

CALL FOR Comment ACCSC

To: ACCSC-Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties
From: Michale S. McComis, Ed.D., Executive Director
Date: February 24, 2017
Subject: Proposed Revisions to the *Standards of Accreditation*

The Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC) presents the following topic for comment by the ACCSC membership and other interested parties:

- **Leave of Absence**

The Commission welcomes and encourages the comments of ACCSC-accredited institutions and other interested parties on the topics listed above. The Commission encourages all member institutions and interested parties to read carefully the Commission's request for feedback and to submit comments and recommendations for consideration by the Commission. The Commission will give careful consideration to the comments received, particularly those that reflect thoughtful insights which take into account what is best for the entire ACCSC membership and support and enhance ACCSC's mission.

With regard to proposed revisions, after considering the written comments, the Commission may adopt the revision as proposed, adopt the revision with additional changes, defer action for further study and consideration, or reject the proposed revision. If the Commission adopts the revision, ACCSC will establish an effective date allowing reasonable time for institutions to come into compliance and will announce the revision via an *Accreditation Alert*.

All comments are to be in the form of a PDF document on letterhead with the signature of the commenter. Please send all written comments to the attention of Michale S. McComis, Ed.D., Executive Director, via e-mail to mccomis@accsc.org.

- Written comments regarding the Proposed Revisions to the *Standards of Accreditation* are due by **March 24, 2017**.

For assistance or additional information regarding this Call for Comment, please contact Michale S. McComis, Ed.D., Executive Director, at 703.247.4520 or mccomis@accsc.org.

Proposed Revision to ACCSC's Leave of Absence Standard

Background

Originally, ACCSC's standard regarding Leave of Absence ("LOA") was modeled largely after the U.S. Department of Education's ("the Department") regulations. However, the Department has provided additional guidance that allows institutions to grant a LOA on behalf of a student without a prior request when unforeseen circumstances would prevent the students from making the request in advance. In instances where an unforeseen circumstance inhibits a student from providing a request prior to the needed LOA period, the Department would allow a school to execute the LOA on behalf of the student as long as the school can document the reason for its decision and collect the request from the student at a

later date. This would apply in such instances where the student sustained an injury due to an accident, became suddenly ill, or had an immediate family member become suddenly ill and in need of immediate care. The Commission understands and agrees that there are times when students cannot know when a LOA will be necessary and thus finds such exceptions to be reasonable.

The Department's Most Recent Regulations Regarding LOAs:

2016 Federal Student Aid Handbook Title IV Rules

A school's policy must require a student to apply in advance for a Leave of Absence ("LOA") unless unforeseen circumstances prevent the student from doing so. For example, if a student were injured in a car accident and needed a few weeks to recover before returning to school, the student would not have been able to request the LOA in advance. A school may grant an LOA to a student who did not provide the request prior to the LOA due to unforeseen circumstances if the school documents the reason for its decision and collects the request from the student at a later date. In this example, the beginning date of the approved LOA would be determined by the school to be the date the student was unable to attend school because of the accident.

Based on the foregoing, ACCSC is recommending the following revisions to the *Standards of Accreditation* (proposed new language in **red bold and italicized print**):

SECTION VII – STUDENT LEARNING, ASSESSMENT, PROGRESS, AND ACHIEVEMENT

A. Student Learning, Assessment, and Satisfactory Progress

3. Student Satisfactory Progress

c. *Leave of Absence*

- i.** If the school allows students to take a leave of absence, the school defines and publishes in its catalog the leave of absence policy to include the process to have a leave of absence approved, ***the reason(s) why a student can request a leave of absence***, the allowable leave of absence period, and the consequences of a student's failure to return from an approved leave of absence. The period of the leave of absence may not begin until the student has submitted and the school has approved a written and signed request for an approved leave of absence ***except in those cases where unforeseen circumstances would prevent a student from submitting a request in advance.***¹
- ii.** A leave of absence period may not exceed 180 days within any 12-month period. A school may grant more than one leave of absence in the event that unforeseen circumstances arise, such as medical reasons affecting the student or a member of student's immediate family, military service requirements, or jury duty, provided that the combined leaves of absence do not exceed 180 days within the 12-month period.
- iii.** If the student does not return following the leave of absence, the school must terminate the student and apply the school's refund policy in accordance with applicable and published requirements.

¹ ***In cases where a school grants a leave of absence to a student who could not provide a request prior to the leave of absence period due to unforeseen circumstances, the school must secure at a later date the request and the reason(s) for the leave of absence along with documentation to show that the leave of absence could not have been requested and approved in advance. In these cases, the beginning date of the leave of absence period can be no earlier than the date that the circumstances prevented the student from attending school.***