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This guide is intended to serve as a resource for ALOs by highlighting important information and sources that will assist you in your role as ALO.

1 ALO Role

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) regularly communicates with institutions about matters of policy and institutional quality through the chief executive officer (CEO). Institutions also designate an accreditation liaison officer (ALO) to be a critical point of contact with the Commission, to maintain institutional records of accreditation activities, and to remain current on Commission policies and practices. The ALO is an advocate for the accreditation process, helping to explain and ensure the adoption of Commission recommendations and requirements. As such, the ALO’s role is critical throughout the entire accreditation cycle.

The ALO is designated by the president and has the time, knowledge, and authority to engage in regular communication about accreditation-related issues with the institution’s president, other offices and individuals on campus, and with the Commission. Effective ALOs have adequate time and resources to focus on accreditation issues, as well as appropriate status, visibility, convening authority, knowledge, access to data, and support from the senior administration to fulfill the responsibilities of the role.

Official correspondence between the Commission and an institution’s president is typically copied to the ALO. Other types of communications (emails, phone calls, and letters) may occur directly between the Commission staff and the ALO. In such instances, you, as the ALO, should ensure that your president is appropriately informed.

To learn more about the role and responsibilities of the accreditation liaison officer, read the Commission’s Policy on the Role of Accreditation Liaison Officers.

1.1 Your ACCJC Staff Liaison

ACCJC uses a portfolio model to support its member institutions and ensure consistent application of ACCJC processes. Each college has been assigned an experienced ACCJC staff liaison who will provide personalized support and guidance. In multi-college districts, all colleges have the same assigned liaison.

One of the central responsibilities of an ALO is to maintain contact with your assigned ACCJC staff liaison. You should communicate with the staff liaison as needed and respond promptly when contacted by your liaison. You can find your institution’s assigned ACCJC staff liaison on ACCJC’s website: go to www.accjc.org, and under the Directory drop down menu, click Find Your Institution’s Staff Liaison.
2  About ACCJC and Accreditation

As an ALO, it is important for you to be familiar with the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). Formed in 1962, ACCJC accredits institutions in the United States (including its territories and affiliates) with a primary mission of granting associate degrees. Institutions accredited by ACCJC may also award certificates and other credentials, including bachelor’s degrees, if those credentials are within the institution’s mission and authorized by their governmental authorities. ACCJC may also accredit non-domestic institutions with a primary mission the granting of associate degrees.

ACCJC is recognized as an institutional accreditor by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). This recognition signifies ACCJC as a reliable authority regarding the quality of education offered by accredited institutions in keeping with the Higher Education Act of 1965.

Accreditation is a process that ensures that an institution of higher education meets established standards of quality and provides degrees, certificates, and/or credits that students and the community can trust. An accredited status from an institutional accreditor enables an institution to qualify for federal grants and contracts, and to distribute federal financial aid to its students.

Accreditation has a dual purpose of both compliance and improvement. The Commission’s Standards provide a framework for best practices that will lead to achievement of the institution’s mission and improving educational quality. A key component of accreditation is peer review. Peer review is the most effective approach to evaluating the complex environment of higher education. It serves as a rich and diverse resource for quality improvement as it uses inquiry from peers to gain an accurate understanding of an institution and provide useful feedback.

3  An Institutional Partnership

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges supports its member institutions to advance educational quality and student learning and achievement. This collaboration fosters institutional excellence and continuous improvement through innovation, self-analysis, peer review, and application of Standards. As such, the accreditation process relies on a partnership between ACCJC and its member institutions. Accreditation processes are most effective when institutional CEOs, administrators, faculty, and staff are engaged in the process of reaffirmation and in maintaining continuous institutional adherence to Eligibility Requirements (ERs), Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies.

When institutional members regard accreditation as an opportunity for deep, honest inquiry into institutional strengths and weaknesses, the process becomes supportive of the institution’s efforts to provide the best educational programs and services possible in fulfillment of its mission. When institutional members review their educational practices for ongoing compliance with accreditation requirements and engage in the continuous improvement process, they help ensure the institution retains its high quality.
To learn more about the ACCJC, accreditation, and the role of the Commission, access the following resources:

- About ACCJC (including Mission, Values, History, Recognition, Geographic Scope)
- Role of the Commission
- Strategic Plan
- Educational Series

4 Helpful Resources and Publications

ACCJC provides several helpful resources that can assist you in your role as ALO. These resources include Eligibility Requirements, Standards of Accreditation, Commission Policies, Guides and Manuals, and Educational Videos.

All of these resources are available from the homepage or can be found under the Resources dropdown menu on the ACCJC website (accjc.org).

5 Accreditation Standards and the Standards Review Process

There are four Standards that work together to define and promote student success, academic quality, institutional integrity, and excellence. The mission provides a framework for all institutional goals and activities. The institution provides the means for students to learn and achieve their goals, assesses how well learning is occurring, and strives to improve learning and achievement through ongoing, systematic, and integrated evaluation and planning (Standard I).

Student learning programs and support services make possible the academic quality that supports student success (Standard II). Human, physical, technology, and financial resources enable these programs and services to function and improve (Standard III). Ethical and effective leadership throughout the organization guides the accomplishment of the mission and supports institutional effectiveness and improvement (Standard IV). The 2014 Standards are the basis for comprehensive institutional evaluations and peer review, and are listed on the website at: https://accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/Accreditation-Standards_-Adopted-June-2014.pdf.

In spring of 2021, ACCJC launched the review and revision process of the 2014 Accreditation Standards. This is a continuation of ACCJC’s ongoing efforts to advance equitable student success and educational excellence. The Standards Review is also consistent with ACCJC’s core goal of supporting the ongoing learning, improvement, and innovation of its member institutions as they pursue their unique institutional missions, visions and cultures. Details on the revision process and timeline can be found on ACCJC’s website (accjc.org) under the Standards Review dropdown menu or visit: https://accjc.org/standards-review/.
6 Accreditation Processes and Reporting Cycles

6.1 Institutional Self-Evaluation and Comprehensive Review (every 7 years)

ACCJC member institutions undergo a comprehensive review for reaffirmation of accreditation every seven years to determine whether they continue to meet ACCJC’s expectations and are engaged in sustainable efforts to improve educational quality and institutional effectiveness.

The cycle begins with an Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER). To get you started on the development of your ISER your ACCJC staff liaison will schedule a training approximately 2 to 2.5 years before your ISER is due. Your ACCJC staff liaison will be available throughout the development of your ISER for assistance and follow-up trainings as needed.

The Guide to Institutional Self-Evaluation, Improvement, and Peer Review contains suggestions for organizing the self-evaluation process and preparing for peer review. It also includes a description of each section that should be included in the ISER, suggestions for what might constitute evidence of meeting Accreditation Standards, and review criteria to help institutions and peer review teams during the evaluation process. The guide is intended to be used by institutions as they prepare their ISER and by peer review teams as they evaluate institutions. A downloadable Template for the ISER is also available on ACCJC’s website (accjc.org) under Guides and Manuals.

6.2 Midterm Reporting (4 years after the comprehensive review)

Each institution must submit a Midterm Report four years after the reaffirmation of accreditation. The Midterm Report keeps the Commission apprised of your institution’s continuous improvement activities. Particular attention is given to efforts derived from improvement recommendations offered by the Commission (as detailed in the Commission Action Letter to the institution), any self-identified improvement plans (from the ISER), and progress made on the quality focused projects as outlined in the college’s Quality Focus Essay. Colleges will also reflect on student learning outcomes and achievement, and their fiscal health per the prompts provided in the midterm reporting guidelines. For more information about the contents and preparation of the Midterm Report, please review The Guidelines for Preparing Institutional Reports to the Commission.

6.3 Other Reporting (Substantive Change, Annual Report, Annual Fiscal Report)

The U.S. Department of Education requires accrediting agencies to have adequate policies and procedures to ensure substantive changes to the educational mission or programs of a member institution do not compromise the capacity of the institution to continue to meet ACCJC’s Standards.

Guided by ACCJC’s Substantive Change Policy, and further detailed in the Substantive Change Manual, certain institutional changes must be approved by the Commission before they are implemented. As ALO, you should be aware of the policies and should ensure all substantive
changes are submitted in a timely manner to the Commission for review and approval. Colleges, through their ALOs, will submit a Substantive Change Inquiry Form for each change, so that a determination can be made as to whether the change requires a full Substantive Change Application or whether an Administrative Approval can be granted.

In accordance with the ACCJC Policy on Monitoring Institutional Performance, the Commission applies a set of annual monitoring and evaluation approaches that assess an institution’s continued compliance with the Commission’s Standards and take into account institutional strengths and stability. Each spring, ACCJC provides links to the Annual Report form and Annual Fiscal Report form along with specific submission instructions. Generally, the ALO assumes responsibility for ensuring these annual reports are submitted to ACCJC on time.

7 Representation of Accredited Status

Per the Policy on Representation of Accredited Status, when acknowledging their accreditation, institutions should include the following information in appropriate publications and in electronic communications such as websites:

(Name of institution) is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 331 J Street, Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95814, (415) 506-0234, an industrial accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the U.S. Department of Education. Additional information about accreditation, including the filing of complaints against member institutions, can be found on ACCJC’s website (accjc.org) under the Resources dropdown menu Complaint Process.

Note that the mailing address and telephone number of the Commission are required by federal regulation to be included in all public references to an institution’s accreditor(s).

8 ACCJC Directory Information

Your institution’s accreditation status is available by visiting the Directory dropdown menu on ACCJC’s website (accjc.org). You can search for your institution or scroll through the alphabetical list of institutions to find your institution. If you need to update the contact information for key personnel, please complete the Update Contact Information form.
Policies

Commission policies describe procedural requirements for institutions and for the Commission, elaborate upon Standards of accreditation, and align with federal requirements. ACCJC continuously revises its existing policies and develops new policies as needed. To view all of the Policies, select Eligibility, Standards, & Policies under the Resources dropdown on ACCJC’s website (accjc.org). Of special interest to ALOs are the following policies:

9.1 Policy on Credit Hour, Clock Hour, and Academic Year

Standard II requires institutions to meet generally accepted practices when awarding credit. This policy incorporates federal credit hour requirements, defines credit hours applicable to a degree or certificate awarded by an accredited institution, and adopts the federal definitions of terms related to institutional degrees and credits.

To view the policy, visit: Policy on Credit Hour, Clock Hour, and Academic Year

9.2 Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions

As your institution’s ALO, it is important for you to understand the types of actions the Commission may take. Institutions applying for candidacy or initial accreditation and accredited institutions undergoing periodic evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation will be reviewed by the Commission, which will apply, as appropriate, one of the actions listed in this policy.

To view the policy, visit: Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions

9.3 Policy on Institutional Advertising and Student Recruitment

All accredited institutions, or individuals acting on their behalf, must exhibit integrity and responsibility in advertising, student recruitment, and representation of accredited status. This policy describes in detail the key information institutions are required by the Commission to include in their publications, whether in print or online. It also provides the framework for the advertising or promotion of the institution’s accreditation status and acceptable terminology.

To view the policy, visit: Policy on Institutional Advertising and Student Recruitment

9.4 Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV

In order to comply with federal regulations regarding Institutional Compliance with Title IV of the Higher Education Act (HEA), and as the designated gate-keepers of federal financial aid, the Commission is required to provide available information germane to an accredited or candidate institution’s program responsibilities or eligibility to participate under Title IV of the HEA.

To view the policy, visit: Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV
9.5 Policy on Rights, Responsibilities, and Good Practice in Relations with Member Institutions

The Commission and its member institutions share rights and responsibilities to develop and promulgate Accreditation Standards and an agreed-upon accrediting process for comprehensive peer review. This policy outlines those areas of responsibility, as well as the Commission’s protocols for good practices in relations with the institutions it accredits. To view the policy, visit: Policy on Rights, Responsibilities, and Good Practice in Relations with Member Institutions

10 Complaints and Third-Party Comments

Federal regulations require accrediting organizations to review and respond to complaints and third-party comments regarding member and candidate institutions. ACCJC has specific policies and procedures for such situations. If the Commission determines a complaint or third-party comment requires a response from an institution, a letter will be sent to the institution’s chief executive officer with a copy of the complaint or third-party comment and a list of information the Commission will need to complete its review. For further details, view the following:

- Complaint Process
- Third Party Comments

11 Learning Opportunities

Educational Series
ACCJC offers a series of short videos where you can learn more about a variety of topics related to accreditation. The Educational Series supplements the other resources, policies, and guides ACCJC has available on its website. ACCJC’s educational series of videos can be found under the Resources dropdown menu on ACCJC’s website, or visit: https://accjc.org/educational-series/

Webinars
ACCJC’s Educational Programming Committee hosts a series of webinars each semester to highlight emerging issues, share best practices, and provide accreditation updates to the field. Details on the webinars and recordings are posted on ACCJC’s website under the Events dropdown menu or visit: https://accjc.org/webinar/

Conferences and Symposia
ACCJC also organizes and participates in various conferences and symposiums to discuss and share information pertaining to accreditation and academic quality. These opportunities are posted on the Events dropdown menu on ACCJC’s website.
Ongoing Trainings
ACCJC staff liaisons work in collaboration with accreditation liaison officers (ALOs) and chief executive officers (CEOs) to provide other needed training workshops, services, and resources that assist colleges with their accreditation efforts, such as campus-wide trainings in preparation of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER), board training, advanced ISER training, etc. In addition, ACCJC provides team chair and team training for those selected to serve on peer review teams.

12 News and Communications
ACCJC communicates with its members through ACCJC Connect, which includes calls to action, Commission announcements and updates, and upcoming events. If you would like to receive these communications directly to your email, subscribe to ACCJC Connect or visit: https://accjc.org/accjc-connect/

Important announcements are posted on ACCJC’s website under the News dropdown menu, or visit: https://accjc.org/announcements/

13 Recent Commission Actions
The Commission meets two times per year, in January and June. Institutions undergoing review will receive a Commission Action Letter within 30 days of the meeting informing the institution of the Commission’s action. Actions taken during the meetings of the Commission are published on the ACCJC website under the Accrediting Commission dropdown menu, or visit: Recent Commission Actions

14 Contact Us
The ACCJC staff welcomes you in your new role as ALO and looks forward to working with you. Please feel free to contact us at any time.

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Thank you!