MEMORANDUM TO THE FIELD  
SEPTEMBER 2019

TO: ACICS-Accredited Institutions and Interested Parties
FROM: Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools
DATE: September 17, 2019

The Memorandum to the Field contains final criteria changes along with other information for ACICS-Accredited Institutions and Interested Parties.

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1. FINAL CRITERIA REVISIONS

At its February 2019 Policy Meeting and April 2019 Council Meeting, the Council proposed several changes to the Accreditation Criteria. The proposed language then went out for comment in the May Memo to the Field. Feedback from the public, the membership, and other interested parties was reviewed along with the proposed changes at the August 2019 meeting. As a product of this meeting, see the finalized changes below.

The ACICS Accreditation Criteria will be updated to reflect all final criteria revisions with a publication date of September 13, 2019. To review the revised copy of the Accreditation Criteria following this date, please visit the ACICS website at www.acics.org.

The following criteria have been accepted by the Council as final (new language is underlined, deleted language is struck). All changes are effective immediately unless otherwise stated.

A. Minimum Eligibility Requirement

*Explanation of Final Changes:*

The following revisions are to recognize the various educational systems and oversight structures internationally. Emphasis on the assessment of financial stability was added as an eligibility criterion to align with current review procedures. The Council also sought to clarify that these eligibility standards must be continually met.

1-2-100 – Minimum Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for consideration for accreditation, an institution or entity must satisfy the following minimum requirements.

(a) It shall be either an institution of postsecondary education (as herein defined) primarily offering certificates or diplomas, and postsecondary institutions offering associate’s, bachelor’s, or master’s degrees in programs designed to educate students for professional, technical, or occupational careers; or a The Council may consider, on a case-by-case basis, a noninstitutional entity which is approved by an agency authorized by the state agency or governing body to evaluate such academic or occupational programs, offering professional enhancement education.

An institution is presumed to be an institution of postsecondary education if it (1) enrolls a majority of its students in one or more programs, the content of which is on a postsecondary academic level and which leads to a postsecondary academic credential (such as a certificate, diploma, or degree); or an occupational objective; (2) enrolls students who possess a high school diploma or its equivalent, or who are beyond the age of compulsory school attendance and demonstrate through valid assessment an ability to benefit from the educational experience; and (3) offers at least one postsecondary program which is a minimum of 300 clock hours in length.
A noninstitutional entity must enroll a majority of its students in one or more programs, the content of which is on the postsecondary level or at a level which prepares the student for immediate enrollment into a postsecondary program. A noninstitutional entity is ineligible to participate in federal student aid programs or to award degrees.

(b) It shall be legally organized: licensed by (1) the appropriate state education agency for postsecondary institutions or (2) the appropriate state agency for authorizing the conduct of business in that state for noninstitutional entities. For non-U.S. institutions in countries in which legal authority to award degrees is not available or required, evidence of acceptance as a reputable private institution with significant support from all key stakeholders must be provided, and haveFor all institutions, offered its educational services must have been offered to the general public for at least two years immediately prior to consideration of the application by ACICS.

(c) Its mission shall be to offer educational programs which help students develop skills and competencies to enhance their careers.

(d) Its residential enrollment and enrollment in each program shall be sufficient both to support coursework and learning experiences that, separately or in combination, constitute measurable and defined educational programs, and to enable ACICS to assess the educational effectiveness of those programs.

Institutions that are considered distance education institutions may be considered on a case-by-case basis provided they require a residential component.

(e) It shall have a sufficient number of graduates from a majority of its programs to enable ACICS to assess the educational effectiveness of those programs.

(f) It shall demonstrate financial stability to sustain operations.

(g) It shall be in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.

(h) It shall be organized as a corporation, as a limited partnership with a corporate general partner, or as a limited liability company.

(i) Its evaluation for accreditation shall be authorized by the chief executive officer.

(j) Its owners or managers shall not have been debarred by ACICS (See Section 2-3-900).

These eligibility requirements must be continuously met in order to maintain accreditation.

B. Change of Ownership/Change of Control

Explanation of Final Changes:
The following revisions are to provide clarity and to update language regarding a change of ownership or control. The proposed language provides distinction between the two terms.

2-2-401. Change of Ownership or Control.
A change of ownership or control generally means that a transaction has occurred whereby a new person, combination of persons, or entity can exercise control of a corporation or limited liability company as described in Section 2-2-400. The following subsections outline the typical changes of ownership or control of the three types of corporations that own accredited institutions, including corporate general partners in limited partnerships, and limited liability companies. Transactions other than those outlined below, however, may constitute a change of ownership or control, and the Council reserves the right in its discretion to make the determination of whether a change of ownership or control has occurred in all cases. Institutions, therefore, must keep the Council informed of all substantive changes in the ownership of stock and the composition of the board of directors. The Council, for purposes of determining ownership or control, views couples in a legally recognized marriage or partnership as a single entity, and it views closely related family groups as a single entity in most cases where all of the present and future relevant stockholders actively participate in the management of the corporation. In addition to the transactions outlined below, any change from one type of entity to another as defined in Section 2-2-400 constitutes a change of ownership or control. Institutions also are reminded that nonmain campuses cannot be bought or sold independently of their main campus.

(a) **Privately held corporation.** A change of ownership or control of a privately held corporation occurs as a result of any of the following transactions:

(i) the transfer of 50% or more of the total outstanding voting stock from one party or parties to another party or parties;

(ii) a transfer of voting stock that results in the ownership of 50% or more of the total outstanding voting stock by any party other than any previous owner of 50% or more of the total outstanding voting stock;

(iii) a transfer of voting stock whereby a stockholder’s ownership of outstanding voting stock decreases from more than 50% to 50% or less, or from 50% to less than 50%; or

(iv) any other transaction whereby a stockholder or group of stockholders who previously could not exercise control of the corporation as described in Section 2-2-400(a) now can exercise control.

(b) **Privately held corporation.** A change of control of a privately held corporation occurs as a result of a transfer of ownership interest within an immediate family.

(c) **Publicly traded corporation.** A change of ownership or control of a publicly traded corporation occurs as a result of any of the following transactions or events:

(i) the change of 50% or more of the voting members of the board of directors in any rolling, 12-month period;

(ii) a change in the number of voting members of the board of directors in any rolling, 12-month period that will allow a group of directors to exercise control who could not exercise control before the change;

(iii) the acquisition of outstanding voting shares by any entity whereby that entity owns 50% or more of the total outstanding voting shares; or
(iv) any other transaction that is deemed by an appropriate governmental agency to constitute a change of control, including but not limited to a transaction that requires the corporation to file Form 8-K with the Securities and Exchange Commission of the United States.

(d) **Publicly traded corporation.** A change of control occurs as a result of any change of 25% or more of voting stock.

(e) **Not-for-profit corporation.** A change of control of a not-for-profit corporation occurs as a result of any of the following occurrences:

(i) the change of 50% or more of the voting members of the board of directors in any rolling, 24-12-month period; or

(ii) a change in the number of voting members of the board of directors in any rolling, 24-12-month period that will allow a group of directors to exercise control who could not exercise control before the change.

(iii) A fundamental change to its governance structure.

(d) **Limited partnership with corporate general partner.** A change of ownership or control of a limited partnership with a corporate general partner occurs when the corporate general partner has undergone a change of ownership or control as defined in subsection (a), (b), or (c) above.

(f) **Limited liability company.** A change of ownership or control of a limited liability company occurs as a result of any of the following transactions:

(i) the transfer of 50% or more of the direct or beneficial ownership interest from one member or members to another member or members;

(ii) a transfer of direct or beneficial ownership interest that results in the holding of 50% or more of the total direct or beneficial ownership interest by any member other than any previous member who owned 50% or more of the total direct or beneficial ownership interest;

(iii) a transfer of direct or beneficial ownership interest whereby a member’s direct or beneficial ownership interest decreases from more than 50% to 50% or less, or from 50% to less than 50%; or

(iv) any other transaction whereby a member or group of members who previously could not exercise control of the company as described in Section 2-2-400(e) now can exercise control.

(b)(g) **Limited liability company.** A change of control of a limited liability company occurs as a result of 49% or less change in officers (or whatever term is used in the operating agreement).

A change of ownership or control also occurs when ownership or control of the primary assets of an institution or the authority to operate an institution is transferred from the controlling corporation, limited partnership, or limited liability company to another corporation, limited partnership, or limited liability company. The Council, for purposes of determining ownership or control, views married couples as a single entity, and it views closely related family groups as a single entity in most cases where all of the present and future relevant stockholders actively...
participate in the management of the corporation. No change of ownership occurs when stock is transferred to a close family member by operation of law or inheritance upon the death of one of the stockholders.

C. Direct Assessment Competency-Based and Self-Paced Programs

Explanation of Final Changes:
Following the evaluation of the standards relative to self-paced and competency-based instruction, the Council determined that there is a need for further development and research on the area of competency-based instruction given its ongoing development. Since self-paced instruction has not been considered by the Council for a number of years, and no longer aligns with the Council’s expectations, the Council finalized the removal of language relative to these areas in Appendix H.

2-2-101. List of Substantive Changes. The following institutional changes will be considered substantive and require Council approval before they can be included in the institution’s scope of accreditation:

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(i) the proposed addition of a direct assessment competency-based program as described in Standards 2-2-111, 3-1-505, and Appendix H, Section 1.

2-2-111. Addition of a Direct Assessment Competency-based Program. It is the responsibility of the institution to submit the required application for Council review and approval. The initial Council approval allows the institution to apply for submission of an application for approval of that competency-based program to the United States Department of Education for Title IV Federal student financial aid. (See also Standard 3-1-505 and Appendix H, Section 1.)

3-1-505. Direct Assessment Competency-based Programs. Competency-based programs utilize direct assessment of student learning by faculty and other experts in the field serving under the supervision of the institution for academic progression in lieu of clock or credit hours. The institution must demonstrate that it has utilized a robust and structured process for identifying the required knowledge, skills and professional behavior (“soft skills”) to be considered “competent” in the field. The syllabus for each course must clearly define the competency standards and how the direct assessment of student learning will be conducted.

The institution must demonstrate to the Council its methodology for determining the equivalent number of credit hours or clock hours required for the program.

The institution is required to maintain, as part of the permanent academic record, student work submitted for direct assessment along with the institution’s assessment of student achievement.

Specific standards and requirements are described in Appendix H Principles and Requirements for Nontraditional Education, Section 1.

APPENDIX C INSTITUTIONAL PUBLICATIONS REQUIREMENTS

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26. If the institution is approved by the Council to offer direct assessment competency-based program(s), the catalog must include the following information:

a. a clear identification and listing of direct assessment competency-based program(s);

b. a concise and clear description of how such programs are structured and administered; any special admissions requirements; how students will be expected to demonstrate achievement of competency goals; the types of academic and student services offered to assist students to pass the assessments; and how student achievements will be shown on the academic transcript;

c. disclosure of the number of equivalent credit hours or clock hours and the general methodology the institution uses to determine the equivalencies;

d. a clear description of how financial aid will be administered and disbursed for eligible students enrolled in such programs;

e. disclosure of other entities or qualified individuals, in addition to the institution’s faculty, engaged in the direct assessment process; and

f. disclosure of the consequences or options available to students if they fail to demonstrate achievement of competency goals within a prescribed period of time.

APPENDIX D STANDARDS OF SATISFACTORY PROGRESS

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17. If the institution is approved to offer direct assessment competency-based programs, the institution must demonstrate that it has implemented appropriate policies that describe how it will measure whether a student enrolled in a competency-based program is making satisfactory academic progress. Policies and procedures must be implemented to identify in a timely manner when a student enrolled in such a program has withdrawn or changed enrollment status. The institution must maintain for Council review evidence that financial aid officers and others assigned to monitor satisfactory academic progress have been trained and are adequately monitored for implementing policies affecting competency-based programs.

APPENDIX H PRINCIPLES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION

SECTION I DIRECT ASSESSMENT COMPETENCY-BASED PROGRAMS

Programs that are designed to prepare students for a specific profession or career are especially suited to be offered as direct assessment competency-based programs because such programs focus on what the students need to know, understand, or be able to do. The process utilized for the development of the curriculum, expected competencies, and ways to directly assess such competencies and equate them to credit hours or clock hours (as required by the United States Department of Education as well as by the Council) demands active
involvement of employers, as appropriate, and other experts in the discipline. Potential benefits gained by such programs are as follows:

- Allow students to progress at their own pace, but in compliance with the institution’s satisfactory academic progress policy;
- Allow flexibility to motivated students;
- May potentially shorten the time for completion of the program;
- May potentially reduce overall cost of education; and
- May foster creativity for the institution, faculty and students in exploring cost-effective pathways to complete a program.

FEDERAL DEFINITION OF DIRECT ASSESSMENT COMPETENCY-BASED PROGRAMS

A direct assessment program is an instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilizes direct assessment of student learning, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others. The assessment must be consistent with the accreditation of the institution or program utilizing the results of the assessment.

Direct assessment of student learning means a measure by the institution of what a student knows and can do in terms of the body of knowledge making up the educational program. These measures provide evidence that a student has command of a specific subject, content area, or skill or that the student demonstrates a specific quality such as creativity, analysis or synthesis associated with the subject matter of the program. Examples of direct measures include projects, papers, examinations, presentations, performances, and portfolios.

ACICS GLOSSARY

Using the Federal definition as a guide, the Council has developed expanded definitions for Competency-based Programs and Direct Assessment Competency-based Programs. A longer list of examples of “direct” assessment measures is given in the Glossary. “Indirect” assessment measures, while deemed valuable for assessing institutional and program effectiveness, are not included in the consideration for the approval of competency-based programs.

For consideration of eligibility to participate in Title IV Federal Student Aid Programs, the Department of Education will consider only direct assessment competency-based programs.

PROCESS FOR REVIEW, APPROVAL, AND QUALITY MONITORING VISITS

Proposed initiation of a direct assessment competency-based program is classified as a substantive change and requires Council review and approval.

Institutions must submit Part I of the Application for Direct Assessment Competency-based Program, along with required supporting documents, for a preliminary review and Council action. A separate application is required for each program. The guidance document and instructions accompanying Part I of the application are designed to guide the institutions in gaining an idea of the types of direct assessment methods that are strongly recommended for
professional and career-focused programs. The principles and requirements included in this Appendix will be applied in reviewing the application.

In considering the application, the Council will determine if the institution has demonstrated that it has used a rigorous process to identify what the student or graduate must know and be able to do to be considered “competent” by employers and experts in the field or discipline. In addition, the institution has demonstrated that it has developed robust direct assessment techniques and has explicitly described how it determines the equivalent number of credit or clock hours for the program.

Upon approval of Part I of the application by the Council, the institution will apply to the U. S. Department of Education for Title IV approval of the proposed direct assessment competency-based program.

Part II of the Application for Direct Assessment Competency-based Programs must be submitted to ACICS at least three months prior to the effective start date of the program. The approval letter will provide instructions on at least two quality monitoring on-site visits to the institution. The first visit will be conducted within six months of the start of the program and a second follow-up visit will be conducted between 12 to 18 months of the start of the program, depending upon the credential level of the program.

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND INSTITUTIONAL READINESS

(a) The basis for the introduction of direct assessment competency-based programs must support the mission and objectives of the institution.

(b) The structure and objectives of the program must clearly demonstrate that a systematic process was utilized in identifying and defining specific competencies related to the program. The process shall include participation of representation from employers, experts in the field, faculty, alumni, and faculty.

(c) The Campus Effectiveness Report must include a discussion of the proposed direct assessment competency-based programs, including the rationale, overall structure, anticipated direct assessment methods engaged, plans for assessment and continuous improvement of the program, and adoption of best practices in competency-based education.

ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS AND ENROLLMENT

Eligibility requirements for admission to direct assessment competency-based programs must be clearly defined, published, and consistently applied. The institution is expected to develop objective mechanisms and standards for determining the potential characteristics of students who are best suited to pursue and complete the program.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND DIRECT ASSESSMENT MEASURES

(d) In the development of the curriculum, institutions must organize each course to enable students to clearly understand measurable learning objectives. Whenever possible, the Council encourages institutions to utilize standardized tests and industry-recognized licensure or certification examinations as direct assessment of student learning. Multiple direct assessment methods, which are student-centered, must be utilized where
appropriate.

(e) The syllabus for each course must be expanded to include clear learning objectives, student competency expectations, direct assessment techniques utilized by the faculty, criterion-based rating scales or rubric scores where appropriate, and the institution’s systematic methods for determining credit hour or clock hour equivalencies. The syllabus must also clearly state how the student’s progress will be monitored and how the final grades will be recorded.

FACULTY AND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

Maximum support of the program faculty is essential to develop and implement this student-centered program. The institution must demonstrate that the faculty members are provided proper training, in-service, and professional development activities to support this program. A rationale for faculty-student ratios must be developed. Adequate technology support must be provided as appropriate for faculty to monitor student progress and competency achievements.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

(f) The institution must demonstrate that it offers strong student support services to assist students in achieving their competency goals. Mentors and student counselors must be trained to provide suitable support.

(g) The institution must have a definite pathway for competency-based program students who may be advised to transition to a traditional fixed schedule, teacher-directed format.

(h) Academic advisors, registrars, career counselors, and financial aid counselors must be provided special training to provide support to the direct assessment competency-based program students.

UTILIZATION OF EXTERNAL ENTITIES AND EXPERTS

(a) If appropriate, the institution may utilize external entities and experts in providing a portion of the direct assessment competency-based program. The scope and nature of their involvement must be clearly outlined in a formal contract. The institution must demonstrate that it has sufficient academic control for the development and monitoring of the program. The contract must be approved by the Council prior to implementation.

(b) If external entities and experts are utilized, the institution’s faculty must provide more than 50 percent of the direct assessments of the competency-based program.

CONTINUOUS PROGRAM ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

The institution must have adequate plans for the continuous assessment of the effectiveness of the program and provide for continuous improvement. These plans must be described in the Campus Effectiveness Plan.

PUBLICATIONS
Full and accurate disclosure of an approved direct assessment competency-based program must be provided in the institution’s catalog and website. The catalog disclosure must follow the requirements as described and outlined in Appendix C.

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SECTION III
SELF-PACED INSTRUCTION

In addition to the general standards in Title III, Chapter 1, which apply to all institutions, and applicable standards in Chapters 2 through 6, the following standards apply specifically to self-paced instruction delivery methods. These principles and guidelines are designed to inform institutions of the policies of the Council and to guide institutional representatives when designing, implementing, and evaluating self-paced instruction forms of educational delivery.

INSTITUTIONAL READINESS

(a) Institutions must notify and receive approval from ACICS prior to using self-paced as a mode of delivery. (See Section 2-2-106.)

(b) Institutions must demonstrate a shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered environment.

(c) Institutions must employ faculty who possess the technical skills to teach in a self-paced environment.

(d) The delivery method must be appropriate for students and the curriculum.

ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS AND ENROLLMENT

Institutions must identify the admissions requirements of self-paced courses and/or programs.

CURRICULUM CONTENT AND INSTRUCTION AND DELIVERY

(a) Regardless of the instructional delivery method, the syllabi must identify the course learning objectives. Each course learning objective must support one or more program learning outcomes. (See Glossary definition of Syllabus.)

(b) Institutions must demonstrate to the Council that the clock or credit hours required and awarded are appropriate for the degrees and credentials offered using a thoroughly developed rationale. Credit award rationales for distance education delivery of courses or programs generally do not use the traditional lecture/laboratory/externship formulas for credit calculations. (See Section 3-1-516, Course and Program Measurement.)

(c) Institutions must demonstrate compliance with applicable federal and state regulations.

FACULTY AND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

(a) The institution must employ academically and/or experientially credentialed faculty to oversee the self-paced course/program.

(b) The faculty must be adequately trained to instruct in a self-paced environment.
(c) The faculty must be supported with the appropriate education resources and technology to facilitate self-paced instruction.

(d) The institution must demonstrate that the student/teacher ratio appropriately supports faculty and student interaction, facilitation of interaction among students, and facilitation of student interaction with curriculum content.

RESOURCES AND EQUIPMENT
The institution must provide an accessible and reliable learning management system and technical support to effectively facilitate online instruction and learning.

STUDENTS AND STUDENT SERVICES
(a) The institution must orient online students to its learning management system, resources, and support services, including technical support.

(b) Student support services available to students enrolled in self-paced programs must be the same or equivalent to those provided to students enrolled in ground-based programs, including but not limited to student services such as counseling, academic advising, financial aid, and employment assistance.

STUDENT EVALUATION AND PROGRAM ASSESSMENT
(a) The course learning objectives for a self-paced course must be the same as the learning objectives for the same course delivered on ground.

(b) Regardless of the instructional delivery method, assessments and assignments should demonstrate student achievement of course learning objectives.

PUBLICATIONS
The institution must fully disclose what form(s) of instruction it uses in its catalog and website and, when appropriate, in its advertising and promotional material. The catalog disclosure must follow the requirements as described and outlined in Section 3.1.701 and Appendix C.

GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS
Self-paced Instruction. An educational delivery method by which a student progresses through a course or program of study in residence utilizing either computer software or instructional materials and resources.

Students progress through the course or program at their own pace with limited interaction with the instructor. The instructor, however, is responsible for overseeing the progress of the student and for evaluating and grading the student.

D. Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Explanation of Final Changes
The Council finalized revisions to the element of “Student Learning Outcomes” (SLOs) in Appendix K, along with Glossary definitions of direct and indirect assessment, to accurately
reflect that the Campus Effectiveness Plan should evaluate the assessment of SLOs. Further clarification was also made to the Glossary definitions to better define direct vs. indirect assessment methods. These revisions are made to provide additional guidance to institutions on the Council’s expectations concerning the evaluation of SLOs as a component of institutional effectiveness.

TITLE I GENERAL POLICIES
Chapter 1 An Overview of the Council

STATEMENT OF MISSION
The mission of the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools is to advance educational excellence at independent, nonpublic career schools, colleges, and organizations in the United States and abroad. This is achieved through a deliberate and thorough accrediting process of quality assurance and enhancement as well as ethical business and educational practices.

DEFINITION OF ACCREDITATION
Accreditation is an independent appraisal of an institution during which the institution’s overall educational quality (including outcomes), professional status among similar institutions, financial stability, and operational ethics are self-evaluated and judged by peers. It is a voluntary activity separate and distinct from business licensing, authority to award educational credentials, and eligibility to administer student financial assistance.

DEFINITION OF ACADEMIC QUALITY
ACICS defines academic quality as the overall performance of the institution in the context of its mission and as measured by the extent to which the institution achieves its intended student learning and student success outcomes.

The evaluation of student learning outcomes involves the assessment of skill and competency attainment. Student success outcomes include student retention or persistence; employment or placement; and student, graduate, and employer satisfaction.

The effectiveness of the institution is demonstrated by its compliance with accreditation standards as well as its continuous striving for enhancement of quality. ACICS assesses academic quality in the following areas: mission and objectives; campus effectiveness planning; student outcomes; financial stability; recruitment and admission practices; organizational structure and administration; student services; academic program and curriculum; quality of faculty and instruction; physical facilities; library and learning resources; and publication and disclosure of student achievement.

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APPENDIX K
EVALUATION OF ELEMENTS IN THE CAMPUS EFFECTIVENESS PLAN (CEP)

The CEP shall, at minimum and at both the campus and program levels, report outcomes for each of the elements listed below. For each element, at the campus and program levels as appropriate, baseline rates and levels for comparison and goals for the current evaluation period must be identified. A summary and analysis of previous performance, a rationale for the baseline rates and levels, goals, and a listing of activities that will be undertaken to achieve the goals must also be included. In accordance with Section 2-1-809, a specific plan to improve the retention, placement, and/or licensure rate(s) for each program not meeting current Council standards must be included within the CEP.

1. Retention rates
2. Placement rates

Student retention and graduate placement rates reported on the Campus Accountability Report (CAR) shall be included in the CEP for the three most recent years, or, if less than three years’ worth of CAR data is available, data for at least one reporting period. The data and information reported for retention and placement rates must demonstrate that the campus is maintaining or improving performance each year, or, if that is not the case, then the campus must provide an explanation of mitigating circumstances affecting improved outcomes. In accordance with Section 2-1-809, a specific plan to improve the retention and/or placement rate(s) for each program not meeting current Council standards for retention and/or placement must be included within the CEP.

3. Graduation Rates

Graduation rates are based on scheduled to graduate cohort for each program offered at a campus. The graduation rates reported on the Campus Accountability Report (CAR) shall be included in the CEP for the most recent three years, or, if less than three years’ worth of CAR data is available, data for at least one reporting period.

4. The level of Current student satisfaction
5. The level of Graduate satisfaction
6. The level of Employer satisfaction

The level of satisfaction for each of the three elements identified above shall be determined and reported at least twice a year. For each of these three elements, the CEP must identify and describe what types of data were used to determine the level of satisfaction, how they were collected, and the target group’s response rate. Graduate satisfaction should be evaluated no sooner than 30 days following and within 6 months after graduation and include both placed and non-placed graduates.

7. Student learning outcomes (SLOs)

Measuring and evaluating achievement of the SLOs are among the most important activities available to validate and confirm overall program and campus effectiveness. The
assessments used to measure SLOs should be appropriately selected with a rationale to reflect the nature of the academic programs offered and must include direct assessments but may also include indirect measurements (see Glossary definitions of Direct Assessment and Indirect Assessment). For campuses that offer programs for which licensure or certification is required to practice in the specific career field, pass rates shall be evaluated as a required student learning outcome.

GLOSSARY

Direct Assessment Competency-based Program. The use of tools or instruments which provide for the direct examination or observation of student knowledge or skills against measurable learning outcomes. Techniques which measure what students know and/or can do and provide strong evidence of student learning. A program that clearly defines the skills, knowledge, and professional behavior (“soft skills”) that are required of a student or a graduate to perform at a level considered to be “competent” by practitioners and employers in the field. Only “direct” assessment of student learning and competencies are acceptable. Direct assessment measures must apply to the course competencies required for the program. Examples of “direct assessment” measures are as follows: acceptable scores on industry-recognized licensure or certification examinations; standardized tests; pre- and post-tests; examinations and quizzes; research projects; case study analysis; criterion-based rating scale or rubric scores; course-embedded questions; observation of clinical experience, internships or field work; and capstone projects, theses, exhibits, or performances. (For a federal definition and for Council standards, see Appendix H, Section 1.)

(“Indirect assessment. Tools or instruments which provide for an evaluation of attitudes and/or inferences of whether student learning has occurred.” measures of student learning, while deemed valuable for institutional program evaluation and enhancement, are not included in the consideration for approval of a competency-based program. Examples of indirect measures are as follows: course evaluations; hours spent in classes or on out-of-class educational activities; graduate or employer satisfaction surveys; graduate placement rates; student retention rates; and student perception surveys.

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Student Learning Outcomes, Assessment of. Concise measurable statements of direct and indirect learning outcomes with assessments that specify what students will know, be able to do, or demonstrate as a result of a specific, planned education experience. Student learning outcomes are expressed as measurable knowledge, skills, abilities or attitudes. (For more information, see about Direct Assessment and Indirect Assessment of Learning Outcomes, see Direct Assessment Competency-based Programs.)

E. Retention and Placement Compliance Standards

Explanation of Final Changes
As part of its systematic review, the Council evaluated the suitability and currency of its compliance standard of 60% for retention and placement. This standard has been compared
against data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) institutional outcomes data from the 2018, 2017, and 2016 Campus Accountability Report (CAR), as well as a comparison of standards from a sample of other comparable accreditation agencies. The research concluded that the rigor of the standard of 60% is appropriate.

However, ACICS previously had retention and placement rates at two separate levels, benchmark and compliance standard. A campus or program below the benchmark, but above the compliance standard, would be subject to reporting. Previously, there was a separate benchmark retention rate for program lengths of more than one year. Based upon the review of the current performance of ACICS institutions and their programs over the past three years, the Council approved one common benchmark retention rate of 70% for all programs lengths. Effective for the 2020 CAR period.

APPENDIX I STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS AND CAMPUS ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTS

... 

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS
Student achievement standards outlined below apply to retention and placement rates at the campus and program levels, and licensure or certification examination pass rates, where applicable, at the program level. Minimum standards are intended to ensure that a substantial majority of students at ACICS-accredited campuses are retained, pass licensure or certification examinations where applicable, and find appropriate employment.

Consideration will be given to extenuating circumstances in relation to local, state, or national requirements or trends; student population; program length; graduates pending the completion of licensure or certification exams; economic or cultural factors; or any other reasonable circumstances impeding an institution’s ability to meet or exceed the established compliance standard. However, the institution must also submit documented evidence of student learning through other appropriate indicators.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus-Level Student Achievement Elements</th>
<th>Compliance Standard</th>
<th>Benchmark*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retention Rate</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>70%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Placement Rate</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Program-Level Student Achievement Elements</th>
<th>Compliance Standard</th>
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<tr>
<td>Retention Rate</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<td>• Program length equal to or less than one (1) year</td>
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<td>• Program length equal to or more than one (1) year</td>
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Placement Rate

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<tr>
<th>Licensure Examination Pass Rates, where applicable**</th>
<th>60%</th>
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F. Additional Causes for Revocation

*Explanation of Final Changes*

The following change to the Accreditation Criteria allows for the immediate revocation of an institution’s current grant of accreditation when the institution is denied a renewal of accreditation and does not appeal the action or loses its appeal (the Review Board affirms the denial action). The intent of this revision is that if an institution is found to be egregiously out of compliance, deeming a denial of the application for renewal of accreditation necessary, then its current grant, which previously would be left to expire at the end of the year, should be revoked at that point as well. An institution still has the right to appeal the denial action prior to revocation.

Additionally, another revision to the same criterion (Section 2-3-401) has added notice of closure from the U.S. Department of Education, as well as other oversight agencies, as reason for revocation. Previously, notice had to come from the institution or campus.

2-3-302. Denial of Renewal of Accreditation or Denial of Reinstatement of Accreditation Following Change of Ownership/Control. An institution that objects to a Council decision to deny an application for a renewal of accreditation or reinstatement of accreditation following a change of ownership or control has the right to appeal the decision to the Review Board of Appeals pursuant to the procedures described in 2-3-604.

Additionally, in cases of affirmed denial of an application for renewal of accreditation, or reinstatement of accreditation following a change of ownership or control, the Council may issue a show-cause directive revoke the institution’s current grant of accreditation as described in Section 2-3-401230.

2-3-400. ACCREDITATION WITHDRAWN.

“Withdrawal of accreditation” differs from “denial of accreditation” in that denial rejects an institution’s application for an initial grant of accreditation or for a renewal of accreditation to take effect upon the expiration of an existing grant of accreditation; withdrawal of accreditation takes away a current grant of accreditation before its expiration. Accreditation may be withdrawn from an institution or inclusion withdrawn from a branch campus through two types of Council action: “revocation of accreditation” or “suspension of accreditation.”
2-3-401. Revocation. Revocation occurs without a hearing for any of the following reasons:

(a) An institution, or campus, State authority, U.S. Department of Education, Ministry of Education, or other similar body notifies the Council that the institution or campus has closed and/or ceased operation.

(b) An institution notifies the Council that it is voluntarily withdrawing its grant of accreditation or the inclusion of one or more of its nonmain campuses from within its grant of accreditation.

(c) An institution is denied a renewal of accreditation and does not appeal the action, or the action is affirmed by the Review Board of Appeals.

(d) An institution or campus fails to submit a written response to a show-cause directive by the indicated due date.

(e) An institution or campus whose accreditation has been summarily suspended does not challenge or appeal the suspension within 10 days of receipt of the suspension notice (See Section 2-2-301).

(f) The institution or campus fails to file an annual report as required by the Council (See Sections 2-1-801 and 2-1-802).

(g) The institution or campus fails to pay its annual fees, application fees, other assessed fees, or evaluation expenses (See Section 2-1-804).

A revocation action is not appealable. It requires an institution to start anew and to undergo the entire accreditation process to regain accreditation.

G. Taught-Out Program Restart

Explanation of Final Changes
The Council finalized the following language to outline when an institution may reapply for a program that has been taught-out, for both Council-directed and voluntary terminations.

2-2-503. Termination of Programs. The withdrawal of approval for a program following the issuance of a program show-cause or compliance warning or a decision by an institution to terminate any program voluntarily must be appropriately communicated to all interested publics. These publics include, but are not limited to, students, governmental agencies, the local community, and ACICS.

All institutions subject to the withdrawal of approval for a program, or who voluntarily terminate an approved program, will be directed to submit a program termination plan that conforms to the following requirements. New students may not be enrolled in any program which cannot be completed prior to the termination date for which public notice has been given. Moreover, the institution is obligated to continue to offer appropriate courses, including prerequisites, so that currently enrolled students will be able to complete the program and receive the credential which was their designated educational objective. For this purpose, the period of time need not extend beyond sufficient time for students already enrolled and maintaining normal academic progress to complete the program.
Council-directed withdrawal of approval for a program conditions the institution’s grant of accreditation with respect to the inclusion of the program and therefore is appealable to the Council. Due to the limited nature and narrow scope of the withdrawal of program approval, the appeal to the Council may be in writing only. **An institution may not initiate the new program application process for a program it was directed to teach-out until after it has requested and received approval from the Council to do so, no sooner than the completion of the program’s teach-out. To reinstate a voluntarily terminated program, the institution must initiate the new program application process.**

To maintain approval, an institution must demonstrate active enrollment in each program of study. If an approved program is inactive for at least two years, the program will be considered discontinued and will be removed from the institution’s list of approved programs. To reinstate the program, the institution must initiate the new program application process. Programs that have not started within one year of the proposed start date will also be surrendered. To reinstate the program, the institution must initiate the new program application process. Requests to extend a program’s proposed start date beyond one year of the initial date must be submitted via the application to the President.

H. Programs Less than 300 Hours

**Explanation of Final Changes**

*The Council has added a new Appendix to the Accreditation Criteria applicable to program offerings which are less than 300 clock hours. Historically, ACICS has had a Non-Credit Short Term (NCST) application process for campuses seeking approval of programs under 300 hours. However, research conducted during the systematic review process in 2018 found that further development was needed, particularly for programs leading to an occupational outcome, to ensure student success. Additionally, some states require application and approval of these programs with review and action on outcomes. Under the proposed changes, programs would be classified as either Occupational or Avocational. Occupational programs would be evaluated as outlined below and must meet student achievement standards as outlined in Appendix L.*

All campuses which have vocational programs under 300 hours will need to apply for, and receive, approval **no later than June 30, 2020**. These program data will be included on the 2020-2021 CAR and subject to review as part of the evaluation process.

**3-1-506. Occupational and Avocational Programs.** The evaluation of these programs, as defined in the Glossary, will be consistent with the guidelines of Appendix M.

**ACICS Glossary**

*Avocational Short-term Courses/Programs.* Courses or programs that are less than 300 contact hours and do not lead to an academic credential; rather, they are for preparation, enhancement, or continuing education.
Occupational Short-term Programs. Programs that are less than 300 contact hours and lead to an academic credential and/or licensure.

Appendix M Guidelines for Occupational and Avocational Programs and Courses

Occupational Programs
The offering of programs with occupational objectives requires the review and approval of ACICS consistent with the procedures of Sections 2-2-105 and 2-2-120. As defined, these programs would be included within the scope of the campus’s approval or institution’s accreditation, and therefore subject to the following expectations of review to assure academic quality.

Evaluation of Occupational Programs

Admissions and Tuition
An admissions policy, appropriate to the scope and outcomes for the program, must be established and published, with consistent application to similar students. Tuition and any applicable fees must be reasonable for the program with notice to students of any changes as well as any balances due at the time of completion.

Program Oversight & Instruction
Evidence must be maintained to demonstrate that the program has qualified oversight and instructors in the area of study to assure adequate preparation of the students. The program must meet all state or licensing requirements for instruction, licensure preparation, and outcomes.

Student Achievement Outcomes
Retention, placement, and licensure pass rates, if applicable, will be evaluated consistent with the guidelines of Appendix L. The program must also be included in the campus’s effectiveness plan for evaluation of each required element.

Avocational Programs/Courses
These programs and/or courses do not require ACICS approval except if required by the state or other licensing/oversight body. Further, these programs and/or courses may only be disclosed in the catalog and other publication/media with clear notice to students and other interested parties that they are not approved by ACICS as part of the institution’s accreditation and are offered for the sole purpose of continuing education, professional development, or preparation.
I. Accreditation Workshop Attendance

Explanation of Final Changes
Given that accreditation workshops provide information about critical ongoing compliance areas and the campus’s responsibility in preparing for the actual visit, the Council has finalized the following revision to clarify the expectation that the workshop must be attended by the campus-specific leadership.

2-1-100 – ACCREDITATION WORKSHOP REQUIREMENTS
The Council schedules accreditation workshops each year. Applicants for initial or renewal of accreditation are required to attend a workshop. During these workshops, Council representatives will consult with institutional representatives to help them understand and complete the process. Institutional representatives are required to attend an accreditation workshop within 18 months prior to the final submission of the evaluation visit materials, which are due two weeks prior to an on-site visit. For initial applicants, the chief on-site administrator of each main campus, as well as any other individuals whose responsibility it is to coordinate the accreditation review process, are required to attend. All branch campuses are required to attend. For currently accredited institutions, the chief on-site administrators or the renewal self-study coordinators for single-campus institutions and multiple-campus institutions are required to attend.

J. Student Advising/Financial Counseling

Explanation of Final Changes
The approved language includes updated terminology to better reflect the expectations regarding appropriate student advising and financial counseling. While the new language removes the requirement to designate an individual on campus for personal advising, the expectation remains that an individual onsite is able to refer students to necessary services.

3-1-434. Administration of Student Financial Aid. Participation in state or federal student financial aid programs requires serious administrative responsibility. The Council expects all institutions participating in such programs to be knowledgeable of and in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. The following requirements govern how such activities are evaluated by ACICS:

(a) An institution participating in student financial aid programs shall designate at least one competent person at the site to administer student financial aid. The extent of this activity and the personnel needed shall be governed by the size and classification of the institution. The person who determines the amount of student awards cannot be responsible for disbursing those awards.

(b) The person or persons assigned to administer student financial aid programs must in all cases be a part of the administration. Administrative personnel involved in student recruitment as their major activity shall not have the final decision-making authority in the approval or awarding of student financial aid.

(c) There shall be professional awareness on the part of the financial aid administrator as
shown by membership and participation in state, regional, or national financial aid associations and by other educational activities designed to keep the administrator up to date on procedures and changes in the field.

(d) Institutions shall document that students are counseled concerning their student loan repayment obligations.

3-1-440 – STUDENT SERVICES
3-1-441. Counseling and Guidance Advising. Each institution shall designate at least one person with experience to advise on staff experienced in counseling students on personal or academic problems and employment opportunities. The extent of such activity, and the personnel assigned to it, shall be determined by the size, classification, and admissions standards of the institution, the characteristics and location of students, and the means of communication with them. Orientation activities shall assist new students in adapting to the institution. The following are minimum expectations:

(a) A system of educational, and occupational and personal advising shall be available to students and shall be provided on a periodic basis to ability-to-benefit students enrolled pursuant to Section 3-1-303(b).

(b) Institutions shall emphasize retention and program completion for all students through activities that take into account their academic and socioeconomic characteristics.

(c) Institutions shall provide employment assistance and document activity. An institution shall not guarantee employment or the starting salary of its graduates. Follow-up studies on graduates and employer satisfaction shall be conducted by all institutions at specific measuring points following placement of the graduate. All institutions that use placement percentages or salary projections as part of their recruiting activities shall maintain data on all graduates, including the percentage receiving jobs and the percentage receiving jobs in the career field for which they were trained. Institutions should also keep data on students who do not graduate but who become employed on their own or with the institution’s assistance.

(d) Institutions shall document that students are counseled concerning their student loan repayment obligations.

APPENDIX H, NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION
SECTION II Distance Education
STUDENTS AND STUDENT SERVICES

(a) The institution must orient online students to its learning management system, resources, and support services, including technical support.

(b) Student support services available to students enrolled in online programs must be the same as or equivalent to those provided to students enrolled in ground-based programs, including but not limited to student services, such as counseling, academic advising, financial aid, and employment assistance.

APPENDIX I, INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS
CURRICULUM CONTENT, INSTRUCTION, AND DELIVERY
V. Students and Student Services.
1. Advising and Counseling
   (a) Institutions must provide academic advising and counseling services to students.
   (b) Institutions must have procedures for adding and dropping courses.

2. Financial Aid
   If applicable, institutions shall detail the institution’s procedure for awarding, disbursing, and counseling students on financial aid funds that will be used for overseas study.

GLOSSARY
Record, Admissions and Advisement. Official documents of admissions data, counseling, and academic advising. Such documents include but are not limited to applications for admission or readmission (for matriculants), admissions letters, denial and waitlist notifications, aptitude/assessment test scores, military records, degree audit records, transfer credit evaluations, transcripts reflecting degrees earned from other institutions, and counseling and academic advising correspondence.

K. Attestation of High School Graduation

Explanation of Final Changes
The revision below is to remove language which allows for the acceptance of attestations from students as evidence of high school graduation. With a renewed emphasis on academic quality and expectation of verified student preparedness to pursue post-secondary education.

3-1-303. Records. Careful recordkeeping is crucial to the smooth day-to-day operation of an institution. The data from these records are important to the institution for future planning, to students for informational purposes, and to evaluation teams during school visits. All such records should be maintained at each institutional site or shall be available at each site during evaluation visits. The Council expects at least the following:

   (a) Adequate records shall be kept by each institution relative to administrative operations. These include financial aid activities, admissions, curriculum, accreditation and licensure, guidance, instructional resources, supplies and equipment, school plant, faculty and staff, student activities, and student personnel.

   …

   (d) For high school graduates or those with high school equivalency, the institution shall have on file evidence that the student has received a high school diploma or its equivalent. A signed statement by the student is acceptable documentation. The student’s record also may include personal background information, evidence of other educational experiences (including certificates, diplomas, or degrees earned), or information about the ability of the student to benefit from the education offered, including any aptitude testing information or recommendations from other sources.
L. Ability-to-Benefit (ATB) Students

Explanation of Final Changes
The Council completed a review of the standards relative to the admission of students under the ability-to-benefit determination. Revision was made to strengthen the language that institutions may only admit students who pass one of the admission tests approved by the U.S. Department of Education – Office of Federal Student Aid.

3-1-303. Records. Careful recordkeeping is crucial to the smooth day-to-day operation of an institution. The data from these records are important to the institution for future planning, to students for informational purposes, and to evaluation teams during school visits. All such records should be maintained at each institutional site or shall be available at each site during evaluation visits. The Council expects at least the following:

(a) Adequate records shall be kept by each institution relative to administrative operations. These include financial aid activities, admissions, curriculum, accreditation and licensure, guidance, instructional resources, supplies and equipment, school plant, faculty and staff, student activities, and student personnel.

(b) For all students admitted under an ability-to-benefit determination, the institution shall maintain records of the validated test scores, initial and periodic academic and career advising, and any other factors used by the institution to support its admissions determination.

(c) For institutions admitting students under an ability-to-benefit determination, documentation shall be maintained to evidence the relationship between test cut-off scores from one of the U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid approved admissions test on whatever test the institution uses and successful academic or employment outcomes.

Such records could include such data as admissions rate (acceptances versus rejections), completion rate of those enrolled, general placement rate, or specific career placement rate.

For students tested and enrolled based on a test’s validity to predict aptitude, the test score should predict successful completion of the program. Institutions must develop longitudinal data comparing the test cut-off score(s) utilized for acceptance with the eventual success of students.

An institution admitting a high percentage of applicants based on testing and losing a comparably high percentage of those students before completion (even allowing for factors other than ability) may not be using the appropriate test to measure aptitude, or the cut-off score for admission is too low, or both. The use of the minimum cut-off scores determined by the U.S. Department of Education will not, in and of itself, satisfy the requirements of this section.

3-1-411. Admissions. The admissions policy shall conform to the institution’s mission, shall be publicly stated, and shall be administered as written. The following minimums apply:

(a) The requirements for students admitted to programs leading to a certificate, diploma, or
degree shall include graduation from high school or its equivalent, or demonstration of the student’s ability to complete the program under the ability-to-benefit classification as specified under standard 3-1-303(b) and (c), as provided for by governing laws. Foreign transcripts of international students seeking admission must be evaluated by a member of Association of International Credential Evaluators (AICE), American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), or National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) to validate equivalency with graduation from high school and eligibility to enter college or university in the United States.

For students admitted under the ability-to-benefit classification as specified under standard 3-1-303(b) and (c), students may only be admitted by passing an independently administered U.S. Department of Education approved ATB test.

M. Maximum Timeframe for Program Actions

Explanation of Final Changes
The Council has removed outdated language for determining program length. Additionally, the revisions below have new language to clarify the Council’s application of maximum timeframe for actions at the program level.

2-1-807. Program Length and Tuition and Fees. ACICS will determine average program lengths and tuition and fees annually based on information collected in the Annual Accountability Reports and will provide these data to all accredited institutions. Institutions with program lengths that are more than one standard deviation from the average will be required to submit an explanation for the deviation. If the Council does not accept the explanation, it may require a consultation between ACICS and the institution, direct an on-site evaluation, issue a compliance warning, or withhold inclusion of the program from the institution’s current grant of accreditation.

In assessing these relationships, the Council will consider institutional mission, program objectives and content, types and locations of instructional delivery, knowledge and skills necessary for students to reach competence, and additional requirements that may be placed upon a graduate for employability, including, if applicable, certification or licensure.

…

Title II, Chapter 3

Introduction
The Council’s decision is based on the extent of an institution’s compliance. The judgment made is referred to as a “Council action.” The actions which the Council may take are described in this chapter. Procedures available to institutions to challenge those actions and the maximum time frames for achieving final disposition of those actions by the Council also are explained. There are four general areas of Council actions: accreditation granted, accreditation deferred, accreditation denied, and accreditation withdrawn.
If the Council determines that an institution is not in compliance with the Accreditation Criteria, it will take prompt adverse action against the institution, or it will require the institution to take appropriate action to bring itself into compliance with the Accreditation Criteria within a time frame specified by the Council after the institution has been notified that it is not in compliance. That time frame will not exceed and may be less than the following:

(a) twelve months, if the longest program is less than one year in length;
(b) eighteen months, if the longest program is at least one year, but less than two years in length; and
(c) two years, if the longest program is at least two years in length.

Similarly, if the Council determines that a campus’s program is not in compliance with the Accreditation Criteria, it will take prompt adverse action on the program, or it will require the campus to take appropriate action to bring the program into compliance with the Accreditation Criteria within a time frame specified by the Council after the campus has been notified that its program is not in compliance. That time frame will also not exceed and may be less than the following:

(a) twelve months, if the program is less than one year in length;
(b) eighteen months, if the program is at least one year, but less than two years in length; and
(c) two years, if the program is at least two years in length.

The above time frames may be extended at the sole discretion of the Council for good cause, including evidence that there has been significant improvement in the deficient area(s) and that the applicable time frame does not provide sufficient time to demonstrate full compliance, e.g., significant improvement in completion or placement rates. In no event will the good-cause extension exceed one year.

N. Program Specializations

Explanation of Final Changes
The following language has been added to provide guidelines that ensure consistency and comparability in the designation of specializations within a program offering.

Effective September 2020

3-3-202. Education Requirements.
There shall be a minimum of 10 semester hours, 15 quarter hours, or their equivalent in general education or applied general education courses. Any specializations within a program shall be a minimum of 9 semester hours, 13.5 quarter hours, or their equivalent, and shall not be considered part of the concentration coursework. The catalog must identify the courses that satisfy the general education and specialization requirements, and it must provide an explanation of the course numbering system.

…

3-4-202. Education Requirements.
There shall be a minimum of 30 semester hours, 45 quarter hours, or their equivalent in courses within the areas of concentration; and a minimum of 15 semester hours, 22.5 quarter hours, or their equivalent in general education courses. Any specializations within a program shall be a minimum of 12 semester hours, 18 quarter hours, or their equivalent, and shall not be considered part of the concentration coursework. Courses within the area of concentration of the subject matter of the program shall not be considered general education courses. The catalog must identify the courses that satisfy the concentration, specialization(s), and general education requirements, and it must provide an explanation of the course numbering system.

3-5-202. Education Requirements.
There shall be a minimum of 60 semester hours, 90 quarter hours, or their equivalent within the areas of concentration; and a minimum of 36 semester hours, 54 quarter hours, or their equivalent in general education courses. Any specializations within a program shall be a minimum of 12 semester hours, 18 quarter hours, or their equivalent, and shall not be considered part of the concentration coursework. Courses within the area of concentration of the subject matter of the program shall not be considered general education courses. The catalog must identify the courses that satisfy the concentration, specialization(s), and general education requirements, and those that are upper-division courses, and it must provide an explanation of the course numbering system.

3-6-403. Education Requirements.
The minimum number of credits required for the master’s degree shall be 30 semester hours, 45 quarter hours, or their equivalent of coursework plus a thesis at the graduate level; or 36 semester hours, 54 quarter hours, or their equivalent of coursework at the graduate level if a thesis is not required. Any specializations within a program shall be a minimum of 12 semester hours, 18 quarter hours, or their equivalent, in addition to the required coursework, and shall not be considered part of the required coursework. The master’s degree normally is earned over three semesters, five quarters, or their equivalent. The catalog must provide an explanation of the course numbering system.

GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS

Specialization: In a degree program, a collection of courses apart from the Area of Concentration that provides students with in-depth knowledge in a given area of expertise leading to potential career opportunities within that specified field of study.

APPENDIX C

At a minimum, the catalog shall contain the following items:

13. A statement of the curricula (programs) offered, including for each:
   (a) a statement of the objective or purpose of the curriculum;
(b) an accurate and complete listing of the courses included in each curriculum, each with a unique identifying number and title;
(c) the credit or clock hours awarded for each subject;
(d) the total credits or clock hours required for satisfactory completion of the curriculum;
(e) specialization options with a listing of all courses which make up that specialization;
(f) requirements for certification, licensing, or registration in the program career field, as appropriate; and
(g) any additional or special requirements for completion (such as practica or externships).

O. Foreign Transcript Evaluation

Explanation of Final Changes

The following revision is to clean up old language and to provide clarity on the appropriate use of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) as an evaluator for equivalency on foreign transcripts. Being an individual member of this organization does not qualify one to do the evaluations; rather, the equivalency must be conducted by the agency’s own International Education Services.

3-1-411. Admissions. The admissions policy shall conform to the institution’s mission, shall be publicly stated, and shall be administered as written. The following minimums apply:
(a) The requirements for students admitted to programs leading to a certificate, diploma, or degree shall include graduation from high school or its equivalent, or demonstration of the student’s ability to complete the program under the ability-to-benefit classification as specified under standard 3-1-303(b) and (c), as provided for by governing laws. Foreign transcripts of international students seeking admission must be evaluated by American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)’s International Education Services, or a member of Association of International Credential Evaluators (AICE) American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) or National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) to validate equivalency with graduation from high school and eligibility to enter college or university in the United States.

3-1-413. Transfer of Credit. An institution shall evaluate and consider awarding proper academic credit for credits earned only at institutions that are either accredited by agencies recognized by the United States Department of Education or recognized by the respective government as institutions of higher education, for internationally-based institutions. The institution shall establish and adhere to a systematic method for evaluating and awarding academic credit for those courses that satisfy current program course requirements including an evaluation of all foreign transcripts by American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)’s International Education Services, or a member of Association of International Credential Evaluators (AICE), American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), or National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) prior to the evaluation and award. Written policies
and procedures must clearly outline the process by which transfer of academic credit is awarded. The institution shall disclose in its catalog its policies on transfer of credit, including a statement of the criteria established by the institution by which a determination is made with regard to accepting credits from another institution, and, if applicable, a list of institutions with which the institution has established articulation agreements.

3-1-541. Faculty Preparation. Preparation of faculty members shall be academically and experientially appropriate to the subject matter they teach. Faculty members shall be competent to teach the subject matter offered and shall have reasonable latitude in their choice of teaching methods.

US-based institutions must provide evidence that all faculty members are graduates of institutions accredited by agencies recognized by the United States Department of Education. Credentials of faculty who are graduates from institutions outside the United States must be evaluated by American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)’s International Education Services, or a member of Association of International Credential Evaluators (AICE) American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), or National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) to determine the equivalency of the credentials awarded by institutions in the United States.

Internationally based institutions must provide evidence that all faculty members are graduates of institutions recognized by their respective governments as institutions of higher education or be evaluated by American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)’s International Education Services, or a member of Association of International Credential Evaluators (AICE) American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), or National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) to determine the equivalency of the credentials awarded by institutions in the United States. ACICS, if unable to determine qualifications, may require the translation and/or evaluation of transcripts in languages other than English.

3-4-401, 3-5-401, and 3-6-701. Staff. A professionally trained individual shall supervise and manage library and instructional resources, facilitate their integration into all phases of the institution’s curricular and educational offerings, and assist students in their use. A professionally trained individual is one who holds a bachelor’s or master’s degree in library or information science or a comparable program or state certification to work as a librarian, where applicable, or, for foreign institutions, one who holds a bachelor’s or master’s degree recognized as appropriate for the position by its government or higher education authority. The institution must provide evidence that the degree is from an institution accredited by an agency recognized by the United States Department of Education. If the degree is from an institution outside of the United States, the institution must be recognized by its government as an institution of higher education or be evaluated by American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)’s International Education Services, or a member of Association of International Credential Evaluators (AICE) American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), or National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) to determine the equivalency of the degree to
degrees awarded by institutions in the United States. ACICS, if unable to determine qualifications, may require the translation and/or evaluation of transcripts in languages other than English. The professionally trained individual must participate in documented annual professional growth activities.

P. Follow-Up Studies on Graduates and Employers

Explanation of Final Changes
The revision below is to clarify the intent of follow-up studies on graduate and employer satisfaction. Campuses are no longer required to conduct follow-up studies on graduate satisfaction at specific measuring points. Rather, the evaluation of follow-up studies has been added to the CEP requirements in Appendix K, with the emphasis on analysis of the trends/patterns that have been identified following the review of data being collected. For example, based on surveys that are already being conducted, or the feedback being received from graduates/employers (over the phone, in focus groups, from advisory board meetings, etc.), observations are made which lead to further targeted follow-up studies and analysis. The Council found that campuses are already engaging in this review and establish schedules, programs, and services that are direct results of such assessment. The Accreditation Criteria revision would align with this process while removing the burden of “specific measuring points following placement.”

Effective January 2020

3-1-440 – Student Services

3-1-441. Counseling and Guidance. Each institution shall designate at least one person on staff experienced in counseling students on personal or academic problems and employment opportunities. The extent of such activity, and the personnel assigned to it, shall be determined by the size, classification, and admissions standards of the institution, the characteristics and location of students, and the means of communication with them. Orientation activities shall assist new students in adapting to the institution. The following are minimum expectations:

(a) A system of educational, occupational, and personal advising shall be available to students and shall be provided on a periodic basis to ability-to-benefit students enrolled pursuant to Section 3-1-303(b).

(b) Institutions shall emphasize retention and program completion for all students through activities that take into account their academic and socioeconomic characteristics.

(c) Institutions shall provide employment assistance and document activity. An institution shall not guarantee employment or the starting salary of its graduates. Follow-up studies on graduates and employer satisfaction shall be conducted by all institutions at specific measuring points following placement of the graduate. All institutions that use placement percentages or salary projections as part of their recruiting activities shall maintain data on all graduates, including the percentage receiving jobs and the percentage receiving jobs in the career field for which they were trained. Institutions also should keep data on students who do not graduate but who become employed on their own or with the institution’s assistance.
An institution is encouraged to provide placement assistance, when requested, to graduates of other ACICS-accredited institutions who are relocating to a new community.

(d) Institutions shall document that students are counseled concerning their student loan repayment obligations.

Appendix K  Requirements and Guidelines for the Campus Effectiveness Plan (CEP)

This Appendix identifies the Council’s requirements for the content of a written Campus Effectiveness Plan (CEP) document. The CEP should provide information about the campus and how it measures and evaluates key elements of its operations in order to continuously improve its overall educational operations and meets its mission and objectives. The Council requires each campus to have a current CEP available that meets the requirements identified in this Appendix.

A main and branch campus may use similar language, format, and general content in CEPs, where appropriate. However, the CEP for each main and branch campus must also include information and data specific to its own campus including the characteristics and demographics of the current student population; the number of students enrolled in each program; campus and program retention, placement, and graduation rates; results of surveys to determine current student, graduate, and employer satisfaction; and student learning outcomes.

Follow-up studies on students or former students, as an extension of, or in addition to, the analysis of satisfaction surveys, must be conducted by the institution and summarized within the CEP. The studies should provide further data or feedback regarding the programs and institution, relative to its performance as an educational institution or program, or regarding the effectiveness of its training in the workplace. Such studies must be conducted at least annually. (See Glossary of Definitions for Follow-up).

For those campuses offering programs in non-traditional modes of delivery, the distance education plan must be integrated into the CEP and the elements evaluated to include the effect of the modality on overall outcomes. Further, the campus must also incorporate its assessment of faculty satisfaction into its plan.

2. PROPOSED CRITERIA REVISION

At its most recent August 2019 meeting, the Council reviewed specific areas of the ACICS Accreditation Criteria outlined in this section, and approved the revisions as proposed for feedback from the field. Proposed changes will be reconsidered for final approval and implementation at the Council’s next meeting and incorporate the perspectives shared by the field. Public comment on these revisions is requested through the ACICS Comment Survey explained at the end of the memorandum. ACICS requests comments and recommendations from a broad cross section of ACICS stakeholders, including students, faculty, school administrators, policy advocates, and other interested parties.
The following criteria have been accepted by the Council as **proposed** (new language is underlined, deleted language has been stricken).

### A. Distance Education Review

*Explanation of Final Changes*

As part of the Council’s systematic review process, areas relative to distance education have been independently evaluated to assess currency and practical application. The Council proposes the following revisions throughout the Criteria.

**Section 3-1-505.** Each institution engaged in the distance education mode of delivery must meet the requirements of Appendix H, Distance Education.

### Glossary

**Distance Education or Distance Learning.** A structured educational situation in which the students and instructors are physically separated. Distance education supports regular and substantive interaction synchronously or asynchronously between instructor and learner, among learners, and between learners and learning resources through one or more interactive technologies (e.g., audio-conferencing, video-conferencing, etc.)

**Hybrid Course or Hybrid Program.** A hybrid course is one which mixes face-to-face, traditional classroom instruction with online instruction. A hybrid program is one which offers or requires a percentage of the required courses in a program online. ACICS requires the school to clearly outline the percentage of online activity included in a course or a program. Institutions are required to apply for and secure approval prior to initiating any distance education activity and also when it increases its distance education activity to the extent that it constitutes 50% or more of a program from hybrid to fully online. See Section 2-2-106.

**Interaction.** Refers to the engagement between faculty and students, among students, and with other participants in learning content at a level aligned with the courses offered as part of the ongoing learning process.

**Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).** An approved arrangement between and among campuses within an institution to provide services, including distance education, from one location to another. Such arrangements must be approved by ACICS and published in the institution’s catalog.

**Appendix H** Principles and Requirements for Nontraditional Distance Education
SECTION I
Distance Education

In addition to the general standards in Title III, Chapter 1, which apply to all institutions, and applicable standards in Chapters 2 through 6, the following standards apply specifically to distance education delivery methods. These principles and guidelines are designed to inform institutions of the policies of the Council and to guide institutional representatives when designing, implementing, and evaluating distance education modes of delivery.

INSTITUTIONAL READINESS

(a) Institutions must notify and receive approval from ACICS prior to using distance education as a mode of delivery. (See Section 2-2-106.)

(b) The objectives which support the institution’s mission must identify the role of distance education learning within its scope and purpose (See Section 3-1-100).

(c) Institutions must have a plan to implement distance education instruction. At a minimum, the plan should include the rationale; instructional, human, and technological resources designed to sustain distance education operations; course/program objectives; content; and student assessment. Institutions must integrate this plan into the Campus Effectiveness Plan (See Section 3-1-111 & Appendix K).

(d) The instructional delivery method must be appropriate for students and the curriculum.

(e) Institutional policies and procedures should be consistently applied using procedures that are appropriate to the mode of delivery.

(f) Institutions must designate a qualified individual to oversee the distance education activities.

ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS AND ENROLLMENT

(a) Institutions must identify the admission requirements of distance education courses and/or programs and how they differ from, if applicable, the on-ground admission requirements.

(b) If an online admissions test is required, it must be administered in a manner which verifies the student’s identity. Institutions must make it clear in writing at the time of enrollment how the student’s identity will be verified throughout the course and program, how the student’s privacy will be protected, and if the student will be assessed any additional charges associated with the verification of student identity.

(c) Institutions must clearly and appropriately state any hardware, software, or other requirements the students must possess or have access to in order to access this mode of delivery.

(d) Institutions must provide an online orientation program to familiarize the student with the equipment and resources used in the distance education activities and to orient the student to the distance education learning process.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY

(a) Regardless of the instructional delivery method, the syllabi must identify the course learning objectives. Each course learning objective must support one or more program learning outcomes (See Glossary definition of Syllabus).

(b) The course must provide sufficient and appropriate opportunities for substantive interaction (See
Glossary definition of Interaction) between faculty and students and among students.

(c) Institutions must demonstrate to the Council that the clock or credit hours required and awarded are appropriate for the degrees and credentials offered using a thoroughly developed rationale. Credit award rationales for distance education delivery of courses or programs generally do not use the traditional lecture/laboratory/externship formulas for credit calculations (See Section 3-1-516, Course and Program Measurement).

(d) Curriculum must be administered in a way that maintains security and stability of access.

(e) Institutions must demonstrate that the student who registers for a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. The verification method, at the option of the institution, may include a secure login and pass code, proctored examinations, and other appropriate student authentication or verification technology. A policy specific to academic integrity expectations and oversight in the distance learning environment must be developed and implemented.

FACULTY AND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

(a) The institution must employ academically and/or experientially credentialed faculty to teach online courses appropriate to the subject matter.

(b) Faculty hired to facilitate online instruction must be properly trained to utilize the institution’s learning management system for purposes of instruction, communication, and assessment.

(c) All staff assigned to, or involved in, the administration and support of the distance education activities must be clearly identified and possess the skills and experience necessary to provide the support for course development and delivery.

(d) The instruction must provide an accessible and reliable learning management system and technical support to effectively facilitate online instruction and learning as well as ensure faculty and student success.

(e) The institution must demonstrate that the student/teacher ratio appropriately supports faculty and student interaction, facilitation of interaction among students, and interaction with curriculum content.

(f) The institution must have a faculty development plan on file that is appropriate for each individual to include professional development and/or in-service activities relevant to the online delivery method (See Section 3-1-543).

(g) Faculty observations and evaluations must be conducted at least annually to assess effectiveness in the distance education environment.

RESOURCES AND EQUIPMENT

(a) The institution must demonstrate that it has adequate financial resources to support the form of delivery.

(b) The institution must demonstrate that students taking online courses have access to the same or equivalent library resources and support as students taking courses in a physical classroom. If 50% or more of the student’s program is approved for online delivery, these resources must include at a minimum access to a virtual library collection of program-related books, journals, and periodicals and access to virtual library and information technology services. These resources are expected to be appropriate for the students’ needs and must be incorporated into the instructional design of the courses offered, as appropriate.
STUDENTS AND STUDENT SERVICES

(a) The institution must orient online students to online education, its learning management system, resources, and support services, including expanded technical support expectations.
(b) Student support services available to students enrolled in online programs must be the same or equivalent to those provided to students enrolled in ground-based programs, including but not limited to student services such as counseling, academic advising, financial aid, and employment assistance.

STUDENT EVALUATION AND PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

(a) The course learning objectives for a course delivered online must be the same as the learning objective for the same course delivered on ground.
(b) Regardless of instructional delivery method, assessments and assignments should demonstrate student achievement of course learning objectives.
(c) The institution must document that it conducts course/program evaluations, including assessment of student learning outcomes; student retention and placement; and student, graduate, faculty, and employer satisfaction. The institution must also evaluate the effectiveness of its distance learning activities, including the extent to which online learning goals are achieved, and use the results of its evaluations to enhance the attainment of established program and/or institutional goals (See Section 3-1-111 & Appendix K).

PUBLICATIONS

(a) The institution must fully disclose what form(s) of instruction it uses in its catalog and website and, when appropriate, in its advertising and promotional material.
(b) The catalog disclosure must follow the requirements as described and outlined in Section 3-1-701 and Appendix C.
(c) The institution must meet all disclosures required by state, federal, or other oversight bodies concerning the recruitment and admission of, and services to, students.

3. FOR INFORMATION ONLY

A. Systematic Review

As ACICS continually strives to enhance its standards to remain current with the best practices in the industry, the Council continues its solicitation of feedback from all stakeholders. The Council’s 2018-2019 Systematic Review Program includes the areas of Nontraditional Education, to include Distance Education (Appendix H), English as a Second Language (Appendix F), and the development of standards relevant to institutions outside of the United States. The Council respectfully requests feedback from all parties in these areas, along with any of the proposed revisions above. Stakeholders with expertise in a particular area are especially invited to contact staff for direct involvement in the continued review and revision of these components of the Accreditation Criteria. Requests may be sent to Karly Zeigler, Manager, Policy and Institutional Compliance at kzeigler@acics.org.
B. Placement Verification Program (PVP) Third-Party Verification

In preparation for the 2019 Campus Accountability Report, campuses will be able to provide third-party verifications from Work Number/Equifax for up to 10% of the reporting year’s placements already submitted to the PVP. The third-party verifications will only be accepted for placements classified as a title match and only from Work Number/Equifax. ACICS will open up the capability for campuses to upload the documentation for non-responders on October 14, 2019, at which time the 10% allowance will be calculated. All Work Number/Equifax verifications submitted must be for placements already submitted to the PVP, but for which no response was received from the graduate or employer. Further details will be forthcoming during the AWARE on Tuesday, September 17, 2019.

C. Mitigating Circumstances

As referenced in Appendix L of the Accreditation Criteria, consideration will be given to reasonable extenuating circumstances directly impacting the institution when reviewing student achievement data. To be considered, an institution must apply. Applications will be posted on the ACICS website and must include a narrative of the extenuating circumstance(s) with back-up documentation as well as a narrative explanation of alternative indicators of student learning in the program with back-up documentation supporting these indicators. Applications will be attached to the CAR upon submission on or before November 1. Applications will be available October 1.

D. Termination of Doctoral Programs

As communicated previously, via the Memorandum to the Field and direct correspondence to the institutions offering doctoral programs, ACICS will terminate all doctoral criteria on December 31, 2019, and all doctoral programs will have to be taught out or the institution have transitioned to another accrediting body. ACICS remains committed to this plan while supporting institutions who serve these students.

E. We Have Moved!

ACICS address, effective July 1, 2019:

1350 Eye Street, NW
Suite 560
Washington, DC 20005

4. CALL FOR COMMENT – Proposed Criteria Revision

The Council encourages students, faculty, administrators, evaluators, employers, and other interested parties to provide feedback regarding the proposed revisions to Distance Education Criteria. Comments on the proposed Criteria revisions are due by Friday, November 1, 2019. ACICS is collecting all comments from the field on proposed Criteria revisions through an electronic survey. Please find the survey link below:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Aug2019CallforComment
In preparation for the scheduled AWARE on **Tuesday, September 17, 2019** to discuss finalized changes and informational procedures, please send your questions to kzeigler@acics.org to ensure that we are able to provide as much guidance as possible. For information on joining the webinar, please visit our website at www.acics.org.

For any other questions or to provide policy comments, please contact:

Ms. Karly Zeigler  
Manager, Policy and Institutional Compliance  
kzeigler@acics.org