



ACCJC

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR
COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Eligibility, Candidacy, and Initial Accreditation Manual

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Introduction

The purpose of the *Eligibility, Candidacy, and Initial Accreditation Manual* is to provide institutions with the steps to achieve the voluntary status of accreditation with the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC). Accreditation serves the public interest by certifying that the institution meets or exceeds specific quality standards. The peer-based nature of accreditation helps maintain the values of higher education and is a positive force in sustaining educational quality and improving the effectiveness of accredited institutions.

Institutions offering the Associate's Degree and located within the geographic region served by ACCJC may seek Eligibility, Candidacy, and Initial Accreditation from the Commission. The process for each is described in the following pages. All institutions that seek accreditation from ACCJC must meet the Commission's Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission Policies (together Commission's Standards). Institutions are therefore referred to the ACCJC website at: www.accjc.org, and are advised to become familiar with the Commission and to review the Commission's Standards.

There are three kinds of accrediting associations recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE): regional accrediting agencies that accredit entire institutions, national accrediting agencies that accredit mostly private career-oriented schools, and professional and specialized programmatic accrediting agencies responsive to the needs of their related professions.

ACCJC is one of seven regional accrediting agencies in the United States recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. ACCJC accredits institutions in California, Hawaii, the Territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, which have as a primary mission the granting of associate degrees, but which may also award certificates and other credentials, including bachelor's degrees, where the provision of such credentials is within the institution's mission and, if applicable, as authorized by their governmental authorities. ACCJC may accredit non-domestic institutions in other geographic regions at its discretion.

1 Establishing Eligibility for Accreditation

1. The institution makes an inquiry about accreditation to the Commission office. Commission staff will discuss the profile of the institution with the applicant and determine how to proceed. Staff will inform the institution of the application fee in accordance with the ACCJC Fee Schedule
2. The institution submits an electronic copy of the Eligibility Application and supporting documentation to the ACCJC. The cover page should be titled "Eligibility Application" and include the institution's name, address, name of preparer, and submission date. The application must address each Eligibility Requirement including evidence.
3. Commission staff will review the Eligibility Application and may arrange a conference call with institutional representatives or a visit the institution as needed to ensure that the Application is a complete portrayal of the institution
4. The Commission's Eligibility Review Committee will review the final Eligibility Application and supporting documentation by means of a conference call that may include institutional representative for a portion of the call; it will then make the determination of Eligibility. The Committee may also defer action and request additional information from the institution prior to making its determination, in which case an additional application fee is not required.
5. The Committee will report its action at the next regular meeting of the Commission.
6. If the institution is deemed to be Eligible, the Commission notifies the institution in writing and develops a time frame for the institution's self-evaluation for Candidacy.
7. If a significant number of Eligibility Requirements (ERs) are not met and Eligibility is denied, the Commission will state which ERs the institution has failed to meet. The institution may submit another Eligibility Application when it determines it can meet the ERs. This subsequent Eligibility Application will be handled through the same process as the initial application.
8. The institution is permitted to withdraw an Eligibility Application without prejudice at any time prior to final action by the Committee. If the institution re-files after withdrawing or being denied Eligibility, the application fee is charged with each new submission.

In summary, the definition of an institution that has been deemed Eligible is one that has been reviewed and found to meet the ERs of the Commission. Eligibility is not a formal affiliation with the Commission and institutions with this designation are not listed in ACCJC directories nor required to pay membership dues. The institution must not make any representation which claims or implies any relationship with the ACCJC. Please refer to the Commission's "Policy on Representation of Accredited Status."

2 Requirements for Being Deemed Eligible to Seek Accreditation

2.1 The Eligibility Application

The eligibility process is designed to screen institutions prior to a period of extensive institutional self-evaluation to ensure that institutions that meet the Eligibility Requirements (ERs) may proceed. The ERs are framed to help identify institutions that align with the type and mission of ACCJC's member institutions and that show promise for achieving compliance with the Standards within a reasonable time. The ERs are listed below along with a description of the documentation institutions typically provide in support of the narrative for each ER.

The ERs anticipate the Standards but are not identical to them. The institution would do well to review the Accreditation Standards and Commission policies as these provide a clear statement of ultimate Commission expectations of quality institutional performance.

When an institution believes it can demonstrate that it meets the ERs, it will submit an Eligibility Application describing how the institution meets each of the ERs, providing evidence to support the assertions.

2.2 Eligibility Requirements and Suggestions for Documentation

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 submits a copy of its articles of incorporation.

Documentation

- Degree-granting approval statement, authorization to operate, or certificates from appropriate bodies
- Articles of incorporation (incorporated private institutions)

2. Operational Status

The institution is operational, with students actively pursuing its degree programs.

Documentation

- Enrollment history of institution (most recent three years suggested)
- Enrollments in institutional degree programs by year or cohort, including degrees awarded, if any
- Current schedule of classes

3. Degrees

A substantial portion of the institution's educational offerings are programs that lead to degrees, and a significant proportion of its students are enrolled in them. At least one degree program must be of two academic years in length.

Documentation

- List of degrees, course credit requirements, and length of study for each degree program
- General education courses and requirements for each degree offered
- Catalog designation of college-level courses for which degree credit is granted

4. Chief Executive Officer

The institution has a chief executive officer appointed by the governing board whose full-time responsibility is to the institution and who possesses the requisite authority to administer board policies. Neither the district/system chief executive officer nor the institutional chief executive officer may serve as the chair of the governing board. The institution informs the Commission immediately when there is a change in the institutional chief executive officer.

Documentation

- Name, address, and biographical information about the CEO
- Certification of CEO's full-time responsibility to the institution signed by the CEO and governing board chair

5. Financial Accountability

The institution annually undergoes and makes available an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or an audit by an appropriate public agency. Institutions that are already Title IV eligible must demonstrate compliance with federal requirements.

Additional financial accountability for eligibility applicants: The institution shall submit with its eligibility application a copy of the budget and institutional financial audits and management letters prepared by an outside certified public accountant or by an appropriate public agency, who has no other relationship to the institution, for its two most recent fiscal years, including the fiscal year ending immediately prior to the date of the submission of the application. The audits must be certified and any exceptions explained. It is recommended that the auditor employ as a guide Audits of Colleges and Universities, published by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. An applicant institution must not show an annual or cumulative operating deficit at any time during the eligibility application process or, if a deficit, the institution must satisfactorily show how it is being addressed.

Documentation

- Past, current, and proposed budgets
- Certified independent audits, including management letters (most recent three

years suggested)

- Financial aid program review/audits, if the institution is a participant
- Student loan default rates and relevant USDE reports, if the institution is a participant

6. Mission

The institution's educational mission is clearly defined, adopted, and published by its governing board consistent with its legal authorization, and is appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education and the constituency it seeks to serve. The mission statement defines institutional commitment to student learning and achievement. (Standard I.A.1 and I.A.4)

Documentation

- Copy of the mission statement as it appears in a published catalog or other public document
- Minutes of governing board meeting where the mission statement was adopted
- Recent revisions to the mission statement, if any

7. Governing Board

The institution has a functioning governing board responsible for the academic quality, institutional integrity, and financial stability of the institution and for ensuring that the institution's mission is being achieved. This board is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the financial resources of the institution are used to provide a sound educational program. Its membership is sufficient in size and composition to fulfill all board responsibilities.

The governing board is an independent policy-making body capable of reflecting constituent and public interest in board activities and decisions. A majority of the board members have no employment, family, ownership, or other personal financial interest in the institution. The board adheres to a conflict of interest policy that assures that relevant interests are disclosed and that they do not interfere with the impartiality of governing body members or outweigh the priority duty to secure and ensure the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution. (Standard IV.C.1, IV.C.4, and IV.C.11)

Documentation

- Biographical information about governing board members
- Copy of governing board bylaws
- Copy of conflict of interest policy
- Certification that there is no board majority of persons with employment, family, ownership, or personal interest in the institution; this must be signed by the chief executive officer and governing board chair.

8. Administrative Capacity

The institution has sufficient staff, with appropriate preparation and experience, to provide the administrative services necessary to support its mission and purpose. (Standard III.A.9 and III.A.10)

Documentation

- Organizational chart, including names of those in the identified positions
- Names and biographical information about administrative staff

9. Educational Programs

The institution's principal degree programs are congruent with its mission, are based on recognized higher education field(s) of study, are of sufficient content and length, are conducted at levels of quality and rigor appropriate to the degrees offered, and culminate in identified student outcomes. (Standard II.A.1 and II.A.6)

Documentation

- Names of programs which reflect the mission of the institution, including documentation of at least one degree program of two academic years in length
- Documentation from catalog or other public document that describes courses and curricular sequence of educational programs
- Documentation of additional location(s) where 50% or more of an educational program is delivered, including a list of those offered electronically
- Student learning outcomes for degree programs

10. Academic Credit

The institution awards academic credits based on generally accepted practices for degree-granting institutions of higher education and in accordance with statutory or system regulatory requirements. The institution provides appropriate information about the awarding of academic credit. (Standard II.A.9 and II.A.10)

Documentation

- Institutional policies on award of credit and acceptance of transfer credit (See Commission's "Policy on Award of Credit" and "Policy on Transfer of Credit")
- Catalog documentation of credits awarded
- Formula used by the institution to calculate values of units of academic credit, especially for laboratory, clinical, or other learning configurations
- Documentation of competency-based awards of credit, if any

11. Student Learning and Student Achievement

The institution defines standards for student achievement and assesses its performance against those standards. The institution publishes for each program its expected student learning outcomes and any program-specific achievement outcomes. Through regular and systematic assessment, it demonstrates that students who complete programs, no matter where or how they are offered,

achieve the identified outcomes and that the standards for student achievement are met. (Standard I.B.2, 1.B.3, and II.A.1)

Documentation

- Catalog statements which establish student learning outcomes for courses, programs, and degrees
- Student learning outcome data from educational program reviews
- Graduation, transfer, job placement, licensure examination pass rate history, course completion, retention term to term, progression to the next course/level, program completion, as appropriate to the institutional mission

12. General Education

The institution defines and incorporates into all of its degree programs a substantial component of general education designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and promote intellectual inquiry. The general education component includes an introduction to some of the major areas of knowledge. General education courses are selected to ensure students achieve comprehensive learning outcomes in the degree program. Degree credit for the general education component must be consistent with levels of quality and rigor appropriate to higher education. (Standard II.A.12 and II.A.5)

Documentation

- List of general education courses currently offered, including catalog descriptions and evidence of student learning outcomes, wherever they exist, i.e., course outlines, syllabi, etc.
- Course outlines for language and quantitative reasoning courses
- Evidence that general education courses are of levels of rigor and quality appropriate to higher education

13. Academic Freedom

The institution's faculty and students are free to examine and test all knowledge appropriate to their discipline or area of major study as judged by the academic/educational community in general. Regardless of institutional affiliation or sponsorship, the institution maintains an atmosphere in which intellectual freedom and independence exist. (Standard I.C.7)

Documentation

- Board approved policy on academic freedom

14. Faculty

The institution has a sufficient number of qualified faculty, which includes full time faculty and may include part time and adjunct faculty, to achieve the institutional mission and purposes. The number is sufficient in size and experience to support all of the institution's educational programs. A clear statement of faculty responsibilities must include development and review of curriculum as well as assessment of learning. (Standard III.A.7 and III.A.2)

Documentation

- Full-time and part-time faculty roster, including degrees and experience (note that faculty degrees must be from U.S. accredited institutions or evaluated for equivalency by an appropriate entity)
- Faculty responsibilities statement or contract outlining faculty responsibilities
- Current schedule of classes identifying faculty responsible for each class

15. Student Support Services

The institution provides for all of its students appropriate student support services that foster student learning and development within the context of the institutional mission. (Standard II.C.1 and II.C.3)

Documentation

- Demographic characteristics of students
- Evidence the institution assesses student needs for services and provides for them
- List of student support services provided that reflect the mission of the institution
- Description of programs for special student populations, if any

16. Admissions

The institution has adopted and adheres to admission policies consistent with its mission that specify the qualifications of students appropriate for its programs. (Standard II.C.6)

Documentation

- Copy of admissions policy from the college catalog or other published document
- Copy of enrollment application
- Statement of student qualifications for admission
- Statement of roles and expectations of admissions personnel

17. Information and Learning Support Services

The institution provides, through ownership or contractual agreement, specific long-term access to sufficient information and learning support services adequate for its mission and instructional programs in whatever format whenever and wherever they are offered. (Standard II.B.1 and II.B.4)

Documentation

- Profile of holdings and resources, including electronic resources
- Copies of agreements for access to external resources

18. Financial Resources

The institution documents a funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to support student learning programs and services, to improve institutional effectiveness, and to ensure financial stability. (Standard III.D.1)

Documentation

- Past, current, and proposed budgets and financial statements
- Documentation of any external foundation or other funding support
- Documentation of funding base

19. Institutional Planning and Evaluation

The institution systematically evaluates and makes public how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes, including assessment of student learning outcomes. The institution provides evidence of planning for improvement of institutional structures and processes, student achievement of educational goals, and student learning. The institution assesses progress toward achieving its stated goals and makes decisions regarding improvement through an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation. (Standard I.B.9 and I.C.3).

Documentation

- Current written institutional plans that describe ways in which the institution will achieve its educational goals
- Evidence of how results of institutional plans are used to guide resource planning and allocation, facilities plans, and other significant institutional planning efforts and decision making processes
- Evidence the institution engages in regular self-reflective evaluation of its operations and of student learning outcomes and uses the results to identify strengths and areas in need of improvement for purposes of developing institutional plans and maintaining educational quality
- Evidence that well-defined decision-making processes and authority serve to facilitate planning and institutional effectiveness

20. Integrity in Communication with the Public

The institution provides a print or electronic catalog for its constituencies with precise, accurate, and current information concerning the following:

General Information

- Official Name, address(es), telephone number(s), and website address of the institution
- Educational mission
- Representation of accredited status with ACCJC and with programmatic accreditors, if any
- Course, program, and degree offerings
- Student learning outcomes for programs and degrees

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- Academic calendar and program length
 - Academic freedom statement
 - Available student financial aid
 - Available learning resources
 - Names and degrees of administrators and faculty
 - Names of governing board members

Requirements

- Admissions
- Student fees and other financial obligations
- Information about degrees, certificates, graduation requirements and transfer policies

Major Policies Affecting Students

- Academic regulations, including academic honesty
- Nondiscrimination
- Transcripts
- Grievance and complaint procedures
- Sexual harassment
- Refund of fees

Locations or publications where other policies may be found. (Standard I.C.2)

Documentation

- Catalog or other public document which serves that purpose
- Recent print or other media advertisements
- Policies regarding public disclosure

21. Integrity in Relations with the Accrediting Commission*

The institution provides assurance that it adheres to the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Commission policies, describes itself in identical terms to all its accrediting agencies, communicates any changes in its accredited status, and agrees to disclose information required by the Commission to achieve its accrediting responsibilities. The institution will comply with Commission requests, directives, decisions and policies, and will make complete, accurate, and honest disclosure. Failure to do so is sufficient reason, in and of itself, for the Commission to impose a sanction, or to deny or revoke candidacy or accreditation. (Standard I.C.12 and 1.C.13)

*This ER is not fully realized until Candidacy or Initial Accreditation.

Documentation

- Copy of the policy adopted and published by governing board assuring compliance with this criterion
- List of other accreditations held by institution and information regarding status with those organizations

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- Copy of directory pages or website which describe the institution's representation by those accrediting bodies

3 Establishing Candidacy

1. Once Eligibility is granted, ACCJC staff develops a time frame for the institution's self-evaluation in preparation for the Candidacy review. The institution's president and ACCJC agree on the semester in which the visit can be conducted. College staff are invited to attend training for institutions undertaking the self-evaluation.
2. In preparation for Candidacy, the institution completes and submits an Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) (without a Quality Focus Essay) using the Accreditation Standards, the *Manual for Institutional Self-Evaluation*, the *Guide to Evaluating and Improving Institutions*, and other Commission policies and resources as appropriate. The ISER is supported by evidence for review by the Candidacy site visit team. The report is submitted to the Commission and the evaluation team members.
3. The Commission sends a review team to visit the college to review the institution's readiness for Candidacy status. It reviews the evidence submitted to verify how well the institution meets or exceeds the Commission's Standards. In its report, the evaluation team provides commendations when the institution exceeds standards; recommendations for institutional improvement; and requirements to resolve deficiencies to meet the Commission's Standards.

The institution will be provided a copy of the draft External Evaluation Team Report and asked to submit proposed correction of errors of fact to the team chair for consideration and adoption. The institution will also be afforded the opportunity to comment in writing to the Commission on any perceived deficiencies noted in the final External Evaluation Team Report prior to the Commission's action on the institution. NOTE: In keeping with federal policies, a public or other non-profit institution may apply to receive Title IV federal financial aid at the Candidacy phase of accreditation. For-profit institutions must achieve Initial Accreditation before applying to qualify for Title IV financial aid.

5. At its next regular meeting, the Commission reviews the ISER and the External Evaluation Team Report. The Commission makes the final determination whether to grant, deny, or defer Candidacy.

The Commission will determine which of the Standards have been met and whether additional development and/or documentation is required from the institution in order to demonstrate compliance. If no compliance issues remain, the Commission may grant Initial Accreditation. If the Commission identifies compliance issues with any of the Standards, these will be expressed in the Commission's Action Letter. In its application for Initial Accreditation, if submitted within two years, the institution needs to address only the Standards found not to be in compliance at the time of the Candidacy review. While the institution therefore does not need to address all of the Standards previously covered in the Candidacy application, the Commission may request updates on certain issues as an aspect of the Initial Accreditation review. The Commission may also require a site visit to verify compliance prior to determining whether to award Initial Accreditation.

6. If Candidacy is granted, the institution is notified by the Commission and a

timeframe for Initial Accreditation is arranged. If Candidacy is denied, the institution may reapply by submitting a Follow-Up Report responding to deficiencies and concerns the Commission noted in their Action Letter in response to the initial application for Candidacy. The Commission will send a Follow-Up evaluation team that will submit their report to the Commission for consideration. If the decision is to defer, the institution is notified regarding the specific items to address and the required date for their submission.

7. The institution is permitted to withdraw an application for Candidacy without prejudice at any time prior to the final action by the Commission.

Candidacy is a formal affiliation status granted to institutions that have successfully undergone an Eligibility review, as well as a comprehensive evaluation process using the Accreditation Standards, including preparation of an Institutional Self Evaluation Report and a review by an evaluation team. Candidacy is granted when the institution demonstrates the ability – as it continues to develop – to fully meet all the Accreditation Standards and Commission policies within the two-year Candidate period.

During Candidacy, the institution undertakes the necessary steps to reach demonstrable and complete compliance with Accreditation Standards. Candidate status may be extended for two years, for a total period not to exceed four years.

Candidacy status is a formal status of affiliation with the Commission; Candidate institutions are listed in the ACCJC directories. Candidate institutions are assessed annual dues, may submit substantive change applications, and are expected to submit annual reports as prescribed for all members institutions. Institutions that have achieved Candidacy status may make public representations about their relationship with the Commission. Please refer to Commission's "Policy on Representation of Accredited Status."

4 Achieving Initial Accreditation after Candidacy is Granted

Candidacy is awarded for two years, during which time an institution applies for Initial Accreditation. As described earlier, the institution addresses only those Standards that were found to be in non-compliance at the time of the Candidacy review. If it deems necessary to do so, the institution may request an additional two years in Candidacy status but may not extend this status beyond a total of four years.

1. When the Candidate institution applies for Initial Accreditation, it must submit a Follow-Up Report that demonstrates resolution of all recommendations for compliance with Accreditation Standards and Commission policies identified in the Commission's Action Letter awarding Candidacy. It will also submit a Quality Focus Essay (QFE), using the *Manual for Institutional Self-Evaluation, Guide to Evaluating and Improving Institutions*, and other Commission policies and resources. The Follow-Up Report, team report (if required), and Quality Focus Essay and related evidence is submitted to the Commission for review at the scheduled meeting. When feasible, the Commissioners assigned as readers for the Candidacy review will also serve as readers for these reports.
3. The Commission makes the final determination whether to grant Initial Accreditation, defer action, deny Initial Accreditation or extend Candidacy. If an institution fails to achieve Initial Accreditation after four years in Candidacy status, it must wait two years before submitting a new Eligibility Application to the Commission and begin the process anew.

5 After Initial Accreditation Is Granted

When Initial Accreditation is granted, the institution is typically placed on a seven-year cycle for reaffirmation. If the institution is part of a multi-college district, the reaffirmation cycle will be aligned with other colleges in that district unless, in the judgment of the Commission, the timing would not be indicative of a meaningful review, in which case alternative dates would be set.