



# HANDBOOK OF ACCREDITATION

## 2015 Edition

# **Handbook of Accreditation: 2015 Edition**

*All previous editions are obsolete.*

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### **Note to the Reader:**

Sections II. Through V. of this Handbook contain conditions that must be met by member institutions and, in most cases, are stated in terms of “shall”, “will”, and “must”. These requirements are indicated in **bold**. Section VI. contains accreditation standards, objectives, and criteria. Within this section, each criterion listed under the ten standards is a requirement for acquiring and maintaining accreditation.

Changes made to this Handbook by the membership from the previous version are highlighted in blue.

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# HANDBOOK OF ACCREDITATION

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# SECTION I.

## The Role and Value of Accreditation

**A**ccreditation is a status granted to an educational institution or program that has been found to meet or exceed stated criteria of educational quality and student achievement. Accreditation emerged in the United States in the late 1800s as a voluntary peer review process that was initiated by educational institutions to assure quality in particular types of institutions (e.g., colleges, high schools, and subsequently other types of institutions). In contrast, accreditation is generally unknown in other countries of the world because they rely on government supervision and control of educational institutions. The record of accomplishment and outstanding success in the education of Americans can be traced in large part to the reluctance of the United States to impose governmental restrictions on institutions of postsecondary education, and to the success of the voluntary system of accreditation in promoting quality without inhibiting innovation. In the United States, accreditation is voluntarily sought by institutions and programs and is generally conferred by non-governmental agencies\*.

Accreditation has two fundamental purposes: (1) to assure the quality of the institution or program, and (2) to assist in the improvement of the institution or program. Accreditation applies to institutions or programs, and is distinguished from certification and licensure which apply to individuals.

Bodies which conduct programmatic or specialized accreditation are national in scope and focus attention on a program within a postsecondary institution preparing students for a profession or occupation.

Bodies which conduct institutional accreditation are national or regional in scope, and consider the characteristics of whole institutions. For this reason, an institutional accrediting body gives attention not only to the educational offerings of the institutions it accredits, but to such other institutional characteristics as student services, financial status, administrative structure, facilities, and equipment. The Council on Occupational Education is recognized as a national institutional accrediting agency.

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\* The sole exception to accreditation for degree-granting higher education institutions being conferred by “non-governmental agencies” is the New York State Board of Regents, which is the oldest accrediting body in the United States. In addition, there are several state agencies that are recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education as “state approval agencies” which confer “accreditation-like” status upon certain public, non-degree, postsecondary, career and technical education institutions.

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## **SECTION II.**

### **Development of COE Accreditation**

**A** fundamental tenet of a democratic society is that all individuals should have an opportunity to receive an education commensurate with their personal abilities and ambitions. For the vast majority of Americans, this means that the educational system must provide for (1) the acquisition of competencies that will lead to gainful employment in various occupational fields and (2) the continuing education necessary as technological advances place new demands on workers.

#### **A. History**

The Council on Occupational Education (hereinafter referred to as the Council or COE) came into existence initially in 1971 as the Commission on Occupational Education Institutions (COEI) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), a regional accrediting association that serves institutions in an eleven-state region. Operating as a unit of SACS, COEI provided accreditation services to postsecondary occupational education institutions located, with a few special exceptions, in the SACS region.

In preparation for assuming a national scope, the Council was incorporated as a non-profit education organization under laws of the State of Georgia in June 1994. At the end of June 1995, the Council became a fully operational agency when all assets (staff, physical resources, and financial resources) and the membership of COEI were transferred from SACS to the Council. The Commission composed of 19 members functions as the governing board and the decision-making body for all accreditation actions of the Council.

Throughout its history, the Council and its predecessor agency have been recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education as a reliable authority on the quality of education offered by the institutions it has accredited. Its current scope of recognition is as a national institutional accrediting agency for the accreditation of non-degree-granting and applied associate degree-granting postsecondary occupational education institutions.

#### **B. Core Values**

On November 8, 2008, the delegates at the Council's annual meeting adopted the core values listed below. The core values provide the foundation for the Council's mission, goals, and objectives.

1. Trustworthiness - denotes honesty, integrity, and reliability. The metaphorical equivalent to having a good credit score.
2. Transparency - implies openness, communication, and clear visibility. Describes an accreditation process or status that is not secretive or mystical.
3. Accountability - implies being answerable and liable. Describes accredited institutions' responsibility to students, regulatory agencies, and business and industry.
4. Commitment - requires dedication of institutions, volunteers, Commissioners and staff. Denotes allegiance, loyalty, and obligation.



5. Flexibility - the ability to adapt to both internal and external market changes while maintaining core values. Implies resilience and being open to modification and change.
6. Planning - a blueprint for expectations for the future. Addresses the expanded learning economy, student preparedness, and cultural understanding.
7. Collaboration - stakeholders working together toward a common goal of quality and integrity and making cooperative use of resources and best practices. Accomplished by institutions through networking and communities of practice.

### **C. Mission, Goals, and Objectives of the Council**

As articulated by its membership, the mission of the Council is “assuring quality and integrity in career and technical education.” The goals that represent the significant values and purposes to which the Council is dedicated are the following:

1. To offer public assurance that accredited educational institutions provide quality instruction in career and technical education that facilitates learning by students and meeting the needs of the labor market.
2. To provide guidance to institutions for the continual improvement of their educational offerings and related activities.
3. To promote high ethical and educational standards for career and technical education.
4. To enhance public understanding of career and technical education providers and of the value of the education and the credentials offered by these providers.
5. To ensure that the accreditation process validates the achievement of learning and program objectives.

These goals embrace a commitment to integrity and credibility that are intended to result in accreditation by the Council being viewed as a nationally-honored seal of excellence for occupational education institutions. Through its accreditation process, the Council seeks to stimulate the following: (1) validation of job skills; (2) certification of skills for local, state, regional, and national application; (3) portability of skill credentials; (4) placement of graduates in jobs related to preparation received; (5) facilitation of partnerships and consortia through which the United States can continue to compete successfully in the global economy; and (6) linkages among employers, policy makers, business and industry, labor, and other parties with vital interests in technical education.

The mission and goals of the Council provide the framework from which the objectives of COE as an accrediting agency are derived. These objectives are the following:

1. To foster excellence in the field of career and technical education by establishing standards and guidelines for evaluating institutional effectiveness.
2. To encourage institutions to view self-assessment and evaluation as a continuous quality improvement process.
3. To provide counsel and assistance to established and developing institutions, disseminating information between and among institutions that will stimulate improvement of educational programs and related activities.

## **4 - Council on Occupational Education**

4. To ensure that the standards, policies, and procedures developed are enforced and demonstrate recognition of and respect the stated mission of the institution, including religious missions, and ensure that the courses or programs of instruction, training, or study offered by the institution, including distance education courses or programs, are of sufficient quality to achieve their stated objective.
5. To ensure that the standards, policies, and procedures developed advance quality, creativity, cooperation, and performance.
6. To require, as an integral part of the accrediting process, an institutional self-assessment that is analytical and evaluative and an on-site review by a visiting team of peers.
7. To ensure that the processes of evaluation, policy-making, decision-making, and public participation accommodate the interests of the constituencies affected by the accrediting agency.
8. To publish and otherwise make publicly available the (a) names of candidate and accredited institutions, (b) names and affiliations of members of its policy and decision-making bodies, and (c) names of its principal administrative personnel.

#### **D. Council Membership**

Membership in the Council is achieved through a process whereby an institution elects on a voluntary basis to seek affiliation with the Council. The institution seeks initial affiliation with the Council as a candidate for accreditation, which is followed by an extensive self-assessment and, where necessary, self-improvement effort to demonstrate compliance with the Council's standards and criteria on educational quality for occupational education institutions. Membership in the Council is achieved and maintained by institutions through the granting of accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation by the Commission of the Council.

Accreditation is a status of recognition that is granted to an institution which complies with the eligibility requirements, standards, procedures, and obligations adopted by the member institutions of the Council. Accreditation does not certify that every facet of an institution is of equal quality, but it does indicate that no part of the institution is so weak that the educational effectiveness of the institution as a whole and its services to students will be undermined.

#### **E. Innovation**

The Commission welcomes and encourages perceptive and imaginative experimentation which aims at increasing the effectiveness of the institution. The Commission is cognizant that special requirements may pertain to some institutions; but these requirements should not be permitted to inhibit new approaches and emphases in educational programs. The Commission insists, however, that such innovative approaches be consistent with the institution's mission and goals, as well as with the mission, goals, and objectives of the Council. Where an innovative or experimental program may be at variance with one or more accreditation criteria of the Council, the institution **must** request Commission concurrence prior to implementation of the innovation. Such concurrence shall be based upon the institution's ability:

1. To identify the specific criteria that cannot be applied to the innovation, as well as its (their) related objectives.
2. To propose alternate ways to assess the effectiveness of the innovation in achieving the objectives which are related to the criteria that cannot be applied to the innovation.

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# SECTION III.

## Affiliation with COE

Institutions may affiliate with the Council by becoming a candidate for accreditation or achieving and maintaining accreditation. These two types of affiliation are described below.

### A. Candidate for Accreditation

#### 1. Meaning of Candidate Status

Candidate for Accreditation is a pre-accreditation status of an institution actively seeking accreditation by the Commission. During the period of candidacy, the institution is involved in the process of self-study and planning for a team visit. Once an institution has been approved as a candidate, the institution has status with the Council and **must** notify the Commission of any changes as specified below under Section V.B.1.f. Substantive and Other Changes. Candidate status does not imply accreditation of an institution. The institution **must not** use its candidate status in any way to imply, publicly or privately, that candidate status with the Council denotes approval of its programs or accreditation of the institution by the Commission.

#### 2. Eligibility Requirements

Each educational institution (school, center, unit, or other entity) applying for affiliation with the Council **must** initially demonstrate that it satisfies each of the requirements enumerated below. Taken together, these requirements define the kind of educational organization that the Council considers a part of its institutional universe and within the scope of the accrediting activities for which the Commission assumes responsibility.

The Council does not accredit institutions that offer instruction via correspondence education. (See Section VII for definition.)

To be eligible to be considered by the Commission for candidacy for accreditation (pre-accreditation status), an institution **must**:

- a. Offer associate degree and/or non-degree postsecondary instruction exclusively in career and technical education **at all campuses**.
- b. Have produced a graduate from the longest program offered by the institution.
- c. Utilize a campus-based instructional delivery system with at least 25 percent of the institution's total FTE being derived from enrollments in traditional programs.
- d. Have an institutional enrollment of no fewer than 10 FTE.
- e. Be legally authorized to operate within the jurisdiction in which it is located for a minimum of one year.
- f. Have been in possession of current and applicable licensure/authorization for a minimum of one year.
- g. Have been in continuous operation and providing instruction at the main campus and under the same ownership for a minimum of one year.
- h. Have the on-site administrator or other full-time employee at the main campus attend a Candidate Academy within 6 months prior to submitting an application for candidate status.
- i. Demonstrate that it has the administrative capabilities (including, but not limited to, financial) to support the educational programs offered.

- j. Demonstrate that it meets the financial stability requirements for the most recent completed fiscal year as stated in Standard 7 - Financial Resources.
- k. Be in compliance with all Federal requirements applicable to accreditation.
- l. Agree to comply with all requirements of the Council.

### 3. Award of Candidate Status

An institution meeting the above requirements **shall** host a candidate visiting team by the Commission (cost to be paid by the institution). The visiting team will submit a written report to the Executive Director within 30 days of the date that the candidate team visit was concluded. The official report will be transmitted to the institution. The institution **must** submit a response to all recommendations for receipt in the Council office within 30 days of the date that the team report was transmitted from the Council office. If the team report and the institutional response report, if required, show that there is a reasonable expectation of accreditation being achieved, the Commission may grant candidate status to the institution. To become a candidate for accreditation, an institution **must** be approved by the Commission.

Institutions located in states that have no state oversight agency for operational and/or program approval may be required to supply additional information to the Commission before candidacy is granted.

Candidate institutions demonstrating progress toward becoming accredited may remain in candidate status for a period not to exceed three years. The only substantive changes that can be approved while in candidate status are changes in existing educational programs originally approved by the Commission. Candidate institutions **must** complete a self-study and host a visiting team no earlier than six months after becoming a candidate but no later than 24 months after becoming a candidate. Institutions that have voluntarily withdrawn from candidacy may file a new application for candidacy for accreditation one year after the effective date of withdrawal.

### 4. Annual Renewal of Candidate Status

Continuation of candidate status is determined annually by Commission approval of institutional annual reports indicating that candidate institutions are making progress toward meeting the Council's standards and criteria. Non-public institutions must also submit financial information on an annual basis as described in Section IV., D.2.

## B. Accreditation

### 1. Eligibility Requirements

After an institution has been accepted as a candidate for accreditation and becomes an active participant in the program of the Council, the earliest that the institution can host a visiting team for the purpose of initial accreditation is six months after the date candidate status is approved. To be eligible for accreditation, an institution **must**:

- a. Continue to meet the eligibility requirements to be a candidate for accreditation.
- b. Demonstrate that the majority of its programs meet all minimum required benchmarks for completion, placement, and licensure exam pass rates for the most recent 12-month period possible.
- c. Occupy its own physical facilities and not be co-located with another institution.

- d. Have students continuously in attendance for a minimum of two years except for regularly scheduled breaks, holidays, and vacation periods.
- e. For initial accreditation, non-public institutions must submit audited financial statements for the two most recent fiscal years at least 60 days prior to hosting an initial accreditation visiting team. The first of those two years **may** be the audited financial statement submitted with the institution's candidacy application and the second audited financial statement must represent activity while the institution is in candidate status. Both audited financial statements must demonstrate compliance with the Commission's financial stability requirements as stated in Standard 7 - Financial Resources.
- f. Host an initial accreditation team visit no earlier than six months after candidate status is granted. (The institution must have a valid candidate academy/self-study workshop certificate on file at the time of the team visit. See next requirement.)
- g. Have the on-site administrator or other full-time employee at the main campus attend a Candidate Academy within six to 18 months prior to hosting the accreditation visiting team.
- h. Have undergone a self-study based on the mission of the institution and the standards and criteria approved by the Council and have filed the required documents with the Commission.
- i. Have undergone a visiting team review.
- j. Have written a letter requesting accreditation and submitted an institutional response, if required, to the team report by the chief administrative officer of the institution. (The response **must** be received in the Council office within 30 days of the date that the letter requesting a response was transmitted from the Council office.)
- k. Be accepted by a majority vote of the Commission as meeting the standards and criteria of the Council.

Institutions being considered for initial accreditation must obtain accreditation status within 12 months after the first review by the Commission.

## 2. Annual Renewal of Accreditation

Accreditation is for a period of one year from July 1 through the following June 30. Continued accreditation is determined annually by Commission approval of institutional annual reports that verify that accredited institutions are complying with the Council's standards, criteria, and conditions. Non-public institutions must also submit financial information on an annual basis as described in Section IV., D.2.

## 3. Reaffirmation of Accreditation

Reaffirmation of accreditation **must** occur from two to six years after initial accreditation or any subsequent reaffirmation decision. The time interval for reaffirmation is determined by the Commission as a part of its accreditation or reaffirmation decision. Institutions **must** meet the same requirements for reaffirmation as required for initial accreditation (see Section III.B.1 above). At the discretion of the Commission, the institution may be required to undergo reaffirmation earlier than the previously determined year.

Institutions undergoing reaffirmation of accreditation must send the chief administrative officer or other full-time employee at the main campus of the institution to a Commission-sponsored Self-Study Workshop within six to 18 months prior to hosting the reaffirmation visiting team. The only substantive changes that may be considered for approval prior to hosting a reaffirmation visiting team are

adding new programs and revising existing programs. Applications for these types of changes must be received in the Commission office no later than 90 days prior to hosting the accreditation team visit. Applications received within 90 days prior to hosting an accreditation team visit will not be processed until after the team visit.

Institutions being considered for reaffirmation of accreditation must obtain reaffirmation within 12 months after the first deferral of action by the Commission. If reaffirmation has not been granted within that twelve-month period immediately following the first deferral of action, the institution shall be dropped from accreditation.

An institution that has been dropped from accreditation may file an appeal of the Commission's decision in accordance with the Commission's policies on appealing Commission decisions (see section E. Commission Action, 3. Appealable Actions, and the Policies and Rules of the Commission, Appeal Process).

# SECTION IV.

## The Accreditation Process

**T**he components of the accreditation process described below represent the primary means through which the objectives of COE as an accrediting agency are addressed. The process incorporates a comprehensive institutional self-study, peer evaluation, and decision of the Commission based on the Council-approved standards and criteria for accreditation.

### **A. The Self-Study**

The primary purpose of the self-study is to examine an institution's qualifications for accreditation through a comprehensive self-evaluation conducted by institutional personnel. The self-study process also serves as a strategic planning vehicle for the improvement of all institutional services. The Council provides guidelines for the self-study in a manual that each institution is expected to use in planning, conducting, and reporting its self-study.

A consultant may be used to assist in the self-study, but clear indications **must** exist that the faculty and staff were primarily responsible for preparing, revising, and editing any documents required in the accreditation process. Within seven days after employing a consultant for the purpose of assisting in the accreditation process, an institution **must** submit a copy of the consultant's resume to the Council. A consultant may provide assistance to the institution by conducting an on-site workshop for one or more of the following purposes:

1. Acquainting the administration and staff with the self-study process.
2. Providing an explanation of the content of the accreditation standards and criteria.
3. Lending assistance in organizing the self-study effort to maximize staff participation.
4. Identifying the types of exhibits or other documentation needed to support or complement the self-study report.

### **B. The Site Visit**

The primary responsibility of the visiting team is to determine whether or not the institution is in compliance with the standards and criteria required for accreditation by the Council. The visiting team assesses the quality of an institution in light of its stated mission using the standards and criteria of the Council as the basis for the assessment. Information sources utilized by team members in conducting the on-site evaluation include the institutional self-study report, documentation available at the institution, interviews of individuals associated with the institution, and observation of conditions and practices.

The Commission is responsible for establishing all requirements related to visiting teams. Those requirements are presented in a separate document containing the guidelines for accreditation visiting teams.



### C. Institutional Response Report

In those instances where a visiting team reports a failure of an institution to comply with one or more standards, criteria, and/or conditions for accreditation (i.e., when the team makes one or more recommendations), the institution is required to take appropriate corrective action immediately. The institution **must** also submit a written report that addresses each violation by describing and documenting the action taken by the institution to comply with the requirement. This report **must** be received within 30 days of the date that the team report was transmitted from the Council office. Specific instructions for preparing and submitting the institutional response report are in the guidelines for accreditation visiting teams adopted by the Commission.

### D. Annual Documentation Required for Renewal of Candidacy or Accreditation

#### 1. Institutional Annual Reports

Continued candidate status or accreditation is determined annually by Commission approval of institutional annual reports. Candidate institutions **must** show progress toward meeting standards and criteria; and accredited institutions **must** show that they are complying with standards, criteria, and conditions for continued accreditation.

The institution **must** provide all of the applicable information requested in the annual report. Reporting substantive changes in the annual report does not constitute written notification to the Council.

Failure to submit an annual report or additional information regarding the annual report by the due date established by the Commission **shall** be grounds for an institution to lose its candidate or accredited status.

#### 2. Audited Financial Statements from Non-Public Institutions

Non-public institutions in candidate or accredited status **must** submit a copy of their audited financial statements, including notes, prepared by an independent certified public accountant for their most recent fiscal year and completed COE financial forms furnished by the Commission. Financial statements **shall** adhere to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and shall be prepared in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS). An income statement **must** be provided for each main campus and branch. (See definition of *audited financial statements* in Section VII. Definitions, Standard Seven.) Any institution which is a wholly-owned subsidiary **must** submit a statement certifying that the parent corporation will be legally responsible for student teach-out, student tuition (including books and supplies), and refund liability for its wholly-owned subsidiary company. This statement **must** be from the parent corporation's board of directors, **must** have the seal affixed, and **must** be submitted on an annual basis. Annual financial information is due in the COE office no later than six months following the date of the end of the institution's fiscal year.

### E. Commission Action

#### 1. Possible Commission Decisions

The Commission has a variety of options for action when making decisions regarding the award, maintenance, or termination of status with the Council for candidate and accredited institutions. The options available are the following:

- a. Award of candidacy
- b. Denial of candidate status
- c. Annual renewal of candidacy
- d. Drop from candidacy
- e. Award of initial accreditation
- f. Denial of initial accreditation
- g. Annual renewal of accreditation
- h. Reaffirmation of accreditation
- i. Denial of reaffirmation of accreditation
- j. Determination of statuses
  - (1) Notification of apparent deficiency
  - (2) Heightened monitoring
  - (3) Warning
  - (4) Probation
  - (5) Show cause order
- k. Deferral of decision
- l. Drop from accreditation

The review of the status of any institution may be conducted periodically as specified in the procedures of the Commission. A focused review may be prompted by a notice of substantive change; by notification of a high default rate or a large increase in the default rate; by a complaint; by notification of possible unethical conduct; or by a possible violation of standards, criteria, or condition adopted by the Council. The Commission may take the same actions in both periodic and focused reviews regarding the institution's status.

With respect to institutions that are currently holding Candidate for Accreditation status, the Commission uses the self-study, visiting team report, and institutional response, if required, to choose one of three alternative actions. The Commission may continue the institution in candidate status, approve the institution's initial accreditation, or drop the institution from candidate status.

With respect to institutions that are currently accredited, the Commission may continue the institution's accredited status, may assign any of five statuses, or may drop the institution from accreditation.

Institutions will be notified within 30 days of adverse Commission decisions which affect their candidate or accredited status by letter sent by certified mail or other signature-required delivery service addressed to the chief administrative officer. The letter includes: the decision, a statement of the substance of the basis for the decision, and the deadline for an institutional response or appeal which may be permitted.

In all cases where the number of days for taking action or making a response is specified, "days" means calendar days unless otherwise indicated. In all situations specifying the number of days within which the institution is required to make a response, the deadline is computed from the date the notice prompting such a reply was transmitted by the Commission.

The Commission may, to provide time for supplementary activity, choose not to take action but may defer its decision. Such a deferral causes an institution's status to remain unchanged unless the Commission, in announcing its deferral action, specifies otherwise.

If in the judgment of the Commission the conditions warrant, the Commission may impose one of the five statuses on an institution. The status may be withdrawn by the Commission upon clarification or remediation, but is not subject to appeal.

The five statuses are defined as follows:

### **Monitoring Statuses**

- a. **Notification of Apparent Deficiency**—Notification of Apparent Deficiency is a status which signifies that the institution is apparently deficient with respect to a requirement of the Commission. The institution has 30 days to respond. This status may be removed at any time by the Commission upon clarification or remediation of the apparent deficiency.
- b. **Heightened Monitoring**—Heightened Monitoring is a status that signifies that the Commission has determined a need to more closely monitor an institution. This status may be extended or removed at any time by the Commission. The institution must satisfy the monitoring requirements of the Commission in order to be removed from Heightened Monitoring status. The types and the requirements for reporting will be established by the Commission and may include but are not limited to reports on financial stability, administrative capability, and program outcomes.

### **Violation Statuses**

- a. **Warning**—Warning is a status imposed on an institution for a period of time from 30 days up to one year by the Commission if it determines that an institution is possibly in violation of one or more of the standards, criteria, and/or conditions of the Council. A focused review team, which may include a Commission representative, may be required to visit the institution.
- b. **Probation**—This status is imposed when, in the judgment of the Commission, there is a violation of standards, criteria, and/or conditions of the Council that must be corrected or the institution will suffer loss of candidate status or accreditation. Probation may be imposed for a period of up to one year.
- c. **Show Cause Order**—This status is assigned by the Commission giving an institution 30 days to show cause why the institution should not be dropped because of one or more serious violations of the standards, criteria, and/or conditions of the Council.

Initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation will not be granted during the time that a violation status is imposed.

When an institution continues to be in violation of standards, criteria, and/or conditions after being placed on warning, probation, or issued a show cause order, or where circumstances are deemed sufficiently compelling, the Commission has the responsibility to drop the institution from candidate or accredited status after 12 months following the imposition of a violation status. The Commission shall notify the chief administrative officer of the institution as to the nature of the action and the procedure to be followed if an appeal is filed. The decision of the Commission is final, subject to the appeal procedure, and will be made known to the public. No institutional response is required; however, an institution may choose to follow the appeals procedure described in Section IV.E.3. below.

An institution that does not choose to appeal may comment in writing regarding the Commission's action provided the response complies with Commission procedures and is received by the Commission within 20 days of the notice of the Commission's action. Any response received by the Commission within 20 days shall be included in the Commission's final report to the appropriate federal, state, and special agencies.

The Commission need not follow any specific sequence or order in the assignment of statuses. Assignment to any one status is not required before an institution may be assigned to another status. Ordinarily, Warning, Probation, or Show Cause Order status will be assigned to an institution to provide an opportunity for remediation and correction before a decision is made by the Commission to drop the institution from accreditation or candidate status. However, where the Commission deems the circumstances sufficiently extreme to warrant a prompt response, it may drop an institution without the prior assignment of any status.

During the resolution of a warning, probation, or show cause status, or during the processing of an appeal, no plan or proposal for a substantive change will be accepted by the Commission.

## 2. Appearance before the Commission

Since all Commission decisions are based upon written documents, there are normally two instances where officials of an institution might appear before the Commission:

- a. Upon request by the Commission for the purpose of answering questions concerning an accreditation matter.
- b. Upon approval of the Executive Director when the institution is making a special request of the Commission.

All requests to appear before the Commission **must** be submitted in writing to the Executive Director and be received at least 30 days prior to the scheduled meeting. Such a request **must** describe in detail why the appearance is necessary. Documentation supporting the request **must** be submitted with the letter.

The Executive Director may approve the request at which time the institution will be informed of the date, time, and place of the appearance. In the event the Executive Director defers action on a request to appear, the matter is taken before the Executive Committee for review and appropriate action.

## 3. Appealable Actions

Institutions that have filed a complete application for candidate status, institutions that are accredited by the Commission, and institutions that are seeking reinstatement of accreditation following a change of ownership or control may appeal the following actions of the Commission:

- a. Denial of candidate status.
- b. Removal of candidate status.
- c. Decision to deny accreditation (membership).
- d. Decision to discontinue accreditation (membership).
- e. Decision to deny reinstatement of accreditation following a change of ownership or control.

An appeal **shall** be based on one or more of the following grounds:

- a. Errors and/or omissions in applying the standards, criteria, and/or conditions of the Council were made by the evaluation team(s) and/or the Commission.
- b. Demonstrable bias or prejudice was displayed by one or more members of the Commission, which significantly affected the decision.

- c. The documentation before the Commission at the time of the negative decision was materially in error.
- d. The decision of the Commission was contrary to the substantial weight of the documentation.

If an institution is aggrieved by any one of the five actions listed above, the chief administrative officer of the institution, with the approval of the governing board of the institution, must give notice of intent to appeal such action to be received in the Commission office within 20 days of the date of the notice of the Commission's action. The notice **shall** be submitted to the Commission's Executive Director in the form of a letter sent by certified mail or other signature-required delivery service. The letter **must** state all of the following:

- a. A request that an appeal board be convened.
- b. The specific grounds for the request with a statement explaining the reason(s) for each ground.
- c. Documentation (such as a copy of a resolution) showing the approval of such appeal action taken by the institution's governing board.
- d. A statement in the letter indicating the willingness of the institution to abide by the appeals conditions and procedures.

The request **shall** be accompanied by a cashier's check in the amount of \$27,500 to cover the necessary cost of the appeal. The \$27,500 consists of a \$2,500 notice-of-intent-to-appeal fee (non-refundable) and a \$25,000 deposit to cover the costs of the appeal board proceedings. Any funds left over from the deposit will be refunded to the institution. Should there be an outstanding balance after the deposit is applied, the institution **must** pay the outstanding balance.

Upon proper notice of intention to appeal, the prior status of the institution, if any, shall be restored and will remain the same pending the disposition of the appeal.

The Commission is responsible for defining the procedures to be used in the appeal process so as to ensure that the process is fair and equitable for all affected parties.

#### 4. Resolution of Disagreements

##### a. Interpretation of Membership Agreements

As a condition of receiving any status with the Council, each institution agrees that all agreements created by the Commission's granting such status **shall** be deemed to have been entered into in Fulton County, Georgia, and **shall** be interpreted in accordance with the laws of the State of Georgia. Further, each institution agrees that jurisdiction and venue for any action which might arise from any membership agreement between the institution and the Council, regardless of which party shall initiate the action, **shall** be exclusively in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Georgia or the state courts of Fulton County, Georgia, whichever of these courts shall have proper subject matter jurisdiction.

##### b. Litigation Bond

An institution that files suit against the Council **shall** be required to post a bond of \$100,000 per location. Should the court rule in favor of the Council, the institution **shall** pay all court costs, Council attorney fees, and all other costs incurred by the Council in its defense.

# SECTION V.

## Obligations of Affiliation

**A**ffiliation of an institution with the Council creates certain obligations that must be met by the institution. Those obligations are grouped and described below under two headings: Administrative and Substantive.

### A. Administrative Obligations

#### 1. Accreditation Liaison Officer

The accreditation liaison officer **must** be a permanent staff member at the main campus of the institution. This is the person with whom the Commission staff will discuss accreditation matters concerning the institution when the chief administrative officer is not available.

#### 2. Official Communications

Only written communication from the Commission will be considered official. All official communications from the Commission to candidate or accredited institutions shall be transmitted to the main campus chief administrative officer or, if applicable, to the institution's accreditation liaison officer. All official communications from candidate or accredited institutions **must** be from the main campus chief administrative officer or, if applicable, from the institution's accreditation liaison officer and in written form. All written communications and supporting documentation created by the institution submitted to the Commission must be in English. (Written communications may be transmitted to the Commission via e-mail or forms provided on the Council web site.)

#### 3. Requested Report or Documentation

Decisions are made by the Commission based on written evidence. Any report or documentation requested by the Commission **must** arrive in the Council office by the date due. All reports and supporting documentation created by the institution submitted to the Commission must be in English. Failure to submit any report or documentation requested by the due date **shall** be grounds for an institution to lose its candidate or accredited status.

#### 4. Confidentiality of Materials

The accreditation of occupational education institutions by the Commission is an activity requiring a high degree of confidentiality. The findings, recommendations, suggestions, and other information relating to an institution are, by implied agreement, exchanged within an atmosphere of trust, confidentiality, and professional integrity. The Commission makes such information available to the participating institution and to other agencies, accrediting bodies, institutions, or individuals only upon the approval of the participating institution, pursuant to these conditions; as required by law; or as required by federal regulations applicable to accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education.

The participating institution may disseminate any of the information it receives from the Commission; however, experience has indicated such dissemination should occur only after the completion of the process leading to an action, certainly not during the process. A number of activities and cautions are employed by the Commission to assure integrity and institution/Commission confidentiality.



## 5. Maintenance of Accreditation File

An institution that is accredited by the Commission **must** maintain a permanent accreditation file. The file **must** contain the following in chronological order:

- a. Copy of all substantive correspondence between the institution and the Commission (COE/COEI) to include, but not limited to, all letters related to accreditation, reaffirmation of accreditation, substantive changes, and official actions of the Commission.
- b. Copy of the last Self-Study.
- c. Copy of the last accreditation visiting team report and all other team reports since the last accreditation visiting team.
- d. Copy of the institution's response report for the last accreditation team and all other response reports to visiting teams since the last accreditation visiting team.
- e. Copy of all substantive change applications since the last accreditation visiting team.
- f. Copy of all annual reports since the last accreditation visiting team.

Failure to maintain the accreditation file as requested will call into question the administrative capability of the institution.

## 6. Publication of Status with the Commission

An institution **must** be accurate in reporting its status with the Commission to the public. In catalogs, brochures, advertisements, web sites, and news releases, any reference made to its status with the Commission **must** be accurate and must include the name and contact information of the Commission as follows: Council on Occupational Education, 7840 Roswell Road, Building 300, Suite 325, Atlanta, GA 30350, Telephone: 770-396-3898 / FAX: 770-396-3790, [www.council.org](http://www.council.org).

Any institution that is found to misrepresent its status with the Commission **shall** issue a news release in the appropriate newspaper and/or other news media to correct the misrepresentation. Documentation that the correction has been made through the news media **must** be submitted to the Commission office.

Each candidate or accredited institution when referring to its status with the Council on Occupational Education **must** use the appropriate choice of the two statements that follow:

(Name of Institution) is a Candidate for Accreditation by the Commission of the Council on Occupational Education.

(Name of Institution) is accredited by the Commission of the Council on Occupational Education.



Accredited institutions may use the accreditation seal of the Council on Occupational Education.

The accreditation seal **must** be used with discretion. It is not to be used for advertising purposes, but rather to identify institutions as being members of a nationally-recognized accrediting agency. The seal may be used only on letterheads, catalogs, certificates, diplomas, transcripts, and web sites. If the seal is used on an institution's web site, it must be linked to the Council's web site ([www.council.org](http://www.council.org)).

The Commission may publish, as it deems appropriate, through its Executive Director, information contained in official notification letters from the Commission to the institution which relate to the following:

- a. Granting candidate status or accreditation.
- b. Candidate status extension or accreditation reaffirmation.
- c. Candidate status termination or accreditation withdrawal.
- d. Notification by the Commission to an institution that there is or may be a violation of a standard or condition resulting in placement on a status or being dropped from candidate or accredited status.
- e. Denial of application for candidate status, accreditation, or reinstatement of accreditation following a change of ownership or control.
- f. Withdrawal from candidate or accredited status.

The Commission shall make public correction of any misleading or incorrect information made public concerning the candidacy or accredited status of an institution, the contents of visiting team reports, or accrediting actions. Misinformation published in the official publications of the Commission shall be corrected in the next issue of the relevant publication. Any misinformation submitted by letter to an institution relative to its status as a candidate for accreditation; its status as to meeting the standards, criteria, and/or conditions of the Council; or the actions of the Commission toward the institution shall be corrected by letter. If the letter containing the misinformation was copied to any federal agency, state agency, another nationally recognized accrediting agency, or anyone else, the letter of correction shall be copied to every agency or person to whom the letter of misinformation was copied.

Likewise, should the Commission discover misleading or incorrect information published by institutions in candidate or accredited status concerning the contents of visiting team reports, accrediting actions of the Commission, or the candidacy or accredited status of the institution, it shall make public a correction of the misinformation. Additionally, the Commission shall notify all applicable federal agencies, state agencies, and other nationally recognized accrediting agencies of the misinformation.

If an institution's operation, recruiting practices, or other actions become a matter of public or Commission concern, the Commission may announce, through its Executive Director, any action the Commission has taken and the basis for that action, including all pertinent information in the possession of the Commission.

#### 7. Voluntary Withdrawal of Status by the Institution

A candidate for accreditation or an accredited institution can withdraw its candidate or accredited status at any time by written notification to the Commission. When an institution voluntarily withdraws its candidate status or accreditation, the Commission shall notify the U.S. Department of Education, appropriate state licensing agencies, and other appropriate agencies of the institution's voluntary withdrawal within 30 days. Should the institution be under a violation status, the notice would indicate that voluntary withdrawal occurred while in that status.



Failure of a candidate or accredited institution to pay its dues, fees, penalties, evaluation costs, or other financial obligation to the Council within 90 days of the due date **will** be taken by the Commission as conclusive evidence that the institution has voluntarily withdrawn its candidate or accredited status. As indicated above, the notice of the institution's withdrawal for non-payment of its financial obligations shall be sent to the appropriate agencies within 30 days.

Institutions that have voluntarily withdrawn from candidate or accreditation status may file a new application for candidacy for accreditation one year after the effective date of withdrawal.

## 8. Payment of Dues and Fees

### a. Dues for Candidates for Accreditation

**Dues**—Institutions that have applied to and have been accepted by the Commission as Candidates for Accreditation **must** pay annual dues. Dues are the same for candidates and accredited institutions. (See schedule in Section b. below.)

**Initial Payment**—When an institution makes application to the Commission, a check for the amount of the annual dues and application fees **must** be attached. The check is made payable to the "Council on Occupational Education." The initial payment is applied to the fiscal year in which the institution is accepted as a candidate for accreditation with the exception that institutions accepted during the last 60 days of any fiscal year will have their initial dues payment credited to the next fiscal year.

**Annual Payment**—The annual dues for candidate institutions are payable upon receipt of an invoice from the Council on Occupational Education. Institutions will be invoiced prior to the first day of July for annual dues that apply to the fiscal year July 1 - June 30.

**Refund Policy**—An institution that makes application to the Commission and is not accepted as a candidate for accreditation is refunded the initial dues less the actual cost of the candidate visit to the institution and any other expenses incurred. An institution that withdraws its application for candidate for accreditation prior to being accepted will be refunded the dues less the cost of the candidate visit and any other expenses incurred. After an institution has been accepted as a candidate for accreditation, no refund of dues will be made. Application fees are non-refundable.

### b. Dues for Candidate and Accredited Institutions

**Annual Dues**—Each candidate or accredited institution **shall** pay annual dues based on enrollment (Full-Time Equivalent or FTE) according to the following schedule.

ANNUAL DUES	
FTE	Public and Non-Public Institutions
**From 10 to 137	\$ 2,640
138 - 276	2,880
277 - 415	3,090
416 - 553	3,360
554 - 692	3,690
693 - 1,039	4,070
1,040 - 1,386	4,430
1,387 - 2,079	5,030
2,080 - 2,773	5,500
2,774 - 4,160	6,090
4,161 - 6,934	6,950
6,935 - 13,869	7,890
More Than 13,869	8,830

\* One FTE is equal to 900 student contact clock hours, 45 quarter credit hours, or 30 semester credit hours.

\*\*Institutions with less than 10 FTE are not eligible for candidate status with the Council on Occupational Education (see Eligibility Requirements).

**Branch Campus Dues**—In addition to the annual dues based on total enrollment (FTE for each branch campus added to the FTE of the main campus), all candidate and accredited non-military institutions **shall** pay \$500 annual dues for each branch campus. All candidate and accredited military institutions shall pay \$250 annual dues for each branch campus. (Exemption: For institutions in candidate or accredited status with the Commission on June 30, 1985, branches in operation on that date are exempt from the \$500 branch campus dues.)

**Annual Payment**—Payment of annual dues for candidate and accredited institutions **must** be made upon receipt of an invoice from the Council on Occupational Education. Invoices are mailed prior to July 1 of each year. Annual dues are for the fiscal year July 1 - June 30 and are due July 1.

**Refund Policy**—No refund of annual dues is made to a candidate or accredited institution.

c. Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)

Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) is a unit of measurement used by the Commission to define the amount of instruction that equates to one full-time student during one academic year. The Commission defines an FTE as 900 student contact clock hours, 45 quarter credit hours, or 30 semester credit hours of instruction. (See the *Policies and Rules of the Commission* for a discussion of the rationale for this definition.)

d. Cost of Institutional Evaluations

Institutions **must** reimburse the Council for all costs of institutional team visits (i.e., team visits for candidacy, initial accreditation, reaffirmation of accreditation, focused review, and substantive changes). Reimbursable items include the cost of transportation, lodging, and meals for visiting team members and staff members and/or Commission representatives. Specific procedures regarding deposits, reimbursement, and travel regulations are presented in the *Policies and Rules of the Commission*.

e. Fees

Fees shall be assessed according to the schedule below. All fees shall be non-refundable. Other fees apply to substantive changes (see chart on page 26).

Application for Candidate for Accreditation .....	\$ 1,500
Warning Status.....	500
Probation Status .....	750
Show Cause Order .....	1,000
Focused Review Visit.....	750
Notice of Intent to Appeal.....	5,000
Reprocessing any Insufficient Application, Report, or Response .....	250
Initial Accreditation .....	1,000
Renewal of Accreditation .....	1,000
Substantive Change Team Visit Deposit.....	3,000
Non-Public Institution Candidate Team Visit Deposit.....	3,000
Non-Public Institution Accreditation Team Visit Deposit.....	5,000
Third-Party Reviews (see <i>Policies and Rules</i> for audit reviews).....	1,500

f. Penalties

Failure to pay dues, fees, penalties, or any charges due within 30 days of due date .....	10% of the amount due
Failure to pay fees, penalties, or any charges within 60 days of due date .....	20% of the amount due
Failure to provide annual report or other report by due date .....	2,000
Failure to attend a workshop required by policy or action of the Commission within the specified time period .....	2,000
Failure to disclose a substantive change to the Commission .....	1,500
Failure to host a substantive change site visit within 180 days.....	1,500

g. Deposits

The Council requires deposits for certain substantive changes, accreditation team visits, and appeal board hearings. Unused funds on deposit for those activities will be applied toward any outstanding debt an institution owes the Council.

## B. Substantive Obligations

1. Institution's Relationship with the Council
  - a. Institutional Ethics and Integrity

The Commission **must** be assured that any institution which seeks candidate status, accreditation, reaffirmation of accreditation, or reinstatement of accreditation following a change of ownership or control conducts its affairs with acceptable standards of honesty and integrity. When the Commission has any cause to believe that a candidate or accredited institution has acted in an unethical or untruthful manner, it will evaluate the matter and take appropriate action as described in the policies governing statuses (Section IV.E.1. Possible Commission Decisions).

If an institution misrepresents itself in documents filed with the Commission for purposes of candidate status, accreditation, reaffirmation, or reinstatement of accreditation following a change of ownership or control, the Commission will immediately sever its relationship with the institution and may publish the decision.

Institutions **must** meet all lawful obligations, including those obligations arising from participation in federal student financial aid programs. Failure of an institution to conform to legal obligations imposed by governments and their agencies **shall** be cause for the Commission to remove the institution's candidate or accredited status. The Commission may publish an action taken for such cause.

The Commission may bar an individual from being an owner, an administrator, or a governing-board member of a COE-accredited institution if the individual has been debarred by a government agency or another accrediting agency or was an owner, an administrator, or a governing-board member of a COE-affiliated institution that was denied accreditation, was dropped from accreditation, or closed without providing a teach-out or refunds to currently enrolled students. The decision of the Commission to bar one or more individuals affiliated with an institution will be made at the time when action is taken against the institution and will be communicated to the individual concurrently with the notice of action taken against the institution. The debarment shall contain such conditions and length of time as the Commission may determine. A person who is barred will have the right to appeal the decision of the Commission. The Commission is responsible for establishing procedures used in appealing debarment to ensure fairness to all affected parties.

- b. Maintaining Eligibility Requirements

Each educational institution applying for affiliation with the Council **must** initially demonstrate that it satisfies each of the eligibility requirements to become a Candidate for Accreditation as stated above in Section III.A.2., Candidate for Accreditation: Eligibility Requirements. Further, each educational institution that applies for accreditation **must** demonstrate that it satisfies each of the eligibility requirements for initial accreditation as stated above in Section III.B.1., Accreditation: Eligibility Requirements. An institution **must** continue to meet the requirements for both candidacy and accreditation in order to maintain its accredited status with the Council.

c. Reports

(1) Annual Report

Continued candidate or accredited status is determined annually by Commission approval of annual reports. Candidate institutions **must** show progress toward meeting standards and criteria; and accredited institutions **must** show that they are complying with standards, criteria, and conditions adopted by the Council.

(2) Focused Institutional Report

The Commission may request a focused report from an institution if, in the judgment of the Commission, substantive changes, high cohort default rate, institution's operation becoming a matter of public concern, or conditions justify a re-evaluation of the school's status. Topics or areas of concern to be addressed in the report will be delineated when the report is requested.

d. Comprehensive Review for Continuation of Accreditation

Reaffirmation **must** occur from two to six years after initial accreditation or any subsequent reaffirmation decision. The time interval for reaffirmation is determined by the Commission as a part of its accreditation or reaffirmation decision. Institutions **must** meet the same requirements for reaffirmation as required for initial accreditation (see Section III.B.1., Accreditation: Eligibility Requirements). At the discretion of the Commission, the institution may be required to undergo reaffirmation earlier than the previously determined year.

Institutions seeking reaffirmation **must** complete a self-study and host a visiting team. Reaffirmation decisions are made by the Commission following a complete review of the self-study report, the visiting team report, and the response report (if required) resulting from the institution's completing a self-study and hosting a visiting team.

An institution that has not been reaffirmed within 12 months following the initial review by the Commission **shall** be dropped from accreditation.

e. Focused Team Evaluation

Focused review team visits are conducted when certain substantive change applications are received or when, in the judgment of the Commission, a re-evaluation of the institution's compliance with the Commission's standards, criteria, conditions, policies, and/or procedures is necessary (cost to be borne by the institution). Accreditation by the Commission is an expression of confidence that an institution is effectively achieving its stated mission. Circumstances, including actions of an institution which become a matter of public or Commission concern, may require a focused review by the Commission. (See Focused Review Teams in the latest edition of the *Policies and Rules of the Commission*.)

The Commission may require the institution to host a focused team visit or may require the institution to complete a new self-study and host a visiting team earlier than previously scheduled if, in the judgment of the Commission, substantive change(s), high cohort default rate, institution's operation becoming a matter of public concern, or conditions justify a re-evaluation of the institution's status. The team may evaluate any area of the institution's compliance with the standards, criteria, and conditions of accreditation. The institution shall be provided a copy of the team's report and **shall** submit

its response to the team's recommendations for receipt in the Council office within 30 days from the date that the report is transmitted from the Council office.

Disruption of an institution by forces beyond its control, although not excused, does not result in summary loss of accreditation. Prolonged inability, for whatever reasons, to conduct its programs **will** require a review of the institution and a reconsideration of its candidate or accredited status. When the alleged circumstances appear to be a violation of standards, criteria, or conditions adopted by the Council, the Executive Director reviews the matter with the Executive Committee and may conduct an inquiry and/or arrange for a focused review site visit.

f. Substantive and Other Changes

(1) Planned and Unplanned Substantive Changes

A substantive change is one which significantly alters an institution's scope, programs, location, standing with another nationally recognized accrediting agency or state or federal agency, financial stability, ownership, or control. A substantive change may be planned or unplanned. A planned substantive change within a candidate or accredited institution **must** be approved by the Commission before the change takes place.

Institutions planning a substantive change **must** submit an application for approval (if required) no later than 90 days prior to the change being implemented. Failure to submit applications in a timely manner may delay approval. Approval for substantive changes must be granted by the Commission before the changes can be implemented. After applications for approval are received, the Commission provides consulting services to the institution to ensure that an orderly transition, consistent with the procedures of the Commission, is accomplished. The institution does not provide a consulting honorarium to the Commission representative or team members but reimburses all expenses.

The only substantive change that may be approved for candidates for accreditation are changes in existing educational programs. Institutions planning to host a team visit for the purpose of reaffirmation of accreditation may not apply for approval of any substantive change except for the addition of new educational programs and changes in existing educational programs within six months of hosting the team visit. *However, no program changes will be approved within 60 days of the scheduled dates of accreditation visiting teams.* Exceptions can be made to this policy when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency.

Failure to implement approved substantive changes within 180 days of the effective date of approval will result in the revocation of the initial approval.

The Commission **must** be notified within five working days after an unplanned substantive change occurs. If applicable, a copy of the letter and/or document informing the institution of the unplanned substantive change **must** accompany the notification to the Commission. Within thirty days of notifying the Commission of an unplanned substantive change, the institution must submit to the Commission all applications required by the Commission for such a change. The Executive Director will then refer the application(s) to the Commission for action at its next meeting. The Commission reserves the right to require a preliminary visit to the institution prior to granting initial approval.

Substantive changes are reviewed by the staff, and approval may be given by the Executive Director unless otherwise indicated. The Commission has reserved the authority to approve certain specified substantive changes. The approval by the Executive Director is subject to approval by the Commission.

A substantive change may require a visit by representatives of the Commission. When a visit is required, the team will confirm the accuracy of information provided by the institution in its substantive change application and may evaluate the institution for compliance with any of the standards, criteria, and conditions adopted by the Council. Final approval for planned substantive changes requiring site visits must be granted before additional applications for changes requiring site visits will be accepted.

Failure to notify the Commission of a substantive change may result in the imposition of a penalty or cause loss of candidate or accredited status.

Initial approval for substantive changes will be revoked should the institution fail to host any required site visit within 180 days from the effective date of initial approval. The institution will then be placed on the next Commission agenda for consideration of adverse action and penalties may apply.

An application for a planned substantive change **shall not** be accepted until any unplanned substantive change has been resolved.

Applications for planned substantive changes requiring a site visit will not be accepted between the dates of an institution's accreditation team visit and the date the Commission grants or reaffirms accreditation.

Substantive change applications **will not** be processed, whether new or pending, before the resolution of violation statuses (warning, probation, or show cause), during the pending of an appeal of a decision of the Commission, or when an institution is past due on an invoice for money owed to COE.

Institutions that make or propose substantive changes will be required to complete a new comprehensive evaluation of its compliance with Commission conditions, standards, criteria and policies when those changes meet one of the following guidelines:

1. Multiple changes made or proposed within a 12-month period include BOTH:
  - a. A Change in Governance/Control - The institution has made or proposes to make a change to governance/control that requires a site visit as described in the substantive change chart; AND,
  - b. Changes in Institutional, Additional Non-Main Campus Sites, and/or Programmatic Changes - The institution has made or proposes to make any TWO substantive changes that require a site visit that fall under one or more of these headings in the substantive change chart.
2. Change(s) made or proposed compromise its ability to fulfill its responsibility to deliver promised instruction and support services to the students it serves

One or more substantive changes made or proposed negatively impact the institution's ability to maintain adequate and appropriate educational programs, physical facilities for students and staff, student services and activities, learning resources, adequate numbers of administrative staff, faculty, and support staff



3. Change(s) made or proposed compromise its ability to sustain financial stability requirements of the Commission

One or more change(s) made or proposed negatively impact the institution's ability to maintain compliance with the Commission's financial stability requirements as detailed in Standard Seven – Financial Resources

The Commission will notify the institution when this requirement is imposed and will require the institution to complete a new institutional self-study and host a site visit to confirm its compliance with accreditation conditions, standards, criteria, and policies. The site visit must be conducted within 18 months from the date of the Commission's notice to the institution in order for the institution to continue its status with the Commission.



Planned substantive changes include, but are not limited to, the following:

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE	Documentation Required		Commission Review/ Approval Required	*Site Visit Required	Fee Required
	Letter of Notification	Application			
<b>GOVERNANCE/CONTROL</b>					
Change of Governance	•				
Reinstatement of Accreditation after a Change of Ownership or Control		•	•	•	\$3,000
Change of Stock, not Control	•				
Change of 50% or More in the Voting Membership of a Non-Profit Institution's Board		•	•	•	\$3,000
Execution of an Agreement (which effectively nullifies the power of the governing board of an institution to control the institution)	•				
Change in Institutional Mission	•		•		
Change in Legal Status	•		•		
<b>INSTITUTIONAL</b>					
Change of a Branch to a Main Campus		•	•	•	\$3,000
Main Campus/Branch or Extension Campus Relationship Change		•	•	•	\$3,000 Per Change
Significant Reduction in Funding Level	•				
Merger of Two or More Institutions (See Section VII for definition.)		•	•	•	\$3,000
Change of Name		•			\$500
Change of Location (A change of location is defined as a physical relocation of an existing main, branch, or extension campus)		•	•	•	\$1,000
Permanent or Temporary Closing of Main Campus, Branch, or Extension		•			\$500 Per Branch or Extension
Withdrawal from Accreditation	•				
Monitoring Institutional Growth (See Monitoring)	•				
Contractual Agreements for Consulting or Recruiting (Third-party review fee may apply)	•				
<b>ADDITIONAL NON-MAIN CAMPUS SITES</b>					
Branch or Extension (Only one application for the establishment of a branch or extension shall be accepted at a time. An application for a second branch or extension will not be accepted until after the on-site visit of the first application and final approval by the Commission.)		•	•	•	\$1,500

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE	Documentation Required		Commission Review/ Approval Required	*Site Visit Required	Fee Required
	Letter of Notification	Application			
<b>ADDITIONAL NON-MAIN CAMPUS SITES (CONTINUED)</b>					
Instructional Service Center		•	•	•	\$1,500
Extended Classroom		•	•	•	\$1,500
Closure of an Instructional Service Center or Extended Classroom	•				\$500
<b>PROGRAMMATIC</b>					
★ New Non-Degree Program <b>within</b> Current Scope (Non-Public Institutions)		•			\$500
★ Change of Scope – Initial Associate Degree Program		•	•	•	\$1,000
★ New Associate Degree Program (Subsequent Application)		•			\$500
Change of Scope – New Occupational Area		•	•	•	\$500
★ Program Relocation/Replication (Non-Public Institutions)		•			\$250
★○ Change in Existing Program - Increase/ Decrease in Length of Less Than 25% - (Only one such change per program can be processed within a 12-month period.)	•				
★○ Change in Existing Program - Increase in Length of 25% or More		•	•		\$250
★○ Change in Existing Program - Decrease in Length of 25% or More		•			\$250
Institutional Distance Education Delivery (See Section VII for definition.)		•	•	•	\$1,000
Contractual Agreements for Instruction (with entities that are/are not Title IV,HEA certified)		•	•		\$1,500
Clock Hour/Credit Hour Conversion		•	•		\$250 Per Program
Deleting an Educational Program (Programs with no students currently enrolled)	•				
Teach Out of a Program (Programs offered by member institutions with students currently enrolled)		•			
Teach Out Plans/Agreements (Teach outs involving two or more institutions)		•	•		

\*Required site visits must be conducted within 180 days of the effective date of initial approval by the Commission.

★ *The only substantive changes that will be considered for approval for accredited institutions within six months prior to hosting a visiting team for reaffirmation of accreditation. However, no program changes will be approved within 60 days of the scheduled dates of accreditation visiting teams.*

○ *The only substantive changes that will be considered for approval while an institution is in candidate status. However, no program changes will be approved within 60 days of the scheduled dates of accreditation visiting teams.*

Unplanned substantive changes include but are not limited to the following:

- (a) Loss of approval or licensure from a state approval agency.
- (b) Loss of candidate or accredited status, or being placed on public probation by another nationally recognized accrediting agency, either institutional or programmatic, while a candidate or accredited with the Commission.
- (c) Loss of good standing with a regulatory or governing body.
- (d) Institution or owner filed for bankruptcy or gone into receivership.
- (e) Findings of a regulatory/oversight agency (e.g. U.S. Department of Education, state approval agency, or nationally recognized accrediting agency) which may affect operations and/or institutional stability.
- (f) The permanent or temporary closing of the main campus or an additional site (branch, extension, instructional service center, extended classroom, or other facility).
- (g) Substantial disruption of classes such as faculty walk out, facility eviction, etc.
- (h) Unplanned change of location.
- (i) Teaching out students of another institution.

An unplanned substantive change shall be reviewed promptly to determine if the candidate or accredited status should be withdrawn.

(2) Other Changes

- (a) All institutions having status with the Commission should inform the Commission within five working days of any change which would affect communication between the Commission and the institution. Such changes shall include but are not limited to:
  - (i) Change in mailing address.
  - (ii) Change in on-site chief administrative officer.
  - (iii) Change in e-mail address of on-site chief administrative officer.
- (b) If a partial change of ownership or control (i.e., less than 50%) occurs for a candidate or accredited institution, the Commission must be informed within the time periods prescribed below:
  - (i) If less than 50% of the assets of a for-profit corporation are transferred to another person, notification of the transfer must be received in the Commission office at least 30 calendar days before the date that the transfer occurs.
  - (ii) If fewer than 50% of the members of the governing board or 50% of the controlling parties of a not-for-profit organization or organization other than a corporation change, notification of the change must be received in the Commission office within 14 calendar days after the date that the change occurs.

(3) Change to Degree-Granting Status

If a candidate or accredited institution begins preliminary discussions that may result in the institution initiating an Associate Degree program, it **must** follow the procedures in order as listed below:

- (a) Submit a signed letter of intent to the Commission at least 180 days before implementing the degree plan.
- (b) Submit a business plan at least 90 days prior to implementing the degree program that includes the following documentation:
  - (i) Authorization for the degree.
  - (ii) Needs assessment and implementation schedule.
  - (iii) Detailed course outlines and syllabi.
  - (iv) Proposed publication of new program(s) including catalogs, brochures, etc.
  - (v) Faculty credentials.
  - (vi) Budgetary information.
  - (vii) Facilities requirement(s).

Upon receipt of all of the above documentation and a check for the application fee, the Executive Director shall review the application and may request additional documentation. The Executive Director will then refer the application to the Commission for action at its next meeting. The Commission reserves the right to require a preliminary visit to the institution prior to granting initial approval of the associate degree program.

Within 180 days after the degree program is granted initial approval, an on-site visit will be conducted. The visiting team (which may include a Commission representative) will consider the adequacy of the program. The visiting team will submit a written report to the Executive Director within 30 days after completing the site visit. A copy of the team report will be transmitted to the institution. The institution must submit a response to all recommendations to the Executive Director for receipt within 30 days of the date that the report is transmitted to the institution. The institution's response report, if required, must provide documentation that deficiencies or violations of standards, criteria, and/or conditions of accreditation have been corrected.

Cost of the on-site evaluation will be borne by the institution. The Executive Director will determine the amount of the deposit for the team site visit that must be conducted.

The Commission shall review the application, the team report, and institutional response, if required, and will make a final decision on the associate degree program at its next meeting.

Two years after the program is implemented, the institution may be required to host an accreditation visiting team.

An institution may apply for subsequent associate degree programs only after final approval of the initial associate degree program has been granted by the Commission.

#### g. Non-Main Campus Sites

A candidate or accredited institution may offer programs at multiple sites to achieve its mission. If an institution conducts educational activities at one or more sites in addition to its main campus, it **must** comply with the definitions and requirements below in designating the type for each site. Procedures for obtaining approval of additional sites are specified by the Commission and presented in the *Policies and Rules of the Commission*.

All non-main campus sites approved by the Commission must offer instruction on a continuous basis.

If any site fails to have students in continuous attendance, except for regularly scheduled holidays and breaks, the institution must notify the Commission of the status of the site (i.e., closure, suspension, or other).

A branch of a main campus is a subordinate site, not a main campus, operating under the supervision of a full-time, on-site, local administrator who reports to the chief administrative officer at the main campus. The branch **must** meet all educational requirements and comply with the operational policies of the main campus. The branch shall not issue a separate catalog, but may supplement the main campus catalog. (Institutions accredited first by another nationally recognized accrediting agency that requires a separate branch catalog may issue such as long as the institution is accredited by the other accrediting agency.) Duplicate records on personnel, financial matters, student attendance, and student educational progress and outcomes data **must** be kept at the main campus.

Branch or extension ownership **must** be by the same owner(s) (same entity, proprietorship or partnership, or the same corporation) as the main campus. All branches and/or extensions of accredited institutions **must** be in compliance with the standards, criteria, and conditions adopted by the Council or jeopardize the accreditation of the main campus. The main campus is held responsible for student teach-out and tuition refund for all campuses. All branches or extensions should bear the same name as the main campus, but names may be expanded to identify clearly different locations or specific program offerings of the branch or extension with approval from the Commission. The complete name of the main campus and the branch or extension **must** be identified in all publications and advertisements when using a campus name. No institution may offer instruction at different locations without approval from the Commission. Any branch or extension **must** maintain the educational integrity of the institution and **must not** endanger its compliance with the standards, criteria, and conditions adopted by the Council. Branches may offer different programs than the main campus, providing all programs are described in the catalog of the main campus.

An extension of a main campus is a subordinate site, not a main campus, and is located within a fifty-mile radius of the main campus. Direct supervision and control are provided from the main campus, and the staff is limited primarily to instructors and support staff. All programs of an extension **must** meet the educational requirements of the main campus and comply with its operational policies. All extension programs **must** be included in the main campus catalog. Personnel and student records **must** be kept at the main campus.

An extended classroom of a main campus is a site owned, leased, or rented to provide classroom or laboratory instruction as a part of the total program of the main or branch campus. It must be located within two miles of a main or branch campus. The extended classroom **must** be supervised by the chief administrative officer of the main or branch campus. If the extended classroom offers at least 50% of a program, the institution **must** submit an application to receive approval for the site as a new branch, extension, or instructional service center.

An instructional service center is a temporary or permanent site that serves employers and the public for the delivery of programs or portions of programs to meet a critical or sustained need. The complete name of the main campus must be identified in all publications and advertisements when referring to an instructional service center. An instructional service center **must** be under the direct control of the main campus and located within the geographic service area designated by the governing board of the institution. Appropriate student services **must** be available on-site, and the full range of services **will** be made accessible to participating students at the main campus. All instructional service center offerings **must** be approved by the Commission. A site visit may be required prior to final approval. Typically, students may participate in Title IV student financial aid programs. Duplicate records on personnel, financial matters, student attendance, and student educational

progress **must** be kept at the main campus. As distinguished from a branch or extension, an instructional service center **must** be a joint venture between the institution and an employer or another educational agency.

Additional space is that which is acquired for instructional or administrative purposes. Additional space acquired must be within one quarter of a mile from a main campus or branch campus and may require a site visit. The institution must notify the Commission when it begins the process of acquiring additional space.

**NOTE:** Institutions with the capability of maintaining and accessing records electronically at any of the above types of sites may keep all records of personnel, student attendance, financial matters, and educational progress at the main campus.

h. Change of a Branch to a Main Campus

A branch **must** exist for two years with all of the services of a main campus and **must** operate in its accredited status with the Commission for one year (of the two years) before being eligible to apply to be a main campus.

Upon receipt of a satisfactorily completed application and a check for the application fee, the Executive Director shall review the application and may request additional documentation, grant initial approval of the application, or refer the application to the Commission for action at its next meeting. The Commission reserves the right to require a preliminary visit to the main campus and the branch prior to granting initial approval for the change of a branch to a main campus.

Within 18 months after the initial approval of the change of a branch to a main campus, the institution **must** complete a self-study and host a visiting team. The visiting team will submit a written report to the Executive Director within 30 days after completing the site visit. A copy of the team report will be transmitted to the institution. The institution **must** submit a response to all recommendations to the Executive Director for receipt within 30 days of the date that the report is transmitted to the institution.

Cost of the on-site evaluation will be borne by the institution. The Executive Director will determine the amount of the deposit for the team site visit that must be conducted.

The Commission shall review the application, self-study, team report, and response report, if required, and will make a decision on final approval of the change of the branch to a main campus. The change of a branch to a main campus **must** be approved by the Commission before a change of ownership application for the new main campus is submitted.

i. Change of Ownership or Control

A change of ownership or control occurs when the events described below occur.

**For-Profit Corporation**—A change of ownership is the transfer of at least 50% of the assets to another person. A change of ownership or constructive ownership of stock occurs at the time a person obtains or accumulates at least 50% of the total combined voting power of all classes of stock entitled to vote or at least 50% of the total value of shares of all classes of stock. Person includes an individual, trust, estate, partnership, association, company, or corporation. If the owner of an institution dies or retires, and the owner's interest is sold or transferred to either a family member or



another current owner of the corporation who has been active in the management of the institution for the past two years prior to the aforementioned action, it will not be treated as a change of ownership. A change from for-profit to not-for-profit constitutes a change of ownership. A change from a sole proprietorship to a corporation constitutes a change of ownership.

**Not-For-Profit Corporation and Organizations Other Than Corporations**—A change of control occurs when 50% or more of the members of the governing board change or 50% or more of the controlling parties change. The membership of record with the Council for the board or controlling parties is the membership at the time candidacy is granted or reinstatement of accreditation is granted following a change of control. A change from not-for-profit to for-profit constitutes a change of control.

Accreditation does not transfer with a change of ownership or control of an institution. Reaffirmation of accreditation cannot be granted until a change of ownership or control has received final approval by the Commission. The Commission shall prescribe the procedures to be used for the reinstatement of accreditation following a change of ownership or control. Those procedures shall be published in the *Policies and Rules of the Commission*.

j. Change of Location

A change of location is defined as a physical relocation of an existing main, branch, or extension campus within the institution's service area.

An institution desiring to relocate a main, branch, or extension campus **must** submit an application to the Commission for initial approval at least 90 days prior to the change of location unless the move is an unplanned relocation (see Section V.B.1.f., Substantive and Other Changes).

The Commission shall prescribe the procedures for obtaining approval of a change of location and publish them in the *Policies and Rules of the Commission*.

k. Closure

Closing an institution or educational program before enrolled students complete means a decision to discontinue educational activities permanently. Such a decision requires planning and serious consideration of alternatives. Before the decision is reached, the administration **must** consider such alternatives as arranging a teach-out agreement with another institution, merging with another institution, forming a consortium, or participating in inter-institutional sharing and cooperation.

The Commission expects the institution's governing board or chief administrator to use the same planning and responsible leadership during the process of closing an educational program or an institution as with any other planned or unplanned substantive change. For this reason, a decision requires specific plans for providing, in appropriate ways, for the students, faculty, administrative staff, and support staff.

COE requires an institution that is closing an educational program or institution (including those utilizing distance education) to submit for COE approval a teach-out plan upon the occurrence of any of the following events:

- (1) The U.S. Department of Education notifies COE of an action against the institution to limit, terminate, or suspend Title IV eligibility;

- (2) The Commission acts to withdraw, terminate, or suspend the accreditation of an institution or program;
- (3) The institution notifies COE that the institution intends to cease operations at the main campus or any other campus or **closes an individual program before enrolled students complete**; or,
- (4) A state licensing or authorizing agency notifies COE that an institution's license or legal authorization to provide an educational program has been or will be revoked.

Institutions **must** comply with all state and federal rules, regulations, and guidelines regarding the closing of an educational program or an institution.

#### I. Teach-Out

##### (1) General

The Council's policy for approval of the teaching out of students requires that, at a minimum, all institutions submit an application and a copy of their plan to conduct the teach-out. [See (2) Teach Out Plan.]

In cases where member institutions partner with other entities to conduct a teach-out of students, a copy of the agreement between the entities involved must also be submitted for review and approval. [See (3) Teach Out Agreement.]

This policy applies to candidate and accredited institutions and all programs affected by a teach out regardless of the mode of delivery.

##### (2) Teach Out Plan

A plan for the teaching out of students from a program or institution must be submitted upon the occurrence of any of the following events:

- (a) The Secretary of Education notifies the Council that the Secretary has initiated an emergency action against an institution, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(G) of the HEA, or an action to limit, suspend, or terminate an institution participating in any title IV, HEA program, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(F) of the HEA, and that a teach-out plan is required.
- (b) A State licensing or authorizing agency notifies the Council that an institution's license or legal authorization to provide an educational program has been or will be revoked.
- (c) The Council acts to withdraw, terminate, or suspend the accreditation or candidacy of the institution.
- (d) The institution notifies the Council that it intends to cease operations entirely or close a location that provides one hundred percent of at least one program, or closes a program **before enrolled students complete**.

A teach-out plan must be consistent with applicable standards and regulations. The plan must provide for the equitable treatment of students by insuring that:



- (a) Students are provided all of the instruction promised by the closed educational program or institution prior to its closure but not provided to the students because of the closure.
- (b) Institutions that are closing must work with regulatory agencies to assure that students are placed.
- (c) Students are notified of additional charges, if any, for completing the course or program at the teach-out institution.

If the Commission approves the teach-out plan that includes a program that is accredited by another accrediting agency, the Commission will notify that agency of the plan's approval.

### (3) Teach Out Agreement with Another Institution

A teach-out agreement, which is entered into by a COE candidate or accredited institution or at the request of the Commission, must be consistent with applicable standards and regulations. The agreement must provide for the equitable treatment of students by insuring that:

- (a) The agreement is between institutions that are accredited or in candidate status with an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education;
- (b) The teach-out institution is geographically proximate to the closed program/institution;
- (c) The teach-out institution can remain stable, carry out its mission, and meet all obligations to existing students;
- (d) The teach-out institution can demonstrate compatibility of its program structure and scheduling to that of the closed program/institution; and,
- (e) The teach-out institution will provide students with information about additional charges, if any.

### (4) Closed Institutions

If an institution the Commission accredits or has within candidate status closes without a teach-out plan or agreement, the Commission will work with the U.S. Department of Education and the appropriate State agency, to the extent feasible, to assist students in finding reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional charges.

### (5) Teach-Out of Another School

An institution **must** notify and receive Commission approval prior to teaching out students of another institution. The teach-out of programs that are not currently offered by the institution may require a focused team visit in the event that the teach-out programs require special safety precautions and procedures.

#### m. Special Requirements for Monitoring Institutional Growth

##### Full-Time Equivalent for Public and Non-Public Institutions

COE monitors increases in total Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) of candidate and accredited institutions by requiring reports from institutions when triggered increases occur. An institution must submit a formal notice to the Commission if the institution has an overall increase in FTE of 25 percent or

more of an established baseline. The baseline for each twelve-month period is the FTE calculation reported in the most recent annual report. When an increase of 25 percent or more is achieved, a formal notice must be submitted to the Commission within 30 days. This notice must include rationale for the increase as well as specific data on enrollment in all programs and for all campuses that experienced significant growth involved in the increase of total institutional FTE. Continued reporting of enrollment data by program will be required until the submission of the next institutional annual report.

### Gross Revenue for Non-Public Institutions

Additionally, COE considers increases in gross revenue an indicator of institutional growth. Non-public institutions that experience increases in gross revenue of 100% or more from the previous year must submit a detailed explanation of the increase to the Commission along with a financial report (which may be internally generated) that demonstrates the increase. The explanation and financial report must be submitted to the Commission within 30 days after the experienced increase. An institution that fails to notify the Commission on a timely basis when required due to an increase in gross revenue is subject to fees and penalties per the Handbook of Accreditation.

## 2. Institution's Relationships with Other Constituencies

### a. Recruitment

All recruitment activities used by an institution **must** be truthful and avoid any false or misleading impressions of the institution, its programs and services, or employment.

The following practices in student recruitment **must not** be utilized:

- (1) Guaranteeing employment.
- (2) Misrepresenting job placement, employment opportunities, or potential salaries for completers.
- (3) Misrepresenting program costs.
- (4) Misrepresenting abilities required to complete intended programs.
- (5) Misrepresenting recruiting personnel as career counselors.
- (6) Misrepresenting transfer of credit to another institution.
- (7) Misrepresenting its accreditation status.

### b. Advertising

All media used by an institution **must** be truthful and presented with dignity to avoid any false or misleading impressions of the institution, its programs and services, or employment.

- (1) All advertising seeking prospective students that is placed by the institution, its representatives, or third parties **must** appear under "instruction," "education," "training," or a similarly titled classification and **shall not** be published under any "help wanted" or "employment" classification.
- (2) All advertisements placed by the institution or its representatives through direct mail, radio, television, internet, or directories seeking prospective students **must** clearly indicate that education is being offered, and **shall not**, either by actual statement, commission, or intimation, imply that prospective employees are being sought.

- (3) Printed bulletins or other promotional information **must** be specific with respect to the prerequisites for admission to the institution's programs, the curricula, the content of courses, and the graduation requirements.
- (4) The institution **must** be emphasized more than accreditation in all promotional and institutional materials.
- (5) A record or copy of all promotional and advertising material **must** be kept on file from one accreditation team visit until the next.
- (6) Media comments which imply that the institution guarantees placement in employment is prohibited.
- (7) An accredited institution assumes the responsibility for all representations made by its recruiting personnel or other employees in procuring students on its behalf.
- (8) Media criticism toward other institutions is prohibited.
- (9) The institution must accurately portray its physical facilities and educational programs in all web sites, bulletins, and other publications, whether printed or online.

c. Contractual Agreements

(1) Contracts for Recruiting and Consulting Services

An accredited institution that enters into a contract for recruiting or consulting services with any agency, corporation, institution, or individual must submit a copy of the contract and an official notification form to the Executive Director.

Each contract must include a conditional statement stipulating that the contract is not binding in the event that activities involved in the contract prevent the member school from complying with the standards, criteria, and conditions adopted by the Council.

The Commission will review all submissions. The Commission may determine that a third-party review of applications and contracts be performed. In this case, a fee to cover the cost of the third-party review will apply.

(2) Contracts for Instruction

The Commission classifies contracts for instruction with external entities as substantive changes. External entities are defined as agencies, corporations, institutions, or individuals. These external entities may or may not be certified to participate in Title IV, HEA programs.

Accredited institutions that are eligible to participate in Title IV Financial Aid programs shall not contract more than 25 percent of the instruction of one or more of its programs with an external entity, whether or not that entity is certified to participate in Title IV, HEA programs.

An accredited institution that negotiates a contract for instruction with any external entity must submit an application and a copy of the contract to the Executive Director before entering into such an agreement.

All parties to such contracts must meet the standards, criteria, and conditions adopted by the Council. Any off-campus instruction must maintain documentation that such activities are in compliance.

Each contract must include a conditional statement stipulating that the contract is not binding in the event that any circumstances with the contractor prevent the member school from complying with the standards, criteria, and conditions adopted by the Council.

An educational program to be taught under a contract must have state approval even though it is not intended to be taught at the main or other campuses.

The Executive Director will seek a third-party review for all applications and contracts submitted. (A fee to cover the cost of the third-party review will apply.) The Commission reserves the right to conduct an on-site visit to the institution or other sites that may be involved in the contract prior to granting approval. The Commission will then review the application, the contract, third-party comments, and site visit report (if required) and will make a decision whether or not to approve or deny the submission or to request additional information.

#### d. Complaints

The Commission reviews all written, signed complaints (that are addressed to the Council on Occupational Education, 7840 Roswell Road, Building 300, Suite 325, Atlanta, GA 30350, and include complainant's mailing address) that allege non-compliant activities and practices of applicant, candidate, or accredited institutions. This review involves obtaining from the complainant a certification that all available institutional remedies have been exhausted or a statement documenting reasons why these remedies have not been sought. The complaint is then sent to the institution. A written institutional response that includes supporting documentation **must** be submitted to the Commission within 30 days of the date of the Commission's letter transmitting the complaint to the institution. In instances where the nature of the complaint requires immediate action, the Executive Director with concurrence from the chair of the Commission may take emergency measures to determine the facts and present them either to the Executive Committee or to the Commission. This may include but is not limited to a site visit. Based on the response of the institution or the findings presented by the Executive Director, the Commission will then review the complaint and act appropriately. The Commission may review any complaint (written or oral) that alleges a safety or health problem at an institution.

The Commission determines its own methods of review and action. It will not intervene on behalf of individuals in cases of disciplinary action or dismissal, or act as a court of appeals in such matters as admission, graduation, fees, financial aid, and similar points of issue. The Commission will also transmit to the appropriate agency validated complaints and/or findings when these are potential violations of law, statute, or regulation and so inform the institution.

Legal action taken against candidate and accredited institutions is not considered a violation of any condition, standard, criterion, or procedure of the Commission. However, specific charges made against institutions can be considered a complaint for practical purposes and necessitate further inquiry and/or action by the Commission. (See Policies and Rules of the Commission, Complaint Procedures of the Commission, I. Issues of Serious Public Concern.)

All candidate and accredited institutions must notify the Commission within five working days of being served and must provide a copy of the lawsuit against the institution with the notice. The notice and attachment(s) must be transmitted to the Council office either in hard copy or via e-mail to the Executive Director at [puckettg@council.org](mailto:puckettg@council.org).

The Commission may, as a result of the report of an evaluation team, an interim team, or special deliberations, withhold or withdraw candidate or accredited status. The institution has the right to appeal the decision.

### 3. Institutional Relationships to Federal Requirements Applicable to Accreditation

Since the Commission is an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education, certain requirements of Federal Regulations must be observed with respect to institutions that can be considered for candidacy or accreditation. There are also Federal Regulations that are imposed on the Commission if candidacy or accreditation is granted to institutions under certain conditions. An institution that seeks candidacy or accreditation with the Commission **must** conform or allow the Commission to conform to these requirements.

#### a. Requirements Applicable to Applicants for Candidacy or Accreditation

- (1) The institution is not the subject of an interim action by a state or federal agency potentially leading to the suspension, revocation, or termination of the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education.
- (2) The institution has not had its state license suspended, revoked, or terminated, even if the required due process procedures have not been completed.
- (3) The institution has not been denied candidacy or accreditation by a nationally-recognized accrediting agency.
- (4) The institution has not voluntarily withdrawn its candidacy or accreditation while not in good standing from a nationally recognized accrediting agency.
- (5) The institution has not had its candidacy or accreditation withdrawn or been placed on public probation by a nationally recognized accrediting agency.
- (6) The institution is not the subject of an interim action by another accrediting agency potentially leading to the suspension, revocation, or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation.
- (7) The institution has not been notified of the loss of any agency's accreditation even if the due process procedures have not been completed.
- (8) If the institution is presently accredited by another nationally recognized accrediting agency, it describes itself in identical terms to each agency with regard to identity (i.e., main campus, branch campus, branch campus to main campus relationship), mission, governance, programs, degrees, diplomas, certificates, personnel, finances, and constituents.
- (9) If the institution is seeking dual accreditation, the reasons for wanting dual accreditation have been submitted to each accrediting agency and to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, and the institution **must** also designate which agency's accreditation is to be utilized in determining the institution's eligibility for program participation under the Higher Education Act.
- (10) If the institution is required to convert clock hours to credit hour equivalencies for the purpose of determining federal financial aid eligibility, it complies with federal requirements for review of course prep hours.
- (11) In order to provide the public an opportunity to comment on an institution's qualifications for status with the Commission, an institution being considered for candidate for accreditation, initial accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation **must** give notice in the appropriate newspaper(s) and/or media services no more than sixty (60) days prior to hosting the candidate or accreditation team visit. This notice for comments **must** be made prior to hosting

a visiting team for candidacy or accreditation. The notice **must** state that the institution is applying to become a candidate for accreditation or for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation with the Commission of the Council on Occupational Education. In addition, it **must** state that persons wishing to make comments should either write to the Executive Director of the Commission, Council on Occupational Education, 7840 Roswell Road, Building 300, Suite 325, Atlanta, Georgia 30350, or submit their comments through the Council's web site ([www.council.org](http://www.council.org)). Persons making comments **must** provide their names and mailing addresses.

- (12) As part of the documentation required for accreditation team visits, institutions preparing to host an accreditation visiting team must submit an evaluation of standards form from one of its occupational advisory committees. This evaluation form requests that advisory committees provide their input regarding the adequacy and relevancy of Commission accreditation standards. The form is available on the Council's web site ([www.council.org](http://www.council.org)) and must be submitted prior to hosting an accreditation visiting team.

b. Requirements Applicable to the Commission

- (1) If the Commission grants candidacy or accreditation to an institution that has been the subject of an adverse action by a recognized institutional accrediting agency or state agency, it will provide the U.S. Secretary of Education a thorough explanation, consistent with Commission accreditation standards, stating why the adverse action does not preclude the Commission from granting the institution candidacy or accreditation. The Commission, after having been notified of an adverse action taken by another agency, may initiate an independent review of the institution. Adverse actions include but are not limited to:
  - (a) Denial or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation by a recognized institutional accrediting agency.
  - (b) Placement on public probation by a recognized institutional accrediting agency.
  - (c) Termination or suspension of legal authority to provide postsecondary education by a state agency.
- (2) When the Commission is notified by the U.S. Department of Education that an institution's cohort default rate equals or exceeds the minimum rates established by the U.S. Department of Education, the Commission reviews the institution to determine if it is in compliance with the standards, criteria, and conditions of the Council.
- (3) Unless the Commission extends the time period for compliance, with good cause, an institution **must** bring itself into compliance with the standards, criteria, and/or conditions of the Council within 12 months immediately following the first deferral of action by the Commission. The Commission will take adverse action for failure to come into compliance. (See Section VII for definition of 'good cause'.)
- (4) When the Council has information regarding a candidate or accredited institution's compliance with its Title IV, Higher Education Act (HEA), program responsibilities including its eligibility to participate in Title IV programs, it will submit the information to the Secretary when requested to assist in resolving problems with the institution's participation in these programs.



- (5) When the Commission has reason to believe that an institution accredited by the Commission is failing to meet its Title IV, HEA, program responsibilities including but not limited to a negative compliance audit or program review finding, or is engaged in fraud or abuse, the Commission will submit the name of the institution to the Secretary along with the reason(s) for concern. When the Department of Education specifies that information shared between the Department and the Commission be kept confidential, the Commission will comply.
- (6) The Commission will submit a summary of the Commission's major activities during the previous year upon request from the Secretary of Education.
- (7) The Commission shall maintain complete and accurate records of its last review of each institution and an accurate, permanent record of its decisions with respect to candidate and accredited institutions.
- (8) The Executive Director shall notify, at the same time, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public (within 24 hours), but no later than 30 days after:
  - (a) Accepting an institution as a candidate for accreditation, accrediting an institution, or reaffirming accreditation of an institution.
  - (b) Any final decision to place a candidate or accredited institution on probation or show cause.
  - (c) A summary of any review resulting in a final accrediting decision involving denial, termination or suspension of candidacy or accreditation together with the comments of the affected institution or notification that the institution was provided the opportunity to provide comments.
  - (d) Being informed by an institution that it is voluntarily withdrawing from candidacy or accreditation.
  - (e) An institution allows its candidacy or accreditation to lapse.
- (9) The Executive Director shall notify the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agency, and the appropriate accrediting agencies at the same time it notifies an institution if the Commission makes a final decision to deny or withdraw candidacy or accreditation or take other adverse action against an institution.
- (10) The Executive Director shall notify the public within 24 hours of its notice to the institution if the Commission makes a final decision to deny or withdraw candidacy or accreditation or take other adverse action against an institution.
- (11) No later than 30 days after a final decision to deny, limit, suspend, or withdraw the candidacy or accreditation of an institution, the Executive Director shall make available to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, the appropriate state licensing or authorizing agency, and the public a summary of the Commission's decision.
- (12) As soon as the annual report of the Council on Occupational Education is printed each year, a copy of the report will be submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Education.

- (13) Once it determines that it needs to make changes to its standards, the Commission will initiate action within 12 months to do so and will complete that action within a reasonable period of time. Furthermore, before any changes to standards are finalized, the Commission will provide notice to all relevant constituencies and other interested parties of the changes the Commission proposes to make and will provide those parties the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes. All comments submitted regarding proposed changes to the standards will be taken into account.
- (14) All proposed revisions in the standards, criteria, conditions, and/or procedures of the Council will be submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Education at the same time that they are submitted to the membership for consideration if the revisions might alter the Council's scope of recognition or its compliance with the requirements for submission of information to the Secretary. Additionally, the Council will post these actions on its web site ([www.council.org](http://www.council.org)) in order to encourage input from potential employers and the general public.

c. Non-Discriminatory Policy of the Council

The Council does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, age, or disability in any of its programs or activities.

Any individual who believes that he or she has been discriminated against because of his/her sex, race, color, national origin, age, or disability should immediately contact the Executive Director, Dr. Gary Puckett, who is the Council's coordinator for Title IX compliance. Dr. Puckett can be reached at 7840 Roswell Road, Building 300, Suite 325, Atlanta, Georgia 30350, (770) 396-3898, ext. 21.

Complaints alleging discrimination on any of the above bases may also be made to:

The Office for Civil Rights  
U.S. Department of Education, Customer Service Team  
Hotline # 1-800-421-3481 or (202) 205-5413  
Fax # (202) 205-9862 TTY # (877) 521-2172  
[ocr@ed.gov](mailto:ocr@ed.gov)



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# **SECTION VI.**

## **Accreditation Standards, Objectives, and Criteria**

**T**he standards, objectives, and criteria for accreditation by the Council are derived from the mission, goals, and objectives of the Council as an accrediting agency. (See Section II.B. above.)

The specific objectives of the COE accreditation process, as used in evaluating providers of occupational education, are grouped within 10 categories or “Standards” representing institutional aspects to be evaluated by the COE accreditation process. The objectives subsumed by each standard provide more specific delineation of the scope of each standard and the basis for deriving the criteria addressed in conducting an institutional evaluation for accreditation. The standards are the following:

### **Standard 1 - Institutional Mission**

### **Standard 2 - Educational Programs**

- A. Admissions/Recruiting
- B. Programs
- C. Instruction

### **Standard 3 - Program and Institutional Outcomes**

### **Standard 4 - Strategic Planning**

### **Standard 5 - Learning Resources**

- A. Media Services
- B. Instructional Equipment
- C. Instructional Supplies

### **Standard 6 - Physical Resources and Technical Infrastructure**

### **Standard 7 - Financial Resources**

### **Standard 8 - Human Resources**

- A. General
- B. Faculty
- C. Administrative and Supervisory Personnel
- D. Instructional Support Staff
- E. Non-instructional Support Staff/Services

### **Standard 9 - Organizational Structure**

### **Standard 10 - Student Services and Activities**

This section contains the COE standards for accreditation with their related objectives and criteria. Following the list of objectives for each standard, the criteria used in evaluating institutions seeking accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation by COE are listed.

# STANDARD ONE

## Institutional Mission

### Objectives of Accreditation Related to “Institutional Mission”

1. To assure that the institution’s primary mission is career and technical education.
2. To assure that the current mission is clearly stated and is publicly available.
3. To assure that the mission is formulated with broad-based participation by the communities of interest served and promoted by a program of public information and community relations.

### Criteria of Accreditation Related to “Institutional Mission”

1. The primary mission of the institution is to instruct students to such competency levels that they are qualified for initial employment and/or career advancement. (Objective 1-1)
2. The institution’s mission is clearly and concisely stated in written form and represents the official statement of the institution. (Objective 1-2)
3. The institution has an appropriate hard copy and/or online publication which it uses to accurately present its mission statement and the educational programs offered to achieve its mission. (Objective 1-2)
4. The current mission statement is publicly available and is used consistently in publications. (Objective 1-2)
5. The institution has an organized and functional institutional advisory committee that meets the following requirements:
  6. Is composed of at least three persons with a majority being external to the institution;
  7. Meets at least once annually, if serving only in an institutional advisory capacity; or twice annually, if serving in an occupational advisory capacity;
  8. Keeps minutes to document their activities, recommendations, and meeting attendance; and,
  9. Is used to provide community involvement in maintaining a relevant mission for the institution.

*The institutional advisory committee can also serve as the occupational advisory committee if only one occupational advisory committee is required for the institution. In those cases, the committee must meet at least twice annually.*

(Objective 1-3)

10. A program of public information and community relations is maintained to promote the institution’s mission in its community. (Objective 1-3)

# STANDARD TWO

## Educational Programs

### Objectives of Accreditation Related to “Educational Programs”

#### A. Admissions/Recruiting

1. To verify that admissions policies are clearly stated, published, and administered uniformly.
2. To assure that the admissions policies are relevant to the student’s ability to complete the educational programs offered, including programs delivered at a distance.
3. To assure that all recruiting/admissions activities and materials are ethical, accurate, and include processes to ensure the verification of student identity for coursework delivered via distance education, if required.

#### B. Programs

1. To verify that the educational programs offered by the institution are congruent with the mission of the institution.
2. To ensure that each program incorporates current job market requirements in its instruction through involvement of the constituencies served.
3. To assure that courses required for each program are offered with sufficient frequency for the student to complete the program within publicized time frames.
4. To assure that opportunities are provided for students to obtain exposure to and appreciation of the dynamics of the industry/occupational environment for which they are being prepared.
5. To assure that the title, program length, and general education components of all associate degree programs offered meet or exceed the minimum acceptable requirements as defined in the criteria.
6. To assure that all programs offered by the institution, regardless of location or mode of delivery, are qualitatively consistent.
7. To assure that the clock hour to credit hour ratio meets the minimum acceptable requirements as defined in the criteria.
8. To assure that all programs provide for timely and meaningful interaction among faculty and students.

#### C. Instruction

1. To assure the integration of academic and occupational education in instructional programs.

2. To assure that instruction is competency-based, including current knowledge, skills, and work ethics relevant to the occupations for which the programs prepare students.
3. To assure that competencies are taught with equipment and in settings reflecting current workplace requirements.
4. To require documentation that instruction for each program is organized to achieve its objectives.
5. To require that methods of evaluating individual student achievement are used to document student progress and that the results are made part of the student's permanent record.
6. To require that work-based activities have objectives appropriate for the respective programs and are properly planned and supervised.

### **Criteria of Accreditation Related to "Educational Programs"**

#### **A. Admissions/Recruiting**

The institution's admissions policies and procedures are:

1. Published;
2. Clearly stated;
3. Consistently communicated to students;
4. Made available to students prior to enrollment; and,
5. Any changes to these publications are communicated in a timely manner.

(Objective 2-A-1)

6. For all students admitted to a Vocational English-As-A-Second-Language Program, the institution utilizes written admission procedures that comply with policies established by the Commission. (Objective 2-A-1)

(See "Vocational English-As-A-Second-Language Programs" in the current edition of the *Policies and Rules of the Commission*.)

7. The institution clearly defines and publishes a policy on the transfer of students between programs within the institution and the transfer of students from other institutions. (Objective 2-A-1)
8. The institution clearly defines and publishes a policy on the transfer of credits that includes a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution. (Objective 2-A-1)
9. Admission requirements offer reasonable expectations for successful completion of the occupational programs offered by the institution regardless of the delivery mode. (Objective 2-A-2)
10. Students admitted into Associate Degree programs have a high school diploma or its equivalent. (Objective 2-A-2)

An institution that admits students by exception to its standard admissions policies must:

11. Have written admissions policies and procedures for these exceptions;
12. Apply them uniformly;
13. Provide documented evidence on how they are used;
14. Maintain records on student progress; and,
15. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the procedures used in admitting students by exception.

(Objective 2-A-2)

16. The institution ensures that recruiting activities are ethical and that all materials used in recruiting accurately describe the mission, instructional outcomes, student performance expectations, and completion requirements of each program. (Objective 2-A-3)
17. Prior to admission, students are informed of the costs, equipment, services, time, and technical competencies, if any, required by the program, including if applicable, personal data collection and processes, and charges associated with verification of student identity. (Objective 2-A-3)
18. Orientation to technology is provided and technical support is available to students. (Objective 2-A-3)
19. **For all coursework delivered via distance education:** The institution has processes in place to establish that the student who registers for a distance education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the academic credit. (Objective 2-A-3)

## B. Programs

Occupational education program policies are congruent with:

1. The governing organization;
2. The mission of the institution; and,
3. The occupational needs of the people served by the institution.

(Objectives 2-A-2 and 2-B-1)

Occupational education program policies are:

4. Publicly accessible;
5. Non-discriminatory; and,
6. Consistently applied.

(Objectives 2-A-2 and 2-B-1)

Differences, if any, in occupational education program policies are justified by:

7. Student learning outcomes; and/or,
8. Program outcomes.

(Objectives 2-A-2 and 2-B-1)

9. The objectives for each educational program are evaluated annually. (Objective 2-B-1)

Each occupational education program has:

10. Clearly stated objectives;
11. Defined content relevant to those objectives and the current needs of business and industry; and,
12. Assessment of student achievement based on the program objectives and content.

(Objective 2-B-2)

A systematic process has been implemented to document:

13. That the objectives and content programs are current; and,
14. That coursework is qualitatively and quantitatively relevant.

(Objective 2-B-2)

15. At least every two years, three bona fide potential employers review each educational program and recommend:

16. Admission requirements;
17. Program content that is consistent with desired student learning outcomes;
18. Program length;
19. Program objectives;
20. Competency tests;
21. Learning activities;
22. Instructional materials;
23. Equipment;
24. Methods of program evaluation;
25. Level of skills and/or proficiency required for completion; and,
26. Appropriate delivery formats for the subject matter being taught.

(Objectives 2-B-2 and 2-B-4)

27. The institution considers the length and the tuition of each program in relation to the documented entry level earnings of completers. (Objective 2-B-2)
28. Courses required for each program are offered with sufficient frequency for the student to complete the program within the publicized time frame. (Objective 2-B-3)

Associate Degree programs offered must meet the following requirements:

29. The appropriate applied degree title, such as Associate of Applied Technology, Associate of Applied Science, Associate of Occupational Studies, Associate of Science, or Associate of Occupational Technology, is used;
30. The program has a minimum of 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours; and,
31. The program includes a minimum of 15 semester hours or 23 quarter hours of general education courses, with a minimum of one course from each of the following areas: humanities, behavioral sciences, natural or applied sciences, and mathematics.

(Objective 2-B-5)

32. **For all coursework delivered via distance education:** The institution's distance education courses and programs are identical to those on campus in terms of the quality, rigor, breadth of academic and technical standards, completion requirements, and the credential awarded. (Objective 2-B-6)

Each program offered by the institution:

33. Is approved and administered under established institutional policies and procedures and supervised by an administrator who is part of the institutional organization;
34. Has appropriate and continuous involvement of on-campus administrators and faculty in planning and approval;
35. Has varied evaluation methodologies that reflect established professional and practice competencies;
36. Has measures of achievement of the student learning objectives;
37. Has individual student records, including period of enrollment, financial, and educational program records, permanently maintained by the institution at the main campus;
38. Is described in appropriate catalogs, brochures, and/or other promotional materials and include tuition/fee charges, refund policies, admissions and academic requirements, and information technology requirements; and,
39. Provides for timely and meaningful interaction among faculty and students.

(Objectives 2-B-6 and 2-B-8)

40. A credit hour is equivalent to a minimum of each of the following: one semester credit for 15 clock hours of lecture, 30 clock hours of laboratory, or 45 clock hours of work-based activities; or one quarter credit for 10 clock hours of lecture, 20 clock hours of laboratory, or 30 clock hours of work-based activities. (This Commission definition is consistent with the Federal definition of a credit hour. See Section VII. Definitions for the term 'Credit Hour [Federal definition]'.) (Objective 2-B-7)
41. **For all coursework delivered via distance education:** The institution ensures timeliness of its responses (synchronously or asynchronously) to students' requests by placing a requirement on response time of no more than 24 hours within the institution's published operational schedule of the program/course. (Objective 2-B-8)



## C. Instruction

1. Academic competencies and occupational skills are integrated into the instructional program for each occupational area. (Objective 2-C-1)
2. The instructional programs provide instruction in the competencies essential to success in the occupation, including job knowledge, job skills, work habits, and attitudes. (Objective 2-C-2)
3. The sequence of instruction required for program completion (lecture, lab, and work-based activities) is determined by desired student learning outcomes. (Objective 2-C-2)

The sequence of instruction required for program completion is used to:

4. Organize the curriculum;
  5. Guide the delivery of instruction;
  6. Direct learning activities; and,
  7. Evaluate student progress in order to maximize the learning of competencies essential to success in the occupation.
8. The institution has appointed an occupational advisory committee for each program or program area taught by the institution.
  9. Occupational advisory committees appointed for each program or program area are used to ensure that desirable, relevant, and current practices of each occupation are being taught.

Each occupational advisory committee must:

10. Consist of a minimum of three members external to the institution;
  11. Represent the geographical service area covered by the program area;
  12. Have expertise in the occupational areas taught by the program;
  13. Meet at least twice annually;
  14. Have at least two members who meet these criteria for membership physically present at each meeting; and,
  15. Keep minutes to document their activities, recommendations, and meeting attendance.
- (Objectives 2-B-2 and 2-C-2)
16. Occupational advisory committees review, at least annually, the appropriateness of the type of instruction (such as lecture, laboratory, work-based instruction, and/or mode of delivery) offered within each program to assure that students gain competency with specific skills required for successful completion of the program. (Objectives 2-B-7 and 2-C-4)
  17. Job-related health, safety, and fire-prevention are an integral part of instruction. (Objectives 2-C-2 and 2-C-3)

18. To develop skill proficiency, sufficient practice is provided with equipment and materials similar to those currently used in the occupation. (Objective 2-C-3)
19. All instruction is effectively organized as evidenced by course outlines, lesson plans, competency tests, and other instructional materials. (Objective 2-C-4)
20. The institution uses a systematic, objective, and equitable method of evaluating student achievement based on required competencies. (Objective 2-C-5)
21. **For all coursework delivered via distance education:** The institution directly verifies the currency and quality of all contracted courseware on an annual basis, is directly responsible for such currency and quality, and maintains curriculum oversight responsibility within all contracts. (Objectives 2-C-2 and 2-C-4)
22. **For all coursework delivered via distance education:** The institution has in place a standardized course template, course descriptions, learning objectives, course requirements (i.e. standard syllabus, outcomes, grading, resources, etc.), and learning outcomes of its programs in order to facilitate quality assurance and the assessment of student learning. (Objectives 2-C-4 and 2-C-5)
23. **For all coursework delivered via distance education:** The institution monitors student progress and participation by means such as course management systems that provide student time online, frequency of logins, electronic footprints, electronic grade book, and percentage of course completed. (Objective 2-C-5)

Written agreements with work-based activity agencies, if any:

24. Are current;
25. Specify expectations for all parties; and,
26. Ensure the protection of students.
27. Each work-based activity has a written instructional plan for students. (Objective 2-C-6)
28. The written instructional plan for each work-based activity specifies the particular objectives, experiences, competencies, and evaluations that are required. (Objective 2-C-6)
29. The written instructional plan for each work-based activity designates the on-site employer representative responsible for guiding and overseeing the students' learning experiences and participating in the students' written evaluations. (Objective 2-C-6)
30. All work-based activities conducted by the institution are supervised by a designated employee possessing appropriate qualifications. (Objective 2-C-6)

# STANDARD THREE

## Program and Institutional Outcomes

### Objectives of Accreditation Related to “Program and Institutional Outcomes”

1. To assure that the institution has developed and utilizes effective means of evaluating the appropriate competencies (knowledge and skill levels) of students in each occupational program.
2. To verify that the institution evaluates program outcomes through a systematic plan for assessing program effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance by achieving specified quantitative requirements with respect to: (a) program completion, (b) job placement, and (c) licensure examinations.
3. To assure that program completers and employers are satisfied with the education that was received.

### Criteria of Accreditation Related to “Program and Institutional Outcomes”

1. Individual student progress data, including (a) appropriate evaluations of knowledge and skills required for occupation(s) studied and (b) notations of completion(s) of and/or withdrawal from programs, are maintained and made a part of his/her record. (Objective 3-1)
2. The institution submits accurate and verifiable program completion data each year to the Commission for comparison with required benchmarks. (Objective 3-2)
3. **FOR INITIAL ACCREDITATION ONLY:** The majority of programs meet the required benchmark for completion for the most recent 12-month period possible. (Objective 3-2)
4. **FOR ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS ONLY:** All programs meet the required benchmark for completion OR the institution has taken any actions required by the Commission due to program completion rates failing to meet the required benchmark. (Objective 3-2)
5. The institution submits accurate and verifiable program placement data each year to the Commission for comparison with required benchmarks. (Objective 3-2)
6. **FOR INITIAL ACCREDITATION ONLY:** The majority of programs meet the required benchmark for placement for the most recent 12-month period possible (Objective 3-2)
7. **FOR ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS ONLY:** All programs meet the required benchmark for placement OR the institution has taken any actions required by the Commission due to program placement rates failing to meet the required benchmark. (Objective 3-2)
8. If applicable, the institution submits accurate and verifiable licensure exam pass rate data each year to the Commission for comparison with required benchmarks. (Objective 3-2)
9. **FOR INITIAL ACCREDITATION ONLY:** If applicable, the majority of programs meet the required benchmark for licensure exam pass rates for the most recent 12-month period possible (Objective 3-2)

10. **FOR ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS ONLY:** All applicable programs meet the required benchmark for licensure exam pass rate OR the institution has taken any actions required by the Commission due to licensure exam pass rates failing to meet the required benchmark. (Objective 3-2)
11. The institution has a written plan to ensure that follow-up is systematic and continuous. (Objective 3-3)

The institution's written plan for follow-up includes the following elements:

12. Identification of responsibility for coordination of all follow-up activities;
13. Collection of information from completers and employers of completers;
14. Information collected from completers and employers of completers focused on program effectiveness for various modes of delivery and relevance to job requirements;
15. Placement and follow-up information used to evaluate and improve the quality of program outcomes; and,
16. Placement and follow-up information made available at least on an annual basis to all instructional personnel and administrative staff.

(Objective 3-3)

# STANDARD FOUR

## Strategic Planning

### Objectives of Accreditation Related to “Strategic Planning”

1. To ensure that the institution uses a systematic process to determine its effectiveness in accomplishing its mission.
2. To ensure that strategic planning leads to the establishment of priorities and to appropriate action.
3. To ensure that a system is used for gathering and utilizing objective data for strategic planning and to facilitate the institution’s process of continuous improvement.
4. To assure that the strategic plan is subject to systematic and periodic review and evaluation by the communities of interest served by the institution.

### Criteria of Accreditation Related to “Strategic Planning”

1. The institution has a written strategic plan. (Objectives 4-1 through 4-4)

The institution’s written strategic plan includes, as a minimum, the following components:

2. Mission of the institution;
3. Vision of the institution;
4. Objectives for a minimum period of three years;
5. Strategies for achieving the objectives; and,
6. Strategies for evaluating progress toward achieving the objectives.

(Objectives 4-1 through 4-3)

7. The strategic plan is reviewed by the faculty, administration, and institutional advisory committee and revised as necessary at least annually. (Objective 4-4)
8. The results of the evaluation of progress toward achieving the objectives are documented annually. (Objective 4-4)

# STANDARD FIVE

## Learning Resources

### Objectives of Accreditation Related to “Learning Resources”

1. To verify the presence and adequate maintenance of learning resources appropriate and essential for the achievement of the objectives for each program offered.
2. To verify that the learning resources are readily available and used by students and faculty.
3. To verify that all learning resources meet applicable safety standards.

### Criteria of Accreditation Related to “Learning Resources”

#### **A. Media Services**

1. The institution has a written plan for its media services which is appropriate for and inclusive of all methods of program delivery. (Objective 5-1 and 5-2)

The institution’s written plan for media services includes the following:

2. The scope and availability of the services;
3. A variety of current and relevant educational materials, such as reference books; periodicals and manuals of a business, professional, technical, and industrial nature; audio-visual materials and equipment; internet access; and other materials to help fulfill the institution’s purposes and support its educational programs;
4. The staff person (administrative, supervisory, or instructional) responsible for the implementation and coordination of the media services;
5. Roles and responsibilities of designated staff member(s);
6. Orientation for user groups (i.e., instructors, students, and others);
7. Facilities and technical infrastructure essential for using media materials;
8. Annual budgetary support for the services; and,
9. Annual evaluation of the effectiveness of media services and utilization of the results to modify and improve media services.

(Objectives 5-1 and 5-2)

10. Media services (instructional supplies, physical resources, and fiscal resources) are available to support the instructional programs offered by the institution. (Objective 5-2)
11. Media services are sufficient to ensure the achievement of desired student learning and program objectives. (Objectives 5-1 and 5-2)
12. A current inventory of media resources is maintained. (Objective 5-1)
13. Provisions are made for necessary repair, maintenance, and/or replacement of media equipment and supplies. (Objective 5-1)

14. Services for creating instructional media (both print and non-print) are adequate and appropriate to support all students and faculty in meeting the objectives of the education program(s). (Objective 5-2)
15. All elements of the institution's learning resources (media services, technology, facilities, and materials) are comprehensive, current, selected with faculty input, and accessible to the faculty and students. (Objective 5-2)

## **B. Instructional Equipment**

1. The institution has a system of instructional equipment inventory. (Objective 5-1)
2. The institution has a system for emergency purchases to assure the acquisition and/or repair of equipment within a reasonable period of time to support continuous instruction. (Objective 5-1)
3. Relevant and up-to-date equipment is available to support the instructional programs offered by the institution. (Objectives 5-1 and 5-2)
4. The institution has a written plan for maintaining equipment and for replacing or disposing of obsolete equipment. (Objectives 5-1 and 5- 2)
5. All instructional equipment meets appropriate and required safety standards. (Objective 5-3)

## **C. Instructional Supplies**

1. Instructional supplies are available to support the instructional programs offered by the institution. (Objective 5-1)
2. The institution has a system for purchasing and storing instructional supplies. (Objective 5-1)
3. Funds are budgeted to provide supplies at a level that assures quality of occupational education. (Objective 5-2)
4. The institution has a system for emergency purchases of instructional supplies within a reasonable period of time to support continuous instruction. (Objective 5-2)
5. First aid supplies are readily available. (Objective 5-2)
6. All instructional supplies meet appropriate and required safety standards. (Objective 5-3)

# **STANDARD SIX**

## **Physical Resources and Technical Infrastructure**

### **Objectives of Accreditation Related to “Physical Resources and Technical Infrastructure”**

1. To verify the presence and adequate maintenance of physical resources and technical infrastructure appropriate and essential for the operation of the institution and the achievement of the objectives for each program offered.
2. To assure that the physical resources provide for the protection of the health and safety of students, faculty, administrative staff, and visitors.
3. To assure that the institution’s technical infrastructure provides for the privacy, safety, and security of data contained within it.
4. To assure that the institution’s technical infrastructure provides for the reliable accessibility and backup of data contained within it.

### **Criteria of Accreditation Related to “Physical Resources and Technical Infrastructure”**

1. A plan that addresses the adequacy and improvement of all physical facilities and technical infrastructure has been developed and is maintained that includes, if applicable, distance education infrastructure. (Objectives 6-1 and 6-2)
2. The technology used by the institution to deliver services and, if applicable, program content to students meets the needs of the students without creating barriers to student support or learning. (Objective 6-1)
3. An appropriate plan for ongoing operation and maintenance of all physical facilities, technical infrastructure and, if applicable, distance education infrastructure, has been developed and is in use. (Objectives 6-1 and 6-2)

The operation and maintenance plan addresses the following elements:

4. Personnel;
5. Equipment and supplies;
6. Relevant state law; and,
7. Applicable federal codes and procedures.

(Objectives 6-1 and 6-2)

The operation and maintenance plan is:

8. Available to employees and students; and,
9. Regularly evaluated/revised.

(Objectives 6-1 and 6-2)



10. Physical facilities at all locations provide adequate, safe, and clean facilities with appropriate supporting utilities for classrooms, laboratories/shops, offices, rest rooms, lounges, meeting rooms, parking, etc. (Objective 6-2)
11. An appropriate plan for assuring the health and safety of the institution's employees, students, and guests has been developed and is in use. (Objective 6-2)

The health and safety plan:

12. Includes a system for reporting and investigating accidents;
13. Has been distributed to employees;
14. Is available to students; and,
15. Is regularly evaluated/revised with appropriate input from employees and students.

(Objective 6-2)

16. An appropriate plan to ensure the privacy, safety, and security of data contained within the technical infrastructure of the institution networks, whether provided directly by the institution or through contractual arrangements, has been developed and is in use. (Objective 6-3)
17. The institution ensures computer system and network reliability and emergency backup for all technical services whether provided directly by the institution or through contractual arrangements. (Objective 6-4)

# STANDARD SEVEN

## Financial Resources

### Objectives of Accreditation Related to “Financial Resources”

1. To verify that the institution has the necessary financial resources to achieve the objectives of its programs and services.
2. To verify that the institution has the financial stability to enable it to continue to meet financial obligations and achieve its objectives.
3. To verify that all revenues and expenditures are capably managed and accurately documented.
4. To verify that the institution complies with applicable refund policies for tuition, fees, and other institutional charges.

### Criteria of Accreditation Related to “Financial Resources”

1. A qualified financial officer or department oversees the financial and business operations of the institution. (Objectives 7-1 and 7-2)
2. Financial records are maintained so that the institution’s fiscal position may be analyzed in a timely manner. (Objectives 7-1 and 7-2)
3. The institution demonstrates responsible financial management with funds sufficient to maintain quality educational programs and to complete the education of all students enrolled. (Objectives 7-1 and 7-2)
4. The institution considers its financial resources as a basis for strategic planning. (Objectives 7-1 and 7-2)
5. The institution uses adequate auditing and budgetary controls and procedures consistent with local, state, and federal requirements. (Objectives 7-1 and 7-2)
6. The institution exercises proper management, financial controls, and business practices. (Objectives 7-1, 7-2, and 7-3)
7. All persons handling institutional funds or revenues from any source are bonded or are covered under an employee-dishonesty insurance policy. (Objective 7-2)
8. Financial aid programs utilizing public and/or private funds are capably administered and accurately documented. (Objective 7-3)
9. Qualified personnel are responsible for proper record-keeping, reporting, and auditing. (Objective 7-4)
10. The institution has reported all contingent liabilities in a timely manner. (See the definition for ‘contingent liability’.) (Objective 7-3)

11. To satisfy Commission reporting requirements, the institution has submitted notices and copies of all lawsuits filed against the institution within 5 days of being served. (Objective 7-3)
12. Compliance with the Higher Education Reauthorization Act Title IV eligibility and certification requirements is maintained, including compliance with default management and audit benchmarks. (Objective 7-3)
13. A written, comprehensive student loan repayment program addressing student loan information, counseling, monitoring, and cooperation with available lenders is utilized. (Objective 7-3)
14. Students are informed of their ethical responsibilities regarding financial assistance. (Objective 7-3)

**Special Financial Stability Requirement for Public Institutions (Item 15)**

15. The institution clearly identifies sources of funds and revenues and shows evidence of fiscal stability. (Objectives 7-1 and 7-2)

**Special Financial Stability Requirements for Non-Public Institutions (Items 16 - 18)**

16. To document financial stability, the institution submits annual audited financial statements prepared by an independent certified public accountant and completed COE financial forms. Financial statements are prepared in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). The audit is performed in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS). A separate income statement must be provided for *each* main campus. (See definition of *audited financial statements* in Section VII. Definitions, Standard Seven.) For initial accreditation, non-public institutions must submit audited financial statements for the two most recent fiscal years. The first of those two years may be the audited financial statement submitted with the institution's candidacy application and the second audited financial statement must represent activity while the institution is in candidate status. Restated (or revised) audited financial statements will not be accepted without third-party certification. (Objectives 7-1 and 7-2)

The institution demonstrates financial stability through submission of the most recent audited financial statement that reflects: (Objective 7-2)

17. A minimum composite score of 1.5; and,
18. No contingent liabilities or on-going litigation which could potentially affect the institution's ability to continue operation.

## **Refund Policy**

19. The institution has a fair and equitable refund policy for the refund of tuition, fees, and other institutional charges in the event the institution cancels a class or if a student does not enter or does not complete the period of enrollment for which the student has been charged.

The following elements are present and indicative of a fair and equitable refund policy:

20. The institution's refund policy is published in the catalog and uniformly administered.
21. Refunds, when due, are made without requiring a request from the student.
22. Refunds, when due, are made within 45 days (1) of the last day of attendance if written notification has been provided to the institution by the student, or (2) from the date the institution terminates the student or determines withdrawal by the student.
23. Retention of tuition and fees collected in advance for a student who does not commence class does not exceed \$100.
24. The institution complies with the refund policies adopted by the Commission unless a different policy is mandated by a non-public institution's licensing agency or a public institution's governing board.

(Objective 7-4)

(See "Refund Policy" in the current edition of the *Policies and Rules of the Commission*.)

# STANDARD EIGHT

## Human Resources

### Objectives of Accreditation Related to “Human Resources”

#### **A. General**

1. To verify that accurate and current job descriptions are available for all employee positions.
2. To verify that appropriate and published complaint/grievance procedures for employees are maintained and followed equitably.
3. To verify that appropriate and published procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of employees are maintained and followed equitably.
4. To verify that appropriate orientation procedures for all employees are maintained and followed equitably and that all employees are provided access to current copies of institutional policies.

#### **B. Faculty**

1. To assure that the number of faculty is sufficient to fulfill the mission and operate the programs of the institution.
2. To verify that the faculty, including adjuncts, are and remain well prepared by virtue of education and experience to perform the duties assigned to them including teaching at a distance where applicable.
3. To verify that, in addition to teaching, faculty are appropriately involved in curriculum development, student advisement, work with business and industry, and planned programs of professional development in order to remain current in their teaching fields.

#### **C. Administrative and Supervisory Personnel**

1. To assure that the number of administrative and supervisory personnel is sufficient to fulfill the mission and operate the programs of the institution.
2. To verify that administrative and supervisory personnel are and remain well prepared by virtue of education and experience to perform the duties assigned to them.

#### **D. Instructional Support Staff**

1. To assure that the number of instructional support staff is sufficient to fulfill the mission and operate the programs of the institution.
2. To verify that instructional support staff are and remain well prepared by virtue of education and experience to perform the duties assigned to them.

## **E. Non-Instructional Support Staff/Services**

To verify that there are adequate non-instructional support staff/services provided by qualified personnel (or contracted services) to support the institution's mission.

### **Criteria of Accreditation Related to "Human Resources"**

#### **A. General**

1. Duties and responsibilities of each position are specified in written job descriptions made available to administrators, faculty, and staff of the institution. (Objective 8-A-1)
2. The institution has provided and implemented appropriate and published procedures for handling complaints/grievances for faculty and staff, consistent with the policies of the institution's governing board. (Objective 8-A-2)
3. Appropriate procedures have been developed for the continuous evaluation of the performance and effectiveness of all institutional employees, with at least an annual written formal review and evaluation. (Objective 8-A-3)
4. Appropriate orientation procedures for all employees are maintained and followed equitably. (Objective 8-A-4)

#### **B. Faculty**

1. The institution has a sufficient number of faculty members to fulfill its mission and operate its programs. (Objective 8-B-1)

Each faculty member possesses:

2. At least a high school diploma (or its equivalent);
3. Expertise in the area of responsibility that is actively maintained; and,
4. A record of performance that reflects work-based standards as interpreted by the institution.

(Objective 8-B-2)

5. Additional requirements established for faculty members by the institution's governing board and/or state regulatory agencies are met. (Objective 8-B-2)
6. Faculty members who teach general education courses in Associate Degree programs hold a minimum of a Bachelor's degree with 15 semester hours or 23 quarter hours in the teaching discipline with a grade of at least a 'C' in every course. (In exceptional cases, evidence of outstanding professional experience or creative achievement in the field may be considered in lieu of formal academic preparation.) (Objective 8-B-2)
7. Faculty members who teach technical courses in associate degree programs have a minimum of an Associate Degree in an area that is related to the technical courses they teach. (In exceptional cases, evidence of documented work experience and skills in the technical field may be considered in lieu of formal academic requirements.) (Objective 8-B-2)

8. **For all coursework delivered via distance education:** The institution provides appropriate training for faculty who use technology in distance education courses and programs. (Objective 8-B-2)
9. The institution plans, provides, supports, and annually documents professional growth opportunities for and participation by all faculty members. (Objective 8-B-2, 3)
10. Documentation is available to demonstrate that each faculty member in a technical field maintains liaison with employers in the technical field through periodic visitations and personal contact. (Objective 8-B-3)

**C. Administrative and Supervisory Personnel**

1. The institution has a sufficient number of administrative and supervisory personnel to fulfill its mission and operate its programs. (Objective 8-C-1)
2. All administrative and supervisory personnel possess postsecondary education credentials and/or experience and demonstrated competencies appropriate to their areas of responsibility. (Objective 8-C-2)

**D. Instructional Support Staff**

1. The institution has a sufficient number of instructional support staff members to fulfill its mission and enable its programs. (Objective 8-D-1)
2. Personnel are employed to maintain student records and financial records; to assist in producing instructional materials; and to prepare correspondence, reports, and other records as needed. (Objective 8-D-1)
3. All instructional support staff possess education credentials and/or experience and demonstrated competencies appropriate to their areas of responsibility. (Objective 8-D-2)

**E. Non-Instructional Support Services**

1. Custodial services are available to provide routine care and maintenance of facilities and grounds for the institution. (Objective 8-E)
2. Preventative maintenance services are provided to ensure continued operation of the facilities. (Objective 8-E)

## **STANDARD NINE**

### **Organizational Structure**

#### **Objectives of Accreditation Related to “Organizational Structure”**

1. To assure that the institution has a properly constituted governing body with legal authority and responsibility for the institution’s operations.
2. To assure that the governing body designates a chief administrative officer to whom is delegated the responsibility for the institution’s operations.
3. To assure that the institution is organized to promote effective and efficient operation of the educational programs and non-instructional services to students.

#### **Criteria of Accreditation Related to “Organizational Structure”**

1. The institution has a properly constituted governing body or board that has the legal authority and responsibility for the institution’s operation and control. (Objective 9-1)
2. If applicable, the non-public institution has in custody the currently valid original document(s), typically a license, required to operate as an occupational education institution within the state where it is located. (Objective 9-1)
3. The authority for implementation of the governing body’s policies is delegated to a chief administrative officer, who is responsible for the institution’s operation. (Objective 9-2)
4. The chief administrative officer is the official of record for all purposes of the Commission, is a full-time staff member of the institution, has his/her office on the main campus, and is the Commission’s point of contact with the institution, including branches, if any. (Objective 9-2)
5. An organizational chart is available that shows the functional relationships among the personnel of the institution. (Objective 9-3)
6. The organizational structure is designed to promote the effective operation of educational programs and institutional services for students. (Objective 9-3)



# STANDARD TEN

## Student Services and Activities

### Objectives of Accreditation Related to “Student Services and Activities”

1. To assure that adequate and appropriate student services are available to support the mission and programs of the institution. These services include:
  - a. Counseling.
  - b. Orientation.
  - c. Records.
  - d. Grievances.
  - e. Academic advisement.
  - f. Financial assistance.
  - g. Health and safety.
  - h. Others as appropriate to the institution.
2. To assure that the institution provides placement services for all program completers and conducts follow-up studies of completers and employers of completers.

### Criteria of Accreditation Related to “Student Services and Activities”

1. Tests or other means of assessing the achievement and aptitudes of students for various occupations are appropriate and are used to provide personalized counseling and program placement services to students. (Objective 10-1-a)
2. There is a student orientation program to acquaint new students with policies, functions, and personnel of the institution. (Objective 10-1-b)
3. A designated staff member is responsible for maintaining official files and records of students. (Objective 10-1-c)
4. Written procedures for access to student coursework, testing, and records are established to protect their confidentiality, limiting access to authorized personnel only. (Objective 10-1-c)
5. The institution, upon request by students, provides transcripts or procedures for obtaining transcripts containing as a minimum the following information: program of study, courses or units of study completed with corresponding grades, and period of enrollment. (Objective 10-1-c)
6. All period of enrollment, financial, academic, and current educational progress records are available at the institution. (Objective 10-1-c)
7. Preserving and protecting student coursework, testing, and records are provided by the use of storage devices, duplicate physical or digital records, security files, or other measures that ensure both the preservation and security of the records from fire, theft, vandalism, and other adverse actions. (Objective 10-1-c)

8. The institution provides and has implemented appropriate grievance policies for handling complaints from students, as described in the institution's catalog and/or the student handbook.
9. The Commission's mailing address and telephone number are included within the grievance policy for cases where the grievance is not settled at the institutional level. (Objective 10-1-d)
10. Institutional records reflect that program complaints and grievances receive due process and include evidence of resolution. (Objective 10-1-d)
11. The institution maintains records on student complaints that are filed in accordance with the institution's grievance policy to ensure acceptable quality in the educational programs offered by the institution. (Objective 10-1-d)
12. The institution provides academic advisement services to assist students in planning and completing the occupational education programs that they pursue. (Objective 10-1-e)
13. If the institution has processed Title IV loans or is currently processing Title IV loans, it has a default management plan that meets the requirements of the Commission for as long as required by the U.S. Department of Education to maintain a plan. (Objective 10-1-f)
14. The institution has adopted and implemented a written plan for the health and safety of students in cases of sickness, accidents, or emergency health care needs on campus; and the plan is evaluated regularly. (Objective 10-1-g)
15. A system is in effect for reporting and investigating all incidents affecting health and safety. (Objective 10-1-g)
16. The institution is responsible for any reasonable accommodation of students who are identified to have special needs. (Objective 10-1-h)
17. The institution has a written plan for determining the effectiveness of student services, for documenting an annual evaluation of these services, and for disseminating the results to the staff so that pertinent information can be used to improve the student services. (Objective 10-1-a through h)
18. The institution provides placement services for all program completers. (Objective 10-2)
19. The institution demonstrates that it is following a written plan for placement services.

The plan for placement services includes the following elements:

20. Identification of responsibility for coordination of services.
21. Communications network between the placement coordinator, the staff, the faculty, and various businesses and industries of the service area.
22. File/listing of employers and employment opportunities.
23. Counseling of students.
24. Maintenance of placement records for completers as a means of measuring the success of the institution in achieving its mission.

(Objective 10-2)

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# SECTION VII.

## Definitions

**Accreditation**—A process by which quality is certified. As applied by the Commission, a self-regulatory process by which the Commission recognizes educational institutions that have been found to meet or exceed stated standards applicable to occupational education institutions and/or programs (quality-assessment).

**Administration**—The professional staff who provide formal leadership in an institution. The institutional administrative staff includes the chief administrative officer and other personnel who perform the administrative functions defined by institutional policy.

**Administrator**—A full- or part-time employee of an institution to whom has been given the responsibility of coordinating operational and/or instructional activities of the institution.

**Admission**—The process through which a student is enrolled in an institution and/or placed into a program area.

**Adverse Action**—An action taken by the Commission or Appeal Board to deny, withdraw, suspend, revoke, or terminate candidacy or accreditation.

**Associate Degree**—

1. The title “Associate of Applied Science” is awarded upon completion of a program designed to lead the individual directly to employment in a specific career. Although the objective of this degree is to enhance employment opportunities, some bachelors’ degree institutions have developed upper-division programs to recognize this degree for transfer purposes, and this trend is to be encouraged when appropriate. The title “Associate of Applied Science” may be used without designation or may be used with a designation to denote special fields of study.
2. “Associate of Technology” or the “Associate of \_\_\_\_\_ Technology” is conferred on students successfully completing degree requirements in programs of technical-occupational education. The word “Technology” may be preceded by “Applied” or an appropriate qualifying adjective.

**Audited Financial Statements**—Financial statements prepared by an independent certified public accountant in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principals (GAAP). The audit must be performed in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS). The audited financial statements must include, as a minimum, the following: (1) accountant’s report; (2) balance sheet; (3) income statement; (4) statement of cash flow; and (5) appropriate footnotes to the financial statements and other relevant disclosures. (Procedural Note: Financial statements submitted by candidate and accredited non-public institutions must be accompanied by completed COE financial forms and must be received in the COE office no later than six months following the date of the end of the institution’s fiscal year.)

**Benchmark**—A standard of excellence or achievement against which similar things must be measured or judged. (Benchmarks for minimally-acceptable percentages of completion, placement, and licensure exam pass rates can be found within the Council’s annual report software and on the Council’s web site – [www.council.org](http://www.council.org).)

**Budget**—A financial plan that contains sufficient major categories of anticipated expenditures and expenses for a specific fiscal period based on a projected amount of funds and revenues.

**Candidacy/Candidate for Accreditation [Pre-accreditation]**—A status granted to an institution that has demonstrated compliance with specified eligibility requirements which define the universe of entities that may seek accreditation by the Commission.

**Career Development**—Professional development and skill enhancements necessary for individual growth and lifelong learning.

**Chief Administrative Officer**—The administrative head of an institution to whom has been delegated major responsibility for the direction, operation, and coordination of the institution's programs and activities. The chief administrative officer must be a full-time employee of the institution and must maintain his/her office on-site at the main campus. This is the person who will be the Commission's point of contact for all campuses of the institution. The administrative head in a military institution is a senior military officer or civilian employee.

**Clinical Instruction**—Supervised instruction involving or concerned with the direct observation and treatment of patients.

**Clock Hour**—A period of 60 minutes with a minimum of 50 minutes of instruction.

**Co-Location**—an arrangement between two legally separate educational institutions in which administration, faculty, staff, and facilities are shared. (This arrangement excludes the contracts between separate institutions that result in instructional service centers or other Commission-approved partnerships.)

**Commission**—The body of 19 elected members who serve as the governing board of the Council and its accreditation decision-making board.

**Competencies**—The specialized knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for successful performance in a specific occupation.

**Competency Test**—A group of questions and/or tasks to which a student responds to produce a quantitative representation of the student's knowledge, skill, and/or performance in a specific occupational area.

**Completer**—A student who has demonstrated the competencies required for a program and has been awarded the appropriate credential (graduate completer) or has acquired sufficient competencies through a program to become employed in the field of education pursued or a related field as evidenced by such employment (non-graduate completer).

**Condition**—A process, status, or situation adopted by the Council with which an institution must comply in order to become and maintain status as a candidate for accreditation or an accredited institution.

**Constituency**—The persons and, if applicable, entities that they represent who are to be served by an institution through one or more of its educational programs.

**Contingent Liability**—A potential liability that may exist in the future depending on the outcome of a past event (i.e., adverse tax court decisions, lawsuits, letter of credit required by the U.S. Department of Education, etc.). In audited financial statements, footnote disclosure is required of the circumstances for potential loss.

**Continuing Occupational Education**—Educational activities or experiences designed to assist in the development of knowledge and skills with the goal of maintaining one's current professional occupation. Participants in continuing education are assumed to have previously attained a basic level of education, training, or experience in the occupational area in which they are enrolling. These activities are not included in the institutional self-study, FTE calculation, or student achievement data collection, and are not required to be included on the COE approved program list. (See definition for Job Upgrade Training.)

**Contractor (Vendor)**—A company or individual who provides goods and/or services to an institution for an agreed upon price.

**Correspondence Education** – Instruction delivered via e-mail or traditional mail service and that employs print-based media which may or may not be supplemented with video tape, CD Rom, audio tape instruction/demonstrations, as well as online learning resources. Correspondence education requires minimal interaction between instructor and student. (The Council does not accredit correspondence education programs.)

**Council**—The legal entity incorporated in the State of Georgia whose membership is all institutions accredited by the Commission.

**Course**—Specific subject matter comprising part of a program for which instruction is offered within a specified time period.

**Credential**—A diploma, certificate, degree, or other official acknowledgment by an institution that a student has completed a program.

**Credit Hour (Federal Definition)**—Except as provided in 34 CFT 668.8(k) and (l), a credit hour is an amount of work represented in intended learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement that is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates not less than: (1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out of class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or, (2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

**Criterion**—A characteristic of an institution that must be possessed or demonstrated as evidence of compliance with an accreditation standard.

**Default Management Plan**—A written plan to address the institution's management of default rates pertaining to Title IV funds. The plan must include appropriate procedures for:

1. Entrance interviews with all borrowers.
2. Distribution of appropriate written information which addresses provisions of the student loan program.
3. Appropriate counseling on the part of the institution to provide guidance in debt management.
4. Appropriate notification to lenders and guarantee agency regarding a student's change in status.
5. Appropriate exit interview process with students withdrawing or graduating from the institution.
6. A written procedure to communicate with the borrower during a grace period.
7. A systematic annual evaluation of its default management plan.

**Distance Education [Delivery Method]** — Education that uses one or more of the technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor; and support regular and substantive instruction between students and the instructor, synchronously or asynchronously. Technologies used may include the internet, print-based media, e-mail, one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD's, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVD's, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed.

**Distance Education Program**—a program that makes available 50% or more of its required instructional hours via distance education.

**Distance Education Student**—a student who completes 50% or more of his/her required instructional hours in a program via distance education.

**Educational Quality**—Determined on the basis of (1) the appropriateness of institutional/program objectives and (2) the effectiveness with which the institution/program is utilizing its resources to achieve these objectives.

**Eligibility Requirements**—Requirements that define the kind of institution or program that an accrediting agency considers a part of its universe and thus within the scope of accrediting activities for which the agency assumes responsibility.

**Emergency Evacuation**—An emergency evacuation can include exiting the building in case of fire or moving to a safe place inside the facility in case of natural disasters.

**Employee**—An individual hired by an institution and paid compensation in the form of an hourly wage or annual salary. Employees of an institution are often eligible for additional benefits in the form of retirement, paid vacation and other leave days, various types of insurances, etc. Employment taxes for these persons are paid by the hiring institution. Equipment used for the performance of the employee's duties is provided by the hiring institution.

**Enrollee**—A person who is admitted to the institution and attends classes in pursuit of completing a program for a minimum time period as specified by institutional policy. (For purposes of measuring outcomes, an institution does not have to report a student as an enrollee if the institution refunds 100% of any tuition and fees that the student may have paid.)

**Equipment Inventory**—A detailed list of equipment including location, number of items, date of purchase, and purchase price and/or current value of each item. The list should include both instructional and non-instructional equipment.

**External Budgeting**—A budgeting process that occurs beyond the immediate control of the individual institution and that generally addresses the overall requirements of a multi-institutional system.

**Faculty**—Full- or part-time personnel of an institution who are responsible for providing instruction to students.

**Final Approval**—The second of two required approvals granted by the Commission for certain substantive changes upon the satisfactory completion of hosting a Council site visit (physical or virtual, in the case of distance education applications) and review by the Commission of all documentation related to the substantive change (the application, the site visit report, and the institution's response to the site visit report – if applicable).

**Follow-Up**—The act of making formal contact to obtain specified factual and/or perceptual information from a particular person or group of persons.

**Generally Accepted Accounting Principals (GAAP)**—Requirements established by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants for use by auditors to prepare audited financial statements.

**Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS)**—Requirements established by the federal government to be used by auditors and audit organizations when performing audits of government organizations, programs, activities, and functions and audits of government funds received by for-profit entities, non-profit organizations, and other non-government organizations.

**Goals of the COE Accreditation Process**—The significant values and major purposes to whose realization the efforts of individuals and groups are directed.



**Good Cause**—The Commission may grant an extension of time for compliance with any of the conditions, standards, criteria, or procedures with ‘good cause’. Good cause may be demonstrated through submission of a clear and detailed explanation of extenuating circumstances that have prevented the institution from demonstrating compliance within the timeframes specified by the Commission. Circumstances described may include, but are not limited to, economic conditions of the community served by the institution, personnel changes that have taken place within the institution, and natural disasters that have prevented timely compliance. The Commission will determine whether or not institutions have demonstrated good cause on a case-by-case basis. The Commission will take into consideration, not only the extenuating circumstances described by the institution, but the institution’s history of compliance with conditions, standards, criteria, and procedures of the Commission, as well as the institution’s standing with federal, state, and recognized accrediting agencies.

**Governing Body or Board**—An appointed or elected group of individuals who are responsible for establishing policies of the institution in compliance with applicable regulatory statutes.

**Graduate**—A student who has demonstrated the competencies required for a program and has been awarded the appropriate credential by the institution.

**Guidelines**—Less prescriptive suggestions for operating or developing something.

**Hybrid Program**—a program that makes available 49% or less of its required instructional hours via distance education.

**Independent Certified Public Accountant**—A person who fulfills the following requirements: 1) has been certified by a state examining board as having fulfilled the requirements of state law pertaining to public accountants as evidence by current credentials which attest to their certification; AND, 2) has no business or family relationship with a COE candidate or accredited institution, its board members, or its owners.

**Initial Approval**—The first of two required approvals granted by the Commission for certain substantive changes upon the satisfactory completion and review of the information provided in a substantive change application. After initial approval is granted, Commission staff schedule physical or virtual site visits within 180 days that are required before the second required approval of the change – Final Approval – is granted. Upon the granting of initial approval, institutions may begin full implementation of the change applied for and may be eligible for approval for student financial aid funding as applicable to the change.

**Institution**—A school, center, unit, or other provider of occupational education that may become or be eligible for COE accreditation.

**Institutional Advisory Committee**—A group of at least three persons, a majority being external to the institution, who are knowledgeable of occupational education and employment needs of the community. Through regularly scheduled and documented meetings, the committee provides consultative assistance to the administration of the institution to ensure that the institution continually strives to meet the occupational education needs of the community.

**Instruction**—Planned activities directed by an instructor for the purpose of enabling students to acquire specific knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes. Instruction may be provided through lectures, laboratory or clinical exercises, distance education, or planned work-based activities.

**Instructional Media**—Any print or non-print learning resources (e.g., books, manuals, periodicals, computer software, films, videotapes, audio tapes, slides, and others) and the equipment and services necessary to use them.



**Instructional Supplies**—Items needed for instruction.

**Instructional Support Staff**—Full- or part-time personnel who are responsible for those tasks which directly support the faculty.

**Integrity**—Wholeness or consistency between or among principles, intentions, and actions, and thus uprightness of character.

**Internal Budgeting**—A budgeting process that occurs primarily at the level of the individual institution and that addresses both instructional and non-instructional needs and daily operational requirements of the institution.

**Job Upgrade Training**— Educational activities or experiences that are designed to enhance existing knowledge and skills and that are offered with the goal of providing persons in specific occupations with the credentials, knowledge, and skills needed for career advancement. These activities are considered to be occupational programs and are included in the institutional self-study, FTE calculation, and student achievement data collection (completion data only), and must be included on the COE approved program list. (See definition for continuing occupational education.)

**Laboratory Instruction**—An instructional setting in which students apply theories and principles learned during lectures in order to acquire the proficiency and dexterity that is required in the occupation for which the student is being prepared.

**Lecture**—Instruction by a qualified faculty member or other resource which imparts to students the concepts, principles, and theories of an academic or technical subject.

**Legal Authority**—The power derived by an individual or group to perform specific functions based on applicable local, state, and/or federal statutory regulations.

**Legal Responsibility**—The obligation and/or liability placed on an individual or group by applicable local, state, and/or federal statutory regulations.

**Merger**—two or more accredited main campuses that merge into one campus; or, an accredited institution becoming a branch of another accredited institution.

**Mission of the Institution**—The end to be attained by an institution through the programs and services provided for its students. The mission of federal institutions shall be to instruct students to such competency levels that they are qualified to perform federal jobs.

**Non-Public Institution**—An institution that is created, operated, and controlled by a non-governmental entity; such as, a business corporation, a foundation, a religious organization, or a chartered association.

**Objectives of COE Accreditation**—Explication in more specific terms of ideas and activities inherent in the aspects of the institution evaluated by the COE accreditation process, but not necessarily obvious or explicit in the goals of COE accreditation.

**Objectives of an Educational Program**—A statement that specifies the knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes to be acquired by students through planned instructional activities.

**Objectives of a Strategic Plan**—Objectives are specific in nature and consist of the following elements:

1. What will be accomplished
2. When it will be accomplished
3. Who is responsible for accomplishing it
4. How accomplishment will be measured

**Occupational Advisory Committee**—Occupational advisory committees, which are composed of at least three members external to the institution, must be appointed for each program or program area taught by the institution. Their primary purpose is to ensure that desirable, relevant, and current practices of each occupation are being taught. An occupational advisory committee may also perform the functions of the institutional advisory committee if only one occupational advisory committee is required for the institution.

**Occupational Education Institution**—An education institution that has as its mission the preparation of individuals for employment and/or skill enhancement. (The main campus or parent institution has a chief administrative officer to whom each branch, extension, or other type of separate site is subordinate and accountable. The institution recognizes individuals who acquire targeted knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other competencies by awarding appropriate credentials such as degrees, diplomas, certificates, and/or other acceptable credentials.)

**Occupational Education Program**—An education program designed to provide a sequence of educational and skill development experiences that lead to workplace competencies. (Such programs offered by Commission accredited institutions are designed to prepare individuals for job entry, career advancement, and/or skill updating in specific occupations or clusters of occupations.)

**Operational Procedure**—Specific provisions that have been established by the institution to implement policies adopted by the governing board.

**Placement**—A completer of a program who (1) is employed in the field of education pursued or in a related field, or (2) has received the appropriate credential and entered the military or continued his/her education. Valid employment in the field or a related field includes placement in a permanent full- or part-time position with an employer or employment agency, or self-employment in the field of education or a related field.

**Policies**—A set of written statements providing the bounds within which all procedures, programs, goals, objectives, and activities of the institution are carried out. These are adopted by the governing board of an institution (or in military institutions, by higher military command headquarters) to ensure operations are in compliance with statutory regulations as well as being consistent with the stated mission.

**Position**—An attitude or stance of an entity—the way a body (organization) looks at an issue or takes a stand on such. A mental or emotional stance adopted with respect to something.

**Pre-accreditation [Candidacy/Candidate for Accreditation]**—A status granted to an institution that has demonstrated compliance with specified eligibility requirements which define the universe of entities that may seek accreditation by the Commission.

**Procedure**—A formal or set order of operating or doing something—a method of conducting affairs.

**Process**—A series of progressive and independent steps by which an end is attained.

**Professional Growth**—Planned activities to increase the knowledge, skills, and/or abilities of professional personnel in areas related directly to job responsibilities.

**Program**—A combination of courses and related activities (e.g. laboratory activities and/or work-based activities) that lead to a credential and are offered by an institution to develop competencies required for a specific occupation.

**Public Institution**—An institution that is created, operated, and controlled by a local, state, or federal governmental entity.

**Publication (e.g. catalogs/brochures/pamphlets/web sites)**—A catalog and/or other official publications, which are published in hard copy or provided online, to provide the information specified below that must be readily available to students, prospective students, and other members of the interested public.

- a. The publication(s) must contain and accurately depict the following:
  1. Institutional mission
  2. Admission requirements and procedures
  3. Policy on the transfer of students between programs within the institution
  4. Policy on the transfer of students from other institutions
  5. Policy on the transfer of credits that includes a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution
  6. Basic information on programs and courses, with any required sequences and frequency of course offerings explicitly stated
  7. Program completion requirements, including length of time required to obtain certification of completion
  8. Faculty (full-time and part-time listed separately) with degrees held and the conferring institution
  9. Description of institutional facilities readily available for educational use
  10. Rules and regulations for conduct
  11. Tuition, fees, and other program costs
  12. Opportunities and requirements for financial aid
  13. Policies, procedures, and time frame for refunding fees and charges to students who withdraw from enrollment
  14. National and/or state legal requirements for eligibility for licensure or entry into an occupation or profession for which education and training are offered
  15. Any unique requirements for career paths or for employment and advancement opportunities in the profession or occupation described
  16. Grading system
  17. Academic/school calendar
  18. Street address and telephone number of each campus of the institution (main campus and each additional permanent site)
  19. Institution's student grievance procedure which includes the Commission's mailing address, telephone number, and web site address
- b. Other publications that make any reference to the institution's status (candidacy or accredited) with the Commission must be accurate and must include the name, address, telephone number, and web site address of the Commission. (In lieu of reference to the Commission, the institution may use the following statement: "For information about national and program accreditation, contact the institution.")

**Real, Threatened, or Impending Danger**—Any situation which could cause injury to persons on the institution's campus, including but not limited to fires, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, bomb threats, or violent acts by an individual.

**Registrant**—A person who registers for instruction with intent to attend.

**Related Field (Placement)**—Placement of graduate and non-graduate completers in a broader field of work that uses the knowledge and skills gained in the program of study regardless of whether the work title specifically references the program of study. Graduate completers who secure employment in a field that does not require the knowledge and skills gained in the program of study for securing that employment must be classified as placed in an ‘unrelated’ field. (Non-graduate completers, by definition, must secure employment in the field of study or a related field, employment that requires knowledge and skills gained in the program, or must be classified as withdrawals from the program of study.)

**Restated (Revised) Audit**—A financial statement that has been re-issued by an independent certified public accountant in order to correct data and/or disclosures from the first statement issued that were not accurately represented or to include data and/or disclosures that did not appear in the first statement. Restated audits submitted to the Commission must be clearly labeled as being restated, must provide a detailed list of data and/or disclosures that have been corrected and/or added since the last statement was submitted to the Commission, and must be prepared according to the guidelines of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. Restated audits must continue to meet the Commission requirements for audited financial statements found in Standard 7 – Financial Resources.

**Scope (change of)**—Any instance in which an institution departs significantly from its mission in regard to the occupational areas for which it offers preparation or the credentials it offers for successful completion of its programs (certificates, diplomas, associate degrees).

**Self-Paced Instruction** – An approach to instructional delivery where the student sets the pace of learning under the guidance and objectives set by an instructor. Criteria for admissions/recruiting, program design, learning objectives, and instruction provided in any self-paced program must be consistent for every student enrolled (see criteria of Standard Two – Educational Programs). In a self-paced program, it is a requirement that the student be given a maximum time parameter for completion of requirements for a specific course, series of courses, and/or the entire program, as established by the institution. Qualified faculty must be present as facilitators/resources for students as they proceed through mastering the various subject matters in courses required for program completion (see criteria of Standard Eight – Human Resources). Additionally, learning resources and student services and activities must be available to self-paced students as detailed in Standards Five and Ten. The length of self-paced programs as listed by the Commission must be shown in terms of average length of time expected for completion of program requirements, unless a state or federal authorizing agency mandates otherwise. (The Commission does not use the terms ‘self-paced instruction’ and ‘open-entry/open-exit scheduling’ interchangeably.)

**Service Area**—Service area is defined as the contiguous geographical area surrounding the institution from which the institution expects to attract students and serve employers.

**Staff**—The administrative, supervisory, faculty, and non-instructional personnel employed by an institution.

**Standard**—Generalizable conditions determined to be essential for objectives to be achieved.

**Strategic Planning**—A formalized, systematic process that the institution uses to anticipate and respond to major decisions facing it in the future.

**Technical Infrastructure**—The framework of an institution’s electronic student, financial, and IT information system inclusive of hardware and software that supports students, faculty, and staff services that guide institutional operations including the delivery of distance education as approved by the Council.

**Third-Party Audit Certification**—A certification process by which a Commission-selected independent certified public accountant thoroughly reviews all re-stated audited financial statements and other questionable statements submitted to the Commission for clarity, accuracy, and compliance with all Federal and Commission requirements governing the formal reporting of financial data.

**Traditional Program**—a program that requires all instructional hours to be completed on campus.

**Vision of the Institution**—A values-based description of a desired future for the institution that clarifies the institution's image and how it should conduct itself as it fulfills its mission.

**Vocational English-As-A-Second-Language Program**—see current edition of the *Policies and Rules of the Commission*.

**Withdrawal**—A student who enrolled in an institution but withdrew before acquiring sufficient competencies for employment and before earning a credential in the field of education pursued or a related field.

**Work-Based Activities**—Structured learning activities conducted in supervised work settings external to the institution or in a setting that involves the public (for example: clients who are served by the institution in cosmetology clinical or automotive technology settings) that are components of educational programs (e.g., externships, internships, clinical experiences, industrial cooperative education, and similar activities). These activities must be planned with at least two objectives:

- 1) To provide students with the opportunity to develop and apply a 'real-world' work experience using the knowledge and skills they attained in their program of study; and,
- 2) To provide the institution with objective input from potential employers or customers of program graduates.

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