

## ACCSC ACCREDITATION ALERT

**To:** ACCSC Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties

**From:** Michale S. McComis, Ed.D., Executive Director

**Date:** July 1, 2015

**Subject:** Revisions to the *Standards of Accreditation*

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### **Revisions:**

The Commission has republished the *Standards of Accreditation* which is now dated July 1, 2015 and replaces the July 1, 2014 version.

**Part I – Substantive Revisions:** The following sections have had substantive revisions based upon the May 29, 2014 Call for Comment and December 19, 2014 Call for Comment:

- *Section VII (G)(1&2), Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation – Term of Accreditation Extended*
- *Section VII (B), Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation – Licensure/Certification Exam Required Pass Rate*

**Part II – Non-Substantive Revisions:** The following sections have had non-substantive clarifying revisions:

- *Chapter 1 – Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation:*
  - *Section I (B)(3)(e)*
  - *Section I (E)(1)*
  - *Section I (I)*
  - *Section IV (E)(2)(j) & (E)(5)(a)(vii)*
  - *Section V (A)(4)*
  - *Section VII (K)(1) & (L)(1)*
  - *Section VII (D)(5)*
- *Chapter 2 – Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation:*
  - *Section I (D)(4-5 & 9)*
  - *Section II (A)(2)*
  - *Section IV (A)(15)*
  - *Section IV (B)(1)*
  - *Section IV (C)(4)(c)*
  - *Enrollment Agreement Checklist*

**Part III – Accreditation Fee Revisions:** In addition to the revisions above, the Commission has increased some user fees as set forth under *Appendix I – Accreditation Fees, Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation*.

### **PART IV – New Upload School Submission Center**

All revisions are effective July 1, 2015 unless otherwise stated in this Alert. For additional information related to this *Accreditation Alert*, please contact Michale S. McComis, Ed.D., Executive Director, at 703.247.4520 or [mccomis@accsc.org](mailto:mccomis@accsc.org).

## **PART I – SUBSTANTIVE REVISIONS**

### **1. Extended Term of Accreditation – 6<sup>th</sup> Year of Accreditation for Schools of Excellence**

The Commission is interested in rewarding outstanding achievement and in incentivizing schools to strive toward achieving above-minimum results in relation to compliance with accrediting standards, particularly in the area of student achievement outcomes. As a result, the Commission has created a process to extend the normal maximum five-year grant of accreditation by one year in exceptional cases and for outstanding performance. It is the Commission's hope that making available a sixth year of accreditation for outstanding performance will urge schools to perform at a higher level and will by extension lead to enhanced student achievement. The additional sixth year of accreditation will only be available to those schools that achieve the status of School of Excellence.

In order to be eligible for the School of Excellence status, an institution, minimally, must go through the accreditation process without issue, pay all fees and submit all reports on time and complete, and exhibit above average outcomes in the majority of its programs to achieve the School of Excellence Award. The Commission will retain its discretion to look at other factors when making determinations about which schools would be eligible for the award of a sixth year of accreditation and a school would not be able to request an extended term of accreditation.

This new provision is in effect for all schools that are granted initial or renewal of accreditation after July 1, 2015 and who ultimately through that process earn and are awarded School of Excellence status. Although the Commission recognizes and greatly appreciates the efforts put forth and the high-level results attained by schools that have received the School of Excellence Award in the past, the Commission will focus on consistently applying the criteria and awarding the School of Excellence Award going forward for future grants of accreditation and as such will not apply the addition of the sixth year retroactively to past years' award recipients.

The revised and new language for the extended term of accreditation follows below (new language in **red**; deleted language in **blue**)

## **SECTION VII – COMMISSION ACTIONS**

### **G. Accreditation**

#### 1. Initial Accreditation:

- a.** Applicants for initial accreditation that are found to be in compliance with accreditation standards and requirements of the Commission will be granted accreditation status. The term of accreditation for schools seeking an initial grant of accreditation is ~~a maximum of~~ three years, but may be less at the discretion of the Commission.
- b.** **In exceptional cases based upon criteria determined by the Commission (e.g., no findings of non-compliance with accrediting standards through the initial accreditation process, exceptional student achievement outcomes, amongst other criteria), the Commission may grant an initial applicant school a four-year term of accreditation.**
- c.** In cases where the school is institutionally accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and in good standing at the time of Initial Application, the Commission may consider up to a five-year term based on the school's demonstrated ability to maintain continuous compliance with **ACCSC's** accrediting standards.

2. Renewal of Accreditation:

- a. Applicants for renewal of accreditation that are found to be in compliance with accreditation standards and requirements will be granted renewal of accreditation. The term of accreditation for schools seeking renewal of accreditation is ~~a maximum of~~ five years, but may be less at the discretion of the Commission.
- b. **In exceptional cases based upon criteria determined by the Commission (e.g., no findings of non-compliance with accrediting standards through the renewal of accreditation process, exceptional student achievement outcomes, amongst other criteria), the Commission may grant a school a six-year term of accreditation.**

## **2. Licensure/Certification Exam Pass Rate Requirement**

While graduation and employment rates play an integral role in an institution's on-going programmatic and institutional assessment plan, an additional area that demonstrates student learning outcomes includes pass rates on licensing/certification examinations required for employment. The Commission collects licensure/certification examination pass rate data through the Annual Report and will now require schools to demonstrate **a minimum 70% pass rate on licensure/certification examinations** for those programs where a governmental entity requires students to pass the examination as a condition of employment – e.g., state nursing boards, Department of Motor Vehicles, cosmetology and massage therapy boards, Federal Aviation Administration, etc. If another entity or agency requires a higher examination pass rate, the higher standard shall apply and the Commission will take into consideration any action taken by another entity or agency with regard to a school's failure to meet an examination pass rate requirement (see *Section I (B)(e)(iii) & Section IV (E)(m), Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation*).

Below are the Commission's proposed standards revisions (new language in **red**; deleted language in **blue**):

## **VII – STUDENT LEARNING, ASSESSMENT, PROGRESS, AND ACHIEVEMENT**

### **B. Student Achievement**

1. Student Achievement

- a. \*\*\*\*
- b. The school demonstrates successful student achievement by maintaining acceptable rates of student graduation and employment in the career field for which the school provided education **as well as acceptable pass rates on licensure/certification exams where required by governmental entities to work in a particular career field.** The school supports ~~these student achievement~~ rates through student transcripts, the school's verifiable records of initial employment of its graduates, **and exam pass rate data obtained from the requiring entity, or other verifiable documentation.**<sup>2</sup>
  - i. The Commission will review student achievement for each program offered at an institution and will consider not only the rates at which students graduate from a training program, ~~and~~ attain employment in a training related field, **and pass licensure/certification exams required for employment,**<sup>3</sup> but also other factors that are reasonably related to student achievement as a measure of educational quality and institutional effectiveness.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Appendix VII* for the Commission's Guidelines for Employment Classification.

<sup>3</sup> **This includes any exam that is required by a governmental entity for employment in a field, regardless of the exam's title or whether passing the exam results in a license, certification, or any other validation credential.**

- ii. \*\*\*\*<sup>4</sup>
  - iii. **For those programs where a governmental entity requires the attainment of a passing score on a licensure/certification exam in order to work in a particular field, the Commission determines a program's licensure/certification exam pass rate to be acceptable when at least 70% of the students that take the exam attain a passing score.**<sup>5</sup>
  - iv. For any program that has a graduation, ~~or~~ employment, **or licensure/certification exam pass** rate that is lower than the Commission's established benchmark rates...
2. Student Achievement Outcomes Monitoring and Reporting
- For any program that has a graduation, ~~or~~ employment, **or licensure/certification exam pass** rate that falls below the Commission's established benchmark rate ...
- a. Heightened monitoring will require, at a minimum, detailed annual review of a program's graduation and/or employment rate(s) and may require the submission of additional student achievement outcomes information as appropriate (e.g., plans for improvement; an updated Graduation and Employment Chart; current program retention, graduation, ~~and/or~~ employment, **and/or licensure/certification exam pass** rate(s); supporting documentation; **etc.**).
  - b. Reporting will require the submission of student achievement outcomes data (e.g., student program retention, graduation rates, and employment rates); pass rates on **professional licensure/certification** examinations ...
  - c. The Commission at its discretion may take a programmatic action such as to require an on-site evaluation; temporarily require a school to cease enrollment in a program; suspend or revoke program, degree-granting, or distance education approval; or may take an institutional action such as to issue a Warning or Probation Order (see *Section VII, Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation*) when the Commission has determined that the school has not demonstrated acceptable student achievement either through its student learning assessment efforts, rates of graduation or employment attainment, **licensure/certification exam pass rate(s)**, or a combination thereof.

## APPENDIX VI – STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT RATES

This Appendix has been updated to include the 70% licensure/certification pass rate requirement as set forth in *Section VII (B)(1)(b)(iii) Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation*.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Appendix VI* for the Commission's current established benchmark rates for acceptable student achievement.

<sup>5</sup> **If another entity or agency requires a higher examination pass rate, the higher standard shall apply and the Commission will take into consideration any action taken by another entity or agency with regard to a school's failure to meet an examination pass rate requirement (see *Section I (B)(e)(iii) & Section IV (E)(m), Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation*).**

## **PART II – NON-SUBSTANTIVE REVISIONS**

### **Chapter 1 – Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation:**

- **Section I (B)(3)(e)** – Clarifies that if a conflict exists between another accrediting or certification agency and ACCSC requirements, the more stringent requirement will take precedence.
- **Section I (E)(1)** – Clarifies that interim monitoring is among ACCSC’s information-gathering methods.
- **Section I (I)** – Clarifies the language regarding the Commission’s allowance to ask a school to produce information at any time to demonstrate compliance with accrediting standards.
- **Section IV (E)(2)(j)** – Includes in the *Rules* the provision from the Application for a Change of Ownership-Part I that the approval of a change of ownership transaction expires if the change of ownership transaction does not occur within 90 days from the date of that approval. (Re-letter subsequent.)
- **Section IV (E)(5)(a)(vii)** – Includes in the *Rules* a provision that ACCSC’s approval of a branch campus expires if the branch campus does not become operational within 12 from the date of that approval. (Re-number subsequent.)
- **Section V (A)(4)** – Clarifies that failure to provide timely, complete, and accurate reporting may constitute grounds for denial or withdrawal of accreditation.
- **Section VII (K)(1)** – Clarifies that in cases where the Commission has reason to believe that a school is not in compliance with one or more accreditation standards or other requirements, the Commission may at its discretion, issue a Warning to the school.
- **Section VII (L)(1)** – Clarifies that in cases where the Commission has significant concerns regarding a school’s compliance with one or more accrediting standards or other requirements or has made a determination that a school is out of compliance with one or more standards, the Commission may, at its discretion, place a school on Probation.
- **Section X (D)(5)** – Clarifies that the Commission, after receiving notice of a decision by a school to voluntarily withdraw its accreditation, will provide written notice to the public of such decision within 30 days of the date on which the school’s accreditation lapses.

### **Chapter 2 – Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation:**

- **Section I (D)(4-5 & 9)** – Cancellation Policies have been moved from *Section IV (A)(15)* to *Section I (D)(4)*; former *Section I (D)(4)* has been moved to *Section I (D)(9)*; *Section I (D)(5)* has been reorganize and codified.
- **Section II (A)(2)** – Clarifies that a program’s name must accurately align to program objectives.
- **Section IV (A)(15)** – Cancellation Policies have been moved from *Section IV (A)(15)* to *Section I (D)(4)* and the remaining standards have been renumbered.
- **Section IV (B)(1)** – Clarifies that all advertising, promotional materials, statements, and claims must be truthful and accurate and avoid leaving any false, misleading, misrepresenting, or exaggerated impressions with respect to the school, its location, its name, its personnel, its training, its services, or its accredited status.
- **Section IV (C)(4)(c)** – Clarifies that a school must disclose whether or not any required programmatic accreditation or other approval required for employment has been achieved and that any claims regarding any type of accreditation or approval by an oversight entity must be truthful and accurate.
- **Section VIII (D)(3)** – Clarifies that each school’s catalog and enrollment agreement must clearly disclose and define the relationship between a branch campus and its main school.

- **Enrollment Agreement Checklist** – The ACCSC Enrollment Agreement Checklist requires an enrollment agreement to disclose the school’s refund policy as disclosed in the school’s catalog. ACCSC will now allow for a summary of the refund policy to be disclosed in the enrollment agreement provided that: a) the summary is consistent with the full policy as disclosed in the catalog; b) the summary refers to the full refund policy published in the school catalog; and (c) the summary contains minimally: (i) information pertaining to how refunds are calculated (e.g., pro-rata), (ii) the date from which refunds will be calculated, and (iii) the order that and timeframe within which refunds will be made.

### **PART III – ACCREDITATION FEE CHANGES**

#### **Appendix I – Accreditation Fees, Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation**

The Commission has enacted the following fee changes effective July 1, 2015:

Accreditation Workshop:

• Member Rates	
• 1 <sup>st</sup> Member.....	\$550
• Each Subsequent Member.....	\$500
• Non-member	
• 1 <sup>st</sup> Non-Member.....	\$600
• Each Subsequent Non-Member.....	\$550
Application for Appeal of a Commission Decision.....	\$6,000
Application for Initial Accreditation	
Part I.....	\$750
Part II.....	\$2,250
Application for Renewal of Accreditation.....	\$2,250
Late Fee.....	\$750

### **PART IV – New Upload School Submission Center**

Schools are now required to electronically upload applications, responses, and reports directly to ACCSC’s College 360 Database via the School Submission Center. The password to access the School Submission Center in the College 360 Database is the same as that used to access the Annual Report Portal. Access to the ACCSC School Submission Center and a detailed overview on how to upload a document to the College 360 School Submission Center can be found [at this link](#). Once a document is uploaded, the school will receive an e-mail confirmation that the file has been received within 24 hours of the submission. If a fee is required for the processing of an application, please mail a check in the required amount directly to ACCSC for processing along with a statement identifying the specific application corresponding to that payment.

Keep in mind, all documents submitted must be prepared in accordance with ACCSC’s [Instructions for Electronic Submission](#) (e.g., prepared as one Portable Document Format (“PDF”) file that has been prepared using Adobe Acrobat software (version 8.0 or higher) and which has a .pdf extension as part of the file name).

Many of the ACCSC Forms have been updated or revised effective July 1, 2015. Schools should only use the forms found on the ACCSC website as these represent the most recent and up-to-date versions.