

# ACCSCCT Alert!

Information for  
our member schools

**To:** ACCSCT Accredited Schools and Other Interested Parties  
**From:** Elise Scanlon, Executive Director  
**Date:** September 30, 2005  
**Subject:** ACCSCT Support for Schools Impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

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Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have affected thousands of Americans in profound ways. Several ACCSCT accredited schools and the students they serve have been directly impacted by the effects of Hurricane Katrina as individuals have been displaced and entire schools destroyed. Hurricane Rita added to the devastation left by Katrina. The Commission is committed to providing assistance to the students, graduates, faculty and administrators who have been impacted by this terrible tragedy by facilitating opportunities for schools to maintain their accredited status as they seek to rebuild and for students to continue their education. This *Accreditation Alert* is designed to provide guidance to ACCSCT accredited schools directly impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and to provide information to the ACCSCT membership regarding ways to help those schools and students in need. The full text of the Accreditation Alert can be found on the Commission's website at: [www.accsct.org](http://www.accsct.org). Go to "Staying Accredited" and then "Accreditation Alert."

Additionally, guidance from the Department of Education regarding federal student aid for those schools, students, and borrowers impacted by Hurricane Katrina is available online at <http://www.ifap.ed.gov/eannouncements/katrina.html>. Please check this page regularly for updates from the Department of Education.

For additional information related to the Commission's interpretative guidance in the areas contained in this *Accreditation Alert*, please contact Michale S. McComis, Associate Executive Director, at (703) 247-4520 or via email at [mccomis@accsct.org](mailto:mccomis@accsct.org).

### **Assessing the Impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita**

In order to understand fully how ACCSCT can be of assistance to schools and students in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Commission is asking all schools impacted by these hurricanes to provide a written update regarding school operations. This update should include a statement regarding the school's operational status, whether the school closed for any period of time or is still closed, plans to reopen or relocate as necessary, and information regarding any damage to student records sustained in the storms' aftermath. For those schools which closed temporarily and have reopened, please indicate the impact of the hurricanes on enrolled students as well as any efforts to assist displaced students to continue their education. For those schools which remain closed, please indicate the number of students who have been displaced and what efforts have been made, if any, to facilitate the continuation of the students' education as well as the school's plan to resume operation to include any plans for relocation. Lastly, the written notification should include any requests to waive a standard that a school believes is necessary.

The Standards of Accreditation state that in limited and exceptional circumstances, the Commission will consider requests to waive the application of accrediting standards and procedures. The Commission is aware of the significant challenges faced by the schools and students impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Accordingly, in those instances where the normal application of a standard will create an undue hardship on students or a school or where exceptional circumstances exist, ACCSCT will consider waiving certain accrediting standards if such a waiver will assist schools and students to recover while at the same time ensuring that educational quality is not compromised. It is important to the Commission that schools affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita will have the opportunity to demonstrate continued compliance with accrediting standards and to assist students who wish to continue their education.

Please provide this written notification to the Commission to the attention of Bettina Falwell, Manager of Institutional Compliance, by letter or via email at [bfalwell@accsct.org](mailto:bfalwell@accsct.org) no later than October 21, 2005.

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### **Requests for Waivers**

The Commission is standing ready to assist accredited member schools and will make a dedicated effort to ensure that schools impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita receive needed support. The following are standards that the Commission expects may require waivers given the circumstances encountered following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This list, however, is not exhaustive and schools should submit a waiver request in any area of the standards as may be necessary.

#### **Maintaining Accreditation** (*Section I (B)(3), Standards of Accreditation*)

In order for a school to maintain its eligibility for accreditation, it must be in continuous compliance with accrediting standards and requirements. This means, among other things, that a school must "be in continuous operation training students in accordance with its primary objective, with the exception of any regularly scheduled vacation periods or an approved change of location."

For those schools directly impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the ability to maintain continuous operation will prove to be a challenge for a variety of reasons. If your school ceased operation for any period of time due to the impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, please provide whatever information is available for Commission consideration. The Commission will consider the school's status and make a determination as to whether it is necessary to waive Section I (B)(3) and all related standards associated with a school's operations (e.g., Program Advisory Committee meetings, faculty development, etc.).

## **Requests for Extensions**

For those schools impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that have previously been directed to submit information for Commission consideration, or that have an upcoming deadline for the submission of information for Commission consideration (e.g. Self-Evaluation Reports, response to a Team Summary Report, response to a Commission Action Letter, request for additional information relating to a substantive change, etc.), the Commission will grant an extension in order to provide each school with an opportunity to reasonably address the request for information. Schools are encouraged to contact Bettina Falwell, Manager of Institutional Compliance, at (703) 247-4538 or via email at [bfalwell@accsct.org](mailto:bfalwell@accsct.org) in order to make an extension request. Please note that all extension requests will be handled on a case by case basis.

## **Documentation/Recording Keeping**

Undoubtedly, the record keeping systems and the availability of documentation may be limited for schools and students impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Any impacted school that requires copies of the Commission's institutional records, documentation regarding substantive change approvals, or any other correspondence with the Commission may contact Leah Matthews, Director of Institutional Compliance and Agency Recognition at (703) 247-4512 or via email at [lmattews@accsct.org](mailto:lmattews@accsct.org). The Commission will consider waiver requests on a case by case basis for those schools that have difficulty demonstrating compliance with record keeping requirements in the areas listed below. Schools, however, should make a concerted effort to compile the appropriate documentation as outlined in the Standards of Accreditation.

- **Advising Sessions** (*Section VI (A)(3), Standards of Accreditation*)  
Documentation of student advising sessions by date and place.
- **Record Keeping** (*Section VI (B)(1), Standards of Accreditation*)  
A student's permanent educational records and necessary financial records must be securely maintained and protected against fire, vandalism and other perils.
- **Verifiable Records of Initial Employment** (*Section VI (B)(2), Standards of Accreditation*)  
The school maintains verifiable records of initial employment of its graduates covering the last five years and bases statements regarding percentage of placement upon such records.
- **Transcripts** (*Section VI (C), Standards of Accreditation*)  
An official transcript must be issued to the student upon completion of the program. The transcript includes, at a minimum, records of attendance (dates of entry and departure), program of study, clock or credit hours and grades. This transcript must be maintained indefinitely and protected against fire, vandalism, and other perils. Additional official transcripts are issued upon request and in accordance with the school's policies and procedures.
- **Faculty and Staff Qualifications** (*Section II (A)(7), Standards of Accreditation*)  
The school must verify prior work experience and maintain documentation of academic credentials of all faculty members and administrators, as required, to demonstrate compliance with applicable Standards of Accreditation.
- **Student Complaints** (*Section VI (E), Standards of Accreditation*)  
The school maintains a complete record of all written student complaints for at least the last five years.

### **Interpretative Guidance - Admission Policies and Practices**

The Commission is providing this interpretative guidance for all schools that might enroll any individual who does not have access to educational records (e.g., High School Diploma, transcripts, GED, etc.) due to the flooding and fires caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Schools should follow their normal admissions policies and procedures and use their best efforts to secure documentation that a student meets admissions requirements. In the event that a school is unable to obtain the necessary documentation, the following procedures should be observed and documentation maintained in the student's file.

#### **Regular Student Enrollment** (*Section V, Standards of Accreditation*)

ACCSCT encourages schools to enroll students who have been impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita even if information that would normally be needed for an admissions decision is not immediately available. If a school enrolls a student (either to begin an educational program or as a transfer student) who does not have the documentation normally required by the school's admissions requirements due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the school must require the student to sign one of the following certification statements as appropriate.

*I certify that I have obtained a High School Diploma from (Insert Name of High School Here) in (Insert Year Here) but do not have my diploma or transcripts due to the effects of Hurricane Katrina/Rita. I also certify that this information is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and that I understand that it is subject to review by applicable accrediting agencies, state Departments of Education, and the United States Department of Education.*

*Printed or Typed Name* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date* \_\_\_\_\_

*I certify that I have obtained a GED from (Insert Name of Entity which awarded the GED Here) in (Insert Year Here) but do not have a copy due to the effects of Hurricane Katrina/Rita. I also certify that this information is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and that I understand that it is subject to review by applicable accrediting agencies, state Departments of Education, and the United States Department of Education.*

*Printed or Typed Name* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date* \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Transfer Students** (*Section II (A)(7)(c), Standards of Accreditation*)

The Commission understands that there will be instances where students enrolled at schools which have ceased operation due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita will need to complete their education at another school as a transfer student. The Commission, therefore, has also established a method for enrolling these students in accordance with accreditation requirements.

Moreover, Section II (A)(7)(c) of the Standards of Accreditation states that “[a]t a minimum, 25% of the required curriculum must be completed at the school awarding the completion credential.” The Commission acknowledges that this requirement may be problematic for displaced students who have completed 75% or more of their educational program at a school that may no longer be in operation. Therefore, the Commission will allow a school to award credentials to displaced students who need less than 25% of the required curriculum to complete their program of study.

In the instances described above for transfer students, the school must maintain in the student's file a detailed explanation as to how the student's previous education was evaluated to determine what educational credit could be transferred and what education courses were outstanding and require the student to sign the following certification statement.

*I certify that I was admitted to or enrolled in an academic program leading to a degree, certificate or other recognized educational credential for the 2005-2006 academic year at (Insert Name of School Here) and am unable to attend that school due to the effects of Hurricane Katrina/Rita. I also certify that this information is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and that I understand that it is subject to review by applicable accrediting agencies, state Departments of Education, and the United States Department of Education.*

*Printed or Typed Name* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date* \_\_\_\_\_

The United States Department of Education has also published its own guidelines regarding the administration of Title IV funds for students who do not have access to documentation necessary to meet a school's admissions requirements and schools are strongly encouraged to find and review that information. The information can be found on the Department's website at:

*<http://ifap.ed.gov/eannouncements/0902HurricaneKatrinaGuid.html>*

## **GETTING INVOLVED**

The Commission has also included with this *Accreditation Alert* information on a number of organizations that are accepting contributions to assist individuals displaced by Hurricane Katrina and to assist the New Orleans community in its recovery efforts. ACCST accredited schools are encouraged to contact these organizations directly for information about the services they are providing to help those impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

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| <b>American Red Cross</b>  | <a href="http://www.redcross.org/">http://www.redcross.org/</a>   |
| <b>Campus-to-Campus Assistance in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina</b>             | <a href="http://www.campusrelief.org">http://www.campusrelief.org</a>                                   |
| <b>Habitat for Humanity</b>  | <a href="http://www.habitat.org/">http://www.habitat.org/</a>   |
| <b>National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Hurricane Relief</b> | <a href="http://www.nasfaa.org/linklists/katrina.html">http://www.nasfaa.org/linklists/katrina.html</a> |
| <b>United Way</b>  | <a href="http://national.unitedway.org/">http://national.unitedway.org/</a>                             |
| <b>US Department of Education: Hurricane Help for Schools</b>                        | <a href="http://www.ed.gov/katrina">http://www.ed.gov/katrina</a>                                       |

Additionally, the following relief funds that have been established by the respective state governments in the disaster area:

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| <b>Alabama Governor's Emergency Relief Fund</b> | <a href="http://www.servealabama.gov">www.servealabama.gov</a>               |
| <b>Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation</b>   | <a href="http://www.louisianahelp.org">www.louisianahelp.org</a>             |
| <b>Mississippi Hurricane Recovery Fund</b>      | <a href="http://www.mississippirecovery.com">www.mississippirecovery.com</a> |