



ACCREDITING COUNCIL FOR INDEPENDENT COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD

TO: ACICS-Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties
FROM Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools
DATE: April 19, 2016
The Memorandum to the Field contains proposed criteria and other information for ACICS-Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties

Table of Contents

1. Proposed Criteria Revisions	1
A. DEFINITION OF ACADEMIC QUALITY	1
B. DATA INTEGRITY STANDARD	2
C. PROBATION STANDARDS.....	3
D. RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES REVIEW	4
E. INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE DISCLOSURES	4
F. PLACEMENT DEFINITION.....	5
G. DEBARMENT POLICY	5
H. ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL MASTER’S DEGREE PROGRAMS ...	7
2. For Information Only	8
A. BOARD OF ETHICS	8
B. INTERIM ON-SITE EVALUATIONS	8
C. PUBLIC COMMENT	9
D. ACICS AWARE WEBINAR	9
E. ACICS WEB SITE	9
F. 2016 WORKSHOP SCHEDULE	10
G. ACICS ANNUAL MEETING.....	10
H. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	11
3. Comment Survey – Proposed Criteria Revisions	12

1. Proposed Criteria Revisions

At its April 2016 meeting, the Council reviewed specific areas of the ACICS *Accreditation Criteria* outlined in Section I and approved the revisions as **proposed** (new language is underlined, ~~deleted language is struck~~). **Public comment on these revisions is requested through the ACICS Comment Survey explained at the end of the memorandum.**

A. DEFINITION OF ACADEMIC QUALITY

Explanation of Proposed Changes

The Council determined that it was important to provide a clear definition of academic quality within the Accreditation Criteria. The proposed language was modified and expanded from current language listed in an ACICS monograph. The Council also determined that it was important to place the ACICS statement of mission (currently placed under Title I, Chapter 2, Introduction) under Title I, Chapter I of the Accreditation Criteria.

*The effective date for this proposed change is **July 1, 2016**.*

Chapter 1 – An Overview of the Council

Statement of Mission

The mission of the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools is to advance educational excellence at independent, nonpublic career schools, colleges, and organizations in the United States and abroad. This is achieved through a deliberate and thorough accrediting process of quality assurance and enhancement as well as ethical business and educational practices.

Introduction Definition of Accreditation

Accreditation is an independent appraisal of an institution during which the institution's overall educational quality (including outcomes), professional status among similar institutions, financial stability, and operational ethics are self-evaluated and judged by peers. It is a voluntary activity separate and distinct from business licensing, authority to award educational credentials, and eligibility to administer student financial assistance.

Definition of Academic Quality

ACICS defines academic quality as the overall performance of the institution in the context of its mission and as measured by the extent to which the institution achieves its intended student learning and student success outcomes.

Student learning outcomes involve assessment of skill and competency attainment. Student success outcomes include student retention or persistence; employment or placement; and student, graduate and employer satisfaction.

The effectiveness of the institution is demonstrated by its compliance with accreditation standards as well as its continuous striving for enhancement of quality. ACICS assesses academic quality in the following areas: mission and objectives; campus effectiveness planning; student outcomes; financial stability; recruitment and admission practices; organizational structure and administration; student services; academic program and curriculum; quality of faculty and instruction; physical facilities; library and learning resources; and publication and disclosure of student achievement.

1-1-100 – Bylaws

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1-1-200 – Recognition

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1-1-300 – Public Participation

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B. DATA INTEGRITY STANDARD

Explanation of Proposed Changes

The Council proposes a new standard in order to provide explicit requirements for its expectations as it relates to the truthfulness, reliability, and accuracy of data collected and submitted by institutions to the Council in fulfillment of its accountability requirements.

In addition, as a procedural measure beginning in the Spring 2016 cycle, the Council will identify an evaluator at each evaluation site visit with the primary role of verifying reported institutional data.

*The effective date for the proposed policy change is **July 1, 2016**.*

3-1-203. Data Integrity.

All performance and institutional data reported to ACICS for any purpose is expected to reflect an accurate and verifiable portrayal of institutional performance, which is subject to review for integrity, accuracy, and completeness. The Council has the discretion to independently review performance data upon which it relies, in part, on making an accrediting decision.

3-1-203204. Financial Stability.

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C. PROBATION STANDARDS

Explanation of Proposed Changes

The Council proposes to include the “Probation” action within the current Council Action Process for non-compliant actions. Probation may be ordered when the institution has consistently demonstrated that it is unable to operate within the standards of the Accreditation Criteria. The action may be ordered following a show-cause directive or if the institution is appealing a denial or withdrawal action. The Council also proposed to clarify the timeframe by which an institution may remain on this status in line with its maximum timeframe procedures listed in Title II, Chapter 3, Introduction.

*The effective date for this proposed change is **July 1, 2016**.*

2-3-240 – Probation

~~Probation is a status that the Council may impose on an institution if the institution is unable to demonstrate that it consistently operates in accordance with the *Accreditation Criteria*.~~

When the Council determines that an institution is not in compliance, and has demonstrated that it cannot consistently operate in compliance with the *Accreditation Criteria*, the institution will be provided in writing with the areas of noncompliance and may be placed on a probation status.

2-3-241. Imposition. Probation may be imposed by the Council either following ~~when it continues~~ a show-cause directive ~~after at least one hearing either in person or in writing,~~ or after an institution has notified the Council that it intends to appeal a denial or withdrawal action.

2-3-242. Result of Probation. The Council will not accept any applications for new programs or new campuses from any institution on probation unless the institution receives approval in advance to submit such an application.

2-3-243. Probation Lifted. ~~Probation does not expire automatically. Instead, the institution is obligated to demonstrate to the Council that the conditions or circumstances which initially led to the imposition of probation have been corrected before probation will be lifted. Probation may be continued even if the show cause directive has been vacated.~~ When the reasons for the probation have been satisfied, the probation may be lifted by ACICS (See Title II, Chapter 3, Introduction). The Council may order a special visit at the institution’s expense before lifting probation.

2-3-244. Notification of Probation. The Council will notify the U.S. Secretary of Education, appropriate state regulatory agencies, other appropriate accrediting agencies,

and the public of its decision to place an institution on probation. The institution is required to notify immediately in writing its current and prospective students that it has been placed on probation by its accrediting agency.

D. RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES REVIEW

Explanation of Proposed Changes

The Council proposes that each institution must have a documented process for ensuring that any person or entity engaged in admissions or recruitment practices is communicating current and accurate information about the institution and its operations. The proposed change will require the institution to maintain documentation of its review and oversight measures of its admissions and recruitment personnel.

*The effective date for this proposed change is **July 1, 2016**.*

In addition, the Council plans to conduct research and survey institutions on its current practices for ensuring compliance with admissions and recruitment standards and, based on its findings, will issue a best practices guidance document.

Section 3-1-412(a): An institution shall have a documented process to ensure that any person or entity engaged in admissions or recruitment activities on its behalf is communicating current and accurate information regarding courses and programs, student achievement disclosures, services, tuition, terms, and operating policies.

E. INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE DISCLOSURES

Explanation of Proposed Changes

The Council proposes fortifying its policy regarding public disclosure of student achievement data. The proposal requires that information related to student achievement must be disclosed at the campus level (and not at the institution-wide level) and that, at a minimum, the campus provides its retention, placement, and licensure exam pass rates.

*The effective date for this proposed change is **July 1, 2016**.*

3-1-704. Performance Information. ~~Institutions~~ Each campus shall routinely provide reliable information to the public on ~~their-its~~ performance, including student achievement as ~~determined by the institution~~ information, that includes, at a minimum, retention, placement, and licensure examination pass rates.

In addition, the Council has developed a standard disclaimer statement that will be required of all institutional disclosures of student achievement that are based on data submitted to ACICS, including those data derived from the Campus Accountability Report. The Disclaimer statement would be included in Appendix C and read as follows:

Appendix C – Institutional Publication Requirements

Performance Information Disclosure

“The student achievement rates for retention, placement, and/or licensure examination disclosed above are provided for information purposes only. They are based on data submitted to ACICS in fulfillment of accountability requirements but have not been 100% verified or tested for complete accuracy. Students should give the information appropriate weight in making an enrollment decision.”

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Statement of Accreditation

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F. PLACEMENT DEFINITION

Explanation of Proposed Changes

The Council has guidelines in which institutions must comply regarding the calculation of placement rates. The Council now proposes to include a succinct definition of placement within the Glossary of the Accreditation Criteria.

*The effective date for this proposed change is **July 1, 2016**.*

Placement. Working in the field of study or acquiring a credential that directly benefits the graduate’s existing employment.

G. DEBARMENT POLICY

Explanation of Proposed Changes

The Council proposes to revise its current procedures for appealing a debarment action. The proposal will clarify that an individual or entity that receives an intent to bar notice will have one opportunity, either in writing or in person, to appeal that notice. If the individual or entity chooses to appeal the notice, the Council will make a final decision on whether to issue a debarment order and determine the terms and length of that debarment following the appeal.

The effective date for this proposed change is July 1, 2016.

2-3-900 – Debarment

The Council may bar a person or entity, including spouses and closely related family groups as defined in Section 2-2-401, from being an owner, senior administrator, or governing board member of an ACICS-accredited institution if that person or entity was found guilty of fraudulent or criminal behavior; was debarred by a government agency or an accrediting agency; or was an owner, senior administrator, or governing board member of an institution that lost its accreditation as a result of a denial or suspension action or that closed without providing a teach-out or refunds to students matriculating at the time of closure.

The Council will notify the person(s) or entity whom it intends to bar as the result of denial or suspension action within four months following the loss of the institution's accreditation. It will notify the person(s) or entity whom it intends to bar as the result of the closing of an institution within a reasonable period of time following the closure. In each case, the Council will forward an intent to bar notice by both electronic and certified mail to the last institutional mailing address known to the Council, unless the Council has received updated mailing information following the institution's closure or loss of accreditation. Those individuals or entities will be considered notified when the Council has forwarded the intent to bar notice in accordance with these procedures.

The intent to bar notice will inform the person(s) or entity that they are entitled to present information and materials in writing or in person to challenge-appeal the intent to bar at the next scheduled meeting of the Council. The notice will stipulate that if they intend to challenge-appeal the intent to bar, the person(s) or entity must inform the Council office in writing within ten days of receipt of the notice as to whether they will challenge-appeal the intent to bar in writing.

A debarment order may be issued by the Council as a result of its consideration of the facts presented. ~~Notice of t~~The Council's decision will be sent to the individual(s) by electronic and certified mail following their challenge-appeal before the Council.

The Council's decision is final if the person or entity elects not to appeal within ten days of Council notification. The Council decision is also final following appeal.

The Council retains final discretion to establish the terms and length of the debarment. The length of debarment will vary depending on the circumstances that led to the debarment decision, but it will be for a period of at least three years. Individual circumstances may justify a longer period of debarment.

~~Person(s) or entities barred by the Council may appeal this decision to the Council in accordance with such debarment appeals procedures as the Council may establish. The Council's decision is final if the person or entity elects not to appeal within ten days of Council notification or if the Council affirms its decision following appeal, and no additional appeal rights are available under these procedures.~~

H. ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMS

Explanation of Proposed Changes

The Council proposes to clarify language related to the admissions requirements for professional master's degree programs which lead to certification or licensure following graduation. Currently, the Council requires that, if an institution admits a student into a master's degree without a baccalaureate degree, the student must complete the requirement of a baccalaureate degree prior to completion or concurrently with the award of the master's degree. The baccalaureate degree is often not required for a professional master's degree by specialized accrediting agencies; therefore, the Council has clarified the standard to allow for these circumstances.

*The effective date for this proposed change is **July 1, 2016**.*

3-6-601. Enrollment Prerequisites. The threshold admission requirement to a master's degree program is a baccalaureate degree.

If admission to a professional program is granted without a baccalaureate degree, the burden is on the institution to demonstrate and justify that the alternate admission requirement is accepted by a recognized licensing or specialized accrediting agency and is common practice among accredited institutions of higher education. In such cases, admission may be granted only to eligible students who have completed, at a minimum, an associate's degree or equivalent. If the institution chooses to award a suitable baccalaureate degree upon completion of specified requirements or concurrently with the award of the professional master's degree, the baccalaureate degree curriculum must be approved by the Council.

~~In instances where a baccalaureate degree is not used as the threshold for admission, the following conditions must be met: (a) admission to the program may be granted only to eligible students who have completed at a minimum an associate degree or equivalent; (b) the program must ensure that a baccalaureate degree, which meets ACICS standards, is awarded upon completion of baccalaureate degree requirements or concurrently with the award of the master's degree; and (c) the baccalaureate degree program must include in its curricular requirements sufficient and appropriate bridge to master's level courses in the field of study and must be approved by ACICS.~~

2. For Information Only

A. BOARD OF ETHICS

The ACICS Board of Directors applies its authority and credibility as a body of independent, ethical, and expert members in arriving at accreditation standards, procedures, and decisions. In order to further protect that independence and integrity, it has added a new factor that may trigger the resignation of a Commissioner or Director, and has strengthened the method by which it reconciles conflicts of interests or perceived breaches of integrity. The newly established Board of Ethics will consist of one standing Board member and two independent, public members, as described below.

Article IV

Elections, Terms, Vacancies, Removal, Resignations, and Compensation

Section 7–Resignations. Resignation from service as a commissioner and Director may be voluntarily tendered at any time. The resignation becomes effective upon receipt of written notice by the Chair of the Board and Council or the President. Automatic tendering of resignation is required under the following circumstances or conditions:

...

(j) the commissioner is employed by an institution that is deemed to be under sustained and serious scrutiny regarding non-compliance with ACICS standards and requirements.

Article V

Committees

Section 2–Standing Committees of the Board of Directors. There shall be the following standing committees of the Board:

...

(e) The Board of Ethics shall consist of three individuals selected by the Board consisting of two independent, public members and one member affiliated with an ACICS institution. The Board will have the authority to review perceived or actual conflicts of interest by a commissioner or Director and decide if the individual is to be directed to resign.

B. INTERIM ON-SITE EVALUATIONS

The Council has strengthened its current process for conducting interim on-site evaluation visits between renewal of accreditation periods. Any time ACICS conducts an on-site visit, the evaluation team will review an institution's overall effectiveness in key areas such as administrative capability, effectiveness planning, admissions and recruitment practices, recordkeeping, faculty qualifications, etc. This process will be incorporated into the existing quality assurance monitoring program as well as for institutions that are determined to be at-risk as a result of student achievement indicators, financial conditions,

ACICS MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD

April 19, 2016

complaint or adverse information, extensive substantive changes or enrollment growth, or other factors as determined by the Council.

The interim evaluation process will begin in the **May/June 2016**.

C. PUBLIC COMMENT

The Council encourages institutions to provide feedback regarding Council operations and procedures. Comments on the proposed *Criteria* revisions are due by **Friday, May 6, 2016**. The link to comment of these proposed changes is <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MTTF042016>.

D. ACICS AWARE WEBINAR

An AWARE webinar will be held on **Thursday, April 21, 2016 at 2:00pm**. This webinar will focus on information presented in the April 2016 Memorandum to the Field. If there are any topics of interest in addition to those in this memorandum that you would like to be addressed during the webinar or if you have specific questions about the material presented, please send an email to Mr. Ian Harazduk at iharazduk@acics.org. ACICS is eager to respond to all questions related to this communication; therefore, if you have any questions prior to the AWARE Webinar, please send an email to Mr. Ian Harazduk at iharazduk@acics.org, so that these responses can be prepared and shared during the webinar.

E. ACICS WEB SITE

Please visit the ACICS Web site. It continues to be revised and updated based on Council activities. The site contains revised and detailed information about accreditation, accredited institutions, applications, publications, workshops and special events. New features are now available.

NOTE: The institutional ACICS ID should be used on all correspondence to and from ACICS. If you have questions about your ID code, please send an email to ebiz@acics.org.

F. 2016 WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Renewal of Accreditation Workshop

Renewal of Accreditation Workshop	May 10, 2016	Ft. Worth, TX
Renewal of Accreditation Workshop	August 25, 2016	Indianapolis, IN

Initial Accreditation Workshop

Initial Accreditation Workshop	May 10, 2016	Ft. Worth, TX
Initial Accreditation Workshop	October 4, 2016	Pasadena, CA

Adding Value Workshop

Adding Value: Campus Effectiveness Plan	August 26, 2016	Indianapolis, IN
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G. ACICS ANNUAL MEETING

ACICS Fundamentals for New Members and Personnel Special Session

These five free sessions provide guidance and clarity on the fundamentals of maintaining compliance with the ACICS Accreditation Standards and Criteria once an initial accreditation has been awarded or upon initial assumption of a leadership role at an ACICS-accredited institution. Sessions include technical and annual reporting requirements, managing institutional change and growth, institutionalizing compliance, partnering with ACICS, and information on accessing Federal financial aid.

This event is free with confirmed registration to the Annual Conference and **open only to initial grant awardees and new campus personnel**. To register, please contact Ms. Perliter Walters-Gilliam (pwgilliam@acics.org).

Responding to Council Findings Special Session

Findings from a site visit, or areas requiring additional information on a deferral motion letter, are an understandable source of concern to institutions. In some instances, these findings may be outside the control of the institution and may not impair academic quality. However, a response to the Council is necessary to demonstrate and validate compliance with the identified area(s) of the Accreditation Criteria. This free session will shed light on

ACICS MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD

April 19, 2016

the team's evaluative process which may result in said findings and how the institution should ensure its response is appropriate and accurate to address the issue(s).

This event is free with confirmed registration to the Annual Conference. To register, please contact Mr. Ian Harazduk at iharazduk@acics.org.



THE ACICS ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND BUSINESS MEETING

May 11 – 13, 2016

Fort Worth, Texas

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H. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

ACICS has given high priority to promoting and defending ACICS accreditation, and the quality of education delivered by member institutions. Schools play an important role acting as the eyes and ears of ACICS: that is, looking and listening for opportunities to promote ACICS accreditation, and to correct misinformation that may lead to negative perceptions and attitudes among policy makers, the post-secondary education community and the general public. As you identify those opportunities in communities where you operate, please let us know about them. Send an email to Mr. Quentin Dean at qdean@acics.org and let him know the source of the information and when it appeared.

ACICS MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD

April 19, 2016

3. Comment Survey – Proposed Criteria Revisions

ACICS is collecting all comments from the field on proposed Criteria revisions through an electronic survey. Please find the survey link below:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MTTF042016>

Please respond by Friday, May 6, 2016.

If you have any questions about the memorandum to the field or the call for comment, please contact:

Mr. Ian Harazduk

Senior Manager, Policy and Compliance

Phone (202) 336-6795

fieldcomments@acics.org