TO: ACICS-Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties

FROM: Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools

DATE: September 1, 2004

SUBJECT: Final Criteria, Proposed Criteria, and Other Information

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I. FINAL CRITERIA REVISIONS

At its August 2004 meeting, the Council reviewed specific areas of the ACICS Accreditation Criteria outlined in sections A and B below. The language contained in section A represents a clarification and was adopted without comment because the change to this section makes clear Council expectations. Section B represents the language that was reviewed by ACICS constituents and interested parties as a result of the April 2004 Council Meeting. This language appeared in the April 2004 Memo to the Field and has been adopted as final Criteria by the Council. The Council adopted the following changes as final criteria. The changes appearing in section A are effective immediately. The language contained in section B does not go into effect until January 1, 2005, and, as a result, institutions are reminded that policies or procedures with regard to these matters should not be implemented until that time.

Because of the recent changes to the Accreditation Criteria, the Council has updated the respective sections of the standards on the ACICS Web site. To obtain a current copy (effective date 9/1/04) of the Accreditation Criteria, please visit our Web site at www.acics.org and access the publications section of the site and connect to the Accreditation Criteria. All of the changes to the standards as amended by the final criteria revisions reported below are included in this most recent version of the standards contained on the ACICS web site.

A. Changes to Programs

The Council has recognized that many institutions have been making changes to programs and implementing these changes prior to submitting program revision notification forms. This criterion has been revised to emphasize the importance of notifying the Council of changes made to programs prior to any implementation by an institution. This revision also includes the Accreditation Alert alerting institutions that any change to a program without prior approval could subject a school to a show-cause directive for offering an unapproved program. Therefore, the Council adopted the following language as final criteria, effective immediately (new language is underlined; deleted language is struck):

Section 2-2-503. Changes to Programs.

Institutions must notify apply for approval from ACICS for any of the following changes of the following changes to a program prior to their implementation or the revised program will be considered an unapproved program:

(a) any changes of less than 25% in existing contact hours, credit awarded, curriculum content (courses offered), or program length of a currently approved program;

(b) a change in the name of an existing program;

(c) any change in the mode of educational delivery of courses that comprise less than a full program of study; or

(d) the conversion of an approved program of study to an entirely on-line delivery format.

All changes to programs as indicated in (a) through (c) above require the submission and approval of a Program Revision Notification Application Form and a change as noted in (d) above requires the submission and approval of a Distance Education Program
Application. The submission of an Annual Institutional Report or catalog identifying program changes does not constitute appropriate notification to the Council.

The Council also revised the “ACCREDITATION ALERT” as follows:

In its August 2003 meeting, the Council requested that Dr. Steven A. Eggland, Executive Director, alert all ACICS-accredited institutions, that in light of the fact that ACICS continues to discover institutions advertising and/or operating unapproved programs or significant program changes revisions that have not been approved, ACICS must do the following beginning November 1, 2003:

a. notify the U.S. Department of Education of the unapproved program,
b. require that an application be submitted immediately along with the required fee,
c. cite the institution in any evaluation report associated with the discovery of the unapproved program,
d. issue a show-cause directive in response to this discovery, and
e. assess a penalty fee of $500 for advertising and/or operating an unapproved program or program revisions that have not been approved.

B. Stability

The Commission reviewed the proposed changes to the criterion related to faculty stability as proposed at the April 2004 meeting and that was forwarded to the field for comment. The field comments did not warrant any negative commentary; therefore, the Council adopted the following language effective January 1, 2005 (new language is underlined; deleted language struck):

Section 3-3-304. Stability.

The proportion of faculty employed on a full-time basis shall be sufficient to ensure sound direction and continuity of development for the educational programs. The institution shall demonstrate through outcomes, length of service, reasonable retention of faculty, and other measures that the core faculty proportion of full-time faculty and the faculty’s average length of service to the institution allow ensures that the institution will meet the institution’s stated mission and objectives. The institution shall promote stability in the faculty through compensation, fringe benefits, professional growth opportunities, and other incentives.
II. PROPOSED CRITERIA REVISIONS – COMMENT REQUESTED

A. Contracts with Unaccredited Institutions or Entities

When conducting visits and teams not having access to files of faculty who are not directly employed by the institution, the Council wanted to address the concern of how to address the qualifications and evaluation of faculty when/if there is a contract with unaccredited parties to provide faculty. Currently, the criterion mandates that when establishing a contract with an unaccredited institution or entity, that an institution must supply the Council with information regarding the program curriculum in addition to student evaluations. The Council adopted the following language as proposed criteria (new language is underlined; deleted language struck):

Section 2-2-506. Contracts with Unaccredited Institutions or Entities. An institution may enter into a contract with an unaccredited institution or entity for the delivery of up to 25% of a program of study.

The institution must submit the contract and provide the following information to ACICS for review and approval prior to the initiation of the contract:

(a) a full catalog description of the program and the services to be provided by the contractor;
(b) a systematic plan for administrative and student evaluations of instructors provided by the contractor;
(c) official transcripts evidencing the qualifications of the faculty to teach the contracted courses;
(d) a description of the instructional facilities provided by the contractor; and
(d) plans for the completion of the program should the contractor fail to provide contracted services.

B. Integrity

The current criterion addresses the institutions evaluation of administrative staff; however, it is not always clear as to how to verify that these evaluations have been conducted in accordance with the institution’s policy. For clarification of the Council’s expectation, the Council adopted the following language as proposed criteria (new language is underlined; deleted language struck):

Section 3-1-202(b). Integrity.

The institution must maintain written evidence that faculty and staff members clearly understand their duties and responsibilities, know the person to whom they report, and understand the standards by which the success of their work is measured. A copy of the document describing these terms and conditions shall be given to the faculty and staff member and a copy maintained by the institution. The administration must maintain documentation of the evaluation of the faculty and staff.
C. Faculty Preparation

The Council discussed the need to verify faculty credentials and preparation. As a result of visits and a review of Criteria the Council decided there was a need to expand the criterion to include faculty who are graduates of unaccredited institutions or institutions not recognized by the governments in countries in which they operate. The Council adopted the following language as proposed criteria (new language is underlined; deleted language struck):

**Section 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. The institution must provide evidence that all faculty members are graduates of accredited institutions recognized by the United States Department of Education. Faculty who are graduates from institutions outside the United States must be graduates of institutions recognized by their government and their transcript must be translated into English and be evaluated by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) or a member of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) to determine the equivalency of the degree to degrees awarded by institutions in the United States.

D. Library, Instructional Resources, and Technology Staff

The Commission determined that the existing criterion required additional clarification as to the qualifications and availability of library personnel at institutions offering master degree programs; specifically, what constitutes a “professionally trained” individual and when the assigned individual should be available to assist students. The Council adopted the following language as proposed criteria (new language is underlined; deleted language struck):

**Section 3-6-701.**

A professionally trained librarian 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 librarian individual is one who holds a B.L.S. or an M.L.S. degree or the equivalent, or state certification to work as a librarian, where applicable. A librarian with special qualifications to aid students in research shall be available to students. The librarian professionally trained individual must participate in documented professional growth activities.

During scheduled library hours, there shall be a professionally trained individual on duty for sufficient hours, as published by the institution, to support the programs and to supervise the library and to assist students with library functions and research. This individual shall be competent both to use and to aid in the use of the library technologies and resources available in the library.

III. FOR INFORMATION ONLY
A. ACICS Web Site

The ACICS Web site, ACICS Online, continues to be updated based on Council activities. The site contains revised and detailed information about accreditation, publications, workshops and special events, applications, accredited institutions, and hot topics of current events and activities. You are encouraged to visit the Web site at www.acics.org.

B. Standards of Satisfactory Academic Progress and Appendix D

The Council reviewed the Standards of Satisfactory Progress and the frequent misinterpretation related to item 10 in Appendix D of the Accreditation Criteria. Item 10 reads: The institution has provisions for an evaluation at the end of the second academic year and at the end of each subsequent academic year(s) where the student must have a minimum cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 2.0 on a scale of 4.0, C, or its equivalent, or has academic standing consistent with the institution’s requirements for graduation. A student receiving federal financial aid who does not meet the CGPA standards at the end of the second year will no longer be eligible for financial aid, may not be placed on probation, and must be dismissed, unless the student wishes to continue without being eligible for federal financial aid. However, a student not meeting the CGPA standards at the end of the second year may remain as an enrolled student who is eligible for federal financial aid if there are documented mitigating circumstances (i.e., death in the family, sickness of the student, etc.).

It is believed that some institutions have interpreted the criteria to indicate that a student receiving federal financial aid who does not have a minimum 2.0 cumulative grade point average at the end of the second year will no longer be eligible for financial aid. However, the language “who does not meet the CGPA standards at the end of the second year” also refers to “or its equivalent, or has academic standing consistent with the institution’s requirements for graduation.” Therefore, an institution must require its students to have a 2.0 CGPA by graduation, but may allow a student’s CGPA to be lower earlier in her/his academic career if the policy permits a progression that is consistent with the institution’s requirements for graduation. The institution must provide documentation to evidence that a student’s academic progression is consistent with the institution’s requirements for graduation.

The Council also reviewed the interpretation of “academic year;” particularly, whether it is measured in terms of time or credits. The Council determined that an academic year can be defined by time or by credits, pointing out cases where students are enrolled on a part-time basis and for longer than the number of quarters or semesters in which a typical full-time student matriculates.
IV. COMMENT FORM – PROPOSED CRITERIA REVISIONS

ACICS ID Code: __________________________ Date: ________________________________

Name of Organization: __________________________________________________________

Address: _______________________________________________________________________

Please check (as appropriate):

Proposed Accreditation Criteria revisions:

A. Contracts with Unaccredited Institutions or Entities [ ]
B. Integrity [ ]
C. Faculty Preparation [ ]
D. Library, Instructional Resources, and Technology [ ]

[ ] Accept as Written [ ] Modify (explain below)

Prepared by: __________________________
Title: ________________________________________________________________________
Signature: _____________________________________________________________________

Please respond by June 30, 2004, to:

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