

Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation

January 2024

Introduction

The Commission's Eligibility Requirements represent the minimum qualifications for institutions seeking an accredited status with ACCJC. An institution must first demonstrate that it meets all of the Eligibility Requirements, and must provide the attached required documentation, in order to be eligible to apply for Candidacy status (also referenced as "preaccreditation" in federal regulations).¹

ACCJC only awards Candidacy status (preaccreditation) to those institutions it determines are likely to be successful in obtaining initial accreditation and sustaining compliance with the Commission's Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and policies (hereafter referred to as the Commission's Standards). Therefore, institutions preparing for Eligibility are advised to become familiar with the Accreditation Standards and Commission policies, in addition to the Eligibility Requirements. Application procedures and information about the Commission's eligibility and candidacy review processes can be found in ACCJC's Accreditation Handbook.

Member institutions are expected to maintain compliance with the Eligibility Requirements at all times. During an institution's comprehensive peer review process, peer review teams will monitor an institution's ongoing compliance with Eligibility Requirements through its evaluation of the institutional self-evaluation report, evidence, and other required documentation per Commission policies.

1. Authority

The institution is authorized or licensed to operate as a post-secondary educational institution and to award degrees by an appropriate governmental organization or agency as required by each of the jurisdictions or regions in which it operates.

Private institutions, if required by the appropriate statutory regulatory body, must submit evidence of authorization, licensure, or approval by that body. If incorporated, the institution shall submit a copy of its articles of incorporation.

2. Operational Status

The institution is operational with students actively pursuing its degree programs.

3. Degrees

A substantial portion of the institution's educational offerings are programs that lead to degrees, and a significant proportion of its students are enrolled in them. At least one degree program must be of two academic years in length.

¹ *Policy on Preaccreditation*

4. Chief Executive Officer

The institution has a chief executive officer appointed by the governing board, whose full-time responsibility is to the institution, and who possesses the requisite authority to administer board policies. Neither the district/system chief executive officer nor the institutional chief executive officer may serve as the chair of the governing board. The institution informs the Commission immediately when there is a change in the institutional chief executive officer.

5. Financial Accountability

The institution annually undergoes and makes available an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or an audit by an appropriate public agency. Institutions that are already Title IV eligible must demonstrate compliance with federal requirements.

Additional financial accountability for eligibility applicants:

- The institution shall submit with its eligibility application a copy of the budget and institutional financial audits and management letters prepared by an outside certified public accountant or by an appropriate public agency, who has no other relationship to the institution, for its two most recent fiscal years, including the fiscal year ending immediately prior to the date of the submission of the application.
- The audits must be certified and any exceptions explained. It is recommended that the auditor employ as a guide Audits of Colleges and Universities, published by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.
- An applicant institution must not show an annual or cumulative operating deficit at any time during the eligibility application process.

6. Mission

The institution's educational mission is clearly defined, adopted, and published by its governing board consistent with its legal authorization, and is appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education and the constituency it seeks to serve. The mission statement defines institutional commitment to student learning and achievement.

7. Governing Board

The institution has a functioning governing board responsible for the academic quality, institutional integrity, and financial stability of the institution and for ensuring that the institution's mission is achieved. This board is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the financial resources of the institution are used to provide a sound educational program. Its membership is sufficient in size and composition to fulfill all board responsibilities.

The governing board is an independent policy-making body capable of reflecting constituent and public interest in board activities and decisions. A majority of the board members have no employment, family, ownership, or other personal financial interest in the institution. The board adheres to a conflict of interest policy that assures that those interests are disclosed and that they do not interfere with the impartiality of governing body members or outweigh the greater duty to secure and ensure the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution.

8. Administrative Capacity

The institution has sufficient staff, with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support its mission and purpose.

9. Educational Programs

The institution's principal degree programs are congruent with its mission, are based on recognized higher education field(s) of study, are of sufficient content and length, are conducted at levels of quality and rigor appropriate to the degrees offered, and culminate in identified student outcomes.

10. Academic Credit

The institution awards academic credits based on generally accepted practices for degree-granting institutions of higher education and in accordance with statutory or system regulatory requirements. The institution provides appropriate information about the awarding of academic credit.

11. Student Learning and Student Achievement

The institution defines standards for student achievement and assesses its performance against those standards. For each program, the institution publishes the program's expected student learning outcomes and any program-specific achievement outcomes. Through regular and systematic assessment, it demonstrates that students who complete programs, no matter where or how they are offered, achieve the identified outcomes and that the standards for student achievement are met.

12. General Education

The institution defines and incorporates into all of its degree programs a substantial component of general education designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and promote intellectual inquiry. The general education component includes an introduction to some of the major areas of knowledge. General education courses are selected to ensure students achieve comprehensive learning outcomes in the degree program. Degree credit for the general education component must be consistent with levels of quality and rigor appropriate to higher education.

13. Academic Freedom

The institution's faculty and students are free to examine and test all knowledge appropriate to their discipline or area of major study as judged by the academic/educational community in general. Regardless of institutional affiliation or sponsorship, the institution maintains an atmosphere in which intellectual freedom and independence exist.

14. Faculty

The institution has a sufficient number of qualified faculty, which includes full time faculty and may include part time and adjunct faculty, to achieve the institutional mission and purposes. The number is sufficient in size and experience to support all of the institution's educational programs. A clear statement of faculty responsibilities must include development and review of curriculum as well as assessment of learning.

15. Student Support Services

The institution provides for all of its students, appropriate student support services that foster student learning and development within the context of the institutional mission.

16. Admissions

The institution has adopted and adheres to admission policies consistent with its mission that specify the qualifications of students appropriate for its programs.

17. Information and Learning Support Services

Through ownership or contractual agreement, the institution provides specific long-term access to sufficient information and learning support services adequate for its mission and instructional programs in any format whenever and wherever they are offered.

18. Financial Resources

The institution documents a funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to support student learning programs and services, to improve institutional effectiveness, and to assure financial stability.

19. Institutional Planning and Evaluation

The institution systematically evaluates and makes public how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes, including assessment of student learning outcomes.

The institution provides evidence of planning for improvement of institutional structures and processes, student achievement of educational goals, and student learning. The institution assesses progress toward achieving its stated goals and makes decisions regarding improvement through an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation.

20. Integrity in Communication with the Public

The institution provides a print or electronic catalog for its constituencies with precise, accurate, and current information concerning the following:

General Information

- Official Name, Address(es), Telephone Number(s), and Website Address of the Institution
- Educational Mission
- Representation of accredited status with ACCJC and with programmatic accreditors, if any
- Course, Program, and Degree Offerings
- Student Learning Outcomes for Programs and Degrees
- Academic Calendar and Program Length
- Academic Freedom Statement
- Available Student Financial Aid
- Available Learning Resources
- Names and Degrees of Administrators and Faculty
- Names of Governing Board Members

Requirements

- Admissions
- Student Fees and Other Financial Obligations
- Degree, Certificates, Graduation and Transfer

Major Policies Affecting Students

- Academic Regulations, including Academic Honesty
- Nondiscrimination
- Acceptance and Transfer of Credits
- Transcripts
- Grievance and Complaint Procedures
- Sexual Harassment
- Refund of Fees

Locations or Publications where Other Policies may be Found

21. Integrity in Relations with the Accrediting Commission

The institution provides assurance that it adheres to the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Commission policies, describes itself in identical terms to all its accrediting agencies, communicates any changes in its accredited status, and agrees to disclose information required by the Commission to achieve its accrediting responsibilities. The institution will comply with Commission requests, directives, decisions and policies, and will make complete, accurate, and honest disclosure. Failure to do so is sufficient reason, in and of itself, for the Commission to impose a sanction, or to deny or revoke candidacy or accreditation.

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Required Documentation

1. Authority
 - Degree-granting approval statement, authorization to operate, or certificates from appropriate bodies
 - Articles of incorporation (private institutions)
2. Operational Status
 - Enrollment history of institution (most recent three years suggested)
 - Enrollments in institutional degree programs by year or cohort, including degrees awarded, if any
 - Current schedule of classes
3. Degrees
 - List of degrees, course credit requirements, and length of study for each degree program
 - General education courses and requirements for each degree offered
 - Catalog designation of college-level courses for which degree credit is granted
 - Data describing student enrollment in each degree program and student enrollment in the institution's non-degree programs
4. Chief Executive Officer
 - Name, address, and biographical information about the CEO
 - Certification of CEO's full-time responsibility to the institution signed by the CEO and governing board chair
5. Financial Accountability
 - Past, current, and proposed budgets
 - Certified independent audits, including management letters (most recent three years suggested)
 - Financial aid program review/audits, if the institution is a participant
 - Student loan default rates and relevant U.S. Department of Education reports, if the institution is a participant
6. Mission
 - Copy of the mission statement as it appears in a published catalog or other public document
 - Minutes of governing board meeting where the mission statement was adopted
 - Any recent revisions to the mission statement
7. Governing Board
 - Biographical information about governing board members
 - Copy of governing board bylaws
 - Copy of conflict of interest policy

- Certification that there is no board majority of persons with employment, family, ownership, or personal interest in the institution; this must be signed by the chief executive officer and governing board chair
- 8. Administrative Capacity
 - Organizational chart, including names of those in the identified positions
 - Names and biographical information about administrative staff
- 9. Educational Programs
 - Names of programs that reflect the mission of the institution, including documentation of at least one degree program of two academic years in length
 - Documentation from the catalog or other public document which describes courses and curricular sequence of educational programs
 - Documentation of location(s) of educational programs, including a list of those offered via distance education and/or correspondence education, as well any competency based programs (direct assessment)
 - Student learning outcomes for degree programs
- 10. Academic Credit
 - Institutional policies on transfer and award of credit (see Commission's Policy on Credit Hour, Clock Hour, and Academic Year; Policy on Transfer of Credit; Policy on Competency Based Education)
 - Catalog documentation of credits awarded
 - Formula used by the institution to calculate values of units of academic credit, especially for laboratory, clinical, or other learning configurations
- 11. Student Learning and Student Achievement
 - Catalog statements that establish student learning outcomes for courses, programs, and degrees
 - Student learning outcome data from educational program reviews
 - Graduation, transfer, job placement, licensure examination pass rate history, course completion, retention term to term, progression to the next course/level, and program completion data, as appropriate to the institutional mission
 - Evidence that the institution reviews meaningfully-disaggregated data, identifies achievement gaps, and engages in planning and improvement to close these gaps
- 12. General Education
 - List of general education courses currently offered, including catalog descriptions and evidence of student learning outcomes, wherever they exist, i.e., course outlines, syllabi, etc.
 - Course outlines for language and quantitative reasoning courses
 - Evidence that general education courses are of higher education rigor and quality
- 13. Academic Freedom
 - Board approved policy on academic freedom

14. Faculty
 - Full-time and part-time faculty roster, including degrees and experience (note that faculty degrees must be from U.S. accredited institutions or the equivalent)
 - Faculty responsibilities statement or contract outlining faculty responsibilities
 - Current schedule of classes identifying faculty responsible for each class
15. Student Support Services
 - Demographic characteristics of students
 - Evidence the institution assesses student needs for services and provides for them
 - List of student support services provided that reflect the mission of the institution
 - Description of programs for special student populations
16. Admissions
 - Copy of admissions policy from the college catalog or other published document
 - Copy of enrollment application
 - Statement of student qualifications for admission
 - Statement of roles and expectations of admissions personnel
17. Information and Learning Support Services
 - Profile of holdings and resources, including electronic resources
 - Copies of agreements for access to external resources
18. Financial Resources
 - Past, current, and proposed budgets and financial statements
 - Documentation of any external foundation or other funding support
 - Documentation of funding base
19. Institutional Planning and Evaluation
 - Current written institutional plans that describe ways in which the institution will achieve its educational goals
 - Evidence of how results of institutional plans are used to guide resource planning and allocation, facilities plans, and other significant institutional planning efforts and decision-making processes
 - Evidence the institution engages in regular self-reflective evaluation of its operations and of student learning outcomes, and uses the results to identify strengths and areas in need of improvement for purposes of developing institutional plans and maintaining educational quality
 - Evidence that well-defined decision-making processes and authority serve to facilitate planning and institutional effectiveness
20. Integrity in Communication with the Public
 - Catalog or other public documents which serve that purpose
 - Recent print or other media advertisements
 - Policies regarding public disclosure

21. Integrity in Relations with the Accrediting Commission

- Copy of the policy adopted or other attestation and published by the governing board assuring compliance with this criterion
- List of other accreditations held by the institution and information regarding status with those organizations
- Copy of directory pages or website which describe the institution's representation by those accrediting bodies

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