



# Policies and Rules of the Commission

**2022 Edition**



# **Policies and Rules of the Commission: 2022 Edition**

All previous editions are obsolete.

**COUNCIL ON OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION**

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## Preface

The Bylaws of the Council on Occupational Education assign to the Commission the responsibility of “establishing and implementing appropriate policies and rules for the enforcement of the approved accreditation standards and membership conditions” (Bylaws of the Council on Occupational Education, Article IV. The Commission, Section 4.2, Commission Responsibilities). Further, the current *Handbook of Accreditation* states in several instances that the Commission will establish policies and/or rules for candidate and accredited institutions to observe in order to maintain their status with the Council. Policies and rules are understood by the Commission to include procedures that may be required to maintain compliance with the Council’s standards and conditions.

The purpose of this document is to communicate to interested and affected parties the policies and rules that have been adopted by the Commission in fulfillment of its obligation under the *Bylaws of the Council*. The order of topics in this document follow the order in which they appear in either the *Bylaws* or the *Handbook of Accreditation*. In those cases where the action of the Commission is mandated by the provisions in the *Handbook of Accreditation*, a reference is given with the specific page number where the mandate appears.

These policies and rules are subject to revision, including additions and deletions, at any time by the Commission as the Commission deems appropriate to carry out its responsibilities under the Bylaws of the Council. The Commission has total and final authority in determining institutional compliance with these policies and rules.

Changes and amendments to these Policies and Rules are highlighted in blue.

Changes made as a result of mandates of the U.S. Department of Education are highlighted in yellow.

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## **Policies and Rules Applicable to the Bylaws of the Council on Occupational Education**

References for Policies and Rules stated in this section are provided for the specific sections where they appear in the *Bylaws of the Council on Occupational Education*. The subsections that follow are consistent with the order in which the topics appear in the *Bylaws*.

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## **ELIGIBILITY TO SERVE AS A PUBLIC MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION OR THE COUNCIL APPEAL PANEL**

An individual who represents the general public on the Commission or the Appeal Panel of the Council on Occupational Education must not be

- (1) an employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to an institution that either is a candidate for accreditation or is accredited by the Council or has applied for candidacy or accreditation by the Council;
- (2) a member of any trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with the Council; or
- (3) a spouse, parent, child, or sibling, of an individual identified in item (1) or item (2) above.

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**REFERENCE:** *Bylaws of the Council on Occupational Education, Article III. Membership and Voting, Section 3.8 Council Appeal Panel, and Article IV. The Commission, Section 4.3 Election and Terms of the Members of the Commission*

## **AVAILABILITY OF COE PUBLICATIONS**

Institutions interested in membership with the Council on Occupational Education may obtain copies of all current Council publications, applications, and forms from the Council's website ([www.council.org](http://www.council.org)).

Candidate visiting team leaders will confirm that institutions applying for candidacy have access to the most current copies of the *Handbook of Accreditation*, *Policies and Rules of the Commission*, *Self-Study Manual*, and *Guidelines for Accreditation Visiting Teams*.

Institutions in candidate or accredited status will be notified when revised editions of the Council's primary publications are available on the Council's website.

Institutions will be directed to download the latest edition of the Self-Study Manual upon notifying the Commission that they are ready to begin their self-study.

Team leaders and members shall have access to the appropriate versions of the *Handbook of Accreditation*, the *Policies and Rules of the Commission*, and the *Guidelines for Accreditation Visiting Teams* on the Council's website. Team leaders will also have access to the *Self-Study Manual*.

Institutions are free to reproduce any of the above publications downloaded from the website or purchase hard copies of Council publications by placing an order with the office of the Commission of the Council on Occupational Education.

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**REFERENCE:** *Bylaws of the Council on Occupational Education, Article IV. The Commission, Section 4.2, Commission Responsibilities*

## **COMMISSION REVIEW COMMITTEE**

The Commission Review Committee is established by the Commission as a standing committee. The committee will be composed of all current members of the Commission and 20 to 25 members who will be elected annually by the Commission to serve one-year terms. Persons elected to the Commission Review Committee are eligible for election to successive one-year terms without limitation. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Commission Executive Committee will serve as the Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, of the Commission Review Committee. The Executive Director of the Commission shall serve as Secretary of the Commission Review Committee.

The function of the Commission Review Committee will be to review institutional materials, educational programs, and any other materials and/or documents that relate to the Standards, Criteria, Conditions, Policies, and/or procedures of the Commission. These functions may be performed by the committee as a whole or by subgroups of the committee as may be appropriate for the particular task.

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**REFERENCE:** *Bylaws of the Council on Occupational Education, Article IV. The Commission, Section 4.16, Commission Committees*

## **PROCEDURES FOR SELECTION OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE COUNCIL AND COMMISSION**

When a vacancy occurs (or is about to occur) in the position of Chief Executive Officer of the Council and Commission, the Commission shall establish a selection committee composed of the Executive Committee of the Commission.

NOTE: The chair and vice-chair of the Commission shall serve as chair and vice-chair of the selection committee.

The duties of the selection committee are:

- (a) To solicit applications from persons to be considered and screen these applicants as to qualifications.
- (b) To nominate at least three (3) acceptable candidates for the position to the Commission. (The Commission may appoint one of these candidates. Should the Commission choose not to appoint one of the candidates, the selection process shall continue.)

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**REFERENCE:** *Bylaws of the Council on Occupational Education, Article IV. The Commission, Section 4.17, Executive Committee*

## **Policies and Rules Applicable to Conditions of Accreditation**

References for Policies and Rules stated in this section are provided for the specific sections where they appear in the *Handbook of Accreditation*. The subsections that follow are consistent with the order in which the topics appear in the *Handbook of Accreditation*.

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## AFFILIATION WITH COE

### EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM POLICIES OF THE COUNCIL

#### Establishment of the List of Approved Programs

An official listing of approved programs is established for each campus in the Council's database once an institution is accepted as a candidate for accreditation. The programs to include on the list are initially provided by the institution in the candidate application. Each program on the list includes a program code (using the Classification of Instructional Programs code – CIP code); program name; mode of delivery (100% traditional, hybrid, and/or distance education); specific length in clock, semester credit, and/or quarter credit hours; and whether or not an applied associate degree credential is awarded for program completion.

IMPORTANT: Federal institutions are not required to follow the same procedure for establishing a list of programs. Information about federal training is initially collected through the candidate application process and detailed further in the institutional self-study performed by federal institution candidates and members.

#### Programs to Include on the List of Approved Programs

The programs included on the list of approved programs are primarily postsecondary and offered by institutions exclusively for career and technical education.

The following criteria are important when determining which programs must appear on the list:

1. The Council is an institutional accreditor. This means that accreditation by the Council includes all programs that offer instruction for job entry or career advancement. Therefore, all career and technical education programs (applied associate degree and non-degree) must be included on the list, including those labeled as job upgrade training\* and Vocational English-as-a-Second-Language programs.
2. The Council does not accredit institutions offering programs beyond the applied associate degree credential. Institutions offering academic degrees or degrees at baccalaureate level or beyond must seek accreditation by another agency.
3. The Council does not accredit avocational programs (such as stand-alone ESL programs). Institutions offering programs or courses that do not prepare students for job entry or career advancement are not included in the list of approved programs accredited by the Council. IMPORTANT: Institutions offering avocational programs/courses must clearly specify that those offerings are not accredited by the Council and do not qualify for Title IV financial aid assistance in all publications in which they appear.
4. There is no minimum or maximum length defined by the Commission for career and technical education programs. All career and technical education programs, regardless of their length, must be included on the list.
5. The names and lengths of programs on the list must be identically stated in all institutional publications (catalogs, brochures, websites, etc.) and on all state and federal authorizing agencies and/or board approvals and licenses.
6. Programs that appear on the list of approved programs are considered to be 'active' programs. That is, they are marketed with the goal of enrolling students, they are mentioned specifically on an enrollment agreement the students sign, and they award a specific credential. ALSO, the programs on the list meet one of the following conditions: (a) currently have students enrolled;

- (b) have had students enrolled in the past 12 months; (c) have been approved by the Commission within the past 180 days; or (d) are secondary occupational programs that, due to state regulations, currently have or may have postsecondary (adult) enrollments. At least one of these conditions is true at any point in time. Programs that fail to meet at least one of these conditions must be removed from the list.
7. Institutions must provide student achievement data (completion, placement and possibly, licensure exam pass rates) for each program on the list of approved programs.\*
  8. The list of approved programs (and student enrollment and number of campuses) is an important factor when establishing the size of accreditation visiting teams and choosing team members with appropriate education and experience for the evaluation of the programs on the list.
  9. The institutional Self-Study Report must address compliance with accreditation Standards for all programs on the list of approved programs, even if a program does not have students enrolled at the time of the accreditation team visit. (See subsection entitled “Changing the List of Approved Programs”.)
  10. Programs on the list of approved programs may be eligible for Title IV Student Financial Aid or other funding sources, but this is not the only factor in determining which programs must be included. The previous points one through nine, alone, determine whether or not programs are included on the list. However, because the Council's accreditation process is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as meeting one of the eligibility requirements for Title IV Student Financial Aid programs, institutions must be sure that all Title IV eligible programs appear accurately on the list of approved programs.

Member institutions are required to notify the Commission of additions, changes, and deletions to the list of approved programs. Institutions that fail to notify the Commission in a timely manner will be subject to penalties. (See the latest edition of the *Handbook of Accreditation*, chart of substantive changes.)

**IMPORTANT: A moratorium will be placed on the acceptance, processing, and approval (both initial and final) of ALL substantive changes beginning six months prior to the original scheduled dates of accreditation team visits through the date the Commission grants initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Also, institutions in candidate status are not permitted to apply for approval of substantive changes of any kind. Waivers of this policy may be granted when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency. (Exception: Program additions and changes may be approved after the last day of an accreditation visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation only for the purpose of compliance with findings stated in the official team report.)**

\*See Definitions - Job Upgrade Training and Continuing Occupational Education. Continuing occupational education programs are not included on the list of approved programs.

### **Programs with Credentialed Exit Points**

Programs are often designed with embedded exit points (also referred to as occupational completion points). These exit points are created during a formal program planning process that is documented and that includes input from the program's occupational advisory committee. Students enrolled in the program who demonstrate acceptable progress are issued credentials (such as certificates of completion) when these points are reached. They indicate specific points within the program at which it is determined, during the program planning process, that a student has gained marketable skills and is employable.

For example, a Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program that is 1,200 clock hours in length (required for a diploma) may be designed with an exit point credential titled 'Certified Nursing Assistant Certificate' (CNA). The CNA certificate is issued to students who complete at least 250 clock hours of the LPN program. Students who choose to leave the LPN program before completing the hours required for the diploma will still be rewarded with a credential for completion of a certain portion of instruction that indicates the student gained a certain level of knowledge and skills. This certificate may greatly benefit the student who seeks employment in the field of Allied Health, even though it may be at a lower level of pay and long-term opportunity.

Institutions are not required to list all exit points on the list of approved programs for the Council. However, if the institution advertises enrollment in an exit point program, like the CNA program mentioned in the example above, it **MUST** list the CNA program separately on the list of approved programs. Institutions' admissions offices must never enroll a student who is seeking only a lower-level credential (like the CNA example, which requires only 250 clock hours and is not eligible for Title IV financial aid) into a longer program (like the LPN program, which requires 1,200 clock hours) that is eligible for Title IV financial aid in order to access that funding.

Overall, it is best to remember this rule: If the institution advertises a workforce preparation/career advancement program (regardless of the length of the program, whether or not it is an exit point of another longer program, or the credential offered) on its website, in newspapers, on television, or any other media, for the purpose of enrolling students, it **MUST** include that program on the Council's list of approved programs. It must also include those programs in the Self-Study Report and FTE calculation, and it must collect student achievement data for that program. (There are options, however, when reporting student achievement data for exit points within the Council's annual report software that are described in the Help Manual for the software and discussed during Council workshops.)

### **Applied Associate Degree Programs**

The official recognition of the Council by the U.S. Department of Education includes the accreditation of institutions that offer programs with credentials through the applied associate degree. Institutions offering academic degrees or degrees at the baccalaureate level or beyond must seek accreditation by another agency.

Institutions accredited by the Council must demonstrate that all applied associate degree programs comply with:

1. The requirement for institutions that do not teach the general education courses required of applied associate degree programs to verify and document that general education courses from other sources are accepted only through formal articulation agreements; these institutions must be accredited by an agency recognized by the Department of Education.
2. The requirement that general education courses are academic courses that are not applicable to a specific occupation.
3. Criteria from each Standard that are applicable to all programs offered by the institution.
4. Policies that govern the establishment and maintenance of the Council's list of approved programs for the institution as specified in the *Policies and Rules of the Commission*.
5. Additional criteria that govern clock hour/credit hour conversion and academic coursework required of degree programs.

6. Benchmarks for completion, placement, and licensure exam pass rates as specified in the *Policies and Rules of the Commission*. (When reporting student achievement data for degree programs, institutions may not combine degree data with the same programs offering a lesser credential level, such as a diploma or certificate. However, diploma and certificate data from the same program may be combined and reported with degree-level data.)

Institutions that seek approval to offer an applied associate degree must begin the process by applying for a change of scope described in this manual.

Additionally, dual accreditation of applied associate degree nursing programs by the Council and the Accrediting Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) is available upon request by COE-accredited institutions. Additional criteria required by ACEN for their accreditation of nursing programs is included within Standard Two – Educational Programs in the *Handbook of Accreditation*.

### **Public Institution Apprenticeship Program Activities**

The Council classifies apprenticeship program activities conducted by accredited institutions as either standard instructional activities or independent activities.

#### **1. Determination Factors**

The primary factors used to make determinations between what are standard instructional activities versus independent activities are those that clarify which entity involved in the apprenticeship program

1. funds the program activities;
2. determines admission requirements;
3. manages the curriculum;
4. employs, supervises, and evaluates the faculty;
5. coordinates with business partners to fulfill on-the-job activities required for completion, [if applicable](#);
6. issues credentials for program completion; and
7. oversees the facilities, equipment, and other assets used for instruction.

The Council makes no attempt to be exhaustive in this listing of factors and, therefore, reserves the right to make individual determinations when necessary.

Ultimately, when the Commission determines an apprenticeship program is a standard instructional activity, it is affirming the institution's ability – and responsibility – to meet accreditation requirements.

#### **2. Standard Apprenticeship Programs**

Public institutions conducting standard apprenticeship activities have the ability to influence program quality and success with respect to student achievement. Therefore, these institutions have the responsibility to include apprenticeship programs classified as 'standard' on the Council's list of approved programs, in institutional Self-Study Reports, in FTE enrollment calculations, and in data collection efforts that determine compliance with student achievement benchmarks.

Additionally, standard apprenticeship programs must demonstrate compliance with all other Council Policies, Standards, Conditions, and Criteria no differently than with any other career or technical (standard) program offering.

### 3. Independent Apprenticeship Programs

Public institutions sometimes partner with local unions, trade associations, and other professional organizations to offer instruction required for apprenticeship programs in a variety of technical fields. In many of these instances, determination factors such as those listed above are the responsibility of the union or association, not the institution. These activities are classified as 'independent'.

Accredited institutions involved in independent apprenticeship activities often have little, if any, control over those critical factors that influence program quality and student achievement to which Council Standards hold them accountable. Therefore, the Council considers independent apprenticeship activities to be outside the scope of the Council's accreditation.

The Council regards independent apprenticeships between its public membership and union and non-union entities as community service educational activities. These types of activities are often core to an institution's mission as it engages with employers and other entities within the community to provide needed services.

Independent apprenticeship programs, therefore, must not appear on the institution's list of approved programs, will not be evaluated during accreditation team visits, will not require the collection of student achievement data, and will not be included in the calculation of full-time equivalent (FTE) for the purpose of assigning annual membership dues.

### 4. Additional Responsibilities for Independent Apprenticeship Programs

Public institutions involved in independent apprenticeship programs must specify that those programs are not accredited by the Council.

Credentials issued by Council-accredited institutions for these activities must not include the Council's seal of accreditation, nor by any other implication – direct or indirect – suggest that these programs are accredited by the Council.

Institutions are expected to make changes to their publications to comply with these requirements. Website information must be revised – if needed – immediately. Hard copy and digital publications, such as catalogs, brochures, etc., must be revised – if needed – upon the next review/revision cycle for those documents.

#### Calculating and Reporting Program Length

As stated previously, there is no minimum or maximum program length that determines which programs must be included on the list of approved programs.

The Council uses the following definitions to describe the methods of measurement of program length:

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

**Semester Credit Hour:** A unit of program measurement that equals a minimum of 15 clock hours of lecture, 30 clock hours of laboratory, or 45 clock hours of work-based activities

**Quarter Credit Hour:** A unit of program measurement that equals a minimum of 10 clock hours of lecture, 20 clock hours of lecture, or 30 clock hours of work-based activities

The Commission is aware that some postsecondary institutional licensing agencies approve courses and/or programs with the number of credit hours being calculated to as many as two decimal places.

The Commission is also aware that the general practice in the postsecondary education community is to measure courses and programs in whole numbers of credit hours.

The policy of the Commission is that the conversion of clock hours to credit hours for individual courses may be calculated to include a fraction or decimal but must not be inflated by rounding up. The sum of the course credit hours for a program must equal a whole number without rounding up.

### **Guidelines for Reporting Secondary Programs**

The Commission offers its evaluative services to postsecondary institutions that enroll secondary students in career and technical education programs. Institutions electing to include secondary programs in the self-study process of the Council must specify this in their application for candidate status with the Council and indicate which programs enroll secondary students.

Once secondary program evaluation is indicated, the institution must

- a. include secondary programs in the Self-Study Report,
- b. include secondary students in the institution's FTE calculation, and
- c. collect completion rate data on the secondary student population.

Secondary programs included on the list of approved programs are those that are occupational in nature and enroll high school students (grades 11 and 12).

In some states, institutions may enroll adult students in secondary occupational programs. When this is the case, those programs that have adults enrolled or MAY enroll adults must be on the list of approved programs, especially if those adults are eligible for Title IV Student Financial Aid.

### **Vocational English-as-a-Second-Language Programs**

A Vocational English-as-a-Second-Language (VESL) Program is a stand-alone program that is limited to persons already possessing occupational competencies who would be employable if they could demonstrate adequate English language skills. The program consists solely of English-as-a-Second Language courses and must meet the following requirements:

- a. The program must meet the Objectives and Criteria required of all COE-approved educational programs.
- b. The institution must admit only students who need instruction in English to be able to use the knowledge and skills that they already possess in order to obtain employment.
- c. The institution must demonstrate that students enrolled in the VESL program possess job skills, as evidenced by documentation such as credentials, test scores, job experience, or verification of skill competencies by a qualified third party.
- d. The institution must accept the responsibility for placement assistance upon graduation, in compliance with COE placement requirements.
- e. The institution must submit student achievement data to verify completion rates, placement rates and, if applicable, licensure exam pass rates, for all students enrolled in Vocational ESL programs.

Vocational English-as-a-Second-Language Programs must be included on the list of approved programs.

Conversely, 'Avocational' English-as-a-Second-Language programs (or 'stand-alone' ESL programs) are those English language programs that enroll members of the community who are interested in learning the language for purposes other than seeking employment. Avocational English-as-a-Second-Language Programs are not included in the Council's scope of accreditation and are not included on the list of approved programs. Institutions offering any avocational programs must specify that the programs are not accredited by the Council and do not qualify for Title IV financial aid assistance in appropriate publications and brochures.

### **Instructional Delivery Methods**

The instructional delivery method is one of the program specifics contained on the list of approved programs. The three types of instructional delivery methods indicated on the list are defined as follows:

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

**Hybrid Program:** A program that makes available less than 50% of its required instructional hours via distance education.

**Traditional Program:** A program that requires all instructional hours to be completed on campus.

When Council publications use the term 'Distance Education' in context of a method of program delivery, it is defined as follows:

**Distance Education [Delivery Method]:** Education that uses one or more 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, email, 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, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed.

Institutions must report the highest percentage of distance education available for a program on the list. That is, either hybrid or distance education delivery must be indicated – not both.

Information regarding approval of distance education as a delivery method is discussed in this manual in the section titled: Procedures Required for Approval of Institutional Distance Education Delivery.

### **Maintenance of the List of Approved Programs**

Institutions are provided access to their current list of approved programs through the MyCouncil accreditation management system. Institutions should review the list at least twice each year to be sure the specifics of each program on the list are accurate and identically match institutional publications and all state, federal, authorizing agency, and/or board approvals and licenses.

The Council classifies changes to the list of approved programs as 'substantive changes'. The *Handbook of Accreditation* provides a detailed chart of these changes under the 'Programmatic' heading.

In most instances, applications must be provided and official approval granted in order to change the list of approved programs once it is established. Site visits and fees are sometimes a part of the approval process. The chart of programmatic substantive changes in the *Handbook of Accreditation* provides institutions with information about the process for approval and whether or not fees and site visits are necessary.

The Council's website ([www.council.org](http://www.council.org)) provides institutions with access to all applications required for changing the list of approved programs. When site visits are involved as part of the approval process, the site visit forms used by team members are also available on the website.

**IMPORTANT: A moratorium will be placed on the acceptance, processing, and approval (both initial and final) of ALL substantive changes beginning six months prior to the original scheduled dates of accreditation team visits through the date the Commission grants initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Also, institutions in candidate status are not permitted to apply for approval of substantive changes of any kind. Waivers of this policy may be granted when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency. (Exception: Program additions and changes may be approved after the last day of an accreditation visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation only for the purpose of compliance with findings stated in the official team report.)**

The term 'teach-out' sometimes applies to programs on the list of approved programs and is defined as follows.

**Teach-Out:** This term is used to describe the process of permanently closing (terminating) a program that currently has students enrolled. The teach-out of a program may be accomplished by the institution alone or in agreement with another institution. When a program teach-out is performed by the institution, an Institutional Teach-Out Form must be submitted for approval by the Commission. When a program teach-out is performed under an agreement with an outside entity, a Two-Party Teach-Out Application, a teach-out plan, and a copy of the teach-out agreement must be submitted for approval by the Commission. Teach-outs occur most commonly when a program fails to meet enrollment expectations or when it fails to meet one or more student achievement benchmarks within the compliance period allowed and the institution must close the program or risk loss of status with the Council. Programs that are taught out and closed because of failure to meet student achievement benchmarks cannot be added back to the list of approved programs until at least 12 months after the last student completes the teach-out and require submission of a new program application. (See the *Handbook of Accreditation* for more information on program teach-outs.)

### **Institutional Procedures for Teaching Out Programs**

The institution should send an email and a hard-copy letter to the last email address and home address it has on file for the students enrolled in the program to be taught out. The email and letter should state that the program in which the student is enrolled is being discontinued at a future date. The letter should go on to state the remaining enrollment dates for specific courses in the program, as well as the projected termination date after which courses in the program will no longer be offered at the institution. The letter should remind the students of its standard registration procedures to ensure that the students correctly enroll in the courses in question. Furthermore, the email and letter should state the options for transferring courses from the soon-to-be-closed program to other programs within the institution. It may

also include information about other institutions in the area that offer the program in question. The email and letter should include a phone number at the institution for students to call (up to a certain date) if they have questions about the program to be closed or about possibly transferring to other programs within the institution or to other institutions. Most importantly, every student enrolled in the program must be provided every opportunity to finish the program at the institution. The institution must keep a copy of these emails and letters on file to document its attempt to notify in a timely way any student remaining in the program.

As stated previously in this section, all programs on the list of approved programs are considered to be 'active' programs. Once a program is 'deleted', it is immediately removed from the list. The Council defines a program deletion as follows:

**Deletion:** This term is used to describe the termination (closure) of a program offered by an institution. Deletion applies when the institution determines that a program will be permanently removed from its list of program offerings and when no students are currently enrolled. Programs that are deleted because of failure to meet student achievement benchmarks cannot be added back to the list of approved programs for 12 months after the last student completes the teach-out and require submission of a new program application.

Programs that have no enrollment for 12 consecutive months are classified as 'deleted' and must be removed from the list of approved programs. Adding a program back to the list that had been removed because of lack of enrollment for 12 consecutive months or more requires the submission of a new program application.

### **Changing the List of Approved Programs**

Institutions applying for changes to the list of approved programs must do so in a timely manner. Applications for substantive changes must be submitted for approval no less than 90 days prior to implementing the change. Normally, approvals to the list of approved programs occur within six to eight weeks after submission of a complete application.

Institutions preparing to host an accreditation visiting team may not apply for approval of changes to the list of approved programs beginning six months prior to the original scheduled dates of accreditation team visits through the date the Commission grants initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Waivers of this policy may be granted when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency. (Exception: Program additions and changes may be approved after the last day of an accreditation visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation only for the purpose of compliance with findings stated in the official team report.)

## Limits to Approvals for Changing the List of Approved Programs

There are several instances when changes to the list of approved programs (or any other substantive change) are not allowed. These instances occur

1. During the period of candidate status (no substantive changes of any kind will be approved).
2. Beginning six months prior to the original scheduled dates of accreditation team visits through the date the Commission grants initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation (a visit that involves the institution writing the Self-Study Report). Waivers of this policy may be granted when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency. (Exception: Program additions and changes may be approved after the last day of an accreditation visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation only for the purpose of compliance with findings stated in the official team report.)
3. When an unplanned substantive change approval is pending.
4. When a decision on the appeal of a Commission decision is pending.
5. When an institution has a past-due invoice for payment owed to the Council.
6. When a restrictive violation status has been imposed against an institution (Probation or Show Cause Order).

It is important to remember that 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.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, pages 7, 36, and 57

## **ANNUAL FINANCIAL DATA FOR NON-PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS**

### **A. Annual Submission of Financial Data**

Each non-public institution that has candidate or accredited status with the Commission of the Council on Occupational Education is required to submit audited financial information on an annual basis. The information required for submission each year must include:

1. Audited financial statements prepared by an independent certified public accountant; and,

Audited financial statements shall adhere to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and shall be prepared in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS).

At a minimum, the financial statements must include the following information:

- (a) Accountant's report
  - (b) Balance sheet
  - (c) Income statement
  - (d) Statement of cash flow
  - (e) Composite score (unrounded) as disclosed on a composite score worksheet included in the audit report using the formula approved by the U.S. Department of Education prepared by an independent CPA. (This requirement applies to all non-public institutions regardless of whether or not they participate in Federal financial aid programs.)
  - (f) Appropriate footnotes to the financial statements and other relevant disclosures
  - (g) The name, licensing number, and licensing state of the CPA or firm responsible for preparing the audited financial statement
2. A completed COE Financial Questionnaire.

The COE Financial Questionnaire must be completed by the institution.

The COE Financial Questionnaire can be obtained from the Council's website ([www.council.org](http://www.council.org)).

The due date for submission of this information occurs annually no later than six months following the end date of the institution's fiscal year. A penalty for late submission of requested documentation will apply to submissions received after the due date, as stated in the *Handbook of Accreditation*.

### **B. Submission of Financial Data for Initial Accreditation**

For initial accreditation, non-public institutions, registered apprenticeship schools (RAS), and national ERISA training institutes (NETIs) 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 must be the financial data submitted with the institution's candidacy application and the second financial data must represent activity while the institution is in candidate status.

Composite score worksheets prepared by an independent CPA (Criterion 15) must also be submitted with the audited financial statements, and both of these financial statements must demonstrate compliance with the Commission's financial stability requirements as stated in the *Handbook of Accreditation*, Standard Seven - Financial Resources including a minimum, unrounded composite score of 1.5.

A candidate institution must host a team visit for initial accreditation no later than 24 months from the date candidate status is granted. Therefore, if a candidate institution fails to present an audited financial report that includes a composite score of at least 1.5 for the fiscal year following the year of the audit report that qualified the institution for candidacy with the Commission, the institution may either: 1) withdraw from candidate status and re-apply at a later date when compliance for two (2) consecutive years can be demonstrated, or 2) be dropped from candidate status.

### **C. Third-Party Audit Review**

The Commission reserves the right to have any audit reviewed by an independent, third-party auditor. A \$1,500 fee will be assessed to an institution requiring a third-party audit review. This assessment consists of a non-refundable \$250 audit review fee and a \$1,250 deposit to cover the review cost. Any funds left over from the deposit are refunded to the institution. Should there be an outstanding balance after the deposit is applied, the institution must pay the outstanding balance. The institution shall be provided with a statement of expenses incurred.

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REFERENCE: *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, pages 8, 10, 17, 28, and 74

## **GUIDELINES FOR ACTION ON FINANCIAL DATA THAT FAILS TO MEET FINANCIAL STABILITY REQUIREMENTS**

Non-public institutions are required to submit financial data to the Commission each year. As stated in the *Handbook of Accreditation*, institutions must demonstrate financial stability through submission of the most recent financial statement that reflects

1. a minimum, unrounded composite score of 1.5 for the two most recent fiscal years as disclosed on a composite score worksheet included in the audit report; and
2. no condition or event which could potentially affect the institution's ability to continue operation, including but not limited to, contingent liabilities, ongoing litigation, or the financial stability of a parent corporation.

Financial data is first reviewed and summarized by Commission staff, then presented to the Commission for its review and action at each of its meetings.

Institutions that fail to meet either one of the conditions above will be placed on a status and required to submit documentation. Actions the Commission may take and documentation it may request are outlined below.

<b>CONDITION</b>	<b>COMMISSION ACTION</b>	<b>DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED</b>
1(a). A composite score equal to 1.0, but less than 1.5	Warning Status (at a minimum)	An audited financial statement completed by an independent CPA for a fiscal year and a completed COE Financial Questionnaire. Both to be submitted on a schedule determined by the Commission.  A pro forma <sup>1</sup> financial statement prepared by an independent CPA to be submitted as part of an interim status report.  The Commission may require additional documentation or action by the institution on a schedule it determines.
1(b). A composite score of less than 1.0	Probation Status (at a minimum)	Same as above
2. Any condition or event which could potentially affect the institution's ability to continue operation, including but not limited to, contingent liabilities, ongoing litigation, or the financial stability of a parent corporation.	Warning Status (at a minimum)	Interim reports on the status of contingent liabilities on a schedule determined by the Commission.  The Commission may require additional documentation or action by the institution on a schedule it determines.

<sup>1</sup>A financial statement that is calculated using an accountant's discretion. It does not follow GAAP or GAGAS. Rather, calculations are computed according to the estimated relevance of certain events/conditions experienced by the company. Items that are normally included/excluded from an audited financial statement using GAAP may be represented differently in a pro forma statement, depending on what the accountant feels accurately represents the company's true performance. However, the Council requires that each pro forma statement submitted must include a balance sheet, an income statement, and a cash flow statement.

## **Time Period for Compliance**

The Commission requires institutions to demonstrate compliance with all financial stability requirements within a time period that does not exceed:

- (1) twelve months, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution is less than one year in length;
- (2) eighteen months, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is at least one year, but less than two years in length; or
- (3) two years, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is at least two years in length.

The Commission may use its discretion to specify a time period for compliance more restrictive than those listed above, based upon circumstances. Institutions approaching the deadline for compliance originally specified by the Commission will be placed on Probation status. The Commission will offer the institution the opportunity to submit a good cause extension request for review and action by the Commission at its next meeting. Once the stated time period for compliance expires, if the institution fails to demonstrate compliance with the Commission's financial stability requirements, it will be dropped from candidate status or accreditation to be effective by the deadline originally specified in the Commission's letter.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, pages 8, 10, 18, 51, and 73

## **GUIDELINES FOR ACTION ON PROGRAMS THAT FAIL TO MEET ESTABLISHED BENCHMARKS**

Upon completion of the annual report software each year, institutions are provided with a list of completion, placement, and licensure performance rates for each program reported.

The minimum student achievement benchmarks required to demonstrate compliance with the Council's Standards and Criteria regarding program outcomes (Standard Three) are as follows:

- 60% Total Completion Rate
- 70% Total Placement Rate
- 70% Licensure Exam Pass Rate

These benchmarks apply to each program at each location approved by the Commission regardless of program length, enrollment, or credential offered.

Student achievement data is submitted annually by all candidate and accredited institutions (except Federal institutions) through the Council's annual reporting software.

Institutions with one or more programs that fail to meet established benchmarks must submit, through the annual report software, an explanation for the program(s) failure to meet the benchmark(s), and a plan of improvement for each triggered program.

Once the Annual Report is submitted to the Commission office, a summary of all institutional annual report data will be reviewed by the Commission at its next scheduled meeting. Institutions reporting one or more programs that fail to meet one or more of the established benchmarks will be placed on Warning status.

Institutions on Warning status must submit documentation requested by the Commission by their stated timelines.

Additional actions may be requested by the Commission which may include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- (1) Attendance of the chief administrator and the placement officer at a Commission-sponsored workshop for reporting completion, placement, and licensure exam pass rate data
- (2) Attendance at a Commission-sponsored workshop on program and institutional outcomes or improvement of completion, placement, and licensure exam pass rates
- (3) Consultation in person or by telephone with a Commission staff member
- (4) The scheduling of a focused review visit to the institution

### **Time Period for Compliance**

The Commission will require institutions to demonstrate that triggered programs are in compliance with the agency's Standard within a time period that must not exceed:

- (1) twelve months, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution is less than one year in length;
- (2) eighteen months, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is at least one year, but less than two years in length; or

- (3) two years, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is at least two years in length.

The Commission may use its discretion to specify a time period for compliance more restrictive than those listed above, based upon circumstances. Institutions approaching the deadline for compliance originally specified by the Commission will be placed on Probation status. The Commission will offer another opportunity for submission of data that demonstrates compliance with the benchmarks, an official notice of the closure or teach-out of triggered programs, or a good cause extension request for review and action by the Commission at its next meeting. Once the stated time period for compliance expires, if the institution fails to demonstrate the compliance of triggered programs with the established minimum benchmarks, it will be dropped from candidate status or accreditation to be effective by the deadline originally specified in the Commission's letter.

REFERENCE: *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, pages 10, 18, 51, and 66

## THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

### TEAM VISITS

#### A. General

The policy of the Commission is to select highly qualified visiting teams in order to ensure the most effective evaluation of institutions. Each visiting team is composed of at least two members representing administrative and academic positions. Larger teams may include public members. A Commission representative may accompany a visiting team. The institution will be notified as to the membership of the team prior to the distribution of the team roster. A team member may be disqualified by the institution for cause.

Consultants may not serve as leaders or members of visiting teams scheduled for institutions for which they have contracted their services. Additionally, consultants must not be present during Council site visits required for candidacy, accreditation, focused review, or approval of substantive changes. Anyone who violates this policy will be permanently barred from participation in visiting teams or any other accreditation activity conducted by the Council. (Additionally, consultants may not serve in the role of accreditation liaison officer for an institution and should not contact the Council office for information on behalf of the institution.)

Visiting team members must certify that they have no vested interest or conflict of interest in the institution to be visited. Team members must also certify that all documents and information will be treated in a confidential manner.

A visiting team shall not be assigned to any institution that has past due invoices from the Council on Occupational Education.

The Commission uses the following guidelines for establishing teams:

1. Team Leader
  - (a) Must have demonstrated competence in evaluation, leadership, and written composition
  - (b) Must have served as a member of at least two teams
  - (c) Must be recommended to serve as future team leader by the leader of a team on which he/she has been a member
  - (d) Must agree to conduct prescribed activities within the identified time frame
  - (e) Must attend a workshop for team leaders, which includes the evaluation of programs offered via traditional delivery and distance education, prior to becoming a team leader and must attend a team leader workshop at least once every three years. (NOTE: The Commission may waive this requirement in special circumstances.)
2. Team Members
  - (a) Must be recommended by a team leader, a school director, a state or county department of education representative, or the Commission staff
  - (b) Must have expertise or experience relevant to the field of occupational education
  - (c) Must have filed a biographical data sheet with the Commission

- (d) Must attend a workshop for team members, which includes the evaluation of programs offered via traditional delivery and distance education, prior to becoming a team member and must attend a team member workshop at least once every three years. (NOTE: The Commission may waive this requirement in special circumstances.)

### 3. Desirable Team Composition

- (a) Administrators and instructors of occupational education institutions accredited by the Commission
- (b) System-wide supervisors, coordinators, and directors of occupational education
- (c) Teacher educators, student personnel specialists, and lay personnel (who have expertise in occupational education)

Team members are selected who have expertise in the programs offered by the institutions and knowledge of the Standards, Criteria, Conditions, Policies, and procedures of the Commission. The team leader and team members are selected by the Commission's staff. The team leader and the team members shall come from outside the state of the main campus of the institution and certify that they have no vested interest or conflict of interest in the institution to be visited and that they will treat all institutional documents and information in accordance with the Council's Conflict of Information and Confidentiality Policy. (Army, Navy, and Air Force shall be considered as states for this purpose.) The Commission relies on the personal and professional integrity of each visiting team member and expects him or her to be sensitive to potential conflicts of interest in the review process.

#### **B. Candidate Visiting Teams**

Upon receipt of a complete application for candidate for accreditation, the Commission staff shall assign a visiting team (usually two members) to evaluate the institution. The team usually plans to arrive by noon on the first day and conduct its review through the afternoon on the following day.

The team evaluates the institution to verify that the eligibility requirements are met and to provide information for the Commission to determine that there is reasonable expectation for the institution to become accredited within three years. 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 findings of non-compliance in the team report for receipt in the Council office within 30 days of the date that the team report was transmitted from the Council office.

The cost of the on-site evaluation will be borne by the institution. The Executive Director will determine the amount of the deposit for the required team visit.

#### **C. Accreditation Visiting Teams**

A current institutional self-study must be completed by the staff of the institution before the preliminary visit is made. The preliminary visit is concluded 30 days prior to the scheduled team visit. The purpose of the preliminary visit is to assure the Commission that the institution is prepared for the team visit and to finalize arrangements for the team visit. The team shall evaluate the educational programs as well as determine compliance with the Standards, Criteria, Conditions, Policies, and procedures of the Commission. The Commission staff will determine the number of team members based on relevant factors such as the number of programs, staff members, students enrolled, campuses, distance between campuses, and whether the purpose of the visit is for initial accreditation or reaffirmation. The team normally visits the institution for three to five days depending on the size of the institution, the number

and location of the campus(es), and the number of programs offered. All sites of the institution are visited each time an institution goes through the reaffirmation cycle. The composition of the team is determined at the discretion of the Commission staff.

The visiting team leader will submit a written report to the Executive Director within 30 days of the date that the site visit was concluded. A copy of the official visiting team report will be transmitted to the institution. The institution must submit a response to all findings of non-compliance in the team report for receipt in the Council office within 30 days of the date the team report was transmitted from the Council office. Identification of deficiencies documented during the visit may result in the institution being placed on special status (Warning, Probation, or Show Cause Order) or losing its accreditation.

The cost of the preliminary visit as well as the cost of the team visit will be borne by the institution. The Executive Director will determine the amount of the deposit for the required team visit.

#### **D. Focused Review Teams**

Focused review team visits are conducted when certain substantive 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. In either circumstance, the number of team members and the length of the visit are determined by the Commission's staff based on relevant factors such as the purpose of the visit, the number of campuses to be visited, and the distance between the campuses to be visited. Focused review visits may require from one to five days on campus depending on the nature of the visit. Focused review visits may be conducted as announced or unannounced visits.

The focused review team leader will submit a written report to the Executive Director within 30 days of the date that the site visit was concluded. A copy of the official visiting team report will be transmitted to the institution. The institution must submit a response to all findings of non-compliance in the team report for receipt in the Council office within 30 days of the date that the team report was transmitted from the Council office. Identification of deficiencies documented during the visit may result in the institution being placed on special status (Warning, Probation, or Show Cause Order) or losing its accreditation.

The cost of the on-site evaluation will be borne by the institution. The Executive Director will determine the amount of the deposit for the required team site visit.

#### **E. Observers on Visiting Teams**

The Commission's policy regarding observers of team visits differentiates between out-of-state and in-state observers. An observer is defined as an individual who is not chosen by the Commission staff to serve on a visiting team but who participates in all activities of the team visit except for evaluation of any aspect of the institution, deliberations of the visiting team, and decisions of the team.

An out-of-state individual may request to be an observer by writing the Commission. An observer is assigned to a visiting team only after receiving Commission staff approval and when concurrence is obtained from the institution to be evaluated. Upon the institution's concurrence, the observer is notified and sent appropriate materials from the team leader, the institution, and the Commission. The Commission may include staff of the U.S. Department of Education or out-of-state agencies on the visiting team. When an individual is invited by the Commission to be an observer, the expenses are reimbursed by the Commission. Persons observing at their own request are responsible for their own expenses.

With respect to in-state observers, the policy of the Commission is not to allow observers (as defined above) on visiting teams to institutions within the state of the observer's residence. Institutions being visited may permit in-state observers to visit the institution during the team evaluation; however, in-state observers do not have access to the team meetings.

**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2021 Edition*, pages 8, 10, 16, and 31

## APPEAL PROCESS

The *Handbook of Accreditation* describes the appealable actions of the Commission, the grounds for appeals, and the basic requirements to initiate an appeal. The Commission is charged with the responsibility of defining procedures to ensure that the appeal process is fair and equitable for all parties. The procedures below are designed to achieve this requirement.

### A. Request for Reconsideration

The institution may, only on one occasion, seek reconsideration by the Commission of significant information that was unavailable to the institution prior to an adverse action. Information may bear materially on the financial deficiencies identified by the Commission or other serious issues that resulted in the adverse action being taken. This review shall take place prior to the appeal board consideration of the adverse action. The Commission's determination relative to significance or materiality of the new information is not separately appealable by the institution.

### B. Appeal Document

The institution must submit an appeal document (in PDF format), to include a table of contents and consecutively numbered pages, to the Executive Director, electronically, at least 10 days in advance of the commencement of the appeal board proceedings. The appeal document shall set out, in detail, all of the facts and arguments that the institution believes support a reversal or modification of the Commission's action and include all documentation to support its appeal.

Upon receipt of the institution's appeal document, the Executive Director will provide the institution with a copy of the Commission's documents (in PDF format) for the appeal board electronically.

### C. Appeal Panel

The appeal panel shall be composed of 45 members (15 to be elected each year). Members of the appeal panel shall be nominated by the Council Committee on Nominations and elected by the Council membership from among the chief administrators (administrators) and occupational supervisors or instructors (academics) of institutions accredited by the Commission and representatives of the general public. The panel members shall be selected on the basis of their academic and administrative expertise and experience in occupational education and their familiarity with the Commission's Standards, Conditions, Policies, and procedures. Elected panel members may serve out their full three-year terms, even if they retire or change positions. An appeal panel member may be removed by the Commission for cause.

After receiving a formal, complete, and properly filed notice of intent to appeal, the Commission Executive Committee shall name a five-member appeal board plus one alternate member from among the members of the appeal panel. Board selections shall fulfill academic and administrative classifications, and at least one of the five-member appeal board selected will represent the general public. The alternate member selected will also be a public member in the event that the initial public member selected is unable to continue during the appeal. This will ensure that a public member will have the opportunity to affect the decision outcome of the appeal.

One member of the appeal board shall be named chair, and one member shall be named vice-chair. The institution will be provided with the names of members elected to the appeal board. Within 15 days,

the institution may veto, with cause, any member elected to this first appeal board. Replacements for members vetoed by the institution shall be named from the appeal panel by the Commission Executive Committee and are not subject to veto by the institution.

The alternate board member shall attend all appeal board proceedings, and shall replace any regular board member who cannot fulfill his/her responsibilities. The vice-chair will preside in the absence of the chair.

Commission members and Commission staff shall not be elected as members of the appeal panel. Should a member of the appeal panel be elected to serve as a Commission member, he/she will be automatically removed from the appeal panel. Appeal panel members from the same state as the aggrieved institution shall not serve on the appeal board. Each selected appeal panel board member shall certify that he/she has no vested interest or conflict of interest in the aggrieved institution and that they will treat all institutional documents and information in accordance with the Council's Conflict of Information and Confidentiality Policy.

#### **D. Expense of Appeal**

The notice of intent to appeal must be accompanied by a cashier's check in the amount of \$35,000 to cover the cost of the appeal. The \$35,000 consists of a non-refundable \$5,000 notice-of-intent-to-appeal fee and a \$30,000 deposit to cover the costs of the appeal board proceedings. Any funds left over from the deposit are refunded to the institution. Should there be an outstanding balance after the deposit is applied, the institution must pay the outstanding balance. The institution shall be provided a statement of expenses incurred.

The institution will bear all direct costs in connection with the appeal including, but not limited to, the following expenses:

1. Travel and subsistence of appeal board members participating in the appeal review and proceedings
2. Cost of proceedings room
3. All direct costs of the appeal, such as stenographic costs, mailing or distribution of appeal documents, and communication services
4. Travel and subsistence of three official Commission representatives
5. Court reporter costs
6. Cost of Commission Legal Counsel should the appeal board affirm the action of the Commission

#### **E. Appeal Board Proceedings**

The Executive Director will set the date, time, and place of the proceedings of the appeal board at least 30 days in advance and so notify the institution and members of the appeal board in writing. The institution shall provide the Executive Director with the names, addresses, and positions of all individuals whom the institution wants to be heard by the appeal board at least 10 days before the date for the proceedings.

The Commission chair shall designate the persons who are to appear on behalf of the Commission. The Commission chair shall submit to the appeal board and the institution a list of names, addresses, and positions of persons whom the chair has asked to appear before the appeal board at least 10 days before the date of the proceedings.

The appeal board proceedings shall be conducted as follows:

1. The chair shall preside and act to maintain decorum. He/she shall ensure that the participants have a reasonable opportunity to be heard and to present all relevant oral and written documentation. The chair may limit presentation of documentation to avoid repetition. He/she shall have the right to vote and the authority to rule on questions which pertain to the conduct of the hearing.
2. The Commission considers an appeal to be an adversarial proceeding. The institution does not have the right to cross-examine individuals, such as the staff, members of the evaluation team, or Commission members. Only the appeal board members have the right to question individuals present at any hearing. Appeals are administrative, not judicial hearings; and, therefore, the legal rules of evidence are not applicable. Hearings on appeals are closed to the public. The institution shall not present any new documentation concerning the progress of the institution or the remedying of deficiencies since the date of the Commission's action that is being appealed. The institution has the right to be represented by legal counsel at the appeal.
3. Legal counsel will be present to advise the appeal board.
4. A court reporter will produce a transcript of the proceedings.
5. The board shall consider all of the oral and written documentation in relation to the specific grounds of appeal.

All members of the appeal board shall attend all of the proceedings. Proceedings shall be scheduled to effectuate their attendance. The designated chair shall preside at all proceedings and will rule on all procedural matters. Decisions of an appeal board will be based upon a majority vote of the board's members.

#### **F. Limitations**

The appeal board shall act within the following limitations:

1. The appeal board shall not include current members of the Commission that took the initial adverse action against the institution.
2. The appeal board affirms, amends, remands, or reverses the adverse actions of the original decision-making body.

#### **G. Responsibility**

The appeal board has the responsibility to prepare a written report for the chief administrator of the institution and for the Commission. The report will give the decision of the board and the reasons for the decision. The report must be sent to the Executive Director within 30 days following the last day of the board proceedings. The Executive Director will send one copy to the institution and place the report on the agenda of the next Commission meeting. The Commission will receive the report of the appeal board, will implement the appeal board's decision, and will act in a manner consistent with the appeal board's decision regarding the institution's or program's accreditation status.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 21

## **OBLIGATIONS OF AFFILIATION**

### **FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT**

The Commission's definition of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) is a unit of measurement used by the Commission to define the amount of scheduled instruction that equates to one full-time student during one academic year. The Commission defines an FTE as 900 contact (clock) hours, 45 quarter credit hours, or 30 semester credit hours of scheduled instruction. The clock or credit hours used to calculate an institution's FTE must reflect coursework in which a student has enrolled and matriculated. The FTE does not include hours or credits transferred from other institutions or awarded as CLEP courses.

In establishing a rationale for specification of FTE, the Commission recognizes that numerous methods may be used by states and institutions for calculating FTE. While many institutions are open twelve months each year, some operate for only nine or ten months. Within some institutions, there are both full-time and part-time students engaged in twelve-month programs, nine-month programs, evening short courses, off-campus instruction, part-time skill upgrade instruction, and possibly other types of instructional activity. Among these institutions, some programs are measured in semester or quarter hours, particularly if they are degree programs, while other programs are measured in student contact (clock) hours. The Commission desires to conform to general practice in the technical education community to the extent feasible and, therefore, has adopted this definition of an FTE for its reporting purposes.

The FTE reported on the Annual Report each year determines the amount of dues that each institution will owe the following fiscal year. The FTE for all types of program measurement at each branch, extension, extended classroom, and instructional service center must be added to the FTE for the main campus to obtain the total FTE for the institution.

With Commission approval, military institutions and Job Corps Centers may apply routinely used alternative methods of computing enrollment that yield a sufficiently accurate approximation of the FTE.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 28

## **COST OF TEAM VISITS**

Institutions must reimburse the Council for actual expenses of team members, staff members, and/or Commission representatives. Reimbursable expenses include travel, lodging, and meals of the team, staff members, and/or Commission representatives. (There is no charge for salaries of team members, staff members, or Commission representatives.)

In addition to the expenses mentioned above, the Council will assess a fee of \$1,000 for initial accreditation and renewal of accreditation. This fee is non-refundable.

Institutions shall not reimburse team members, staff members, or Commission representatives directly. All reimbursements are made in accordance with the policies and guidelines of the Council. Local institutional travel policies do not apply to team visits since the individuals conducting the visits act as agents of the Commission. The Council will contract with institutions or school systems that cannot otherwise reimburse the Council for team visit expenses.

The Executive Director will determine the amount of the deposit for each team visit that must be received at least 60 days in advance of the date on which the team visit begins. The institution shall be provided a statement of expenses incurred. Unused funds from the deposit shall be returned provided that the institution has no other outstanding debt with the Council; otherwise, unused funds will be applied toward any outstanding debt the institution owes the Council. Any costs in excess of the deposit must be paid by the institution.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 28

## **DEBARMENT APPEAL PROCEDURES**

### **A. Notice of Appeal**

A person debarred by the Commission may appeal the debarment decision by submitting a written notice of intent to appeal to the office of the Council on Occupational Education within 20 days of the date of the letter notifying the person of the debarment decision. The person (appellant) must state in the letter the grounds for the appeal and whether the appeal review will be conducted with a hearing or without a hearing.

### **B. Appointment of a Debarment Appeal Board**

The appeal proceeding will be conducted by a three-member Debarment Appeal Board appointed by the Commission Chair from among the 45 members of the Council Appeal Panel. The Commission Chair shall designate one member of the Debarment Appeal Board as Board Chair. In any instance where two or more debarments are imposed by the Commission based on the same set of facts and/or conditions, the Debarment Appeal Board may consider any or all appeals in one proceeding. The Debarment Appeal Board Chair will establish deadlines for the submission of documentation to be considered by the Board and the subsequent schedule for the conduct of the proceeding.

### **C. Review without Hearing**

If the appellant does not request a hearing, the Debarment Appeal Board shall meet to determine its decision regarding the appeal based on the appellant's notice of intent to appeal and any supporting documentation and written arguments submitted by the appellant in accordance with the time schedule established by the Board Chair. The Debarment Appeal Board may consult with legal counsel of the Commission in reviewing the case and making its decision on the appeal. The decision of the Debarment Appeal Board shall be transmitted to the Commission for final action at its next meeting. The appellant shall be notified of the Commission's final action within 30 days of its decision.

### **D. Review with Hearing**

The appellant may have a hearing before the Debarment Appeal Board if requested in the letter notifying the Commission of the intent to appeal the debarment. The Chair of the Debarment Appeal Board shall notify the appellant of the date, time, and place for the hearing and the deadline for receiving, in advance of the hearing, any written submissions, including documentation and arguments related to the debarment from the appellant and legal counsel for the Commission. Such submissions must be received in the Council's office by the established deadline. The following procedures will be applicable to the hearing:

1. The appellant shall have the burden of demonstrating that the debarment should be set aside or modified.
2. The Debarment Appeal Board Chair shall establish the amount of time that will be allotted for the hearing, taking into account the number of persons whose appeals are being heard concurrently. The appellant may be represented by legal counsel. The time for the hearing will be divided between the appellant and the Commission so as to give the Commission time to present its case for debarment and the appellant time to present a rebuttal argument.
3. The Debarment Appeal Board's decision on the appeal will be transmitted to the Commission within 30 days of the conclusion of the hearing for final action at its next meeting. The appellant will be notified of the Commission's action within 30 days of the Commission's decision.

**E. Authority of the Debarment Appeal Board**

The Debarment Appeal Board shall have the authority to recommend any of the following actions:

1. Affirmation of the Commission's debarment decision
2. Reversal of the debarment decision if it finds that the Commission's decision was arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to the substantive obligations for accreditation by the Commission
3. Modification of the Commission's debarment decision based upon newly discovered substantive information, reversal of the grounds used for the debarment, or other material grounds deemed applicable by the Debarment Appeal Board

**F. Expenses of the Debarment Appeal Board**

The appellant shall bear all expenses of the debarment appeal including, but not limited to, the cost of travel and subsistence for the Debarment Appeal Board and two Council representatives, court reporter services, Commission legal counsel, hearing room, and any other direct costs of the appeal. The Council will require a deposit prior to the appeal review whether with or without a hearing, based on estimated costs of the appeal. Failure to pay the deposit by the due date shall be grounds for dismissal of the appeal without further recourse.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 29

## SUBSTANTIVE AND OTHER CHANGES

### PROCEDURES REQUIRED FOR APPROVAL OF A CHANGE OF OWNERSHIP OR CONTROL

A change of ownership or control is defined as follows:

- A. For-Profit Corporation: A change of ownership is defined as 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. Any change from one ownership structure to another constitutes a change of ownership.

EXCEPTION: Cases when the owner of an institution dies, and the owner's interest is transferred to either a family member or another current owner of the corporation (either of whom has been active in the management of the institution for the past two years prior to the aforementioned action), will not be treated as a change of ownership.

- B. 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 approval is granted following a change of control. A change from not-for-profit to for-profit constitutes a change of control.
- C. Registered Apprenticeship Programs/National ERISA Training Institutes: A change of control for a Registered Apprenticeship Program or National ERISA Training Institute occurs when its trust agreement is altered in any way that changes the voting authority of the governing board.

Accreditation does not transfer with a change of ownership or control of an institution. After an official notification of a change of ownership or control is received from an institution, no substantive change approvals will be granted for pending applications, nor will new applications for substantive changes be accepted. An application for a change of ownership or control will not be accepted until any substantive changes requiring a site visit have been granted final approval. Reaffirmation of accreditation cannot be granted until a pending change of ownership or control has received final approval by the Commission. The following moratorium also applies to a change of ownership or control:

**IMPORTANT: A moratorium will be placed on the acceptance, processing, and approval (both initial and final) of ALL substantive changes beginning six months prior to the original scheduled dates of accreditation team visits through the date the Commission grants initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Also, institutions in candidate status are not permitted to apply for approval of substantive changes of any kind. Waivers of this policy may be granted when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency. (Exception: Program additions and changes may be approved after the last day of an accreditation visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation only for the purpose of compliance with findings stated in the official team report.)**

The procedures defined by the Commission for approval of a change of ownership or control of an institution are described below.

#### **A. Change of Ownership or Control of Total Institution**

As previously stated, accreditation does not transfer with a change of ownership or control of an institution. Due to both Department of Education regulations and requirements of the Commission, the change of ownership or control of an institution is a time-sensitive process. The institution shall contact Council staff at least 120 days prior to the anticipated date of a change of ownership or control. The institution must notify the Commission in a letter sent by certified mail or other signature-required delivery service at least seven days prior to a change of ownership or control. Upon legal change of ownership or control and if the institution desires to be accredited, a completed Application for Change of Ownership or Control and cashier's check for the application fee must be received in the Council office by the Executive Director within 14 days. The application must include the institution's audited financial statements prepared by an independent certified public accountant for the two most recent fiscal years. It must also include the purchaser's audited financial statements prepared by an independent certified public accountant for the two most recent fiscal years. In addition, the purchaser must submit an audited balance sheet prepared by an independent certified public accountant for the institution as of the date of purchase to be received in the Council office within 14 days after the closing date. Financial statements shall adhere to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and shall be prepared in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS).

At the time of the receipt of the Application for Change of Ownership or Control, the Commission considers the change in ownership or control final. In the event that, for any reason, the ownership or control reverts back to the previous owner(s) or non-profit board/controlling parties, a new application for candidate for accreditation must be filed.

Upon receipt of a completed application, the Executive Director shall review the application and may request additional documentation. The Executive Director shall then refer the application to the Commission for review and action at its next meeting. The Commission reserves the right to require a preliminary visit to any new site prior to granting initial approval of the change of ownership or control application.

Within 180 days from the effective date the Commission grants initial approval for the change of ownership or control, an on-site visit will be conducted at the institution. The cost of the on-site visit will be borne by the institution. The Executive Director will determine the amount of the deposit for the site visit. Prior to hosting the on-site visit, the change of ownership or control must be implemented and operational. If the change of ownership or control being considered has not been implemented within 180 days from the effective date of initial approval, initial approval of the change of ownership or control will be rescinded. Initial approval 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.

The visiting team (which may include a Commission representative) will verify the accuracy of information provided by the institution in its application and ensure that the institution continues to comply with the Standards, Criteria, Conditions, Policies, and procedures of the Commission.

The visiting team will submit a written report to the Executive Director within 30 days of the date that the site visit was concluded. A copy of the official team report will be transmitted to the institution. The institution must submit a response to all findings of non-compliance stated in the team report for receipt in the Council office within 30 days of the date that the report is transmitted from the Council office. The institution's response report, if required, must provide documentation that deficiencies or violations of the Standards, Criteria, and/or Conditions of Accreditation have been corrected. Identification of deficiencies documented during the visit may result in the institution being placed on status (Warning, Probation, or Show Cause Order) or losing its accreditation.

The Commission will review the application, financial statements, team report, and the institution's response report, if required, and will make a final decision on the change of ownership or control at the next Commission meeting. Should the institution be denied approval of the change of ownership or control, candidate or accredited status is terminated. The institution may appeal the decision in accordance with procedures specified by the Commission.

Following final approval of a change of ownership or control, an eligible institutional representative must attend required workshops, and the institution must complete a self-study and host a full accreditation team visit. The timing of the accreditation visit may have to be adjusted to accommodate the change of ownership process but must occur no later than 18 months after final approval is granted.

**B. Change of Ownership or Control of a Branch or Extension**

If an institution sells or otherwise disposes of a branch or extension, the accreditation of the branch or extension will be discontinued simultaneously with the sale or disposal action that results in a change of ownership or control. If an accredited institution acquires a branch or extension and wishes to continue to operate it as a branch or extension, the procedures required to establish a new branch or extension shall be followed. Should the new owner or non-profit board wish to make the branch or extension an accredited main campus, it must make application for candidate for accreditation.

**C. Change of Ownership or Control of Candidate for Accreditation**

Institutions granted candidacy for accreditation may not change ownership or control while in candidate status.

**D. Partial Change of Ownership or Control**

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.

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REFERENCE: *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, pages 35 and 41

## PROCEDURES REQUIRED FOR APPROVAL OF A CHANGE OF LOCATION

A change of location is defined as a physical relocation of an existing main, branch, extension campus, or instructional service center within the institution's service area, and where there is a reasonable expectation for current students, faculty, and staff to continue instruction and/or employment at the new location.

Institutions seeking approval for a change of location must first submit to the Commission a letter of intent for the planned change of location at least 30 days before submitting a Change of Location application. Failure to provide advance notification may call into question the entire institution's accreditation. The institution must then submit the application to the Commission for initial approval at least 90 days prior to the change of location unless the move is an unplanned relocation, thereby constituting an unplanned substantive change. The application shall include the following documentation:

1. The rationale for the change of location
2. Documentation of planning that took place including minutes, long-range plan, Annual Report, needs assessment, and other relevant documentation
3. The distance of the new location from the old location, and whether the new location is within the same 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.)
4. A budget, to include major categories such as administration, instructional programs, personnel salaries, plant maintenance, lease or rent of building, insurance, custodial services, and security service. (Provide projected revenue, expenditures, and cash flow.)
5. A plan for accommodating students (to include teach-out agreements made with other institutions or agencies, as well as refunds to students not wishing to relocate)
6. Information concerning programs to be offered at the new location. (A New Program application for each new program and/or Program Relocation/Replication application must be submitted.)
7. A single line drawing with dimensions of facilities to be used with each area identified
8. A copy of the license, if required, indicating the new location's address
9. A copy of the lease agreement, if applicable
10. A copy of applicable insurance
11. A check for the Change of Location fee, per the *Handbook of Accreditation*

An application for a change of location will not be accepted until any pending substantive changes requiring a site visit have been granted final approval by the Commission and as stated in the following:

**IMPORTANT: A moratorium will be placed on the acceptance, processing, and approval (both initial and final) of ALL substantive changes beginning six months prior to the original scheduled dates of accreditation team visits through the date the Commission grants initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Also, institutions in candidate status are not permitted to apply for approval of substantive changes of any kind. Waivers of this policy may be granted when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency. (Exception: Program additions and changes may be approved after the last day of an accreditation visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation only for the purpose of compliance with findings stated in the official team report.)**

Upon receipt of a completed application, the Executive Director shall review the application and may request additional documentation. The Executive Director shall then refer the application to the Commission for review and action at its next meeting. The Commission reserves the right to require a preliminary visit to any new site prior to granting initial approval of the change of location application.

Within 180 days from the effective date the Commission grants initial approval for the change of location, an on-site visit will be conducted to the new location. The cost of the on-site visit will be borne by the institution. The Executive Director will determine the amount of the deposit for the site visit. Prior to hosting the on-site visit, the change of location must be implemented and operational. If the change of location being considered has not been implemented within 180 days from the effective date of initial approval, initial approval of the change of location will be rescinded. Initial approval 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.

The visiting team (which may include a Commission representative) will verify the accuracy of information provided by the institution in its Change of Location application, consider the adequacy of the new location, and ensure that the institution continues to comply with the Standards, Criteria, Conditions, Policies, and procedures of the Commission.

The visiting team will submit a written report to the Executive Director within 30 days of the date that the site visit was concluded. A copy of the official team report will be transmitted to the institution. The institution must submit a response to all findings of non-compliance stated in the team report for receipt in the Council office within 30 days of the date that the report is transmitted from the Council office. The institution's response report, if required, must provide documentation that deficiencies or violations of the Standards, Criteria, and/or Conditions of Accreditation have been corrected. Identification of deficiencies documented during the visit may result in the institution being placed on status (Warning, Probation, or Show Cause Order) or losing its accreditation.

The Commission will review the application, the team report, and institutional response, if required, at its next meeting and will make a final decision on extending accreditation to include the change of location.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, pages 35 and 42

**PROCEDURES REQUIRED FOR APPROVAL TO ESTABLISH  
A NEW NON-MAIN CAMPUS SITE  
(Branch, Extension, Instructional Service Center, Extended Classroom)**

The different types of non-main campus sites are defined in the *Handbook of Accreditation*. Refer to those definitions to determine the appropriate type of applications required for approval.

The Commission does not approve sites where work-based activities such as internships, externships, clinicals, or apprenticeships occur.

Institutions seeking approval to establish a new non-main campus site must first submit to the Commission a letter of intent for the planned new non-main campus site at least 30 days before submitting the appropriate new non-main campus application. Failure to provide advance notification may call into question the entire institution's accreditation. The institution must then submit the application to the Commission for initial approval at least 90 days before students are enrolled at the new site.

An application for a new non-main campus site will not be accepted until any pending substantive changes requiring a site visit have been granted final approval by the Commission and as stated in the following:

**IMPORTANT: A moratorium will be placed on the acceptance, processing, and approval (both initial and final) of ALL substantive changes beginning six months prior to the original scheduled dates of accreditation team visits through the date the Commission grants initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Also, institutions in candidate status are not permitted to apply for approval of substantive changes of any kind. Waivers of this policy may be granted when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency. (Exception: Program additions and changes may be approved after the last day of an accreditation visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation only for the purpose of compliance with findings stated in the official team report.)**

Upon receipt of a completed application, the Executive Director shall review the application and may request additional documentation. The Executive Director shall then refer the application to the Commission for review and action at its next meeting. The Commission reserves the right to require a preliminary visit to any new site prior to granting initial approval of the new non-campus site application.

Within 180 days from the effective date the Commission grants initial approval for the new non-main campus site, an on-site visit will be conducted at the new site and the main campus. Prior to hosting the on-site visit, the new non-main campus site must be in full operation with students attending. If the new non-main campus site being considered is not in full operation with students attending within 180 days from the effective date of initial approval, initial approval of the new non-main campus site will be rescinded. Initial approval 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.

The visiting team (which may include a Commission representative) will verify that the information provided by the institution in its application is accurate and that the additional site has the personnel, facilities, and resources it claims to have. The team will consider the adequacy of the new site and its potential impact on the institution as a whole and will ensure that the institution continues to comply with the Standards, Criteria, Conditions, Policies, and procedures of the Commission. The approval

process shall include, but is not limited to, a thorough review of programs, financial resources, physical resources, and human resources (administration and management), of both the main campus and the new site. Branch campuses must meet, at a minimum, all Criteria of Standard Ten – Student Services and Activities.

The visiting team will submit a written report to the Executive Director within 30 days of the date that the site visit was concluded. A copy of the official team report will be transmitted to the institution. The institution must submit a response to all findings of non-compliance stated in the team report for receipt in the Council office within 30 days of the date that the report is transmitted from the Council office. The institution's response report, if required, must provide documentation that deficiencies or violations of the Standards, Criteria, and/or Conditions of Accreditation have been corrected. Identification of deficiencies documented during the visit may result in the institution being placed on status (Warning, Probation, or Show Cause Order) or losing its accreditation.

The Commission will review the application, the team report, and institutional response, if required, at its next meeting and will make a final decision on extending accreditation to include the new non-main campus site.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, pages 35 and 38

## PROCEDURES REQUIRED FOR APPROVAL OF A CHANGE OF SCOPE: Initial Associate Degree Program and New Occupational Area of Instruction

A change of scope is defined as any instance in which an institution departs significantly from its mission by seeking to offer its first applied associate degree program or with regard to the occupational areas for which it offers preparation.

### Approval for Initial Associate Degree Program

The Council does not accredit institutions that offer degree credentials of any type other than the applied associate degree.

Institutions seeking approval to offer the initial (first) associate degree program must first submit to the Commission a letter of intent to offer its initial associate degree program at least 30 days before submitting a New Associate Degree Program application. Failure to provide advance notification may call into question the entire institution's accreditation. The institution must then submit the application to the Commission for initial approval at least 90 days prior to the date students will be in the new program.

An application for the initial associate degree program will not be accepted until any pending substantive changes requiring a site visit have been granted final approval by the Commission or the Executive Director and as stated in the following:

**IMPORTANT: A moratorium will be placed on the acceptance, processing, and approval (both initial and final) of ALL substantive changes beginning six months prior to the original scheduled dates of accreditation team visits through the date the Commission grants initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Also, institutions in candidate status are not permitted to apply for approval of substantive changes of any kind. Waivers of this policy may be granted when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency. (Exception: Program additions and changes may be approved after the last day of an accreditation visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation only for the purpose of compliance with findings stated in the official team report.)**

Upon receipt of a completed New Associated Degree Program application, the Executive Director shall review the application and may request additional documentation. Associate degree programs must demonstrate compliance with all applicable Conditions, Standards, and Criteria specified in the *Handbook of Accreditation*. In exceptional cases, evidence of documented work experience and skills in the technical field may be considered instead of formal academic requirements for faculty members teaching associate degree coursework. (Refer to the latest edition of the *Handbook of Accreditation* for all criteria relating to faculty requirements for associate degree programs.) The Executive Director may approve the application or refer it to the Commission for review and action at its next meeting. The Commission reserves the right to require a preliminary visit to any new site prior to granting initial approval of the initial associate degree program application.

**[NOTE:** See section on next page entitled "Additional Procedures Required for Approval of a Change of Scope: Initial Associate Degree Program and New Occupational Area of Instruction".]

## Approval for Addition of New Occupational Area of Instruction

Institutions seeking approval to add a new occupational area for which instruction will be provided must first submit to the Commission a letter of intent to add a new occupational area of instruction at least 30 days before submitting a Change of Programmatic Scope application. Failure to provide advance notification may call into question the entire institution's accreditation. The institution must then submit the application to the Commission for initial approval at least 90 days prior to the date students will be in the new program. The application **must** be accompanied by a new program application from the occupational area resulting in the institution's change in programmatic scope.

An application for a Change of Programmatic Scope will not be accepted until any pending substantive changes requiring a site visit have been granted final approval by the Commission or the Executive Director and as stated in the following:

**IMPORTANT: A moratorium will be placed on the acceptance, processing, and approval (both initial and final) of ALL substantive changes beginning six months prior to the original scheduled dates of accreditation team visits through the date the Commission grants initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Also, institutions in candidate status are not permitted to apply for approval of substantive changes of any kind. Waivers of this policy may be granted when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency. (Exception: Program additions and changes may be approved after the last day of an accreditation visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation only for the purpose of compliance with findings stated in the official team report.)**

Upon receipt of the completed Change of Programmatic Scope application, the Executive Director shall review the application and may request additional documentation. The Executive Director may approved the application or refer it to the Commission for review and action at its next meeting. The Commission reserves the right to require a preliminary visit to any new site prior to granting initial approval of the Change of Programmatic Scope application.

**[NOTE:** See next section entitled "Additional Procedures Required for Approval of a Change of Scope: Initial Associate Degree Program and New Occupational Area of Instruction".]

## **Additional Procedures Required for Approval of a Change of Scope: Initial Associate Degree Program and New Occupational Area of Instruction**

Within 180 days from the effective date the Commission or Executive Director grants initial approval for the change of scope (initial associate degree program or new occupational area of instruction), an on-site visit will be conducted at all locations where the instruction occurs. The cost of the on-site visit will be borne by the institution. The Executive Director will determine the amount of the deposit for the site visit. Prior to hosting the on-site visit, the institution must have fully implemented the change of scope and students must be enrolled in the program(s) described in the application. If the change of scope being considered is not in full operation with students attending within 180 days from the effective date of initial approval, initial approval will be rescinded. Initial approval 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.

The visiting team (which may include a Commission representative) will verify the accuracy of information provided by the institution in its application, will consider the adequacy of the program's instruction and resources as well as its potential impact on the institution as a whole, and will ensure that the institution continues to comply with the Standards, Criteria, Conditions, Policies, and procedures of the Commission.

The visiting team will submit a written report to the Executive Director within 30 days of the date that the site visit was concluded. A copy of the official team report will be transmitted to the institution. The institution must submit a response to all findings of non-compliance stated in the team report for receipt in the Council office within 30 days of the date that the report is transmitted from the Council office. The institution's response report, if required, must provide documentation that deficiencies or violations of the Standards, Criteria, and/or Conditions of Accreditation have been corrected. Identification of deficiencies documented during the visit may result in the institution being placed on status (Warning, Probation, or Show Cause Order) or losing its accreditation.

The Executive Director may approve the application or refer it to the Commission for review of the application, the team report, and institutional response, if required, at its next meeting and will make a final decision on extending accreditation to include the change of scope.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, pages 36, 38, 59, and 77

## PROCEDURES REQUIRED FOR APPROVAL OF A CHANGE IN EXISTING PROGRAM

The Council defines a change in an existing program previously approved by the Commission as:

- (1) increases or decreases the length required for completion of the program and award of a credential, and/or
- (2) changes the method of instructional delivery for the program.

These changes must be reported to and approved by the Commission no later than 90 working days prior to the change taking place. The process for review and approval differ depending on the degree to which the changes affect the length of a program and its method of delivery and are detailed below.

**IMPORTANT: A moratorium will be placed on the acceptance, processing, and approval (both initial and final) of ALL substantive changes beginning six months prior to the original scheduled dates of accreditation team visits through the date the Commission grants initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Also, institutions in candidate status are not permitted to apply for approval of substantive changes of any kind. Waivers of this policy may be granted when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency. (Exception: Program additions and changes may be approved after the last day of an accreditation visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation only for the purpose of compliance with findings stated in the official team report.)**

### Increase/Decrease in Length of Less than 25%

Changes made to programs that result in an increase or decrease of less than 25% of the total hours required for completion of the program and an award of a credential previously approved by the Commission must be reported to the Commission through an application.

The application requires the institution to report, course by course, the specific changes made in the curriculum and to submit copies of all applicable local, state, and/or federal level approvals (if required); an application fee; and other supporting documentation specified in the application.

Substantive changes of this type are reviewed by the staff. Approval for the change may be granted by the Executive Director, or the review and approval may be referred to the Commission for action. All changes approved by the Executive Director are subject to final approval by the Commission.

### Increase/Decrease in Length of 25% or More and Changes in Instructional Delivery Methods

Changes made to programs that result in an increase or decrease of greater than 25% of the total hours required for completion of the program and an award of a credential previously approved by the Commission, and those that change the method of instructional delivery for programs, are considered substantial in nature and must be reported to the Commission through an application.

One application is used to report changes in length and/or changes in delivery methods. The application requires the institution to report, course by course, the specific changes made in the curriculum and/or instructional delivery method (if applicable), and to submit copies of all applicable local, state, and/or federal level approvals, if required, an application fee, and other supporting documentation specified in the application.

Substantive changes in length of programs (increases of 25% or more) are reviewed by the staff, but approval is granted only by the Commission.

If the program is to be delivered to any degree via distance education delivery methods, and the institution has not been previously approved to offer instruction via distance education, an application for approval of Institutional Distance Education **must** be submitted. (See section entitled “Procedures Required for Approval of Institutional Distance Education Delivery”.) Institutional approval is required only once. Approval for changing the delivery mode of instruction will not be issued until the Institutional Distance Education application has been approved by the Commission. Exemption: Institutions offering Commission-approved distance education instruction prior to July 1, 2007 are not required to file the application for approval of Institutional Distance Education.

Institutions that seek approval for the first (initial) program that includes a distance education mode of delivery – whether it is hybrid or distance education - AND is currently approved by the Commission, requires a virtual visit within 180 days of the effective date of initial approval. The Commission must grant both initial approval of the application and final approval after the site visit has been performed. (NOTE: Approval for initial programs with a distance education mode of delivery may require a physical site visit as well; therefore, a deposit for a physical site visit may be required by the Commission, per the *Handbook of Accreditation*.)

Approval for an institution’s subsequent conversion of a currently-approved traditional program to a hybrid program where the institution is approved to offer distance education by the Council may be initially approved by the Executive Director or may be referred to the Commission for review and action. Also, the Commission may require a virtual visit prior to approval. Virtual visits, if required, will take place within 180 days of initial approval. The Commission will grant final approval.

Approval for an institution’s subsequent conversion of a currently-approved traditional or hybrid program to a full distance education program may be approved by the Executive Director, or may be referred to the Commission for review and action. A virtual visit will follow within 180 days of initial approval. The Commission will grant final approval.

It is important to note, when considering changes to distance education delivery methods, that the Commission’s eligibility requirements specify that institutions must utilize a campus-based instructional delivery system with at least 25% of the institution’s total FTE being derived from enrollments in traditional programs.

Failure to implement approved substantive changes within 180 days of the effective date of initial approval will result in the revocation of the initial approval of the substantive change. Initial approval of the change may also be revoked if, when required, an institution fails to host a site visit. If this occurs, the institution will be placed on the next Commission agenda for consideration of adverse action and penalties may apply.

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REFERENCE: *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 36

## PROCEDURES REQUIRED FOR APPROVAL OF INSTITUTIONAL DISTANCE EDUCATION DELIVERY

Standard Two – Educational Programs, as presented in the *Handbook of Accreditation*, applies to all programs offered by member institutions regardless of their mode of delivery. The Council does not accredit institutions that offer instruction via correspondence education.

Institutions engaged in or investigating the possibility of offering instruction via distance education must maintain compliance with the Council's eligibility requirements and other conditions applicable to candidacy and accreditation as printed in the latest edition of the *Handbook of Accreditation*.

**IMPORTANT: A moratorium will be placed on the acceptance, processing, and approval (both initial and final) of ALL substantive changes beginning six months prior to the original scheduled dates of accreditation team visits through the date the Commission grants initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation. Also, institutions in candidate status are not permitted to apply for approval of substantive changes of any kind. Waivers of this policy may be granted when changes are mandated by the institution's local school district or state agency. (Exception: Program additions and changes may be approved after the last day of an accreditation visit for initial or reaffirmation of accreditation only for the purpose of compliance with findings stated in the official team report.)**

Contracts for instruction are common in programs offered via distance education. However, accredited institutions must maintain compliance with the Commission's conditions regarding contractual agreements. Further information on contractual arrangements may be found in the latest edition of the *Handbook of Accreditation* and in these *Policies and Rules of the Commission*.

### A. Institutional Distance Education Approval

Applying for approval to begin distance education instruction involves completing an Institutional Distance Education application. The application must be reported to and approved by the Commission no later than 90 working days prior to the change taking place. This application addresses applicable criteria in the Standards regarding technical infrastructure, timeliness of faculty responses to students, and privacy and security, among other concerns. Institutional Distance Education approval is required only once. A fee is due with submission of the application, per the *Handbook of Accreditation*.

Approval of Institutional Distance Education applications will require a virtual visit and may involve a physical site visit as well. Site visits will be conducted within 180 days after initial approval is granted. The application is reviewed by the Commission for final approval.

Once an institution receives Institutional Distance Education approval, applications for programs with a distance education delivery method will be considered. Distance education program applications may be submitted in conjunction with the Institutional Distance Education application.

### B. Hybrid Programs

Applying for approval to begin distance education instruction involves completing an Institutional Distance Education Approval application. Once Institutional Distance Education approval is granted, institutions may apply for approval to offer hybrid programs (where less than 100% of the program's required hours are available via distance education).

If an institution's initial program offering that includes a distance education delivery method is a hybrid program (where less than 100% of the program's required hours are available via distance education), the institution is required to submit the appropriate program application for approval. A virtual visit will be made and a physical site visit may be made as well. The Executive Director shall review the application and may request additional information. The Executive Director shall then refer the application to the Commission for review and approval.

A site visit will be conducted within 180 days after initial approval is granted. The application is reviewed by the Commission for final approval.

### **C. Distance Education Programs**

Once Institutional Distance Education approval is granted, approval for a distance education program (where 100% of the program's required hours are available via distance education) requires submission of the appropriate program application. A virtual visit will be made and a physical site visit may be made as well. The Executive Director shall review the application and may request additional information. The Executive Director shall then refer the application to the Commission for review and approval.

A site visit will be conducted within 180 days after initial approval is granted. The application is reviewed by the Commission for final approval.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 36

## **SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR MONITORING INSTITUTIONAL GROWTH**

### **A. Full-Time Equivalent**

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% 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% or more is achieved, a formal notice must be submitted to the Commission within 30 days. This notice must include the 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.

### **B. 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*.

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REFERENCE: *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, pages 45 and 46

## **CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENTS**

The role of contractors hired by candidate/accredited institutions must exclude the authority to make official decisions for the institution or to serve in the role of accreditation liaison officer for the institution.

### **A. 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, per the *Handbook of Accreditation*.

### **B. 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% 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. If the educational program to be taught under a contract is to be taught at a location that is not yet approved for the institution by the Commission, the institution must submit an application for a new Instructional Service Center designating the location of instruction. Initial approval of the Instructional Service Center application must be granted by the Commission before the institution's students may begin instruction at the new site.

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.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, pages 35 and 47

## COMPLAINTS

### COMPLAINT PROCEDURES OF THE COMMISSION

The procedures to be followed by the Commission on complaints concerning alleged injustices or unethical practices by applicants, candidates, and accredited institutions will depend upon the nature of the charges and the documentation submitted.

A complaint may be defined as any formal notification provided to the Commission alleging violations of the Standards, Criteria, Conditions, Policies, and/or procedures of the Commission. A complaint may be brought against an institution by one or more parties, including students, instructors, administrators, state or federal agencies, employers, vendors, another institution, or others. A complaint may also take the form of a lien, lawsuit, disciplinary action, negative action by another accrediting body or a regulatory agency or board, or a decision of a criminal or civil court. Complaints that do not relate to the Commission's Standards, Criteria, Conditions, Policies, and/or procedures are referred to the appropriate federal or state agency.

When a complainant is associated with an institution in some capacity and contacts the Commission in person or by telephone, the complainant is asked whether institutional grievance procedures have been followed. If not, it is recommended to the complainant that he or she do so prior to making a formal complaint to the Commission. The complainant is also told to submit the complaint in writing, to address the complaint specifically to the Commission, and to include any supporting documentation. The complaint must be signed and must provide the name and mailing address of the complainant.

The Commission may review any oral or written complaint that alleges a safety or health problem at a candidate or accredited institution.

#### **A. Complaints**

The Commission reviews certified complaints (as documented on the Complaint Certification form) that allege non-compliant activities and practices regarding applicant, candidate, and accredited institutions. Complainants are sent an email describing the process and containing a Complaint Certification form. The email also informs the complainant (when associated with the institution) that it is assumed he or she has exhausted the grievance procedures of the institution prior to submitting the complaint. The complainant must return the Complaint Certification form and any supporting documentation within 14 days of the email.

#### **B. Grievance Certification**

A Complaint Certification form is sent along with the email to the complainant. This form is to be completed and attests either that all grievance procedures have been exhausted, or that grievance procedures have not been followed due to reasons stated on the form. The form is signed, dated, and returned. (See Complaint Certification and sample letters.) Uncertified complaints will not be processed.

#### **C. Institution Notification**

After receiving any additional information as requested from the complainant that substantiates the allegations of the complainant, the complaint is sent to the institution requesting that a written reply be furnished to the Commission within 21 calendar days from the date of the letter. The standard form letter informs the institution that the complaint, if true, may be a serious violation of the Commission's

Standards, Criteria, Conditions, Policies, and/or procedures and requires a reply with documentation demonstrating that (a) the complaint has been resolved, (b) the complaint has no merit and documentation is offered in support of this position, or (c) the complaint has merit and documentation is offered to support changes that will eliminate such complaints in the future. The institution is informed that the complaint, together with the institution's response and the complainant's comments of the response, will be taken to the Commission for review and appropriate action.

#### **D. Comment on Institutional Response**

A copy of the institutional response to the complaint received by the Council will be transmitted to the complainant for review. The complainant will have an opportunity to review and make comment on the institution's response. The comment on the institutional response should be submitted in writing by the complainant to the Council within 7 calendar days of the date the institutional response is transmitted to the complainant by the Council and may include supporting documentation.

#### **E. Commission Review**

The Commission, or the Commission Executive Committee acting on behalf of the Commission, then determines whether the complaint has merit or not, and considers whether the institutional response is adequate. The Commission or the Commission Executive Committee will then take appropriate action within 21 days, which may include one or more of the following:

1. **Resolution of the Complaint:** A letter informs both the complainant and the institution that the Commission believes the matter to be resolved. The letter to the institution may contain a stern warning that a similar complaint in the future will cause the institution's accreditation to be in jeopardy. The resolution of the complaint may be a result of acting upon the merits of the complaint and the institutional response, or upon additional information obtained by staff and/or a special evaluation team.
2. **Deferral of Action for Additional Information:** The Commission or the Commission Executive Committee may request additional information concerning the matter either from the institution, the complainant, or other sources including state, federal, or accreditation agencies.
3. **Deferral of Action for Site Visit:** The Commission or the Commission Executive Committee may request a focused review team to obtain additional facts from the complainant, the institution, and/or other agencies.
4. **Placement of Institution on Conditional Status:** When it appears that serious violations of Standards, Criteria, Conditions, Policies, and/or procedures have occurred, the Commission or the Commission Executive Committee may immediately issue a Notification of Apparent Deficiency, place the institution on Probation status, or issue a Show Cause Order, which gives the institution 30 calendar days to respond in writing. The notification sets forth (1) the particular Standard, Criterion, Condition, Policy, and/or procedure apparently violated; (2) the nature of the violation as it relates to the Standard, Criterion, Condition, Policy, and/or procedure; and (3) the evidence of the violation. The Commission or the Commission Executive Committee may also place the institution on Warning status. Notices of Probation, Warning, and Show Cause Order are sent to all appropriate state, federal, and accrediting agencies with a request for any additional information from them concerning the institution. (This process also informs the agencies of possible violations of federal or state law.)
5. **Removal of Conditional Status:** When the Commission or the Commission Executive Committee receives documentation that the institution has complied with the requirements imposed upon it as a result of the complaint, then the conditional status is removed and letters are issued to appropriate state, federal, and accrediting agencies announcing

this action. Depending on the nature of the situation and compliance requirements, the complainant may or may not be informed of this action.

6. **Severance of Its Relationship with the Institution:** For serious unethical conduct, the Commission or Commission Executive Committee may act to sever the Council's relationship with the institution by issuing a letter dropping the institution from accredited or candidate status. A copy of this letter is also sent to appropriate state, federal, and accrediting agencies. If the institution is an applicant for candidacy (having no actual candidate or accredited status with the Commission) and has been found to be in serious violation of Standards, Criteria, or Conditions, the Commission may sever its relationship by issuing a letter Denying the Application with Cause and copying this letter to the appropriate state, federal, and accrediting agencies.

#### **F. Due Process and Privacy Rights**

In all instances, the Commission recognizes the rights of Due Process, the rights of Privacy and Confidentiality, and the rights of Appeal. Complainants and/or institutions may request or be requested to appear before the Commission. Such appearances, however, are for purposes of obtaining information and are not adversarial; and, therefore, they do not bear the weight of law. Whenever there are indications to the contrary, the Council's general counsel advises the Commission as to next steps in dealing with the matter.

#### **G. Third Parties**

Although complainants may contact other agencies who in turn also submit copies of the complaint to the Commission, it is the position of the Commission to deal only with the complainant and the institution in resolving the matter. For this reason, third parties are not necessarily informed regarding the action of the Commission unless specifically requested to do so. However, any conditional status imposed upon an institution will result in certain agencies being notified as appropriate.

The Commission 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, course grades, graduation, fees, financial aid, and similar points of issue.

#### **H. Legal Representation**

When a complainant or member institution is represented by legal counsel, the attorney must allow the client to submit material on his/her own behalf in writing or the lawyer will deal directly with the Council's general counsel. The Commission staff does not communicate in oral or written form with attorneys on either side of an adversarial proceeding involving parties other than the Commission.

#### **I. Commission Staff Perspective**

The Commission's staff does not evaluate the merits of a complaint. What appears to be a frivolous or arbitrary complaint may be so due to the inability of the complainant to convey in words the serious nature of the allegations. Even when the complaint appears to be a hoax or is vindictive in nature, it is sent immediately to the institution for response so that the institution can take whatever action is indicated. Whenever the Commission receives a written communication alleging improprieties of any kind on the part of a candidate or member institution, the Commission believes the school should know about it.

## **J. Issues of Serious Public Concern**

The Commission and staff have a keen responsibility to recognize and act upon emergency complaints. When it appears that a complaint is of such magnitude or is of such a serious nature as to require immediate action, the complaint may be taken directly to the Commission Executive Committee or the Commission via telephone conference call for review and appropriate action. When neither the Commission nor the Commission Executive Committee is in session, the Executive Director may act on behalf of the Commission in response to such an emergency situation. Such matters as front-page news stories involving alleged improprieties, for example, may require an immediate inquiry on the part of the Commission.

## **K. Complaints Against the Commission**

If the Commission receives a formal written complaint from a school regarding a COE Commissioner or staff member, the Commissioner or staff member will be notified and given a copy of the complaint. The Commissioner or staff member will be given an opportunity to respond to the complaint; however, a response is optional. The complaint and any response will be reviewed by the Commission Executive Committee in the absence of the individual against whom the complaint was lodged, to determine what, if any, action is appropriate or required.

## **L. Timeliness of Complaint Process**

The Commission processes all complaints alleging safety or health matters immediately upon receipt. Members of the Commission Executive Committee provide timely review and response and make recommendations for resolving the complaint or continuing the review. The Commission attempts to resolve all complaints within 70 days. However, if the Commission or Council staff requests additional documentation from either the complainant or the institution, additional time may be required for the resolution of the complaint.

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REFERENCE: *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 49

## **REQUIREMENTS APPLICABLE TO THE COMMISSION**

### **GUIDELINES FOR ACTION ON INSTITUTIONS WITH COHORT DEFAULT RATES THAT MEET TRIGGER LEVELS SPECIFIED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

#### **Factors Considered to Establish Priorities**

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Number of years triggered (one, two, three or more)

Number of students in repayment who have defaulted

Completion, placement, and licensure exam pass rates

Record of actions taken by the Commission regarding the institution, including student complaints and placement on a status

#### **Range of Actions Directed by the Commission**

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Submission of a written report to the Commission that includes the following:

- A copy of the institution's cohort default management plan
- A description of actions taken to reduce cohort default rate
- The status of any action taken by the U.S. Department of Education
- An explanation of student population served and any mitigating circumstances
- Evidence of educational program evaluation

Attendance at a Commission workshop on student financial aid management

Imposition of a focused review visit to evaluate compliance with the Standards, Criteria, and Conditions of the Council

Placement on monitoring or violation status

Termination of accreditation

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 51

## REVIEW OF ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

The Commission conducts an ongoing and systematic review of its accreditation standards through feedback sought from its constituents to determine if

1. the Standards used by the Commission are adequate for the evaluation of the quality of the education or training provided by its member institutions, and
2. the Standards are relevant to the educational or training needs of students.

The Commission seeks input from its member institutions as part of the institutional annual reporting process. Commissioners are also petitioned for their input in evaluating the Standards through a web survey.

Input is sought from members of the public and potential employers of graduates through a survey available on the Council's website. Potential employers are also solicited for their input during occupational advisory committee meetings conducted by institutions prior to hosting accreditation visiting teams.

State and federal authorities and other accrediting agencies are contacted annually to encourage their input in the evaluation of the Council's Standards. These groups are also directed to use the survey available through the Council's website.

The data collected from these efforts are reviewed each year by the Council Committee on Accreditation Standards and Conditions.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 52

## **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, extension 105.

Complaints alleging discrimination on any of the above circumstances 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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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 53

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Policy is to protect the Council on Occupational Education's interest when it is carrying out its mission of assuring quality and integrity in career and technical education. This policy is intended to supplement but not replace any applicable state laws governing conflicts of interest or confidentiality applicable to the Council on Occupational Education as a non-profit corporation organized under the laws of the State of Georgia.

### **Conflict of Interest**

No member of the board of commissioners of the Council on Occupational Education ("COE" or "the Council") or any of its evaluation team members, consultants, appeal board members, or administrative staff shall derive any personal profit or gain, directly or indirectly, by reason of his or her participation with the Council.

Each individual shall disclose to the Council any personal interest which he or she may have in any matter pending before the Council and shall refrain from participation in any decision on such matter. Any member of the Commission, evaluation team, or an appeal board who is an officer, board member, committee member, or staff of an institution that is accredited, a candidate for accreditation, or seeking accreditation from the Council shall identify his or her affiliation with the institution and shall not participate in any decision affecting that institution by the Council.

### **Confidentiality**

The accreditation of occupational education institutions by the Commission is an activity requiring a high degree of trust, professional integrity, and confidentiality. All materials reviewed by the Commission in its role as the Board of Directors of COE or furnished to it, or to anyone with Commission-delegated powers, for the purpose of accreditation reviews or other Council business are considered confidential information. The contents of those materials and the actions taken by the Commission are to be disclosed in accordance with established communication protocols and notification procedures set forth in COE's governing documents and Section V.A.5. of the *Handbook of Accreditation*.

### **Annual Statements**

Each member of the Commission, or administrative staff with Commission-delegated powers, shall annually sign a statement which affirms that such person

- a. has received a copy of the Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Policy,
- b. has read and understands the policy, and
- c. has agreed to comply with the policy.

## Statements by Occurrence

Each member of evaluation teams, appeal boards, or consultants with Commission-delegated powers shall sign a statement upon the occurrence of the Commission assigning such powers, which affirms that such person:

- a. has received a copy of the Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Policy,
- b. has read and understands the policy, and
- c. has agreed to comply with the policy.

## Violations of the Conflict-of-Interest and Confidentiality Policy

If the Commission has reasonable cause to believe that a Commissioner, committee member, appeal board member, evaluator, or administrative staff member has failed to disclose actual or possible conflicts of interest, it shall inform the individual of the basis for such belief and afford the individual an opportunity to explain the alleged failure to disclose.

If after hearing the response of the individual and undertaking such further investigation as may be warranted under the circumstances, the Commission determines that the individual has, in fact, failed to disclose an actual or possible conflict of interest or failed to abide by the Council's protocols on the confidentiality of institutional and/or Council information, it shall take appropriate action consistent with the *By-Laws of the Council on Occupational Education*.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 24

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## **Policies and Rules Applicable to Accreditation Standards, Objectives, and Criteria**

References for Policies and Rules stated in this section are provided for the specific sections where they appear in the *Handbook of Accreditation*. The subsections that follow are consistent with the order in which the topics appear in the *Handbook of Accreditation*.

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## **STANDARD ONE: INSTITUTIONAL MISSION**

### **Requirements for Institutional Advisory Committees**

Accredited institutions are required to seek input and provide community involvement in maintaining a relevant mission for the institution.

#### **Activities of the Institutional Advisory Committee**

Following are suggestions based on best practices of accredited institutions for institutional advisory committee activities that prove to be most beneficial:

1. Annual evaluation of the institution's strategic plan (and documentation of the results of the committee's evaluation);
2. Review of financial resources as a basis for the written strategic plan;
3. Annual evaluation (and revision) of the institution's written plan for the operation, maintenance, and improvement of the physical plant;
4. Annual evaluation (and revision) of the institution's health and safety plan;
5. Review of the results of the annual evaluation of student services and offer recommendations for improvements to these services; and,
6. Validation of the planning for and implementation of new campuses and programs for the institution.

#### **Persons to Involve on the Institutional Advisory Committee**

Institutions with effective advisory committees find that involving persons from the following categories is instrumental in their success:

- Internal members: School directors, owners, department heads. These members must represent a minority of the institutional advisory committee membership.
- External members: Anyone whose business expertise may support the institution's mission and programs (e.g., business owners, manufacturing/service representatives, community leaders, financial/legal business representatives).

In the Council's experience, five to seven members categorized as 'external' seem to work best for most institutions. It is important to note, however, that the requirements stated in the *Handbook of Accreditation* regarding the numbers of members required are stated as minimums. Institutions may have as many members on their institutional advisory committees as they see fit, but the committee must have no less than three persons, all of whom are external to the institution. (Committees larger than three members must maintain a majority of external members.)

#### **Requirements Applicable to Institutional Advisory Committees**

The *Handbook of Accreditation* lists specifics that apply to institutional advisory committees with regard to minimum numbers of external members and documentation of committee activities, to name a few. The information provided below is offered in addition to the criteria that direct this Standard. (See Standard One – Institutional Mission in the appropriate version of the *Handbook of Accreditation*.)

## Same Committee Members/Dual Purposes

It is common for institutions to seek clarification on whether or not the institutional advisory committee can also serve in the role of an occupational advisory committee. It is possible for an institutional committee to serve as an occupational advisory committee if **all** of the following circumstances exist:

- The institution is a single-program institution and only requires one occupational advisory committee.
- The institution keeps separate minutes of institutional advisory and occupational advisory committee activities.
- Those who serve in an institutional advisory role also qualify to serve in an occupational advisory role. (See requirements for occupational advisory committees under Standard Two in the *Handbook of Accreditation*.)

## Committee Meeting Attendance

Institutions frequently inquire about ‘presence’ of members during meetings of the institutional advisory committee. As stated in the *Handbook of Accreditation*, committees must be comprised of no less than three members all of whom are external to the institution. (Committees larger than three members must maintain a majority of external members.) During its meetings, the committee must document that at least three external members attend each meeting, with at least two members being physically present and one virtually present. This means that one member could attend the meeting via video conference, webinar, or teleconference. (Virtual attendance of members must be in synchronous format.)

## Documentation Required/Recommended for Meetings

Minutes of each official meeting of a committee must be typed and include the following specific information:

1. Meeting specifics, such as the date and time meetings take place and the physical location of meetings
2. Names of attendees (committee members and others)
3. Names, titles, business addresses, and contact information for each member of the committee
4. Activities of the committee (highlights of their discussions)
5. Recommendations made by the committee

The Council also recommends institutions compile the following documentation as evidence of committee activities:

1. The meeting agenda
2. Handouts that may have been distributed during each meeting
3. The date and signature of the transcriber of meeting minutes

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REFERENCE: *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 56

## **STANDARD TWO: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS**

### **Requirements for Occupational Advisory Committees**

Accredited institutions are required to seek the involvement of members within its community to ensure desirable, relevant, and current practices of each occupation are being taught.

#### **Activities of Occupational Advisory Committees**

The following occupational advisory committee activities prove to be most beneficial and validate:

1. Ethical recruiting activities for each program;
2. The congruency with the institution's mission and local employment needs;
3. Program objectives;
4. The appropriateness of instructional delivery methods (traditional, hybrid, distance education);
5. Job placement and follow-up information at least annually to improve program effectiveness and program outcomes;
6. The level of instructional equipment and supplies funding to ensure quality occupational education; and,
7. Distance education courses are identical in quality, rigor, standards, and outcomes as those in traditional (bricks-and-mortar) programs, if applicable.

Also, these meetings provide an opportunity for the completion of Employer Program Verification forms by committee members who represent a company that may hire graduates.

#### **Persons to Involve on Occupational Advisory Committee**

Institutions with effective occupational advisory committees find that involving persons from the following categories is instrumental in their success:

- Internal members: School directors, owners, department heads, faculty, student body representatives. These members must represent a minority of the institutional advisory committee membership.
- External members: Anyone whose business expertise may support the institution's programs and its mission (e.g., occupational specialists who are practitioners, business owners, manufacturing/service representatives, etc.).
- External members must, collectively, represent each service area where the program is taught. Institutions with multiple campuses even within the same state may find that student demographics and employment opportunities are very different from that of the main campus. In these instances, the institution must ensure that all relevant constituencies and circumstances are represented on the advisory committee for each program. (Institutions with campuses with multiple campuses within the same or multiple states may find that convening separate committees for each campus provides the most effective advisory committee feedback for its programs.)

## Other Requirements Applicable to Occupational Advisory Committees

### Same Committee Members/Dual Purposes

It is common for institutions to seek clarification on whether or not the members of one occupational advisory committee can also serve on another occupational advisory committee (e.g., a member on the practical nursing program committee serving on the committee for the certified nurse assistant program). It is possible for a committee member to serve on more than one program committee if **all** of the following circumstances exist:

- The committee member meets the requirements as stated in the *Handbook of Accreditation* for both programs (e.g., practical nursing and certified nurse assistant).
- The institution keeps separate minutes for each program's committee meetings.

Also, it is common for institutions to seek clarification on whether or not the institutional advisory committee can also serve in the role of an occupational advisory committee. See Standard One: Institutional Mission in this *Policies and Rules of the Commission* and in the *Handbook of Accreditation* for more information on this subject.

### Committee Meeting Attendance

Institutions may convene their occupational advisory committees as often as deemed necessary but must convene each program's committee no less than **once** annually. **This meeting** must be conducted face-to-face.

As stated in the *Handbook of Accreditation*, occupational advisory committees must be comprised of at least three members external to the institution. At least two of the three external members must be physically present during the required face-to-face meeting. This means that one **or more** external members could attend the meeting via video conference, webinar, or teleconference. Virtual attendance of members must be in synchronous format.

### Documentation Required/Recommended for Meetings

Minutes of each official meeting of a committee must be typed and include the following specific information:

1. Meeting specifics, such as the date and time meetings take place and the physical location of meetings
2. Names of attendees (committee members and others)
3. Demographic information for each member of the committee (names, titles, business addresses, contact information)
4. Activities of the committee (highlights of their discussions)
5. Recommendations made by the committee

The Council also recommends institutions compile the following documentation to demonstrate committee activities:

1. The meeting agenda
2. Handouts that may have been distributed during each meeting
3. The date and signature of the transcriber of meeting minutes

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, pages 57 and 60

## **STANDARD THREE: PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

### **Documenting ACCURACY of Student Achievement Data**

Institutions frequently seek clarification on the types of documentation they should collect to document accuracy of data reported in the completion, placement, and licensure (CPL) form of the annual report. Documentation provides not only the basis for data reported in the CPL form of the annual report, it demonstrates that the institution is performing follow-up activities required in the Standards for accreditation and collecting the information required in each student file.

The following sections ARE NOT a comprehensive listing of all types of documentation that serve this purpose, but provide a general guide as to the kinds of documentation that should be present in student files. The more information an institution collects, and the more current the information is, the more likely that data accuracy can be verified and compliance with accreditation requirements can be confirmed.

Visiting teams will look for documentation in student files that indicates the institution's compliance with several accreditation Criteria. It is also the starting point for the verification processes used by visiting teams to confirm accuracy of reported data.

### **Completion Rate Data**

#### **Graduate Completers:**

- Query results from institutional databases indicating completion of programs. Names of students, programs of study, grade information that indicates completion of required coursework, dates of completion, and types of credentials issued must be specified.
- Individual student reports generated from institutional databases that demonstrate the meeting of all program requirements and the conferring of credentials for program completion (certificates, diplomas, associate degrees).

#### **Non-Graduate Completers:**

- Follow-up questionnaires completed by former students who left their programs before earning a credential, but who secured employment in the field of training/related field of training. Questionnaires must specify dates of hire and positions for which former students were hired.
- Follow-up questionnaires completed by employers of non-graduate completers that confirm dates of hire and positions for which former students were hired.
- Postings on social media sites regarding those who secured employment in the field of training/related field of training.
- Copies of business licenses for those non-graduate completers who formed their own businesses in the field of training/related field of training. Advertisements for those businesses are good supplemental documents to collect, if possible.
- Email confirmation from former students regarding the securing of employment in the field of training/related field of training after having left programs without a credential.
- Rosters of telephone contacts made by employees of the institution with former students. Rosters must specify name of student, telephone number, program of study, date student left program without credential, date employment was secured, relative comments related to employment.

## **Placement Data for Graduate Completers and Non-Graduate Completers**

- Follow-up questionnaires completed by former students (graduate or non-graduate completers) that confirm dates of hire and positions for which former students were hired.
- Follow-up questionnaires completed by employers of graduate and non-graduate completers that confirm dates of hire and positions for which former students were hired.
- Official confirmation letters from employers of students regarding dates of hire and positions in the field of training/related field of training. Letters must specify the name of the business, name of contact person, address of the business, telephone number, and signature of contact person.
- Postings on social media sites regarding employment secured in the field of training/related field of training.
- Copies of business licenses for those non-graduate completers who formed their own businesses in the field of training/related field of training. Advertisements for those businesses are good supplemental documents to collect, if possible.
- Email confirmation from employers or former students regarding the securing of employment in the field of training /related field of training after having left programs without a credential. Student name, positions, dates of hire, and telephone number must be specified.

## **Licensure Exam Pass Rate Data**

- Official state/federal reports detailing licensure exam pass results. Student name and confirmation of exam pass/fail results must be specified.
- Official confirmation letters from employers of students regarding dates of hire and positions in the field of training/related field of training. The name of business, contact person, location of business, contact number, and signature of contact person must be specified.
- Email confirmation from former students regarding the results of licensure exams taken. Student name and dates of successful licensure exam test must be specified.
- Copies of industry licenses issued by state/federal agencies.

## **VERIFYING Student Achievement Data**

Verification of student achievement data is a separate activity from documenting data reported in the annual report. The verification process (an auditing process) is conducted by members of COE visiting teams who search student files for evidence that

1. institutions are performing required follow up with former students and employers of students to collect outcomes data,
2. student files contain required information, and
3. data reported in the Annual Report is deemed to be accurate based on a random sampling of the data collected by institutions.

Team members commonly verify the accuracy of data by random selection of student files, which should contain accurate and up-to-date contact information for former students and their employers. Members most often call students and employers of students/former students to confirm program completion, employment, and licensure exam results.

The accreditation process requires that at least five positive verifications are secured in four categories: graduate completion, placement for graduate completers, placement for non-graduate completers, and licensure exam pass results.

In addition to calling state/federal agencies for licensure exam results, team members may verify accuracy of data reported for licensure exams by reviewing official state/federal reports of licensure exam results from those agencies.

When a team is unable to secure at least five positive verifications of data reported in COE annual reports and contained in student files, findings of non-compliance are cited in the official report of the team visit. The Commission frequently requires institutions to host a second, focused visit as a second attempt to secure positive verification of data. Repeated failure of an institution to provide data that is verifiable may be grounds for it to lose its status with the Council.

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**REFERENCE:** *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 66

## STANDARD SEVEN: FINANCIAL RESOURCES

### Refund Policy

The *Handbook of Accreditation* states the following under Standard Seven - Financial Resources:

The institution shall have a fair and equitable refund policy for the refund of tuition, fees, and other institutional charges in the event the institution cancels a class if a student does not enter or does not complete the period of enrollment for which the student has been charged. All of the following are elements of a fair and equitable plan:

- a. The institution's refund policy is included in official publications and uniformly administered.
- b. Refunds, when due, are made without requiring a request from the student.
- c. Refunds, when due, are made within 45 days (1) of the last day of attendance if written notification of withdrawal 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.
- d. Retention of tuition and fees collected in advance for a student who does not commence class does not exceed \$100.
- e. The institution complies with the refund policies adopted by the Commission unless a different policy or deviation is mandated by a non-public institution's licensing agency or a public institution's governing board and it is approved by the Commission.

As referenced in item "e" above, the refund policy adopted by the Commission is as stated below.

1. Refunds for Classes Canceled by the Institution  
If tuition and fees are collected in advance of the start date of a program and the institution cancels the class, 100% of the tuition and fees collected must be refunded. The refund shall be made within 45 days of the planned start date.
2. Refunds for Students Who Withdraw On or Before the First Day of Class  
**If tuition and fees are collected in advance of the start date of classes and the student does not begin classes or withdraws on the first day of classes, no more than \$100 of the tuition and fees may be retained by the institution.** Appropriate refunds for a student who does not begin classes shall be made within 45 days of the class start date.
3. Refunds for Students Enrolled Prior to Visiting the Institution  
Students who have not visited the school facility prior to enrollment will have the opportunity to withdraw without penalty within three days following either attendance at a regularly scheduled orientation or following a tour of the facilities and inspection of the equipment.
4. Refunds for Students Enrolled in Professional Development, Continuing Education, or Limited Contract Instruction  
Institutions engaging in programs which are short-term must have a written policy or contract statement regarding whether or not fees and instructional charges are refundable.
5. Refunds for Withdrawal After Class Commences
  - (a) Public Institutions  
The refund policy for students attending public institutions shall be consistent with the policy established by the institution's governing board.

(b) Non-Public Institutions

(1) Refund Policy for Programs Obligating Students for Periods of 12 Months or Less

The refund policy for students attending non-public institutions who incur a financial obligation for a period of 12 months or less shall be as follows:

- (i) During the first 10% of the period of financial obligation, the institution shall refund at least 90% of the tuition.
- (ii) After the first 10% of the period of financial obligation and until the end of the first 25% of the period of obligation, the institution shall refund at least 50% of the tuition.
- (iii) After the first 25% of the period of financial obligation and until the end of the first 50% of the period of obligation, the institution shall refund at least 25% of the tuition.
- (iv) After the first 50% of the period of financial obligation, the institution may retain all of the tuition.

(2) Refund Policy for Programs Obligating Students for Periods Beyond Twelve Months

Institutions with programs longer than 12 months that financially obligate the student for any period of time beyond 12 months shall release the student of the obligation to pay beyond the 12 months if the student withdraws during the first 12 months. The calculation of the refund for the unused portion of the first 12 months shall be based on section (b)(1) Non-Public Institutions above.

If the student withdraws during any subsequent period following the first 12 months, the student's refund for the unused portion of the tuition applicable to the period of withdrawal shall be based on section (b)(1) Non-Public Institutions above.

Deviations from the requirements of this section are permitted if they are (1) mandated by a non-public institution's licensing agency or a public institution's governing board and (2) approved by the Commission.

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REFERENCE: *Handbook of Accreditation: 2022 Edition*, page 74

## 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 administrator 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.

**Annual/Annually**—Occuring once per calendar year (January through December).

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

**Associate Degree**—As defined in the U.S. Secretary of Education's scope of recognition for the Council, the term 'associate degree' refers to an 'applied' program with a credential awarded upon completion that is designed to lead the individual directly to employment in a specific career. The sole focus of associate degree programs accredited by the Council must not be described as transferability to a program offering a bachelor's degree. 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. When articulation agreements with four-year institutions do exist, those opportunities may be described in appropriate publications. However, institutions approved to offer applied associate degree programs by the Council must take care not to guarantee the transferability of credit to other institutions by way of the title of the programs or the descriptions of the programs.

**Audited Financial Statement**—The result of an official financial examination performed by an independent certified public accountant in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS). In order to document compliance with Council Policies and Standards, audited financial statements must include, at a minimum, the following information:

1. Accountant's report
2. Balance sheet
3. Income statement
4. Statement of cash flow
5. Composite score (unrounded) as disclosed on a composite score worksheet included in the audit report using the formula approved by the U.S. Department of Education prepared by an independent CPA
6. Appropriate footnotes to the financial statements and other relevant disclosures

7. The name, licensing number, and licensing state of the CPA or firm responsible for preparing the audited financial statement

(Procedural Note: Audited financial statements must be accompanied by a COE Financial Questionnaire.)

**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 website – [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 that 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.

**Certification**—Credentials that enhance employability, but are not necessarily required for employment in specific occupational positions (e.g., software certifications for programmers: MSE certification, A+ Certification, etc.).

**Chief Administrator**—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 administrator 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.

**CLEP (College-Level Examination Program)**—A set of standardized tests in various subjects, qualifying scores on which can be used to earn college credits.

**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, websites, links to websites, telephone numbers, and/or physical facilities may be 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.

**Community**—A group or groups comprised of institutional constituents/ stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, faculty, potential employers, governmental and other entities) who are served by or have an interest in the educational programs offered by an institution.

**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 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 (as opposed to advancing one’s career). 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 Report, FTE calculation, or student achievement data collection, and are not required to be included on the COE approved program list. (See Definitions—Job Upgrade Training.)

**Contractor (Vendor)**—A company or individual who provides goods and/or services to an institution for an agreed upon price. Contractors are not considered full-time employees for the purpose of meeting workshop attendance required by the Council’s accreditation processes.

**Correspondence Education**—Instruction delivered via email 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 faculty 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**—A series of lectures, laboratory, and/or work-based activities that pertain to a particular subject and that are typically required as part of a broader curriculum (e.g., a program).

**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. conducting entrance interviews with all borrowers,
2. distributing written information that addresses provisions of the student loan program,
3. counseling on the part of the institution to provide guidance in debt management,
4. notifying lenders and guarantee agency regarding a student's change in status,
5. conducting exit interviews with students withdrawing or graduating from the institution,
6. communicating with the borrower during a grace period, and
7. conducting a systematic annual evaluation of its default management plan.

**Distance Education**—An educational delivery method that uses one or more technologies to provide instruction to students who are separated from **faculty** and support regular and substantive instruction between students and **faculty**, synchronously or asynchronously. Technologies used may include the internet, print-based media, email, 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, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed. Limitations specified under 'Contractual Agreements/Contracts for Instruction' apply to distance education delivery of instruction.

**Distance Education Program**—A program that makes available **100%** its required instructional hours 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.

**Employment Requirements**—The certifications or licensure that may be required to secure employment in a specific position or within an occupational area.

**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 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.

**External Members (on Advisory Committees)**—Official members of an advisory committee who are not employees of the institution (staff, faculty, or administrators) or corporation, who have no relation to employees of the institution (e.g., family members), and who have no financial interest in the institution.

**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 person or group of persons.

**Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)**—A unit of measurement used by the Commission to define the amount of scheduled instruction that equates to one full-time student during one academic year. The Commission defines an FTE as 900 contact (clock) hours, 45 quarter credit hours, or 30 semester credit hours of scheduled instruction. The clock or credit hours used to calculate an institution's FTE must reflect coursework in which a student has enrolled and matriculated. The FTE does not include hours or credits transferred from other institutions or awarded as CLEP courses. (In some cases, a Federal institution may use an "Average-on-Board (AOB)" measure in place of FTEs for computing dues.)

**Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (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 time frames 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 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. The extension granted by the Commission will not exceed the length of the longest program.

**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 less than 100% 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. An institution is a physical location (a bricks and mortar 'schoolhouse') where students, faculty, administrators, and other staff are present and where primary and supportive resources are available to instruct students in each course required of every approved program offered by the institution. This includes the designation of physical areas (classrooms, lab areas, administrative and common areas) appropriate for meeting the needs of students, staff, faculty, and others present at the campus. Approvals for specific programs issued by state, federal, or other agencies are not synonymous with the Council's definition of an institution.

**Institutional Advisory Committee**—A group of no less than three persons, all of whom are external to the institution, who are knowledgeable of occupational education and employment needs of the community. (Committees larger than three members must maintain a majority of external members.) 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 **faculty** 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 (as opposed to maintaining one's current professional occupation position). These activities are considered to be occupational programs and are included in the institutional Self-Study Report, FTE calculation, and student achievement data collection (completion data only), and must be included on the COE approved program list. (See Definitions—Continuing Occupational Education.)

**Laboratory Instruction**—An instructional setting under the supervision of institutional faculty 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.

**Licensure**—Credentials that are required for employment in specific occupational positions (such as Licensed Practical Nursing and Cosmetologist).

**Main Campus**—The lead (or parent) institutional campus is the location where the offices of the chief administrator and accreditation liaison officer are maintained and to which all non-main campus sites are subordinate and accountable. The main campus must offer at least one approved occupational program and must maintain duplicates of all student records for non-main campus sites.

**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-Graduate Completer**—A student who left the institution without a credential, but 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. (See Definitions—Graduate and Completer.)

**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 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 Area**—A general term used to group programs of study that educate students in a variety of specific concentrations that are related to that term.

**Occupational Education Institution**—An education institution that has as its mission the preparation of individuals for employment and/or career enhancement. (The main campus or parent institution has a chief administrator 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 applied associate degrees, diplomas, certificates, and/or other acceptable credentials.)

**Occupational Education Program**—A sequence of instruction and related activities (e.g. laboratory activities and/or work-based activities) designed to provide educational and workplace competencies that lead to a credential. (Such programs offered by Commission-accredited institutions are designed to prepare individuals for job entry and/or career advancement. Test preparation activities do not qualify as occupational education programs.)

**Official Meeting**—A meeting is considered ‘official’ if it a) is planned or called by the institution, b) requires the attendance of members, c) follows an agenda, and d) is recorded in official minutes.

**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 that (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. Internships and externships, either paid or unpaid, do not qualify as placements.

**Plan**—A detailed written proposal/method for achieving an objective. The following elements must be included in a plan: scope of services, budgetary resources, major activities, evaluations of the plan, and stakeholders with whom the plan is shared.

**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 comply with statutory regulations and are 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 that 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.

**Pro Forma**—A financial statement that is calculated using an accountant’s discretion. It does not follow GAAP or GAGAS. Rather, calculations are computed according to the estimated relevance of certain events/conditions experienced by the company. Items that are typically included/excluded from an audited financial statement using GAAP may be represented differently in a pro forma statement, depending on what the accountant feels accurately represents the company’s actual performance. However, the Council requires that each pro forma statement submitted must include a balance sheet, an income statement, a cash flow statement, and notes and disclosures.

**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.

**Publications** (e.g., the institution's website and other printed materials)—A website and other official informational documents which are made available through various media (hard copy or online) to provide the information specified below that must be readily available to students, prospective students, and other constituents:

- a. The publication(s) must contain and accurately depict the following information:
  1. The institutional mission
  2. Admission requirements and procedures
  3. The institution's policy on the transfer of students between programs within the institution
  4. The institution's policy on the transfer of students from other institutions
  5. The institution's 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. A 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. Avocational programs/courses that are neither accredited by the Council, nor qualify students to receive Title IV financial aid (such as ESL programs)
  14. Policies, procedures, and time frame for refunding fees and charges to students who withdraw from enrollment
  15. National and/or state legal requirements for eligibility for licensure or entry into an occupation or profession for which education and training are offered
  16. Any unique requirements for career paths or for employment and advancement opportunities in the profession or occupation described
  17. The institution's grading system
  18. The institution's academic/school calendar
  19. The street address and telephone number of each campus of the institution (main campus and each additional permanent site)
  20. The institution's student grievance procedure which includes the Commission's mailing address, telephone number, and website 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 website 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.")
- c. The website is readily and publicly available to students, prospective students, and other constituents to provide current information as specified below:
  1. The name of the institution exactly as approved by the Commission and the institution's authorizing agency
  2. The name, email address, and telephone number of the institution's Chief Administrator
  3. A list of programs that is consistent with those approved by the Commission and state/federal agencies
  4. Photos (if used) that accurately depict the institution's physical facilities and programs

**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 Seven – Financial Resources.

**Scope (change of)**—Any instance in which an institution departs significantly from its mission with regard to the occupational areas for which it offers preparation.

**Self-Paced Instruction** – An approach to instructional delivery where the student sets the pace of learning under the guidance and objectives set by faculty. 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 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 institutions use to develop forecasts or projections so as to identify future goals and create objectives for achieving those goals.

**Student**—A person who is formally engaged in learning as demonstrated by a commitment to attend class and pay tuition regardless of the source.

**Syllabus (Syllabi)**—An outline or other brief statement of the main points of the subjects of a course or lecture, the contents of a curriculum, etc.

**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 Vocational English-as-a-Second-Language Programs section of this manual.

**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 a program, or in a setting that involves the public (e.g., 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). Work-based activities may also include structured learning activities that occur outside of the classroom. 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
- 2) To provide the institution with objective input from potential employers or customers of program graduates

**Work-Based Ethics**—Commonly-accepted values, moral principles, and standards of a workplace, industry, or occupation.



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