

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

Determining Eligibility with ACCSC

Is my institution a private, postsecondary career school 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. ACCSC 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 ACCSC.

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 breaks and 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?

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.

Does my school offer at least one program that is 300 clock hours (or longer)?

The school must, at a minimum, offer at least one program that is 300 clock hours or longer in length.

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?

ACCSC accredited institutions are required to submit copies of their financial statements on an annual basis. Financial statements submitted to the Commission must be prepared in accordance with ACCSC's Instructions for the Submission of Financial Statements and Financial Reporting. **The statements must be audited**, must be prepared on the accrual basis of accounting by an independent certified public accountant licensed by the state to perform such services, and must be presented using a comparative format. The format of the financial statements must comply with generally accepted accounting principles. Financial statements must show that the school has sufficient resources for the proper operation of the school and discharge of obligations to students. The financial statements for an institution making application for initial accreditation should not show any of the following:

- Net loss for the two most recent fiscal years;
- Negative net worth for the two most recent fiscal years; or
- Negative cash flow from operations for the most recent fiscal year.

ACCSC's Accreditation Process

What is the first step of the accreditation process?

After determining that an institution is eligible for accreditation from ACCSC, the very first step is attendance at an Initial Accreditation Workshop. ACCSC hosts several accreditation workshops per year. The Initial Accreditation Workshop is hosted at ACCSC's office located in Arlington, Virginia. Registration information, including the dates and location of each Accreditation Workshop, can be found at www.ACCSC.org, under the Events section. Schools are reminded that the full-time, on-site director of the school, or appropriate member of the school's management team is required to attend an accreditation workshop prior to the submission of the Application for Initial Accreditation

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

Typically, it takes a school between 18 months and 2 years to complete the initial accreditation process. The timeline is dependent on a number of variables, most importantly, that the school submits complete and accurate information to ACCSC demonstrating that the school complies with ACCSC's *Standards of Accreditation*. ACCSC has built in a series of maximum deadlines for our schools that are seeking accreditation for the first time.

- The ACCSC Financial Review Committee will evaluate the year-end financial statements (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 financially sound, the Committee will instruct staff to advise the institution that pursuit of accreditation will rely upon a demonstration of financial viability.
- Initial applicants must submit their Application for Initial Accreditation - Part I within six months (maximum time frame) following the Initial 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 within six months of submission. ACCSC 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 Initial 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 Evaluation with an ACCSC 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 and afford the school an opportunity to revise its materials before the full-team on-site evaluation occurs.
- The revised Application for Initial Accreditation - Part II and Self-Evaluation Report along with copies of any required Occupation Specialist Materials, and the required on-site evaluation fee must be submitted within 45 days following the school's receipt of its Orientation Evaluation Report.

- A full team on-site evaluation is scheduled at the institution. ACCSC 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 ACCSC. This report summarizes the team's observations from its on-site evaluation to the school. This report is typically sent to the school within 60 days following the on-site evaluation.
- 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 ACCSC 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 - **\$600 per person**. Please note that workshop participants are responsible for securing their own travel and hotel arrangements. ACCSC negotiates special hotel rates for workshop participants, which is disclosed during the registration process.
- Application for Initial Accreditation - Part I **\$750**. A non-refundable processing fee that covers expenses associated with a staff analysis and review by the ACCSC Financial Review Committee.
- Application for Initial Accreditation - Part II **\$2,250**. 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 Evaluation - **\$1400**. This fee covers the expense of a mandatory one-day on-site visit at the institution with a member of the ACCSC staff.
- Full Team On-Site Evaluation - **\$6000**. This fee covers a two-day on-site evaluation with a member of the ACCSC 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 \$150 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 ACCSC Bylaws, which is distributed at the Accreditation Workshop. According to the Bylaws:

Members of the Corporation shall pay dues annually in accordance with the following: (i) if the gross tuition of the member is \$1,000,000 or less, the dues shall be \$900 plus .0026 times gross tuition over \$200,000; (ii) if the gross tuition of the member is greater than \$1,000,000 but not more than \$3,000,000, dues shall be \$3,000 plus .0010 times gross tuition over \$1,000,000; and (iii) if the gross tuition of the member is greater than \$3,000,000, dues shall be \$5,000 plus .000150 times gross tuition over \$3,000,000.

ACCSC General Information

Is ACCSC recognized by the United States Department of Education?

Yes. For more than 45 years, ACCSC 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. ACCSC 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 should I know about ACCSC's mission and vision, and core values?

ACCSC'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 way for the Commission to continually meet its mission in a committed fashion, ACCSC has established a values-based framework supported by the following foundational core values: Integrity, Accountability, Continuous Improvement, and Community. The Commission, its professional staff, and its corps of volunteers were all instrumental in developing these core values as a way to convey how we strive to go about our work. ACCSC uses the following definitions to give a deeper expression of its core values:

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.

COMMUNITY

Fostering a free and timely exchange of ideas and information in a collegial environment through the establishment of strong partnerships that emphasize respect and mutual support.

What types of programs are offered at ACCSC accredited institutions?

Programs within the medical field continue to have the highest number of enrollments at ACCSC 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 ACCSC accredited institutions. For specific information on these institutions and the programs they offer, visit www.ACCSC.org and select Directory.

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

Be sure to check out our web page at www.accsc.org. The ACCSC web page includes a myriad of information on the accreditation process, hot-topic issues relevant to higher education, current ACCSC publications, and a current workshop schedule. All of ACCSC's required forms and reports are available for download at no charge. ACCSC also offers a diverse array of training for administrators of ACCSC-accredited institutions via the ACCSC Online Training Center at <http://www.accsctraining.org/ACCSC/>

ACCSC can be reached directly at our main line, (703)247-4212.