

**ACCSC**

Accrediting Commission  
of Career Schools and  
Colleges



## ACCSC Monograph Series

Completing a Successful Degree  
Application

## About ACCSC

Since 1965, the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC) has been committed to establishing and advancing quality education at postsecondary career schools and colleges. ACCSC's scope of recognition includes the accreditation of postsecondary, non-degree-granting institutions and degree-granting institutions, 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. ACCSC is dedicated to ensuring a quality education for more than 150,000 students who annually pursue career education at over 650 trade and technical accredited institutions across the United States, Puerto Rico, and abroad.

2017 marks 50 years of continuous recognition for ACCSC, including earning, in 2011 & 2016, consecutive five-year recognition grants from the U.S. Department of Education, the maximum timeframe allowed under current federal regulations.

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 mission has two primary objectives:

- To assure students and the general public of the quality of educational training provided by ACCSC-accredited institutions and their programs and
- To assist institutions in continuously improving themselves and the training they provide students

Today, ACCSC remains committed to helping enhance the student educational experience through quality assurance, supporting workforce development, and bridging the growing skills gap in the United States.



# Core Values of ACCSC

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**

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.

## Welcome to the ACCSC Monograph Series

As higher education continues to expand and diversify in the United States, now, more than ever, postsecondary school leaders need better tools to achieve their strategic goals and to ensure institutional and student success. Higher education in the United States continues to change in profound ways. With increased globalization, a greater reliance on technology, and more competition among education providers both domestically and internationally, America's higher education system must embrace a culture of continuous innovation and quality improvement as a means to remain viable and a global leader in postsecondary education.

The Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC) developed a series of brochures — *the ACCSC Monograph Series*— on topics critical to institutional success. These brochures are designed to provide guidance on some of the more technical areas of ACCSC accreditation. Through the *ACCSC Monograph Series*, the Commission hopes to help accredited schools to comply fully and accurately with the *Standards of Accreditation*, achieve institutional success, and ensure that students are well prepared to enter the workforce.

This brochure, ***Completing a Successful Degree Application***:

- Outlines ACCSC's application approval process for occupational or academic associates degree, a baccalaureate degree, or a master's degree;
- Defines the approval process for initial and expansive distance education; and
- Offers helpful tips to help schools to create and submit a successful application for Commission consideration.

The Monograph begins with a focus on degree programs - defining and outlining the requirements for each degree type in accordance with the *Standards of Accreditation*. From there, the Monograph outlines the accreditation requirements including faculty, admissions, facilities, advertising, student services, as well as the differences in curricula as dictated by the level of degree being offered.

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## Is Our Institution Prepared to Implement a Degree Program?

Implementing a degree program at your school requires thoughtful planning and institutional assessment long before submitting the application for Commission consideration.

The expectations for degree granting institutions as captured in the *Standards of Accreditation* underscores the serious commitment required by a school:

Degree programs represent a **significant, additional educational commitment** by a school and must be **consistent** with the school's mission. Schools offering degree programs must **demonstrate the ability to meet this educational commitment** and award degrees that represent **sufficient breadth and depth of study** in the field and only to eligible students who, within the appropriate time-frame, successfully complete the program requirements and demonstrate the required proficiencies, competencies, and skills. In addition, schools offering degree programs must comply with all other applicable accrediting standards, including faculty, admissions, facilities, advertising, and student services standards.

## Beginning the Process

For degree programs to be successful, a school should consider:

- Logical, sound reasons for creating a degree program
- Employer demands/needs in the community (job opportunities)
- Impact of a new program on the existing school operations
- Internal and external feedback regarding the program and degree-level
- A one-year, three-year, and five-year strategic plan and budget
- Impact of a new program on existing faculty and staff time
- Realistic time-frame for implementing the program

Planning, planning, and more planning is the key to creating and setting up a new degree program. In the initial phases of program planning, consider reasons the program needs to be offered at the degree level.



## Justification of the Proposed Degree Program

The justification for a new degree program submitted to ACCSC should be based on a well-designed plan that includes an analysis of the reasons why the school is seeking to offer this program. Schools should use the application as an opportunity to explain the basis for the degree offering, how the curriculum is consistent with the mission and goals of the school, and how graduates will have meaningful gainful employment opportunities after completing the program.

A thorough and detailed program viability study regarding how the proposed program meets the needs of students and employers is crucial to completing a successful application. Questions to consider in the application include:

1. If this program is currently offered at the certificate level, how does a degree enhance the student's ability for employment?
2. What is the difference between the degree program and the same or similar program offered at the non-degree level?
3. How does offering this program at the degree level impact the school's ability to demonstrate gainful employment?
4. Can the school justify the implementation of this degree program when factoring in the program tuition vs. the entry level salary of graduates?

## Assessment of Program Viability

Program viability assessment is a formal process for demonstrating how a school's program offerings are in alignment with the school's mission and objectives. A program viability study provides an in-depth review of a proposed or existing program in order to demonstrate that the program is in alignment with the school's mission, the school's infrastructure, the community's workforce needs, and the students' need for hands-on, entry-level training. Submitting a thorough and well-written narrative detailing the program's viability including an analysis of the demand for graduates from the program's area of study (e.g. an assessment of the local employment outlook) provides a clear and measurable method of ensuring the program will meet accreditation standards.

Questions to consider in building a program viability study include:

- How does the program meet the needs of students?
- How does the program meet the needs of local employers?
- Why should this program be offered at the degree level?
- What is the one-year, three-year, and five-year local employment outlook?
- Why is there a need for training in this field of study in your community?
- What are socioeconomic factors in the community that may affect the proposed program's outcomes?
- How does the proposed program compare to existing, competing programs both in- and out- of the school's community?

A key part of planning is the consideration of growth in the school's infrastructure to accommodate a new degree. Whether adding an associate degree, baccalaureate degree, or master's degree, enhancing your school's infrastructure is paramount to the success of the institution and institutional assessment and planning.

A successful application will include details as to how the school's infrastructure has been enhanced to accommodate a degree program in the areas of:

- (1) student services,
- (2) learning resource center,
- (3) faculty qualifications,
- (4) faculty/student interaction,
- (5) Director of Education leadership,
- (6) admission requirements, and
- (7) administrative support staff.



## Internal and External Assessment

To create a robust demonstration of a program's viability, consider submitting an evaluation of the program that takes into account internal and external factors, and shows viable student outcomes as well as expected budgetary and resource needs for the program. Questions to consider in program review include:

### Internal

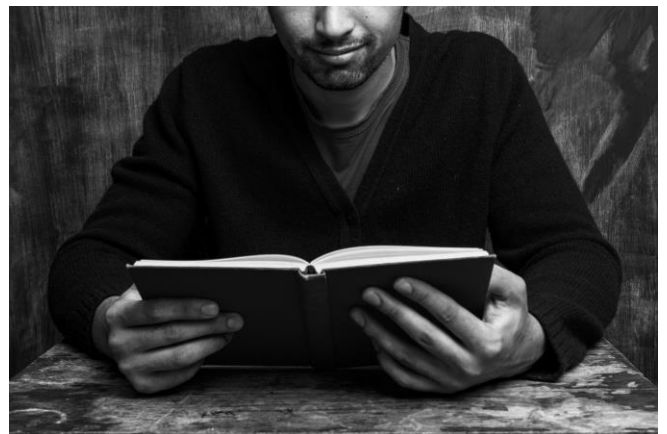
1. Has the curriculum been designed with feedback from internal resources (faculty, graduates, etc.)?
2. How are program objectives tied directly to graduate outcomes (graduation and employment)?
3. Are classes scheduled in a manner that meets potential applicants' schedules?
4. Is there available space for additional facilities and equipment?
5. How many students does the school expect to enroll each year? Is the need for this skill on a national level, regional, and/or in your local community?
6. Is the field growing? Remaining static?
7. Does the school have enough staff (faculty if applicable) in place?
8. Will the school culture support a new program?

### External

1. Is there adequate industry support from the employment community for the new program? Is there adequate demand for graduates of this program? What is the local employment outlook?
2. What are the possible job titles and potential salaries for graduates who obtain this degree in your area?
3. What industry trends are prevalent for the degree?
4. Does the program provide a foundation of technical skills for students to gain an entry-level position upon graduation?
5. How does the proposed program compare to other programs in this field of study (of similar size and scope) in terms of credit hours, curriculum, program price, and program length?

## Items to Consider for Demonstrating Program Viability in Your Application

- An overview that ties the proposed program to the school's mission.
- Program objectives and intended outcomes that are clearly defined and presented.
- An Institutional Assessment and Improvement Plan that has measurable assessments and goals for the new program.
- PAC recommendations that are clear and relevant to the proposed program.
- A realistic timeline of approvals and processes involved.
- Fiscal support and physical facilities allotted to the new program.



# Program Design, Development, Organization, and Length

Does your school have an established process for the design and development of training programs and ensure that appropriate elements are included in the program curriculum?

## Program Design and Development

To meet this standard schools must demonstrate that they have an established process:

- To design and develop courses, course learning materials and resources, curricula, student learning outcomes and competencies, and student assessment for which the institution obtains input from appropriate internal and external resources.
- To determine the need and viability of the educational program using external validation
- To support articulation opportunities with other academic and training programs, where appropriate
- To address the instructional and teaching methods to be used in delivering the program content
- To involve administrative and instructional staff, students and graduates when appropriate

## Program Organization and Length

To meet this standard schools must demonstrate that the program:

- Accurately aligns with program objectives
- Is an appropriate length aligned with objectives
- Has detailed and organized instructions outlines and syllabi
- Has the correct mix of technical and general education courses
- Conforms to regulatory and state, federal, or national standards
- Is appropriate to enable students to acquire skills necessary for initial employment

## Program Evaluation

To meet this standard schools must demonstrate that they have:

- A systematic and evidence-based process to evaluate a new program's curriculum and course content
- A proposed budget which clearly defines future allocation of financial resources to operate the new program
- A clear description of the existing facilities and any changes that are needed for new program success
- Comprehensive instructional materials that reflect current occupational knowledge and practice
- Instructional equipment similar to that found in the field of study
- Sufficient equipment and learning stations

When reviewing and evaluating curriculum, answering these questions helps create a systematic and evidence-based way to measure curriculum and content.

1. What's being measured?
2. What method is being used?
3. When should the component be measured?
4. Who is initiating the timeline of measurement?
5. What is the benchmark the component needs to reach?
6. What are the findings?

## Program Advisory Committees (PAC)

No organization exists in a vacuum. Much in the same way your school will need to work internally to create a successful degree program, your school will also need to build a robust Program Advisory Committee, known as PAC. A PAC is crucial to the success of a program regardless if the program is in a proposal phase or is well-established.

Each school must have an independent PAC for each occupational program or each group of related occupational programs. Even for the purpose of reviewing a proposed program, the school must provide minutes from a PAC meeting that includes at least three members in attendance that represent the employment community. Additionally, the PAC must be diverse and include individuals that are qualified to review and comment on all aspects of a program, including technical and general education courses. For each master's degree program area, the PAC must include two individuals with graduate level education experience qualified to review and comment on the school's graduate level education.

### Checklist for PAC Minutes

Do PAC minutes contain the following?

1. A description of all members in attendance (i.e., titles and affiliations)
2. The date, time, and location of the meeting; and
3. A comprehensive and clear description of the review of and commentary made by the school representatives and the PAC members that reflect compliance with the Standards or Accreditation



PACs provide an opportunity for a school to stay ahead, to examine employment trends and practices, and to provide the essential feedback from employers that is critical for a school focusing on developing the next generation of skilled workers.

Creating an effective and meaningful PAC requires:

- Creating a realistic budget for bi-annual PAC meetings
- Making PAC member recruitment a top priority for senior school administrators
- Drafting a “position description” that explains the roles and responsibilities for PAC members
- Taking advantage of all opportunities to recognize PAC members (i.e., awards for service)
- Incorporating PAC members into the campus culture – as part of graduation ceremonies, or professional development days
- Creating a New PAC Member Orientation that helps to prepare new members to seamlessly join an existing group of diverse professionals

## Learning Resource System (LRS)

A learning resource system (LRS) includes all materials that support a student's educational experience and enhance a school's educational program such as libraries; texts; electronic resources; learning resource laboratories and centers; library consortia and interlibrary loan agreements; computers; internet access; research databases; and other similar resources and equipment. To enhance your school's degree application, you should:

### STEP 1:

Provide a clear narrative regarding how the current LRS supports the education experience including the new program.

### STEP 2:

Provide a clear narrative regarding how the LRS has been enhanced to meet the objectives of the proposed program and how those enhancements are sufficient to support the new program.

### STEP 3:

Provide written policies and procedures for the ongoing development of the LRS.

### STEP 4:

Explain how the LRS will be integrated into the new program curriculum including a description of assignments that will require use of the LRS.

### STEP 5:

Demonstrate that the school has an individual qualified to oversee and supervise the learning resource system (*Section II (A)(7)(c), Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation*). Schools that offer a baccalaureate degree or higher must have a learning resource system coordinated by an individual holding a Master's degree in either the library science or information specialist fields.

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# Personnel for the Proposed Degree Program

## Faculty

Schools are required to retain a strong and experienced faculty that is continually attentive to the needs of the students, interested in strengthening the curricula, and obligated to continued self-improvement.

The school must demonstrate that faculty meet *Section III (B) Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation* including:

- Engage in ongoing assessment and professional development
- Meet requirements relating to practical work experience and appropriate degree with the required coursework in the subject area taught
- Have received training in instructional methods and teaching skills or be experienced teachers prior to any responsibilities in a classroom
- Engage in ongoing development of teaching skills

## Management and Administration

The success of a school is directly related to the quality of its management and administration. For the degree application, schools should present how they have sufficient educational administration to support the degree program specifically in the role of Director of Education and Program Head.

Checklist of items to consider:

- The position and how the staff member is qualified for the position
- The degree(s) and credential(s) earned by the staff member
- Description of work experience and/or training for the position
- Job description for the position
- The Director Education must have an earned degree at least one level higher than the highest degree offered by the school

If information is not available for the Program Head, the school may submit specific hiring criteria and a timeline for when the position will be filled. However, the school must submit information for the Director of Education in order for the degree to be considered.

If a school elects to have the Director of Education serve as the Program Head (if applicable by area of study) then the application should outline how the same person will allocate adequate time to successfully fulfill both roles.



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