ACCREDITATING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES
Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Policy on Substantive Change


Background
The U.S. Department of Education regulations require that accrediting agencies have adequate policies and procedures to ensure that any substantive changes to the educational mission, or programs of an institution, maintain the capacity of the institution to continue to meet Accreditation Standards. Membership of the Substantive Change Committee is set forth in the ACCJC Bylaws and represents the composition of academic and administrative personnel required of decision-making bodies by the U.S. Department of Education.¹

Federal law mandates that accrediting agencies require institutions to obtain accredits approval of a substantive change before the change is included in the scope of the accreditation granted to the institution. The scope of an institution’s accreditation covers all activities conducted in its name.

Policy
The Commission, through its substantive change process, ensures that institutions continue to meet the Standards. The substantive change process requires evidence of institutional planning, resource commitment to the proposed change, and evidence that following the change the institution continues to meet the Eligibility Requirements, Standards, and Commission policies.

It is the institution’s responsibility to demonstrate the effect of a substantive change on the quality, integrity, capacity and effectiveness of the total institution. Substantive changes must be approved by the Commission prior to implementation. 34 C.F.R. § 602.22.

The Commission publishes a Substantive Change Manual that describes the approval process. The institution’s accreditation will be extended to areas affected by the change upon review and approval by the Commission. Major substantive changes or the area potentially affected by the substantive change may cause the Commission to decide whether an educational quality and institutional effectiveness review (formerly comprehensive review) or site visit is required to make a determination regarding the substantive change². Situations which may trigger this determination include:

- Change of ownership/control/legal status during reaffirmation of accreditation or candidacy status;
- Complete or significant change in mission and/or a significant change of mission sought within two years of a change of ownership and change of control;

¹ 34 C.F.R. § 602.15(a)(3). In addition, educators with specialized expertise may also be represented on the committee to facilitate consideration of substantive change applications involving programs or single-purpose institutions that prepare students for a specific profession.

² 34 C.F.R. § 602.22(a)(3)
• Any relocation coupled with a change of mission;

• A change of classification from a branch campus to a main campus;

• Significant departure from meeting the Eligibility Requirements (ERs), Accreditation Standards and/or Commission policies;

• A site visit, special visit or special report that indicates noncompliance with the ERs, Accreditation Standards or Commission policies;

• Evidence of unethical practices;

• Student indebtedness compared to program, job market, and salary;

• Poor student graduation rates, program quality, performance and/or program outcomes;

• Lack of effective educational policies and practices;

• Any change that results in the transition to a 100% distance education institution; or

• Other circumstances and the accumulation of changes wherein the Commission concludes the institution, to which it granted accreditation, has effectively ceased to operate under the conditions upon which that grant of accreditation was based.

Institutions may not submit a Substantive Change Proposal in the six-month period preceding the site visit. The Commission may defer consideration of a substantive change request if an institution is on a sanction such as Warning, Probation, or Show Cause until the conditions that caused the Commission to defer a decision to impose a sanction have been resolved and the Commission has reaffirmed accreditation.

Substantive Changes include, but are not limited to, the following:

**Change in Mission, Objectives, Scope, or Name of the Institution**

• a change in the mission or character of the institution; if the mission or character of the institution becomes dramatically different, the Commission reserves the right to require the institution to complete the eligibility, candidacy, and initial accreditation process;

• a change in the degree level from that which was previously offered by the institution, i.e., offering a degree at a level higher than the accredited institution offers currently;

• any change in the official name of the institution;

• a merger of two separately-accredited ACCJC institutions into a single accreditable institution;

• a reduction of programs to an extent that the institution’s mission cannot be accomplished;

**Change in the Nature of the Constituency Served**

• a change in the intended student population;

• closure of an institution;

• closure of a location geographically apart from the main campus at which students can complete at least 50% of an educational program.
- courses or programs offered outside the geographic region currently served

**Change in the Location or Geographic Area Served**

An institution that moves to a new location or opens a new location geographically apart from the main campus where students can complete 50% or more of a program constitutes a substantive change. The Commission will determine if an institution applying for substantive change for a new location requires a site visit. The Commission will determine if an institution may be exempted from the requirement of a site visit if the following conditions are met:

- An institution has successfully completed at least one cycle of accreditation of maximum length offered by the Commission (six years) and one renewal or has been accredited for at least ten years and has three additional locations already approved by the Commission through the substantive change process.

- The institution has demonstrated sufficient capacity to add additional locations without individual prior approvals, including at a minimum satisfactory evidence of a system to ensure quality across a distributed enterprise that includes: clearly identified academic control; regular evaluation of the locations; adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems; financial stability; and long-range planning for expansion.

The Commission must determine the institution’s fiscal and administrative capacity to operate the additional location. In addition, the Commission shall arrange a visit, within six months of review, to each additional location the institution establishes if the institution has a total of 3 or fewer additional locations, has not demonstrated to the Commission’s satisfaction that it has a proven record of effective educational oversight of additional locations or has been placed on sanction by the Commission. 34 C.F.R § 602.22(c). The purpose of the site visits is to verify that the additional location(s) has the personnel, facilities, and resources the institution claims to have in its application to the Commission for approval of the additional location(s).

The Commission may not approve an institution’s addition of locations after the institution undergoes a change in ownership resulting in a change of control as defined in 34 C.F.R. § 600.31 until the institution demonstrates that it meets the conditions for the agency to pre-approve additional locations described in 34 C.F.R. § 602.22.

**Change in the Control or Legal Status of the Institution**

- any change in the form of control, legal status, or ownership of the institution

- a merger with another institution

- the separation of one unit of the institution into separate institutions, dividing an institution into two or more separately controlled and accredited units

- the acquisition of any other institution or program or location of another institution, and/or the addition of a permanent location at the site of a teach-out the institution is conducting

- contracting for the delivery of courses or programs in the name of the institution with a non-regionally-accredited organization

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3 See also Policy on Contractual Relationships with Non-Regionally Accredited Organizations
- a change by a parent institution of one of its off-campus sites into a separate institution

**Change in Courses or Programs or their Mode of Delivery that Represents a Significant Departure from Current Practice**
- a change in the mode or location of delivery when the courses constitute 50% or more of a program, degree or certificate and/or are offered at a new or different location or through distance education or correspondence education for the total amount of credits awarded for courses or programs; addition of courses that constitute 50% or more of a program or 50% of the institution's courses offered through a mode of distance or electronic delivery
- the addition of courses or new programs that represent a significant departure from existing offerings of educational programs or methods of delivery from those that were offered when the institution was last evaluated
- addition of programs of study at a degree or credential level different from that which is included in the institution's current accreditation or preaccreditation

**A Change in Credit Awarded**
- a substantial increase or decrease in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for the successful completion of a program
- a change from clock hours to credit hours
- a change in rigor of the credit hour

**Implementation of a Direct Assessment Program**
- an instructional program that, in lieu of clock hours or credit hours, utilizes direct assessment of student learning
- an instructional program that recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others
- a program that must obtain USDE approval as a direct assessment program under 34 C.F.R. § 668.10

**A Contractual Relationship with a Non-Regionally-Accredited Organization**
A contractual relationship with a non-regionally-accredited organization is considered a substantive change when more than 25 percent of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs is offered by the non-regionally-accredited organization. 34 C.F.R. § 602.22(a)(2)(vii).
ACCREding COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES
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Policy on Institutional Integrity and Ethics
(Adopted June 2011; Second Reading June 2013)

Background
In accordance with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies, the Commission expects each member institution to exhibit integrity and to subscribe to and advocate high ethical standards. Recognition by the U.S. Department of Education requires the Commission to monitor an accredited institution's compliance with the institution's Title IV program responsibilities and the institution's responsibility to ensure that no false, erroneous, or misleading statements or misrepresentation are made about it. 34 C.F.R. 602.16(a)(1)(x).

Policy
Accredited institutions, or individuals acting on their behalf, must exhibit integrity and subscribe to and advocate high ethical standards in the management of its affairs and all of its activities dealing with students, faculty, staff, its governing board, external agencies and organizations, including the Commission, and the general public.

Policy Elements

1. An accredited institution will uphold and protect the integrity of its practices.

2. An institution applying for eligibility, candidacy or extension of candidacy, accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation, or responding to Commission requests for information or reporting requirements, such as the annual reports, provides the Commission with information that is readily available, current, complete, and accurate, including reports of other accrediting agencies, licensing and auditing agencies. This includes any information on matters that may affect an institution's integrity.

3. The institution assures the clarity, accuracy and availability of information provided to all persons or organizations and related to its mission statement; its educational programs; its admissions requirements; its student services; its tuition and other fees and costs; its financial aid programs; its policies related to transcripts, transfer of credit and refunds of tuition and fees. The institution reports accurately to the public its accreditation status.

4. The institution has policies to ensure academic honesty, policies to assure integrity in the hiring processes, and policies and procedures to prevent conflict of interest throughout the organization, including governing board decision-making and contracting, and policies that provide due process protections. Such policies are reviewed regularly and are widely available to institutional staff, students, governing board members and the public. The institution is able to provide evidence that it upholds its policies.

5. The institution demonstrates integrity and honesty in interactions with students and prospective students in all academic, student support and administrative functions and services as well as statements and other information provided about its accredited status, its transfer of credit policies, and whether successful completion of its courses
qualify students to receive, to apply, and/or to take licensure examinations or non-governmental certification.

6. The institution establishes and publicizes policies ensuring institutional integrity that contain clear statements of responsibility for assuring integrity and describe how violations of integrity are to be resolved.

The institution, in its relationship with the Commission, cooperates in preparation for site visits, receives evaluation teams or Commission representatives in a spirit of collegiality, and complies with the Eligibility Requirements, Standards, and Commission policies. The institution maintains an openness and commitment to external evaluation and assists peer evaluators in performing their duties.

7. The institution establishes a governance process and policies to receive and address complaints regarding questionable accounting practices, operational activity which is a violation of applicable law, rules, and regulations, or questionable activities which may indicate potential fraud, waste, and/or abuse. The process shall allow for the confidential and anonymous submission of complaints.

8. The institution, in its relationship with the Commission, cooperates in preparation for site visits, receives evaluation teams or Commission representatives in a spirit of collegiality, and complies with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies. The institution maintains an openness and commitment to external evaluation and assists peer evaluators in performing their duties.

9. The institution makes complete, accurate and honest disclosure of information required by the Commission, and complies with Commission requests, directives, decisions and policies. The institution acknowledges that if it fails to do so, then the Commission may act to impose a sanction, or to deny or revoke candidacy or accreditation.1,2

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1 Eligibility Requirement 21. See also the Policy on Public Disclosure and Confidentiality, § II: “If an institution conducts its affairs so that it becomes a matter of public concern, misrepresents a Commission action, or uses the public forum to take issue with an action of the Commission relating to that institution, the Commission President may announce to the public, including the press, the action taken and the basis for that action, making public any pertinent information available to the Commission.”

2 Other Commission policies which address integrity and ethics include: Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment and Representation of Accredited Status; Policy on Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education Programs for Non-U.S. Nationals; Policy on Representation of Accredited Status; Policy on Good Practice in Relations with Member Institutions; and Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV.
Policy on Award of Credit
(Adopted June 2004; Revised June 2012; Second Reading June 2013)

Background
While many institutions rely on the calculation of in-class time to determine the amount of credit awarded for a particular class, Accreditation Standards require that institutions award credit based on student achievement of the course’s stated student learning outcomes. The Accreditation Standards also require that the units awarded be consistent with institutional policies that reflect generally accepted norms in higher education (Standard I.A.2.ii). In addition, institutions increasingly are providing more varied educational experiences as a means for students to earn college credits such as distance education, independent study, group project work, study abroad, work-experience, transfer of credits from other institutions, and credit by examination, and through direct assessment programs. Institutional policy and practice in award of credit must assure the integrity of credit awarded to all educational experiences.

Policy
Institutions must maintain policies and procedures that assure award of credit for educational experiences is based on achievement of the course’s stated student learning outcomes, comparability of that learning to other institutions in higher education, appropriateness of that learning experience for the program or degree offered, and generally accepted norms in higher education. Institutions must conform to a commonly accepted minimum program length as per the Commission Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credit. Institutions must also conform to U.S. Department of Education regulations defining a credit hour and to regulations regarding clock to credit hour conversions that may be applicable to non-degree undergraduate programs. Institutions must obtain Substantive Change approval and approval from the U.S. Department of Education for direct assessment programs. The Commission will conduct an effective review and evaluation of the reliability and accuracy of the institution’s assignment of credit hours used for federal program purposes.

Policy Elements
In the determinations about the award of credit, institutions have a responsibility to assure that the courses or other educational experiences that are awarded or assigned credit meet the following criteria:

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1 34 C.F.R. § 668.10.
2 34 C.F.R. § 602.2, 602.24(f). The Commission will: review the institution’s policies and procedures for determining the credit hours and the application of the institution’s policies and procedures to its programs and coursework; make a reasonable determination of whether the institution’s assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practices in higher education; review and evaluate the institution’s policies and procedures for the award of credit through sampling and other methods in the evaluation; and take appropriate actions if an institution is found to be deficient, including notifying the U.S. Secretary of Education if the institution demonstrates systemic non-compliance with its own or the ACCJC’s policies in one or more programs of study.
• The courses or other educational experiences have identified student learning outcomes that students must meet at a defined level of performance to receive credit.

• The courses or other educational experiences meet standards of quality as defined by the institution.

• The credits awarded for a course or educational experience are comparable in quantity and nature to credits awarded to other courses at the institution.

• The credits are appropriate for higher education or for pre-collegiate education, and are defined as such.

• The credits are appropriate and applicable to the institution's own educational programs leading to a degree, certificate, or other defined educational outcomes.

Institutions have a responsibility to assure that work offered for credit is of sufficient quality to produce the student learning outcomes necessary to meet standards of quality in higher education of transfer institutions, and of employers, as well as the program and degree requirements of the institution itself.

Institutions have a responsibility to be consistent in award of credit, particularly in the award of credit to learning gained through alternative methods of delivery or by other providers of training and education. Consistency is especially important in assuring a comparable level of student competence and learning for different activities assigned comparable credit.

Institutions have a responsibility to maintain the integrity of award of credit by clearly stating requirements in policies, publishing those policies in documents used by faculty and students, and assuring that the policies are adhered to. The public has a significant interest in higher education student learning outcomes. Public funding and private donations and support are based on expectations that award of credit is directly related to student learning and student competencies.
Policy on Representation of Accredited Status


The following statements govern representations which can be made by an institution during three types of accreditation status. In addition, institutions on probation, show cause, or termination status must disclose that information to students and prospective students and in any publication where the institution makes reference to its accredited status.

A. Representation of Status by Institutions Preparing, Submitting, or Completing Eligibility Reviews

An institution which is preparing, has submitted, or completed an eligibility review has no formal relationship with the Commission. An institution that has completed an eligibility review may not make any representation which claims or implies any relationship with the Accrediting Commission.

During the period in which the college prepares its self-study institutional self evaluation, the institution does not have a publicly recognized relationship with the Accrediting Commission and cannot represent itself to current or prospective students, the public, governmental agencies, other accrediting bodies, or any other parties as having an affiliated status with the Commission.

No formal or informal statements should be made about possible future accreditation, status, or qualification which is not yet conferred by the Commission.

Representations should include but be limited to the following statement:

At its (date of meeting), the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges reviewed and accepted the Eligibility Report submitted by (name of institution). Under Commission rules, acceptance of an Eligibility Report does not establish a formal relationship between the Commission and the college. Inquiries about accreditation should be made to the Commission office: ACCJC/AWASC, 10 Commercial Blvd., Suite 204, Novato, CA 94949, (415) 506-0234.

B. Representation of Status by Candidate Institutions

Institutions that have achieved candidacy status should use the following language in public representations about their relationship with the Accrediting Commission. Note that both paragraphs are required.

(Name of institution) is a Candidate for Accreditation by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 10 Commercial Blvd., Suite 204, Novato, CA 94949, (415) 506-0234, an institutional accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the U.S. Department of Education. Additional
information about accreditation, including the filing of complaints against member institutions, can be found at: www.accjc.org

Candidate for Accreditation is a status of preliminary affiliation with the Commission initially awarded for up to two years. Candidacy is not accreditation and does not assure eventual accreditation.

C. Representation of Status by Accredited Institutions

Representations of accredited status should include but be limited to the following statement. Additional modifiers such as “fully accredited” are not appropriate since no partial accreditation is possible.

(Name of institution) is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 10 Commercial Blvd., Suite 204, Novato, CA 94949, (415) 506-0234, an institutional accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the U.S. Department of Education. Additional information about accreditation, including the filing of complaints against member institutions, can be found at: www.accjc.org