

ACCSCCT Alert!

Information for
our member schools

To: *ACCSCCT Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties*
From: *Elise Scanlon, Executive Director*
Date: *December 14, 2004*
Subject: *Amendments to the Standards of Accreditation*

The Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology has reviewed all written comments submitted by accredited institutions and other interested parties regarding the revisions to the Standards of Accreditation as proposed in the Commission's September 14, 2004 Call For Comment. The Commission has subsequently voted to adopt the additions and revisions to the Standards of Accreditation in the following areas effective immediately unless otherwise indicated:

- *Section II (A)(5) – Learning Resource System*
- *Section II (B)(4) – Master's Degree Standards*
- *Section IV (B) – Catalog Requirements*

The Commission has also established an interpretation in the following area:

- *Section III (B)(3) – Faculty Qualifications*

The full text of the Accreditation Alert can be found on the Commission's website at: www.accsct.org. Go to "*Staying Accredited*" and then "*Accreditation Alert*." The revisions and additions have been incorporated into the Standards of Accreditation, a revised copy of which can be found on the Commission's website by going to "*Staying Accredited*" and then "*Standards of Accreditation*." The revised Standards of Accreditation dated December 14, 2004 should be used to replace all previous versions.

Accredited institutions and others maintaining complete, up-to-date copies of the Standards of Accreditation should add this notice to their current standards book under the Accreditation Alerts tab. For additional information related to these adopted changes, please contact Michale S. McComis, Associate Executive Director, at (703) 247-4520.

Section II (A)(5) – Learning Resource System

The Commission, through its systematic program of review and Call for Comment process, has established new standards for learning resources in ACCSCT accredited institutions. The Commission has expanded its definition of learning resources and has replaced the requirement of a “library/resource center” with the requirement for a “learning resource system” as a means to address decentralized systems and technological solutions. Electronic resources and library partnerships are also addressed in the new standards.

A key component to the new standards is the “scaleable” language used. These standards are applicable to all institutions large or small, highly specialized or departmentalized. The overall intent is that all schools must be able to demonstrate that the resources available to students adequately serve that student body and support the type and level of education provided.

An important change to be aware of is the Commission’s requirement that schools make learning resources part of a program’s curriculum. Learning resource materials available outside of the classroom and external to the curriculum can be used to enhance critical thinking and problem solving skills. Learning resource materials and research projects are often used to engage students in dynamic ways and to facilitate and develop independent critical thinking and problem solving skills. Accordingly, the Commission now requires that learning resources be integrated into a program’s curriculum in order to enhance a student’s educational experience.

The Commission would like to provide clarification on one issue pointed out by some respondents to the September 14, 2004 Call for Comment. Specifically, institutions which offer an academic baccalaureate degree or higher, “must have a learning resource system *coordinated* by an individual holding a Master of Library Science credential or with equivalent education and experience.” This individual is responsible for coordinating the learning resource system so that the higher level academic degrees are appropriately supported with sufficient educational materials. This individual is not required to provide full-time on-site supervision or management of a school’s library system, however, as long as a school’s learning resource system is otherwise managed on a full-time basis by qualified school personnel with sufficient experience to provide oversight and supervision.

These standards are effective immediately with the following exceptions:

- Use of the learning resource system materials must be integrated into a school’s curriculum and program requirements as a mechanism to enhance the educational process and to facilitate positive learning outcomes for students (Section II (A)(5)(c)).
- Schools which offer a baccalaureate degree or higher must have a learning resource system coordinated by an individual holding a Master of Library Science credential or with equivalent education and experience (Section II (A)(5)(d)).

In these areas, the Commission has extended a six month grace period to June 30, 2005 for schools to come into compliance.

The following language represents the Commission's revisions to Section II (A)(5) of the Standards of Accreditation:

II. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

This section identifies various program elements which enable a school to meet its objectives and, thus, achieve and maintain accreditation. Such elements include appropriate program length; comprehensive course outlines; learning objectives; instructional materials and equipment; the availability, accessibility and integration of adequate learning resource materials; and processes that prepare students for employment.

A. General Requirements

The following requirements apply to all programs:

5. Learning Resource System

A learning resource system includes all materials that support a student's educational experience and enhance a school's educational program such as libraries; texts; electronic resources; learning resource laboratories and centers; library consortia and interlibrary loan agreements; computers; internet access; research databases; and other similar resources and equipment. The learning resource system can be centralized or decentralized in organization but resources must be easily and readily accessible to students and faculty during and beyond classroom hours, regardless of location or means of delivery. Other necessary elements of a school's learning resource system follow.

- a. A school's learning resource system must include materials commensurate with the level of education provided and appropriate to the courses of study in sufficient quantity and scope to meet the educational objectives of each program and include such elements as: relevant and current texts and periodicals; research journals and databases; standard works of reference; multi-media and/or electronic resources; electronic library resource technologies; and other resource materials necessary to adequately serve the student body.
- b. Use of the learning resource system materials must be integrated into a school's curriculum and program requirements as a mechanism to enhance the educational process and to facilitate positive learning outcomes for students.
- c. A school's learning resource system must be managed by qualified school personnel with sufficient experience to provide oversight and supervision. Schools which offer a baccalaureate degree or higher must have a learning resource system coordinated by an individual holding a Master of Library Science credential or with equivalent education and experience.
- d. Qualified school personnel orient, train and assist students and faculty in the use of the learning resource system in a manner that supports learning objectives.

- e. A school must have written policies and procedures for the on-going development of its learning resource system as part of its institutional improvement program. A school must demonstrate sufficient support and budgetary allocations for the learning resource system.
- f. In any case, it remains the responsibility of the school to ensure that its student body is adequately served and has ready access to sufficient and appropriate learning resource materials in compliance with these standards.

For the following deletions to Section II (B), renumber the remaining items in this section as appropriate.

B. Degree Programs

1. General Requirements

- ~~g. The school shall maintain a library/resource center supervised by a staff member who demonstrates competence to provide oversight and management. The library/resource center shall include holdings appropriate to the courses of study, standard works of reference, relevant current periodicals, and relevant reference materials in sufficient titles and numbers to adequately serve the students. Study space appropriate for the number of students served shall be provided. Appropriate assistance shall be available to the students by qualified staff personnel.~~

2. Associate Degrees

b. Academic Associate Degrees

- ~~3. In schools offering academic associate degree programs, the library/resource center must be properly supervised by a person trained to provide management and oversight of the school's library system. Training may be provided by the institution offering the degree program.~~

3. Baccalaureate Degrees

- ~~e. In schools offering baccalaureate degree programs, the library/resource center must be properly supervised by a person trained to provide management and oversight of the school's library system. Training may be provided by the institution offering the degree program.~~

MASTER'S DEGREE STANDARDS

The Commission has promulgated a new section of standards which will give authority to recognize degree programs at the master's degree level within the scope of a school's institutional accreditation. The Commission has been engaged in a pilot project for the addition of standards which cover graduate level education in career oriented fields of study since 2001. Currently there are three schools offering a master's degree as part of the ACCSCT pilot program and there are several other schools which have either received approval to submit an application for a master's degree program or have expressed an interest in doing so. After having worked with the schools in the pilot and consulting with both internal and external resources familiar with evaluation and assessment in this area, the Commission arrived at a set of standards which it believes comprehensively address the components necessary for the assurance of quality education at the graduate level. Furthermore, the Commission believes that these standards are consonant with the requirements of other agencies which accredit or approve master's degree programs.

The Commission will next petition the United States Department of Education for an expansion of the Commission's scope of recognition. Approval by the Department of Education is necessary before students attending graduate level programs at ACCSCT accredited institutions can be eligible for federal financial aid. Accordingly, the Commission has revised its scope statement found in Section I of the Standards of Accreditation to support this petition.

Presently, the new master's degree standards will be maintained in one section; however, portions of these standards may be moved to other areas of the Standards of Accreditation in the future for greater clarity (e.g., faculty, admissions requirements, etc.). The Commission's new standards for master's degrees are set forth below and are effectively immediately with the exception of the schools participating in the pilot program which have until June 30, 2005 to achieve compliance.

I. CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY

A. Commission Scope

Only private, postsecondary career schools and colleges with trade, occupational or technical educational objectives are eligible for accreditation. The Commission may decline to consider for accreditation otherwise eligible schools if it determines that the programs offered by an applicant school fall outside of the Commission's primary scope and competence or there is a lack of standards necessary for meaningful review. Schools primarily directed toward avocational or general education objectives are ineligible for accreditation from the Commission.

C. Educational Objectives

The school's primary educational objective must be to prepare students for entrance or advancement in one or more occupations requiring technical or career oriented competencies and skills. Educational objectives are career oriented and provide graduates with the necessary competencies, skills, and level of education for employment in their fields of study. A school must ensure that all required courses are available to enable students to complete their programs of study.

II. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

B. Degree Programs

4. Master's Degrees

a. General Requirements

1. The institution's curricular offerings must be consistent with the goals, objectives, and mission of the institution. Master's degree-granting institutions must place emphasis on higher-level course work, including research and analytical skills, and independent and critical thinking skills. The master's degree must evidence contribution to the field of study undertaken and that graduates are able to acquire the necessary competencies and skills for employment in the field of study undertaken.
2. Only institutions which are approved by the Commission to award baccalaureate degrees and which have received approval from applicable oversight agencies may apply for master's degree approval.
3. An institution seeking approval to add a master's degree program will receive an on-site evaluation to review compliance with accrediting standards in accordance with the Commission's processes and procedures.

b. Program Requirements

1. The length of a master's degree must be appropriate to enable students to achieve the required competencies and skills for employment or advancement in the field for which training is provided.
2. A master's degree program must be designed and offered in a way that provides for a distinct level of education and foster independent learning and an understanding of research methods appropriate to the academic discipline. Graduate level courses must be based on appropriate pre-requisites and learning outcomes and expectations must be clearly stated to students.
3. Master's degree programs must include a minimum of 30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours. At least 24 semester hours or 36 quarter hours must be in the technical field for which the degree is awarded.
4. In a master's degree program, the curriculum must include an applied, integrated or culminating experience required for program completion (e.g., capstone experience, comprehensive examination, research project, or thesis).

c. Program Advisory Committee

For master's degree programs, the institution must have a diverse Master's Degree Program Advisory Committee which includes a balance of employers, current graduate faculty, as well as individuals with graduate level education experience who are not employed by the institution (e.g., graduate students, alumni, graduate faculty from other institutions, etc.). The Master's Degree Program Advisory Committee must perform all requirements set forth in Section II (A)(4) of the Standards of Accreditation.

d. Educational Administration and Supervision

1. Graduate level education offered by an institution must be appropriately supervised and coordinated by an individual with an earned doctorate degree. The school must demonstrate that the director of graduate level education has the experience and competence to manage the instructional program.
2. Each master's degree program must be appropriately managed by an individual with a minimum of a graduate degree in the same field for which training is provided.

e. Faculty

1. At a minimum, at least 50% of the graduate level courses included in the master's degree program must be taught by faculty members who possess a minimum of four years of related practical work experience, an earned doctorate degree or other terminal degree in a related field of study, and appropriate preparation in the subject area taught. The remaining 50% of the courses may be taught by faculty who possess a minimum of four years of related practical work experience and a master's degree in a related field of study with appropriate preparation in the subject area taught or a master's degree in an unrelated field of study with 18 semester credit hours or 27 quarter credit hours of graduate level education in the subject area taught.
2. In exceptional cases, outstanding professional experience and contributions to the occupational field of study may be substituted for a formal degree. In such instances, the faculty member must possess a minimum of eight years of related practical work experience and the school must justify and document, on an individual basis, the outstanding professional experience and contributions to the occupational field.
3. Graduate faculty and other appropriate school personnel participate in the development, on-going review, and improvement of graduate level curriculum.

f. Admissions

1. The school must use appropriate techniques to assess whether applicants have the skills and competencies to benefit from the training provided at the graduate level. A student admitted to a master's degree program must possess an earned baccalaureate degree from a recognized higher education institution (e.g., accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or the equivalent). All admissions criteria, to include evidence of an earned baccalaureate degree, must be met prior to matriculation.
2. For graduate level courses or master's degree programs, standardized or national examinations may be required (e.g., GRE or GMAT). The school may utilize other entrance tests that have been reviewed by a qualified, independent third party for appropriateness of the instrument and specific score levels required for admission. In any case, the school must disclose the type and nature of examination and the acceptable score and/or range of scores applicants must receive to be admitted.

g. Graduation Requirements

1. Graduation from a master's degree program requires a 3.0 grade point average or better (assuming the traditional 4.0 grade point scale) and is based upon the student's satisfactory achievement and demonstration of the required knowledge and skills.
2. Only those graduate level courses in which a student earns the equivalent of a 2.0 or better may be applied toward the total number of credits required for graduation.

Section IV (B) – Catalog Standards

The following revisions to the Standards of Accreditation govern the provision of school catalogs to students. The main idea behind the revisions is to allow schools the option of providing students with an electronic copy of the catalog. These revisions will still require schools to provide a printed copy of the catalog upon request, but the Commission believes that the allowance for electronic catalogs will allow schools additional options and opportunities to provide pertinent and necessary information to students.

The Commission sent recommendations to the ACCSCT membership in a September 14, 2004 Call for Comment proposing revisions to the Commission's catalog requirements. At the November 14, 2004 meeting the Standards Committee reviewed the responses to the Call for Comment and has acted to adopt the revisions from the Call for Comment with no additional changes. The following standards from Section IV (B) of the Standards of Accreditation are effectively immediately.

IV. STUDENT RECRUITMENT

B. Catalog

1. A school's catalog must accurately portray the school; its educational programs, resources and facilities; and policies and procedures and include, at a minimum, all items listed on the Catalog Checklist.
2. A school's catalog must be designed and written, to convey an accurate and dignified impression of the school. The catalog's illustrations, photos and narrative must pertain directly to the school and sources of illustrations and photos must be clearly identified.
3. A school must provide each applicant with a current and complete catalog prior to signing the enrollment agreement so that each potential student may make an informed decision relative to the school's educational programs, institutional policies, and procedures. A school may provide either a printed and bound copy of the catalog or a read-only format electronic copy which cannot be altered (e.g., portable document format (PDF), etc.). In either case, all versions of the catalog must be identical and students that receive an electronic copy of the catalog must also be able to receive a printed and bound copy of the catalog upon request.

Section III (B)(3) – Interpretation of Faculty Qualification Standards:

The Commission has found it necessary to provide an interpretation of Section III (B)(3) of the Standards of Accreditation and what is meant by “appropriate coursework” and “college level coursework.” Section III (B)(3) of the Standards of Accreditation states the following:

*Faculty teaching applied general education courses in an occupational associate degree program must have a baccalaureate degree with **appropriate coursework** in the subject area(s) taught or three years related practical work experience and **college level coursework** in the subject area(s) taught.*

The Commission intends to conduct research and attempt to determine the best practices of schools offering AOS degrees with applied general education. Upon completion of this research, the Commission will determine the need for further clarification or revision to the standard. In the interim, the Commission will interpret Section III (B)(3) as follows:

The interpretation of “appropriate coursework” and “college level coursework” is **15 semester credit hours (or the equivalent) in subject areas which support the curriculum content.**

This interpretation will be used prospectively. Therefore, faculty hired to teach applied general education courses between April 1, 2004 (when this standard was promulgated) and December 31, 2004 will be grandfathered and the appropriateness of their qualifications will be reviewed on an individual basis in the ordinary course of the Commission’s accreditation process. Faculty hired after December 31, 2004 will be required to comply with the Commission’s interpretation.