

## Policy on Accreditation of Baccalaureate Degrees

*(Adopted June 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 the institution remains in compliance with Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies as the program implementation moves forward.

Upon completion of the substantive change requirements and following approval, the baccalaureate degree program will be expected to demonstrate and maintain compliance with Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies 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 of the baccalaureate degree program with all applicable Accreditation Standards, Eligibility Requirements, and Commission policies.

### **Limits on Institutional Baccalaureate Degree 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 degree or pre-Associate degree college level, and 60% of students at the institution must be in Associate degree or pre-Associate Degree level programs, except that a primarily 2-year higher education institution that has or proposes only a single baccalaureate degree program may do so without regard for these percentages.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) has granted to ACCJC the scope of approving one baccalaureate degree at each member institution through the substantive change process.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Department of Education's approval of this scope is the means by which institutions and their programs may qualify for federal student aid and federal aid to postsecondary institutions.

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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 as would fall within ACCJC's general scope of accreditation under its Bylaws.

Institutions exploring the addition of Baccalaureate Degrees will need to consider the extent of ACCJC's scope.

An institution preparing an Institutional Self Evaluation Report for purposes of reaffirmation of accreditation must, for the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies listed below, specifically address and provide evidence of its practices as to the baccalaureate degree and how those practices meet the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies. In addressing the standards Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies, the institution must also address and provide evidence of its practices for the baccalaureate degree program-specific evaluation criteria listed below.

### Eligibility Requirements

The Eligibility Requirement listed below applies to the baccalaureate degree programs.

**1. Authority:** *The institution is authorized or licensed to operate as a post-secondary educational institution and to award degrees by an appropriate governmental organization or agency as required by each of the jurisdictions or regions in which it operates.*

*Private institutions, if required by the appropriate statutory regulatory body, must submit evidence of authorization, licensure, or approval by that body. If incorporated, the institution shall submit a copy of its articles of incorporation.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- 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.

A number of additional Eligibility Requirements (ERs) referenced in the Standards have specific application to the baccalaureate degree and are covered by the institution's compliance with those standards Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies.

### Accreditation Standards

The Accreditation Standards listed below apply to the institution as a whole and to each baccalaureate degree program. As appropriate, the list includes criteria indicating how the Standards specifically apply to baccalaureate degree programs. In addressing the Standards, the institution must also address and provide evidence of its practices for the baccalaureate degree program-specific evaluation criteria identified below.

**Standard I.A.1,** *The mission describes 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. (ER 6)*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- Institutions may need to make changes to the institutional mission to reflect the baccalaureate degree which must align with the Institutional mission.
- Student demand for the baccalaureate degree should demonstrate its correlation with the institutional mission.

**Standard 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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The assessment of data, in addition to measuring institution effectiveness, must also demonstrate the effectiveness of the baccalaureate degree program.
- The assessment of the baccalaureate degree must be differentiated from the overall assessment of institutional outcomes.

**Standard 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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The baccalaureate degree program is clearly aligned with the institutional mission.
- The institution has included the baccalaureate degree in its decision making and planning processes, and in setting its goals for student learning and achievement.

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

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- Student learning outcomes for upper division baccalaureate degree courses reflect higher levels of depth and rigor generally expected in higher education.
- Assessment must be accurate and distinguish the baccalaureate degree outcomes from those of other programs.

**Standard 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)*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The Institution has institution-set standards for the baccalaureate degree program and assesses performance related to those standards. It uses this assessment to improve the quality of the baccalaureate degree program.

- Student Achievement standards are separately identified and assessed for baccalaureate degree programs to distinguish them from associate degree programs.

**Standard 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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The institutional evaluation of policies and practices recognizes the unique aspects and requirements of the baccalaureate degree program in relation to learning and student support services and resource allocation and resource management.

**Standard 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)*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- Information related to baccalaureate degree programs is clear and accurate in all aspects of this Standard, especially in regard to learning outcomes, program requirements, and student support services.

**Standard I.C.2:** *The institution provides a print or online catalog for students and prospective students with precise, accurate, and current information on all facts, requirements, policies, and procedures listed in the “Catalog Requirements” (see endnote). (ER 20)*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The catalog and other information for students shall include accurate and current information concerning all requirements for the baccalaureate degree including admissions criteria, enrollment processes, academic requirements, and all other relevant and pertinent information.

**Standard 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)*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The assessment results of student learning and student achievement in the baccalaureate degree programs are used in the communication of academic quality.

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

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The purpose, content, course requirements and learning outcomes of the baccalaureate degree programs are clearly described.

**Standard 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)*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The baccalaureate degree field of study aligns with the institutional mission.
- The baccalaureate degree program is appropriate to higher education
- The baccalaureate degree program will culminate in identified student learning outcomes appropriate to higher education.
- The baccalaureate degree program leads to employment or transfer to other higher education programs.

**Standard 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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- Learning outcomes for baccalaureate courses, programs, and degrees are identified and assessed consistent with institutional processes.

**Standard 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)*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- A Minimum of 40 semester credits or equivalent of upper division coursework including the major and general education is required.
- The academic credit awarded for upper division courses within baccalaureate degree programs is clearly distinguished from that of lower division courses.
- The instructional level and curriculum of the upper division courses in the baccalaureate degree are comparable to those commonly accepted among like degrees in higher education and reflect the higher levels of knowledge and intellectual inquiry expected at the baccalaureate degree level.
- Student expectations, including learning outcomes, assignments and examinations of in the upper division courses demonstrate the rigor commonly accepted among like degrees in higher education.

- The program length and delivery mode of instruction are appropriate for the expected level of rigor.

**Standard 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.*<sup>3</sup> (ER 9)

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- Baccalaureate degree courses are scheduled to ensure that students will complete those programs in a reasonable period of time.

**Standard 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)

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- Baccalaureate Degrees and the course credit in those programs are based on student learning outcomes. These outcomes are consistent with generally accepted norms and equivalencies in higher education, especially in relation to upper division courses.

**Standard 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)

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

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

**Standard 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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

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<sup>3</sup> Glossary- Established expectations in higher education (also, appropriate for, accepted in, common to, accepted norms in, etc.): Shared and time honored principles, values and practices within the American community of higher education.

- Student learning outcomes in baccalaureate degree programs are consistent with generally accepted norms in higher education and reflect the higher levels expected at the baccalaureate degree level.

**Standard 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)*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- At least 36 semester units or equivalent of lower and upper division general education is required, including at least 9 semester units or equivalent of upper division general education coursework.
- 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 degree level student learning outcomes and competencies.

**Standard 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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The baccalaureate degree program includes a focused study on one area of inquiry or discipline at the baccalaureate level and includes key theories and practices appropriate to the baccalaureate degree level.

**Standard 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*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- 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.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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- Learning support services to support the baccalaureate degree program are sufficient to support the quality, currency, rigor and depth of the baccalaureate degree and reflect the unique needs of the program.
- Resource collections are sufficient in regard to the rigor, currency, and depth expected of baccalaureate degree programs.

**Standard 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<sup>4</sup> to complete degrees, certificate and transfer goals. (ER 16)*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

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

**Standard 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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

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

**Standard 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)*

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<sup>4</sup> Glossary- Pathways: The specific selection and progression of courses and learning experiences students pursue and complete and they progress in their education toward a certificate, degree, transfer, or other identified educational goal.

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The qualifications for faculty teaching upper division courses in the baccalaureate degree include the requirement for a master's degree (or academic credentials at least one level higher than the baccalaureate degree) or doctoral degree, in an appropriate discipline.
- In cases where no Master's degree is available for the field of study, the qualifications for faculty teaching upper division courses in the baccalaureate degree include a bachelor's degree in the discipline or closely related discipline, and a Master's degree in any discipline, and demonstrated industry work experience in the field for a minimum of six years, and commonly required industry-recognized certification or professional licensure.
- The Commission may require some faculty in non-career technical education baccalaureate programs to have the recognized terminal degree in the field of study.

**Standard 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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- There is at least one full-time faculty member assigned to the baccalaureate degree program.

**Standard 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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The facilities and other physical resources utilized by the baccalaureate degree program are evaluated for effectiveness for the program on a regular basis.

**Standard 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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- Technology services and support, facilities, hardware and software utilized by the baccalaureate degree program are appropriate and adequate for the program.

**Standard 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)*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The financial resources allocated to the baccalaureate degree program are sufficient to support and sustain program student learning and effectiveness.
- Financial resources allocated to the baccalaureate degree program ensure the financial stability of the program

**Standard 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.*

Specified Baccalaureate Degree Program Evaluation Criteria:

- The faculty and academic administrators assigned to the baccalaureate degree program have responsibility for making recommendations to appropriate governance and decision-making bodies about the curriculum, student learning programs, and services for the program.

## **Catalog Requirements**

The institution assures that the Catalog provides the following information about the baccalaureate degree program:

1. General Information
  - Course Program and Degree Offerings
  - Student Learning Outcomes for the Program and Degree
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>5</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

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<sup>5</sup> See the Checklist for Evaluating Institutional Compliance with Federal Regulations and Related Commission Policies for articulation of the evaluation criteria.