



December 31, 2016

***Re: Accrediting Commission Report
December 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 December 2016 meeting. Specific reports relative to the December 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 April and August 2017 meetings.

A synopsis of the Commission’s actions on ACCET policies undertaken at the December 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 December 2016 meeting, the Commission made changes to Document 7 – Guidelines for On-Site Evaluation Teams to expand the section pertaining to the orientation and training of team evaluators. Further, the Commission considered several documents that were scheduled for the five-year review, including the satisfactory progress policy and checklist.

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 3.ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Template

Changes were made to the specific field criteria under Standard IV-A Educational Goals and Objectives to indicate that: *“The content and length of ESOL programs are consistent with the objectives of the programs and sound educational practice, with total program length not exceeding the parameters supported by the published research of recognized experts in the ESOL field.”*

2. Document 7 – Guidelines for On-Site Evaluation Teams

Changes were made to expand the section pertaining to the orientation and training of team evaluators, including a provision that states: “*Prior to participating on an on-site visit, new team evaluators must have: (1) attended a Team Evaluator Workshop and/or (2) completed ACCET’s online evaluator training.*” Further, it is the responsibility of team members “*to demonstrate appropriate preparation to serve as an on-site evaluators in the accreditation peer review process by: (1) attending the ACCET Team Evaluator Workshop, (2) completing ACCET’s online evaluator training, and/or (3) previously serving as an on-site evaluator on at least two ACCET accreditation visits.*”

3. Document 18 - Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy

Changes were made to eliminate the sections entitled “*Standards*” and “*Rationale*” to be consistent with other ACCET policy documents. Revisions were also made to add the following provisions to reflect revisions to Standard VIII-C Student Progress, including: (a) The institution clearly and effectively communicates the assessment system to students at orientation and/or the beginning of each course; (b) Students are informed of their progress on a regular and timely basis, including after each evaluation period or increment; and (c) Satisfactory academic progress policies clearly identify the consequences of failing to meet minimum standards. Students must demonstrate that they meet the SAP standards established by the institution or be dismissed from training in accordance with the institution’s policy, including when it is no longer feasible for students to meet the requirements to successfully complete their programs. An additional change specifies that: “*Each programs is divided into evaluation periods or increments, based upon the published program length, as follows:*

- *Financial Aid Purposes: For institutions participating in federal Title IV financial aid programs, evaluation periods or increments for determining student financial aid eligibility must align with payment periods. These evaluation periods or increments may not be longer than 50% of the program or 50% of an academic year, whichever is less.*
- *Academic Purposes: To ensure that students are informed of their progress on a regular and timely basis, evaluation periods or increments for academic purposes may be no longer than 25% of the program or 25% of the academic year, whichever is less.”*

4. Document 18.1 - Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy Checklist

Changes were made to reflect the changes to Document 18.

5. Document 50 FA - On-Site Financial Aid Review Checklist

Proposed are changes to solicit information relative to: (1) heighten cash monitoring; (2) student consumer information about financial aid including gainful employment disclosures such as costs, student debt, and student earnings; and (3) gainful employment benchmarks.

CALL FOR COMMENT

1. Document 3.ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)Template

Proposed is a change to the specific field criteria under Standard VI – Instructional Methods that: “*The schedule of ESOL instruction: (1) is educationally sound, (2) facilitates language development, and (3) avoids excessive breaks in instruction that impede student language progression.*”

2. Document 36.ESOL – Leave of Absence and Vacation Policy

For purposes of clarity, proposed is to establish a separate leave of absence (LOA) and vacation policy applicable to international students enrolled in ESOL programs under F visas. Proposed is to require that the length and frequency of any vacations and school breaks must: (a) be reasonable within the context of the institution's curriculum, (b) consistent with sound educational practice, (c) reasonable relative to the period of student completed by the student, and (d) consistent with the institution's published policy. The institution's vacation and LOA policies must be consistent with ACCET and federal requirements, including those of SEVP which may differ from ACCET policy and, if stricter, take precedence.

The institution's vacation policy must ensure that: (a) a vacation is only granted after a student completes an extended period of study (at least 16 consecutive weeks of attendance), with the vacation granted for a maximum period of one week for every four weeks of study completed. Vacations must occur at the completion of a student's term or session and may not be granted as a means to excuse student absences.

In accordance with the proposed policy, a leave of absence (LOA) is a temporary break in study during which time an international F student must be out of the United States. An LOA must: (a) be requested in writing by the student in advance of the leave, (b) approved in accordance with the institution's written policy, and (c) documented by the institution. Additionally, the institution may not assess the student any additional charges as a result of the LOA and must evaluate the student's language proficiency before reentry into the student's language program consistent with sound educational practice and the institution's published policy.

3. Document 36 – Leave of Absence Policy

Proposed is to establish a separate leave of absence policy (LOA) applicable to all students, except international students enrolled in ESOL programs under F visas. A LOA may be granted for emergency situations and for a maximum period of 180 days in any 12-month period or half the program length, whichever is less. The length and frequency of the LOA must not impede student progress and be reasonable within the context of the institution's curriculum. A LOA must: (a) be requested in writing by the student in advance of the leave, (b) approved in accordance with the institution's written policy, and (c) documented by the institution. The institution's LOA policies must also consistent with federal requirements, which may differ from ACCET policy and, if stricter, take precedence.