Important Reminder: 
Updated ACCET Guidance – COVID-19 Temporary Flexibilities

The Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training (ACCET) recently reviewed the continuing and emerging challenges of COVID-19 and made a decision to revisit the guidance issued following the December 2020 and April 2021 Commission meetings.

Upon additional consideration of the emerging challenges and significant impact of COVID-19, the Accrediting Commission voted to keep the temporary flexibilities that have previously been issued in place until such time as they are affirmatively rescinded but no later than 180 days following the date on which the COVID-19 national emergency declaration is rescinded. In extending these temporary flexibilities, ACCET is following the guidance of the U.S. Department of Education and the Student Exchange Visitors Program (SEVP), including the period for temporary flexibilities due to COVID-19.

As a point of clarification, institutions that are not seeking to offer distance education as part of the ongoing delivery of programs, the U.S. Secretary of Education waived, for the duration of the national emergency declaration and 180 days following the date on which the COVID-19 national emergency declaration is rescinded, the requirement so that accreditors may waive their distance education review requirements for institutions working to accommodate students whose enrollment is otherwise interrupted as a result of COVID-19. Under the Department of Education’s Guidelines, this waiver is limited to distance learning opportunities developed specifically for the purpose of serving students who were already in attendance and whose attendance was interrupted by COVID-19.

Temporary Flexibilities: ACCET guidance provides certain flexibilities for institutions that are working to help students complete the term in which they are currently enrolled and identifies options available to institutions so that they can continue to serve current students during the coronavirus emergency including:

- Temporary closure.
- Temporary distance learning (IDL) delivery.
- Change in student enrollment status (e.g., full-time to part-time status) (This option is not available to IEPs).
- Consortium agreements (This option is not available to IEPs).
- Temporary change of location (This option is only available to IEPs).
**Externships:** Institutions will be permitted the temporary flexibility of offering students whose scheduled internship/externship is disrupted due to the COVID-19 emergency their (each student’s) choice to either:

1. Complete a rescheduled externship/internship, which may require the student to take a leave of absence; or
2. Complete, in lieu of internship/externship, a capstone course comparable in length (clock hours or credit hours) to the internship/externship, unless prohibited by any applicable licensing boards and/or other approval or certifying authorities.

**Labs:** Institutions will be permitted the temporary flexibility of offering students whose scheduled labs are disrupted due to the COVID-19 emergency their (each student’s) choice to either:

1. Complete rescheduled labs, which may require students to take a leave of absence;
2. Complete simulated labs that: (a) provide synchronous (real-time) sharing of hands-on practice using video conferencing, and (b) assess students’ skills based on observed levels of performance during lab time. Note that this option is not permissible if prohibited by any applicable licensing boards and/or other approval or certifying authorities; or
3. Complete didactic classes comparable in length (clock hours or credit hours) to the labs missed due to COVID-19 on the condition that the institutions schedule make-up labs in the future to provide students the opportunity to subsequently complete labs necessary for students to develop and practice their hands-on skills. Note that this option is not permissible if prohibited by any applicable licensing boards and/or other approval or certifying authorities.

**Verification of High School (or Equivalent) Completion Status:** Where an institution is unable to obtain documentation of an applicant’s high school completion or equivalency, an institution will be permitted the temporary flexibility to accept a signed and dated attestation from an applicant attesting to his or her high school completion and approximate date of completion in lieu of the applicant’s official high school diploma, official transcript, or high school equivalency certificate during the COVID-19 emergency period. Note that this temporary flexibility is not permissible if prohibited by any applicable state and/or other approval or certifying authorities.

**Leaves of Absence (LOA):** Institutions will be permitted the following temporary flexibilities relative to leaves of absence, including:

1. Waiving the requirement that: (a) the institution must approve a written and signed leave of absence request by the student prior to the leave of absence and (b) the student returning from a leave of absence (LOA) must resume at the same point in his/her program that the student began the LOA.
2. Establishing, even on a temporary basis, a formal written leave of absence policy consistent with any state, federal, and accreditation requirements if the institution previously did not have a formal written policy.
**Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP):** Institutions will be permitted the following temporary flexibilities relative to satisfactory academic progress (SAP):

1. An institution may exclude from the quantitative component (pace measurement) of satisfactory academic progress (SAP) attempted credits/hours a student was unable to complete as a result of the COVID-19 national emergency.

2. It is not necessary for a student to have filed an SAP appeal for an institution to exercise the flexibility identified in item #1. However, to exclude attempted credits/hours from SAP, an institution must have reasonably determined that the student’s failure to complete those credits/hours was the result of a COVID-19 related circumstance. Allowable circumstances include, but are not limited to, (a) illness of the student or family member, (b) need to become a caregiver or first responder, (c) economic hardship, (d) added work hours, (e) loss of childcare, (f) inability to continue with classes via distance education, (g) inability to access wi-fi due to closed facilities. If an institution temporarily ceases operations during a period of enrollment, attempted credits for all affected students (specific to that enrollment period) may be excluded.

**Completion and Placement Statistics:**

1. Institutions are expected to continue reporting annual completion and placement data during the COVID-19 emergency. The U.S. Department of Education defines the emergency period as continuing for “the duration of the national emergency declaration,” unless otherwise specified.

2. Institutions must continue to document their completion and placement processes and provide student services consistent with policies and procedures of ACCET, the institution, and any pertinent regulatory bodies.

3. Institutions have been evaluated for completion and placement data reported for calendar year 2019 (January 1 – December 31, 2019) per the regular ACCET policies.

4. Institutions have been evaluated for completion and placement data reported for calendar year 2020 (January 1 – December 31, 2020), keeping in mind the difficulties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the flexibilities allowed. Institutions reporting rates significantly below ACCET benchmarks are being monitored for improvement.

5. Institutions have also been evaluated for placement verification documentation for sample cohorts for calendar years 2019, 2020, and 2021 Year-to-Date.

6. Institutions will continue to be accountable for ensuring accuracy of records and support to students in the completion and placement processes. Evaluation for reports related to calendar year 2021 will focus on continued compliance with required processes and service to graduates in the placement process.

**Completion Flexibility for Calendar Year 2020 and 2021:** For the Calendar Year 2020 and 2021 Year-to-Date, the Commission will consider completion waivers for students who are unable to complete their program due to circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Allowable circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- Illness of the student or family member;
- Need to become a caregiver or first responder;
• Economic hardship;
• Added work hours;
• Homeschooling or child/dependent care issues; or
• Inability to continue with classes via distance education; and
• Inability to access wi-fi due to closed facilities.

COVID-19 waivers must be documented, including the student’s signature, date, and notification of a specific reason. Waivers that bring the percentage above 10% will result in adjusted waiver and completion rates and will be reviewed by the Commission.

**Placement Flexibility for Calendar 2020 and 2021:** For the Calendar Year 2020 and 2021 Year-to-Date, the Commission will consider placement waivers for students who are waiving placement assistance due to circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Allowable circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- Illness of the student or family member;
- Need to become a caregiver or first responder;
- Economic hardship;
- Added work hours;
- Homeschooling or child/dependent care issues; or
- Inability to continue with classes via distance education; and
- Inability to access wi-fi due to closed facilities.

COVID-19 Waivers must be documented, including the student’s signature, date, and notification of a specific reason. Waivers that bring the percentage above 15% will result in adjusted waiver and completion rates and will be reviewed by the Commission.

Depending on the duration and severity of COVID-19, the Commission may decide, in the future, to review its completion and placement policy, such as completion/placement waivers and/or benchmarks.

ACCET-accredited institutions are encouraged to contact Christopher Lambert, ACCET Executive Director, at chris@accet.org with any questions. In addition, institutions with pending IDL Program applications are invited to contact ACCET staff to discuss available options.