



Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges

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**To: ACCSC-Accredited Institutions**  
**From: Ronald S. Blumenthal, Chair of the Commission  
Michale S. McComis, Ed.D., Executive Director**  
**Date: May 21, 2010**  
**Subject: New ACCSC Student Achievement Benchmarks**

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Dear Colleague,

Outcomes assessment through the analysis of graduation and employment data has been a cornerstone of the Commission's process of evaluating institutional effectiveness for over a decade. Although increased focus on outcomes assessment represents a major shift within other sectors of the higher education community, the Commission has always relied upon verifiable outcomes data as a means of assessing educational programs and institutional effectiveness. Pursuant to the *Standards of Accreditation*, the Commission establishes and publishes the benchmark graduation and employment rates gleaned from data submitted in the Annual Reports of its accredited schools. Attached to this letter you will find the Commission's newly established Student Achievement benchmarks, based on Annual Report data from 2006-2008, that will go into effect July 1, 2010.

In addition to updating the student achievement benchmarks to reflect more recent data, you will see that the Commission has modified the program length categories for its graduation rate benchmarks. For programs under 25 months, the Commission has reduced the program length groupings from six-month to three-month increments. This means, for example, that the former 1-6 month program length group has been broken into two groups: 1-3 month programs and 4-6 month programs. As another example, the 12-17 month program length group has been broken into the following groups: 10-12 month programs, 13-15 month programs, and 16-18 month programs. In addition, for longer programs, the Commission has replaced the existing 24 months and greater category with two new groups: 25-35 months and 36 months and greater. The intent of these changes is to create program length groupings that exhibit less variability, to establish benchmark graduation rates that more closely align to the programs being evaluated, and to take into account the fact that program length has the strongest statistical relationship to expected levels of graduation. You will notice that for some programs the benchmark graduation rate has increased, but in most instances the benchmark graduation rate has decreased. Please note that the Commission will take into account the transition of graduation rate benchmarks when evaluating student achievement data reported after July 1, 2010.

In addition, the Commission's new Annual Report data again yielded a benchmark employment rate of 70%. The Commission fully understands that the current economic condition may impede the ability of some programs in attaining this benchmark. The Commission, however, determined that lowering the benchmark at this time is not prudent and the Commission is committed to working with institutions to understand the specific issues faced by a particular program reporting a below-benchmark employment rate.

In this regard, it is important to note that the Commission has always provided an opportunity for institutions to demonstrate successful student achievement when a school reports a graduation rate or

employment rate that is below benchmark. *Section VII (B)(1)(b)(iii), Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation*, states that:

*For any program that has a graduation or employment rate that is lower than the Commission's established benchmark rates, a school may still demonstrate with supporting documentation the successful achievement of its students in that program by providing other reliable indicators of successful student learning and by showing that factors such as economic conditions, state and national trends, location, student population served, length of program, students who withdraw from training but still obtain employment, state requirements, or other external or mitigating factors reasonably related to student achievement are adversely impacting the school's ability to meet the Commission's established benchmark rates.*

A key phrase in this standard is: "...by providing other reliable indicators of successful student learning..." This means, for example, that if a school reports a below-benchmark employment rate, the school may present other indices of student achievement, such as student success in obtaining educational objectives as measured by grades mapped to objective rubrics; evaluations from externship sites; student success on certification and licensure exams; or student and employer satisfaction surveys that address knowledge and skill attainment, among several others.

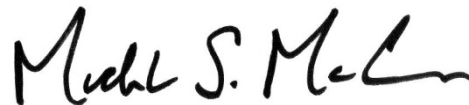
Last year the Commission promulgated significant changes to the ACCSC *Standards of Accreditation* in the areas related to student learning, assessment, progress, and achievement. The Commission's revisions placed particular emphasis on several key areas that the Commission believes enhance the opportunity for schools to demonstrate student achievement as well as to expand the Commission's ability to assess and evaluate institutional success in relation to student achievement. The Commission's newly established student achievement benchmarks seek to do the same. Moreover, the Commission encourages its institutions to not simply use the benchmark rates as a goal for graduation and employment. These benchmarks provide an assessment starting point and represent the Commission's need to focus its efforts on those programs in the greatest need of attention. Institutions should continue to set the highest attainable goals with regard to student success and the rates of graduation and employment – hopefully well above the Commission's benchmark rates and above the average rates of achievement.

Overall, the Commission's standards attempt to take into account a broad spectrum of factors that contribute to student learning and achievement and attempt to provide institutions with multiple methods to demonstrate the success of students. Graduation and employment rates are one method; however, the Commission is committed to reviewing other qualitative factors that also demonstrate institutional and student success. The Commission is hopeful that schools will use these various tools as a means to enhance student assessment and achievement and as a means to express student success.

Sincerely,



Ronald S. Blumenthal  
Chair of the Commission



Michale S. McComis, Ed.D.  
Executive Director

Encl: ACCSC Graduation Employment Rate Benchmarks

## ACCSC Established Benchmark Graduation and Employment Rates Effective July 1, 2010

The Commission determines the established benchmark rates of student graduation and graduate employment for its accredited schools from information collected in Annual Report submissions (see *Section VII (C), Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation*). The following student achievement rates are in effect for all Graduation and Employment Charts that use a Report Date of July 1, 2010 and later. These rates remain in effect until further notice.

<b>ESTABLISHED BENCHMARK GRADUATION RATES</b>			
Program Length in Months	Average Rates of Graduation Demonstrates Acceptable Student Achievement	Standard Deviation	Established Benchmark Graduation Rates*
1-3	92%	8%	84%
4-6	82%	13%	69%
7-9	69%	14%	55%
10-12	69%	15%	54%
13-15	61%	16%	45%
16-18	59%	17%	42%
19-24	56%	20%	36%
25-35	55%	22%	33%
36+	47%	15%	32%

\*If a school reports a lower graduation rate for a program, that program will be subject to additional monitoring or reporting as deemed appropriate.

<b>ESTABLISHED BENCHMARK EMPLOYMENT RATE</b>			
	Average Rate of Employment Demonstrates Acceptable Student Achievement	Standard Deviation	Established Benchmark Employment Rate*
All Programs	82%	12%	70%

\*If a school reports a lower employment rate for a program, that program will be subject to additional monitoring or reporting as deemed appropriate.

Please note that if a school reports a graduation or employment rate that is less than the established benchmark rates set forth above, the school will have an opportunity to demonstrate, with supporting documentation, the successful achievement of its students by taking into account additional factors the school relates to measuring academic success. These factors may include internal improvements made to a school, other reliable indicators of successful student learning, as well as external factors (e.g., market conditions) reasonably related to student achievement (See *Section VII (B)(1)(b)(iii), Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation*).