



Handbook for Programmatic Accreditation

2009 Edition

Council on Occupational Education



**Handbook for Programmatic Accreditation:
2009 Edition**

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~Table of Contents~

Introduction.....	1
Conditions of Accreditation	5
Eligibility Requirements	7
Annual Renewal of Accreditation	8
Reaffirmation of Accreditation	8
Annual Report for Renewal of Accreditation.....	8
Accreditation Liaison Officer.....	8
Substantive Changes	8
Criteria for Programmatic Accreditation.....	9
Policies.....	15
Cost of Team Visits.....	18
Fees	18
Penalties	18
Guidelines for Action on Programs with Completion, Placement, and/or Licensure Exam Pass Rates One or More Standard Deviations Below Acceptable Levels.....	19
Programmatic Accreditation Process.....	21
Definitions.....	27

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INTRODUCTION

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A. History

On September 24, 2002, the Commission of the Council on Occupational Education approved a plan to offer occupational education unit accreditation to selected workforce development entities. This action was based on recommendations from the Commission's Committee on Policies and Rules to meet a need for an occupational education unit accreditation process to complement the Council's institutional accreditation process.

The Commission views unit accreditation for occupational education programs as consistent with the mission of the Council: assuring quality and integrity in career and technical education.

On September 22, 2004, the Commission approved eligibility requirements, standards and criteria, policies, and definitions for use in occupational education unit accreditation.

B. Goals of Programmatic Accreditation

The Council on Occupational Education is a national accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education as a reliable authority on the quality of education offered by the institutions it accredits.

In addition to the accreditation of entire institutions dedicated to career and technical education, the Council provides programmatic accreditation for programs operating within institutions that are institutionally accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The Council also provides programmatic accreditation for programs operated by other educational providers granted a waiver by the Commission (see Eligibility Requirements). The goals of the Council's programmatic accreditation are:

1. To increase program accountability;
2. To demonstrate educational credibility to local business leaders;
3. To promote relationships between career and technical education providers and the business community;
4. To build a sense of academic integrity for faculty; and,
5. To enhance institutional accreditation provided by other agencies with an evaluation of career and technical programs that focuses on measurable outcomes.

It is important to note that the Council's programmatic accreditation is for quality assurance only and is not included in the Council's institutional scope of recognition by the U.S. Department of Education for Title IV student financial aid purposes.

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CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION

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Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible to be considered for accreditation by the Commission, the occupational education program must:

- A. Be located in an institution that is accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education unless a waiver is granted by the Commission for a program operated by a local education agency, a non-traditional provider of education and training, or other situation for which waiver is considered justified by the Commission.
- B. Offer an associate degree or lesser credential in a postsecondary occupational area.
- C. Utilize a campus-based instructional delivery system with at least 25 percent of the program's total FTE being derived from traditional enrollments.
- D. Demonstrate that it meets the minimum required benchmarks for completion, placement, and/or licensure exam pass rates.
- E. Be legally authorized to operate within the jurisdiction in which it is located.
- F. Have been in continuous operation providing instruction for a period of time sufficient for at least one class of students to complete.
- G. Be able to provide a letter of good standing from the institutional accreditor or other appropriate oversight agency.
- H. Be in compliance with all institutional accrediting agency and/or Federal agency requirements applicable to accreditation of the institution that operates the career and technical department or program.
- I. Have the on-site administrator or other full-time employee of the career and technical department or program attend Commission Self-Study and Annual Report Workshops within three to fifteen months prior to hosting the accreditation visiting team.
- J. Agree to comply with all requirements of the Council pertinent to programmatic accreditation.

Annual Renewal of Accreditation

Programmatic accreditation is for a period of one year. Continued accreditation is determined annually by Commission approval of annual reports verifying that accredited programs are complying with the Council's conditions, criteria, and policies.

Reaffirmation of Accreditation

Reaffirmation of programmatic accreditation must occur from two to five years after initial accreditation or any subsequent reaffirmation decision. The time interval for reaffirmation is determined by the Commission as a part of its accreditation or reaffirmation decision. Accredited programs must meet the same requirements for reaffirmation as required for initial accreditation. At the discretion of the Commission, programs may be required to undergo reaffirmation earlier than the previously determined year.

Annual Report for Renewal of Accreditation

Continued programmatic accreditation is determined annually by Commission approval of annual reports. Accredited programs must show that they are complying with conditions, criteria, and policies.

The institution must provide all of the applicable information requested in the annual report. Reporting substantive changes to the list of COE-approved programs in the annual report does not constitute written notification to the Council.

Failure to submit an annual report or additional information regarding the annual report by the due date established by the Commission shall be grounds for a program to lose its accredited status.

Accreditation Liaison Officer

The accreditation liaison officer must be a permanent staff member of the institution. This is the person with whom the Commission staff will discuss accreditation matters concerning approved programs when the chief administrative officer is not available.

Substantive Changes

The following substantive changes must be reported to the Commission:

- A. Addition of new program.
- B. Change in the length, location, or mode of delivery of an existing educational program.
- C. Change from clock hours to credit hours or from credit hours to clock hours.
- D. Dropping an educational program.

CRITERIA for Programmatic Accreditation

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A. Admissions and Student Services

1. The admissions policy of the program is consistent with the institution's admissions policies.
2. Admission requirements offer reasonable expectations for successful completion of the program regardless of the delivery mode.
3. Appropriate career counseling, orientation, and placement services are available to support the program.

B. Programs

1. The program is congruent with the mission of the institution and with the occupational needs of the people served by the institution.
2. The objectives for the program are evaluated annually.
3. The program has clearly stated objectives, defined content relevant to these objectives and the current needs of business and industry, and student evaluation based on the program objectives and content.
4. A systematic process has been implemented to document that the objectives and content of the program are current.
5. At least every two years, three bonafide potential employers review the program and recommend admission requirements, program content, program length, program objectives, competency tests, instructional materials, equipment, method of evaluation, and level of skills and/or proficiency required for completion, and appropriateness of the delivery mode for the program.
6. The institution considers the length and the tuition of the program in relation to the documented entry-level earnings of completers.
7. Courses required for the program are offered with sufficient frequency for the student to complete the program within the publicized time frame.
8. Associate Degree programs meet the following requirements:
 - a. The appropriate applied degree title, such as Associate of Applied Technology, Associate of Applied Science, Associate of Occupational Studies, Associate of Science, or Associate of Occupational Technology, is used.
 - b. The program has a minimum of 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours.
 - c. The program includes a minimum of 15 semester hours or 23 quarter hours of general education courses, with a minimum of one course from each of the following areas: humanities, behavioral sciences, natural or applied sciences, and mathematics.

9. The program, regardless of location or time or mode of delivery, is qualitatively consistent with those offered on the main campus, and must:
 - a. Be approved and administered under established institutional policies and procedures and supervised by an administrator who is part of the institutional organization.
 - b. Have appropriate involvement of on-campus administrators and faculty in planning, approval, and on-going evaluation.
 - c. Have individual student records, including period of enrollment, financial, and educational program records, permanently maintained by the institution at the main campus.
 - d. Be described in appropriate catalogs, brochures, and/or other promotional materials and include tuition/fee charges, refund policies, admissions and academic requirements, and information technology requirements.
 - e. Provide for timely and meaningful interaction among faculty and students.
10. A credit hour is equivalent to a minimum of each of the following: one semester credit for 15 clock hours of lecture, 30 clock hours of laboratory, or 45 clock hours of work-based activities; or one quarter credit for 10 clock hours of lecture, 20 clock hours of laboratory, or 30 clock hours of work-based activities.

C. Instruction

1. Academic competencies and occupational skills are integrated into the program.
2. The program provides training in the competencies essential to success in the relevant occupation, including job knowledge, job skills, work habits, and attitudes.
3. An occupational advisory committee is used to ensure that desirable, relevant, and current practices of the occupation are being taught. The committee (a) is composed of at least three members, all being external to the institution and representative of the geographical service area covered by the program area; (b) meets at least twice annually with a majority of official members present; and (c) keeps minutes of each meeting to document their activities and recommendations.
4. The occupational advisory committee reviews, at least annually, the appropriateness of the type of instruction (such as lecture, laboratory, work-based instruction, and/or mode of delivery) offered within the program to assure that students gain competency with specific skills required for successful completion of the program.
5. Job-related health, safety, and fire-prevention are an integral part of instruction.
6. To develop skill proficiency, sufficient practice is provided with equipment and materials similar to those currently used in the occupation.
7. Instructional supplies are available in adequate variety and quantity to support the program.
8. Instruction in classrooms, shops, laboratories, and distance education locations is effectively organized as evidenced by course outlines, lesson plans, competency tests, and other instructional materials.

9. The program uses a systematic, objective, and equitable method of evaluating student achievement based on required competencies.
10. Each work-based activity has a written instructional plan for students specifying the particular objectives, experiences, competencies, and evaluations that are required.
11. The instructional plan designates the on-site employer representative responsible for guiding and overseeing the students' learning experiences and participating in the students' written evaluations.
12. All work-based activities conducted by the program are supervised by a designated employee possessing appropriate qualifications.

D. Program Outcomes

1. Individual student progress data, including (a) appropriate evaluations of knowledge and skills required for occupation(s) studied and (b) notations of completion(s) of and/or withdrawal from programs, are maintained and made a part of his/her record.
2. The program submits accurate and verifiable completion data each year to the Commission for comparison with similar COE-accredited programs, meets the minimum required benchmarks, and takes any actions required by the Commission due to the completion rate being unacceptably lower than the completion rates for peer programs.
3. The program submits accurate and verifiable placement data each year to the Commission for comparison with similar COE-accredited programs, meets the minimum required benchmarks for placement, and takes any actions required by the Commission due to the placement rate being unacceptably lower than the placement rates for peer programs.
4. For programs requiring a licensure examination, the program submits accurate and verifiable licensure performance data each year to the Commission for comparison with similar COE-accredited programs, meets the minimum required benchmarks for licensure exam pass rates, and takes any actions required by the Commission due to the licensure examination pass rate being unacceptably lower than the licensure examination pass rates for peer programs.
5. The program has a written plan to ensure that follow-up is systematic and continuous, and includes the following elements:
 - a. Identification of responsibility for coordination of all follow-up activities.
 - b. Collection of information from completers and employers of completers.
 - c. Information collected from completers and employers of completers focused on program effectiveness for various modes of delivery and relevance to job requirements.
 - d. Placement and follow-up information used to evaluate and improve the quality of program outcomes.
 - e. Placement and follow-up information made available at least on an annual basis to all instructional personnel and administrative staff of the program.

E. Distance Education

Distance education criteria apply only to institutions that offer one or more programs where 50% or more of the required instructional hours are available via distance education.

1. The delivery of distance education programs is consistent with the institution's mission, goals, and objectives.
2. The institution determines students are qualified by prior education or equivalent experience to be admitted to a program including, in the case of international students, English language skills.
3. The institution informs the prospective students of technical competence, cost and timeframe required for the program.
4. The institution's advertising, recruiting, and admissions material clearly and accurately represent the program, the services available, and the necessary hardware and software requirements for the distance education program.
5. The distance education program is identical to those on campus in terms of the quality, rigor, breadth of academic and technical standards, completion requirements, and the credential awarded.
6. The institution directly verifies the currency and quality of all contracted courseware on an annual basis, is directly responsible for such currency and quality, and maintains curriculum oversight responsibility within all contracts.
7. The program utilizes a standardized course template, course descriptions, learning objectives, course requirements (i.e. standard syllabus, outcomes, grading, resources, etc.), and learning outcomes of its programs in order to facilitate quality assurance and the assessment of student learning.
8. The institution provides a coherent plan for the student to access all courses necessary to complete the program.
9. The institution continues the program for a period sufficient to enable all admitted students to complete a degree, diploma, or certificate in a publicized timeframe.
10. The institution monitors student progress and participation by means such as course management systems that provide student time online, frequency of logins, electronic footprints, electronic grade book, and percentage of course completed.
11. The institution's evaluation of the distance education program takes place in the context of the regular evaluation of all programs on an annual basis.
12. The learning outcomes of students in the distance education program are comparable to those of campus-based students.
13. The program's distance education students have access to online learning resources and can effectively utilize those resources to support their learning.
14. The distance education program is designed to maximize interaction between and among faculty and students.
15. The institution ensures timeliness and quality of its responses (synchronously or asynchronously) to students' requests by placing a requirement on response time of no more than 24 hours within the institution's published operational schedule of the program/course.

POLICIES

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The following policies have been established by the Commission:

1. All programs selected by the career and technical department in consultation with COE must be included in the accreditation process. COE will accept program accreditation by agencies that are recognized nationally as evidence of assuring educational program quality. Programs that are in good standing with recognized agencies (e.g., U.S. Secretary of Education, Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors, and industry organizations) may be exempt from the COE programmatic accreditation self-study and may be included in the scope of accreditation for the career and technical department.
2. Any COE-accredited institution that merges with a regionally-accredited institution can be converted to programmatic accreditation by a “grandfather clause”, if requested by the institution’s president. The new career and technical department or program would maintain its current accreditation cycle and be required to attend a self-study workshop and host a visiting team in the last year of the accreditation cycle.
3. Attendance at the self-study workshop for representatives of career and technical departments or programs and the annual report workshops are requirements. Within two years after application approval, the career and technical department or program must host an accreditation team visit. The career and technical department or program must have the on-site administrator or other full-time employee of the career and technical department or program attend a Commission Self-Study Workshop within three to fifteen months prior to hosting the accreditation visiting team.
4. The self-study document will include an introductory section describing community and institutional characteristics and program compliance with the conditions of accreditation. The self-study document focuses on a description of program compliance with the criteria for accreditation. Programs that offer several credential levels within them may include all credential requirements within the self-study.
5. The reaffirmation cycle for programmatic accreditation will be two to five years.
6. Accredited programs will pay annual dues payable July 1st based on full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment of all accredited programs as defined by the Commission according to the schedule below.

<u>FTE</u>	<u>DUES</u>
1 – 137	\$1,170
138 – 276	1,275
277 – 415	1,375
416 – 553	1,490
554 – 692	1,640
693 - 1,039	1,800
1,040 - 1,386	1,960
1,387 - 2,079	2,230
2,080 - 2,773	2,430
2,774 - 4,160	2,700
4,161 - 6,934	3,080
6,935 - 13,869	3,500
More Than - 13,869	3,925

Cost of Team Visits

The institution must reimburse the Council for all costs incurred in conducting team visits. Reimbursable expenses include travel, lodging, and meals of the team, staff members, and/or Commission representatives. (There is no charge for salaries of team members, staff members, or Commission representatives.)

The institution shall not reimburse team members, staff members, or Commission representatives directly. Local institutional travel policies do not apply to team visits since the individuals conducting the visits act as agents of the Commission. The Council will contract with appropriate departments or super-ordinate entities that cannot otherwise reimburse the Council for team visit expenses.

Fees

Fees shall be assessed according to the schedule below. All fees shall be non-refundable.

Application for Initial Accreditation (per institution)	\$ 750
Warning Status	250
Probation Status	250
Show Cause Order.....	250
Focused Review Visit	500
Notice of Intent to Appeal.....	2,500
Reprocessing any Insufficient Application, Report, or Response.....	250
Renewal of Accreditation (per institution).....	750

Penalties

Failure to pay dues, fees, penalties, or any charges	
due within 30 days of due date	10% of the amount due
Failure to pay fees, penalties, or any charges within	
60 days of due date	20% of the amount due
Failure to provide annual report or other report by due date.....	500
Failure to attend a self-study workshop within the specified time	
period prior to hosting a visiting team.....	500
Failure to disclose a substantive change to the Commission	1,500

GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

**on Programs with Completion, Placement,
and/or Licensure Exam Pass Rates One or
More Standard Deviations Below Acceptable Levels**

Completion, Placement, or Licensure Exam Pass Rate

Action Directed at the Discretion of the Commission

1 standard deviation below average

- Narrative report submitted with the annual report offering explanation, including mitigating circumstances, and a plan for improvement
- Submission of semi-annual status reports on plan for improvement of completion, placement, and/or licensure exam pass rates

2 standard deviations below average

- Narrative report submitted with the annual report offering explanation, including mitigating circumstances, and a plan for improvement
- Submission of semi-annual status reports on plan for improvement of completion, placement, and/or licensure exam pass rates
- Attendance at a Commission Workshop on Program Outcomes or improvement of completion/placement/licensure exam pass rates
- Consultation in person or by telephone

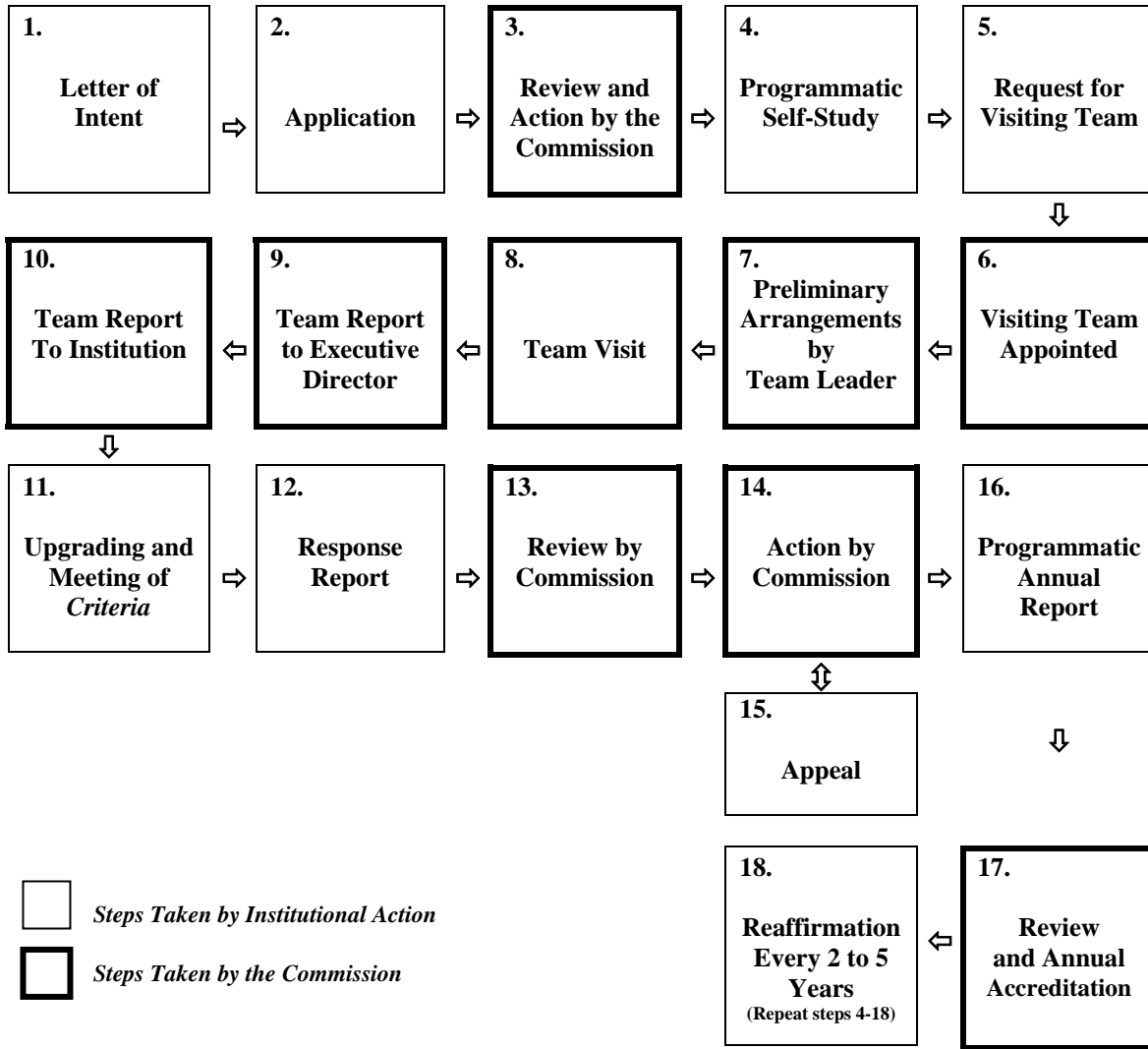
3 standard deviations below average

- Narrative report submitted with the annual report offering explanation, including mitigating circumstances, and a plan for improvement
- Submission of semi-annual status reports on plan for improvement of completion, placement, and/or licensure exam pass rates
- Attendance at a Commission Workshop on Program Outcomes or improvement of completion/placement/licensure exam pass rates
- Consultation in person or by telephone
- Issuance of a warning
- Conduct of a focused review visit

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THE PROGRAMMATIC ACCREDITATION PROCESS

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Application

1. Letter of intent to seek accreditation and to request application forms.
2. Application for programmatic accreditation.
3. Commission review of application. Application approval by Commission. If disapproved, appeal may be made to the Commission.
4. A self-study should be initiated as soon as possible after approval of the application. (Within two years after application approval, the institution must host an accreditation team visit. The career and technical department or program must have the on-site administrator or other full-time a Commission Self-Study and Annual Report Workshops within three to fifteen months prior to hosting the accreditation visiting team.)

Accreditation

5. The institution must submit a request to host an accreditation visiting team.
6. Team appointed by Commission staff.
7. Preliminary arrangements are made by the visiting team leader approximately 30 days prior to team visit.
8. An oral report is made to the institution at the end of the visit.
9. The written team report is sent to the Commission Executive Director by the team leader within 30 days of the visit.
10. The Executive Director sends team report to the institution.
11. The program makes changes necessary to meet the criteria.
12. The chief administrative officer submits three (3) copies of the response, if required, to the team report.
13. The Commission reviews the team report, response report, self-study, and report of readers.
14. The Commission may defer action and request additional documentation, grant accreditation, or deny accreditation. If accreditation is granted (based on the self-study, team report, and response report), the Commission will specify the number of years in the next reaffirmation cycle (two to five years). The year of reaffirmation may be changed for cause as determined by the Commission.
15. The institution may appeal a negative action to the Commission.

Annual Review

16. All institutions must submit an annual report for all accredited programs to the Commission.
17. Continued accreditation is determined annually by Commission approval of annual reports.
18. During the year prior to the year that ends the reaffirmation period, a representative of the career and technical department or program must attend a self-study workshop, begin another self-study, and request another team visit.

NOTE: Failure to submit an annual report or additional information regarding the annual report, if requested, by the due date established by the Commission shall be grounds for a program to lose its accreditation.

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DEFINITIONS

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Accreditation - A process by which quality is certified. As applied by the Commission, a self-regulatory process by which the Commission recognizes programs that have been found to meet or exceed stated criteria applicable to occupational education programs (quality-assessment).

Associate Degree—

1. The title “Associate of Applied Science” is awarded upon completion of a program designed to lead the individual directly to employment in a specific career. Although the objective of this degree is to enhance employment opportunities, some bachelors’ degree institutions have developed upper-division programs to recognize this degree for transfer purposes, and this trend is to be encouraged when appropriate. The title “Associate of Applied Science” may be used without designation or may be used with a designation to denote special fields of study.
2. “Associate of Technology” or the “Associate of _____ Technology” is conferred on students successfully completing degree requirements in programs of technical-occupational education. The word “Technology” may be preceded by “Applied” or an appropriate qualifying adjective.

Benchmark – a standard of excellence or achievement against which similar activities may be measured or judged. (Benchmarks for minimally-acceptable percentages of completion, placement, and licensure exam pass rates can be found within the Council’s annual report software and on the Council’s website – www.council.org.)

Career and Technical Department - A department of an educational institution, or in some special cases an institution, that has as its goal the preparation of individuals for employment and/or skill enhancement.

Career Development – Professional development and skill enhancements necessary for individual growth and life-long learning.

Clock Hour—A period of 60 minutes with a minimum of 50 minutes of instruction.

Competencies—The specialized knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for successful performance in a specific occupation.

Completer—A student who has demonstrated the competencies required for a program and has been awarded the appropriate credential (graduate completer) or has acquired sufficient competencies through a program to become employed in the field of education pursued or a related field as evidenced by such employment (non-graduate completer).

Course—Specific subject matter comprising part of a program for which instruction is offered within a specified time period.

Credential—A diploma, certificate, degree, or other official acknowledgment by an institution that a student has completed a program.

Distance Education Delivery Method - As defined, for the purposes of accreditation review, a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. Distance education may employ correspondence study or audio, video, or computer technologies.

Distance Education Program—a program that makes available 50% or more of its required instructional hours via distance education.

Distance Education Program—a program that makes available 50% or more of its required instructional hours via distance education.

Educational Quality - Determined on the basis of (1) the appropriateness of program objectives and (2) the effectiveness with which the program is utilizing its resources to achieve these objectives.

Eligibility Requirements – Requirements that define the kind of program considered by the Council to be a member of the universe and thus within the scope of accrediting activities for which the Council assumes responsibility.

Follow-Up – The act of making formal contact to obtain specified factual and/or perceptual information from a particular person or group of persons.

Full-Time Equivalent – Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) is a unit of measurement used by the Commission to define the amount of instruction that equates to one full-time student during one academic year. The Commission defines an FTE as 900 scheduled student contact clock hours, 45 quarter credit hours, or 30 semester credit hours of instruction.

Graduate—A student who has demonstrated the competencies required for a program and has been awarded the appropriate credential by the institution.

Hybrid Program—A program that makes available 50% or less of its required instructional hours via distance education.

Instruction—Planned activities directed by an instructor for the purpose of enabling students to acquire specific knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes. Instruction may be provided through lectures, laboratory or clinical exercises, distance education, or planned work-based activities.

Instructional Media—Any print or non-print learning resources (e.g., books, manuals, periodicals, computer software, films, videotapes, audio tapes, slides, and others) and the equipment and services necessary to use them.

Laboratory Instruction—An instructional setting in which students apply theories and principles learned during lectures in order to acquire the proficiency and dexterity that is required in the occupation for which the student is being prepared.

Lecture—Instruction by a qualified faculty member which imparts to students the theories, principles, and/or history of an academic or technical subject.

Non-traditional Provider of Education/Training – A unit operated within a public or private organization or agency other than an educational institution for the purpose of preparing individuals for employment and/or skill enhancement.

Occupational Advisory Committee—The occupational advisory committee (a) is composed of at least three members external to the institution, (b) meets at least twice annually with a majority of official members present, and (c) keeps minutes of each meeting to document their activities and recommendations. The occupational advisory committee may also perform the functions of the institutional advisory committee if only one occupational advisory committee is required for the institution.

Objectives of an Educational Program—A statement that specifies the knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes to be acquired by students through planned instructional activities.

Occupational Education Program - An education program designed to provide a sequence of educational and skill development experiences that lead to workplace competencies. (Such programs accredited by the Council are designed to prepare individuals for job entry, career advancement, and/or skill updating in specific occupations or clusters of occupations.)

Placement – A completer of a program who (1) is employed in the field of education/training pursued or in a related field, or (2) has received the appropriate credential and entered the military or continued his/her education.

Program—A combination of courses and related activities (e.g. laboratory activities and/or work-based activities) that lead to a credential and are offered by an institution to develop competencies required for a specific occupation.

Traditional Program—a program that requires all instructional hours to be completed on campus.

Withdrawal - A student who enrolled in an institution but withdrew before acquiring sufficient competencies for employment and before earning a credential in the field of education pursued or a related field.

Work-Based Activities—Structured learning activities conducted in work settings that are components of educational programs (e.g., externships, internships, clinical experiences, industrial cooperative education, and similar activities).

Workforce Development - Preparation determined by job market needs for those persons seeking initial entry into an occupation, training for continuation or advancement within an occupation, or entry into another occupation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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