



**ACCREDITING
COMMISSION
for COMMUNITY and
JUNIOR COLLEGES**

*Western Association
of Schools and Colleges*

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Date: **June 11, 2014**
Memo to: **Chief Executive Officers, Accreditation Liaison Officers**
From: **Krista Johns, JD**
Subject: **June 2014 Commission Actions on Policies**

We request that you publicize the information in this memo at your institution. Please note that comment is invited from the field on the first reading policies listed below in section 1. A two-week period of time has been established for comment, and information about how to submit comment is included below.

The Policy Committee is a standing committee of the Commission. Through Commission processes, the Policy Committee oversees the ongoing review and updating of Commission policy. Commission procedures require that proposed institutional policy changes and/or new policies be considered by the Commission in a two-meeting process. At the first meeting, new policies/policy changes are discussed and modifications are made as appropriate. Policies approved by the Commission for first reading are then circulated to ACCJC accredited institutions via email, and to other interested parties via online posting, for review and comment before presentation at the next Commission meeting for second reading and adoption. If it is necessary, after the comment period, the Commission may meet and conduct an electronic vote on second reading policies.

When changes are needed in order to align with federal regulations or guidelines, these changes must be made expeditiously; they may be made by the Commission without the normal first reading/second reading process. If such changes are made by Commission action between regular meetings, then the changes are reported to the field at the next Commission meeting. No actions of this nature were reported at the June 2014 Commission meeting.

Changes to existing policies are noted in italic and strikethrough. New policies are all bold italic. As a part of the ongoing policy review process, terminology has been changed in all reviewed policies as necessary to align with current usage of terms in the *Manual for Institutional Self Evaluation*.

The institutional policies and operational policies of the Commission are published annually in the *Accreditation Reference Handbook (ARH)* along with Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards. The publication is completed after the June Commission meeting each year. The ARH is sent to each member institution and is also available online at www.accjc.org.

1. The following institutional policies were approved by the Commission for first reading and approval.

- **Policy on Representation of Accredited Status**

The revisions put into policy the expected online posting by institutions of accreditation information within one page (one click) of the institution's home page that took effect in Spring 2013. The revision also clarifies that both candidate (pre-accredited) and accredited institutions are required to post information concerning their accredited status.

- **Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions**

The revision approved for first reading applies to new language in Section V, Action that Terminate Accreditation. This language establishes a new post-termination status for qualified institutions entitled "Restoration Status." For ease of reference, the attachment is with the revised language only (the full policy is included with second reading adoptions, below), and an explanatory statement is presented with that language.

Please note that second reading and adoption of this policy is also contingent on written confirmation by the U.S. Department of Education that implementation of the policy will not cause ACCJC to be in noncompliance with federal regulations, particularly 34 C.F.R. § 602.20.

The policies considered for first reading as well as the adopted policies and organizational documents were attached to an electronic version of this correspondence emailed to Chief Executive Officers and Accreditation Liaison Officers. The policies can also be found online at www.accjc.org under 'Recent Commission Actions,' 'Actions on Policy.'

Please note: The Commission invites comment on these first reading policy matters through June 25, 2014, 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time.

Comments may be made in written, FAX, or email format and sent to one of the following addresses:

- Email: kjohns@accjc.org
- FAX: 415-506-0238
- Mail: ACCJC, 10 Commercial Boulevard, Suite 204, Novato, CA 94949

2. The following institutional policies were presented to the Commission for second reading and were adopted.

- **Policy on Monitoring Institutional Performance**

The new Policy on Monitoring Institutional Performance highlights the periodic (annual) monitoring of key indicators as required by USDE regulations. This area of accreditation practice and reporting by colleges will be more transparent to member institutions and interested others with the creation of a stand-alone policy on the subject. Additional language was added to this policy in October to align with federal regulations concerning monitoring activities of accrediting agencies.

- **Policy on Direct Assessment of Learning (formerly Policy on Credit for Prior Experiential Learning in Undergraduate Programs)**

In the course of its ongoing review of Commission policies, the committee determined this policy had become out of date since its last revision in 2009. There has been a great deal of movement on this subject over the past several years, and the U.S. Department of Education recently clarified its expectations related to direct assessment programs, which may include prior experiential learning. The policy has been renamed and revised with these factors in mind.

It should be noted that several other Commission policies also address direct assessment programs, including the Policy on Substantive Change, Policy on Award of Credit, and Policy on Institutional Degrees and Credits.

- **Policy on the Rights and Responsibilities of the Commission and Member Institutions**

During a regular review of the Policy on Rights and Responsibilities of the Commission and Member Institutions, it was determined that a separate section on third party comment would be helpful to the member institutions and to the public. The section pulls materials that were previously found in several other policies and records them together in this section. Other revisions were made in October to align with federal regulations and guidelines.

3. The following Commission operational document was amended in March 2014 and again in June 2014 in accordance with Bylaws. It is presented for public information in this report.

Operational policies are not circulated to the field for comment prior to final approval. Upon approval, they are included in the Commission's report on Recent Commission Actions on Policy, and are posted online in the *Accreditation Reference Handbook*.

- **ACCJC Bylaws—Report on Action Taken**

The ACCJC Bylaws were amended in March 2014 and again in June 2014 in accordance with the Bylaws. These amendments included edits for correction and clarification, and deletion of a section not needed now that ACCJC is in its second year since reorganizing. Two new sections were added, one on indemnification, and the other on legal costs in the event an institution files suit against the Commission.

4. The Policy Committee obtained Commission endorsement of its plan to proceed with revising the definitions of accredited status in response to input from the field and in accord with actions by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC).

At its spring 2013 Development Workshop, the Commission agreed in principle to the alignment of its definitions of sanctions with those in the common framework and understanding developed by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. [See attached announcement of this framework by C-RAC.] Further, the Commission agreed in principle to address input from the field about categories of reaffirmation by creating a “reaffirmation for one year,” for institutions which substantially meet the standards but have areas of noncompliance which can be fully resolved in one year.

The implementation of these changes will required a substantial revision of the Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions. The Policy Committee asked that the Commission endorse its plan to proceed with revisions to the policy, for presentation as a first reading policy at the January 2015 meeting, and the endorsement was granted.

The Commission welcomes your thoughts on ACCJC policy matters.

Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions

For Immediate Release: April 9, 2014

Contact: Beth Sibolski, (267) 284-5030

Regional Accreditors Announce Efforts to Improve Public Understanding of Commission Actions

Washington, DC –The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) today announced plans to implement a common framework and understanding of terms for key actions regarding accredited institutions.

“As regional accreditation evolved over the years, unique descriptions were developed to identify varying levels of concern regarding the accreditation status of individual colleges and universities. At a time when more institutions are operating on a national scale, these terms have, at times, resulted in confusion among students and the general public in cases when actions have been taken,” said Beth Sibolski, Chair of C-RAC and President of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

To address this issue, Sibolski announced, beginning this year, that the terms “Warning, Probation, Show Cause, Withdrawal of Accreditation, Denial of Accreditation, and Appeal” will be consistent across regions. “This is an important step in improving the information accreditors provide – information critical for students in making decisions about their academic future and important in promoting better public understanding of the accreditation status of institutions,” added Sibolski.

“One of the key strengths of regional accreditation is its ability to share best practices among the Commissions and build upon them,” said Sylvia Manning, Vice-Chair of C-RAC and President of the Higher Learning Commission. “This effort also demonstrates how the higher education community is able to come together to address issues rather than relying on a legislative or regulatory solution,” Manning added.

“We are very pleased with this announcement and the efforts of C-RAC, which reflect one of the key recommendations from *Assuring Academic Quality in the 21st Century: Self-Regulation in a New Era*, a report released by ACE’s National Taskforce on Institutional Accreditation,” said Molly Corbett Broad, President of the American Council on Education. “As noted in our report, a frequent complaint about accreditation is the use of different language and terminology to describe similar things. C-RAC has made a huge step in addressing this issue,” added Broad.

A description of the terms and definitions follows.

**REGIONAL ACCREDITATION:
WARNING, PROBATION, WITHDRAWAL OF ACCREDITATION**

The seven regional accrediting commissions share a common framework and a common understanding of terms for certain actions regarding accredited institutions: Warning, Probation, Show Cause, Withdrawal of Accreditation, Denial of Accreditation, and Appeal.

Public Sanctions:

- **Warning:** Indicates that an institution has been determined by the commission¹ not to meet one or more standards² for accreditation.
- **Probation:** Indicates that an institution has been determined by the commission not to meet one or more standards for accreditation and is an indication of a serious concern on the part of the Commission regarding the level and/or scope of non-compliance issues related to the standards.

By federal regulation, the Commission must take immediate action to withdraw accreditation if an institution is out of compliance with accreditation standards for two years unless the time is extended for good cause.

Show cause: An institution is asked to demonstrate why its accreditation should not be withdrawn. A written report from the institution and, if specified by the commission, a focused visit are preliminary to a hearing with the commission. Show cause may occur during or at the end of the two-year probation period, or at any time a commission determines that an institution must demonstrate why its accreditation should not be withdrawn (i.e., probation is not a necessary precursor to show cause).

Withdrawal of Accreditation: An institution's accredited status is withdrawn, and with it, membership in the association.

Denial of Accreditation: An institution is denied initial accreditation because it does not meet the requirements for accreditation.

Appeal: The withdrawal or denial of accreditation may be appealed. Institutions remain accredited (or candidates for initial accreditation) during the period of the appeal.

¹ *Commission* encompasses decisions made by any appropriate decision-making body of one of the seven regional accrediting bodies.

² *Standards* encompasses any requirements for accreditation, including eligibility requirements, standards, criteria, or polices of the commission.