

## Policy and Procedures for Institutional Accreditation

Key to Changes: **Delete**, **Add**

### 1. Applicant Status

#### A. Attaining Applicant Status

An institution desiring applicant status with the Commission on Accreditation (COA) must contact the COA office to schedule a one-day preliminary visit by a member of COA professional staff to the institution's campus. The staff visit must be completed during the 24 months prior to the institution's application submission. The purpose of the visit is to assist the institution in understanding the process and timetable for accreditation, and to provide the COA with a preliminary assessment of the institution's achievement of the Conditions of Eligibility.

The institution should submit one electronic copy (pdf) of the following documents to [coa@abhe.org](mailto:coa@abhe.org) by the due date for consideration by the COA at the next COA meeting. Applications are considered on a rolling basis as follows:

Due Date	Commission on Accreditation Review
May 15	June
September 15	October/November
December 15	February

Application documents:

1. A completed COA application form,
2. An official letter from the chief executive officer stating the board of control's desire for the institution to pursue accreditation with the COA,
3. An official statement from the chief executive officer reflecting a board of control decision to affirm support of the ABHE Tenets of Faith,
4. A document demonstrating compliance with the Conditions of Eligibility, and
5. A check for the application fee sent by postal mail to the COA office within 24 hours of submission of the application documents (made out to COA).

The COA's Committee on Applicant and Candidate Status (APCAN) will review these materials and determine whether to grant or deny applicant status or defer action. The committee's decision is based upon whether it believes the institution has demonstrated compliance with the Conditions of Eligibility and appears to be able to achieve candidate status within a maximum of five years.

Since decisions regarding candidate status, initial accreditation, and reaffirmation of accreditation are generally made only at the February COA meeting, an institution granted applicant status at the summer or fall COA meeting will be placed on the accreditation timeline as if starting the following February—an institution granted applicant status in June or November would have a maximum of five years from the following February to achieve candidate status, and that February to the following February would be considered the institution's initial year of applicant status.

An institution denied applicant status must wait one year before reapplying. An institution may voluntarily withdraw its request for applicant status, without prejudice, at any time prior to the decision of APCAN.

## **B. Maintaining Applicant Status**

New applicant institutions are expected to send one or more representatives to the two-day Achieving Accreditation Standards Conference (new applicant orientation) held at the ABHE office in the institution's first year of applicant status (usually May/June). The workshop provides guidance on satisfying the Standards for Accreditation and the Essential Elements within each standard. Institutions will conduct a self-assessment of compliance with the standards/essential elements as part of the workshop.

An applicant institution must demonstrate progress in moving toward candidate status. An annual one-day visit by a member of the COA's professional staff is required in any year in which the institution does not host a visiting team. The Standards Self-assessment is completed prior to each annual staff visit. The evaluation should be submitted to the staff representative at least one week prior to the scheduled visit. The COA staff representative will analyze the institution with respect to the Standards for Accreditation and advise the institution concerning organization for self-study, assessment, and institutional planning. APCAN will annually review the institution's progress report, the staff representative's report, the institution's financial audit report for the recently completed fiscal year, and data from its completed online annual report. The committee will make a report to the COA, which is responsible for making a determination whether sufficient progress is being made to warrant the continuation of applicant status. Continued applicant status is contingent upon submission to the COA of all required reports and timely payment of annual Association and COA dues and applicable fees. In extenuating circumstances, a grace period of up to six months may be requested. ~~Institutional representatives are expected to participate annually in one of~~

~~the COA self-study seminars.~~ Institutional representatives are expected to participate annually in self-study seminars offered at the ABHE Annual Meeting.

In November of the third year of applicant status, the institution is expected to submit self-study documents to the COA Committee on Applicant and Candidate Status (APCAN). The committee will review the documents and assess the institution's readiness to host an evaluation team visit in the following fall. When an institution is not ready to submit a self-study, the institution may invoke the contingency year (fifth year of applicant status) and defer the evaluation team visit until the final year of applicant status. Where the desire to delay the self-study and/or team visit is initiated by the institution, a formal letter of request must be submitted to APCAN explaining the rationale for the delay and the extenuating circumstances that make the request necessary.

~~Or~~ If APCAN determines that the self-study requires more work before a visiting team is authorized the team visit for candidate status, APCAN ~~or the institution~~ will direct the institution to make the necessary improvements. In rare cases where the self-study needs extensive revision, APCAN may invoke the contingency year (fifth year of applicant status) and defer the evaluation team visit until the final year of applicant status.

~~Where the desire to delay the self-study and/or team visit is initiated by the institution, a formal letter of request must be submitted to APCAN explaining the rationale for the delay and the extenuating circumstances that make the request necessary.~~ Institutions should note that when the contingency year has been utilized, the COA decision must be to grant candidate status or remove applicant status completely. A deferral of action with additional time to resolve issues is not an option at that point.

[See also: Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status]

## 2. Candidate Status

### A. Attaining Candidate Status

The institution will conduct an institutional self-study with respect to its own mission and objectives and with respect to the Standards for Accreditation. A final report of the institution's self-study in the form of a compliance document (normally not exceeding 100 pages), together with an institutional assessment plan and planning document, is to be submitted to [coa@abhe.org](mailto:coa@abhe.org) no later than November 15 prior to an evaluation team visit scheduled for the fall of the institution's fourth year of applicant status.

An institution making significant progress may request to accelerate the timeline and

submit self-study documents early for review. In such instances, the institution must submit a written request to accelerate the process to candidate status to APCAN at least one committee meeting prior to submission of the self-study. The due date for self-studies is November 15; therefore, the request to accelerate must be received by May 15. The request must be accompanied by a progress report addressing the institution's resolution of any prior concerns noted in action letters and the institution's readiness to demonstrate satisfaction of all Institutional Accreditation Standards. In exceptional circumstances, an applicant institution that demonstrates substantial compliance with all standards and essential elements may include in its request to accelerate a request for consideration of initial accreditation. The decision concerning acceleration will be informed by the institution's past compliance with reporting deadlines, the number and seriousness of concerns communicated in prior action letters, and how well the institution has addressed prior concerns in its progress reports.

An evaluation team will verify claims made in the institution's self-study materials, formulate recommendations relative to the institution's achievement of the Standards for Accreditation, assess whether the institution has systems in place for ongoing development, and prepare a recommendation for the COA regarding the institution's readiness for advancement to candidate status.

Institution representatives will be given an opportunity to appear before the COA as it considers the evaluation team report and the institution's response to the team report and determines whether to grant or deny candidate status or defer action. The COA's decision is based upon whether the institution appears able to achieve accredited status within a maximum of five years.

An institution denied candidate status must wait one year before seeking reinstatement to applicant or candidate status. If desired, it may appeal the decision in accord with the Policy and Procedures for Reviews and Appeals. An institution may voluntarily withdraw its request for candidate status, without prejudice, at any time prior to the decision of the COA.

## **B. Maintaining Candidate Status**

A candidate institution must demonstrate progress in moving toward accredited status. An annual one-day visit by a member of the COA professional staff is required in any year in which the institution does not host a visiting team. The Standards Self-assessment is completed prior to each annual staff visit. The evaluation should be submitted to the staff representative at least one week prior to the scheduled visit. The COA staff representative will analyze the institution with respect to the Standards for Accreditation and advise the institution concerning organization for self-study, assessment, and institutional planning. APCAN will annually review the institution's progress report, the staff representative's report, the institution's financial audit report for

the recently completed fiscal year, and data from its completed online annual report. The committee will make a report to the COA, which is responsible for making a determination whether sufficient progress is being made to warrant the continuation of candidate status. Continued candidate status is contingent upon submission to the COA of all required reports and timely payment of annual Association and COA dues and applicable fees. In extenuating circumstances, a grace period of up to six months may be requested. ~~Institutional representatives are expected to participate annually in one of the COA's self-study seminars.~~ Institutional representatives are expected to participate annually in self-study seminars offered at the ABHE Annual Meeting.

[Applicable Policies: Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status]

### **3. Accredited Status**

#### **A. Attaining Accredited Status**

A candidate institution will conduct an institutional self-study with respect to its own mission and objectives and with respect to the Standards for Accreditation. A final report, of the institution's self-study, in the form of a compliance document (normally not exceeding 100 pages), together with an institutional assessment plan and planning document, is to be submitted to [coa@abhe.org](mailto:coa@abhe.org) no later than November 15 prior to an evaluation team visit scheduled for the fall of the institution's fourth year of candidate status.

An institution making significant progress may request to accelerate the timeline and submit self-study documents early for review. In such instances, the institution must submit a written request to accelerate the process to accredited status to APCAN at least one committee meeting prior to submission of the self-study. The due date for self-studies is November 15; therefore, the request to accelerate must be received by May 15. The request must be accompanied by a progress report addressing the institution's resolution of any prior concerns noted in action letters and the institution's readiness to demonstrate satisfaction of all Institutional Accreditation Standards. The decision concerning acceleration will be informed by the institution's past compliance with reporting deadlines, the number and seriousness of concerns communicated in prior action letters, and how well the institution has addressed prior concerns in its progress reports.

An evaluation team will verify claims made in the institution's self-study materials, formulate recommendations relative to the institution's achievement of the Standards for Accreditation, assess whether the institution has systems in place for ongoing development, and prepare a recommendation for the COA regarding the institution's readiness for advancement to accredited status.

Institution representatives will be given an opportunity to appear before the COA as it considers the evaluation team report and the institution's response to the team report and determine whether to grant or deny initial accreditation or defer action. The COA's decision is based upon the Principle for Accreditation, i.e., that an institution is substantially achieving and can be reasonably expected to continue to achieve its own mission and objectives and the Standards for Accreditation, and that it is committed to ongoing institutional development.

An institution denied accredited status must wait one year before seeking reinstatement to applicant, candidate, or accredited status. If desired, it may appeal the decision in accord with the Policy and Procedures for Reviews and Appeals. An institution may voluntarily withdraw its request for accredited status, without prejudice, at any time prior to the decision of the COA.

## **B. Maintaining Accredited Status**

Continued accreditation is contingent upon submission to the COA of all required reports and timely payment of annual Association and COA dues and applicable fees. In extenuating circumstances, a grace period of up to six months may be requested. In the third year of accreditation, a supplementary evaluation visit will be conducted by a representative of the COA in order to verify the progress reported by the institution.

## **C. Reaffirming Accredited Status**

An accredited institution will conduct an institutional self-study with respect to its own mission and objectives and with respect to the Standards for Accreditation. A final report of the institution's self-study, in the form of a compliance document (normally not exceeding 100 pages), together with an institutional assessment plan and planning document, is to be submitted to [coa@abhe.org](mailto:coa@abhe.org) not less than eight weeks prior to an evaluation team visit that will be scheduled for the spring of the institution's fifth year of accredited status.

An evaluation team will verify claims made in the institution's self-study materials, formulate recommendations relative to the institution's achievement of the Standards for Accreditation, assess whether the institution has in place a mechanism for ongoing development, and prepare a recommendation for the COA regarding the reaffirmation of the institution's accredited status.

The COA will consider the evaluation team report and the institution's response to the team report and determine whether to reaffirm the institution's accredited status. The COA's decision is based upon the Principle for Accreditation, i.e., that an institution is substantially achieving and can be reasonably expected to continue to achieve its own

mission and objectives and the Standards for Accreditation, and that it is committed to ongoing institutional development.

An institution denied reaffirmation of accredited status may, if desired, appeal the decision in accord with the Policy and Procedures for Reviews and Appeals.

Once reaffirmed, the institution will repeat the reaffirmation process every ten years. Institutions offering sub-baccalaureate vocational education may be required to host an unannounced visit between reaffirmation visits. The purpose of the visit will be to ensure that the institution has the personnel, facilities, and resources it has claimed to have and that it continues to comply with the Standards for Accreditation. These visits are conducted without the benefit of self-study materials. The COA will consider reports of unannounced visits at its regular meetings. Upon considering such reports, it will have the same range of decision-making options as are available for regular reaffirmation visits.

Five-year and ten-year reaffirmation visits will be conducted in the spring. In extenuating circumstances, an institution may petition the COA for a fall reaffirmation visit.

#### **D. Title IV Noncompliance**

As a consequence of the 1992 Higher Education Amendments, the U.S. Department of Education is more closely monitoring institutional compliance with Title IV (Federal Student Financial Assistance) requirements. Upon discovery that an institution is no longer in compliance with Title IV requirements, COA will conduct a special assessment to assure that the institution remains in substantial compliance with the COA's Standards for Accreditation.

[Applicable Policies: Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status]

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