



September 30, 2009

*Re: Accrediting Commission Report
August 2009 Meeting
(via email distribution)*

Dear ACCET and Other Colleagues:

This letter is presented as an update on the actions undertaken by the ACCET Accrediting Commission at the August 2009 meeting. A summary of all final actions, referenced by institution, a summary of statistics for all actions relative to the various classifications of review, and the policy/documentation revisions, previously posted and referenced herein, can be viewed and/or downloaded from the ACCET website (www.accet.org). This report is also posted on the website under Commission Reports.

Provided below is a synopsis of the Commission's actions on ACCET policies at the August 2009 meeting to include: (1) a resolution approved by the Commission, (2) a call for comment by the membership and (3) finalized document approvals. It is noted, as a reminder, that the Commission's Standards and Policy Review Committee (SPRC) undertakes a review of every policy that has not been subject to review for a period of five years.

Resolution Pertaining to the Requirement for State Licensure and/or Exemption for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Institutions Operating in the State of California

(The resolution is available on ACCET's website)

The ACCET Commission's has revisited its prior restrictive policy on this issue and considers it to be an undue and unreasonable hardship to private postsecondary vocational institutions to continue to be denied the opportunity to apply for initial ACCET accreditation as a consequence of not being licensed or exempted by the State of California solely due to the sunset provision of the California statute (expired July 1, 2007) that had previously established an agency (BPPVE) to approve and monitor private postsecondary and vocational institutions. Therefore, the ACCET Commission resolved that, effective August 7, 2009 and until such time as the State of California establishes an entity to license and/or exempt private postsecondary and vocational institutions, it will allow the receipt and processing of applications for initial accreditation from private postsecondary vocational institutions operating in the State of California that: (1) were not required to be licensed or were not fully operational prior to the sunset of the aforementioned law, and, (2) therefore, were unable to seek and obtain the state approval and/or exemption otherwise required as an eligibility criteria for ACCET accreditation.

Call for Comment Solicited

(The draft documents and call for comment form are available on ACCET's website)

Document 7 – Guidelines for On-Site Evaluation Teams

In accordance with the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), the key proposed revision addresses requirements for the process and criteria used by ACCET to select qualified team members for on-site evaluations, specifically referenced to distance learning programs. Additional changes include: (a) modifying the listing under 1-Person Teams; (b) identifying the verification of completion and placement as an assignment for the Commission Representative; (c) stating that, if applicable, team members also will evaluate the institution against the Specific Criteria identified in the various Document 3 templates; and (d) modifying the “*During the Visit*” and “*Exit Briefings*” and “*Rating Scale*” sections.

Document 25 – Policy for Approval of New or Revised Curriculum

As part of the normal 5-year review process, Document 25 was presented for updating in conjunction with related program documents (Documents 25.2-25.7). Proposed changes include: (a) revising the definitions of “program”, “course”, and “externship” to be consistent with Document 33 – Definitions; and (b) moving the descriptions of required exhibits to Document 25.2 – Checklist for Application for Curriculum Revision/Addition, in an effort to be consistent with the organization and structure of other applications.

Document 25.2 – Application Checklist

Proposed changes are to: (a) expand the title and (b) provide additional instructions regarding the submission of the application and required supporting documentation.

Document 25.3 – Employer Questionnaire and Program Overview

The proposed changes are primarily to shorten the questionnaire and focus the questions on the adequacy of the proposed program curriculum and the level of market demand for program graduates. Specifically, the changes are to: (a) add the email address and ACCET ID number of the institution, and (b) modify the questions to determine whether the program is sufficient in content and length to prepare graduates for employment and assess the level of projected local demand for program graduates, and (c) delete specific questions about the need for previous work experience and the availability of externships sites at the employers' organizations.

Document 25.7 – Admissions Standards and Criteria

Proposed changes include: (a) requesting information on the institution's re-test policy, if applicable; and (b) identifying critical admissions standards to ensure reasonable expectation of success in completing the training, obtaining any applicable certification/licensure, and securing employment (e.g. vaccinations, no convictions of felony, DUI/DWI, drug offenses, etc.).

Document 29.1 – Enrollment Agreement Checklist

The proposed change requires institutions that charge and retain tuition by payment periods or periods of obligations (e.g. semester, terms, or modules) to clearly and fully disclose to enrolling students: (a) the payment periods or periods of obligation for the program; (b) the schedule of payment, based upon these payment/obligation periods; and (c) the impact of these payment/obligation periods on the institution's cancellation and refund policy.

Document 31 – Cancellation and Refund Policy

Proposed are changes to: (a) increase the maximum that an institution may retain in the event that a student withdraws or terminates during the first week of classes; and (b) increases the maximum total that may be retained, if a student, accepted by the institution, cancels prior to the start of scheduled classes or never attends class (no-show), when the student is recruited from outside the United States or its territories and possesses a student visa to enter the country for study.

Document 31 ESL – Cancellation and Refund Policy

Proposed are changes to allow an institution to retain the tuition for the first four weeks of training for students who enter the United States on the institution's I-20 Visa, but never start training at that institution.

Document 36 – Leave of Absence Policy

Proposed is a change to allow a student enrolled under a F-1 or M-1 Visit to be granted multiple leaves of absence for a maximum total period in accordance with: (1) the written leave of absence policy of the institution, (2) the regulations of the Department of Homeland Security, and (3) sound educational and professional practice.

Finalized Document Approvals

The following revised documents were approved by the Commission. These approvals were granted after a careful review of any comments received as a result of a prior call-for-comment solicitation, unless only minor changes were proposed or documents were modified to be compliant with provision of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA).

3 eASER Attachment 1 – Electronic ASER/BASER Guidelines/Checklist and 3 eASER/BASER Attachment 2 – Electronic ASER/BASER Routing Procedures

For easier reference by the accreditation applicant, the consolidation of the two documents into a single document included changes to the title, format, content, and document number. Instructional revisions updated requirements for preparing and distributing the eASER/BASER.

Document 4 – Application for Accreditation

The change was to require initial applicants to report their annual enrollment and gross tuition revenue on ACCET Document 12 – Annual Report and Enrollment Statistics for the institution's most recent fiscal year and submit the completed document as an exhibit to the application.

Document 8 – Visit Form

The changes include: (a) the addition of an email address for the contact person and (b) a more specific request for information about schedule considerations to facilitate team scheduling.

Document 8.1 – Special Visit Form

The changes include: (a) the addition of an email address for the contact person and (b) a more specific request for information about schedule considerations to facilitate team scheduling.

Document 11 – Policies and Practices of the Accrediting Commission

Consistent with the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), modifications to the appeal process include: (a) allowing additional financial information to be considered upon appeal under prescribed circumstances; (b) explicitly stating that appeals panel members shall be subject to ACCET's conflict of interest policy; (c) making reference to the option that a Commissioner may be designated to represent the Commission's action in the course of an appeals panel hearing; and (d) specifying that the appeals panel decision, as interpreted and implemented by the Commission, represents the final administrative remedy available to the institution.

Document 13 - By Laws

The revisions include: (1) permit Public Member Commissioners to serve three full terms, given the premium on such service reflected in the experience and availability of those commissioners; and (2) language provided by ACCET's attorney pertaining to state law governing interpretation of Bylaws in disputes between accredited institutions or applicants for accreditation and ACCET.

Document 25.1 – Application for Curriculum Revision/Addition

No substantive changes.

Document 25.4 – Program Information Sheet

No substantive changes.

Document 25.5 – Course Information Sheet

No substantive changes.

Document 25.6 – Subject Hour Breakdown

No substantive changes.

Document 25. OAD – Occupational Associates Degrees

A minor change included to clarify what documentation must be submitted in response to the request for an “*outline of the program*”.

Document 30 -- Policies for Recruitment and Advertising/Promotional Practices

The changes include: (a) emphasis that websites are considered as communication with prospective students and, therefore, are covered by the requirements outlined in this document; and (b) clarification that all institutions are to include ACCET contact information in any publications that offer substantial information about the institution and reference ACCET accreditation.

Document 31 – Cancellation and Refund Policy

The change limits the previous exclusion of programs of “less than 300 clock hours (or the credit hour equivalent) from ACCET’s refund policy regarding “*withdrawals or terminations after start of class*” to “*avocational programs of less than 300 clock hours (or the credit hour equivalent)*”. A growing number of shorter term vocational programs are being offered to students who may not be adequately protected by state refund and cancellation policies.

Document 32 – Closing/Teach-Out Policy

The change is to identify specific circumstances that require the submission of a teach-out plan and/or agreement consistent with the new requirements under the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA).

Document 33 – Definitions

The changes included: (a) the revised definition of “Program” consistent with that identified in Document 25 – Policies for the Approval of New or Revised Curriculum and (b) necessary Scrivener changes.

Document 48 – Policy on Adverse Actions by Other Agencies

No substantive changes.

Other Business

HEOA Regulations

The call for comment period following the USDE's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking Amending the Regulations Regarding The Secretary's Recognition of Accrediting Agencies ended on September 8th and the final regulations are scheduled to be published by November 1, 2009. A relatively small number of those changes require substantive revision of ACCET policy and procedure, the most significant of which have already been incorporated, including those effecting the appeals process, teach-outs, and transfer of credit. It is a credit to the Commission and the membership that have supported a progressive agenda of ongoing review and revision to ACCET policies and practices ahead of the regulatory curve. We are now scheduling for the five-year review of the Standards for Accreditation, which is not anticipated to require major surgery, but will begin in early 2010 with a call for comment over the summer, culminating in a vote by the membership tallied at the Business Meeting held at next year's conference.

Website/Database Upgrade

We have finally made the plunge with a contract to revamp the tattered remains of our database, developed in 1993, and maintained since then with prayers, duct tape and patience on everyone's part. The research and design specification phase, which as currently at the midpoint, has been an opportunity for us to rethink a number of processes and practices that can be made much more efficient and effective for the Commission and staff internally and the membership externally. As for the website, the removal and destruction of that picture will be the highest priority, to be followed with the design of a seamless portal for interaction and communications that presents both an improved information channel and a fresh look for the membership and agency to the world.

35th Annual Conference

Our registrations are over the top, approaching double the previous year in San Antonio. Palm Springs conference is the last week in October and has a solid program of presentations and a nice place to relax at a reasonable expense. We look forward to seeing you there.

In closing, I would simply like to thank you all for your continued commitment to the high standards reflected in the work you invest in your students aspirations each day. Such are the accomplishments that best represent this important work as a partnership for quality. Best regards.

Sincerely,



ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE

Roger J. Williams
Executive Director