

Glossary of Accreditation

Academic

An individual whose current responsibilities focus primarily on the curricular aspects of an educational institution or program. Depending on the nature of the institution, this definition may encompass designations such as dean, department head, instructor, lecturer, mentor, professor, teacher and trainer, etc.

Accreditation

A voluntary, non-governmental system of evaluation used to protect the public interest and to verify the quality of service provided by academic programs and institutions. The process involves initial and periodic self-study and evaluation by peers. Accreditation implies stimulation toward quality improvement beyond the minimum standards specified by the accrediting body.

Administrator

An individual whose current responsibilities focus primarily on the managerial aspects of an educational institution or program. Depending on the nature of the institution, this definition may encompass designations such as president, provost, chancellor, treasurer, registrar and financial aid officers, etc.

Adverse Action

The denial or withdrawal of accreditation or candidate status by a recognized accreditation association or commission.

Appeal

The right and process available to a program or institution for a review of an adverse accreditation decision.

CAO

The chief academic officer at an academic program or institution.

CEO

The chief executive officer at an academic program or institution.

CFO

The chief financial officer at an academic program or institution.

CHEA

Council for Higher Education Accreditation. A private, nonprofit national organization that coordinates accreditation activity and recognizes regional, institutional, and professional accrediting agencies in the United States.

Competencies

Specialized knowledge, skills and attitudes required for successful performance in a specific occupation.

Compliance

The extent to which a program or institution conforms and adheres to accreditation standards

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Comprehensive Review

Periodic review of a program by an accreditation agency, where the agency's decision-making body or its representatives evaluate a program's conformity to Standards. The process typically includes the program submitting a self-study, undergoing an on-site evaluation and an accreditation decision being made.

Conflict of Interest

A real or perceived circumstance that compromises an individual's capacity to render a fair and impartial decision regarding the accreditation status of an institution.

Continued Accreditation

Accreditation status granted to programs and institutions that continuously demonstrate evidence of their conformity to the Standards.

Contractual Arrangements

Contracts between the institution and any agency, corporation, institution or individual which involve instruction, recruiting or consulting services.

Course

A single instructional subject commonly described by title, number, credits, and expected learning outcomes in the college catalog or bulletin.

Criterion

A characteristic of an institution that must be possessed or demonstrated as evidence of compliance with an accreditation standard.

Curriculum

A program of course fulfilling the requirements for a certificate, diploma or degree in a particular field of study.

Dean

Chief academic officer (dean, director or chair) of an accredited program.

Deferral

An extension of time granted to an institution for consideration of its application for initial or renewed grant of accreditation, usually because of the accrediting body's need for additional information.

Degree

Credential awarded for the successful completion of an academic program, normally at least two academic years in length.

Diploma

A document issued to evidence completion of an academic program, generally less than two years in length and not providing a degree.

Discontinued Program

Any program that has not been in operation for a continuous twelve-month period.

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Distance Education

A formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when student and instructor are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Distance education may employ correspondence study, or audio, video or electronically mediated technologies.

Eligibility Requirements

Basic requirements that institutions/programs must meet before consideration is given by an accrediting body to an application for accreditation.

Enrollment Agreement

A contract between institution and student that sets for the program in which a student is enrolled fees, expenses and payment plan for the program and requirements of attendance at the institution.

Evaluation Team Report

A report written by external reviewers during or following the on-site evaluation visit to validate the program self-study and document the level of compliance with standards and performance with respect to program and institutional outcomes.

Externship

A field-based, supervised practical experience that involves the application of previously studied theory. A written agreement between the institution and the externship site includes specific learning objectives and evaluation criteria.

Faculty

Individuals who provide instruction.

Faculty Records

Required documentation for faculty members' files.

Financial Aid

Monetary assistance that is available to assist students in meeting educational program costs (e.g. Workforce Initiative Assistance, Title IV funds.)

Full Accreditation

Programs or institutions which demonstrate that they comply with accreditation standards and will continue to do so receive full Accreditation in the form of Initial Accreditation for programs or institution being accredited for the first time or Continued Accreditation for those who have already been accredited.

General Education

Those areas of learning which are deemed to be the common experience of all "educated" persons, including subject matter from the humanities, mathematics, sciences and the social sciences. General education courses directly applicable to the specific occupation may be considered applied

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Institutional Integrity

The pursuit of knowledge governed and administered with respect for individuals in a nondiscriminatory manner while responding to the educational needs and legitimate claims of the constituencies it serves, as determined by its mission and goals.

general education courses (e.g. medication math, psychology for health professionals and business math.) These applied courses satisfy the general education requirement for AOS and AAS Degree programs.

Grant

The period of time given to an institution/program when it becomes accredited.

Grievance Procedure

A written procedure for addressing any complaints by students, faculty, staff or the general public.

Initial Accreditation

Accreditation that has been granted to a program or institution being accredited for the first time

In-Service Training

A systematic program of training, sponsored by an institution, to provide for the development of faculty in teaching and curricular processes (i.e. development of curriculum concepts, new theories and techniques of instruction, new educational media.)

Institutional Accreditation

A grant of accreditation to an institution with educationally appropriate objectives which meet the accrediting body's standards.

Institutional Effectiveness Plan (IEP)

A written plan that outlines a systematic process for evaluation of institutional outcomes.

Institutional Mission

The educational purpose to which the institution is committed, in terms of which it provides its programs and services.

Level

Refers to placement of students at a certain level of college work, i.e., lower division (first two years) or associate degree, upper division (last two years) or bachelor's degree, first level graduate or master's degree, terminal professional degree or Ph.D.

Lower Level Course

Freshman and Sophomore level courses (100 or 200 level) found in degree programs.

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Licensure

The process by which an agency of the government grants permission 1) to persons meeting predetermined qualifications to engage in a given occupation and/or use of a particular title, or 2) to institutions to perform specified functions.

Main Campus

The main campus of an institution holds the accreditation for all of the locations where education is offered.

Member Institution

An institution that has met the conditions of eligibility and standards and has been granted accreditation status by an accrediting body.

Mission and Goals Statement

The statement in which an institution identifies its mission and goals. It reflects institutional values and encompasses the intellectual and affective development of the student, the pursuit of knowledge, the study of values and attitudes, and public service. The institution's statement of mission describes its particular philosophic stance and serves as a guide for educational planning. It also operates as a frame of reference for decisions about such practical matters as student admission and retention, the curriculum, the faculty, and allocation of funds.

Non-Main Campus

A site offering a complete program of study that meets the following requirements:

1. It is within the same control as the accredited main campus;
2. It offers programs leading to an occupational objective;
3. It has legal authorization to operate in the state where the non-main campus is located
4. It is described as a non-main campus in a common catalog; and
5. Uses the same name as the main campus.

Objective

Explication in more specific terms of ideas and activities inherent in the statement of mission and the goals to which an institution aspires.

Onsite Evaluation (also On-Site Review, On-Site Visit, Evaluation Visit, Site Visit)

The part of the comprehensive review in which members of the External Review Panel travel to the program's location to validate the information contained in the Program Presentation.

Onsite Reviewers (also Onsite Team, Onsite Review Panel)

A group of individuals appointed by the accreditation agency with the task of visiting a program or institution for the purpose of verify information in Self-Study Report.

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Orientation

A scheduled time, during which students are provided direction on dealing with the many facets of school experiences, including time management, note-taking, study techniques and use of applicable technology as appropriate.

Outcomes

The information by which an institution measures its effectiveness.

Peer Review

A process for evaluating the quality of a program or institution using one's equals from other programs or institutions to ensure that it meets accreditation Standards.

Placement

1. An active service provided for students in their search or employment; and
2. A graduate of a program who is employed in the field or related field of training.

Probation

A negative sanction indicating that a candidate or accredited institution fails to respond to the concerns communicated by the Commission, or when it deviates significantly from the Commission's standards, policies, or eligibility requirements, but not to such an extent as to warrant the issuing of a Show-Cause order or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation, the institution may be placed on Probation for a specified period of time. While on Probation, the institution may be subject to monitoring by the Commission, which may include a requirement to submit periodic prescribed reports and to receive visits for evaluation by representatives of the Commission. In addition, during the period of Probation, any new site or degree program initiated by the institution will be regarded as a major substantive change. The candidate or accredited status of the institution continues during the probation period.

Professional Development

Activities in which faculty increase their knowledge, skills and abilities in the field in which they are teaching (e.g. attendance at professional seminars, membership in professional organizations, enrollment in continuing education courses.)

Program

A program of study leading to a credential or degree.

Programmatic (Specialized) Accreditation

A grant of accreditation for a specific program.

Public Member

A member of an accreditation agency who is appointed from the public at large to represent the public interest.

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Reapplication

The procedure used when an institution that had not been granted accreditation because of deficiencies noted in the evaluation report again seeks accreditation after correcting the deficiencies.

Reasonable Assurance

An indication by a regional association that an unaccredited institution appears to have the potential and to be making appropriate progress which, if continued, will result in its meeting accreditation requirements on a normal schedule.

Recycle

Renewal.

Refund

An amount of monies paid to the institution determined to be returned to appropriate agencies and/or students using institutionally or state defined policies.

Regional Accreditor

An agency that accredits institutions of higher education. In the United States, the regional agencies (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, New England Association of Schools and Colleges, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and Western Association of Schools and College) generally accredit institutions that are only within specific geographic areas.

Retention

1. A system put in place by an institution which facilitates that students who enter a program complete it; or
2. Housing student records in a safe place that is accessible.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

The progress of students in their educational program toward successful completion of a program of academic study.

School

An administrative unit (e.g. school, college, or department) in an institution of higher education offering one or more programs that lead to a degree.

Scholarship

A financial grant which does not involve repayment by a student, financial need may or may not be a consideration as criteria when applying for a scholarship award.

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Self-Evaluation Report (SER) (also Self-Study; Program Presentation)

A document prepared by the program or institution as part of the comprehensive review process. This document describes the program or institution, how it meets the Standards, analyzes its strengths, weaknesses, and challenges and sets forth the program's plans and goals for future development and continued compliance with the Standards.

Separate Classroom

A separate classroom or laboratory space where:

1. Staff is limited primarily to instruction;
2. Supervision is from a main or non-main campus to which it is assigned and all student records are housed at this campus;
3. Complete program of instruction is not provided; and
4. The facility is within reasonable commuting distance of a main or non-main campus to which it is assigned.

Specialized Accreditor

An agency that accredits post-secondary professional and occupational-education programs or schools, such as medical schools, engineering schools, teacher-education programs and health-profession programs.

Staff

The supervisory and non-instructional personnel employed by an institution.

Standards (also Criteria)

Accreditation standards establish minimum levels of quality around which evaluations and accreditation decisions must be based. Standards are created through a consensus process that calls for input from educators, students, practitioners, regulators and the general public.

Student Records

An accumulation of school-related documentation that is maintained throughout a student's enrollment.

Substantive Change

Significant modification, expansion or contraction in the nature or scope of an accredited program or institution including, but not limited to mission, organization, curricular delivery, enrollment, leadership, etc.

Sustaining Fee

Money required to be paid to an accrediting agency on an annual basis, generally based on the gross tuition collected by the institution.

Syllabus

A description of how a course will be taught with a planned sequence of content, materials and activities. A course syllabus must reflect the most recent trends, developments and instructional materials for the specific subject areas.

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Synchronous Instruction

Synchronous literally means "at the same time". Instructor and students are able to communicate with each other in "real time", for example, a classroom setting, through video conferencing or interactive television.

Tenure

The employment status of a faculty or staff member whose employment is not subject to termination by the governing board, except in stipulated circumstances.

Term

A block of time during which a course or series of courses takes place (i.e. academic term, semester or quarter).

Terminal Contract

A contract agreement setting beginning and ending dates of employment of a faculty or staff member with no legal obligation that the expiration of the contract is to be followed by another contract agreement.

Terminal Degree

The highest credential generally available in a discipline (e.g. advanced degrees such as an earned doctorate or a master's degree in some disciplines; a baccalaureate degree in some fields; a 2-year degree in occupational areas).

Third-Party Contract

A contract between two parties in which the institution/program relinquishes, or shares, part of the management, delivery of education, administration or any other major institutional function.

Transcript

The permanent academic (educational) record of a student's achievement.

Unfunded Student Financial Aid

Refers to that portion of total student financial aid that is purely institutional assistance. It is the total amount of tuition scholarships that is awarded, but is not covered by endowment earnings and annual contributions designated for tuition scholarships, federal, state, or local funding, or monies an outside group contributes for student tuition. It is the amount of total tuition generated from enrollments the institution foregoes to attract and retain students.

Upper Level Course

Junior and Senior level courses (300 or 400 level) found in degree programs

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Vocational Education

Organized educational programs offering courses or instruction in a sequence or aggregation of competencies that are directly related to preparation for employment in occupations requiring other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree. These programs must include competency-based applied learning that contributes to an individual's academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills, necessary for economic independence as a productive and contributing member of society.

Virtual Library

A full text library available to students and staff via computer.

Warning

When the Commission finds that an institution has pursued a course that, if continued, could lead to more serious sanctions, it may issue to the institution a Warning to correct its deficiencies, to refrain from certain activities, or to initiate certain activities within a stated period of time. A Warning is a private sanction and does not affect the candidate or accredited status of the institution.

Withdrawal

The termination of a student's attendance in class or in all classes before the end of a term.

Withdrawn Accreditation

An accreditation status indicating a program is no longer accredited by an agency effective as of a specific date. Accreditation may be withdrawn by either:

1. a program or institution voluntarily withdrawing from the accreditation process; or
2. The accreditation agency withdrawing accreditation for serious lack of conformity to the Standards, for failure to participate in the process or for not meeting financial obligations to the accreditation agency.