Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
Beginning the Accreditation Process with the Accrediting Commission of Careers Schools and Colleges (ACCSC)

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

Who is ACCSC?

ACCSC was founded in 1965 as the Accrediting Commission of the National Association of Trade and Technical Schools (NATTS). In 1967, the Commission received recognition from the U.S. Department of Education, as a private, non-profit, independent accrediting agency which confirmed the Commission’s status as a reliable authority for the establishment of educational standards. In 1990, the name changed to the Accrediting Commission of Trade and Technical Schools (ACTTS) a part of the Career College Association and in 1993, the Accreditation Commission separated from the trade association unit creating a new wholly independent organization – the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCT). In October 2009, ACCSCT changed its name again to the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC).

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. ACCSC’s principal purpose is the accreditation of institutions of higher education that provide occupational, vocational, trade, and technical education and training at the degree and non-degree level.

ACCSC strives to establish and maintain high educational standards that promote ethical business practices and quality education among its accredited institutions and engages in thorough assessment practices designed to evaluate an institution’s compliance with those standards. ACCSC accreditation ensures that an institution and its educational programs meet established standards that will benefit students.

What is ACCSC’s scope of accreditation as recognized by the United States Department of Education?

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 is accreditation?
Accreditation is a private, voluntary, non-governmental, peer-review process which provides a means of assisting schools and colleges to become stronger and better institutions by setting standards of educational quality. Accreditation seeks to assess and enhance the educational quality of an institution, ensure consistency in institutional operations, promote self-evaluation and institutional improvement, and provide for public accountability. ACCSC accreditation enhances the quality of education provided and promotes institutional accountability by systematically and comprehensively evaluating institutions based upon criteria established via the Standards of Accreditation.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, “[t]he goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality.” An agency seeking national recognition by the U.S. Secretary of Education must meet the Secretary’s procedures and criteria for the recognition of accrediting agencies by submitting information demonstrating the agency’s compliance with the federal criteria for recognition in areas such as administrative capacity, scope of standards, fairness of processes and procedures, and transparency in actions. In meeting its mission, the U.S. Department of Education authorizes accrediting agencies to serve as reliable authorities as to the quality of educational institutions. As such, ACCSC believes that accreditation by a U.S. Department of Education recognized agency can be a primary consideration for students, parents, and other organizations interested in educational quality assurance.

What are the Standards of Accreditation?
ACCSC’s Standards of Accreditation describes the accreditation process and sets forth the base of essentials against which a school studies and evaluates itself. Each school determines its own educational objectives, which must be to prepare students for entrance or advancement in one or more occupations requiring manual, manipulative or technical competence or skills. Educational objectives must be career oriented and provide graduates with the necessary competencies, skills and level of education for employment in their fields of study. The Commission has effective mechanisms in place for evaluating the extent to which an institution successfully achieves its stated objectives and continuously evaluates whether an institution has the capacity to demonstrate compliance with accrediting standards.

The Standards of Accreditation establish mechanisms to evaluate all aspects of the institution that include management and administrative capacity; institutional assessment and improvement; financial stability and responsibility; physical facilities; program requirements, including curriculum content and academic rigor, program length and organization; learning resources; equipment; instructional delivery method; educational administration and faculty qualifications; student recruitment, including catalog, enrollment agreement, and advertising and promotion; student admissions policies and practices; student services; student progress, including student achievement outcomes (graduation and employment); separate facilities; and distance education, as applicable.

Through the accreditation process, ACCSC is afforded an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of an institution’s educational programs by evaluating the infrastructure that supports the delivery of programs as well as educational outcomes, including student achievement. Institutions seeking accreditation from ACCSC must prepare for and conduct an
introspective self-evaluation, in which the institution compares its programs and educational objectives to established standards, and identifies areas of comparable strength and needed improvement.

**Determining Eligibility with ACCSC**

**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. 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 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 ACCSC. 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. 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?
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 ACCSC’s Instructions for the Submission of Financial Statements and Financial Reporting, must be audited 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. ACCSC 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 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.

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.

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 are accredited by the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC).

For specific information on these institutions and the programs they offer, visit www.accsc.org and select 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 ACCSC in its Application for Initial Accreditation and Self-Evaluation Report. A high level of reliance is placed upon information, data, and statements provided to ACCSC 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. 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 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.

- 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. 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 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 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 (i.e. record keeping) before the full-team visits the institution to measure the school’s compliance with accrediting standards.
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 fee 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. 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 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 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 - $550 per person (as of July 1, 2011). Please note that workshop participants are responsible for securing their own travel and hotel arrangements. ACCSC negotiates special hotel rates for our workshop participants, which is disclosed during the registration process.

Application for Initial Accreditation Part I $500. 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 $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 - $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 Visit - $5400*. This fee covers a two-day visit 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 $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 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.

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.

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