

**ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES,  
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES (ACCJC)**

**Policy on Accreditation of Baccalaureate Degrees**

*(New, First Reading January 2016)*

General Requirements

Member institutions which seek to gain accreditation for a baccalaureate degree program will first need to gain substantive change approval.<sup>1</sup> That approval may include the requirement for a follow-up report and team visit, to address specific issues identified by the Substantive Change Committee and to verify that conditions remain in compliance with standards as the program implementation moves forward.

Upon completion of the substantive change requirements and following approval, the baccalaureate degree program will be expected to maintain compliance with Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies (together Commission standards), as part of an accredited institution. As part of an institution's comprehensive evaluation, both the institutional self evaluation report (ISER) and the evaluation team report will be expected to specifically address the compliance conditions of the baccalaureate degree program with all applicable Commission standards.

Limits On Institutional Baccalaureate Offerings

The ACCJC extends its accreditation to institutions which have as a primary mission the granting of associate degrees. In accordance with the Bylaws of the ACCJC:

The operational definition of having as a primary mission the granting of associate degrees includes the following: 75% of the programs offered by the institution must be at the Associate of Arts (AA) degree or pre-AA college level, and 60% of students at the institution must be in AA degree or pre-AA level programs, except that a primarily 2-year higher education institution may offer one baccalaureate degree without regard for these percentages.

The one-baccalaureate-degree exception cited above may trigger the need for an institution to demonstrate its primarily 2-year higher education mission by other measures, if enrollments in the baccalaureate program account for a significant proportion of enrollments at the institution.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Education has granted to ACCJC the scope of approving one baccalaureate degree at each member institutions through the substantive change process.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> See the Policy on Substantive Change, and the Manual on Substantive Change for articulation of the policies and procedures related to substantive change.

<sup>2</sup> As has been previously communicated to the field, the ACCJC is seeking an expansion of this USDE scope to include baccalaureate degrees within ACCJC's general scope of accreditation under its Bylaws. [NOTE to authors—adjust this footnote as appropriate to include the U.S. Department of Education decision from the December 2015 compliance review by NACIQI.]

U.S. Department of Education scope is the means by which institutions and programs may qualify for federal student aid and federal aid to postsecondary institutions.

Institutions exploring the addition of baccalaureate degrees will want to consider the extent of ACCJC's scope.

### Evaluation Criteria Specific to the Baccalaureate Degree

#### **Eligibility Requirements**

Eligibility Requirement 1, Authority, requires that an institution be authorized or licensed as a post-secondary institution to award degrees. An institution wishing to gain approval for a baccalaureate degree will have to provide evidence of the institution's authorization to offer the degree, as required by each of the jurisdictions or regions in which it operates.

#### **Accreditation Standards**

Standard I.A.1, Mission, requires the mission describe the institution's broad educational purposes, its intended student population, the types of degrees and other credentials it offers, and its commitment to student learning and student achievement.

Baccalaureate degrees generally extend beyond previously identified credentials, service areas, and intended student populations. Member institutions may need to make changes within the institutional mission to reflect these differences.

In preparing its ISER, an institution with one or more ACCJC-accredited baccalaureate degrees<sup>3</sup> must, for the Accreditation Standards listed below, specifically address and provide evidence of its practices as to the baccalaureate degree and how those practices meet the standard. In addressing the standards, the institution must also address and provide evidence of its practices for the baccalaureate program-specific evaluation criteria identified below.

Standard I.A. Mission: Standards I.A.2 and I.A.3.

I.A.2. The institution uses data to determine how effectively it is accomplishing its mission, and whether the mission directs institutional priorities in meeting the educational needs of students.

I.A.3. The institution's programs and services are aligned with its mission. The mission guides institutional decision-making, planning, and resource allocation and informs institutional goals for student learning and achievement.

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<sup>3</sup> As mentioned on page 1 of this policy, the ACCJC scope authorized by the U.S. Department of Education to accredit baccalaureate degrees of member institutions extends to one baccalaureate degree approved through substantive change. [NOTE to authors—adjust as needed upon receipt of compliance review decision.]

Standard I.B. Assuring Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness: Standards I.B.2, I.B.3, and I.B.7.

I.B.2. The institution defines and assesses student learning outcomes for all instructional programs and student and learning support services. (ER 11)

I.B.3. The institution establishes institution-set standards for student achievement, appropriate to its mission, assesses how well it is achieving them in pursuit of continuous improvement, and publishes this information. (ER 11)

Criterion specific to baccalaureate included with this standard:

- The institution-set standards are differentiated as appropriate to the baccalaureate degree program.

I.B.7. The institution regularly evaluates its policies and practices across all areas of the institution, including instructional programs, student and learning support services, resource management, and governance processes to assure their effectiveness in supporting academic quality and accomplishment of mission.

Standard I.C. Institutional Integrity: Standards I.C.1, I.C.3, and I.C.4.

I.C.1. The institution assures the clarity, accuracy, and integrity of information provided to students and prospective students, personnel, and all persons or organizations related to its mission statement, learning outcomes, educational programs, and student support services. The institution gives accurate information to students and the public about its accreditation status with all of its accreditors. (ER 20)

I.C.3. The institution uses documented assessment of student learning and evaluation of student achievement to communicate matters of academic quality to appropriate constituencies, including current and prospective students and the public. (ER 19)

I.C.4. The institution describes its certificates and degrees in terms of their purpose, content, course requirements, and expected learning outcomes.

Standard II.A. Instructional Programs: Standards II.A.1, II.A.3, II.A.5, II.A.6, II.A.9, II.A.10, II.A.11, II.A.12, II.A.13, and II.A.14.

II.A.1. All instructional programs, regardless of location or means of delivery, including distance education and correspondence education, are offered in fields of study consistent with the institution's mission, are appropriate to higher education, and culminate in student attainment of identified student learning outcomes, and achievement of degrees, certificates, employment, or transfer to other higher education programs. (ER 9 and ER 11)

Criteria specific to baccalaureate included with this standard:

- The baccalaureate degree field of study aligns with the institutional mission.

- Student demand for the baccalaureate degree program demonstrates its correlation with the institutional mission.

II.A.3. The institution identifies and regularly assesses learning outcomes for courses, programs, certificates and degrees using established institutional procedures. The institution has officially approved and current course outlines that include student learning outcomes. In every class section students receive a course syllabus that includes learning outcomes from the institution's officially approved course outline.

II.A.5. The institution's degrees and programs follow practices common to American higher education, including appropriate length, breadth, depth, rigor, course sequencing, time to completion, and synthesis of learning. The institution ensures that minimum degree requirements are 60 semester credits or equivalent at the associate level, and 120 credits or equivalent at the baccalaureate level. (ER 12)

Criteria specific to baccalaureate included with this standard:

- At least 45 semester credits or equivalent of upper division coursework are required.
- The curriculum and instructional level of the upper division courses in the baccalaureate degree are comparable to those commonly accepted among like degrees in higher education.
- Curriculum content and methods of instruction demonstrate expectations for students, including assignments and examinations of the upper division courses that have the rigor commonly accepted among like baccalaureate degrees in higher education.
- The program length and delivery mode of instruction are appropriate for the expected level of rigor.

II.A.6. The institution schedules courses in a manner that allows students to complete certificate and degree programs within a period of time consistent with established expectations in higher education. (ER 9)

II.A.9. The institution awards course credit, degrees and certificates based on student attainment of learning outcomes. Units of credit awarded are consistent with institutional policies that reflect generally accepted norms or equivalencies in higher education. If the institution offers courses based on clock hours, it follows Federal standards for clock-to-credit-hour conversions. (ER 10)

II.A.10. The institution makes available to its students clearly stated transfer-of-credit policies in order to facilitate the mobility of students without penalty. In accepting transfer credits to fulfill degree requirements, the institution certifies that the expected learning outcomes for transferred courses are comparable to the learning outcomes of its own courses. Where patterns of student enrollment between institutions are identified, the institution develops articulation agreements as appropriate to its mission. (ER 10)

Criterion specific to baccalaureate included with this standard:

- Policies for student transfer into the baccalaureate program ensure that all program requirements are fulfilled, including completion of the minimum required semester units, prerequisites, experiential activities, and general education.

II.A.11. The institution includes in all of its programs, student learning outcomes, appropriate to the program level, in communication competency, information competency, quantitative competency, analytic inquiry skills, ethical reasoning, the ability to engage diverse perspectives, and other program-specific learning outcomes.

Criteria specific to baccalaureate included with this standard:

- The student learning outcomes for the baccalaureate degree include the areas identified in this standard, at a level appropriate to the baccalaureate program.
- The curriculum of the baccalaureate degree is designed for achievement of the program's student learning outcomes.

II.A.12. The institution requires of all of its degree programs a component of general education based on a carefully considered philosophy for both associate and baccalaureate degrees that is clearly stated in its catalog. The institution, relying on faculty expertise, determines the appropriateness of each course for inclusion in the general education curriculum, based upon student learning outcomes and competencies appropriate to the degree level. The learning outcomes include a student's preparation for and acceptance of responsible participation in civil society, skills for lifelong learning and application of learning, and a broad comprehension of the development of knowledge, practice, and interpretive approaches in the arts and humanities, the sciences, mathematics, and social sciences. (ER 12)

Criteria specific to baccalaureate included with this standard:

- At least 36 semester units or equivalent of general education are required for the baccalaureate program.
- At least 9 semester units or equivalent of upper division general education coursework are required for the baccalaureate program.
- The general education requirements are integrated and distributed to both lower division and upper division courses.
- The general education requirements are distributed across the major subject areas for general education; the distribution appropriately captures the baccalaureate level student learning outcomes and competencies.

II.A.13. All degree programs include focused study in at least one area of inquiry or in an established interdisciplinary core. The identification of specialized courses

in an area of inquiry or interdisciplinary core is based upon student learning outcomes and competencies, and include mastery, at the appropriate degree level, of key theories and practices within the field of study.

II.A.14. Graduates completing career-technical certificates and degrees demonstrate technical and professional competencies that meet employment standards and other applicable standards and preparation for external licensure and certification.

Criterion specific to baccalaureate included with this standard:

- The CTE baccalaureate degree ensures students will be able to meet employment standards and licensure or certification as required in the field of study.

Standard II.B. Library and Learning Resources: Standard II.B.1.

II.B.1. The institution supports student learning and achievement by providing library, and other learning support services to students and to personnel responsible for student learning and support. These services are sufficient in quantity, currency, depth, and variety to support educational programs, regardless of location or means of delivery, including distance education and correspondence education. Learning support services include, but are not limited to, library collections, tutoring, learning centers, computer laboratories, learning technology, and ongoing instruction for users of library and other learning support services. (ER 17)

Standard II.C. Student Support Services: Standard II.C.6.

II.C.6. The institution has adopted and adheres to admission policies consistent with its mission that specify the qualifications of students appropriate for its programs. The institution defines and advises students on clear pathways to complete degrees, certificate and transfer goals. (ER 16)

Criteria specific to baccalaureate included with this standard:

- The prerequisites and other qualifications for the baccalaureate are appropriately communicated and applied to students.
- The advising of students related to the baccalaureate degree appropriately identify course sequencing and pathways.

Standard III.A. Human Resources: Standards III.A.1, III.A.2, and III.A.7.

III.A.1. The institution assures the integrity and quality of its programs and services by employing administrators, faculty and staff who are qualified by appropriate education, training, and experience to provide and support these programs and services. Criteria, qualifications, and procedures for selection of personnel are clearly and publicly stated and address the needs of the institution in serving its student population. Job descriptions are directly related to institutional mission and goals and accurately reflect position duties, responsibilities, and authority.

Criterion specific to baccalaureate included with this standard:

- The job descriptions for faculty members teaching in the baccalaureate degree accurately reflect the duties and responsibilities associated with the position.

III.A.2. Faculty qualifications include knowledge of the subject matter and requisite skills for the service to be performed. Factors of qualification include appropriate degrees, professional experience, discipline expertise, level of assignment, teaching skills, scholarly activities, and potential to contribute to the mission of the institution. Faculty job descriptions include development and review of curriculum as well as assessment of learning. (ER 14)

Criterion specific to baccalaureate included with this standard:

- The qualifications for faculty teaching in the baccalaureate degree include the requirement for a master's degree or above in the appropriate discipline, and faculty currently teaching in the program upper division courses reflect those qualifications.

III.A.7. The institution maintains a sufficient number of qualified faculty, which includes full time faculty and may include part time and adjunct faculty, to assure the fulfillment of faculty responsibilities essential to the quality of educational programs and services to achieve institutional mission and purposes. (ER 14)

Standard III.B. Physical Resources: Standard III.B.3.

III.B.3. To assure the feasibility and effectiveness of physical resources in supporting institutional programs and services, the institution plans and evaluates its facilities and equipment on a regular basis, taking utilization and other relevant data into account.

Standard III.C. Technology Resources: Standard III.C.1.

III.C.1. Technology services, professional support, facilities, hardware, and software are appropriate and adequate to support the institution's management and operational functions, academic programs, teaching and learning, and support services.

Standard III.D. Financial Resources: Standard III.D.1.

III.D.1. Financial resources are sufficient to support and sustain student learning programs and services and improve institutional effectiveness. The distribution of resources supports the development, maintenance, allocation and reallocation, and enhancement of programs and services. The institution plans and manages its financial affairs with integrity and in a manner that ensures financial stability. (ER 18)

## Standard IV.A. Decision-Making Roles and Processes: Standard IV.A.4.

IV.A.4. Faculty and academic administrators, through policy and procedures, and through well-defined structures, have responsibility for recommendations about curriculum and student learning programs and services.

### Catalog Requirements

1. General Information
  - Course Program and Degree Offerings
  - Student Learning Outcomes for Programs and Degrees
2. Requirements for
  - Degrees, Certificates, Graduation and Transfer

### Commission Policies

In preparing its ISER, an institution with one or more ACCJC-accredited baccalaureate degrees must, for the evaluation criteria cited in the Checklist for Evaluating Institutional Compliance with Federal Regulations and Related Commission Policies<sup>4</sup> in the categories identified below, specifically address and provide evidence of its practices as to the baccalaureate degree and how those practices meet the criteria.

- Standards and Performance with Respect to Student Achievement
- Credits, Program Length, and Tuition
- Transfer Policies
- Distance Education and Correspondence Education
- Institutional Disclosure and Advertising and Recruitment Materials

### *Standards and Performance with Respect to Student Achievement*

- The institution has defined elements of student achievement performance across the institution, and has identified the expected measure of performance within each defined element. Course completion is included as one of these elements of student achievement. Other elements of student achievement performance for measurement have been determined as appropriate to the institution's mission.
- The institution has defined elements of student achievement performance within each instructional program, and has identified the expected measure of performance within each defined element. The defined elements include, but are not limited to, job placement rates for program completers, and for programs in fields where licensure is required, the licensure examination passage rates for program completers.
- The institution-set standards for programs and across the institution are relevant to guide self-evaluation and institutional improvement; the defined elements and expected performance levels are appropriate within higher education; the results are reported regularly across the campus; and the definition of elements and results are used in

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<sup>4</sup> See the Checklist for Evaluating Institutional Compliance with Federal Regulations and Related Commission Policies for articulation of the evaluation criteria.

program-level and institution-wide planning to evaluate how well the institution fulfills its mission, to determine needed changes, to allocating resources, and to make improvements.

- The institution analyzes its performance as to the institution-set standards and as to student achievement, and takes appropriate measures in areas where its performance is not at the expected level.

#### *Credits, Program Length, and Tuition*

- Credit hour assignments and degree program lengths are within the range of good practice in higher education (in policy and procedure).
- The assignment of credit hours and degree program lengths is verified by the institution, and is reliable and accurate across classroom based courses, laboratory classes, distance education classes, and for courses that involve clinical practice (if applicable to the institution).
- Tuition is consistent across degree programs (or there is a rational basis for any program-specific tuition).
- Any clock hour conversions to credit hours adhere to the Department of Education's conversion formula, both in policy and procedure, and in practice.
- The institution demonstrates compliance with the Commission *Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credits*.

#### *Transfer Policies*

- Transfer policies are appropriately disclosed to students and to the public.
- Policies contain information about the criteria the institution uses to accept credits for transfer.
- The institution complies with the Commission *Policy on Transfer of Credit*.

#### *Distance Education and Correspondence Education*

- The institution has policies and procedures for defining and classifying a course as offered by distance education or correspondence education, in alignment with USDE definitions.
- There is an accurate and consistent application of the policies and procedures for determining if a course is offered by distance education (with regular and substantive interaction with the instructor, initiated by the instructor, and online activities are included as part of a student's grade) or correspondence education (online activities are primarily "paperwork related," including reading posted materials, posting homework and completing examinations, and interaction with the instructor is initiated by the student as needed).
- The institution has appropriate means and consistently applies those means for verifying the identity of a student who participates in a distance education or correspondence education course or program, and for ensuring that student information is protected.
- The technology infrastructure is sufficient to maintain and sustain the distance education and correspondence education offerings.

- The institution demonstrates compliance with the Commission *Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education*.

*Institutional Disclosure and Advertising and Recruitment Materials*

- The institution provides accurate, timely (current), and appropriately detailed information to students and the public about its programs, locations, and policies.
- The institution complies with the Commission *Policy on Institutional Advertising, Student Recruitment, and Representation of Accredited Status*.