

The Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCCT)

Mission and Scope:

For 40 years, the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCCT) ACCSCCT has worked to ensure a quality education for students seeking career and technical education. ACCSCCT'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.

Accreditation is a private, voluntary, non-governmental, peer-review process that provides for continuous efforts to achieve maximum educational effectiveness. ACCSCCT accreditation enables schools and colleges to become stronger and better institutions by setting standards of educational quality. ACCSCCT-accredited institutions undergo a rigorous process in which they must demonstrate that they meet or exceed high standards of educational quality. ACCSCCT accreditation seeks to assess and enhance the educational quality of an institution, assure consistency in institutional operations, promote self-evaluation and institutional effectiveness, and provide for public accountability. Institutions, students, and the employment community benefit from the rigor and fundamental tenets of ACCSCCT accreditation and the organization's commitment to educational quality, on-going institutional enhancement, and student achievement measures. Students attending an ACCSCCT-accredited school are provided with focused training that allows them to compete in a demanding and competitive economy and the accreditation process holds institutions accountable for providing students with the skills necessary to be successful in their chosen fields of study.

The "Accrediting Commission" is comprised of 13 members, nine of whom represent career and technical colleges and four of who represent other related fields of education. ACCSCCT accredits nearly 800 institutions across the United States with an enrollment of 220,000 students.¹

The Standards of Accreditation:

The *Standards of Accreditation*² represent 40 years of establishing best practices in career and technical postsecondary educational institutions and are rigorous measures of educational quality and student achievement. The *Standards* include measures in areas such as: management and administrative capacity, institutional enhancement, financial capacity, curriculum, learning resource materials and equipment, faculty qualifications and professional development, admissions practices and policies, student progress and achievement, student support services, and facilities. The *Standards* emphasize student achievement as a chief measure of institutional success and schools must demonstrate acceptable rates of student graduation and graduate employment outcomes in each specific educational program area. For example, institutions must demonstrate that a minimum of 70% of all graduates in each program area obtain employment in a field related to the education received at the school.³

¹ [Click here](http://www.accscct.org) for a searchable online directory of ACCSCCT-accredited institutions is available at www.accscct.org

² [Click here](#) to download a copy of ACCSCCT's Standards of Accreditation.

³ A copy of ACCSCCT's Student Achievement Standard can be found under Appendix IV in the Standards of Accreditation.

Achieving and Maintaining Accreditation:

When a school applies for and receives accreditation, the school accepts the obligation to demonstrate its continuous compliance with ACCSCT's *Standards*. The accreditation process is rigorous and requires a comprehensive self evaluation and a demonstration of quality education delivery and appropriate student support services.

In order to be eligible for ACCSCT accreditation, a school's primary educational objective must be to prepare students for entrance or advancement in one or more occupations requiring technical or career oriented competencies and skills. Although each school determines its own educational objectives, keeping in mind that such objectives must be appropriate for a postsecondary educational institution, the Commission assesses the success to which an institution meets those objectives and provides quality education to students. In order to apply for accreditation, a school must have indicators of success (e.g., operational and student graduation history) and in order to achieve accreditation, a school must be able to show acceptable success achievement and demonstrate its overall compliance with ACCSCT's *Standards*.

Once achieved, the burden of maintaining accreditation rests with the school to establish that it is meeting ACCSCT's *Standards*. ACCSCT monitors its accredited schools to ensure continued compliance with accrediting standards and requirements. This monitoring forms the basis of Commission decisions and is conducted through analysis of applications for accreditation, self-evaluation reports, annual reports, substantive change applications and reports, financial reports, complaints, information from government agencies and other third parties, interim on-site evaluations, and other sources. In order for a school to maintain its eligibility for accreditation, it must: comply on a continuous basis with accreditation standards; operate on a continuous basis training students in accordance with its primary objectives; fulfill all reporting and interim monitoring requirements; maintain compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal requirements; and pay all sustaining, processing, and on-site evaluation fees as required. Schools must seek renewal of accreditation within a maximum term of five years, but may require a shorter term at the discretion of the Commission.

Accreditation Review Process:

ACCSCT meets regularly to review its accredited institutions for purposes related to granting initial accreditation, renewal of accreditation, interim monitoring, or to review institutional substantive changes (e.g., addition of new programs or facilities). In the review process, the Commission relies heavily upon the integrity of the information submitted by institutions and makes decisions based upon demonstrated compliance with the *Standards* as well as institutional and student success. ACCSCT assesses 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. Through a process of self-evaluation, ACCSCT requires institutions to:

- Demonstrate adequate management, administrative capacity, and resources (financial and human) necessary for the proper operation of the school and to meet obligations to students;
- Demonstrate that all educational programs are sound and current and that the employment community is actively involved in discussions about how to develop and maintain programs that are relevant, current, and accurately reflect industry requirements;
- Demonstrate that faculty have the appropriate prior work experience, education and teaching qualifications necessary to support the institutions educational programs;
- Demonstrate appropriate admissions requirements, recruitment practices, student services, and monitoring of student progress toward graduation;

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- Measure student outcomes quantitatively in areas such as rates of graduation and graduate employment and to use graduation rates and employment rates as a means to focus qualitative efforts toward continuous institutional effectiveness and improvement;

Upon completion of the self-evaluation process, an institution undergoes an on-site evaluation by a team of ACCSCT subject-matter experts. The team prepares a report outlining the institutions success at meeting its educational objectives and that describes any areas that the team believes the institutions to be out of compliance with accreditation standards.

Accreditation Actions:

After an on-site evaluation, an institution has an opportunity to respond to the report prepared by the on-site evaluation team. Upon receipt of that response, the Commission then reviews all pertinent information from the accreditation review process. Upon completion of that review, the Commission may grant accreditation, grant accreditation with stipulation or interim reporting requirements, defer final action, direct an institution to show cause as to why accreditation should not be revoked, place an institution on probation or revoke institutional accreditation. Because accreditation has a core value of continuous improvement, the Commission will often times provide a school multiple opportunities to improve itself and demonstrate compliance with accreditation standards before any adverse action is taken. There are times, however, when expeditious review and action are required.

Probation Orders:

A school subject to a Probation Order will be required to demonstrate corrective action and compliance with accrediting standards. A school that is unable to achieve compliance within the specified timeframe is subject to a loss of accreditation unless the Commission determines there is good cause to extend the period of time allowed to achieve compliance. ACCSCT provides written notice, via its web page, to the public regarding a decision to place a school on probation.

Accreditation Revocation:

If ACCSCT Commission finds, through the review of reports, institutional data, complaints, and/or an on-site evaluation report that an institution has not met accreditation requirements, the Commission may take action to order the institution to show cause why accreditation should not be withdrawn, put the institution on Probation, or take action to revoke the approval status of a substantive change. The Commission may also, after extensive fact-finding and review of submissions from an institution, act to revoke the accredited status of the school altogether. The school has the opportunity to appeal an adverse action before an independent panel, comprised of three independent members. When a revocation decision becomes final, appropriate federal and state agencies are notified in accordance with regulatory requirements. A revocation decision can render an institution ineligible to continue to participate in Federal Student Financial Aid programs. ACCSCT provides written notice, via its web page, to the public regarding a final decision to revoke an institution's accreditation.

Monitoring the Growth of ACCSCT-Accredited Institutions:

The addition of branch campuses, new programs (degree and non-degree) and distance education requires a significant amount of capital investment and education management experience to successfully launch this process and serve the needs of students. In accreditation terminology, this is called a *substantive change*. The accreditation process requires all institutions seeking to approval of a substantive change to undergo a rigorous capacity assessment process and subsequent monitoring that evaluates the successful implementation of the substantive change. Following the implementation of a

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substantive change, the institution undergoes a comprehensive on-site evaluation by an accreditation team, the results of which are forwarded to the full Commission for review. Student outcomes are carefully monitored to ensure that the graduation and employment rates meet accreditation requirements. Finally, interim reports regarding faculty qualifications, advisory committee recommendations, and institutional assessment and improvement planning can be required to show that the institution continues to meet the conditions upon which approval of the substantive change was granted.

Complaint Process:

Institutions that are accredited by ACCSCT must have a published procedure and operational plan for handling complaints. Complainants are encouraged first to avail themselves of the school's complaint procedures. As a general practice, the Commission will not act on an anonymous complaint. Institutions are given a period of time upon receipt of the complaint to prepare a response. In the event that ACCSCT staff is unable to make a determination of compliance through an analysis process, the complaint, the school's response, and all supporting documentation is forwarded to the Commission for further consideration. In all cases, both the school and complainant are notified of the final disposition of the complaint.

ACCSCCT's Role Within the Larger Education Assessment Field:

ACCSCCT is one of many institutional accrediting organizations that are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education⁴ as reliable authorities as to the quality of post-secondary education. Accreditation by a recognized agency is a threshold requirement for a post secondary institution to apply for eligibility to participate in federal student financial aid programs that are administered by the U.S. Department of Education. In order to achieve recognition, accrediting organizations like ACCSCT must petition the U.S. Department of Education and prove that they are in compliance with regulations relating to the *Standards* and processes used in evaluating and conferring accreditation on institutions.

Accrediting organizations rely on state licensure to ensure that applicant and accredited institutions operate with sound and ethical business practices and appropriate service to student consumers. Information provided by state licensing agencies, federal agencies, and the public concerning an institution's track record of performance is an important component of the accreditation process.

Recognized accrediting organizations, state licensing agencies, and the U.S. Department of Education together form what has become known as an "oversight triad." Within the triad, the states are chiefly responsible for the protection of student consumers within their states, the accrediting organizations are responsible for the quality of educational programs offered, holding institutions accountable to established standards of quality and student performance. The Department of Education is responsible for ensuring that postsecondary institutions act as responsible fiduciaries of the federal student aid programs by administering those programs in accordance with all applicable federal regulations.

ACCSCCT works with higher education associations including the Council of Recognized National Accrediting Agencies (CRNAA), the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and others on national policy issues that affect higher education institutions and students. We have worked with the U.S. Congress and the Department of Education on legislation and regulation geared toward greater accountability and transparency in higher education and the role accreditation can and should play in helping to achieve a more highly educated and skilled workforce.

⁴ [Click here](#) for more information from the U.S. Department of Education on accreditation in the United States.

Key Facts

Based on data reported in the 2006 ACCSCT Annual Report as of June 30, 2006:

- 220,000 students were enrolled in an ACCSCT-accredited school
- 53 percent of enrolled students were under the age of 35
- 69 percent of enrolled students had earned a high school diploma
- 69 percent of ACCSCT accredited schools enrolled less than 300 students, and the average enrollments at all ACCSCT accredited schools was 286 students
- 64 percent of ACCSCT-accredited schools offer a certificate or diploma program, and 66 percent of students enrolled in an ACCSCT-accredited school are enrolled in a certificate or diploma program.
- 36 percent of ACCSCT-accredited schools offer a degree program, and 30 percent of all programs offered at ACCSCT-accredited schools are degree programs.

In addition, the 2006 Annual Report yielded the following student achievement outcomes data:

- The average graduation rate for all programs offered by an ACCSCT-accredited school was 67 percent
- The average employment attainment rate for all graduates from an ACCSCT-accredited school was 82 percent

During the 2006 calendar year, ACCSCT conducted 349 on-site evaluations, an average of 29 on-site evaluations each month.