ACEN Accreditation Manual

GENERAL INFORMATION

A publication of the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing

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INTRODUCTION

MISSION

The Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) supports the interests of nursing education, nursing practice, and the public by the functions of accreditation. Accreditation is a voluntary, peer-review, self-regulatory process by which non-governmental associations recognize educational institutions or programs that have been found to meet or exceed standards and criteria for educational quality. Accreditation also assists in the further improvement of the institutions or programs as related to resources invested, processes followed, and results achieved. The monitoring of certificate, diploma, and degree offerings is tied closely to state examination and licensing rules and to the oversight of preparation for work in the profession.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the ACEN is to provide specialized accreditation for all types of nursing programs, including clinical doctorate, master’s/post-master’s certificate, baccalaureate, associate, diploma, and practical nursing programs. The ACEN accredits nursing programs in secondary, postsecondary, and hospital-based governing organizations that offer certificates, diplomas, or degrees.

GOALS

The goals of the ACEN are to:

• Promulgate a common core of standards and criteria for the accreditation of nursing education programs.
• Strengthen educational quality through assistance to associated nursing education units by evaluation processes, functions, publications, and research.
• Advocate self-regulation in nursing education.
• Promote peer review.
• Foster educational equity, access, opportunity, mobility, and preparation for employment based upon type of nursing education.
• Serve as gatekeeper to Title IV-HEA programs for which the ACEN is the accrediting agency. (These include some practical nursing and all hospital-based diploma programs eligible to participate in programs administered by the United States Department of Education or other federal agencies.)

RECOGNITION

The ACEN is recognized as the accrediting body for all types of nursing education by:

• United States Department of Education (USDOE)
• Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
• Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA)
• Employers
National, regional, and specialized accreditors that oversee federal funding eligibility must be reviewed by the USDOE to ensure that the accrediting body meets specific standards established by Congress. The Secretary of Education for the USDOE is charged with review of accrediting bodies and providing recognition to those accrediting agencies that meet the Secretary of Education’s criteria. Students in institutions or programs accredited by a USDOE-recognized agency are eligible for federal financial aid assistance and other needed resources.

**BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION**

ACEN accreditation is a voluntary peer-review process intended to enhance quality improvement in nursing education. Accreditation:

- provides recognition that a nursing education program has been evaluated and periodically re-evaluated by a qualified, independent group of respected and competent peers.
- is a gateway to licensure, certification, and eligibility for entitlement programs.
- identifies areas needing development.
- fosters ongoing self-examination, re-evaluation, and focus on the future.
- aids in student recruitment and retention.
- assists employers seeking graduates who are competent nurses.
- facilitates career and education decision-making.
- promotes professional and educational mobility of program graduates.
- enables student eligibility for funding support from federal and state agencies.
- fulfills the eligibility requirement for applicants seeking advanced certification.

**PHILOSOPHY OF ACCREDITATION**

The ACEN accreditation program is founded on the belief that specialized accreditation contributes to the centrality of nursing for the public good and provides for the maintenance and enhancement of educational quality through continuous self-assessment, planning, and improvement. Accreditation indicates to the general public and to the educational community that a nursing program has clear and appropriate educational objectives and is working to achieve these objectives. Emphasis is placed upon the total nursing program and its compliance with established standards and criteria in the context of its mission/philosophy as well as current and future nursing practice.

Accrediting agencies share responsibility with faculty and clinicians for the development of accreditation standards and criteria, policies, and procedures for participation in accreditation and review of accreditation processes.

The ACEN supports the continuation and strengthening of voluntary specialized accreditation by peers as a principal means of public accountability and ongoing improvement. Specialized accreditation sets standards for programs and ensures, through the self-study process and accreditation review, the promotion of effective education and program improvement. Because the nursing education unit analysis is closely related to the governing organization itself, ACEN activities will, when possible, be coordinated with those of other officially recognized regional and specialized accrediting bodies.

Standards and criteria for accreditation, materials that document compliance, policies, and procedures are based on principles widely accepted and tested in general and professional
education. All those involved in the process must be aware of current developments in education and nursing; the effectiveness of the current standards, criteria, policies, and procedures; and the evidence of need for change. A systematic ongoing review of all components of the accreditation process is essential to ensure an up-to-date, reliable, and valid accrediting process.

HISTORY OF NURSING ACCREDITATION

1893 The American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses, forerunner of the National League for Nursing, was founded for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a universal standard of training for nurses.

1917 The National League of Nursing Education published Standard of Curriculum for Schools of Nursing.

1920 Accrediting activities in nursing education were begun by many different organizations.

1937 The National League of Nursing Education published A Curriculum Guide for Schools of Nursing, the last of its type by the organization.

1938 The National League of Nursing Education initiated accreditation for programs of nursing education for registered nursing.

1949 The National Nursing Accrediting Service was formed for the purpose of unifying accreditation activities in nursing. It was discontinued in 1952 when accreditation activities were consolidated under the National League for Nursing (NLN).

1952 The USDOE recognized the NLN and included it on the initial list of recognized accrediting agencies. NLN (later NLNAC) has been continually recognized by the U.S. Department of Education since this date.

1958 The NLN Board of Directors established a policy charging each educational council with the responsibility for developing its own accreditation program. The program was conducted through the three (3) NLN membership units: the Council of Baccalaureate and Higher Degree Programs; the Council of Diploma and Associate Degree Programs; (the Diploma and Associate Degree Programs separated into two (2) councils in 1965); and the Council of Practical Nursing Programs (1966). The accreditation program and services were administered by NLN professional staff.

1964 Federal funding for nursing education under the Nurse Training Act was contingent upon the compliance of schools of nursing with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

1977 The Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) recognized the NLN Accreditation Program.

1991 Outcome criteria were incorporated into Standards and Criteria for all accredited programs.

1995 The NLN Board of Governors approved the recommendation of the NLN Accreditation Committee to institute core Standards and Criteria.

1996 The NLN Board of Governors approved establishment of an independent entity within the organization to be known as the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC).

1997 The NLNAC, now the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), began operations with sole authority and accountability for carrying out the responsibilities inherent in the accreditation processes.
Fifteen (15) Commissioners were appointed: nine (9) nurse educators, three (3) nursing service representatives, and three (3) public members. The Commissioners assumed responsibilities for the management, financial decisions, policy-making, and general administration of the NLNAC.

The peer review process was strengthened with the formation of program-specific Evaluation Review Panels.

1998  The NLNAC continued collaborative work with specialty organizations to strengthen application of standards for advanced practice nursing programs. Advanced practice nurses were invited to serve as clinicians on the site visit teams.

1999  The Secretary of Education, USDOE, renewed NLNAC recognition as a nationally recognized accrediting agency for nursing education.

2000  The NLNAC received continuing recognition by the CHEA.

2001  The NLNAC was incorporated as a subsidiary of the NLN.

2002  The Secretary of Education, USDOE, renewed NLNAC recognition as a nationally recognized accrediting agency for nursing education.

2005  The NLNAC received continuing recognition by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).


2008  The Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education, expanded the scope of NLNAC’s recognition to include distance education.

2011  The NLNAC received continuing recognition by the CHEA.

2013  The name of the Commission was changed to the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN).

**PRODUCTS AND SERVICES**

- Initial accreditation and continuing accreditation site visits of approximately 175 nursing programs per year
- Continuous monitoring of more than 1,200 programs per year
- ACEN Accreditation Manual
  - General Information
  - Policies
  - Standards and Criteria/Glossary
- ACEN Directory of Accredited Nursing Programs (electronic database)
- *Bridges* (quarterly electronic newsletter)
- Forums/Workshops
  - Self-Study
  - Program Evaluator
  - Nurse Administrator
- Candidacy Program
- Mentoring by Professional Staff
- Report to Constituents
  - Analysis of ACEN Annual Reports
  - Analysis of Accreditation Cycles
- ACEN website: www.acenursing.org
ACEN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

THE COMMISSION

OVERALL STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION

The ACEN is governed by a 15-member Board of Commissioners. The Commissioners are elected by the representatives of ACEN-accredited nursing programs. The legal basis for the foundation and structure of the Commission is outlined in the Bylaws and the Articles of Incorporation. The ACEN is incorporated under the laws of the state of New York.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

- Nine (9) Commissioners are nurse educators representing ACEN-accredited programs, three (3) Commissioners represent the public, and three (3) Commissioners represent nursing service.
- Commissioners are diversified and ensure balanced representation from across identified constituencies insofar as possible.
- No Governor, officer, or employee of the NLN or employee of the ACEN may serve as a Commissioner.
- The Board of Commissioners sets accreditation policy and makes accreditation, administrative, budget, and policy decisions.
- Commissioners serve as chairpersons of the program-specific Evaluation Review Panels.
- Decision of accreditation status is made by the Commissioners based on review of program materials, the Site Visit Report, and the recommendation of the Evaluation Review Panel.

Names, credentials, and affiliations of Commissioners are available online at www.acenursing.org/acen-board-of-commissioners/.

Support Staff

ACEN Chief Executive Officer

Professional Staff

Administrative Staff

Peer Evaluators

ACEN Board of Commissioners
ACEN STAFF

The ACEN staff maintain operational functions of the office and support the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Board of Commissioners, and nursing programs. Names and credentials of staff are available online at www.acenursing.org/acen-staff-3.

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR ACADEMIC QUALITY OF POSTSECONDARY AND HIGHER DEGREE PROGRAMS IN NURSING

ACEN DEFINITION OF QUALITY

The core values of accreditation emphasize learning, community, responsibility, integrity, value, quality, and continuous improvement through reflection and analysis. They require the nursing program to measure itself by exacting standards, honor high aspiration and achievement, and expect all persons associated with the program to recognize their responsibility to provide a supportive and humane environment in which people interact with each other in a spirit of cooperation, openness, and mutual respect.

Accreditation standards are agreed-upon rules to measure quantity, extent, value, and quality. Criteria are statements that identify the variables that need to be examined in evaluation of a standard. The ACEN Standards and Criteria are presented to peer reviewers as statements that represent an accurate description of an accredited program.

Peer review is a long-established and effective component of program evaluation in educational settings. It is used to help determine which programs to accredit. Peer reviewers are familiar with the current thinking in the various program types, understand the curriculum rules and conventions, and are trained to identify program compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria.

Program-specific expertise is preserved at the point of documentation, program evaluation conducted by peers from like programs at the time of the site visit, during Evaluation Review Panel deliberations, and upon appeal.

Quality in education ensures high levels of opportunity for student learning and achievement. Accreditation is an affirmation of values central to thinking about postsecondary and higher education: appropriate mission, organizational structures, processes, and functions; resources aligned with core values; collegiality; and continuous self-improvement.

The ACEN accredits all types of nursing education programs in a variety of postsecondary and higher education settings including vocational-technical agencies, hospitals, for-profit institutions, professional schools, seminaries, colleges, universities, and other institutions that offer diplomas, certificates, and/or academic degrees.
ACEN ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

STANDARD 1
Mission and Administrative Capacity
The nursing education unit’s mission reflects the governing organization’s core values and is congruent with its strategic goals and objectives. The governing organization and program have administrative capacity resulting in effective delivery of the nursing program and achievement of identified outcomes.

STANDARD 2
Faculty and Staff
Qualified faculty and staff provide leadership and support necessary to attain the goals and outcomes of the nursing education unit.

STANDARD 3
Students
Student policies, development, and services support the goals and outcomes of the nursing education unit.

STANDARD 4
Curriculum
The curriculum prepares students to achieve the outcomes of the nursing education unit, including safe practice in contemporary health care environments.

STANDARD 5
Resources
Fiscal, physical, and learning resources promote the achievement of the goals and outcomes of the nursing education unit.

STANDARD 6
Outcomes
Evaluation of student learning demonstrates that graduates have achieved identified competencies consistent with the institutional mission and professional standards and that the outcomes of the nursing education unit have been achieved.

UNDERSTANDING STANDARDS AND CRITERIA IN THE EVALUATION OF NURSING EDUCATION UNITS

The singular function of nursing is the improvement of the human condition. Each certificate, diploma, or degree has an identifiable, discrete set of specific student learning outcomes and program outcomes. Postsecondary and higher education provide for the development of learners’ ability to think for themselves, master analytical problem-solving, apply scientific knowledge, and make value judgments within the context of the specific program type. Thus, education requires a broad academic orientation and depth and breadth of intellectual skills translated into competencies so as to fulfill nursing’s functions in all types of nursing.

Standards are the agreed-upon rules for the measurement of quantity, extent, value, and quality.
Criteria are statements that identify the variables that need to be examined in evaluation of a Standard.

The current version of the Accreditation Standards and Criteria becomes effective on the Commission’s approval date. Programs scheduled for review within 12 months of revision of the Standards and Criteria may elect to use the current or former version of the Standards and Criteria.

ACCREDITATION PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

PLANNING FOR ACCREDITATION

Nursing education units considering accreditation should contact the ACEN to begin the candidacy process. As part of this process, nursing education units will be assigned a member of the professional staff as their mentor. The mentoring service is provided to facilitate faculty self-review and planning. The nurse administrator, faculty of the program, and administrative officers of the governing organization determine when the program is ready to apply for candidacy and initial evaluation. The decision should be based on an in-depth self-study of the program in relation to the ACEN Standards and Criteria. When the ACEN Commission grants accreditation to a program, all students who graduated during or after the accreditation cycle during which the initial site visit was performed will be recognized as graduates of an accredited nursing program.

Note: Initial accreditation is effective as of the accreditation cycle in which the Board of Commissioners grants initial accreditation. Accreditation is not retroactive for students who graduated prior to the semester/quarter/term in which the initial accreditation site visit occurred.

*Fall Cycle: July 1 to December 31
Spring Cycle: January 1 to June 30

EVALUATION PROCESS

The ACEN accreditation process includes the following:

- Candidacy (for programs seeking initial accreditation)
- Program preparation of the Self-Study Report
- Team site visit for program evaluation by program-specific site visitors
- Site Visit Report
- Staff review of Site Visit Report
- Evaluation Review Panel with program-specific expertise
- Professional staff review of program and referral to the Board of Commissioners
- Commission accreditation decision
- Appeal Panel (when appropriate)

The ACEN process for the evaluation of nursing education programs is a comprehensive four-step process with the program self-review and Self-Study Report as the first step. The second step is the site visit conducted by peer evaluators resulting in the Site Visit Report. In the third step, a Evaluation Review Panel examines the reports written by and about the program (Self-
Study Report and Site Visit Report). The final step is a review of the process and the accreditation status decision determined by the ACEN Board of Commissioners.

**CANDIDACY PROCESS**

A nursing education unit seeking initial accreditation must apply for candidacy. Candidate status is granted after the ACEN professional staff review the nursing program’s potential to achieve ACEN accreditation. Programs applying for initial accreditation will be assigned an ACEN professional staff member once they have begun the candidacy process. A program seeking accreditation must:

1. Complete an application for candidacy and submit payment for the required fee.
2. Provide evidence of current approval from the state regulatory agency for nursing and the governing organization’s accreditation/approval status (where appropriate) is a requirement of this component of the process.
3. Submit a narrative presentation that includes:
   - Faculty academic and experiential qualifications;
   - The curriculum/program plan of study;
   - The systematic plan of evaluation; and
   - Catalog (where appropriate). See Guidelines for Candidacy Presentation available on the ACEN website (www.acenursing.org) under Resources for Nursing Programs.

All materials submitted are reviewed by the ACEN professional staff. Applicants are notified if approved for candidate status or given a deferral. A program that has achieved candidate status must complete the accreditation process within two (2) years by scheduling an initial accreditation site visit. Candidate status does not guarantee that a program will achieve initial accreditation. If deferred, the program has up to one (1) year to resubmit the candidacy presentation for reconsideration without incurring an additional fee. Upon resubmission, the program is either granted candidacy or disapproved. Disapproval occurs when the program has not provided sufficient evidence of the ability to become compliant with the ACEN Standards and Criteria during the candidacy period.

Programs that have achieved candidate status may indicate the following to potential students and interested members of the public:

“This nursing education program is a candidate for accreditation by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing.”

If a program’s candidacy expires prior to scheduling an initial accreditation site visit, then the program must restart the candidacy process to renew its candidacy status. The candidacy process can be restarted at any time.

*Additional information related to the preparation of the candidacy presentation is available online at www.acenursing.org.*

**INITIAL ACCREDITATION**

A governing organization that offers a program not previously accredited by the ACEN initiates the process through its chief executive officer. The chief executive officer of the governing organization for the nursing education unit must authorize the ACEN to conduct the
accreditation process by submitting the official authorization form sent from the Commission, which is included with the site visit information form. A program seeking initial accreditation must achieve candidacy status prior to scheduling the initial accreditation visit.

A nursing program may discontinue the initial accreditation process up to 12 weeks prior to the date of the site visit. Changes within 12 weeks of the scheduled site visit will result in the program being responsible for all expenses incurred for the site visit. A program seeking initial accreditation can also withdraw from the process at any point prior to being reviewed by the Board of Commissioners.

CONTINUING ACCREDITATION

Planning for continuing accreditation is an ongoing process. A program must be visited and re-evaluated at specified intervals to ensure continuing compliance with the Accreditation Standards and Criteria. The ACEN staff notify the program of a pending visit approximately one (1) year in advance. Dates for the site visit are scheduled in consultation with the nurse administrator, as the program must be in full operation during the visit.

Official authorization to conduct the ACEN accreditation process is secured from the chief executive officer of the governing organization and the nurse administrator for the nursing education unit. The ACEN will provide a site visit information form for the program to complete approximately one (1) year before the visit is to take place.

If the nurse administrator of an ACEN-accredited program chooses to cancel the accreditation process, notification of cancellation must be submitted in writing by the nurse administrator and the chief executive officer of the governing organization to the ACEN CEO. Refer to ACEN Policy #14 Reporting Substantive Changes for additional information related to cancellation of the accreditation process. The Board of Commissioners will then take formal action and remove the program from the official list of ACEN-accredited programs. Any changes made within 12 weeks of a scheduled site visit will result in the program being responsible for all expenses incurred.

If a program is notified about its need to comply with a Commission action and does not respond, the program will be removed from the official listings of ACEN-accredited programs by the Commission at its next scheduled meeting.

STAFF ASSISTANCE

The ACEN professional staff are available to assist programs preparing for accreditation site visits.

Self-Study Forums are offered annually to provide information about the accreditation processes and details regarding the preparation of the Self-Study Report. All programs seeking initial accreditation are expected to attend a Self-Study Forum; programs planning a continuing accreditation site visit are also invited to attend a Forum. Dates and locations are posted on the ACEN website: www.acenursing.org.
SELF-REVIEW AND SELF-STUDY REPORT

Any program preparing for accreditation must submit a Self-Study Report to demonstrate the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Accreditation Standards and Criteria.

The process of self-study represents the combined efforts of the governing organization administrators, nursing education unit administrators, faculty, staff, students, and other individuals concerned with the nursing program. All those associated with the program should participate in the self-study process. Broad participation leads to an understanding of the total program.

The Self-Study Report is a primary document used by the site visit team, the Evaluation Review Panels, and the Board of Commissioners to understand the nursing program.

- The report must be based on the ACEN Accreditation Standards and Criteria in effect at the time of review and the most recent edition of the ACEN Accreditation Manual. Accreditation Standards and Criteria become effective on the Commission’s approval date. Programs scheduled for review within 12 months of revision of the Standards and Criteria may elect to use the current or the former version of the Standards and Criteria.
- Faculty and administrators are responsible for presenting evidence that clearly indicates how the Standards and Criteria are being met. Members of the site visit team will use the Self-Study Report in preparation for their visit to the program.

Guidelines for the Preparation of the Self-Study Report are available online at www.acenursing.org.

THE SITE VISIT

The purpose of the accreditation site visit is to evaluate the nursing education unit by clarifying, verifying, and amplifying program materials as presented in the Self-Study Report. Based on these data, the site visit team will make a recommendation relative to the accreditation status of the nursing program(s).

The visit is an essential part of the accreditation process. It gives the program an opportunity to demonstrate and highlight information presented in the Self-Study Report and provides for interaction among all concerned: administrators, faculty, students, staff, and site visitors. In addition, the onsite visit allows site visitors an opportunity to see the nursing program first-hand. The site visitors conduct an independent analysis and makes professional judgments on the program’s compliance with the Standards and Criteria; the findings are documented in the Site Visit Report. The site visitors verify congruence between the Self-Study Report and the actual practices of the program so that the members of the Evaluation Review Panel and Board of Commissioners have a clear and complete understanding of the program.

Multiple Nursing Programs Within a Nursing Education Unit
The ACEN encourages nursing education units offering more than one (1) type of nursing program (clinical doctorate, master’s, baccalaureate, associate, diploma, and/or practical) to request that all programs be reviewed for accreditation at the same time. The nursing education unit will prepare one (1) Self-Study Report.
Collaborative and Coordinated Site Visits With Other Agencies

The ACEN welcomes the opportunity to cooperate with other accreditation and approval-granting agencies. The goal is to increase efficiency and decrease faculty workload while maximizing outcomes. Two (2) options are available: the coordinated and the collaborative visit.

To arrange either a collaborative or coordinated visit, the nurse administrator initiates the process by submitting a request to the ACEN. The staff then works with the nursing education unit to achieve their goal.

**Collaborative Visit**

The collaborative visit involves the establishment of one (1) site visit team that incorporates representatives from the ACEN and the other accreditation or approval-granting agency. Using the standards and criteria from both agencies, the program prepares one (1) Self-Study Report. A single agenda is established for the visit. At the conclusion of the site visit, the representatives of each agency on the visit team write individual reports that assess compliance with their respective standards and criteria or regulations.

**Coordinated Visit**

For a coordinated visit, the program prepares materials separately for each agency team. The two (2) teams share an agenda and conduct a site visit that meets each agency’s requirements. However, the representative from another agency is not a member of the ACEN site visit team. The ACEN team and the other representative may participate jointly in such activities as conferences with faculty, students, and other groups. Many of the activities of the ACEN team and the representative will be carried out separately as the purposes of ACEN accreditation may differ from those of other accrediting/approval-granting bodies. At the conclusion of the visit, each visit team develops a report that assesses compliance with its standards and criteria or regulations.

**Length of Visit**

Accreditation visits are typically scheduled for a minimum of three (3) days. However, the length depends on several factors, including size and complexity of the nursing education unit, geographical locations of the various resources used for student learning experiences, the number of nursing programs involved, and coordination of the visit with other agencies. Correspondence from the ACEN will indicate the inclusive dates of the visit.

**Assignment of Site Visit Team**

Each site visit is conducted by a team of nursing educators with program-specific expertise and, when appropriate a clinician. A site visit team for review of a single program typically has a minimum of three (3) members. Graduate programs offering advanced practice nursing options will have at least one (1) team member with current advanced practice certification.

The ACEN staff will select a team and notify the nurse administrator in advance of the visit. The nurse administrator is invited to contact ACEN staff if a possible conflict of interest is identified among team members. If a team member becomes ineligible or unable to serve, another site visitor with comparable qualifications will be appointed.
The ACEN staff will assign site visitors considering their expertise with multiple program factors, including but not limited to:

- Program type(s)
- Size of program and governing organization
- Method(s) of program delivery
- Carnegie classification
- Setting (urban, suburban, or rural)
- State
- Governance of the governing organization (public, private, religious affiliation, etc.)

**Team Chairperson**
A site visitor is eligible to be a team chairperson for an accreditation visit after serving in the role of team member a minimum of three (3) times.

**Responsibilities of the Team Chairperson**
The team chairperson assumes the following responsibilities:

- Acts as official spokesperson for the team
- Reviews all content of the ACEN accreditation information packet upon receipt
- Coordinates planning with the team members
- Conducts the team orientation and subsequent team meetings and conferences
- Receives and reviews the electronic files from the nurse administrator listing information on all individuals and groups interviewed by the team and all documents reviewed in the evidence room
- Allocates responsibilities for various activities to ensure optimum utilization of team members and adequate coverage of all areas during the visit, including interviews and conferences with key personnel on and off campus
- Requests additional information as necessary
- Notifies the nurse administrator of the arrival of the team and plans the time for the first meeting
- Conducts periodic conferences with the nurse administrator
- Arranges for the exit meeting with the nurse administrator and any persons the nurse administrator invites to be present
- Collates and edits the Site Visit Report to ensure completeness and clarity
- E-mails the completed Site Visit Report to the ACEN within one (1) week following the site visit
- Is available for telephone contact by the Evaluation Review Panel at the time of the program’s review
- Assumes the additional responsibilities stated under “Responsibilities of the Team Members”

**Responsibilities of the Team Members**
The team member assumes the following responsibilities:

When the ACEN accreditation information packet is received:

- Reviews all content of the packet
When the materials from the program are received:
  - Reviews all materials
  - Prepares a draft copy of the report findings and submits draft to the team chair for areas as assigned
  - Makes a list of findings from the report that require additional verification, amplification, or verification at the time of the site visit

Upon arrival at the site:
  - Assumes responsibility to collect data cooperatively and make observations
  - Further develops Site Visit Report based on findings of the onsite visit
  - Participates in the exit meeting with the nurse administrator and any persons invited to be present

After the visit:
  - Retains a copy of the Self-Study Report, Catalog, Site Visit Report, and any other resource materials used/developed during the site visit until the Commission’s decision is finalized
  - Reviews materials in preparation for contact by the Evaluation Review Panel
  - Is available for telephone contact by the Evaluation Review Panel at the time of the program’s review

Responsibilities of the Nursing Education Unit
  - Provides the team chair with an electronic file that lists the names, credentials, and titles of individuals and group members interviewed by the site visitors on site
  - Provides the team chair with an electronic file listing all documents available in the evidence room by defined category
  - Provides computers and printer(s) for the team to use throughout the visit
  - Establishes a room in which materials for the site visitors are assembled, where the team can read and work during the period of the visit
  - Obtains any necessary written permissions required prior to the visit (e.g., review of records and visits to clinical agencies)
  - Assembles the following materials in the evidence room:
    - Annual reports to the administration of the governing organization and to the state regulatory agency for nursing
    - Budgets
    - Class and clinical schedules for the current academic term
    - Complete course syllabi, outlines, and materials, including samples of examinations and evaluation forms
    - Faculty handbook
    - Faculty curricula vitae
    - Minutes of faculty and committee meetings for the past two (2) to three (3) years
    - Most recent accrediting agency report and approval letter for the governing organization
    - Results of standardized tests, licensure examinations, and/or certification examinations
    - Most recent state regulatory agency for nursing report(s) to the program and approval letter
    - Samples of student and faculty projects
    - Student handbook
    - Clinical agency contracts
Data/evidence to support the systematic evaluation plan
- Other materials the faculty deem essential to the site visitors’ understanding of the nursing education unit and its program(s)

These materials will be used during the visit and left with the nursing education unit upon completion of the visit. Site visitors will ask to review records of faculty, students, and recent graduates. The student records include both academic and financial aid. These records will be reviewed in the offices where they are filed.

Programs for which all or part of the curriculum is delivered in a language other than English should make provisions for an interpreter to be present throughout the site visit and to make certain that all program documents are available in English for review by the site visitors.

Additional information related to the materials for the evidence room is available online at www.acenursing.org.

Visit Arrangements

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<th>Area</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
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| Lodging  | Nurse administrator will make hotel reservations for the site visitors and notify the team chair.  
- Each visitor is to have a separate hotel room in close proximity to each other; availability of restaurant facilities is essential.  
- The program is responsible for additional housing costs above $150.00 per night unless approved by the ACEN. |
|          | Site Visitor  
- Individual site visitors will pay for the hotel accommodations and be reimbursed by the ACEN. |
| Travel   | The program is responsible for arrangements for transportation to and from the airport/hotel.  
- Any intra-visit travel expenses and arrangements are also the responsibility of the program. |
|          | Site Visitor  
- All persons traveling on ACEN business are expected to use common carriers (economy/coach class or equivalent rates).  
- Reservations, whether by air, bus, or train, are to be reserved and purchased through the ACEN-designated travel agency at least six (6) weeks in advance of the site visit.  
- A written request to use a personal automobile is required in advance of the visit. |
| Food     | Food during the visit is the responsibility of each site visitor and will be reimbursed by the ACEN after the visit based on current ACEN policy. |
| Fees     | The ACEN will invoice the program according to the prevailing fee schedule prior to the accreditation visit.  
- Payment is expected prior to the visit, or the accreditation visit will be canceled. |
|          | Site Visitor  
- All persons traveling on ACEN business are expected to use common carriers (economy/coach class or equivalent rates).  
- Reservations, whether by air, bus, or train, are to be reserved and purchased through the ACEN-designated travel agency at least six (6) weeks in advance of the site visit.  
- A written request to use a personal automobile is required in advance of the visit. |
Agenda for the Visit

At least six (6) weeks prior to the scheduled visit, a tentative agenda for the visit is prepared by the nursing education unit and sent to the site visit team chairperson along with a copy of the class and clinical laboratory schedules and the completed technology assessment form. Activities typically planned to take place during the visit include:

- Preliminary, interim, and closing meetings with the nurse administrator (and assistants)
- Meetings with:
  - faculty
  - administrative officers of the governing organization
  - nursing students
  - the public for third-party comments
  - student support service personnel
  - nursing service personnel (as appropriate)
- Visits to:
  - appropriate facilities and resources
  - selected clinical agencies to observe and meet with students
- Review of:
  - curricular and other materials prepared by the faculty
  - appropriate records of faculty, students, and recent graduates
  - additional data to clarify and amplify the SSR
- Classroom and clinical observations

Visiting Off-Site Location(s) of the Nursing Program

Prior to the visit, programs with branch campuses or off-campus instructional sites must discuss with the site visit team chairperson alternative methods for the visiting team to evaluate additional locations on which the program is offered. If locations are more than one (1) hour apart in driving distance, the nurse administrator should communicate with the ACEN professional staff regarding visits to the additional locations.

THE SITE VISIT REPORT

The site visit team chairperson is responsible for presenting an accurate, complete, and well-organized report to the ACEN one (1) week after the conclusion of the site visit. Team members review the final report prior to submission to the ACEN.

Additional information related to the preparation of the Site Visit Report is available online for site visitors at www.acenursing.org.

ACEN Staff Review

All Site Visit Reports are reviewed by the ACEN professional staff. If questions arise, the team chairperson is contacted for clarification.

A draft copy of the report is mailed to the nurse administrator of the nursing education unit for review and correction of errors of fact within eight (8) weeks after the conclusion of the site visit. An e-mail with the completed nurse administrator response form attached must be received by the ACEN within one (1) week after the nursing education unit receives the draft report. Substantive comments are shared with the team chairperson, who then decides whether the report is to be changed. The corrected final Site Visit Report and the nurse administrator response form will become part of the permanent materials relating to the accreditation visit.
The final Site Visit Report will be sent to the nurse administrator and the site visit team members prior to the Evaluation Review Panel meeting.

EVALUATION REVIEW PANEL

The Evaluation Review Panel (ERP) is appointed by the ACEN Board of Commissioners. The role of the ERP is to ensure that the process of peer evaluation has been carried out according to the Accreditation Standards and Criteria. ERP make professional judgments based on its own independent analysis for compliance with the Standards and Criteria and to ensure the consistent application of the Standards and Criteria among programs of the same type. The Panel members review the findings of the site visit team as presented in the Site Visit Report compared to the program self-study and catalog and make a recommendation for accreditation status to the Board of Commissioners.

The role of the Evaluation Review Panel is to validate the work of the site visitors and extend it by noting points of agreement and raising any questions where disagreement or a lack of clarity exists. In the latter case, site visitors are available by telephone during ERP deliberations and may enter into discussion with the Panel to assure an accurate understanding of the Site Visit Report. The aim is to provide consistency in the recommendations for the program type. The role of the professional staff is to facilitate the work of both review groups.

Panelists determine the adequacy of the evidence to support each Standard and Criterion. The purpose is to see that the ACEN Standards and Criteria are applied consistently across all programs reviewed by the Panel. Finally, they make a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners on the accreditation status of each program.

Nursing Program Representative Attendance at the Evaluation Review Panel Meeting
The nurse administrator and one (1) additional program representative may attend the deliberations of the Evaluation Review Panel about the program in person or by telephone conference. The attendees are observers during the presentation of the program, ERP deliberations, and vote; attendees will not be asked to respond to questions or to clarify information. At the conclusion of the ERP deliberations, the nurse administrator is invited to address the Panel.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

The Board of Commissioners has the sole authority to determine the accreditation status of programs. Composed of nurse educators, nursing clinicians/practitioners, and public members, the Board of Commissioners bases its decisions on its own independent analysis and professional judgment for complete and consistent application of the Accreditation Standards and Criteria within and across program types. The full Board of Commissioners makes the final accreditation decision at its next regularly scheduled meeting. To assist the nursing program in future planning, a copy of the Summary of Deliberations of the Evaluation Review Panel is forwarded to the program along with the Commission decision letter. Documents relative to developments occurring after the site visit may be used in the deliberations. In cases where accreditation is denied, programs have the opportunity to present their case in a full and impartial hearing before an independent Appeal Panel.
PEER EVALUATORS

Peer evaluators make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners. Peer evaluators are knowledgeable about common, contemporary, and best practices within the various program types, appropriate curricula, and conventions and current trends in healthcare, nursing education, and/or nursing practice.

Eligibility for Selection as a Peer Evaluator

Eligibility to serve as an ACEN peer evaluator is dependent on the following requirements:

See ACEN Policy #1 Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest
See ACEN Policy #2 Representation on the Site Visit Teams, Evaluation Review Panels, and Board of Commissioners

Academic Credentials:
Clinical Doctorate Programs
Earned doctoral degree from a regionally accredited college/university and a graduate degree with a major in nursing

Master’s Degree Programs
Earned doctoral degree from a regionally accredited college/university and a graduate degree with a major in nursing

Baccalaureate Degree Programs
Earned doctoral degree from a regionally accredited college/university and a graduate degree with a major in nursing

Associate Degree Programs
Graduate degree with a major in nursing

Diploma Programs
Graduate degree with a major in nursing

Practical Programs
Graduate degree with a major in nursing

Nurse Clinician
Graduate degree with a major in nursing

Experience:
Nurse Educator
1. Currently hold a full-time faculty or administrative appointment in an ACEN-accredited program.

2. Previously held a full-time faculty or administrative appointment in an ACEN-accredited program and now holds a part-time faculty or administrative appointment in an ACEN-accredited program.

3. Held a full-time faculty or administrative appointment in an ACEN-accredited program and is retired for no more than two years from this position.

4. Held a full-time faculty or administrative appointment in an ACEN-accredited program and then held a part-time faculty or administrative appointment in an ACEN-accredited program and is retired for no more than two years from the part-time position.
• Knowledge of postsecondary and/or higher education; curriculum and instructional methods; current issues in nursing education and practice.
• Expertise in communication, group dynamics, information literacy, use of technology, best practices in educational and clinical settings.
• Contributions in scholarship/research, practice, community service, professional service.

Nurse Clinician
Full-time or part-time time position in a clinical practice environment

• Knowledge of current nursing practice, contemporary issues in healthcare settings, transition of new graduates into nursing practice.
• Expertise in communication, group dynamics, information literacy, use of technology, best practices for patient health and safety.
• Contributions in scholarship/research, practice, community service, professional service.

We encourage you to self-nominate or nominate nurse educators and nurse clinicians/practitioners to serve as a peer evaluator. Please send your nomination to peerevaluator@acenursing.org.

Peer Evaluator

Selection
All peer evaluators are selected through mechanisms and criteria established by the ACEN.

Individuals identified by staff, nominated by a colleague, or self-nominated must submit a letter of interest, current curriculum vitae/resume, and a letter of recommendation. After ACEN staff review of submitted materials, selected individuals will be invited to become peer evaluator and must participate in the peer evaluator professional development offered by the ACEN.

Appointment
Peer evaluators are eligible to serve for an indefinite period of time if they receive ongoing positive site visit performance evaluations and remain current with the accreditation process.

Continuing Eligibility
A peer evaluator who:
• Retires may continue to serve up to two (2) additional years if she/he remains current in nursing education and the accreditation process.
• Is no longer affiliated with a nursing education program or nursing service will be ineligible to continue as a peer evaluator.
• Accepts a position in a nursing program not accredited by the ACEN will be ineligible to continue as a peer evaluator.

Evaluation
Peer evaluators are evaluated by the members of the site visit team and the nursing education unit following each site visit.

Preparation
Briefing sessions are conducted by telephone conference call for all peer evaluators prior to the assigned visit each accreditation cycle.

**Honorarium**
An honorarium will be provided to the peer evaluator after a visit is completed.

**Evaluation Review Panel Members**

**Selection**
Members of the ERP and alternate members are program-specific and appointed by the Board of Commissioners. The ACEN professional staff review candidates based on information from current members of the ERP, peer evaluators, Commissioners, and accredited programs and recommend their names to the Board of Commissioners. Members of the ERP and alternate members must be eligible peer evaluators.

**Appointment**
Members of the ERP serve for a three-year term and may be appointed to a second consecutive term. Alternate members of the ERP may serve indefinitely. Panel vacancies are filled by program-specific peer evaluators selected from the list of alternate members.

**Preparation**
Members of the ERP are expected to participate in a briefing session held to orient new Panel members and update the continuing Panel members.

**Appeal Panel Members**

**Selection**
Members of the Appeal Panel must have knowledge of and experience with the peer-review process. The nurse educator and nursing clinicians/practitioners members must be currently eligible peer evaluators. Commissioners cannot serve on the Appeal Panel.

**Appointment**
The Appeal Panel consists of individuals drawn from a Board of Commissioners-approved list of the individuals qualified to serve as members of the Appeal Panel. See ACEN Policy #10 Appeal Process and Submission and Review of New Financial Information Subsequent to Adverse Action.