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

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1. Final Criteria Revisions (Effective July 1, 2016)

At its May 2016 meeting, the Council reviewed specific sections of the ACICS Accreditation Criteria for the purpose of enhancing and fortifying its program of review of colleges and schools offering programs that prepare students from employment in professional, technical and occupational fields. The language contained in the following sections reflect content and policy previously reviewed by the Council, as well as consideration of comments and recommendations derived from a broad cross-section of ACICS stakeholders, including students, faculty, school administrators, policy advocates and others.

The ACICS Accreditation Criteria will be updated to reflect all final criteria revisions effective July 1, 2016. To review the revised copy of the Accreditation Criteria before July 1, please visit the ACICS website at www.acics.org >About Us>Publications>Accreditation Criteria.

The following criteria were previously reviewed and have been accepted as final and the effective date is July 1, 2016 (new language is underlined, deleted language is struck).

In addition, as published in the January 13, 2016 Memorandum to the Field, the following Criteria revisions will also be effective July 1, 2016:

- Unannounced Visits
- Community Resources
- Teaching Loads
- Faculty Assignments – Applied General Education
- Glossary – Lecture, Laboratory, In-Service Training
- Faculty Preparation
- Admissions and Recruitment
- Campus Effectiveness Plan

For details on these revisions previously announced, please visit our website at: Memorandum to the Field.

A. DEFINITION OF ACADEMIC QUALITY

Explanation of Final Changes

The Council determined that it was important to provide a clear definition of academic quality within the Accreditation Criteria. The definition provides guidance on the measures of academic quality and how an institution and ACICS will assess these measures. The Council also determined that it was important to place the ACICS statement of mission (currently placed under Title I, Chapter 2, Introduction) under Title I, Chapter I of the Accreditation Criteria.
The effective date for this change is **July 1, 2016**.

**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.

**Introduction 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.

Student learning outcomes involve 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.

**1-1-100 – Bylaws**

...

**1-1-200 – Recognition**

...

**1-1-300 – Public Participation**

...
B. DATA INTEGRITY STANDARD

Explanation of Final Changes

The Council included a new standard in order to provide explicit requirements for its expectations as it relates to the truthfulness, reliability, and accuracy of data collected and submitted by institutions to the Council in fulfillment of its accountability requirements. Following the comments from the field, the Council clarified the expectation that all data reported to ACICS must reflect accurate information and is subject to review.

The effective date for the change is **July 1, 2016**.

3-1-203. Data Integrity.
All data reported to ACICS for any purpose is expected to reflect an accurate and verifiable portrayal of institutional performance and is subject to review for integrity, accuracy, and completeness.

3-1-203204. Financial Stability.

C. RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES REVIEW

Explanation of Final Changes

The Council maintains its requirement that each institution must ensure that any person or entity engaged in admissions or recruitment practices is communicating current and accurate information about the institution and its operations. The Council added the explicit requirement that the institution must ensure that student achievement disclosures (as described in Section 3-1-704) are accurate. Following comments from the field, the Council clarified the language which states that the institution must maintain documentation that it systematically monitors its recruitments activities.

The effective date for this change is **July 1, 2016**.

**Section 3-1-412(a):** An institution shall ensure that any person or entity engaged in admissions or recruitment activities on its behalf is communicating current and accurate information regarding courses and programs, student achievement disclosures (See Section 3-1-704), services, tuition, terms, and operating policies. The institution must maintain documentation that demonstrates that it systematically monitors its recruitment activities.
D. INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE DISCLOSURES

Explanation of Final Changes

The Council has fortified its policy regarding public disclosure of student achievement data. The language requires that information related to student achievement must be disclosed at the campus- and program-level (and not at the institution-wide level if a multi-campus institution) and that, at a minimum, each campus and each program (at each campus) provides its retention, placement, and licensure exam pass rates (where applicable). Following comments from the field, the Council also clarified that this data should be the information that is reported on its most recent Campus Accountability Report.

The effective date for this change is July 1, 2016.

3-1-704. Performance Information. Institutions Each campus shall routinely provide reliable information to the public on their performance, including student achievement as determined by the institution information, that includes, at a minimum, retention, placement, and licensure examination pass rates (where applicable). The information provided shall be for the entire campus and for each program as reported to ACICS in its most recent Campus Accountability Report.

In addition, the Council developed a standard disclaimer statement that will be required of all institutional disclosures of student achievement. Following comments from the field, the Council simplified the statement, which requires institutions to clearly identify that the information is data submitted to ACICS in its Campus Accountability Report. The Disclaimer statement is included in Appendix C and reads as follows:

Appendix C – Institutional Publication Requirements

Performance Information Disclosure
“These are the data reported to ACICS by the institution in its most recent Campus Accountability Report.”

Statement of Accreditation

…
E. PLACEMENT DEFINITION – GLOSSARY

Explanation of Final Changes

The Council has guidelines in which institutions must comply regarding the calculation of placement rates. The Council has included a succinct definition of placement within the Glossary of the Accreditation Criteria.

The effective date for this change is July 1, 2016.

Based on comments from the field and ACICS initiative to enhance the reliability of information upon which ACICS uses to make an accrediting decision, the Council has authorized a comprehensive review of all the definitions, reporting templates and training support for the development, tracking, reporting and verification of student achievement data, including the Campus Accountability Report Guidelines, retention data, placement data, and licensure examination pass rate data. The reform will be announced in advance of the next CAR reporting interval.

Placement. Working in the field of study or acquiring a credential that directly benefits the graduate’s existing employment.

F. DEBARMENT POLICY

Explanation of Final Changes

The Council revised its current procedures for appealing a debarment action. The procedures clarify that an individual or entity that receives an intent to bar notice will have one opportunity, either in writing or in person, to appeal that notice, which may include additional information for Council consideration. If the individual or entity chooses to appeal the notice, the Council will make a final decision on whether to issue a debarment order and determine the terms and length of that debarment following the appeal.

The effective date for this change is July 1, 2016.

2-3-900 – Debarment
The Council may bar a person or entity, including spouses and closely related family groups as defined in Section 2-2-401, from being an owner, senior administrator, or governing board member of an ACICS-accredited institution if that person or entity was found guilty of fraudulent or criminal behavior; was debarred by a government agency or an accrediting agency; or was an owner, senior administrator, or governing board member of an institution that lost its accreditation as a result of a denial or suspension action or that closed without providing a teach-out or refunds to students matriculating at the time of closure.
The Council will notify the person(s) or entity whom it intends to bar as the result of denial or suspension action within four months following the loss of the institution’s accreditation. It will notify the person(s) or entity whom it intends to bar as the result of the closing of an institution within a reasonable period of time following the closure. In each case, the Council will forward an intent to bar notice by both electronic and certified mail to the last institutional mailing address known to the Council, unless the Council has received updated mailing information following the institution’s closure or loss of accreditation. Those individuals or entities will be considered notified when the Council has forwarded the intent to bar notice in accordance with these procedures.

The intent to bar notice will inform the person(s) or entity that they are entitled to present information and materials in writing or in person to challenge the intent to bar at the next scheduled meeting of the Council. The notice will stipulate that if they intend to challenge the intent to bar, the person(s) or entity must inform the Council office in writing within ten days of receipt of the notice as to whether they will challenge the intent to bar in writing.

A debarment order may be issued by the Council as a result of its consideration of the facts presented. The Council’s decision will be sent to the individual(s) person(s) or entity by electronic and certified mail following their challenge before the Council. The Council’s decision is final if the person or entity elects not to appeal within ten days of Council notification. The Council decision is also final following appeal.

The Council retains final discretion to establish the terms and length of the debarment. The length of debarment will vary depending on the circumstances that led to the debarment decision; however, it may vary depending on the circumstances that led to the debarment decision. Individual circumstances may justify a longer period of debarment.

Person(s) or entities barred by the Council may appeal this decision to the Council in accordance with such debarment appeals procedures as the Council may establish. The Council’s decision is final if the person or entity elects not to appeal within ten days of Council notification or if the Council affirms its decision following appeal, and no additional appeal rights are available under these procedures.

G. ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL MASTER’S DEGREE PROGRAMS

Explanation of Final Changes

The Council clarified language related to the admissions requirements for professional master’s degree programs which lead to certification or licensure required for employment
in the field. The Council has clarified the standard that, if a baccalaureate degree is not
required for a professional master’s degree by the appropriate specialized accrediting
agencies and is common practice among accredited institutions, then the Council will
accept such evidence as meeting the alternate admissions standards.

The effective date for this change is **July 1, 2016**.

**3-6-601. Enrollment Prerequisites.** The threshold admission requirement to a master’s
degree program is a baccalaureate degree.

If admission to a professional program is granted without a baccalaureate degree, the
burden is on the institution to demonstrate and justify that the alternate admission
requirement is accepted by a recognized licensing or specialized accrediting agency and is
common practice among accredited institutions of higher education. In such cases,
admission may be granted only to eligible students who have completed, at a minimum, an
associate’s degree or equivalent. If the institution chooses to award a suitable baccalaureate
degree upon completion of specified requirements or concurrently with the award of the
professional master’s degree, the baccalaureate degree curriculum must be approved by the
Council.

In instances where a baccalaureate degree is not used as the threshold for admission, the
following conditions must be met: (a) admission to the program may be granted only to
eligible students who have completed at a minimum an associate degree or equivalent; (b)
the program must ensure that a baccalaureate degree, which meets ACICS standards, is
awarded upon completion of baccalaureate degree requirements or concurrently with the
award of the master’s degree; and (c) the baccalaureate degree program must include in its
curricular requirements sufficient and appropriate bridge to master’s-level courses in the
field of study and must be approved by ACICS.

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2. Proposed Criteria Revisions
At its May 2016 meeting, the Council reviewed a specific area of the ACICS Accreditation
Criteria outlined in this Section and made substantial modifications to previously proposed
revisions (new language is underlined, deleted language is struck). Public comment on
these new revisions is requested through the ACICS Comment Survey explained at
the end of the memorandum.

A. PROBATION STANDARDS

*Explanation of Proposed Changes*
The Council proposes to clarify its current Council action procedures to note that the Council may take an appropriate action to bring a program or institution into compliance at any time. This will include the “Probation” action. Probation may be ordered when the institution has materially demonstrated that it is unable to operate within the standards of the Accreditation Criteria. The Council also proposes to clarify the timeframe by which an institution may remain on the Probation status in line with its procedures listed in Title II, Chapter 3, Introduction.

2-3-200 – Accreditation Deferred or Conditioned
The Council, upon review of relevant information concerning an institution, may take any of the following actions at any time in accordance with the procedures described.

2-3-210. Deferral.

2-3-240. Probation.
Probation is a status that the Council may impose on an institution when it determines that if the institution does not is unable to demonstrate that it consistently materially operates in accordance with the Accreditation Criteria.

2-3-241. Imposition. The institution will be provided in writing the areas in which the institution did not materially operate in accordance with the Accreditation Criteria and will be required to demonstrate corrective action for review by ACICS. Probation may be imposed by the Council either when it continues a show-cause directive after at least one hearing either in person or in writing, or after an institution has notified the Council that it intends to appeal a denial action.

2-3-242. Result of Probation. The Council will not accept any applications for new programs or new campuses from any institution on probation unless the institution receives approval in advance to submit such an application.

2-3-243. Probation Lifted. Probation does not expire automatically. Instead, the institution is obligated to demonstrate to the Council that the conditions or circumstances which initially led to the imposition of probation have been corrected before probation will be lifted. Probation may be continued even if the show-cause directive has been vacated. When the areas of noncompliance for the probation have been satisfied, the probation may be lifted by ACICS (See Title II, Chapter 3, Introduction). The Council may order a special visit at the institution’s expense before lifting probation.

2-3-244. Notification of Probation. The Council will notify the U.S. Secretary of Education, appropriate state regulatory agencies, other appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public of its decision to place an institution on probation. The institution is required to notify immediately in writing its current and prospective students that it has been placed on probation by its accrediting agency.
3. For Information Only

A. BOARD OF ETHICS

The ACICS Board of Directors applies its authority and credibility as a body of independent, ethical, and expert members in arriving at accreditation standards, procedures, and decisions. In order to further protect that independence and integrity, it has added a new factor that may trigger the resignation of a Commissioner or Director, and has strengthened the method by which it reconciles conflicts of interests or perceived breaches of integrity. The newly established Board of Ethics will consist of one standing Board member and two independent, public members, as described below:

Article IV
Elections, Terms, Vacancies, Removal, Resignations, and Compensation

Section 7—Resignations. Resignation from service as a commissioner and Director may be voluntarily tendered at any time. The resignation becomes effective upon receipt of written notice by the Chair of the Board and Council or the President. Automatic tendering of resignation is required under the following circumstances or conditions:

…
(j) the commissioner is employed by an institution that is deemed to be under sustained and serious scrutiny regarding non-compliance with ACICS standards and requirements.

Article V
Committees

Section 2—Standing Committees of the Board of Directors. There shall be the following standing committees of the Board:

…
(e) The Board of Ethics shall consist of three individuals selected by the Board consisting of two independent, public members and one member affiliated with an ACICS institution. The Board will have the authority to review perceived or actual conflicts of interest by a commissioner or Director and decide if the individual is to be directed to resign.

B. INTERIM ON-SITE EVALUATIONS

The Council has strengthened its current process for conducting interim on-site evaluation visits between renewal of accreditation periods. Any time ACICS conducts an on-site visit,
the evaluation team will review an institution’s overall effectiveness in key areas such as administrative capability, campus effectiveness planning, admissions and recruitment practices, recordkeeping, academics, faculty qualifications, etc. This process will be incorporated into the existing quality assurance monitoring program as well as for institutions that are determined to be at-risk as a result of student achievement indicators, financial conditions, complaints or adverse information, extensive substantive changes or enrollment growth, or other factors as determined by the Council.

The strengthened interim evaluation process began in the Spring 2016 cycle and will continue through subsequent cycles.

C. DATA INTEGRITY REVIEW

The Council has initiated its enhanced Data Integrity Review in the Spring 2016 cycle. Each comprehensive evaluation site visit includes an evaluator with the primary role of verifying reported institutional data, specifically included placement data reported by the institution on its most recent Campus Accountability Report.

The Council will provide further guidance regarding this review prior to its Fall 2016 cycle.

D. PUBLIC COMMENT

The Council encourages institutions to provide feedback regarding Council operations and procedures. Comments on the proposed Criteria revisions are due by Friday, July 8, 2016. The link to comment on these proposed changes is: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MTTF052016.

E. ACICS AWARE WEBINAR

An AWARE webinar will be held on Thursday, May 26, 2016 at 2:00 pm. This webinar will focus on information presented in the May 2016 Memorandum to the Field. If there are any topics of interest in addition to those in this memorandum that you would like to be addressed during the webinar or if you have specific questions about the material presented, please send an email to Mr. Ian Harazduk at iharazduk@acics.org. ACICS is eager to respond to all questions related to this communication; therefore, if you have any questions prior to the AWARE Webinar, please send an email to Mr. Ian Harazduk at iharazduk@acics.org, so that these responses can be prepared and shared during the webinar.
F. ACICS WEB SITE

Please visit the ACICS Web site. It continues to be revised and updated based on Council activities. The site contains revised and detailed information about accreditation, accredited institutions, applications, publications, workshops and special events. New features are now available.

NOTE: The institutional ACICS ID should be used on all correspondence to and from ACICS. If you have questions about your ID code, please send an email to ebiz@acics.org.

G. 2016 WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Renewal of Accreditation Workshop

Renewal of Accreditation Workshop August 25, 2016 Indianapolis, IN

Initial Accreditation Workshop

Initial Accreditation Workshop October 4, 2016 Pasadena, CA

Adding Value Workshop

Adding Value: Campus Effectiveness Plan August 26, 2016 Indianapolis, IN

H. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

ACICS has given high priority to promoting and defending ACICS accreditation, and the quality of education delivered by member institutions. Schools play an important role acting as the eyes and ears of ACICS: that is, looking and listening for opportunities to promote ACICS accreditation, and to correct misinformation that may lead to negative perceptions and attitudes among policy makers, the post-secondary education community and the general public. As you identify those opportunities in communities where you operate, please let us know about them. Send an email to Mr. Quentin Dean at qdean@acics.org and let him know the source of the information and when it appeared.
4. Comment Survey – Proposed Criteria Revision

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/MTTF052016

Please respond by Friday, July 8, 2016.

If you have any questions about the memorandum to the field or the call for comment, please contact:
Mr. Ian Harazduk
Senior Manager, Policy and Compliance
Phone (202) 336-6795
iharazduk@acics.org