

Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions

June 2021-June 2022

This policy sets forth the actions that may be taken on the accredited status of institutions by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC). Institutions applying for candidacy or initial accreditation and accredited institutions undergoing periodic evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation will be reviewed by the Commission. The Commission will examine institutional evidence of student learning and achievement, the Institutional Self Evaluation Report, the Peer Review Team Report, and other relevant documents to determine whether the institution complies with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies (together Commission's Standards). The Commission will apply, as appropriate, one of the actions listed in this policy.

In the case when an accredited institution no longer demonstrates that it meets the Commission's Standards, the institution will be notified in the Commission action letter of the time it has to come into compliance, which must not exceed three years¹ after first receiving notification of any noncompliance with a standard.² If the institution cannot document that it has come into compliance within the designated period, the Commission will take adverse action. In extraordinary circumstances, the Commission may take immediate adverse action if an institution is egregiously out of compliance due to unlawful or unethical action³. In keeping with the provisions of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, the Commission defines adverse actions for accredited institutions as withdrawal of accreditation; denial, or withdrawal for institutions seeking candidacy; and denial for institutions seeking initial accreditation.

The Commission will not condition the granting of candidacy, initial accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation on the payment of any fees which are not approved by the Commission for payment of annual dues, evaluation costs, or other fees and assessments to the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC).

Actions on Accredited Status

I. Actions on Institutions that are Applicants for Candidacy

Grant Candidacy. Candidacy is a pre-accreditation status granted to institutions that have successfully undergone eligibility review⁴ as well as a comprehensive evaluation process using the Accreditation Standards, including preparation of an Institutional Self Evaluation Report and a review by peer review team. Candidacy is granted when the institution

¹ CFR § 602.18

² The Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies together comprise the Commission's Standards. College deficiencies may result in noncompliance with a standard that is in the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, or in Commission policies.

³ CFR § 602.20 (b)

⁴ See the *Policy on Eligibility to Apply for Accredited Status*.

demonstrates the ability to meet all the Accreditation Standards and Commission policies, or to fully meet them within the two-year candidate period.

Candidacy indicates that an institution has achieved initial association with the Commission and is progressing toward accreditation. During candidacy, the institution undertakes the necessary steps to reach demonstrable and complete compliance with Accreditation Standards.

Grant Initial Accreditation. Initial accreditation may be granted to applicants for candidacy after a comprehensive institutional evaluation demonstrating that the institution is in compliance with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies (together Commission's Standards). The institution is required to submit a Midterm Report midway through the seven-year accreditation cycle. The institution must be fully evaluated again within a maximum of seven years from the date of the Commission action granting initial accreditation.

Deny Candidacy. Candidacy is denied when the Commission determines, on review of the institution's initial comprehensive evaluation for candidacy, that the institution has demonstrated that it does not meet all of the Eligibility Requirements, or does not meet a significant portion of the Accreditation Standards and Commission policies, and therefore cannot be expected to meet all Accreditation Standards and Commission policies within a two-year period. Denial of candidacy is subject to a request for an appeal under the applicable policies and procedures of the Commission.

II. Actions on Institutions which are Applicants for Initial Accreditation

Grant Initial Accreditation. Initial accreditation may be granted after a comprehensive institutional evaluation, or a preaccreditation follow up review if the institution applies within two years of receiving Candidacy, demonstrating that the institution is in compliance with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies (together Commission's Standards). The institution is required to submit a Midterm Report midway through the seven-year accreditation cycle. The institution must be fully evaluated again within a maximum of seven years from the date of the Commission action granting initial accreditation.

Extend Candidacy. The Commission may extend candidacy in lieu of granting initial accreditation when the institution's application material does not demonstrate sufficient evidence indicating it has met the conditions for initial accreditation and has had candidacy for one two-year term. Candidacy can only be extended for a maximum of two years.

Withdraw Candidacy. Candidacy is withdrawn when the Commission determines that an institution has not maintained its eligibility for candidacy or has failed to explain or correct deficiencies of which it has been given notice. Withdrawal of Candidacy is subject to a request for an appeal under the applicable policies and procedures of the Commission. If candidacy is withdrawn, the institution may not reapply for candidacy for at least two years.

Deny Initial Accreditation. The Commission denies initial accreditation when an applicant institution is not in compliance with the Commission's Standards within the maximum period allowed for a college to remain in candidacy. A denial is subject to a request for an appeal under the applicable policies and procedures of the Commission. If initial accreditation is not granted, the institution may not reapply for candidacy for at least two years.

III. Actions on Accredited Institutions Actions that Reaffirm Accreditation

Reaffirm Accreditation. The institution is in compliance with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies (together Commission's Standards). The institution is reaffirmed accreditation for seven years and is required to submit a Midterm Report midway through the seven-year accreditation cycle.

Reaffirm Accreditation and Require a Follow-Up Report. The institution continues to demonstrate compliance with Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, or Commission policies, but has some minor deficiencies. The institution is required to submit a Follow-Up Report demonstrating that it has resolved the deficiencies. The Commission will specify the issues to be addressed and the due date of the Follow-Up Report. The period of reaffirmation is seven years. The institution is required to submit a Midterm report midway through the seven-year cycle.

Reaffirm Accreditation for 18 months and Require a Follow-Up Report. The institution has significant deficiencies with Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies. The institution is required to submit a Follow-Up report demonstrating that it has resolved all cited deficiencies. The Commission will specify the issues to be addressed and the due date of the report, with or without peer review team visit. The period for reaffirmation will be 18 months. Upon successful resolution of the cited deficiencies as demonstrated in the Follow-Up Report, and if applicable Follow-Up Team Report, the institution will be reaffirmed for the remainder of the seven-year accreditation cycle. If the institution does not resolve the deficiencies, the Commission may take the following actions:

- Defer action, require a second follow up report and specify additional information required for submission, not to exceed 12 months, with or without a peer review team visit. The accredited status of the institution continues until the Commission considers the institution's status in the designated timeframe.
- Place the college on sanction (warning, probation, or show cause) depending on the severity of noncompliance and based on the conditions of the college and its history of compliance, require a second follow up report not to exceed 18 months, with or without a peer review team visit.

Whether the Commission defers action or places the college on sanction, the time the College has to come into compliance must not exceed three years from the Commission's initial written notification indicating the College's noncompliance with any standards or policies.

Sanctions

Sanctions serve as an indicator of the severity of noncompliance by an institution. The determination is based upon the conditions of the college.

Warning. An institution has been determined by the Commission not to meet one or more standards, the deficiencies lead to serious noncompliance with the Standards, and Reaffirmation for 18 months is not warranted. When the Commission finds that an institution is out of compliance with the Commission's Standards to an extent that gives concern to the Commission, it may **issue Warning** to the institution to correct its deficiencies, refrain from certain activities, or initiate certain activities, and meet the standards. The Commission may

also **issue Warning** if the institution has acknowledged within its Institutional Self-Evaluation Report or Special Report the deficiencies leading to serious noncompliance, and has demonstrated affirmative steps and plans to fully resolve the deficiencies within twelve months. The Commission will specify the time within which the institution must resolve the deficiencies and demonstrate compliance, generally twelve to eighteen months. During the Warning period, the institution will be subject to reports and visits at a frequency to be determined by the Commission. If Warning is issued as a result of the institution's comprehensive review, reaffirmation is delayed during the period of Warning. The accredited status of the institution continues during the Warning period.

Probation. An institution has been determined by the Commission not to meet one or more standards, and there is a serious concern on the part of the Commission regarding the level and/or scope of the noncompliance issues. When an institution deviates significantly from the Commission's Standards, but not to such an extent as to warrant a Show Cause mandate or the termination of accreditation, the Commission will **impose Probation**. The Commission may also **impose Probation** when the institution fails to respond to conditions placed upon it by the Commission, including a Warning. The Commission will specify the time within which the institution must resolve deficiencies and demonstrate its compliance with the Commission's Standards, generally twelve to eighteen months. During the Probation period, the institution will be subject to reports and visits at a frequency to be determined by the Commission. Institutions placed on Probation are required to submit a teach-out plan in accordance with the Commission's Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Agreements. If Probation is imposed as a result of the institution's comprehensive review, reaffirmation is delayed during the period of Probation. The accredited status of the institution continues during the Probation period.

Show Cause. When the Commission finds an institution to be in substantial noncompliance with the Commission's Standards, it will **mandate Show Cause**. The Commission may also **mandate Show Cause** when the institution has not responded to the previous conditions imposed by the Commission. Under Show Cause, the institution is required to demonstrate why its accreditation should not be withdrawn at the end of a stated period by providing evidence that it has corrected the deficiencies noted by the Commission and is in compliance with the Commission's Standards. In such cases, the burden will rest on the institution to demonstrate why its accreditation should be continued. The Commission will specify the time within which the institution must resolve deficiencies and meet the standards. Institutions placed on Show Cause are required to submit a teach-out plan and teach-out agreement in accordance with the Commission's Policy on Teach-Out Plans and Agreements. While under a Show Cause mandate, the institution will be subject to reports and visits at a frequency to be determined by the Commission. If Show Cause is mandated as a result of the institution's comprehensive review, reaffirmation is delayed pending the institution's ability to demonstrate why its accreditation should be continued. The accredited status of the institution continues during the period of the Show Cause mandate.

Actions Related to Commission Withdrawal of Accreditation

Withdraw Accreditation for Noncompliance. If, in the judgment of the Commission, an institution has not satisfactorily explained or corrected deficiencies of which it has been given notice, or has taken an action that has placed it significantly out of compliance with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies (together Commission's Standards), its accreditation may be withdrawn. The Commission will give the institution written reasons for its decision. Commission withdrawal of an institution's

accreditation is subject to a request for an appeal under the applicable policies and procedures of the Commission. The accredited status of the institution continues pending completion of any appeal process the institution may request. Otherwise, the institution's accreditation ends on the date when the time period permitting such a request expires. In such a case, the institution must complete the entire accreditation process beginning with Eligibility Review and then Candidacy to regain its accreditation.

Administratively Withdraw Accreditation. The Commission may administratively withdraw the accreditation of a member institution for nonpayment of dues, costs incurred as part of an evaluation team visit, or special assessments, following provision of notice to the institution of nonpayment and sufficient time to pay, and upon providing 60 days' notice of the impending withdrawal action.

Other Actions

Defer Action. The Commission may postpone its decision on the candidacy or initial accreditation of an institution pending receipt of specific documentation, as identified by the Commission that is needed in order to grant candidacy or initial accreditation. The deferral may be for a period not to exceed twelve months.

The Commission may postpone a decision on the reaffirmation of accreditation of an institution pending receipt of specified additional information from the institution. The response from the institution may be followed by a visit addressed primarily to the reasons for the deferral. The Commission will specify the nature, purpose, and scope of the information to be submitted and of the visit to be made. The accredited status of the institution will continue during the period of deferral. The deferral may be for a period not to exceed twelve months.

Grant Good Cause Extension. In exceptional situations, if the institution has done all within its authority to reach compliance on any standard but remains out of compliance after the time allocated by the Commission for coming into compliance, the Commission is permitted by regulations to allocate a Good Cause Extension for the college to reach compliance prior to acting.⁵ The Commission may grant a good cause extension for the following reasons:

- a) The institution has completed a great amount of work on needed changes. The Commission projects the institution has the resources necessary to achieve compliance, additional time is reasonable, and grants no more than one year to complete the work.
- b) It is necessary to provide additional time for an institution to resolve a deficiency because the institution is dependent upon, or requires coordination with, other controlling agencies, third-party entities, or outside organizations.
- c) Exigent reasons beyond the control of the institution have negatively impacted an institution's ability to meet the timeline to resolve deficiencies.

When a Good Cause Extension is granted by the Commission, it shall not exceed one year. No Good Cause Extension will be granted if there is risk to the students in regard to academic quality or to the sustained viability of the institution, or if the period of noncompliance contributes to the cost of the program to the student without the student's

⁵ CFR § 602.18(d)(1); § 602.20(a)(3)

consent or creates any undue hardship on, or harm to, students. The Commission will require that a report be submitted by an institution and/or a site visit be conducted to verify sustained compliance with the Commission's Standards prior to acting.

Require a Special Report and/or Site Visit to Verify Sustained Compliance. The Commission may require that a report be submitted by an institution and/or a site visit be conducted at an institution to verify sustained compliance with the Commission's Standards. Special reports, with or without a visit, may be required as a result of the Commission's review of annual reports, annual fiscal reports, substantive change applications, or other information brought to the Commission's attention, which indicate significant noncompliance with the Commission's Standards.⁶

Accept or Not Accept Report. Institutions are required to submit various reports to the Commission, such as, but not limited to, midterm reports, annual reports, special reports, or teach-out plans and agreements. The Commission accepts reports which have met the specific requirements. In instances where the institution did not meet the specific requirements, the Commission will not accept the report, and will provide reasons to the institution, including guidance for follow up steps in accordance with Commission policies and procedures.

Accept Institutional Request for Voluntary Withdrawal. An institution may voluntarily withdraw its request for initial candidacy at any time (even after evaluation) prior to action by the Commission on the institution's accredited status. Upon receipt of written notice of voluntary withdrawal by the institution through its chief executive officer and governing board, the Commission will act to accept the withdrawal.

Candidate institutions and accredited institutions may voluntarily withdraw from accreditation at any time by submitting notification to the Commission of the intention to withdraw and the expected time for the withdrawal effective date. If the voluntary withdrawal will result in the likely closure of the institution or certain programs, then the institution must submit a closure plan in accordance with the *Policy on Closing an Institution*. The Commission will act at its next meeting to accept the institution's voluntary withdrawal upon fulfillment of the closure plan.

If the voluntary withdrawal is based on the anticipation of accreditation by another recognized accrediting agency, the Commission will act to accept the institution's voluntary withdrawal upon receipt of notification by the U.S. Department of Education that another recognized accrediting agency has been authorized for the institution. While that notification is pending, the institution will remain accredited by the ACCJC, with all the attendant responsibilities of a member institution.

Accept Institutional Re-application for Accredited Status. In the event of the withdrawal of accreditation of an institution, the institution must complete again the entire accreditation process, starting with the Eligibility Review and then Candidacy, to regain accreditation.

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⁶ *Policy on Monitoring Institutional Performance; Policy on Substantive Change; Policy on Student and Public Complaints Against Institutions; Policy on Rights, Responsibilities, and Good Practice in Relations with Member Institutions*

Definitions Related to Commission Actions and Action Letters

Accreditation Cycle. The accreditation cycle is a seven-year period beginning at the conclusion of a comprehensive review and continuing through the next comprehensive review.⁷ During the accreditation cycle, all institutions complete annual reports and a midterm report. Institutions may be required to complete other reports with or without visits as determined by the Commission based upon the institution's status of compliance with standards.

Appealable Adverse Action⁸. An appealable adverse action of the Commission is defined as (1) deny or withdraw the candidacy status of an institution, (2) deny initial accreditation of an institution, unless the institution remains in Candidate status, or (3) withdraw accreditation of an institution.

Commendations. The institution exceeds standards demonstrated by exemplary practices, policies, processes, and/or outcomes.

Compliance. The institution meets all of the Commission's Standards.

Deficiency. An institutional policy, procedure or practice, or absence thereof, which results in an institution not meeting one or more standards. These conditions are generally noted within the factual findings of a peer review team report, and may also be noted in the Institutional Self Evaluation Report, or by the Commission in its review of other monitoring reports.

Enforcement Action. Federal regulations require accreditors to take adverse action (action to deny or withdraw accredited status) to enforce compliance with accreditation standards per the Commission's written policies.⁹ The Commission must provide the institution with written notice and a deadline for resolving the deficiencies and coming into compliance that must not exceed three years from when the institution was first notified in writing of the noncompliance. The Commission may extend the time period for noncompliance by granting a Good Cause Extension in accordance with this policy. The Commission shall take adverse action if the institution has not come into compliance within the specified written timeline.

Requirement to meet standards. A narrative statement of actions required to be taken by an institution in order to resolve its deficiencies and to meet the cited standard(s). The citation of the Commission's Standards included in a requirement to meet standards notes the areas of noncompliance by the institution.

Recommendation to improve. A narrative statement of actions recommended to be taken by an institution that is currently meeting the cited Eligibility Requirement, Accreditation Standard or Commission policy, but without further action may fall into noncompliance.

Team notations of effective practice. Peer review team observations of an institution exceeding the standard, or of effective practice, may be noted in the peer review team report narrative and conclusions. The peer review team may also note suggestions for enhancement or institutionalization of effective practices.

⁷ The seven-year cycle will take effect and begin for an institution when it has concluded its initial comprehensive review under the Accreditation Standards adopted in June, 2014.

⁸ ACCJC *Policy on Institutional Appeals*

⁹ 34 CFR § 602.20 and § 602.18

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