

# ACCSCCT Alert!

Information for  
our member schools

**To:** ACCSCT Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties  
**From:** Elise Scanlon, Executive Director  
**Date:** April 17, 2008  
**Subject:** Amendments to the *Standards of Accreditation*

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The Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCCT) has reviewed its practices, policies, and standards and has issued guidance and revisions in the following areas:

- *Electronic Submission Requirements Reminder*
- *Transfer of Credit*
- *Notification and Information Sharing*

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 "*Accreditation*" and then "*Standards of Accreditation*" and "*Accreditation Alert*."

Accredited institutions and others maintaining a complete and up-to-date copy of the *Standards of Accreditation* should add this notice to their current standards book under the *Accreditation Alerts* tab. The *Standards of Accreditation* will be revised July 1, 2008 at which time these revisions will be incorporated into that document. The July 1, 2008 *Standards of Accreditation* will be available for download from the Commission's website at [www.accsct.org](http://www.accsct.org).

For additional information related to these approved revisions, please contact Michale S. McComis, Ed.D., Associate Executive Director, at (703) 247-4520 or via email at [mccomis@accsct.org](mailto:mccomis@accsct.org).

## **Electronic Submission Requirements Reminder**

### **Rationale – From the September 18, 2007 Accreditation Alert**

The Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology continuously seeks ways to improve the efficiency of its procedures as a means to ensure the best allocation of its resources and the resources of its accredited institutions. To that end, ACCSCT's accreditation processes and procedures have become increasingly reliant upon technology as a means of achieving greater efficiency. A long-range goal of ACCSCT's Technology Plan has been to develop an Enterprise Content Management System in which technologies are fully utilized to capture, manage, store, preserve, and deliver content and documents related to accreditation processes. Over the past two years, the Commission has undertaken an electronic submission pilot project in which a small number of institutions volunteered to prepare and submit applications and responses to the Commission in electronic format using the ACCSCT Instructions for Electronic Submission. Based on the success of the pilot along with the 100% success rate for accredited institutions submitting the Online Annual Report, the Commission has found that receiving materials in an electronic format enhances its ability to:

- Reduce paper handling and manual processes;
- Reduce the requirement for paper storage;
- Afford faster access to information;
- Improve control over accreditation documents and processes;
- Streamline the time-consuming conversion of paper submissions to electronic format;
- Increase security over the accessibility of accreditation records; and
- Improve tracking and monitoring of accreditation processes, with the ability to modify the system to continuously improve efficiency.

The Commission has therefore determined that ACCSCT can transition to receiving all applications, forms, responses, and other documentation from institutions in electronic format. The Commission has established a timeline to phase in the submission of electronic documents incrementally over the next eighteen months. The purpose of this *Accreditation Alert* is to announce the timelines and procedures associated with this transition.

### **Implementation Timeline**

#### **Application for Accreditation:**

Beginning with the **October 2-3, 2007 Accreditation Workshop**, all institutions have been required to submit the Application for Renewal of Accreditation or the Application for Initial Accreditation and the Self Evaluation Report in accordance with the ACCSCT Instructions for Electronic Submission and in accordance with the timeframes announced at the workshop.

**Financial Statements:**

Financial statements for fiscal years ending on or after January 1, 2007 must be submitted in accordance with the ACCSCT Instructions for Electronic Submission and the Instructions for the Submission of Financial Statements and Financial Reporting. This includes institutions in initial accreditation applicant status.

**Response to On-Site Evaluation Report and Commission Action Letter:**

Institutions that are instructed to prepare a response to an On-Site Evaluation Report (e.g. Team Summary Report) or a response to a Commission Action Letter (e.g., Deferral, Show Cause Order, or Probation Order) scheduled for consideration at the May 2008 Commission Meeting or later have been required to submit the response in accordance with the ACCSCT Instructions for Electronic Submission.

**Substantive and Nonsubstantive Change Applications and Reports:**

Beginning July 1, 2008, institutions submitting an application for a substantive change or a nonsubstantive change report must do so in accordance with the ACCSCT Instructions for Electronic Submission.

**Application for Appeal of a Commission Decision:**

Beginning July 1, 2008, institutions submitting an Application for Appeal of a Commission Decision must do so in accordance with the ACCSCT Instructions for Electronic Submission.

**Processing Fee Assessment:**

The Commission also authorized the assessment of a \$500 processing fee for institutions that submit paper materials after the dates provided above.

## Transfer of Credit

On December 19, 2001, ACCSCT issued a Transfer of Credit Resolution that served as a guideline for institutions for the evaluation of credit earned at other institutions. At that time, the Commission intended this resolution to be integrated into the *Standards of Accreditation* at an appropriate time. After researching the credit transfer policies of other accrediting agencies and the policies of accredited institutions (with regional and national accreditation) and after soliciting comments from the membership and other interested parties on this issue, the Commission determined that the addition of a transfer of credit standard is appropriate as a means to present a best practice for its accredited institutions in this area.

The Commission's new credit transfer standard emphasizes the importance of having a well defined process for evaluating credits for comparability and alignment and a policy for accepting credits that respects the principles articulated in the standard. The following is the Commission's new credit transfer language, to be inserted as *Section II (A)(9) Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation*, and effective as of July 1, 2008:<sup>1</sup>

### Proposed New Transfer of Credit Standard:

#### Standards of Accreditation

#### Chapter 2 - Substantive Standards

#### II. Program and Curriculum

#### A. General Requirements

##### 9. Transfer of Credit

- a. At its discretion, a school may accept transfer credit for a course completed in other postsecondary institutions when comparable in scope and content to the school's own coursework.
- b. In evaluating credit earned by students for transfer, a school must adhere to the following principles and practices:
  - i. A school has established appropriate criteria (in areas such as comparability, applicability, source, and age of the previously earned credit; academic preparedness of the student at the time of credit transfer; grade earned for the credit to be transferred; etc.) and applies a systematic, consistent process for determining whether to accept credit earned at other institutions for transfer.
  - ii. A school publishes its transfer-of-credit policy in its catalog and clearly communicates the criteria and process for evaluating and accepting credit earned at other institutions for transfer.

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<sup>1</sup>The current ACCSCT Transfer of Credit Resolution found in *Appendix IV, Standards of Accreditation* will be deleted as of July 1, 2008.

- iii. The acceptance of credit for transfer is primarily based on the competencies achieved by the student in previously completed coursework and whether the competencies reasonably align with the coursework and the program into which the credit is to be transferred.
- iv. Accreditation of the institution or program from which the student is seeking to transfer credits is a consideration for credit transfer decisions; however, the source of accreditation of the institution or program from which the student is seeking to transfer credits is not the sole basis for accepting or denying credit for transfer.
- c. The school must document in the student record from what school and on what basis transfer credit was accepted.
- d. At a minimum, 25% of the credits required for nondegree and undergraduate degree programs must be completed at the school awarding the degree.
- e. The majority of the credits required for a graduate degree program must be completed at the school awarding the degree.

## Notification and Information Sharing

The Commission reviewed its rules for the disclosure of its actions to governmental agencies, other accrediting agencies, and the public and, after soliciting comments from the ACCSCT membership and other interested parties, determined that revisions are warranted in the interest of greater transparency. The Commission has inserted new disclosure language in *Section VII (K), Rules of Process and Procedure* and redrafted the language in *Section X, Rules of Process and Procedure*. The new language, effective immediately, is as follows:<sup>2</sup>

### VII. COMMISSION ACTIONS (*Rules of Process and Procedure*)

#### K. Probation

8. A school subject to a Probation Order must inform current and prospective students that the school has been placed on probation and that additional information regarding that action can be obtained from the Commission's website.

### X. NOTIFICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING (*Rules of Process and Procedure*)

#### A. Scope of Public Information

1. The Commission will make available to the public and may publish in official ACCSCT publications, including its website and Directory of Accredited Schools, the following information:
  - a. The Standards of Accreditation;
  - b. The name, address, telephone number, and director of a school;
  - c. The accredited or nonaccredited status of a school;
  - d. The date of a school's initial accreditation, renewal of accreditation, or previous term of accreditation;
  - e. The current term of a school's accreditation;
  - f. A list of a school's approved programs;
  - g. A summary of information pertaining to a Probation Order as described in these *Rules*;
  - h. A summary of information pertaining to an adverse action as defined in these *Rules*;
  - i. A summary of information pertaining to an action subject to appeal; and

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<sup>2</sup> The *Standards of Accreditation* define "adverse actions" and "actions subject to appeal" as denial of an application for initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation, withdrawal of accreditation, or denial of a substantive change application.

- j. The date of a school's voluntary withdrawal of accreditation and status of the school's accreditation as of that date (e.g., operating under reporting, a Show Cause Order, Probation Order, etc.).
2. Confidentiality of Records: Information pertaining to the Commission's actions is confidential and is not shared with third parties, other ACCSCCT school members, the press, or the public, except as authorized by a school or as required by these *Rules*, government regulation, judicial or administrative process, and other legal requirements.

## **B. Notification of Commission Actions to Schools**

1. The Commission will provide written notice to a school of a decision to grant initial or renewal of accreditation within 30 days of the decision.
2. The Commission will provide written notice to a school of all other nonadverse actions in a timely manner, generally within 30 days of the decision, except as indicated in number 3 below.
3. The Commission will provide written notice of a decision to place a school on Probation within 30 days of the decision.
4. The Commission will provide written notice to a school of an adverse accreditation decision.
5. The Commission will provide written notice to a school of a final decision to deny or withdraw accreditation within 30 days of the decision. A final decision to deny or withdraw accreditation is one reached after a school has exhausted the appeals process provided for under *Section VIII, Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation* or that becomes effective after a school has failed to avail itself of its appeal rights within the prescribed time frame.

## **C. Notification of Commission Actions to Government Entities and Other Accrediting Agencies**

1. The Commission, at the same time it notifies the school, will provide written notice to the U.S. Department of Education, the appropriate state licensing agency, and appropriate accrediting agencies of a decision by the Commission to grant initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation.
2. The Commission, at the same time it notifies the school, will provide notice and a summary of the reasons why a school is placed on Probation to the U.S. Department of Education, the appropriate state licensing agency, and appropriate accrediting agencies.
3. The Commission, at the same time it notifies the school, will provide the same notice to the U.S. Department of Education, the appropriate state licensing agency, and appropriate accrediting agencies, of an action subject to appeal along with a summary of the reasons for the Commission's action and information pertaining to the ACCSCCT appeal process.
4. The Commission, no later than 60 days after a final decision to deny or withdraw accreditation, will make available to the U.S. Department of Education, the appropriate

state licensing agency, and appropriate accrediting agencies the reasons for the Commission's decision and the comments, if any, that the affected school has submitted with regard to that decision. A decision to deny or withdraw accreditation becomes a final decision when a school has exhausted the appeals process provided for under *Section VIII, Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation* or that becomes effective after a school has failed to avail itself of its appeal rights within the prescribed time frame.

5. The Commission, no later than 30 days after the Commission has received notice of a decision by a school to voluntarily withdraw its accreditation, will provide written notice to the U.S. Department of Education, the appropriate state licensing agency, appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public of such decision.
6. The Commission will notify the U.S. Department of Education of the name of any school accredited by ACCST that the Commission, upon review of the Team Summary Report or other relevant information, has reason to believe is failing to meet its Title IV HEA program responsibilities or is engaged in fraud or abuse. The Commission will also provide the reason(s) for the concern(s).

#### **D. Disclosure of Commission Actions to the Public**

1. The Commission, at the same time it notifies the school, will make public any final decision to grant initial accreditation or renewal of accreditation.
2. The Commission, at the same time it notifies the school, will make public a decision to place a school on Probation and provide a summary of the reasons why a school is placed on Probation.
3. The Commission, at the same time it notifies the school, will make public an action subject to appeal, with the exception of the denial of a substantive change application. A summary of the reasons for the Commission's action will also be made public along with information pertaining to the ACCST appeal process.
4. The Commission, no later than 60 days after a final decision to deny or withdraw accreditation, will make public a summary of the reasons for the decision together with any comments submitted by the school. A decision to deny or withdraw accreditation becomes a final decision when a school has exhausted the appeals process provided for under *Section VIII, Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation* or that becomes effective after a school has failed to avail itself of its appeal rights within the prescribed time frame.

#### **E. Information Sharing with Government Entities and Other Accrediting Agencies**

1. ACCST will grant all reasonable special requests for accreditation information made by other accreditation agencies and government entities. Requests for information from such entities must be in writing, submitted to the Executive Director, and state the name and address of the school for which the information is sought, the nature of the information requested, and the purpose for which the information is to be used. A decision to deny such a request is not subject to appeal.

2. Schools accredited by or seeking accreditation from ACCSCT agree to provide a release for purposes of eliciting information from state licensing agencies and governmental entities, as well as an acknowledgment of the fact that accreditation information may, at the discretion of the Commission, be shared with other accrediting agencies and government entities.

#### **F. Exception in the Event of Appropriate Legal Request**

As a general rule, the Commission has no authority or duty to refuse to disclose information about a school when requested to do so pursuant to appropriate legal process. If the request is made by a party with the ability to obtain school records through a legal process, it will be within the discretion of the Commission whether to require that the formalities of the legal process be observed or to provide such information to the requester as if the legal process has been followed. The Commission will be under no obligation to inform a school that such a request has been made and complied with. Such notice may be furnished to the school if the Commission so decides and if such notices are determined to be in accordance with law.

#### **G. Authorized Disclosure of Information**

If a school wishes specific accreditation information that is otherwise to be treated as confidential under this section of the *Rules*, to be released to third parties, the director of such school or a school- designated official is to provide a written release to the Commission stating the precise information sought to be released and the party or parties to whom the information is to be released.