



May 4, 2016

*Re: Accrediting Commission Report
April 2016 Meeting
(via email distribution)*

Dear ACCET Members and Other Colleagues:

This letter provides information regarding actions undertaken by the ACCET Accrediting Commission at its April 2016 meeting. Specific reports relative to the April 2016 Commission meeting are available on the ACCET website under the “Commission” tab, including: (1) Final Actions Taken by the Commission (referenced by institution), (2) Summary Statistics of Actions Taken by the Commission, and (3) a copy of this Accrediting Commission Report, which describes new and/or revised ACCET policy documents considered by the Commission for final approval or sent out for comment. Also available on the website is a request for written comments relative to institutions scheduled for consideration of accreditation at the Commission’s August and December, 2016 meetings.

A synopsis of the Commission’s actions on ACCET policies undertaken at the April 2016 meeting is included as follows: (1) final documents approved by the Commission (available on the ACCET website under “Documents and Forms”) and (2) call for comment on proposed revisions to policy documents. At the April 2016 meeting, the Commission established the process for ACCET to accredit bachelor degree programs, on a pilot basis, and approved a program application and template for bachelor degree programs. The Commission also made significant changes primarily for purposes of clarity to Document 31 – Cancellation and Refund Policy, which is applicable to all programs, except ESOL programs. Further, the Commission considered several documents that were scheduled for the five-year review, including documents pertaining to: (1) annual reporting, (2) on-site visits, and (3) the application for new and revised programs.

As a reminder, the Commission’s Standards and Policy Review Committee (SPRC) conducts an ongoing review of each ACCET policy document at least every five years. Additionally, SPRC considers specific policy documents for review and revision to address governmental regulatory requirements, arising issues of concern, and/or the need for additional policy guidance. Member institutions and other interested parties are invited and encouraged to submit their written comments to proposed changes to ACCET policies and standards (available on the ACCET website under “News”).

FINAL APPROVAL

1. Document 25 – Policy for New, Revised, and Existing Programs/Courses

Changes were made to add a new section on bachelor’s degree programs to be accredited by selected ACCET-accredited institutions during a pilot project.

2. Document 25.BA – Application for Bachelor’s Degree Program

A new application was created for the approval of bachelor’s degree programs to be offered by ACCET-accredited institutions.

3. Document 3. BA – Bachelor’s Degree Template (NEW)

A bachelor’s degree template was established with Specific Field Criteria for bachelor’s degree programs.

4. Document 31 – Cancellation and Refund Policy

Changes were made primarily for the purpose of clarity. Modifications included: (a) clarifying the section pertaining to the use of State and ACCET cancellation and refund policies; (b) clarifying what must be done if the institution is unable to translate the enrollment agreement and refund policy into a student’s native language; (c) clarifying that an institution may not impose additional requirements for refund processing; (d) clarifying the information required for refund documentation; (e) calculating the 45-day deadline in the event of advanced notices of withdrawal; (f) moving the section “Charges Other Than Tuition”; (g) clarifying the language relative to international students who cancel prior to the start of class or no show; (h) moving the section on partial weeks; and (i) clarifying the requirement for calculating refunds based only on tuition and other costs attributable to the portion of the program attended by the student; (j) clarifying the language under the refund computation example; and (k) providing definitions for terms used in the policy document. Other changes included moving to the “General Requirements” section, the following: (i) the requirement that refunds be based on last date of attendance (LDA), (ii) the statement that ACCET’s cancellation and refund policy identify minimum standards, and institutions may incorporate policies that are more generous to students, (iii) the statement regarding consistent treatment of students relative to charges and refunds, and (iv) requirements regarding refund calculation documentation.

Additionally, the refund requirements for withdrawals now include an upper limit on unearned tuition and remove the allowance for a cancellation fee.

Inquiry Questionnaire:

1. Changes were made to: (a) simplify the language pertaining to financial information and (b) to align the Microsoft Word version of the questionnaire with the AMS version.

Annual Reporting:

2. Document 12 – ACCET Annual Reporting Requirements

No substantive revisions were made. The only change was to delete reference to the Document 27 Addendum, which is no longer in use.

3. Document 12a – Annual Report and Data Verification

No substantive revisions were made. The only change was to delete the heading “Rationale” to be consistent with other ACCET documents.

4. Document 12b – Annual Report and Enrollment Statistics

Changes included: (a) deleting the heading “Rationale”; (b) requesting a description of the outcome or a status update under the “Legal/Regulatory Status” section.; (c) deleting reference to classroom extension; and (d) indicating that language programs/courses may compute total participate based on booking weeks, as follows: “# participate clock hours = (# booking weeks for all enrollees) times (# scheduled hours @ week).

5. Document 12c – Annual Completion and Placement Reporting

Changes included: (a) deleting the heading “Rationale”; and (b) eliminating the requirement that Document 29 – Catalog Checklist and Guidelines be completed and submitted with the annual report.

On-Site Review:

6. Document 6 – Faculty/Administrative Personnel Form

No substantive revisions were made. The only change was to clarify that institutions must either (a) complete this form in its entirety, or (b) complete Section I of this form and attach it to a resume.

7. Document 19 – Instructor Evaluation

Changes were made to the criteria and the rating scale utilized by the team to evaluate instructors during classroom observations.

8. Document 20 – Review of Instructional Materials

Changes were made to the criteria and the rating scale utilized by the team to evaluate instructional materials.

9. Document 29 – Catalog Guidelines and Checklist

Changes were made to: (a) delete the heading “rationale”, and (b) require the school catalog to be published on the institution’s website, effective January 1, 2017.

10. Document 50FA – On-Site Financial Aid Review Checklist

Changes were made to request the three-year Cohort Default Rates provided by the U.S. Department of Education in the past three years, including any unpublished rates for the most recent year. There were additional minor edits to the document.

11. Preparation Checklist for ACCET On-Site Evaluation Visits

Changes were made to clarify that copies of documents, including those listed on the Checklist may be taken by the ACCET staff representative for preparation of the team report and may be included as exhibits in the team report.

Program Application:

12. Document 24 – Profile of Institutional Clientele and Programs

No substantive changes were made. The revisions included: (a) changing ESL to ESOL, and (b) lowering the stated age from 24 to 18.

13. Document 25.1 – Application for New or Revised Programs/Courses

Changes were made for purposes of clarity, including: (a) adding “if applicable”, (b) providing the CIP codes for language learning programs and language teaching programs, and (c) requesting additional information regarding the nature of program revisions.

14. Document 25.2 – Checklist for Application for New or Revised Programs/Courses

No substantive changes were made to the checklist.

15. Document 25.3 – Employer Questionnaire and Program Overview

The only change was to the header to state that the document is pertinent to vocational programs.

16. Document 25.4 – Program Information Sheet

No changes were made.

17. Document 25.5 – Course Information Sheet

A change was made to request “detailed course outlines” instead of “weekly objectives and competencies”.

18. Document 25.6a – Clock Hour Breakdown – By Program and Course

No changes were made to the form.

19. Document 25.6b – Clock Hour and Credit Hour Breakdown – By Program and Course

Changes were made for purposes of clarity, including: (a) changing the title to “Clock Hour and Credit Hours Breakdown for Academic Purposes – By Program and Course; (b) indicating that the credit hours used for academic purposes are to use the Carnegie clock-to-credit hour conversion for lecture, lab, and externship; and (c) including a table identifying the Carnegie method for clock-to-credit hour conversion for academic purposes.

20. Document 25.7 - Admissions Standards and Criteria

No substantive changes were made.

21. Document 25.8 - Externship/Internship Component of New/Revised Program

Changes were made to align the required exhibits with the information requested in the ASER under Standard IV – C Externship/Internship.

22. Document 25.9 – Clock Hour to Credit Hour Breakdown – By Program ad Course

Changes were made for purpose of clarity, including: (a) asking whether the institution calculates credit hours based on work outside of class (homework); and (b) deleting the questions regarding the conversion.

CALL FOR COMMENT

1. Document 31.ESOL – Cancellation and Refund Policy

Proposed changes are primarily for purposes of clarity. Changes include: (a) eliminating the headings “Standards VII-B Cancellation and Refunds” and “Rationale”; (b) moving to the “General Requirements” section, the following: (i) the requirement that refunds be based on last date of attendance (LDA), (ii) the statement that ACCET’s cancellation and refund policy are minimum standards, and institutions may incorporate policies that are more generous to students, (iii) the statement regarding consistent treatment of students relative to charges and refunds, (iv) the requirements regarding refund calculation documentation; (c) clarifying the section pertaining to the use of State and ACCET cancellation and refund policies; (d) clarifying what may be done if the institution is unable to translate the enrollment agreement and refund policy into a student’s native language; (e) the calculation of the 45-day deadline for advanced notices of withdrawal; (f) changing “program” to “an enrollment”; (g) requiring refund eligibility for students who are terminated due to violations of the institution’s written disciplinary or attendance policies; (g) clarifying refund requirements for students who withdraw in their first term/session and in subsequent terms/sessions; (h) moving the items under “Changes Other than Tuition” to other sections; and (i) providing definitions for terms used in the policy document.

Additionally, changes are proposed to update the period being pro-rated for withdrawals from the current language of “term/session”, which has been interpreted in multiple different, equally valid ways, to “period of financial obligation.”

2. Document 36 – Leave of Absence Policy

Proposed are changes to clarify that for all students: (a) leaves of absence may be granted for emergency situations such as a serious illness, debilitating injury, or death in the immediate family; and (b) the length and frequency of the leaves of absence and/or vacation must not impede student progress and must be reasonable within the context of the institution’s curriculum.

Additionally, the policy states that: “A student enrolled under a F-1 or M-1 visa may only be granted leaves of absence, reduced course load, and/or vacations in accordance with the regulations of the Department of Homeland Security and ACCET requirements. Any vacation policy must stipulate that students are only allowed vacation after completing an extended period of study at the institution. Cumulative leaves of absence and vacation may not exceed 180 calendar days in any 12-month period or 50% of the student’s enrollment period, whichever is shorter. An extended absence whether it be for a leave of absence or vacation (more than four weeks) will require the student to retest upon reentry into a language program.”