-site evaluations, apply or establish its policies, and make its accrediting and preaccrediting decisions, including, if applicable to the agency's scope, their responsibilities regarding distance education and correspondence education;**

(3) Academic and administrative personnel on its evaluation, policy, and decision-making bodies, if the agency accredits institutions;

(4) Educators and practitioners on its evaluation, policy, and decision-making bodies, if the agency accredits programs or single-purpose institutions that prepare students for a specific profession;

(5) Representatives of the public on all decision-making bodies; and

(6) Clear and effective controls against conflicts of interest, or the appearance of conflicts of interest, by the agency's--

(i) Board members;

(ii) Commissioners;

- (iii) Evaluation team members;
- (iv) Consultants;
- (v) Administrative staff; and
- (vi) Other agency representatives; and

(b) The agency maintains complete and accurate records of--

- (1) Its last full accreditation or preaccreditation reviews of each institution or program, including on-site evaluation team reports, the institution ' s or program ' s responses to on-site reports, periodic review reports, any reports of special reviews conducted by the agency between regular reviews, and a copy of the institution ' s or program ' s most recent self-study; and
- (2) All decisions **made throughout an institution's or program's affiliation with the agency** regarding the accreditation and preaccreditation of any institution or program **and substantive changes**, including all correspondence that is significantly related to those decisions.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1845-0003)

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

## REQUIRED STANDARDS AND THEIR APPLICATION

### §602.16 Accreditation and preaccreditation standards.

(a) The agency must demonstrate that it has standards for accreditation, and preaccreditation, if offered, that are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the agency is a reliable authority regarding the quality of the education or training provided by the institutions or programs it accredits. The agency meets this requirement if--

- (1) The agency ' s accreditation standards effectively address the quality of the institution or program in the following areas:
  - (i) Success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution's mission, **which may include different standards for different institutions or programs, as established by the institution**, including, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, State licensing examination, and job placement rates.
  - (ii) Curricula.
  - (iii) Faculty.
  - (iv) Facilities, equipment, and supplies.
  - (v) Fiscal and administrative capacity as appropriate to the specified scale of operations.
  - (vi) Student support services.
  - (vii) Recruiting and admissions practices, academic calendars, catalogs, publications, grading, and advertising.
  - (viii) Measures of program length and the objectives of the degrees or credentials offered.
  - (ix) Record of student complaints received by, or available to, the agency.
  - (x) Record of compliance with the institution's program responsibilities under Title IV of the Act, based on the most recent student loan default rate data provided by the Secretary, the results of financial or compliance audits, program reviews, and any other information that the Secretary may provide to the agency; and
- (2) The agency's preaccreditation standards, if offered, are appropriately related to the agency's accreditation standards and do not permit the institution or program to hold preaccreditation status for more than five years.

(b) If the agency only accredits programs and does not serve as an institutional accrediting agency for any of those programs, its accreditation standards must address the areas in paragraph (a)(1) of this section in terms of the type and level of the program rather than in terms of the institution.

**(c) If the agency has or seeks to include within its scope of recognition the evaluation of the quality of institutions or programs offering distance education or correspondence education, the agency's standards must effectively address the quality of an institution's distance education or correspondence education in the areas identified in paragraph (a)(1) of this section. The agency is not required to have separate standards, procedures, or policies for the evaluation of distance education or correspondence education;**

(d) If none of the institutions an agency accredits participates in any Title IV, HEA program, or if the agency only accredits programs within institutions that are accredited by a nationally recognized institutional accrediting agency, the agency is not required to have the accreditation standards described in paragraphs (a)(1)(viii) and (a)(1)(x) of this section.

(e) An agency that has established and applies the standards in paragraph (a) of this section may establish any additional accreditation standards it deems appropriate.

**(f) Nothing in paragraph (a) of this section restricts--**

**(1) An accrediting agency from setting, with the involvement of its members, and applying accreditation standards for or to institutions or programs that seek review by the agency; or**

**(2) An institution from developing and using institutional standards to show its success with respect to student achievement, which achievement may be considered as part of any accreditation review.**

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1845-0003)

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.17 Application of standards in reaching an accrediting decision.**

The agency must have effective mechanisms for evaluating an institution's or program's compliance with the agency's standards before reaching a decision to accredit or preaccredit the institution or program. The agency meets this requirement if the agency demonstrates that it--

(a) Evaluates whether an institution or program--

(1) Maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate in light of the degrees or certificates awarded;

(2) Is successful in achieving its stated objectives; and

(3) Maintains degree and certificate requirements that at least conform to commonly accepted standards;

(b) Requires the institution or program to prepare, following guidance provided by the agency, an in-depth self-study that includes the assessment of educational quality and the institution's or program's continuing efforts to improve educational quality;

(c) Conducts at least one on-site review of the institution or program during which it obtains sufficient information to determine if the institution or program complies with the agency's standards;

(d) Allows the institution or program the opportunity to respond in writing to the report of the on-site review;

(e) Conducts its own analysis of the self-study and supporting documentation furnished by the institution or program, the report of the on-site review, the institution's or program's response to the report, and any other appropriate information from other sources to determine whether the institution or program complies with the agency's standards;

(f) Provides the institution or program with a detailed written report that assesses--

(1) The institution's or program's compliance with the agency's standards, including areas needing improvement; and

(2) The institution's or program's performance with respect to student achievement; **and**

**(g) Requires institutions that offer distance education or correspondence education to have processes in place through which the institution establishes that the student who registers in a distance education or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. The agency meets this requirement if it--**

**(1) Requires institutions to verify the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the option of the institution, methods such as--**

**(i) A secure login and pass code;**

**(ii) Proctored examinations; and**

**(iii) New or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identity; and**

**(2) Makes clear in writing that institutions must use processes that protect student privacy and notify students of any projected additional student charges associated with the verification of student identity at the time of registration or enrollment.**

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.18 Ensuring consistency in decision-making.**

The agency must consistently apply and enforce standards **that respect the stated mission of the institution, including religious mission, and that** ensure that the education or training offered by an institution or program, including any offered through distance education **or correspondence education**, is of sufficient quality to achieve its stated objective for the duration of any accreditation or preaccreditation period granted by the agency. The agency meets this requirement if the agency--

**(a) Has written specification of the requirements for accreditation and preaccreditation that include clear standards for an institution or program to be accredited;**

**(b) Has effective controls against the inconsistent application of the agency's standards;**

**(c) Bases decisions regarding accreditation and preaccreditation on the agency ' s published standards;**

**(d) Has a reasonable basis for determining that the information the agency relies on for making accrediting decisions is accurate; and**

**(e) Provides the institution or program with a detailed written report that clearly identifies any deficiencies in the institution's or program's compliance with the agency's standards.**

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.19 Monitoring and reevaluation of accredited institutions and programs.**

**(a) The agency must reevaluate, at regularly established intervals, the institutions or programs it has accredited or preaccredited.**

**(b) The agency must demonstrate it has, and effectively applies, a set of monitoring and evaluation approaches that enables the agency to identify problems with an institution's or program's continued compliance with agency standards and that takes into account institutional or program strengths and stability. These approaches must include periodic reports, and collection and analysis of key data and indicators, identified by the agency, including, but not limited to, fiscal information and measures of student achievement, consistent with the provisions of §602.16(f). This provision does not require institutions or programs to provide annual reports on each specific accreditation criterion.**

**(c) Each agency must monitor overall growth of the institutions or programs it accredits and, at least annually, collect headcount enrollment data from those institutions or programs.**

**(d) Institutional accrediting agencies must monitor the growth of programs at institutions experiencing significant enrollment growth, as reasonably defined by the agency.**

**(e) Any agency that has notified the Secretary of a change in its scope in accordance with §602.27(a)(5) must monitor the headcount enrollment of each institution it has accredited that offers distance education or correspondence education. If any such institution has experienced an increase in headcount enrollment of 50 percent or more within one institutional fiscal year, the agency must report that information to the Secretary within 30 days of acquiring such data.**

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.20 Enforcement of standards.**

(a) If the agency's review of an institution or program under any standard indicates that the institution or program is not in compliance with that standard, the agency must--

(1) Immediately initiate adverse action against the institution or program; or

(2) Require the institution or program to take appropriate action to bring itself into compliance with the agency's standards within a time period that must not exceed--

(i) Twelve months, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is less than one year in length;

(ii) Eighteen months, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is at least one year, but less than two years, in length; or

(iii) Two years, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is at least two years in length.

(b) If the institution or program does not bring itself into compliance within the specified period, the agency must take immediate adverse action unless the agency, for good cause, extends the period for achieving compliance.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.21 Review of standards.**

(a) The agency must maintain a systematic program of review that demonstrates that its standards are adequate to evaluate the quality of the education or training provided by the institutions and programs it accredits and relevant to the educational or training needs of students.

(b) The agency determines the specific procedures it follows in evaluating its standards, but the agency must ensure that its program of review--

(1) Is comprehensive;

(2) Occurs at regular, yet reasonable, intervals or on an ongoing basis;

(3) Examines each of the agency's standards and the standards as a whole; and

(4) Involves all of the agency's relevant constituencies in the review and affords them a meaningful opportunity to provide input into the review.

(c) If the agency determines, at any point during its systematic program of review, that it needs to make changes to its standards, the agency must initiate action within 12 months to make the changes and must complete that action within a reasonable period of time. Before finalizing any changes to its standards, the agency must--

(1) Provide notice to all of the agency's relevant constituencies, and other parties who have made their interest known to the agency, of the changes the agency proposes to make;

(2) Give the constituencies and other interested parties adequate opportunity to comment on the proposed changes; and

(3) Take into account any comments on the proposed changes submitted timely by the relevant constituencies and by other interested parties.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

## REQUIRED OPERATING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

### s602.22 Substantive change.

(a) If the agency accredits institutions, it must maintain adequate substantive change policies that ensure that any substantive change to the educational mission, program, or programs of an institution after the agency has accredited or preaccredited the institution does not adversely affect the capacity of the institution to continue to meet the agency's standards. The agency meets this requirement if--

(1) The agency requires the institution to obtain the agency's approval of the substantive change before the agency includes the change in the scope of accreditation or preaccreditation it previously granted to the institution; and

(2) The agency's definition of substantive change includes at least the following types of change:

(i) Any change in the established mission or objectives of the institution.

(ii) Any change in the legal status, form of control, or ownership of the institution.

(iii) The addition of courses or programs that represent a significant departure **from the existing offerings of educational programs**, or method of delivery, from those that were offered when the agency last evaluated the institution.

(iv) The addition of programs **of study** at a degree or credential level **different from** that which is included in the institution's current accreditation or preaccreditation.

(v) A change from clock hours to credit hours.

(vi) A substantial increase in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program.

**(vii) If the agency's accreditation of an institution enables the institution to seek eligibility to participate in title IV, HEA programs, the entering into a contract under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the title IV, HEA programs offers more than 25 percent of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs.**

**(viii) (A) If the agency's accreditation of an institution enables it to seek eligibility to participate in title IV, HEA programs, the establishment of an additional location at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program. The addition of such a location must be approved by the agency in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section unless the accrediting agency determines, and issues a written determination stating that the institution has--**

**(1) Successfully completed at least one cycle of accreditation of maximum length offered by the agency and one renewal, or has been accredited for at least ten years;**

**(2) At least three additional locations that the agency has approved; and**

**(3) Met criteria established by the agency indicating sufficient capacity to add additional locations without individual prior approvals, including at a minimum satisfactory evidence of a system to ensure quality across a distributed enterprise that includes--**

**(i) Clearly identified academic control;**

**(ii) Regular evaluation of the locations;**

**(iii) Adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems;**

**(iv) Financial stability; and**

**(v) Long-range planning for expansion.**

**(B) The agency's procedures for approval of an additional location, pursuant to paragraph (a)(2)(viii)(A) of this section, must require timely reporting to the agency of every additional location established under this approval.**

**(C) Each agency determination or redetermination to preapprove an institution's addition of locations under paragraph (a)(2)(viii)(A) of this section may not exceed five years.**

**(D) The agency may not preapprove an institution's addition of locations under paragraph (a)(2)(viii)(A) of this section after the institution undergoes a change in ownership resulting in a change in control as defined in 34 CFR 600.31 until the institution demonstrates that it meets the conditions for the agency to preapprove additional locations described in this paragraph.**

**(E) The agency must have an effective mechanism for conducting, at reasonable intervals, visits to a representative sample of additional locations approved under paragraph (a)(2)(viii)(A) of this section.**

**(ix) The acquisition of any other institution or any program or location of another institution.**

**(x) The addition of a permanent location at a site at which the institution is conducting a teach-out for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all students have completed their program of study.**

**(3) The agency's substantive change policy must define when the changes made or proposed by an institution are or would be sufficiently extensive to require the agency to conduct a new comprehensive evaluation of that institution.**

(b) The agency may determine the procedures it uses to grant prior approval of the substantive change. **However, these procedures must specify an effective date, which is not retroactive, on which the change is included in the program's or institution's accreditation. An agency may designate the date of a change in ownership as the effective date of its approval of that substantive change if the accreditation decision is made within 30 days of the change in ownership.** Except as provided in paragraph (c) of this section, these **procedures** may, but need not, require a visit by the agency.

(c) **Except as provided in (a)(2)(viii)(A) of this section,** if the agency's accreditation of an institution enables the institution to seek eligibility to participate in Title IV, HEA programs, the agency's procedures for the approval of an additional location **where at least 50 percent of an educational program is offered must provide for a determination of the institution's fiscal and administrative capacity to operate the additional location.** In addition, the agency's procedures must include--

(1) A visit, within six months, to each additional location the institution establishes, if the institution--

(i) Has a total of three or fewer additional locations;

(ii) Has not demonstrated, to the agency's satisfaction, that it has a proven record of effective educational oversight of additional locations; or

(iii) Has been placed on warning, probation, or show cause by the agency or is subject to some limitation by the agency on its accreditation or preaccreditation status;

(2) An effective mechanism for conducting, at reasonable intervals, visits to **a representative sample of** additional locations of institutions that operate more than three additional locations; and

(3) An effective mechanism, which may, at the agency's discretion, include visits to additional locations, for ensuring that accredited and preaccredited institutions that experience rapid growth in the number of additional locations maintain educational quality.

(d) The purpose of the visits described in paragraph (c) of this section is to verify that the additional location has the personnel, facilities, and resources it claimed to have in its application to the agency for approval of the additional location.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.23 Operating procedures all agencies must have.**

(a) The agency must maintain and make available to the public written materials describing--

- (1) Each type of accreditation and preaccreditation it grants;
- (2) The procedures that institutions or programs must follow in applying for accreditation or preaccreditation;
- (3) The standards and procedures it uses to determine whether to grant, reaffirm, reinstate, restrict, deny, revoke, terminate, or take any other action related to each type of accreditation and preaccreditation that the agency grants;
- (4) The institutions and programs that the agency currently accredits or preaccredits and, for each institution and program, the year the agency will next review or reconsider it for accreditation or preaccreditation; and
- (5) The names, academic and professional qualifications, and relevant employment and organizational affiliations of-

(i) The members of the agency's policy and decision-making bodies; and

(ii) The agency's principal administrative staff.

(b) In providing public notice that an institution or program subject to its jurisdiction is being considered for accreditation or preaccreditation, the agency must provide an opportunity for third-party comment concerning the institution's or program's qualifications for accreditation or preaccreditation. At the agency's discretion, third-party comment may be received either in writing or at a public hearing, or both.

(c) The accrediting agency must--

(1) Review in a timely, fair, and equitable manner any complaint it receives against an accredited institution or program that is related to the agency's standards or procedures. **The agency may not complete its review and make a decision regarding a complaint unless, in accordance with published procedures, it ensures that the institution or program has sufficient opportunity to provide a response to the complaint;**

(2) Take follow-up action, as necessary, including enforcement action, if necessary, based on the results of its review; and

(3) Review in a timely, fair, and equitable manner, and apply unbiased judgment to, any complaints against itself and take follow-up action, as appropriate, based on the results of its review.

(d) If an institution or program elects to make a public disclosure of its accreditation or preaccreditation status, the agency must ensure that the institution or program discloses that status accurately, including the specific academic or instructional programs covered by that status and the name, address, and telephone number of the agency.

(e) The accrediting agency must provide for the public correction of incorrect or misleading information an accredited or preaccredited institution or program releases about--

(1) The accreditation or preaccreditation status of the institution or program;

(2) The contents of reports of on-site reviews; and

(3) The agency's accrediting or preaccrediting actions with respect to the institution or program.

(f) The agency may establish any additional operating procedures it deems appropriate. At the agency's discretion, these may include unannounced inspections.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1845-0003)

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.24 Additional procedures certain institutional accreditors must have.**

If the agency is an institutional accrediting agency and its accreditation or preaccreditation enables those institutions to obtain eligibility to participate in Title IV, HEA programs, the agency must demonstrate that it has established and uses all of the following procedures:

(a) Branch campus.

(1) The agency must require the institution to notify the agency if it plans to establish a branch campus and to submit a business plan for the branch campus that describes--

- (i) The educational program to be offered at the branch campus;
- (ii) The projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow at the branch campus; and
- (iii) The operation, management, and physical resources at the branch campus.

(2) The agency may extend accreditation to the branch campus only after it evaluates the business plan and takes whatever other actions it deems necessary to determine that the branch campus has sufficient educational, financial, operational, management, and physical resources to meet the agency's standards.

(3) The agency must undertake a site visit to the branch campus as soon as practicable, but no later than six months after the establishment of that campus.

(b) Change in ownership. The agency must undertake a site visit to an institution that has undergone a change of ownership that resulted in a change of control as soon as practicable, but no later than six months after the change of ownership.

(c) Teach-out plans and agreements.

**(1) The agency must require an institution it accredits or preaccredits to submit a teach-out plan to the agency for approval upon the occurrence of any of the following events:**

**(i) The Secretary notifies the agency that the Secretary has initiated an emergency action against an institution, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(G) of the HEA, or an action to limit, suspend, or terminate an institution participating in any title IV, HEA program, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(F) of the HEA, and that a teach-out plan is required.**

**(ii) The agency acts to withdraw, terminate, or suspend the accreditation or preaccreditation of the institution.**

**(iii) The institution notifies the agency that it intends to cease operations entirely or close a location that provides one hundred percent of at least one program.**

**(iv) A State licensing or authorizing agency notifies the agency that an institution's license or legal authorization to provide an educational program has been or will be revoked.**

**(2) The agency must evaluate the teach-out plan to ensure it provides for the equitable treatment of students under criteria established by the agency, specifies additional charges, if any, and provides for notification to the students of any additional charges.**

**(3) If the agency approves a teach-out plan that includes a program that is accredited by another recognized accrediting agency, it must notify that accrediting agency of its approval.**

**(4) The agency may require an institution it accredits or preaccredits to enter into a teach-out agreement as part of its teach-out plan.**

**(5) The agency must require an institution it accredits or preaccredits that enters into a teach-out agreement, either on its own or at the request of the agency, with another institution to submit that teach-out agreement to the agency for approval. The agency may approve the teach-out agreement only if the agreement is between institutions that are accredited or preaccredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency, is consistent with applicable standards and regulations, and provides for the equitable treatment of students by ensuring that--**

(i) The teach-out institution has the necessary experience, resources, and support services to--

(A) Provide an educational program that is of acceptable quality and reasonably similar in content, structure, and scheduling to that provided by the institution **that is ceasing operations either entirely or at one of its locations;** and

**(B) Remain stable, carry out its mission, and meet all obligations to existing students; and**

(ii) The teach-out institution demonstrates that it can provide students access to the program and services without requiring them to move or travel substantial distances **and that it will provide students with information about additional charges, if any.**

**(d) Closed Institution.** If an institution the agency accredits or preaccredits closes **without a teach-out plan or agreement**, the agency must work with the Department and the appropriate State agency, to the extent feasible, to **assist students in finding** reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional charges.

**(e) Transfer of credit policies.** The accrediting agency must confirm, as part of its review for initial accreditation or preaccreditation, or renewal of accreditation, that the institution has transfer of credit policies that--

**(1) Are publicly disclosed in accordance with §668.43(a)(11); and**

**(2) Include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education.**

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1845-0003)

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.25 Due process.**

The agency must demonstrate that the procedures it uses throughout the accrediting process satisfy due process. The agency meets this requirement if the agency does the following:

**(a) Provides adequate written specification of its requirements, including clear standards, for an institution or program to be accredited or preaccredited.**

**(b) Uses procedures that afford an institution or program a reasonable period of time to comply with the agency's requests for information and documents.**

**(c) Provides written specification of any deficiencies identified at the institution or program examined.**

**(d) Provides sufficient opportunity for a written response by an institution or program regarding any deficiencies identified by the agency, to be considered by the agency within a timeframe determined by the agency, and before any adverse action is taken.**

**(e) Notifies the institution or program in writing of any adverse accrediting action or an action to place the institution or program on probation or show cause. The notice describes the basis for the action.**

**(f) Provides an opportunity, upon written request of an institution or program, for the institution or program to appeal any adverse action prior to the action becoming final.**

**(1) The appeal must take place at a hearing before an appeals panel that--**

**(i) May not include current members of the agency's decision-making body that took the initial adverse action;**

**(ii) Is subject to a conflict of interest policy;**

**(iii) Does not serve only an advisory or procedural role, and has and uses the authority to make the following decisions: to affirm, amend, or reverse adverse actions of the original decision-making body; and**

**(iv) Affirms, amends, reverses, or remands the adverse action. A decision to affirm, amend, or reverse the adverse action is implemented by the appeals panel or by the original decision-making body, at the agency's option. In a decision to remand the adverse action to the original decision-making body for further consideration, the appeals panel must identify specific issues that the original decision-making body must address. In a decision that is implemented by or remanded to the original decision-making body, that body must act in a manner consistent with the appeals panel's decisions or instructions.**

**(2) The agency must recognize the right of the institution or program to employ counsel to represent the institution or program during its appeal, including to make any presentation that the agency permits the institution or program to make on its own during the appeal.**

**(g)** The agency notifies the institution or program in writing of the result of its appeal and the basis for that result.

**(h) (1) The agency must provide for a process, in accordance with written procedures, through which an institution or program may, before the agency reaches a final adverse action decision, seek review of new financial information if all of the following conditions are met:**

**(i) The financial information was unavailable to the institution or program until after the decision subject to appeal was made.**

**(ii) The financial information is significant and bears materially on the financial deficiencies identified by the agency. The criteria of significance and materiality are determined by the agency.**

**(iii) The only remaining deficiency cited by the agency in support of a final adverse action decision is the institution's or program's failure to meet an agency standard pertaining to finances.**

**(2) An institution or program may seek the review of new financial information described in paragraph (h)(1) of this section only once and any determination by the agency made with respect to that review does not provide a basis for an appeal.**

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.26 Notification of accrediting decisions.**

The agency must demonstrate that it has established and follows written procedures requiring it to provide written notice of its accrediting decisions to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public. The agency meets this requirement if the agency, following its written procedures--

(a) Provides written notice of the following types of decisions to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public no later than 30 days after it makes the decision:

(1) A decision to award initial accreditation or preaccreditation to an institution or program.

(2) A decision to renew an institution's or program's accreditation or preaccreditation;

(b) Provides written notice of the following types of decisions to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, and the appropriate accrediting agencies at the same time it notifies the institution or program of the decision, but no later than 30 days after it reaches the decision:

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

(2) A final decision to deny, withdraw, suspend, revoke, or terminate the accreditation or preaccreditation of an institution or program.

**(3) A final decision to take any other adverse action, as defined by the agency, not listed in paragraph (b)(2) of this section;**

(c) Provides written notice to the public of the decisions listed in paragraphs (b)(1) , (b)(2) , **and (b)(3)** of this section within 24 hours of its notice to the institution or program;

(d) For any decision listed in paragraph (b)(2) of this section, makes available to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, and the public, no later than 60 days after the decision, a brief statement summarizing the reasons for the agency's decision and the **official** comments that the affected institution or program may wish to make with regard to that decision, **or evidence that the affected institution has been offered the opportunity to provide official comment;** and

(e) Notifies the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and, upon request, the public if an accredited or preaccredited institution or program--

(1) Decides to withdraw voluntarily from accreditation or preaccreditation, within 30 days of receiving notification from the institution or program that it is withdrawing voluntarily from accreditation or preaccreditation; or

(2) Lets its accreditation or preaccreditation lapse, within 30 days of the date on which accreditation or preaccreditation lapses.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1845-0003)

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.27 Other information an agency must provide the Department.**

**(a) The agency must submit to the Department--**

(1) A copy of any annual report it prepares;

(2) A copy, updated annually, of its directory of accredited and preaccredited institutions and programs;

(3) A summary of the agency's major accrediting activities during the previous year (an annual data summary), if requested by the Secretary to carry out the Secretary's responsibilities related to this part;

(4) Any proposed change in the agency's policies, procedures, or accreditation or preaccreditation standards that might alter its--

(i) Scope of recognition, **except as provided in paragraph (5)(a) of this section;** or

(ii) Compliance with the criteria for recognition;

**(5) Notification that the agency has expanded its scope of recognition to include distance education or correspondence education as provided in section 496(a)(4)(B)(i)(I) of the HEA. Such an expansion of scope is effective on the date the Department receives the notification;**

(6) The name of any institution or program it accredits that the agency has reason to believe is failing to meet its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities or is engaged in fraud or abuse, along with the agency's reasons for concern about the institution or program; and

(7) If the Secretary requests, information that may bear upon an accredited or preaccredited institution's compliance with its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities, including the eligibility of the institution or program to participate in Title IV, HEA programs.

**(b) If an agency has a policy regarding notification to an institution or program of contact with the Department in accordance with paragraph (a)(6) or (a)(7) of this section, it must provide for a case by case review of the circumstances surrounding the contact, and the need for the confidentiality of that contact. Upon a specific request by the Department, the agency must consider that contact confidential.**

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1845-0003)

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.28 Regard for decisions of States and other accrediting agencies.**

(a) If the agency is an institutional accrediting agency, it may not accredit or preaccredit institutions that lack legal authorization under applicable State law to provide a program of education beyond the secondary level.

(b) Except as provided in paragraph (c) of this section, the agency may not grant initial or renewed accreditation or preaccreditation to an institution, or a program offered by an institution, if the agency knows, or has reasonable cause to know, that the institution is the subject of--

(1) A pending or final action brought by a State agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education in the State;

(2) A decision by a recognized agency to deny accreditation or preaccreditation;

(3) A pending or final action brought by a recognized accrediting agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution's accreditation or preaccreditation; or

(4) Probation or an equivalent status imposed by a recognized agency.

(c) The agency may grant accreditation or preaccreditation to an institution or program described in paragraph (b) of this section only if it provides to the Secretary, within 30 days of its action, a thorough and reasonable explanation, consistent with its standards, why the action of the other body does not preclude the agency's grant of accreditation or preaccreditation.

(d) If the agency learns that an institution it accredits or preaccredits, or an institution that offers a program it accredits or preaccredits, is the subject of an adverse action by another recognized accrediting agency or has been placed on probation or an equivalent status by another recognized agency, the agency must promptly review its accreditation or preaccreditation of the institution or program to determine if it should also take adverse action or place the institution or program on probation or show cause.

(e) The agency must, upon request, share with other appropriate recognized accrediting agencies and recognized State approval agencies information about the accreditation or preaccreditation status of an institution or program and any adverse actions it has taken against an accredited or preaccredited institution or program.

(Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1845-0003)

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

## **Subpart C -- The Recognition Process**

### **APPLICATION AND REVIEW BY DEPARTMENT STAFF**

#### **§602.30 Activities covered by recognition procedures.**

Recognition proceedings are administrative actions taken on any of the following matters:

- (a) Applications for initial or continued recognition submitted under §602.31(a).
- (b) Applications for an expansion of scope submitted under §602.31(b).
- (c) Compliance reports submitted under §602.31(c).
- (d) Reviews of agencies that have expanded their scope of recognition by notice, following receipt by the Department of information of an increase in headcount enrollment described in §602.19(e).
- (e) Staff analyses identifying areas of non-compliance based on a review conducted under §602.33.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

#### **§602.31 Agency submissions to the Department.**

(a) Applications for recognition or renewal of recognition. An accrediting agency seeking initial or continued recognition must submit a written application to the Secretary. Each accrediting agency must submit an application for continued recognition at least once every five years, or within a shorter time period specified in the final recognition decision. The application must consist of--

- (1) A statement of the agency's requested scope of recognition;
- (2) Evidence, including documentation, that the agency complies with the criteria for recognition listed in subpart B of this part and effectively applies those criteria; and
- (3) Evidence, including documentation, of how an agency that includes or seeks to include distance education or correspondence education in its scope of recognition applies its standards in evaluating programs and institutions it accredits that offer distance education or correspondence education.

(b) Applications for expansions of scope. An agency seeking an expansion of scope by application must submit a written application to the Secretary. The application must--

- (1) Specify the scope requested;
- (2) Include documentation of experience in accordance with §602.12(b); and
- (3) Provide copies of any relevant standards, policies, or procedures developed and applied by the agency and documentation of the application of these standards, policies, or procedures.

(c) Compliance reports. If an agency is required to submit a compliance report, it must do so within 30 days following the end of the period for achieving compliance as specified in the decision of the senior Department official or Secretary, as applicable.

(d) Review following an increase in headcount enrollment. If an agency that has notified the Secretary in writing of its change in scope to include distance education or correspondence education in accordance with §602.27(a)(5) reports an increase in headcount enrollment in accordance with §602.19(e) for an institution it accredits, or if the Department notifies the agency of such an increase at one of the agency's accredited institutions, the agency must, within 45 days of reporting the increase or receiving notice of the increase from the Department, as applicable, submit a report explaining--

- (1) How the agency evaluates the capacity of the institutions or programs it accredits to accommodate significant growth in enrollment and to maintain educational quality;
- (2) The specific circumstances regarding the growth at the institution(s) or programs(s) that triggered the review and the results of any evaluation conducted by the agency; and
- (3) Any other information that the agency deems appropriate to demonstrate the effective application of the criteria for recognition or that the Department may require.

(e) Consent to sharing of information. By submitting an application for recognition, the agency authorizes Department staff throughout the application process and during any period of recognition--

- (1) To observe its site visits to one or more of the institutions or programs it accredits or preaccredits, on an announced or unannounced basis;
- (2) To visit locations where agency activities such as training, review and evaluation panel meetings, and decision meetings take place, on an announced or unannounced basis;
- (3) To obtain copies of all documents the staff deems necessary to complete its review of the agency; and
- (4) To gain access to agency records, personnel, and facilities.

(f) Public availability of agency records obtained by the Department. (1) The Secretary's processing and decision making on requests for public disclosure of agency materials reviewed under this part are governed by the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. §552; the Trade Secrets Act, 18 U.S.C. §1905; the Privacy Act of 1974, as amended, 5 U.S.C §552a; the Federal Advisory Committee Act, 5 U.S.C. Appdx. 1; and all other applicable laws. In recognition proceedings, agencies may--

- (i) Redact information that would identify individuals or institutions that is not essential to the Department's review of the agency;
- (ii) Make a good faith effort to designate all business information within agency submissions that the agency believes would be exempt from disclosure under exemption 4 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. §552(b)(4). A blanket designation of all information contained within a submission, or of a category of documents, as meeting this exemption will not be considered a good faith effort and will be disregarded;
- (iii) Identify any other material the agency believes would be exempt from public disclosure under FOIA, the factual basis for the request, and any legal basis the agency has identified for withholding the document from disclosure; and
- (iv) Ensure documents submitted are only those required for Department review or as requested by Department officials.

(2) The Secretary processes FOIA requests in accordance with 34 CFR part 5 and makes all documents provided to the Advisory Committee available to the public.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.32 Procedures for Department review of applications for recognition or for change in scope, compliance reports, and increases in enrollment.**

(a) After receipt of an agency's application for initial or continued recognition, or change in scope, or an agency's compliance report, or an agency's report submitted under §602.31(d), Department staff publishes a notice of the agency's application or report in the Federal Register inviting the public to comment on the agency's compliance with the criteria for recognition and establishing a deadline for receipt of public comment.

(b) The Department staff analyzes the agency's application for initial or renewal of recognition, compliance report, or report submitted under §602.31(d) to determine whether the agency satisfies the criteria for recognition, taking into account all available relevant information concerning the compliance of the agency with those criteria and in the agency's effectiveness in applying the criteria. The analysis of an application for recognition and, as appropriate, of a compliance report, or of a report required under §602.31(d), includes--

- (1) Observations from site visit(s), on an announced or unannounced basis, to the agency or to a location where agency activities such as training, review and evaluation panel meetings, and decision meetings take place and to one or more of the institutions or programs it accredits or preaccredits;
- (2) Review of the public comments and other third-party information the Department staff receives by the established deadline, and the agency's responses to the third-party comments, as appropriate, as well as any other information Department staff assembles for purposes of evaluating the agency under this part; and
- (3) Review of complaints or legal actions involving the agency.

(c) The Department staff analyzes the materials submitted in support of an application for expansion of scope to ensure that the agency has the requisite experience, policies that comply with subpart B of this part, capacity, and performance record to support the request.

(d) Department staff's evaluation of an agency may also include a review of information directly related to institutions or programs accredited or preaccredited by the agency relative to their compliance with the agency's standards, the effectiveness of the standards, and the agency's application of those standards.

(e) If, at any point in its evaluation of an agency seeking initial recognition, Department staff determines that the agency fails to demonstrate compliance with the basic eligibility requirements in §§602.10 through 602.13, the staff--

(1) Returns the agency's application and provides the agency with an explanation of the deficiencies that caused staff to take that action; and

(2) Recommends that the agency withdraw its application and reapply when the agency can demonstrate compliance.

(f) Except with respect to an application that has been returned or is withdrawn under paragraph (e) of this section, when Department staff completes its evaluation of the agency, the staff--

(1) Prepares a written draft analysis of the agency;

(2) Sends the draft analysis including any identified areas of non-compliance and a proposed recognition recommendation, and all supporting documentation, including all third-party comments the Department received by the established deadline, to the agency;

(3) Invites the agency to provide a written response to the draft analysis and proposed recognition recommendation and third-party comments, specifying a deadline that provides at least 30 days for the agency's response;

(4) Reviews the response to the draft analysis the agency submits, if any, and prepares the written final analysis. The final analysis includes a recognition recommendation to the senior Department official, as the Department staff deems appropriate, including, but not limited to, a recommendation to approve, deny, limit, suspend, or terminate recognition, require the submission of a compliance report and continue recognition pending a final decision on compliance, approve or deny a request for expansion of scope, or revise or affirm the scope of the agency; and

(5) Provides to the agency, no later than seven days before the Advisory Committee meeting, the final staff analysis and any other available information provided to the Advisory Committee under §602.34(c).

(g) The agency may request that the Advisory Committee defer acting on an application at that Advisory Committee meeting if Department staff fails to provide the agency with the materials described, and within the timeframes provided, in paragraphs (f)(3) and (f)(5) of this section. If the Department staff's failure to send the materials in accordance with the timeframe described in paragraph (f)(3) or (f)(5) of this section is due to the failure of the agency to submit reports to the Department, other information the Secretary requested, or its response to the draft analysis, by the deadline established by the Secretary, the agency forfeits its right to request a deferral of its application.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.33 Procedures for review of agencies during the period of recognition.**

(a) Department staff may review the compliance of a recognized agency with the criteria for recognition at any time--

(1) At the request of the Advisory Committee; or

(2) Based on any information that, as determined by Department staff, appears credible and raises issues relevant to recognition.

(b) The review may include, but need not be limited to, any of the activities described in §602.32(b) and (d).

(c) If, in the course of the review, and after provision to the agency of the documentation concerning the inquiry and consultation with the agency, Department staff notes that one or more deficiencies may exist in the agency's compliance with the criteria for recognition or in the agency's effective application of those criteria, it--

(1) Prepares a written draft analysis of the agency's compliance with the criteria of concern. The draft analysis reflects the results of the review, and includes a recommendation regarding what action to take with respect to

recognition. Possible recommendations include, but are not limited to, a recommendation to limit, suspend, or terminate recognition, or require the submission of a compliance report and to continue recognition pending a final decision on compliance;

(2) Sends the draft analysis including any identified areas of non-compliance, and a proposed recognition recommendation, and all supporting documentation to the agency; and

(3) Invites the agency to provide a written response to the draft analysis and proposed recognition recommendation, specifying a deadline that provides at least 30 days for the agency's response.

(d) If, after review of the agency's response to the draft analysis, Department staff concludes that the agency has demonstrated compliance with the criteria for recognition, the staff notifies the agency in writing of the results of the review. If the review was requested by the Advisory Committee, staff also provides the Advisory Committee with the results of the review.

(e) If, after review of the agency's response to the draft analysis, Department staff concludes that the agency has not demonstrated compliance, the staff--

(1) Notifies the agency that the draft analysis will be finalized for presentation to the Advisory Committee;

(2) Publishes a notice in the Federal Register including, if practicable, an invitation to the public to comment on the agency's compliance with the criteria in question and establishing a deadline for receipt of public comment;

(3) Provides the agency with a copy of all public comments received and, if practicable, invites a written response from the agency;

(4) Finalizes the staff analysis as necessary to reflect its review of any agency response and any public comment received; and

(5) Provides to the agency, no later than seven days before the Advisory Committee meeting, the final staff analysis and a recognition recommendation and any other information provided to the Advisory Committee under §602.34(c).

(f) The Advisory Committee reviews the matter in accordance with §602.34.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

## **REVIEW BY THE NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY AND INTEGRITY**

### **§602.34 Advisory Committee meetings.**

(a) Department staff submits a proposed schedule to the Chairperson of the Advisory Committee based on anticipated completion of staff analyses.

(b) The Chairperson of the Advisory Committee establishes an agenda for the next meeting and, in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act, presents it to the Designated Federal Official for approval.

(c) Before the Advisory Committee meeting, Department staff provides the Advisory Committee with--

(1) The agency's application for recognition or for expansion of scope, the agency's compliance report, or the agency's report submitted under §602.31(d), and supporting documentation;

(2) The final Department staff analysis of the agency developed in accordance with §602.32 or §602.33, and any supporting documentation;

(3) At the request of the agency, the agency's response to the draft analysis;

(4) Any written third-party comments the Department received about the agency on or before the established deadline;

(5) Any agency response to third-party comments; and

(6) Any other information Department staff relied upon in developing its analysis.

(d) At least 30 days before the Advisory Committee meeting, the Department publishes a notice of the meeting in the Federal Register inviting interested parties, including those who submitted third-party comments concerning the agency's compliance with the criteria for recognition, to make oral presentations before the Advisory Committee.

(e) The Advisory Committee considers the materials provided under paragraph (c) of this section in a public meeting and invites Department staff, the agency, and other interested parties to make oral presentations during the meeting. A transcript is made of all Advisory Committee meetings.

(f) The written motion adopted by the Advisory Committee regarding each agency's recognition will be made available during the Advisory Committee meeting. The Department will provide each agency, upon request, with a copy of the motion on recognition at the meeting. Each agency that was reviewed will be sent an electronic copy of the motion relative to that agency as soon as practicable after the meeting.

(g) After each meeting of the Advisory Committee at which a review of agencies occurs, the Advisory Committee forwards to the senior Department official its recommendation with respect to each agency, which may include, but is not limited to, a recommendation to approve, deny, limit, suspend, or terminate recognition, to grant or deny a request for expansion of scope, to revise or affirm the scope of the agency, or to require the agency to submit a compliance report and to continue recognition pending a final decision on compliance.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.35 Responding to the Advisory Committee's recommendation.**

(a) Within ten days following the Advisory Committee meeting, the agency and Department staff may submit written comments to the senior Department official on the Advisory Committee's recommendation. The agency must simultaneously submit a copy of its written comments, if any, to Department staff. Department staff must simultaneously submit a copy of its written comments, if any, to the agency.

(b) Comments must be limited to--

- (1) Any Advisory Committee recommendation that the agency or Department staff believes is not supported by the record;
- (2) Any incomplete Advisory Committee recommendation based on the agency's application; and
- (3) The inclusion of any recommendation or draft proposed decision for the senior Department official's consideration.

(c)(1) Neither the Department staff nor the agency may submit additional documentary evidence with its comments unless the Advisory Committee's recognition recommendation proposes finding the agency noncompliant with, or ineffective in its application of, a criterion or criteria for recognition not identified in the final Department staff analysis provided to the Advisory Committee.

(2) Within ten days of receipt by the Department staff of an agency's comments or new evidence, if applicable, or of receipt by the agency of the Department staff's comments, Department staff, the agency, or both, as applicable, may submit a response to the senior Department official. Simultaneously with submission, the agency must provide a copy of any response to the Department staff. Simultaneously with submission, Department staff must provide a copy of any response to the agency.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**REVIEW AND DECISION BY THE SENIOR DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL**

**§602.36 Senior Department official's decision.**

(a) The senior Department official makes a decision regarding recognition of an agency based on the record compiled under §§602.32, 602.33, 602.34, and 602.35 including, as applicable, the following:

- (1) The materials provided to the Advisory Committee under §602.34(c).
- (2) The transcript of the Advisory Committee meeting.
- (3) The recommendation of the Advisory Committee.

(4) Written comments and responses submitted under §602.35.

(5) New evidence submitted in accordance with §602.35(c)(1).

(6) A communication from the Secretary referring an issue to the senior Department official's consideration under §602.37(e).

(b) In the event that statutory authority or appropriations for the Advisory Committee ends, or there are fewer duly appointed Advisory Committee members than needed to constitute a quorum, and under extraordinary circumstances when there are serious concerns about an agency's compliance with subpart B of this part that require prompt attention, the senior Department official may make a decision in a recognition proceeding based on the record compiled under §602.32 or §602.33 after providing the agency with an opportunity to respond to the final staff analysis. Any decision made by the senior Department official absent a recommendation from the Advisory Committee may be appealed to the Secretary as provided in §602.37.

(c) Following consideration of an agency's recognition under this section, the senior Department official issues a recognition decision.

(d) Except with respect to decisions made under paragraph (f) or (g) of this section and matters referred to the senior Department official under §602.37(e) or (f), the senior Department official notifies the agency in writing of the senior Department official's decision regarding the agency's recognition within 90 days of the Advisory Committee meeting or conclusion of the review under paragraph (b) of this section.

(e) The senior Department official's decision may include, but is not limited to, approving, denying, limiting, suspending, or terminating recognition, granting or denying an application for an expansion of scope, revising or affirming the scope of the agency, or continuing recognition pending submission and review of a compliance report under §§602.32 and 602.34 and review of the report by the senior Department official under this section.

(1)(i) The senior Department official approves recognition if the agency complies with the criteria for recognition listed in subpart B of this part and if the agency effectively applies those criteria.

(ii) If the senior Department official approves recognition, the recognition decision defines the scope of recognition and the recognition period. The recognition period does not exceed five years, including any time during which recognition was continued to permit submission and review of a compliance report.

(iii) If the scope or period of recognition is less than that requested by the agency, the senior Department official explains the reasons for approving a lesser scope or recognition period.

(2)(i) Except as provided in paragraph (e)(3) of this section, if the agency either fails to comply with the criteria for recognition listed in subpart B of this part, or to apply those criteria effectively, the senior Department official denies, limits, suspends, or terminates recognition.

(ii) If the senior Department official denies, limits, suspends, or terminates recognition, the senior Department official specifies the reasons for this decision, including all criteria the agency fails to meet and all criteria the agency has failed to apply effectively.

(3)(i) Except as provided in paragraph (e)(3)(ii) of this section, if a recognized agency fails to demonstrate compliance with or effective application of a criterion or criteria, but the senior Department official concludes that the agency will demonstrate or achieve compliance with the criteria for recognition and effective application of those criteria within 12 months or less, the senior Department official may continue the agency's recognition, pending submission by the agency of a compliance report, review of the report under §§602.32 and 602.34, and review of the report by the senior Department official under this section. In such a case, the senior Department official specifies the criteria the compliance report must address, and a time period, not longer than 12 months, during which the agency must achieve compliance and effectively apply the criteria. The compliance report documenting compliance and effective application of criteria is due not later than 30 days after the end of the period specified in the senior Department official's decision.

(ii) If the record includes a compliance report, and the senior Department official determines that an agency has not complied with the criteria for recognition, or has not effectively applied those criteria, during the time period specified by the senior Department official in accordance with paragraph (e)(3)(i) of this section, the senior Department official denies, limits, suspends, or terminates recognition, except, in extraordinary circumstances, upon a showing of good cause for an extension of time as determined by the senior

Department official and detailed in the senior Department official's decision. If the senior Department official determines good cause for an extension has been shown, the senior Department official specifies the length of the extension and what the agency must do during it to merit a renewal of recognition.

(f) If the senior Department official determines, based on the record, that a decision to deny, limit, suspend, or terminate an agency's recognition may be warranted based on a finding that the agency is noncompliant with, or ineffective in its application of, a criterion or criteria of recognition not identified earlier in the proceedings as an area of noncompliance, the senior Department official provides--

(1) The agency with an opportunity to submit a written response and documentary evidence addressing the finding; and

(2) The staff with an opportunity to present its analysis in writing.

(g) If relevant and material information pertaining to an agency's compliance with recognition criteria, but not contained in the record, comes to the senior Department official's attention while a decision regarding the agency's recognition is pending before the senior Department official, and if the senior Department official concludes the recognition decision should not be made without consideration of the information, the senior Department official either--

(1)(i) Does not make a decision regarding recognition of the agency; and

(ii) Refers the matter to Department staff for review and analysis under §602.32 or §602.33, as appropriate, and consideration by the Advisory Committee under §602.34; or

(2)(i) Provides the information to the agency and Department staff;

(ii) Permits the agency to respond to the senior Department official and the Department staff in writing, and to include additional evidence relevant to the issue, and specifies a deadline;

(iii) Provides Department staff with an opportunity to respond in writing to the agency's submission under paragraph (g)(2)(ii) of this section, specifying a deadline; and

(iv) Issues a recognition decision based on the record described in paragraph (a) of this section, as supplemented by the information provided under this paragraph.

(h) No agency may submit information to the senior Department official, or ask others to submit information on its behalf, for purposes of invoking paragraph (g) of this section. Before invoking paragraph (g) of this section, the senior Department official will take into account whether the information, if submitted by a third party, could have been submitted in accordance with §602.32(a) or §602.33(e)(2).

(i) If the senior Department official does not reach a final decision to approve, deny, limit, suspend, or terminate an agency's recognition before the expiration of its recognition period, the senior Department official automatically extends the recognition period until a final decision is reached.

(j) Unless appealed in accordance with §602.37, the senior Department official's decision is the final decision of the Secretary.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

## **APPEAL RIGHTS AND PROCEDURES**

### **§602.37 Appealing the senior Department official's decision to the Secretary.**

(a) The agency may appeal the senior Department official's decision to the Secretary. Such appeal stays the decision of the senior Department official until final disposition of the appeal. If an agency wishes to appeal, the agency must--

(1) Notify the Secretary and the senior Department official in writing of its intent to appeal the decision of the senior Department official, no later than ten days after receipt of the decision;

(2) Submit its appeal to the Secretary in writing no later than 30 days after receipt of the decision; and

(3) Provide the senior Department official with a copy of the appeal at the same time it submits the appeal to the Secretary.

(b) The senior Department official may file a written response to the appeal. To do so, the senior Department official must--

(1) Submit a response to the Secretary no later than 30 days after receipt of a copy of the appeal; and

(2) Provide the agency with a copy of the senior Department official's response at the same time it is submitted to the Secretary.

(c) Neither the agency nor the senior Department official may include in its submission any new evidence it did not submit previously in the proceeding.

(d) On appeal, the Secretary makes a recognition decision, as described in §602.36(e). If the decision requires a compliance report, the report is due within 30 days after the end of the period specified in the Secretary's decision. The Secretary renders a final decision after taking into account the senior Department official's decision, the agency's written submissions on appeal, the senior Department official's response to the appeal, if any, and the entire record before the senior Department official. The Secretary notifies the agency in writing of the Secretary's decision regarding the agency's recognition.

(e) The Secretary may determine, based on the record, that a decision to deny, limit, suspend, or terminate an agency's recognition may be warranted based on a finding that the agency is noncompliant with, or ineffective in its application with respect to, a criterion or criteria for recognition not identified as an area of noncompliance earlier in the proceedings. In that case, the Secretary, without further consideration of the appeal, refers the matter to the senior Department official for consideration of the issue under §602.36(f). After the senior Department official makes a decision, the agency may, if desired, appeal that decision to the Secretary.

(f) If relevant and material information pertaining to an agency's compliance with recognition criteria, but not contained in the record, comes to the Secretary's attention while a decision regarding the agency's recognition is pending before the Secretary, and if the Secretary concludes the recognition decision should not be made without consideration of the information, the Secretary either--

(1)(i) Does not make a decision regarding recognition of the agency; and

(ii) Refers the matter to Department staff for review and analysis under §602.32 or §602.33, as appropriate, and review by the Advisory Committee under §602.34; and consideration by the senior Department official under §602.36; or

(2)(i) Provides the information to the agency and the senior Department official;

(ii) Permits the agency to respond to the Secretary and the senior Department official in writing, and to include additional evidence relevant to the issue, and specifies a deadline;

(iii) Provides the senior Department official with an opportunity to respond in writing to the agency's submission under paragraph (f)(2)(ii) of this section, specifying a deadline; and

(iv) Issues a recognition decision based on all the materials described in paragraphs (d) and (f) of this section.

(g) No agency may submit information to the Secretary, or ask others to submit information on its behalf, for purposes of invoking paragraph (f) of this section. Before invoking paragraph (f) of this section, the Secretary will take into account whether the information, if submitted by a third party, could have been submitted in accordance with §602.32(a) or §602.33(e)(2).

(h) If the Secretary does not reach a final decision on appeal to approve, deny, limit, suspend, or terminate an agency's recognition before the expiration of its recognition period, the Secretary automatically extends the recognition period until a final decision is reached.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

**§602.38 Contesting the Secretary's final decision to deny, limit, suspend, or terminate an agency's recognition.**

An agency may contest the Secretary's decision under this part in the Federal courts as a final decision in accordance with applicable Federal law. Unless otherwise directed by the court, a decision of the Secretary to deny, limit, suspend, or terminate the agency's recognition is not stayed during an appeal in the Federal courts.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)

## Subpart D -- Department Responsibilities

### **§602.50 What information does the Department share with a recognized agency about its accredited institutions and programs?**

(a) If the Department takes an action against an institution or program accredited by the agency, it notifies the agency no later than 10 days after taking that action.

(b) If another Federal agency or a State agency notifies the Department that it has taken an action against an institution or program accredited by the agency, the Department notifies the agency as soon as possible but no later than 10 days after receiving the written notice from the other Government agency.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1099b)