



Beginning the Accreditation Process with the Accrediting Commission of Careers Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCCT)

The information enclosed herein is designed to provide an overview of ACCSCCT and the accreditation process. In order to help determine whether or not your institution is ready to begin the initial accreditation process with ACCSCCT.

What is the purpose of accreditation and the accreditation process?

Accreditation is a means of assisting private career schools and colleges to become stronger and better institutions by setting standards of educational quality. Accreditation supports the efforts of institutions to achieve maximum educational effectiveness for students, employers and the public. It also provides an assurance of quality and establishes eligibility for participation in federally funded programs. ACCSCCT's accreditation process is a comprehensive review of all academic and ancillary activities and resources that support an institution's educational objectives and the programs it offers.

Is my institution a private, postsecondary career schools or college with trade, occupational or technical educational objectives?

Only private, postsecondary career schools and colleges with **trade, occupational or technical educational objectives** are eligible for accreditation. ACCSCCT may decline to consider for accreditation otherwise eligible schools if it determines that the programs offered by an applicant school fall outside of the Commission's primary scope and competence or there is a lack of standards necessary for meaningful review. Please note that schools primarily directed toward avocational or general education objectives are ineligible for accreditation with ACCSCCT.

What is my school's primary educational objective?

The school's primary educational objective must be to prepare students for entrance or advancement in one or more occupations requiring manual, manipulative or technical competence or skills. Training, which is job oriented, must provide graduates with the necessary competencies for employment in their occupational field.

How long has my school been training students?

In order to be eligible for initial accreditation, at the time of application, the school must have been training students continuously (except for regularly scheduled vacation periods) for the preceding two consecutive years, and demonstrate that it will operate continuously thereafter.

Does my school have a graduate from the longest program offered?

If you did not answer yes to this question, you may not be eligible for accreditation from ACCSCCT. At the time of application, a school must demonstrate to the Commission that it graduated students from its longest program offered during that two-year period. If a school has two programs of equal length, and each program is the longest program offered at the institution, then the school must have graduated a student from both programs. In order to be eligible for accreditation, a school must refrain from adding a new, longest program to its offerings during the initial accreditation process.

Is my school in compliance with state, local and other federal requirements?

A school must be in compliance with federal, state and local government requirements. In cases where accrediting standards and state or federal requirements differ, the more stringent shall apply. If conflicts exist between state or federal requirements and accrediting standards, the state or federal requirements shall take precedence.

Is my school financially sound?

The school must be financially sound with sufficient resources for the proper operation of the school and discharge of obligations to students. Financial statements submitted to the Commission must be prepared in accordance with ACCSCT's Instructions for the Submission of Financial Statements and Financial Reporting, must be audited or reviewed, and must be prepared on the accrual basis of accounting by an independent certified public accountant licensed by the state to perform such services. The format of the financial statements must comply with generally accepted accounting principles. ACCSCT accredited institutions are required to submit copies of their financial statements on an annual basis.

What is the first step of the accreditation process?

After determining that an institution is eligible for accreditation from ACCSCT, the very first step is attendance at an Accreditation Workshop. ACCSCT hosts several accreditation workshops per year throughout the United States. Registration information, including the dates and location of each Accreditation Workshop, can be found at www.accsct.org, under the Events section. Schools are reminded that the full-time, on-site director of the school is **required** to attend an accreditation workshop prior to the submission of the Application for Initial Accreditation (*Introduction, Process and Procedures, Accreditation Workshop, Standards of Accreditation*).

The Accreditation Workshop will cover the following topics in detail: The Standards of Accreditation, The Accreditation Process, The Application for Accreditation, The Self Evaluation Report, Visit Activities, and Commission Actions.

Is ACCSCT recognized by the United States Department of Education?

Yes. For more than 35 years, ACCSCT has been at the forefront of establishing and advancing quality education at private, postsecondary career schools and colleges, and is recognized by the United States Department of Education as a private, non-profit, independent accrediting agency. Most recently, on December 13, 2004, ACCSCT's Petition for Renewal of Recognition was considered by the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI). Upon a recommendation by U.S. Department of Education (ED) staff, NACIQI voted to recommend to the Secretary of Education that ACCSCT's recognition be renewed for five years, the maximum time period allowed under the Higher Education Act, with no additional reporting requirements, and to continue to include the review of distance education programs within ACCSCT's scope of recognition.

What is ACCSCT's scope of accreditation as recognized by the United States Department of Education?

ACCSCT is currently recognized by the United States Department of Education for the accreditation of private, postsecondary, non-degree-granting institutions and degree-granting institutions in the United States, including those granting associate, baccalaureate and master's degrees, that are predominantly organized to educate students for occupational, trade and technical careers, and including institutions that offer programs via distance education.

What types of programs are offered at ACCSCT accredited institutions?

Programs within the medical field continue to have the highest number of enrollments at ACCSCT accredited institutions. Other programs that include a high number of enrollments include program offerings related to automotive repair, information technology, graphic/computer design, the construction fields, massage therapy, electronics, entertainment/media, and culinary arts. Enrollment data reported show that the majority of students continue to enroll into non-degree programs at ACCSCT accredited institutions. Additionally, approximately 38% of all ACCSCT accredited institutions currently offer a degree program.

Is my school too small for ACCSCT?

Absolutely not. ACCSCT accredits both large and small institutions across the country, in Puerto Rico, and the British Virgin Islands. ACCSCT does not compare small schools to large schools, or small schools to other small schools. The purpose of the accreditation process is to ensure that an institution is meeting its own stated education objectives, and is in compliance with the Standards of Accreditation.

What are the benefits of accreditation?

There are many benefits to accreditation. Among them, accreditation encourages continuous efforts to achieve maximum educational effectiveness, provides an assurance of acceptable quality, and establishes eligibility for participation in federally funded programs including student financial aid. Currently, over 800 institutions in the United States and Puerto Rico and the British Virgin Islands are accredited by the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCT). For specific information on these institutions and the programs they offer, visit www.accsct.org and select School Directory.

How long does the accreditation process take? What are the key areas I should know about?

Typically, it takes a school 1.5 – 2 years to complete initial accreditation process. The timeline is dependent on a number of variables, most importantly, that the school submits complete and accurate information to ACCSCT in its Application for Initial Accreditation and Self-Evaluation Report. A high level of reliance is placed upon information, data, and statements provided to ACCSCT by a school. The integrity and honesty of a school are fundamental and critical to the process, and a compromise of integrity is considered to be an extreme offense. Accredited schools agree to, and must meet or exceed, the Standards of Accreditation at the time of initial accreditation and throughout the accreditation period.

ACCSCT has built in a series of maximum deadlines for our schools that are seeking accreditation for the first time.

- The ACCSCT Financial Review Committee will evaluate the year-end financial statements (reviewed or audited statements) submitted with the Application for Initial Accreditation - Part I, prior to the acceptance of the application. Should the financial statements indicate that the institution may not be able to achieve financial viability, the Committee will instruct staff to advise the institution that pursuit of accreditation will rely upon a demonstration of financial viability in accordance with Section VIII (B)(1) of the Standards of Accreditation. The non-refundable application processing fee associated with the submission of the Application for Initial Accreditation - Part I is \$500.
- Initial applicants must submit their Application for Initial Accreditation - Part I within six months (maximum time frame) following the Accreditation Workshop. If a school does not submit an Application for Initial Accreditation – Part I within the allotted time, it must attend another Accreditation Workshop and restart the process.

- The Application for Initial Accreditation - Part I must be accepted by staff within six months of submission. ACCSCT staff will look to review all applications within 60 days, however, the application will be deferred at the staff level should a school fail to demonstrate compliance in the areas identified in the Application for Initial Accreditation - Part I. The school may resubmit, incorporating the necessary revisions to demonstrate compliance, within the six-month time frame and remain on the same timeline. If a school does not resubmit an Application for Initial Accreditation - Part I within the allotted time, it must attend another Accreditation Workshop and restart the process.
- Following acceptance of the Application for Initial Accreditation - Part I, a school must then submit its initial Self-Evaluation Report, Application for Initial Accreditation - Part II, and all corresponding fees, within 6 months of the receipt of the acceptance letter.
- The school must have an Orientation Visit with an ACCSCT staff member. This one-day visit provides an opportunity for the school to meet with staff on-site to review the school's Application for Initial Accreditation - Part II, and Self-Evaluation Report. Staff will identify any areas that require improvement (i.e. record keeping) before the full-team visits the institution to measure the school's compliance with accrediting standards. As of July 1, 2004 the Application for Initial Accreditation - Part II fee is \$2,000.00. The cost of the Orientation Visit is \$1,200.00.
- The revised Application for Initial Accreditation - Part II and Self-Evaluation Report (4 copies of each), along with copies of any required Occupation Specialist Materials, and the required visiting team deposit (\$4,900) must be submitted within 45 days following the school's receipt of its Orientation Visit Report.
- A full team on-site evaluation is scheduled at the institution. ACCSCT will attempt to schedule the site visit 2-3 months following the submission of the revised Application for Initial Accreditation - Part II and Self-Evaluation Report.
- The school receives the Team Summary Report from ACCSCT. This report summarizes the team's observations from its visit to the school. This report is typically sent to the school within 60 days following the visit.
- The school submits its response to the Team Summary Report. The response from the school is due in the Commission office within 45 days following its receipt.
- All materials are submitted to the ACCSCT Commissioners for review. The Commissioners make the determination if the school has met, at a minimum, all items identified in the Standards of Accreditation. The Commissioners meet four times per year, in February, May, August, and November.

What expenses can I expect my institution to incur during the accreditation process?

- ❖ Accreditation Workshop - \$500 per person. This fee covers meals (networking reception, 1 breakfast, 1 lunch), and all materials from the workshop, including: the Accreditation Workbook, a copy of the Standards of Accreditation, Commission Consultant Brochures, Catalog Checklist Guidebook, Enrollment Agreement Checklist Guidebook, and all other promotional materials.
- ❖ Application for Initial Accreditation - Part I \$500. A non-refundable processing fee that covers expenses associated with a staff analysis and review by the ACCSCT Financial Review Committee.

- ❖ Application for Initial Accreditation - Part II \$2000*. A non-refundable process fee that covers expenses associated with a comprehensive staff analysis intended to measure the school's compliance with the Standards of Accreditation.
- ❖ Orientation Visit - \$1200*. This fee covers the expense of a one-day on-site visit at the institution with a member of the ACCSCT staff.
- ❖ Full Team Visit - \$4900*. This fee covers a two-day visit with a member of the ACCSCT staff, a Team Leader, and Education Specialist, and one local occupational specialist. If the school offers more than one unrelated vocational program, an additional local occupation specialist may be required. There is a \$250 fee for each additional occupation specialist.

Note: Once accreditation is achieved, there is a yearly sustaining fee that is based upon the school's gross tuition. A copy of this policy can be found in the ACCSCT Bi-Laws, which is distributed at the Accreditation Workshop.

What should I know about ACCSCT's mission and vision, and core values?

ACCSCT's mission is to serve as a reliable authority on educational quality and to promote enhanced opportunities for students by establishing, sustaining, and enforcing valid standards and practices which contribute to the development of a highly trained and competitive workforce through quality career oriented education.

As a values driven organization, ACCSCT is dedicated to:

- Integrity** Accomplishing our mission with a commitment to ethics, honesty, trust, consistency and fairness.
- Accountability** Fulfilling our responsibilities to one another, the higher education community, and the public.
- Continuous Improvement** Cultivating personal and professional growth through learning, goal setting, innovation, commitment and participation.
- Open Communication** Fostering a free and timely exchange of ideas and information in collegial environment.
- Teamwork** Creating strong partnerships while recognizing individual strengths and emphasizing respect and mutual support.

How do I get more information on the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCT)?

Be sure to check out our web page at www.accsct.org. The ACCSCT web page includes a myriad of information on the accreditation process, hot-topic issues relevant to higher education, current ACCSCT publications, and a current workshop schedule. All of ACCSCT's required forms and reports are available for download at no charge.

For more information about the accreditation process, please contact Christopher Lambert, Associate Director of Membership Development and Commission Relations at (703)247-4516 or via email at clambert@accsct.org. For more information on the Accreditation Workshops, please contact Kerry Judge, Professional Development Coordinator at (703)247-4527 or via email at kjudge@accsct.org.

ACCSCT can be reached directly at our main line, (703)247-4212, or at info@accsct.org.