

## Policy on Review of Accreditation Standards

*(Adopted June 1996; Revised June 1998, January 1999, June 2001, January 2007;  
Edited October 2007; Revised January 2013)*

The Commission initiates a systematic and comprehensive review of its Accreditation Standards and practices every six years. The review is designed to assess the utility, effectiveness and relevance of the Accreditation Standards and practices, and to ensure that they are updated to align with changing institutional characteristics, societal needs, and federal regulations. Information from multiple sources, including input from internal and external constituencies, is used in the review. If the Commission determines that changes to the Accreditation Standards are needed, then it announces its intent to change the Standards.<sup>1</sup>

The review may result in formative and clarifying improvements, or in significant changes, to Accreditation Standards and practices as deemed appropriate by the Commission. At the time of each review, the Commission will also seek to align Accreditation Standards and practices with federal regulatory requirements and with excellent practices in higher education accreditation.

### The Review Process

The Commission makes available to the public information announcing the Review, the Commission's means of soliciting input on Accreditation Standards and practices, and a tentative timeline for completing the review and issuing new Accreditation Standards. The Commission also provides periodic updates to member institutions on its progress in reviewing and developing new Accreditation Standards and practices through communications to member institutions and other constituencies, notices on its website, and its newsletter.

The process for review of Accreditation Standards and practices:

1. Examines whether the Standards and practices are adequate to evaluate institutional and educational quality;
2. Examines whether the Standards are relevant to the educational needs of students;
3. Examines each standard and the Standards as a whole;
4. Examines the accreditation practices that implement Accreditation Standards and Commission policies;
5. Solicits suggestions from internal constituencies such as Commissioners and Commission staff, member institutions and their staffs and governing board members, and persons who serve as evaluation team members;
6. Solicits suggestions from communities of interest or with special expertise in accreditation related matters; and

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<sup>1</sup> If, during a review process, the Commission determines changes to the Accreditation Standards are needed, then the Commission is required to initiate action within 12 months to make the changes, and must complete the action within a reasonable period of time. 34 C.F.R. 602.21(c).

7. Solicits suggestions from external constituencies such as students, business leaders and other members of the public served by member institutions.

## **Development and Approval of New Accreditation Standards**

The Commission may use the assistance of special topic task forces, accreditation experts, an editorial board or drafting committee, and persons from member colleges when drafting proposed language for the Accreditation Standards.

The Commission provides opportunity to member institutions and their staffs and governing board members, college systems to which they may belong, students, business leaders and other members of the public, and other higher education associations to comment on proposed changes to Accreditation Standards. These individuals and groups are invited to send written comments to the Commission and/or to testify at public hearings and meetings scheduled by the Commission. The comments thus gathered are taken into account as the Commission finalizes any revisions to Accreditation standards.

When the Commission has developed a final draft of the Accreditation Standards, it will announce the date and location for a Commission meeting at which the Accreditation Standards will be considered for first reading, and will invite comment on that draft through a public hearing. In order to facilitate constituency and public input, the Commission may conduct additional public hearings throughout the Western region on the final draft Accreditation Standards. The Commission will announce the date and location for a Commission meeting at which the Accreditation Standards will be considered for second reading and adoption, and will invite comment before taking action to adopt the new Accreditation Standards.

## **Changes to Standards between Reviews**

The above notwithstanding, if the Commission identifies a need to change the standards between reviews<sup>2</sup>, the process for ensuring constituent participation is consistent with the process used during six-year standard reviews. When the Commission identifies a need to change the Accreditation Standards, it will initiate action within twelve months. The process for drafting and approving new standards normally will be completed within two years.

The Commission further reserves the right to make small editorial changes to the language of Accreditation Standards designed to clarify meaning on an as-needed basis through the normal Commission meeting process with a first and second reading, and will provide notice to member institutions of the opportunity for institutional and public comment on such proposed editorial changes before adoption.

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<sup>2</sup> The USDE can require accrediting bodies to make changes to Accreditation Standards and policies within one year of adoption of new regulations or discovery by the USDE that an accreditor's Standards are not compliant with federal regulations. In such cases, the ACCJC will need to respond within the one year time frame.

34 C.F.R. §602.36.