
Policy on Review of Accreditation Standards

January 2024

The Commission initiates a systematic and comprehensive review of its Accreditation Standards every ten years. The review is designed to assess the utility, effectiveness and relevance of the Accreditation Standards, and to ensure that they are updated to align with changing institutional characteristics, societal needs, federal regulations, and best practices in higher education. 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.¹ The review may result in formative and clarifying revisions, or in significant changes to Accreditation Standards as deemed appropriate.

The Review Process

The Commission makes available to its member institutions and the public information announcing the Review, the Commission's means of soliciting input on Accreditation Standards, and a proposed timeline for completing the review and implementation of any new or revised Accreditation Standards. During the review process, the Commission will provide periodic updates to its member institutions and the public on its progress in reviewing and developing the Accreditation Standards through electronic communications, notices on its website, and other media and news outlets.

The process for review of Accreditation Standards:

1. Examines whether the Standards are adequate to evaluate institutional and educational quality;
2. Examines whether the Standards are relevant to the educational needs of students and adequately evaluate student learning and achievement;
3. Examines each standard and the Standards as a whole;
4. Solicits suggestions from internal constituencies such as Commissioners and Commission staff; member institutions, their staff, and governing board members; and persons who serve as evaluation team members and team chairs;
5. Solicits suggestions from communities of interest or others with special expertise in accreditation related matters; and
6. Solicits suggestions from external constituencies such as students, business leaders and other members of the public served by member institutions.

¹ 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).

Development and Approval of Revised Accreditation Standards

If the review process results in the need for revisions to the 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 revised Accreditation Standards.

Once any revised Accreditation Standards have been drafted, the Commission will provide opportunities to its member institutions, their staff 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 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 the draft during its open session. In order to facilitate constituency and public input, the Commission may conduct additional listening sessions on the final draft of the 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 revised Accreditation Standards. The process for drafting and approving standards normally will be completed within two years.

Revisions to Accreditation Standards between Reviews

If the Commission identifies a need to revise a Standard ² at any time between the regular ten-year review, the process for ensuring constituent participation will be consistent with the process used during the ten-year review. When the Commission identifies a need to change an Accreditation Standard, it will initiate action within 12 months.

At any time between the regular ten-year review of Accreditation Standards, if the Commission identifies any ambiguities in the Accreditation Standards language, the Commission may revise the wording of a Standard to clarify meaning through the normal Commission meeting process with a first and second reading. Notice will be provided to member institutions and the public of the opportunity for institutional and public comment on such proposed changes before adoption.

Adopted June 1996; Revised June 1998, January 1999, June 2001, January 2007; Edited October 2007; Revised January 2013; Revised January 2018; Edited January 2024.

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² The U.S. Department of Education (ED) can require accrediting bodies to make changes to Accreditation Standards and policies within one year of adoption of new regulations or discovery by ED that an accreditor's Standards are not compliant with federal regulations. In such cases, ACCJC will need to respond within the one year time frame (34 C.F.R. § 602.36).