



**ACEN**

Accreditation Commission  
for Education in Nursing

# ACCREDITATION MANUAL

## Section II Policies

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# **ACEN Accreditation Manual**

## **POLICIES**

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## **POLICY #1**

# **CODE OF CONDUCT AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

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To ensure that all matters dealing with the accreditation of programs by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) are conducted with integrity, fairness, impartiality, and objectivity, the ACEN has adopted this policy addressing conflict of interest, conduct, and confidentiality.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST FOR PEER EVALUATORS**

In all circumstances, not only conflicts of interest, but also the appearance of conflicts of interest, must be avoided in all circumstances. All site visitors, Evaluation Review Panel members, Commissioners, Appeal Panel members, and any other individuals who act on behalf of the ACEN shall not have direct involvement with and/or participate in any decision-making capacity for a nursing program if they have an actual or potential conflict of interest with the program. Actual or potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Maintaining employment with or serving as a graduate advisee/advisor involving the governing organization that is under review;
2. Being a current student, former student, or graduate of the governing organization that is under review;
3. Maintaining employment in the same state as the nursing education unit that is under review;
4. Having served as a peer evaluator in the past five (5) years on any ACEN accreditation matter involving the nursing program that is under review;
5. Having served as a consultant in the past five (5) years on any accreditation matters involving the governing organization, nursing education unit, or nursing program that is under review;
6. Having jointly authored research or literature, participated in a common consortium, or been involved in special research with current nursing program faculty of the program that is under review;
7. Having served in an evaluation role in the past five (5) years for an agency other than the ACEN regarding the same governing organization, nursing education unit, or nursing program that is under review, including but not limited to membership on the state regulatory agency for nursing site visit teams, regional accreditation teams, or evaluation committees for boards of trustees or regents;
8. Having been paid or otherwise profited or appeared to profit from service in the past five (5) years to the nursing education unit or nursing program that is under review;
9. Having affiliations or close personal or professional relationships in the past five (5) years with key personnel in the governing organization, nursing education unit, or nursing program that is under review;
10. Having immediate family members who are current employees, board members, or students enrolled at the governing organization that is under review;

11. Having primary employer that is a non-ACEN accredited nursing program.
12. Having a current financial interest in the governing organization that is under review, including but not limited to ownership of shares of stock in the governing organization or any parent of the governing organization, excepting shares or interests held indirectly, such as in mutual funds, insurance policies, or blind trusts. In addition, having any immediate family members with any of the above financial interests; and
13. Having any other relationship or reason that could serve as an impediment to rendering an impartial, objective professional judgment regarding the nursing program that is under review.

## **CONDUCT AND ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR NURSING PROGRAMS AND PEER EVALUATORS**

### Responsibilities of Nursing Programs Seeking Accreditation

1. It is the responsibility of each nursing program to facilitate a thorough and objective appraisal of its nursing program.
2. Nursing programs may veto a peer evaluator if it can be demonstrated, in writing, that an actual or a potential conflict of interest exists.
3. Any perceived inadequacies of the ACEN procedures or processes should be reported by the nurse administrator of the nursing program to the ACEN Chief Executive Officer at the time of the occurrence rather than withheld until action has been taken.

### Responsibilities of Peer Evaluators

1. Any Commissioner or member of the Evaluation Review Panel who was a member of a site visit team for a nursing program under consideration or resides in or is currently employed in the same state as the program under consideration must recuse her/himself from the Evaluation Review Panel or Commission discussion about the program and abstain from voting.
2. When the nursing program of an Evaluation Review Panel is being considered for accreditation or appeal, the individual may not serve on the Evaluation Review Panel during that accreditation cycle. When the nursing program with which a Commissioner is employed is being considered for accreditation or appeal, the Commissioner will recuse her/himself from the portion of the Commission meeting agenda concerned with the evaluation of that program and abstain from voting.
3. Commissioners, Evaluation Review Panel members, and site visitors will be reminded of the confidentiality of all information pertaining to the review of programs and the need to avoid any actions that might give the appearance of a conflict of interest or could reasonably be perceived as affecting their objectivity. Commissioners, Evaluation Review Panel members, and site visitors are required to refrain from accepting membership on a team, recuse themselves from the discussion during the review of any program if their presence would constitute or appear to constitute a conflict of interest, and abstain from voting if a conflict of interest is identified.
4. To avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest, serving as a site visitor for another specialized accrediting agency shall preclude serving as a Commissioner, Evaluation Review Panel member, or site visitor for the ACEN. An Evaluation Review Panel member or site visitor who has served in a similar capacity for another specialized accrediting agency may be eligible to serve as an

ACEN Evaluation Review Panel member or site visitor after a period of one (1) year has elapsed since the last review activity for the other organization.

#### Actions to be Avoided by Peer Evaluators

1. Advertising of one's status as a site visitor, Evaluation Review Panel member, Commissioner, or Appeal Panel member for the purpose of consulting;
2. Soliciting consultation arrangements with programs preparing for accreditation review;
3. Giving advice to a nursing program or consulting for a nursing program for a period of two (2) years after serving as a peer evaluator on any ACEN accreditation matter; and
4. Offering definitive answers related to ACEN policies and procedures or Accreditation Standards and Criteria.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST, CONDUCT, AND ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR ACEN STAFF**

In all circumstances, not only conflicts of interest, but also the appearance of conflicts of interest, must be avoided in all circumstances. No staff member shall have direct involvement with a nursing program if they have an actual or potential conflict of interest with the program.

Staff members should inform the ACEN Chief Executive Officer where an actual or potential conflict of interest exists. A conflict of interest exists if a staff member:

1. Was a compensated consultant, appointee, employee of, or candidate for employment at the governing organization, nursing education unit, or nursing program within the past five (5) years;
2. Is a graduate of the governing organization;
3. Has a close personal or familial relationship with persons at the governing organization;
4. Has a strong bias regarding the governing organization, nursing education unit, or nursing program;
5. Has any other relationship or reason that could serve as an impediment to acting in an impartial, objective professional manner toward the governing organization, nursing education unit, or nursing program; or
6. Has a current financial interest in the governing organization under review, including but not limited to ownership of shares of stock in the governing organization or any parent of the governing organization, excepting shares or interests held indirectly, such as in mutual funds, insurance policies, or blind trusts, or has any immediate family members with any of the aforementioned financial interests.

In addition, staff members are prohibited from accepting fees, awards, or honorary degrees from a governing organization with a nursing program that is accredited by the ACEN.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY AND COMMUNICATIONS FOR PEER EVALUATORS AND ACEN STAFF**

To ensure that all matters dealing with the accreditation of nursing programs are conducted with integrity, fairness, impartiality, and objectivity, the ACEN has adopted this confidentiality policy. Individuals who participate in ACEN activities, including but not limited to site visitors, Evaluation Review Panel members, Commissioners, Appeal Panel members, and ACEN staff members, must maintain confidentiality with regards to all non-public information related to the accreditation review and consideration of a nursing program by the ACEN. Accordingly, site visitors, Evaluation Review Panel members, Commissioners, Appeal Panel members, and ACEN staff members shall conduct themselves as follows:

1. Documents, reports, and other materials prepared by the program for ACEN action should be treated as confidential materials in the absence of specific policies that make clear the degree and extent of their exposure. The ACEN will release materials in response to a valid court order or otherwise as may be required by law.
2. All materials pertinent to the nursing program under review are considered confidential materials prepared for use by the ACEN and should not be shown to or discussed with anyone other than site visitors, Evaluation Review Panel members, Commissioners, Appeal Panel members, and/or ACEN staff members as appropriate and when necessary.
3. The accreditation decision issued by the ACEN Board of Commissioners will be communicated to the program in writing by the ACEN Chief Executive Officer.
4. A site visitor, Evaluation Review Panel member, Commissioner, Appeal Panel member, or ACEN staff member shall not share with a governing organization/nursing program employee or any other person of the review proceedings.

Any request by a site visitor for additional information from the governing organization/nursing program following an accreditation visit must be directed to the ACEN professional staff. There will be no direct communication between a site visitor, Evaluation Review Panel member, Commissioner, Appeal Panel member and the governing organization and/or nursing program under review except in preparation for an upcoming accreditation visit.

Policy #1 History  
Revised November 2015  
Edited October 2016

**DISCLOSURE MEMORANDUM AND COMMITMENT TO COMPLY WITH  
ACEN CODE OF CONDUCT AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY #1**

(To be signed prior to each assignment or at each meeting and signed by ACEN staff annually)

**TO:** Site Visitor, Evaluation Review Panel Member, Commissioner, Appeal Panel Member, and ACEN Staff

**DATE:** (Each ACEN activity)

I have received and read the ACEN Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy #1 and agree to comply in all respects with this Policy.

I understand my duties to avoid any actual conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest regarding any ACEN-accredited program. I understand that I shall not ever have direct involvement with and/or participate in any decision-making capacity for a nursing program if I have an actual or potential conflict of interest with the program. I further understand that I have a duty to disclose an actual or potential conflict of interest as described in Policy #1 that must be exercised as soon as the conflict becomes apparent. Accordingly, (1) I will not vote on any nursing program status in which I have an actual or potential conflict of interest with the governing organization, nursing education unit, or nursing program; (2) I will not participate in a site visit to a nursing program in which I have an actual or potential conflict of interest with the governing organization, nursing education unit, or nursing program; (3) I will recuse myself and will not participate in the discussion of, visit to, or vote on any nursing program in which I have an actual or potential conflict of interest with the governing organization, nursing education unit, or nursing program.

I also understand and agree to all of Policy #1's provisions related to my conduct and my obligation to maintain confidentiality of all information regarding each nursing program accredited by the ACEN.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **POLICY #2**

# **REPRESENTATION ON SITE VISIT TEAMS, EVALUATION REVIEW PANELS AND THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

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Site visit teams, Evaluation Review Panels, and the ACEN Board of Commissioners are composed of nurse educators and nursing clinicians/practitioners. Evaluation Review Panels and the ACEN Board of Commissioners are composed of nurse educators, nursing clinicians/practitioners, and members of the public.

### **NURSE EDUCATORS**

Nurse educators work in the classroom, laboratory, and/or practice settings. They are responsible for educating nursing students at all levels of nursing practice. Nurse educators are responsible for designing, implementing, evaluating, and revising nursing education programs that lead to a certificate, diploma, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, master's degree, post-master's certificate, clinical doctorate, and/or DNP specialist certificate.

Nurse educators are individuals who:

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 hold a part-time faculty or administrative appointment in an ACEN-accredited program;
3. Previously held a full-time faculty or administrative appointment in an ACEN-accredited program and have been retired for no more than two (2) years from this position; or
4. Previously held a full-time faculty or administrative appointment in an ACEN-accredited program and subsequently held a part-time faculty or administrative appointment in an ACEN-accredited program and have been retired for no more than two (2) years from the part-time position.

Nurse educators are eligible to serve on a site visit team as a team member or team chair, the Evaluation Review Panel as a member, and the ACEN Board of Commissioners. Nurse educators elected to the ACEN Board of Commissioners may serve as chair of an Evaluation Review Panel.

### **NURSING CLINICIANS/PRACTITIONERS**

Nurse clinicians/practitioners are licensed nurses who currently hold a full- or part-time position in a clinical practice environment. Nurse clinicians/practitioners are responsible and accountable for organizing, planning, assigning, and overseeing care of individuals, families, groups, and communities.

Nurse clinicians/practitioners are eligible to serve on a site visit team as a team member or team chair, Evaluation Review Panel as a member, and the ACEN Board of Commissioners. Nurse clinicians/practitioners elected to the ACEN Board of Commissioners may serve as chair of an Evaluation Review Panel.

### **PUBLIC MEMBERS**

Public members are individuals with no connection to the discipline of nursing. An individual representing the public may not be:

1. An employee, owner, or shareholder of a governing organization with any accredited or non-accredited nursing program or candidate/applicant nursing program;
2. A member of the governing board for a governing organization with any accredited or non-accredited nursing program or candidate/applicant nursing program;
3. A consultant to any accredited or non-accredited nursing program or candidate/ applicant nursing program;
4. Affiliated or associated with any nursing accreditation agency or nursing organization, such as the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), *American Nurses Association (ANA)*, or National League for Nursing (NLN); or
5. A spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in the above statements.

Public members are eligible to serve on the ACEN Board of Commissioners. Public members elected to the ACEN Board of Commissioners may serve as chair of an Evaluation Review Panel.

The ACEN Chief Executive Officer reserves the right to appoint one (1) or more special members who may not be a nurse educator or clinician to (1) a site visit team or (2) an Evaluation Review Panel. The special member or members may have expertise in an area that a nurse educator and/or clinician typically would not have. The governing organization/nursing program is responsible for all costs of the special members serving on the site visit team.

The ACEN Chief Executive Officer reserves the right to have a professional staff member accompany a site visit team. The professional staff member would offer guidance to the site visitors. The governing organization/nursing program is responsible for all costs of the professional staff member accompanying the site visit team.

Policy #2 History  
Revised November 2015  
Revised October 2016

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## **POLICY #3**

### **ELIGIBILITY FOR ACCREDITATION**

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To be eligible for initial or continuing accreditation, a nursing program must demonstrate that it meets or continues to meet the following eligibility requirements of the ACEN:

1. The governing organization/institution offering the program:
  - a. is legally authorized to provide a postsecondary education program in the state in which the institution/nursing program is physically located; and
  - b. is legally authorized to grant the credential (degree, diploma, or certificate) to the nursing program seeking accreditation.

Once eligibility is established, the nursing program must demonstrate that it meets the ACEN Accreditation Standards.

2. The governing organization/institution offering the nursing program and granting the credential is accredited or approved for candidacy (or status equivalent to candidacy) by an appropriate agency.

If the governing organization has candidate status (or a status equivalent to candidacy status) with an accrediting agency, then the governing organization/institution must achieve initial accreditation with the agency prior to the nursing education unit hosting an initial accreditation visit with the ACEN.

In order to maintain eligibility for ACEN accreditation, the governing organization/ institution must earn accreditation within the appropriate agency's timeframe and, once earned, the governing organization/institution must continuously hold accreditation/approval by its appropriate agency.

3. The ACEN will accredit a nursing program when it:
  - a. Is administered by a college, university, or technical/vocational governing organization/institution that is part of the system of higher education; grants a diploma, certificate, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, master's degree, post-master's certificate, clinical doctorate degree in nursing, or DNP specialist certificate; and the college, university, or technical/vocational governing organization/institution holds institutional accreditation through an [ACEN-recognized institutional accrediting agency](http://www.acenursing.org/institutional-accrediting-agencies) ([www.acenursing.org/institutional-accrediting-agencies](http://www.acenursing.org/institutional-accrediting-agencies)).
  - b. Is administered by a vocational/technical/career school or public school system/district; grants a postsecondary certificate; and the vocational/technical/career school or public school system/district holds institutional accreditation through an [ACEN-recognized institutional accrediting agency](#), or the governing organization is supervised by a state education department/public school system/district.

If the nursing program is administered by a vocational/technical/career school or public school system/district and grants a postsecondary certificate, the governing organization/institution/nursing program may use ACEN accreditation to establish eligibility to participate in Title IV programs of the Higher Education Act of 1965 as amended. If the governing organization's/institution's accrediting agency is recognized by the U.S. Department of



Education to establish Title IV eligibility, the ACEN may not be used to establish Title IV eligibility.

- c. Is administered by a hospital; grants a diploma, certificate, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, master's degree, post-master's certificate, clinical doctorate in nursing degree, or DNP specialist certificate; and the hospital holds institutional accreditation through an [ACEN-recognized institutional accrediting agency](#).

If the nursing program is administered by a hospital and grants a diploma, certificate, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, master's degree, post-master's certificate, clinical doctorate in nursing, or DNP specialist certificate, the governing organization/institution/nursing program may use ACEN accreditation to establish eligibility to participate in Title IV programs of the Higher Education Act of 1965 as amended. If the governing organization's/institution's accrediting agency is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to establish Title IV eligibility, the ACEN may not be used to establish Title IV eligibility.

- d. Is administered by an independent college, university, or technical/vocational governing organization/institution; grants a diploma, certificate, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, master's degree, post-master's certificate, clinical doctorate in nursing degree, or DNP specialist certificate; and the college, university, or technical/vocational governing organization/institution holds institutional accreditation through an [ACEN-recognized institutional accrediting agency](#).
4. The nursing program must be currently approved without qualification by the state agency or agencies that has or have legal authority for education programs in nursing. This policy is not applicable to those programs in nursing over which a state regulatory agency that has legal authority for education programs in nursing has no jurisdiction (e.g., selected master's degree programs or programs admitting previously licensed registered nurses).
  5. For initial accreditation of a nursing program without previous graduates, the initial accreditation site visit for the nursing program should occur while the initial cohort of students is enrolled in either (1) the final semester/quarter/term of the nursing program or (2) the semester/quarter/term prior to the final semester/quarter/term of the nursing program.

For initial accreditation of a nursing program with previous graduates, the initial accreditation site visit can occur during any semester/quarter/term of the candidacy period.

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.**

6. A nursing program that offers more than one (1) option/track must be reviewed by the ACEN in its entirety. All nursing program options/tracks that lead to the same degree or certificate within a single governing organization/institution must be accredited by the ACEN for any one (1) of the options/tracks to be accredited. The nursing program may not select individual options/tracks within the same certificate or degree to be reviewed for accreditation.

For example:

- The accreditation of a master’s degree program that includes several options/tracks such as Family Nurse Practitioner, Adult Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner, Nurse Educator, and Nurse Leader must be inclusive of all options/tracks. The nursing program may not select only the Family Nurse Practitioner and Adult Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner options/tracks to be reviewed for accreditation. [Rationale: Students graduate from a master’s degree program, not an option/track; therefore, the accreditation applies to the entire nursing program.]
  - The accreditation of an associate degree program that includes two (2) options/tracks such as pre-licensure and LPN-to-RN must be inclusive of all options/tracks. The nursing program may not select only the pre-licensure option/track to be reviewed for accreditation. [Rationale: Students graduate from an associate degree program, not an option/track; therefore, the accreditation applies to the entire nursing program.]
7. If a governing organization/program offers a certificate or certificates composed of only the specialty courses for an option/options or track/tracks, the ACEN will automatically include the certificate program option(s)/track(s) in its review of the degree program in the accreditation process.
- For example, if the governing organization/program seeks accreditation of a master’s program that includes several options/tracks such as Family Nurse Practitioner, Adult Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner, Nurse Educator, and Nurse Leader, **and** the governing organization/program offers a certificate or certificates composed of only the specialty courses from an option/options or track/tracks such as Family Nurse Practitioner, then the ACEN will automatically include the certificate program option(s) in its review of the degree program in the accreditation process. [Rationale: The options/tracks that compose the certificate(s) are a subset of the degree program, and the accreditation applies to the entire nursing program, including the certificate(s).]
8. In accordance with federal regulation 34 CFR §602.28:
- a. The ACEN may not grant initial accreditation or continuing accreditation to a governing organization/institution or a nursing program offered by a governing organization/institution if the ACEN knows, or has reasonable cause to know, that a governing organization/institution or a nursing program is the subject of:
    1. A pending or final action brought by a state agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate a governing organization’s/institution’s legal authority to provide postsecondary education in the state;
    2. A decision by a recognized agency to deny accreditation or pre-accreditation;
    3. A pending or final action brought by a recognized accrediting agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate a governing organization’s/ institution’s accreditation or pre-accreditation; or
    4. Probation or an equivalent status imposed by a recognized agency.
  - b. The ACEN may grant initial accreditation or continuing accreditation to a governing organization/institution or nursing program only if ACEN provides to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, within 30 calendar days of its action, a thorough and reasonable explanation, consistent with the ACEN Standards and Criteria, why the action of the other body

does not preclude the granting of initial accreditation or continuing accreditation by the ACEN.

- c. If the ACEN learns that a governing organization/institution or nursing program it accredits is the subject of an adverse action by another recognized accrediting agency or has been placed on probation or an equivalent status by another recognized agency, the ACEN must promptly review its accreditation of the governing organization/institution or nursing program to determine if it should also take adverse action or place the governing organization/institution or nursing program on conditions or warning. See ACEN Policy #14 Reporting Substantive Changes and ACEN Policy #18 Accreditation Status of the Governing Organization for details regarding a negative or adverse action by an appropriate institutional accrediting agency.

Policy #3 History  
Revised July 2015  
Revised October 2016  
Revised July 2017

## **POLICY #4 TYPES OF COMMISSION ACTIONS FOR INITIAL AND CONTINUING ACCREDITATION**

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### **INITIAL ACCREDITATION**

The Board of Commissioners may grant initial accreditation or deny initial accreditation.

#### Granted

Initial accreditation of a nursing program is granted when the Board of Commissioners determines a program demonstrates compliance with all Accreditation Standards. Next review shall be in five (5) years.

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.***

#### Denied

Initial accreditation of a nursing program is denied when the Board of Commissioners determines a program does not demonstrate compliance with all Accreditation Standards. Denial of initial accreditation is an appealable action.

The nursing program may restart the Candidacy process at any time after the denial of initial accreditation.

### **CONTINUING ACCREDITATION**

The Board of Commissioners may grant continuing accreditation or deny continuing accreditation.

#### Granted

The maximum amount of time between continuing accreditation cycles shall be eight (8) years.

1. Continuing accreditation is granted when the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is in compliance with all Accreditation Standards.
2. Continuing accreditation with conditions is granted when the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is in non-compliance with one (1) or two (2) Accreditation Standards. Next review and follow-up action(s) are determined by the Board of Commissioners.

3. Continuing accreditation with warning is granted when the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is in non-compliance with three (3) or more Accreditation Standards. Next review and follow-up action(s) are determined by the Board of Commissioners.
4. Continuing accreditation with a removal of conditions is granted when the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is in compliance with the Accreditation Standards.
5. Continuing accreditation with a removal of warning is granted when the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is in compliance with the Accreditation Standards.
6. Continuing accreditation with a removal of good cause is granted when the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is in compliance with the Accreditation Standards.
7. Continuing accreditation for good cause – see below.

#### Denied

A nursing program seeking continuing accreditation may be denied continuing accreditation. A nursing program denied continuing accreditation will be removed from the list of accredited programs. Denial of continuing accreditation is an appealable action.

The nursing program may start the Candidacy process at any time after the denial of continuing accreditation and removal from the list of accredited programs.

### **CONTINUING ACCREDITATION WITH CONDITIONS OR WARNING STATUS**

#### Continuing Accreditation with Conditions

- I. When the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is non-compliant with one (1) or two (2) Accreditation Standards, the Board of Commissioners may grant a nursing program continuing accreditation with conditions for up to the maximum monitoring period for the program type.
  - a. When a nursing program has been granted continuing accreditation with conditions, the program must submit a Follow-Up Report addressing the Standard(s) with which the nursing program was found to be in non-compliance; a follow-up visit may be required within a specified period of time. The Follow-Up Report, or Follow-Up Report and Follow-Up Site Visit Report, and Evaluation Review Panel Summary constitute a basis for the Board of Commissioners' decision.

The length of the monitoring period defines the Board of Commissioners' action the next time a nursing program is reviewed. At the next review,

- b. If the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is in compliance with the identified Accreditation Standards, the Board of Commissioners may grant continuing accreditation with a removal of conditions.
- c. If the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is non-compliant:
  - 1. With one (1) or two (2) Accreditation Standards, the Board of Commissioners may grant continuing accreditation with conditions if the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation has not concluded.
  - 2. With three (3) or more Accreditation Standards, the Board of Commissioners may grant continuing accreditation with warning if the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation has not concluded.
  - 3. With any Accreditation Standard, the Board of Commissioners may grant continuing accreditation for good cause if the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation has concluded and the program meets the requirements for good cause.
  - 4. With any Accreditation Standard, the Board of Commissioners may deny continuing accreditation and remove the program from the list of accredited programs, whether the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation has or has not concluded.

#### Continuing Accreditation with Warning

- I. When the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is non-compliant with three (3) or more Accreditation Standards, the Board of Commissioners may grant a nursing program continuing accreditation with warning for up to the maximum monitoring period for the program type.
  - a. When a nursing program has been granted continuing accreditation with warning, the program must submit a Follow-Up Report addressing the Standard(s) with which the nursing program was found to be in non-compliance, and a follow-up visit is required within a specified period of time. The Follow-Up Report, Follow-Up Site Visit Report, and Evaluation Review Panel Summary constitute a basis for the Board of Commissioners' decision.

The length of the monitoring period defines the Board of Commissioners' action the next time a nursing program is reviewed. At the next review,

- b. If the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is in compliance with the identified Accreditation Standards, the Board of Commissioners may grant continuing accreditation with a removal of warning.
- c. If the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program is non-compliant:
  - i. With one (1) or two (2) Accreditation Standards, the Board of Commissioners may grant continuing accreditation with conditions if the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation has not concluded.

- ii. With three (3) or more Accreditation Standards, the Board of Commissioners may grant continuing accreditation with warning if the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation has not concluded.
- iii. With any Accreditation Standard, the Board of Commissioners may grant continuing accreditation for good cause if the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation has concluded and the program meets the requirements for good cause.
- iv. With any Accreditation Standard, the Board of Commissioners may deny continuing accreditation and remove the program from the list of accredited programs, whether the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation has or has not concluded.

#### Maximum Monitoring Period – Conditions and Warning

1. The maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation with conditions or continuing accreditation with warning for clinical doctorate, master's, baccalaureate, associate, and diploma programs is two (2) years from the Board of Commissioners' determination of this accreditation status.
2. The maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation with conditions or continuing accreditation with warning for practical nursing programs is 18 months from the Board of Commissioners' determination of this accreditation status.
3. The maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation with conditions or continuing accreditation with warning for standalone certificate nursing programs that are not a practical nursing program is determined by the length of the certificate nursing program.
  - a. If the shortest period of time in which a student could complete a standalone certificate nursing program is less than 12 months, then the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation with conditions or continuing accreditation with warning is 12 months from the Board of Commissioners' determination of this accreditation status.
  - b. If the shortest period of time in which a student could complete a standalone certificate nursing program is at least one (1) year but less than two (2) years, then the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation with conditions or continuing accreditation with warning is 18 months from the Board of Commissioners' determination of this accreditation status.
  - c. If the shortest period of time in which a student could complete a standalone certificate nursing program is at least two (2) years, then the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation with conditions or continuing accreditation with warning is two (2) years from the Board of Commissioners' determination of this accreditation status.

#### Maximum Monitoring Period – Good Cause

1. If the Board of Commissioners determines a nursing program has not remedied deficiencies at the conclusion of its maximum monitoring period on continuing accreditation with conditions or continuing accreditation with warning, the Board of Commissioners must (1)

deny continuing accreditation and remove the nursing program from the list of accredited programs, or (2) grant continuing accreditation for good cause.

- a. The maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation for good cause for clinical doctorate, master's, baccalaureate, associate, and diploma programs is two (2) years from the Board of Commissioners' determination of this accreditation status. If compliance with all the Accreditation Standards is not demonstrated within two (2) years, the Board of Commissioners must deny continuing accreditation and remove the nursing program from the list of accredited programs.
- b. The maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation for good cause for practical nursing programs is 18 months from the Board of Commissioners' determination of this accreditation status. If compliance with all the Accreditation Standards is not demonstrated within 18 months, the Board of Commissioners must deny continuing accreditation and remove the nursing program from the list of accredited programs.
- c. The maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation for good cause for standalone certificate nursing programs that are not a practical nursing program is determined by the length of the certificate nursing program.
  - i. If the shortest period of time in which a student could complete a standalone certificate nursing program is 12 months, then the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation for good cause is 12 months from the Board of Commissioners' determination of this accreditation status. If compliance with the Accreditation Standards is not demonstrated within 12 months, the Board of Commissioners must deny continuing accreditation and remove the nursing program from the list of accredited programs.
  - ii. If the shortest period of time in which a student could complete a standalone certificate nursing program is at least one (1) year but less than two (2) years, then the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation for good cause is 18 months from the Board of Commissioners' determination of this accreditation status. If compliance with all the Accreditation Standards is not demonstrated within 18 months, the Board of Commissioners must deny continuing accreditation and remove the nursing program from the list of accredited programs.
  - iii. If the shortest period of time in which a student could complete a standalone certificate nursing program is at least two (2) years, then the maximum monitoring period for continuing accreditation for good cause is two (2) years from the Board of Commissioners' determination of this accreditation status. If compliance with all the Accreditation Standards is not demonstrated within two (2) years, the Board of Commissioners must deny continuing accreditation and remove the nursing program from the list of accredited programs.



### Good Cause

- I. The Board of Commissioners can extend a nursing program's continuing accreditation for good cause if the Board of Commissioners determines the program satisfies all of the following principles:
  - a. The nursing program has demonstrated significant recent accomplishments in addressing non-compliance;
  - b. The nursing program has documented that it has the potential to remedy all deficiencies within the extended period as defined by the Commission; that is, that the program provides evidence which makes it reasonable for the Board of Commissioners to determine it will remedy all deficiencies within the extended time defined by the Commission;
  - c. The nursing program provides assurance to the Board of Commissioners that it is not aware of any other reasons, other than those identified by the Commission, why the accreditation of the nursing program could not be continued for good cause.
2. The nursing program has the responsibility for making its case for good cause. To demonstrate good cause, the chief executive officer of the governing organization and the nurse administrator of the nursing program must submit a report attesting that the program satisfies all three (3) principles for good cause. The report must be received by the ACEN Chief Executive Officer no later than 14 calendar days before the Board of Commissioners' meeting. Along with the Good Cause Report, the nursing program may submit selected new, updated information and evidence (e.g., faculty profile table, verification of faculty credentials, and performance on licensure examination) that demonstrate the program has made significant recent accomplishments in addressing the Standard(s) with which the program was found to be in non-compliance.

Policy #4 History  
Revised July 2015  
Revised July 2017  
Revised October 2017  
Revised July 2018

## **POLICY #5**

### **NOTIFICATION OF COMMISSION DECISIONS**

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A nursing program accredited by ACEN or seeking ACEN initial accreditation explicitly agrees that if accreditation is granted, all records pertaining to that program may be made available to the Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education, and the state regulatory agency for nursing as appropriate.

The Commission will submit to the Secretary of Education information regarding a program's compliance with federal student aid program requirements if the Secretary of Education requests such information, or the Commission believes that the program is failing to meet its Title IV responsibilities or is involved in fraud and abuse with respect to its activities. Prior to submission of information, the program will be provided an opportunity to comment on Commission findings.

Within 60 calendar days of a final adverse action, the Commission will make available to the Secretary of Education, appropriate state regulatory agencies, recognized accrediting agencies, and the public, a brief statement summarizing the reasons for the adverse action determination and the comments, if any, made by the program with regard to the Commission decision.

Within 30 calendar days of the accreditation decisions made at the Commission meetings, the ACEN staff will send written notification of the Commission action to the nurse administrator, the chief executive officer of the governing organization, the site visit team members, and the Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education, the appropriate state licensing agency/authorizing agency, and the governing organization's accrediting agency.

#### **OTHER GROUPS TO BE INFORMED**

- State Regulatory Agencies for Nursing
- U.S. Department of Education Case Management Teams
- Accrediting Agencies of Governing Organizations
- State Departments of Education (as applicable)
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
- Higher Education Publications, Inc.
- The Public

#### **INFORMATION PROVIDED TO THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

The following information will be reported to the Secretary of Education at the same time it is reported to the nursing education unit.

Report Category	Time for Submission		Programs Affected By Requirements					
	Other	Annually	C	M	B	A	D	P
Final Accreditation Decision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial Accreditation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Granted</li> <li>○ Denied, with reasons</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Continuing Accreditation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Granted</li> <li>○ Granted with Conditions</li> <li>○ Granted with Warning</li> <li>○ Granted for Good Cause</li> <li>○ Denied, with reasons</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Outcome of Appeal, with reasons</li> <li>• Withdrawal</li> </ul>	Within 30 calendar days of Commission action	June (aggregated – Report to Constituents submitted)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Summary of Major Accreditation Activities		June (aggregated – Report to Constituents submitted)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Directory of Accredited Programs		Available Online	X	X	X	X	X	X
Substantive Changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Accredited Programs</li> <li>• Title IV Participants</li> </ul>	Within 30 calendar days of Commission action	June (aggregated – Report to Constituents submitted)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Complaints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Against Accredited Programs</li> <li>• Against the ACEN</li> </ul>		June (aggregated – Report to Constituents submitted)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Title IV Participant Compliance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive Loan Repayment Plan</li> <li>• Default Rates</li> <li>• Adverse Financial or Compliance Audits</li> <li>• Fraud or Abuse</li> </ul>	Within 30 calendar days of Commission action	June (aggregated – Report to Constituents submitted)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Proposed Changes that alter the scope of recognition or compliance with requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy</li> <li>• Procedures</li> <li>• Standards and Criteria</li> </ul>	As necessary	5 years	X	X	X	X	X	X

**C:** Clinical Doctorate, DNP Specialist Certificate; **M:** Master’s, Post-Master’s Certificate;  
**B:** Baccalaureate; **A:** Associate; **D:** Diploma; **P:** Practical

## **POLICY #6**

# **DELAY/ADVANCEMENT OF CONTINUING ACCREDITATION VISIT**

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The nurse administrator may formally request a delay or rescheduling of a visit for continuing accreditation. The ACEN Chief Executive Officer makes the decision to grant or deny the request based on the reason(s) provided. The timeframe considered for a visit delay is six (6) months/one (1) accreditation cycle. Delays are granted only when circumstances beyond the control of the nursing program occur; typically these involve a major disruption (e.g., natural disaster, catastrophic fire) that interrupts the education of currently enrolled students. A change in the nurse administrator or implementation of a substantive change are not considered beyond the control of the nursing program.

Delays are not granted to nursing programs:

- Granted delays in the most recent accreditation cycle.
- With a current status of continuing accreditation with warning or continuing accreditation for good cause.
- Having outstanding Follow-Up Reports requested by the Commission.<sup>1</sup>
- Under review or with conditional/provisional/probationary approval status by the state regulatory agency for nursing.
- Due for review following the granting of initial accreditation by the Commission.

<sup>1</sup>If a nursing program does not submit the Follow-Up Report by the date requested, the program will be presented for action to the Commission at the next Board of Commissioners meeting.

If the request for a delay is made six (6) weeks or less prior to the site visit, the reprocessing/rescheduling site visit fee is applicable.

A nursing program that is granted a delayed accreditation visit will be returned to its original visit schedule for the next accreditation visit.

Policy #6 History  
Revised July 2015

## **POLICY #7**

# **VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL FROM ACEN ACCREDITATION**

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Accredited programs voluntarily withdrawing from ACEN accreditation must submit written notification of their decision signed by the chief executive officer of the governing organization and the nurse administrator of the nursing program to the attention of the ACEN Chief Executive Officer. When a nursing program voluntarily withdraws from the ACEN, the program's accreditation will continue through (1) the end of the nursing program's current initial or continuing accreditation period, (2) the end of the current ACEN fall or spring accreditation cycle\*, or (3) a date specified by the program prior to the end of the current ACEN fall or spring accreditation cycle\*. The program must specify the intended accreditation withdrawal date in its written notification to the ACEN. At the selected date of withdrawal, the nursing program will be removed from the ACEN's listings of accredited programs. The nursing program must remove all references to ACEN accreditation intended to inform the public including all print and electronic documents.

The ACEN will deem as a voluntary withdrawal from accreditation any refusal or failure of an accredited program to submit to a required (1) Site Visit, Follow-Up Visit, or Focused Visit, (2) Self-Study Report, Follow-Up Report, or Focused Visit Report, or (3) other requested information. The effective date of the withdrawal will be the last day of the current ACEN accreditation cycle\*. The program will be so notified, in writing, by the ACEN Chief Executive Officer within 30 calendar days of an accredited program refusing or failing to submit to a required (1) Site Visit, Follow-Up Visit, or Focused Visit, (2) Self-Study Report, Follow-Up Report, or Focused Visit Report, or (3) other requested information.

ACEN will deem as a voluntary withdrawal from accreditation any refusal or failure of an accredited program to pay its fees and expenses when due. The effective date of the withdrawal will be the last day of the current ACEN accreditation cycle\*. The program will be so notified, in writing, by the ACEN Chief Executive Officer within 30 calendar days of an accredited program refusing or failing to pay its fees and expenses on a timely basis.

A nursing program may initiate the Candidacy process for initial accreditation at any time after voluntarily withdrawing from accreditation and being removed from the list of accredited programs.

A nursing program may reinitiate the Candidacy process for initial accreditation at any time after voluntarily withdrawing from its initial accreditation process. A nursing program must voluntarily withdraw from the Candidacy process for initial accreditation before reinitiating the Candidacy process.

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

Policy #7 History  
Revised July 2015  
Revised March 2016  
Revised July 2017

## **POLICY #8**

# **OPPORTUNITIES FOR THIRD-PARTY COMMENTS ON NURSING PROGRAMS SCHEDULED FOR INITIAL OR CONTINUING ACCREDITATION**

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As part of ongoing efforts to make the accreditation process responsive to a broad range of constituents, the ACEN invites third-party comments on nursing programs being reviewed for initial or continuing accreditation. The ACEN welcomes comments from interested individuals from the nursing community, students, and graduates as well as the public.

The Commission expects a sincere and thoughtful attempt by nursing programs undergoing initial or continuing accreditation to identify their constituents and invite comments on the program. The ACEN requires nursing programs to publish basic information about the visit in appropriate outlets (e.g., nursing program newsletter, governing organization publications, program website, local newspapers, local radio stations, and postings at clinical agencies used by the program). Guidelines for the solicitation of third-party comments will be provided to the nursing program.

During the accreditation site visit, a time is to be set aside for the peer evaluators on the site visit team to meet with interested members of the public. In addition, the constituents may submit comments in writing to the ACEN to be shared with the peer evaluators.

Policy #8 History  
Revised November 2015

## **POLICY #9**

# **DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAM**

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When a governing organization and/or nursing education unit makes a disclosure regarding the ACEN accreditation status of a nursing program, it must (1) accurately cite each program (e.g., clinical doctorate, DNP specialist certificate, master's, post-master's certificate, baccalaureate, associate, diploma, and/or practical) and (2) accurately identify each nursing program's accreditation status with ACEN. "Fully accredited" must not be used as partial accreditation is not possible.

The disclosure must include the name, address, telephone number and web address of the ACEN as illustrated below.

Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN)  
3343 Peachtree Road NE, Suite 850  
Atlanta, GA 30326  
404-975-5000  
[www.acenursing.org](http://www.acenursing.org)

If the governing organization and/or nursing education unit publishes incorrect or misleading information about the accreditation status of a nursing program or any action by the ACEN relative to the accreditation status of a nursing program, the governing organization and/or nursing education unit must immediately provide public correction via a news release or through other media.

If a governing organization and/or nursing education unit makes public the contents from a Site Visit Report, Follow-Up Site Visit Report, Focused Site Visit Report, Summary of Deliberations of the Evaluation Review Panel, or Commission decision letter, it must provide full sentences and context. Characterizing, quoting, and/or providing excerpts from a Site Visit Report, Follow-Up Site Visit Report, Focused Site Visit Report, Summary of Deliberations of the Evaluation Review Panel, or Commission decision letter must also be accompanied by a note stating that a copy of the complete document(s) can be obtained from the nursing education unit. Should the statements be misinterpreted, the program must correct this misinterpretation through a clarifying release to the same audience that received the information. When it is determined that a governing organization and/or nursing education unit is in violation of this policy, the ACEN Chief Executive Officer will inform the governing organization and/or nursing education unit through a formal letter. If the violation is not corrected, the CEO shall report the matter to the ACEN Board of Commissioners for appropriate action.

Policy #9 History  
Revised November 2015  
Edited July 2017

## **POLICY #10**

# **APPEAL PROCESS AND SUBMISSION AND REVIEW OF NEW FINANCIAL INFORMATION SUBSEQUENT TO ADVERSE ACTION**

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The purpose of this policy is to provide the opportunity for review of an adverse action. The appeal process allows a program to appeal an adverse action taken by the Board of Commissioners.

### **DECISIONS ELIGIBLE FOR APPEAL**

A program may only appeal an adverse action taken by the ACEN Board of Commissioners. An adverse action is defined as a denial of initial accreditation or a denial of continuing accreditation.

### **GROUNDS FOR APPEAL**

1. There are two (2) grounds for appeal:
  - a. The ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision was arbitrary; that is, it was unreasonable and not based on, or consistent with, the published ACEN Standards and Criteria or the ACEN published policies and/or procedures; or
  - b. The ACEN Board of Commissioners failed to follow its published policies and/or procedures and this failure was significant in leading to the Board of Commissioners' decision.

### **SUBMISSION AND REVIEW OF NEW FINANCIAL INFORMATION SUBSEQUENT TO ADVERSE ACTION**

If an adverse action is taken by the ACEN Board of Commissioners based solely on financial grounds, including Commission action to deny initial accreditation or to deny continuing accreditation, a nursing program may submit and seek review of new financial information prior to the action becoming final if the following conditions are met:

1. The financial information was unavailable to the program until after the adverse action was taken; and
2. The financial information is significant and bears materially on the financial deficiencies identified in support of the adverse action.

A nursing program may seek the review of new financial information only once. A nursing program may seek review of new financial information prior to appealing the adverse action. In such case, any determination by the Commission made with respect to the review of new financial information shall not provide a basis for an appeal. Alternatively, a nursing program may submit and seek review of new financial information as part of the appeal of the adverse action consistent with this policy and the procedures set forth below.



## **NOTICE OF APPEAL**

An adverse action taken regarding the accreditation status of a nursing program may be appealed within 30 calendar days of the program's receipt of notice of such adverse action. A program shall initiate an appeal by filing a written notice of intent to appeal via hand delivery, certified/registered mail, or another means that provides written evidence of the delivery. The notice of appeal shall be sent by the Chief Executive Officer of the appellant program's governing organization to the ACEN Chief Executive Officer. Upon receipt of the notice, the ACEN shall maintain the prior accreditation status of the nursing program until the disposition of the appeal.

The request of a program for an appeal process must identify the specific alleged procedural failures or the specific manner in which the decision was arbitrary, that is, was unreasonable and not based on, or consistent with, the published ACEN Standards and Criteria or ACEN published policies and/or procedures.

The appeal process will be completed within a reasonable amount of time following the date of receipt of the notice of intent to appeal. The date for the Appeal Hearing will be determined by the availability of Appeal Panel members to hear the case and by the establishment of a quorum. The final determination of the date will be made by the ACEN Chief Executive Officer after consultation with the Appeal Panel members and the appellant program. The ACEN will make every effort to honor the preference of the appellant program but cannot guarantee the date.

The notice of intent to appeal fee must be submitted with the written notice of intent to appeal. The appeal process fee is due within 45 calendar days of the submission of the notice of intent to appeal. The appeal will be considered withdrawn if the program fails to submit the appeal process fee within 45 calendar days of the submission of the notice of intent to appeal. The Appeal Hearing will not be scheduled until the appeal process fee has been paid in full. Additionally, the appellant program will be charged a non-refundable administrative appeal fee, which must be submitted with the written notice of intent to appeal. Credit cards are not an acceptable form of payment for the notice of intent to appeal fee, the appeal process fee, or the non-refundable administrative appeal fee.

If the travel, lodging, meal, legal, and other expenses directly related to the appeal process incurred by the ACEN exceed the cumulative total of the notice of intent to appeal fee and appeal process fee, the program will be responsible for the difference and will receive a subsequent invoice for the additional expenses not covered by the fees. Credit cards are not an acceptable form of payment for invoices for appeal-related expenses. If the travel, lodging, meal, legal, and other expenses directly related to the appeal process incurred by the ACEN are less than the cumulative total of the notice of intent to appeal fee and appeal process fee, the program will be refunded the difference. The appellant program is responsible for all of the travel, lodging, meal, legal, and other expenses directly related to the appeal process incurred by the ACEN regardless of the outcome, disposition, and/or cancellation of the Appeal Hearing.

## **APPOINTMENT OF AN APPEAL COMMITTEE**

Seven (7) members from the Appeal Panel membership shall be appointed to an Appeal Committee to examine a specific appeal. Five (5) members of the Appeal Committee shall represent nursing education of the same program type as the appellant program; one (1) member of the Appeal Committee shall represent nursing practice; one (1) member of the Appeal Committee shall represent the public. Current members of the ACEN Board of Commissioners may not serve on the Appeal Panel.

The ACEN Chief Executive Officer shall appoint the Appeal Committee. A member of the Appeal Panel shall recuse him/herself from the Appeal Committee if there is a conflict of interest or an appearance of a conflict of interest. Appeal Panel and Appeal Committee members are subject to the requirements of ACEN Policy #1 Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest.

The ACEN Chief Executive Officer shall provide notice of the Appeal Committee membership to the appellant program. The appellant program will have the opportunity to review the proposed Appeal Committee members for any conflicts of interest. Within three (3) business days of appellant program's receipt of the names of the proposed Appeal Committee membership, the appellant program shall provide written notice of any assertions that a proposed Appeal Committee member has a conflict of interest to the ACEN Chief Executive Officer. If the ACEN Chief Executive Officer determines a conflict of interest exists, another Appeal Committee member shall be appointed within three (3) business days with notification to appellant program. The appellant program shall have an opportunity to review the appointed Appeal Committee member for any conflict of interest. Within three (3) business days of appellant program's receipt of the name of the appointed panel member, the appellant program shall provide written notice of any assertion that the substituted Appeal Committee member has a conflict of interest to the ACEN Chief Executive Officer. If the ACEN Chief Executive Officer determines that the panel member has a conflict of interest, the procedures of this paragraph shall be repeated until an Appeal Committee member is secured and the Appeal Panel is determined. The ACEN Chief Executive Officer's determination of a conflict of interest shall be final.

Where necessary to avoid a conflict of interest or in other exceptional circumstances, the ACEN Chief Executive Officer may, in consultation with the appellant program, select individuals outside of the approved list maintained by the ACEN of persons qualified to serve as Appeal Panel members as long as such panel member otherwise meets the qualifications to be a panel member.

## **PROCEDURES FOR GOVERNING THE APPEAL PROCESS AND APPEAL HEARING**

The Appeal Process and Appeal Hearing is a collegial one, and it shall not be bound by technical or formal rules of evidence or pleading. The Appeal Hearing is an administrative process, not judicial hearing, with each party to the appeal advocating its position. Therefore, legal Rules of Evidence and legal procedures, such as the examination of the competency of members of the Appeal Committee, the use of sidebars, or cross-examining those present, are prohibited.

Throughout the Appeal Process and Appeal Hearing, the appellant program will bear the burden of proof.

The ACEN is responsible for sending all material concerning the appeal to members of the Appeal Committee; for providing support services, including lodging, transportation and meeting space for the Appeal Committee members; for confirming the date of the Appeal Hearing; and for securing the services of a court reporter.

The following procedures must be adhered to in an appeal.

## **DOCUMENTS FOR THE HEARING**

- I. At least 30 calendar days before the date of the Appeal Hearing, the ACEN must submit to the appellant program and the Appeal Committee documents (administrative record) used by the ACEN Board of Commissioners leading to and arriving at the decision regarding the program. The

administrative record includes the following: (a) minutes of the ACEN Board of Commissioners as pertain exclusively to the appellant program case, (b) a historical summary of the actions taken by the ACEN involving the appellant program, (c) the official ACEN correspondence leading to the adverse action and also related to the appeal, (d) all materials used by the Evaluation Review Panel as the basis for its recommendation, and (e) other documents bearing on the substance of the appeal.

2. At least 14 calendar days before the date of the Appeal Hearing, the appellant program must submit to the ACEN Chief Executive Officer the brief it intends to present at the Appeal Hearing. The brief must specifically direct Appeal Committee members to citations in the administrative record which justify the appellant program's grounds for appeal. The appellant program must cite page numbers of the text supporting its position. The appellant program is required to submit ten (10) copies of its brief. Failure of the appellant program to provide a brief within the specified period time shall be cause for case dismissal by the Appeal Committee.
3. At least ten (10) calendar days before the date of the Appeal Hearing, the ACEN is required to submit copies of the administrative record and the appellant program's brief to the Appeal Committee.
4. At least seven (7) calendar days before the date of the Appeal Hearing, the ACEN must submit to the appellant program and Appeal Committee, its response to the appellant program's brief.
5. Neither the appellant program nor the ACEN may submit additional briefs or any other materials during or following the Appeal Hearing.

## **THE HEARING**

1. The Appeal Committee will select a Chair who will be responsible for ensuring effective implementation of the appeal process and for filing the Appeal Committee's decision with the ACEN Chief Executive Officer.
2. The Chair of the Appeal Committee may have a preliminary conference, in person or by telephone, either at the Chair's request or at the request of a party, to discuss the procedures for the appeal. The conference will be conducted by the Chair with representatives from both parties in attendance.
3. At least 14 calendar days before the date of the Appeal Hearing, the appellant program and the ACEN must submit to each other the names and titles of those individuals selected to appear as witnesses, representatives, and legal counsel, one (1) of whom must be the Nurse Administrator. Once the names are submitted to each other there may be no substitutions, except as may be approved by the Chair.
4. The ACEN Board of Commissioners bases its adverse action on reports, institutional responses, documentation, and evidence presented by the institution at the time of its review. If the appellant program failed to present documentation and evidence available at the time the ACEN Board of Commissioners took adverse action, it cannot make that information available for consideration by the Appeal Committee under any circumstances. In addition, neither the ACEN nor the appellant program may include new information/materials as part of their briefs presented to the Appeal Committee nor may they introduce new evidence during the Appeal Hearing unless, in the case of an institution removed from accreditation based solely on finances, it may make available new and verifiable financial information that became available since adverse action was taken and that is

material to the reason for the ACEN Board of Commissioner's adverse action. It is incumbent upon all parties to ensure that all evidence to be presented at the Appeal Hearing is submitted as required by ACEN Policy #10 Appeal Process for Review of Adverse Action.

5. The Appeal Hearing is closed to the public and shall include only those persons who can speak to the grounds for appeal.
6. Both parties are present during the Appeal Hearing.
7. No more than five (5) persons and one attorney shall appear for each of the parties. The nurse administrator of the appellant program shall appear before the Appeal Committee.
8. Attendees will be seated with counsel and may testify from where they sit. There will be no sequestration of witnesses.
9. The Appeal Committee may ask questions of the attendees, and their questions shall not count against the time allowed either side.
10. Legal counsel may not cross-examine witnesses for the other party and may not voice objections.
11. The presentation of the parties, including any questions of the Appeal Committee, shall be transcribed by a court reporter provided by the ACEN.
12. Since the appellant program bears the burden of proof, the appellant program will be the first party to present its case during the Appeal Hearing.
13. The Chair of the Appeal Committee will limit the presentation of the appellant program and the ACEN to one (1) hour each, and shall notify both before the Appeal Hearing of such time limit. The one (1) hour does not include a time period for questioning from the members of the Appeal Committee. At the request of the appellant program or the ACEN, the Chair may allow time for final response by either party, not to exceed one-half hour. These time limits can be extended only by the Chair. Since the institution bears the burden of proof, the institution will be the first party to present a final response and may reserve some time to conclude.
14. Within seven (7) calendar days of the date of the Appeal Hearing, the Chair of the Appeal Committee shall inform the ACEN Chief Executive Officer and Chair of the ACEN Board of Commissioners in writing of the Appeal Committee's decision. This notification must include specific reasons for the decision, must address each of the grounds for appeal identified by the appellant program, and must address the findings with regard to standards on which the ACEN Board of Commissioner's decision was based. A PDF version of the letter of notification will be emailed and will be deemed acceptable by transmission. The original letter will be next-day express mailed to the chief executive officer of the appellant program's governing organization and to the ACEN Chief Executive Officer.
15. Within 30 calendar days of receiving the decision from the chair of the Appeal Committee, the ACEN will notify the U.S. Department of Education of the final decision.

## CONDITIONS

- I. The appellant program bears the burden of proof.
  - a. To gain a REVERSAL of the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision, the appellant program must present evidence which, in the judgment of the Appeal Committee, demonstrates that the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision was arbitrary, that is, was unreasonable and not based on, or consistent with, the published ACEN Standards and Criteria or ACEN published policies and/or procedures.
  - b. In order to gain a REMAND, the appellant program must present evidence which, in the judgment of the Appeal Committee, demonstrates that the ACEN Board of Commissioners failed to follow its published policies and/or procedures and that this failure was significant in leading to its decision. An appellant program removed from accreditation based solely on finances may also gain a remand if it presents new and verifiable financial information that has become available since the adverse action was taken and that is material to the reason for the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision.
  - c. If the appellant program fails to provide evidence adequate to gain a REVERSAL or a REMAND, the initial decision of the ACEN Board of Commissioners must be AFFIRMED.
2. The accreditation status of an appellant program for which an appealable action has been taken shall remain as it was before such action until the 10 calendar day period for filing an appeal has expired. Receipt of a notification of an appeal from an appellant program by the ACEN Chief Executive Officer during this 10 calendar day period will cause that previous status to be continued until a final decision is made on the appeal. If the result of an appeal is to affirm the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision, the original effective end date of the nursing program's accreditation is also affirmed.

## RIGHTS AND LIMITATIONS

- I. The appellant program and the ACEN have the following rights in an appeal:
  - a. To have available legal counsel or a representative of their choice to advise them at the Appeal Hearing. Legal counsel representing each of the parties will be permitted to present or assist in the presentation of the case during the Appeal Hearing. Legal counsel will not be permitted to conduct a cross-examination of representatives from the opposing party.
  - b. If the Chair of the Appeal Committee, the appellant program, or the ACEN requests a pre-hearing conference, the conference will be conducted by the Chair with representatives from both parties in attendance.
  - c. To present written or oral testimony and/or evidence pertinent to the grounds for the appeal consistent with this ACEN Policy #10 Appeal Process for Review of Adverse Action. Only the Appeal Committee has the right to question individuals present at the Appeal Hearing. All individuals who testify will testify under oath as administered by the court reporter.
  - d. To receive a transcript and any other related records of the Appeal Process and Appeal Hearing, upon payment of the costs of reproduction.

- e. The Appeal Committee's discussions and deliberations, all votes taken, and the discussion on the final decision itself are not conducted on the record.
  - f. Presentations by the appellant program and the ACEN, questions asked of these representatives by the Appeal Committee, and responses to such questions are to be recorded and transcribed. Transcripts are a matter of record of the proceedings.
2. The decision of the ACEN Board of Commissioners shall be reviewed based exclusively upon the conditions existing at the time of that decision, except in the case of an appellant program removed from accreditation based solely on finances that has available new and verifiable financial information that is material to the ACEN Board of Commissioners' adverse action, and shall be subject to the following limitations:
- a. No evidence concerning the remedying of deficiencies since the time of the ACEN Board of Commissioners' adverse action shall be presented at or before the Appeal Hearing under any circumstances. The Appeal Committee is prohibited from considering such evidence in reaching its decision. No new evidence made available since the time of the ACEN Board of Commissioners' adverse action shall be presented at or before the Appeal Hearing. The Appeal Committee is prohibited from considering such evidence in reaching its decision. The only exception is that of the case of an appellant program removed from accreditation based solely on finances that has available new and verifiable financial information that is material to the ACEN Board of Commissioners' adverse action, in which case the matter shall be remanded for further review.
  - b. The Appeal Committee shall not, in its decision or otherwise, instruct the ACEN staff, the Evaluation Review Committee, or the ACEN Board of Commissioners to consider evidence concerning the remedying of deficiencies since the date of the ACEN Board of Commissioners' original decision, except in the case of an appellant program removed from accreditation based solely on finances for which the matter is remanded.
3. The Chair of the Appeal Committee **must disallow** evidence presented by the appellant program or the ACEN:
- a. Which is not pertinent to the grounds for appeal;
  - b. Which concerns the remedying of deficiencies since the time of the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision;
  - c. Which was not available to the Board of Commissioners at the time of its decision, except in the case of an appellant program removed from accreditation based solely on finances that has available new and verifiable financial information that is material to the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision.
4. The Appeal Committee members may not disclose the content of confidential discussions or deliberations leading to its decision.
5. The Appeal Committee members may not disclose its decision prior to the Chair's notification to the ACEN Chief Executive Officer and the Chair of the ACEN Board of Commissioners.

## **ACTIONS**

- I. The Appeal Committee, after the presentation of oral and/or written testimony, must determine whether the appellant program has demonstrated either of the following:
  - a. That the ACEN Board of Commissioners failed to follow its published policies and/or procedures and that this failure was significant in leading to the Board of Commissioners' decision; or
  - b. That the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision was arbitrary, that is, was unreasonable and not based on, or consistent with, the published ACEN Standards and Criteria or ACEN published policies and/or procedures.
2. The Appeal Committee shall act within the following limitations:
  - a. **AFFIRM** the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision
    - i. The Appeal Committee shall AFFIRM the Commission's decision, unless it finds that the appellant program:
      1. Demonstrated that the ACEN Board of Commissioners failed to follow its published policies and/or procedures and that this failure was significant in leading to the Board of Commissioners' decision;
      2. Demonstrated that the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision was arbitrary, that is, was unreasonable and not based on, or consistent with, the published ACEN Standards and Criteria or ACEN published policies and/or procedures;
      3. Removed from accreditation based solely on finances, produced evidence that it has available new and verifiable financial information and that the financial information is material to the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision.
    - ii. The decision by the Appeal Committee to AFFIRM the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision is final and is not subject to further appeal.
  - b. **REVERSE** the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision
    - i. The Appeal Committee shall REVERSE the decision of the ACEN Board of Commissioners if it finds that the appellant program has demonstrated that:
      1. The ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision was arbitrary, that is, was unreasonable and not based on, or consistent with, the published ACEN Standards and Criteria or ACEN published policies and/or procedures.
    - ii. The decision by the Appeal Committee to REVERSE the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision is final and is not subject to further appeal.
  - c. **REMAND** the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision

If the appellant program demonstrated that the ACEN failed to follow its published policies and/or procedures, the Appeal Committee shall remand to the specific group where the failure occurred.

- i. The Appeal Committee shall REMAND the decision of the ACEN Board of Commissioners if it finds that the appellant program has demonstrated that the ACEN failed to follow the its published policies and/or procedures, that the failure was significant in leading to the ACEN Board of Commissioners' decision, and that the failure was significant in leading to the adverse action.
- ii. The Appeal Committee shall REMAND the case to the specific group where the failure occurred with specific instructions to review the case taking into consideration any findings of the Appeal Committee. The specific group where the failure occurred will reconsider the case and forward its recommendation to the next level of review.
- iii. If the Appeal Committee REMANDS the case, the reconsideration shall occur at the next realistic accreditation review cycle following the decision of the Appeal Committee.

If the ACEN Board of Commissioners affirms its original decision, the appellant program may again appeal based on the Grounds for Appeal. The case will be heard again by an Appeal Committee composed of different members, which will then make a final decision to affirm or reverse. The Appeal Committee cannot remand again.

Policy #10 History  
Revised July 2015

## **POLICY #11**

### **PUBLIC NOTICE OF PROPOSED POLICY CHANGES**

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The ACEN provides notice of proposed new or revised policies. Interested parties are given an opportunity to comment prior to implementation.

Policy #11 History  
Revised April 2014



## **POLICY #12**

### **NURSING PROGRAM RECORDS ON FILE**

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The ACEN maintains the following records for each nursing program:

1. Accreditation and Reaccreditation (from most recent review)
  - a. Self-Study Report
  - b. Governing Organization Catalog
  - c. Site Visit Report
  - d. Nurse Administrator Response Form
  - e. Summary of the Deliberations of the Evaluation Review Panel
  
2. Formal Written Correspondence (as applicable)
  - a. Commission Action on Accreditation Status
  - b. Commission Action on Substantive Change Prospectus and/or Letter of Notification
  - c. Complaints (see ACEN Policy #20)
  - d. Correspondence between the ACEN and the Governing Organization and/or Nursing Education Unit
  
3. Reports (as applicable)
  - a. Focused Visit Report
  - b. Focused Site Visit Report
  - c. Follow-Up Report
  - d. Follow-Up Site Visit Report
  - e. Substantive Change Prospectus and/or Letter of Notification
  - f. Candidacy Application Form (for a period of three [3] years or until initial accreditation is earned, whichever occurs first)
  - g. Candidacy Presentation (for a period of three [3] years or until initial accreditation is earned, whichever occurs first)

Selected records for nursing programs that have voluntarily withdrawn from the accreditation process or been denied continuing or initial accreditation are maintained by the ACEN.

Policy #12 History  
Revised November 2015

## **POLICY #13**

### **INTERIM REPORT (NOT IN EFFECT)**

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Policy #13 History  
Revised April 2014

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## **POLICY #14**

### **REPORTING SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES**

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#### **NURSING PROGRAM OBLIGATIONS**

It is the responsibility of each nursing education unit to notify the ACEN of major changes in a nursing program to ensure maintenance of accreditation status and protection of students in accordance with Policy #14 Reporting Substantive Changes and, when required, seek approval prior to the initiation of the substantive change. Failure to report a substantive change places the accreditation status of a nursing program in jeopardy and may have consequences related to Title IV certification and eligibility.

The ACEN reserves the right to reconsider the accreditation status of a nursing program at any time. The ACEN Board of Commissioners may also take action to require formal monitoring of a nursing program due to non-compliance with any Accreditation Standard.

A substantive change is a significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of a nursing program and/or nursing education unit. Based on federal regulations and ACEN policies, a substantive change includes:

- Changing the ownership, legal status, or form of control of the governing organization
- Changing the mission or objectives of the governing organization (this does not include a revision/update in the mission statement)
- A change in the nurse administrator
- A significant change in the organizational structure of the nursing education unit that would place a nursing program in non-compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
- Offering a nursing program via distance education
- Changing the method of academic measurement (e.g., from clock hours to credit hours)
- Adding courses or nursing programs of study at a degree or credential level different from that which is included in the nursing education unit's current accreditation
- Adding a nursing program option within an accredited nursing program
- Changing the number of credit hours or the number of clock hours from currently accepted/approved courses required for successful completion of a nursing program
- Revising the curriculum by increasing, decreasing, or substituting the number of credit hours or the number of clock hours, either in content or method of delivery, required for successful completion of a nursing program
- Inactivating a nursing program
- Closing a nursing program
- Acquiring from another governing organization an accredited or non-accredited nursing program
- Acquiring from another governing organization an off-campus instructional site where an accredited or non-accredited nursing program is offered
- An increase in enrollment of 25% or greater by headcount, in one academic year, for each nursing program offered
- An increase in enrollment of 50% or greater by headcount, in one academic year, for the governing organization
- Establishing a branch campus where an accredited or non-accredited nursing program is offered
- Establishing a new off-campus instructional site
- Relocating a currently approved off-campus instructional site serving the same geographic region where nursing program is offered

- Adding an off-campus instructional site at which the governing organization is conducting a teach-out for students of another governing organization that has ceased operating before all students enrolled in an accredited or non-accredited nursing program have completed the nursing program of study
- Inactivating an off-campus instructional site where a nursing program or nursing program option is offered
- Closing an approved off-campus instructional site or branch campus where a nursing program is offered
- Entering into a contractual or consortia relationship with an entity to jointly offer all or part of a nursing program
- Entering into a relationship under which an entity not certified to participate in Title IV, HEA offers more than 25% of one (1) or more of the nursing education unit's nursing programs
- A change in the approval status with the state regulatory agency for nursing (see ACEN Policy #17)
- A negative or adverse action by an appropriate institutional accrediting agency (see ACEN Policy #18)
- A decline in the nursing program outcomes, including performance on licensure or certification examinations, nursing program completion rates, and/or employment rates
- A change in Title IV Status (applies only if ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper for the nursing program)

## **PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING A SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE: AN OVERVIEW**

There are three (3) procedures for addressing the different types of substantive changes.

- Procedure 1: Review of a planned substantive change requiring the approval of the Board of Commissioners prior to implementation or review of an unplanned substantive change requiring the approval of the Board of Commissioners as soon as the change occurs; prospectus required.
- Procedure 2: Review of a substantive change requiring only notification prior to implementation; letter of notification required.
- Procedure 3: Review of the closing of a nursing program or closing of an off-campus instructional site or branch campus where a nursing program is offered; approval prior to implementation, teach-out agreement, and/or teach-out plan required.

## **POLICY STATEMENTS REGARDING SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE**

1. The Standards and Criteria apply to all ACEN-accredited nursing programs wherever the nursing program is located or however the nursing program is delivered. Failure to comply with the Standards and Criteria or with the procedures referred to in this policy could result in the nursing program being placed on warning or being removed from the list of accredited nursing programs.
2. Denial of a substantive change is not appealable. A nursing education unit that fails to gain approval of a substantive change may resubmit a revised prospectus following the guidelines and timeframes described in this document.
3. A nursing program in the appeals process or in litigation with the ACEN is not eligible for consideration of substantive change.
4. Nursing programs that were granted continuing accreditation with warning or continuing accreditation for good cause by the ACEN Board of Commissioners as a result of the last

accreditation review may not implement a substantive change until the warning or for good cause status has been resolved. Exceptions may be made for substantive changes deemed necessary to ensure the nursing program's compliance with the Standards and Criteria with which the program was found to be in non-compliance. For example, a nursing program may implement a curriculum change to address non-compliance with Standard 4 Curriculum. However, a nursing program may not increase student enrollment, add new nursing program options, add new teaching locations, implement distance education, or add new nursing program types until the warning or for good cause status has been resolved.

5. The ACEN substantive change policy applies only to accredited nursing programs. The substantive change policy does not apply to programs in candidacy.
6. Procedures 1, 2, and 3 may not address all substantive changes. The ACEN reserves the right to classify significant changes other than those described above as substantive in nature and to follow-up accordingly. The follow-up procedure may include a focused visit.
7. A nursing program may withdraw/discontinue a substantive change at any time prior to the review by either the ACEN staff or the Board of Commissioners by submitting a formal letter of withdrawal to the ACEN Chief Executive Officer.
8. Once a nursing program submits a substantive change and the document is reviewed by either the ACEN staff or the Board of Commissioners, any information included therein that indicates possible non-compliance with any of the Standards and Criteria may lead ACEN to further review the nursing program, even if the prospectus is withdrawn or approval of the change is denied.
9. ACEN staff review all substantive changes requiring notification prior to implementation.
10. ACEN staff will conduct a preliminary review of all changes requiring approval by the ACEN Board of Commissioners. All substantive changes described in Procedure 1 are referred to the Board of Commissioners for approval, as are the following situations:
  - a. A proposed substantive change requiring prior approval submitted by a nursing program that was granted continuing accreditation with warning or continuing accreditation for good cause.
  - b. A proposed substantive change submitted by an institution placed on reimbursement or cash monitoring status by the U.S. Department of Education for Title IV federal funding when the ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper for the nursing program.
11. Substantive changes of the types described in Procedure 1 and Procedure 2 will not typically affect a nursing program's cycle of reaccreditation.
12. Following the approval of a degree level change by the ACEN Board of Commissioners, an institution may not initiate additional nursing program options at the new degree level until after the Board takes positive action on the nursing program's accreditation following the site visit authorized at the time of approval.
13. The date of the letter of approval of a substantive change is considered the date on which the change is included as part of the nursing program's accreditation.
14. Extensive substantive changes by a nursing education unit may accelerate the date for the nursing program's next reaccreditation. Examples of triggers for an accelerated reaccreditation include the

following changes: proliferation of branches or off-campus instructional sites where the nursing program is offered, frequent mergers or consolidations with other nursing programs, significant increase in enrollment in the nursing program, or rapid proliferation of new nursing program options.

15. If ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper for the nursing program and the nursing program fails to follow the ACEN substantive change policy and procedures, the nursing program may lose its Title IV funding or be required by the U.S. Department of Education to reimburse it for money received for nursing programs related to the unreported substantive change. In addition, the nursing program may be referred to the ACEN Board of Commissioners for the imposition of a sanction or removal from the listing of accredited nursing programs.

## **COMMISSION RESPONSIBILITIES**

The ACEN accredits nursing programs wherever a nursing program is located or however a nursing program is delivered. ACEN is responsible for reviewing all substantive changes that occur, determining whether the change has affected the quality of the nursing program, and assuring the public that all aspects of the nursing program continue to meet the Standards and Criteria.

The ACEN is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an agency whose accreditation enables nursing programs to seek eligibility to participate in Title IV nursing programs. To maintain its recognition with the U.S. Department of Education, the ACEN has incorporated federal requirements into its substantive change policy and procedures. Some of those requirements specify that a nursing education unit seek and receive approval prior to the initiation of a substantive change so that the change can be included in the nursing program's scope of accreditation.

## **NURSING PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES**

It is the responsibility of a nursing program to follow ACEN substantive change procedures and inform the ACEN of substantive changes as specified in this policy and procedures. If a nurse administrator is unclear as to whether a change is substantive in nature, he or she should contact ACEN staff for consultation.

## **TYPES OF COMMISSION ACTIONS**

For substantive changes that require a nursing program to follow Procedure 1, the Board of Commissioners may take the following actions:

1. Approve the substantive change; no focused visit required.
2. Approve the substantive change and authorize a focused visit for review of compliance with specified Accreditation Standard(s); the focused visit must occur within six (6) calendar months after the implementation of the substantive change. The Focused Site Visit Report will be reviewed by the Board of Commissioners in accordance with ACEN Policy #19 Focused Visit.
3. Deny the substantive change. This is not an appealable action.
4. Request additional information regarding area(s) of concern with specified Criteria; the due date for the additional information may not exceed one (1) calendar year from the date of the request.
5. Accept the additional information and affirm the program's accreditation status and date of the next scheduled visit; no further information is requested.
6. Recognize the additional information and authorize a focused visit for review of compliance with specified Accreditation Standard(s); the focused visit must occur within six (6) calendar months. The Focused Site Visit Report will be reviewed by the Board of Commissioners in accordance with ACEN Policy #19 Focused Visit.

For substantive changes that require a nursing program to follow Procedures 2 and 3, the ACEN staff may take the following actions:

1. Accept the required documentation; no further information is requested.
2. Refer the substantive change request to the Board of Commissioners for consideration and possible further action.

## **REPORTING THE VARIOUS TYPES OF SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE**

The different types of substantive change, the specific procedure to be used for each, the respective approval/notification requirement, and the reporting timeline are included in the following table. Please read the full text under the appropriate procedure for details regarding reporting.

Type of Substantive Change	Procedure	Timeframe for Submitting Required Documentation to ACEN	Prior Approval from ACEN Required	Focused Visit	Required Documentation
Changing the ownership, legal status, or form of control of the governing organization	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> if ACEN is not the Title IV gatekeeper
	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Required	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> if ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper; change must go into effect within 30 calendar days of the effective date approved by the Board of Commissioners
Changing the mission or objectives of the governing organization (this does not include a revision/update in the mission statement)	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> if ACEN is not Title IV gatekeeper
	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Required	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> if ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper
A change in the nurse administrator	2	Upon decision being made but no later than one (1) month after permanent or interim nurse administrator assumes duties/responsibilities	No	No	Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup>
Significant change in the organizational structure of the nursing education unit that would place a nursing program in non-compliance with ACEN Standards and Criteria	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria

Type of Substantive Change	Procedure	Timeframe for Submitting Required Documentation to ACEN	Prior Approval from ACEN Required	Focused Visit	Required Documentation
Distance Education					
Offering 50% to 100% of the number of credit hours or the number of clock hours of the nursing courses via distance education; once approved to offer any nursing program via distance education, approval is not required to offer subsequent nursing program(s)	1	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
Offering 25% to 49% of the number of credit hours or the number of clock hours of the nursing courses via distance education	2	Prior to implementation	No	No	Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup>
Offering 1% to 24% of the number of credit hours or the number of clock hours of the nursing courses via distance education	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A



Type of Substantive Change	Procedure	Timeframe for Submitting Required Documentation to ACEN	Prior Approval from ACEN Required	Focused Visit	Required Documentation
Changing the method of academic measurement (e.g., from clock hours to credit hours)	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
Adding courses or nursing programs of study at a degree or credential level different from that which is included in the nursing education unit's current accreditation	2	Prior to implementation	No	No	Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the currently accredited nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria  See candidacy process for the nursing program at the new degree or credential level different from that which is currently included in the nursing education unit's current accreditation
Adding a nursing program option within a nursing program by deleting and/or substituting 25% or more of the existing nursing courses to form the new nursing program option	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria

Type of Substantive Change	Procedure	Timeframe for Submitting Required Documentation to ACEN	Prior Approval from ACEN Required	Focused Visit	Required Documentation
<p>Curriculum revisions involving an increase, decrease, or substitution of 25% or greater of the credit hours or clock hours from currently accepted/ approved courses in a nursing program required for completion of a nursing program, including but not limited to:</p> <p>Deleting existing nursing courses and substituting new nursing courses</p> <p>Deleting existing general education courses and substituting new general education courses</p>	1	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
Inactivating a nursing program	2	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	No	No	Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup>
Reactivating a nursing program	2	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	No	No	Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup>
Closing a nursing program	3	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Teach-out plan and/or teach-out agreement <sup>3</sup>
Closing an option within a nursing program	3	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	No	Teach-out plan and/or teach-out agreement <sup>3</sup>
Acquiring from another governing	1	Four (4) months prior to	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the

Type of Substantive Change	Procedure	Timeframe for Submitting Required Documentation to ACEN	Prior Approval from ACEN Required	Focused Visit	Required Documentation
organization an accredited or non-accredited nursing program		implementation of the change			impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
Acquiring from another governing organization an off-campus instructional site where an accredited or non-accredited nursing program is offered	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
An increase in enrollment of 25% or greater by headcount in one (1) academic year for each nursing program offered	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
An increase in enrollment of 50% or greater by headcount in one (1) academic year for the governing organization	2	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	If ACEN is not the Title IV gatekeeper, Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	If ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper, Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with ACEN Standards and Criteria

Type of Substantive Change	Procedure	Timeframe for Submitting Required Documentation to ACEN	Prior Approval from ACEN Required	Focused Visit	Required Documentation
Establishing a branch campus at which an accredited or non-accredited nursing program is offered	2	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	If ACEN is not the Title IV gatekeeper, Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
	1	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Required	If ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper, Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with ACEN Standards and Criteria
Establishing a new off-campus instructional site at which students can obtain...					
... 50% or more of the number of credit hours or the number of clock hours required for completion of a nursing program	1	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Required for first three (3) new off-campus instructional sites <sup>4</sup>	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
... 25% to 49% of the number of credit hours or the number of clock hours required for completion of a nursing program	2	Prior to implementation	No	No	Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup>
... 1% to 24% of the number of credit hours or the number of clock hours required for completion of a nursing program	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Type of Substantive Change	Procedure	Timeframe for Submitting Required Documentation to ACEN	Prior Approval from ACEN Required	Focused Visit	Required Documentation
Relocating a currently approved off-campus instructional site serving the same geographic region where nursing program is offered	2	Prior to implementation	No	Possible	Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup>
Adding an off-campus instructional site at which the governing organization is conducting a teach-out for students of another governing organization that has ceased operating before all students enrolled in an accredited or non-accredited nursing program have completed the nursing program of study	2	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
Inactivating an off-campus instructional site where a nursing program or nursing program option is offered	2	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	No	No	Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup>
Reactivating an off-campus instructional site where a nursing program or nursing program option is offered	2	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	No	No	Letter of Notification <sup>2</sup>

Type of Substantive Change	Procedure	Timeframe for Submitting Required Documentation to ACEN	Prior Approval from ACEN Required	Focused Visit	Required Documentation
Entering into a contractual or consortia relationship with an entity to jointly offer all or part of a nursing program	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria; may require approval through the candidacy process for the nursing program
Entering into a relationship under which an entity not certified to participate in Title IV, HEA offers 25% or more of the clock hours or credit hours required for completion of a nursing program	I	Four (4) months prior to implementation of the change	Yes	Possible	Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
A change in approval status with the state regulatory agency for nursing; see ACEN Policy #17	I	N/A	N/A	Possible	Immediate submission of Prospectus <sup>1</sup> within 30 business days when an a negative or adverse action is known documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
A negative or adverse action by the appropriate institutional accrediting agency; see ACEN Policy #18	I	N/A	N/A	Possible	Immediate submission of Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
A decline in licensure examination/certification pass rates that places the program's annual licensure	I	N/A	N/A	Possible	Immediate submission of Prospectus <sup>1</sup> within 30 business days when an a negative or adverse action is known documenting the impact on the

Type of Substantive Change	Procedure	Timeframe for Submitting Required Documentation to ACEN	Prior Approval from ACEN Required	Focused Visit	Required Documentation
examination/certification pass rates below 80% for all first-time test-takers during the same 12-month period					compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
A decline in the annual nursing program completion rate with regards to the expected level of achievement established for the nursing program	I	N/A	N/A	Possible	Immediate submission of Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of the nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria
Change in Title IV status <sup>5</sup>	I	N/A	N/A	Possible	Immediate submission of Prospectus <sup>1</sup> documenting the impact on the compliance of nursing program with the ACEN Standards and Criteria

<sup>1</sup> See Procedure 1 – Prospectus (pp. 47-48) for reporting instructions.

<sup>2</sup> See Procedure 2 – Letter of Notification (p. 49) for reporting instructions.

<sup>3</sup> See Procedure 3 – Closings (p. 50) for reporting instructions.

<sup>4</sup> When an institution initiates its fourth, fifth, sixth, etc. off-campus instructional sites where 50% or more of a nursing program’s credits are offered, the ACEN may, at its discretion, choose not to conduct a focused visit to any of these additional sites at the times of their initiation if the institution has previously demonstrated a record of effective oversight of the nursing program at its off-campus instructional sites and has not been placed on warning or continuing accreditation for good cause. However per federal regulation, if ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper it is required to review and possibly conduct a visit a sample of off-campus instructional sites every five (5) years.

<sup>5</sup> Only applies if ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper for a nursing program.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

Please see the ACEN Glossary for the definition of the following terms:

- **Alternative Methods of Delivery**
- **Branch Campus**
- **Closing Report**
- **Contractual Agreement**
- **Consortia Relationship**
- **Distance Education**
- **Distance Technology**
- **Geographic Region**
- **Geographically Separate**
- **Governing Organization**
- **Inactivation of a Nursing Program**
- **Inactivation of an Off-Campus Instructional Site**
- **Letter of Notification**
- **Nursing Education Unit**
- **Nursing Program**
- **Off-Campus Instructional Site**
- **Nursing Program Length**
- **Nursing Program Locations**
- **Nursing Program Option**
- **Nursing Program Type**
- **Reactivation of a Nursing Program**
- **Reactivation of an Off-Campus Instructional Site**
- **Teach-Out Agreement**



## PROCEDURE I – PROSPECTUS

### Review of Substantive Changes Requiring the Approval of the Board of Commissioners

#### DIRECTIONS

1. One (1) electronic copy of the Prospectus is to be sent to the ACEN via email (maximum attachment size 20 MB) or via postal mail on a USB flash drive **no later than four (4) months prior to the planned implementation date or within 30 business days following an unplanned change.**

Directions for Electronic Copies: The Prospectus must be in a single file/document. This one (1) file document should address all of the required components for the substantive change and any appendices in the sequence that they would appear in a paper copy. The preferred file formats are Portable Document Format (PDF) or Microsoft Word.

2. Nursing programs with questions regarding substantive changes should contact the Coordinator of Substantive Change for guidance.

#### REQUIRED INFORMATION BY TYPE OF SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

1. [Changing the ownership, legal status, and/or form of control of the governing organization](#)
2. [Changing the mission or objectives of the governing organization \(this does not include a revision/update of the mission statement\)](#)
3. [Significant change in the organizational structure of the nursing education unit that would place a nursing program in non-compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria](#)
4. [Implementation of distance education – offering 50% to 100% of the credit hours or clock hours of a nursing program via distance education](#)
5. [Changing the method of academic measurement \(e.g., from clock hours to credit hours\)](#)
6. [Adding a nursing program option within a nursing program by deleting and/or substituting 25% or more of existing nursing courses to form the new nursing program option](#)
7. [Curriculum revisions involving an increase, decrease, or substitution of 25% or greater of the credit hours or clock hours required for completion of a nursing program from currently accepted/approved courses in a nursing program](#)
8. [Acquiring from another governing organization an accredited or non-accredited nursing program](#)
9. [Acquiring from another governing organization an off-campus instructional site where an accredited or non-accredited nursing program is offered](#)
10. [An increase in enrollment of 25% or greater by headcount in one \(1\) academic year for each nursing program offered](#)
11. [An increase in enrollment of 50% or greater by headcount in one \(1\) academic year for the governing organization if the ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper for the nursing program](#)
12. [Establishing a branch campus where an accredited or non-accredited nursing program is offered and if ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper for the nursing program](#)

13. [Establishing a new off-campus instructional site at which students can obtain 50% or more of the credit hours or clock hours of a nursing program](#)
14. [Entering into a contractual or consortia relationship with an entity to jointly offer all or part of a nursing program](#)
15. [Entering into a relationship under which an entity not certified to participate in Title IV, HEA programs offers 25% of one \(1\) or more of the nursing education's unit's nursing programs](#)
16. [A change in approval status with the state regulatory agency for nursing; see ACEN Policy #17](#)
17. [A negative or adverse action by the appropriate institutional accrediting agency; see ACEN Policy #18](#)
18. [A decline in licensure examination/certification pass rates that places the program's annual licensure examination pass rates below 80% for all first-time test-takers during the same 12-month period](#)
19. [A decline in the nursing program completion rate with regards to the expected level of achievement established by the nursing program](#)
20. [Change in Title IV status \(applies only if ACEN is the Title IV gatekeeper for the nursing program\)](#)

## PROCEDURE 2 – LETTER OF NOTIFICATION

### Review of Substantive Changes Requiring Notification Prior to Implementation

#### DIRECTIONS

1. One (1) electronic copy of the Letter of Notification is to be sent to the ACEN via email (maximum attachment size 20 MB) or via postal mail on a USB flash drive **prior to the implementation date**.

Directions for Electronic Copies: The Letter of Notification must be in a single/file document. This one (1) file document should address all of the required components for the substantive change and any appendices in the order that they would appear in a paper copy. The preferred file formats are Portable Document Format (PDF) or Microsoft Word.

2. Nursing programs with questions regarding substantive changes should contact the Coordinator of Substantive Change for guidance.

#### REQUIRED INFORMATION BY TYPE OF SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

1. [A change in nurse administrator](#)
2. [Implementation of distance education – offering 25% to 49% of the number of credit hours or the number of clock hours of a nursing program via distance education](#)
3. [Inactivating a nursing program](#)
4. [Reactivating a nursing program](#)
5. [An increase in enrollment of 50% or greater by headcount in one \(1\) academic year for the governing organization and if the ACEN is \*\*not\*\* the Title IV gatekeeper for the nursing program](#)
6. [Establishing a branch campus where an accredited or non-accredited nursing program is offered if ACEN is \*\*not\*\* the Title IV gatekeeper for the nursing program](#)
7. [Adding courses or nursing programs of study at a degree or credential level different from that which is included in the nursing education unit's current accreditation](#)
8. [Establishing a new off-campus instructional site where students can obtain 25% to 49% of the credit hours or clock hours of a nursing program](#)
9. [Relocating a currently approved off-campus instructional site serving the same geographic region where a nursing program is offered if the ACEN is \*\*not\*\* the Title IV gatekeeper for nursing program](#)
10. [Adding an off-campus instructional site at which the governing organization is conducting a teach-out for students of another governing organization that has ceased operating before all students enrolled in an accredited or non-accredited nursing program have completed the nursing program of study](#)
11. [Inactivating an off-campus instructional site where a nursing program or nursing program option is offered](#)
12. [Reactivating an off-campus instructional site where a nursing program or nursing program option is offered](#)

## **PROCEDURE 3 - CLOSINGS**

### **Review of Substantive Changes Related to**

#### **Closing a Nursing Program**

#### **Closing an Approved Off-Campus Instructional Site or Branch Campus Where a Nursing Program is Offered**

### **DIRECTIONS**

- A. See ACEN Policy #16 for information and directions related to closing a nursing program or closing an approved off-campus instructional site or branch campus where a nursing program is offered.
- B. Nursing programs with questions regarding substantive changes should contact the Coordinator of Substantive Change for guidance.

Policy #14 History  
Revised July 2015  
Edited August 2016  
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Edited May 2018

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## **POLICY #15**

### **DISTANCE EDUCATION**

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While the definitions provided in Policy #15 may differ from those used by the governing organization of a nursing program, programs accredited by the ACEN must use the following definitions for ACEN-related matters.

#### **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

Please see the **ACEN Glossary** for the definition of the following terms:

1. **Asynchronous Learning**
2. **Distance Education**
3. **Hybrid/Blended Nursing Course**
4. **Hybrid/Blended Nursing Program**
5. **Online/Internet Nursing Course**
6. **Online Nursing Program**
7. **Synchronous Learning**

See ACEN Policy #14 Reporting Substantive Changes for requirements related to reporting the implementation of distance education.

#### **DISTANCE EDUCATION CRITICAL ELEMENTS:**

1. Congruence with the mission of the governing organization.
2. Instructional design and delivery method of the course(s).
3. Preparation and competence of the faculty members teaching each course.
4. Quality and accessibility of the support services for students enrolled in each course.
5. Quality and accessibility of the support services for the faculty members teaching each course.
6. Accessibility, currency, and relevancy of learning resources available for the students enrolled in each course.
7. Currency and appropriateness of each course relative to the method of delivery.
8. Provision for regular and substantive faculty/student and student/student interaction in each course.
9. Ongoing evaluation of student learning in each course.
10. Provision for verification of student identity in each course.

#### **VERIFICATION OF STUDENT IDENTITY**

Nursing programs offering any course via distance education must demonstrate that the governing organization:

1. Has processes in place to establish that the student who registers in each distance education course is the same student who participates in and completes the course

or program and receives the academic credit. The governing organization may verify student identity through methods such as:

- a. assignment of a secure login and pass code,
  - b. proctored examinations, and/or
  - c. utilization of new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identity;
2. Uses processes that protect the privacy of the students enrolled in a distance education course; and
  3. Notifies students of any projected additional fees associated with verification of student identity at the time of registration for or enrollment in a distance education course.

The following guidelines contain elements of the ACEN Standards and Criteria that faculty must consider in evaluating the use of distance education within each nursing course, nursing program option, or a nursing program.

The students enrolled in each nursing course, a nursing program option, or a nursing program must have:

1. Access to the range of appropriate student services to support their learning and academic success, including but not limited to admissions, financial aid, academic advising, delivery of course materials, placement, and counseling comparable to those support services available to the students enrolled in non-distance education courses/programs;
2. Knowledge and equipment necessary to use the technology employed and assistance when experiencing difficulty using the required technology;
3. A means for resolving complaints;
4. Information related to advertising, recruiting, and admissions that adequately and accurately represents the course(s)/program(s), admission and completion requirements, and services available;
5. Access to learning resources and guidance in effectively using the learning resources;
6. Their use of learning resources monitored; and
7. Access to laboratory facilities, equipment, and other types of technology as appropriate to the courses or program(s).

Each nursing course, nursing program option, or nursing program provides:

1. Regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty and among the students;
2. Faculty responsibility for oversight, ensuring both the rigor and the quality of instruction;
3. Technology that is appropriate to the end-of-program student learning outcomes, role-specific graduate competencies, program outcomes, and course objectives;
4. Currency and rigor of materials;
5. Clear policies concerning the ownership of materials, faculty compensation, copyright issues, and the utilization of revenue derived from the creation of intellectual property;
6. Faculty support services specifically related to distance education; and
7. Faculty development for faculty who teach in distance education modes of delivery.

Fiscal and physical provisions are made for long-range planning, budgeting, and policy development processes that reflect the facilities, staffing, equipment, and other resources essential to the viability and effectiveness of each nursing course, nursing program option, or nursing program.

Ongoing systematic evaluation is conducted to assess:

1. Student capability to succeed in each nursing course, a nursing program option, or a nursing program, and used in the review and revision of policies and procedures;
2. Achievement of end-of-program student learning outcomes, role-specific professional competencies, and program outcomes, with a comparison made to campus-based programs; and
3. The integrity of student work and credibility of the degree and credits awarded.

Policy #15 History  
Revised November 2015  
Edited August 2016

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## **POLICY #16**

### **PROGRAM CLOSING**

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#### **CLOSING A NURSING PROGRAM, OFF-CAMPUS INSTRUCTIONAL SITE, OR BRANCH CAMPUS WHERE A NURSING PROGRAM IS OFFERED**

When an institution makes the decision to close a nursing program, off-campus instructional site, or branch campus where a nursing program is offered, the institution/nursing program must make a good faith effort to assist affected students so they experience minimal disruption in the pursuit of their program of study. In all cases, students should be notified of the decision as soon as possible so they can make appropriate plans. Students who have not completed their program of study should be advised by faculty or professional counselors regarding suitable options, including transfer to comparable programs.

When an institution makes the decision to close a nursing program, off-campus instructional site, or branch campus where a nursing program is offered, a Closing Report that fully describes the plan for closing must be submitted to the ACEN. The Closing Report must include a teach-out agreement and/or teach-out plan.

1. **A teach-out agreement** is a written agreement between institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students and a reasonable opportunity for students to complete their program of study if an institution or an institutional location that provides 100% of at least one (1) program offered ceases to operate before all enrolled students have completed their program of study. A teach-out agreement requires approval from the ACEN prior to implementation of the agreement.
2. **A teach-out plan** is a written plan developed by an institution that provides for the equitable treatment of students if an institution or an institutional location that provides 100% of the program of study ceases to operate before all students have completed their program of study. A teach-out plan requires approval from the ACEN prior to implementation of the plan.

The institution closing the nursing program, off-campus instructional site, or branch campus where a nursing program is offered may fulfill its educational commitment to currently enrolled students through either:

1. A teach-out agreement with another institution(s); or
2. A teach-out plan whereby the institution educates its currently enrolled students until all students graduate from the nursing program, off-campus instructional site, or branch campus that is closing.

Arrangements for the teach-out agreement or teach-out plan must be consistent with the requirements of ACEN Policy #14 Reporting Substantive Change.

The ACEN may require an institution/nursing program that it accredits to enter into a teach-out agreement as part of its teach-out plan.



The ACEN must require an institution/nursing program that it accredits that enters into a teach-out agreement, either on its own or at the request of the agency, with another institution to submit that teach-out agreement for approval.

If an institution/nursing program closes without a teach-out plan or agreement, ACEN must work with the U.S. Department of Education and the appropriate state agency, to the extent feasible, to assist students in finding reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional charges.

When the ACEN serves as the Title IV gatekeeper for a nursing program, a teach-out agreement is required upon the occurrence of the following events:

1. The U.S. Department of Education Secretary of Education notifies the ACEN that the Secretary has initiated an emergency action against an institution, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(G) of the HEA, or an action to limit, suspend, or terminate an institution participating in any title IV, HEA program, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(F) of the HEA.
2. The ACEN acts to withdraw, terminate, or suspend the accreditation of the program.
3. The institution notifies the ACEN that it intends to cease operations entirely or close a location that provides 100% of the nursing program.
4. A State licensing or authorizing agency notifies the ACEN that an institution's license or legal authorization to provide the program has been or will be revoked.

When the ACEN does not serve as the Title IV gatekeeper for a nursing program, a teach-out agreement and/or teach-out plan is required upon the occurrence of the following events:

1. The ACEN acts to withdraw, terminate, or suspend the accreditation of the program;
2. The institution notifies the ACEN that it intends to cease operations entirely or close a location that provides 100% of the nursing program;
3. A state licensing or authorizing agency notifies the ACEN that an institution's license or legal authorization to provide the nursing program has been or will be revoked.

Based on the information provided in the Closing Report, the accreditation status of the nursing program, and the date of the next scheduled accreditation visit, the Commission will take one (1) of the following actions:

1. When the program is accredited without qualifications, the Commission will:
  - a. Cancel the next visit and continue accreditation until closing; or
  - b. Reaffirm the originally scheduled visit.
2. When the current status of the program is continuing accreditation with conditions or warning, the Commission will:

- a. Extend the conditions or warning status if the program is scheduled to close within 12 months after the scheduled visit; or
  - b. Determine the date of a next visit if the program is scheduled to close beyond a year after the scheduled visit.
3. If a program planning to close fails to submit a Closing Report to the ACEN or comply with Commission request(s), such action will constitute a declaration to have accreditation status withdrawn, and the Commission will take action accordingly.
  4. If a program previously scheduled to close extends its operation beyond the original closing date, a site visit will be scheduled at the earliest possible date. The procedure to be followed will depend on the program's status at the time the announcements about the closing and the change of plans were made.
  5. If a program closes in the interim between Commission meetings and without prior notice to the ACEN, the closing automatically terminates ACEN accreditation.

## **FORMATTING AND SUBMITTING THE CLOSING REPORT**

1. The number of text pages should not exceed 50 pages.
2. The appendix has no page limit.
3. Confidential records (e.g., faculty transcripts, student records) should not be included.

## **DIRECTIONS**

1. One (1) electronic copy of the Closing Report is to be sent to the ACEN via email (maximum attachment size 20 MB) or via postal mail on a USB flash drive **no later than four (4) months prior to the planned implementation date.**

Directions for Electronic Copies: The Prospectus must be in a single file/document. This one (1) file document should address all of the required components for the substantive change and any appendices in the sequence that they would appear in a paper copy. The preferred file formats are Portable Document Format (PDF) or Microsoft Word.

2. Nursing programs with questions regarding substantive changes should contact the Coordinator of Substantive Change for guidance.
3. In addition to the submission of the Closing Report, a letter confirming the program's final closure is to be submitted to the ACEN within 10 calendar days of the actual closing date.

## **REQUIRED INFORMATION IN THE CLOSING REPORT**

### **A. Type of Closing by Type**

1. Closing a program
2. Closing an off-campus instructional site
3. Closing a branch campus

B. Teach-out Agreement

The ACEN may approve the teach-out agreement only if the agreement:

1. Includes a description and timetable demonstrating how all current nursing students will have the opportunity to successfully complete their nursing education and ensures that all current nursing students have the opportunity to successfully complete their nursing education within a specified timeframe.
2. Ensures that students are no longer being admitted into the nursing program, off-campus instructional site, or branch campus where a nursing program is offered.
3. Is consistent with the program-specific Accreditation Standards and Criteria.
4. Is between institutions that are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency.
5. Provides for the equitable treatment of students, specifies any additional charges, and provides for notification to the students regarding any additional charges.
6. Ensures/demonstrates that the teach-out institution has the necessary experience, resources, and support services to:
  - a. provide a program of study that is of acceptable quality and reasonably similar in content, structure, and scheduling to that provided by the program of study that is closing
  - b. remain stable, carry out its mission, and meet all obligations to students currently enrolled in the program of study that is closing
  - c. provide students currently enrolled in the nursing program, off-campus instructional site, or branch campus where a nursing program is offered that is closing access to their program of study and academic/student support services without requiring them to move or travel substantial distances and
  - d. provide students with information about additional charges, if any
7. Specifies appropriate plans for the maintenance of the records pertinent to the nursing program and each graduate such as student files, notification of graduates, provision for security and confidentiality, and processing of requests for information.

If the ACEN approves a teach-out agreement that includes a program of study that is accredited by another recognized accrediting agency, the ACEN must notify that accrediting agency of its approval.

C. Teach-out Plan

The ACEN may approve the teach-out plan only if the plan:

1. Includes a description and timetable demonstrating how all current nursing students will have the opportunity to successfully complete their nursing education and ensures that

all current nursing students have the opportunity to successfully complete their nursing education within a specified timeframe.

2. Ensures that students are no longer being admitted into the nursing program, off-campus instructional site, or branch campus where a nursing program is offered.
3. Is consistent with the program-specific Accreditation Standards and Criteria.
4. Demonstrates that there will be an adequate number of appropriately qualified faculty to carry out instructional activities in the program of study until all students graduate.
5. Demonstrates that there will be a continuation of essential academic and student support services (e.g., learning center, counseling, financial aid, health, and housing) to facilitate the students' success in the program of study until all students graduate.
6. Specifies appropriate plans for the maintenance of the records pertinent to the nursing program and each graduate such as student files, notification of graduates, provision for security and confidentiality, and processing of requests for information.

If the ACEN approves a teach-out plan that includes a program of study that is accredited by another recognized accrediting agency, the ACEN must notify that accrediting agency of its approval.

Policy #16 History  
Revised July 2015  
Edited January 2018  
Edited May 2018

## **POLICY #17**

### **STATE REGULATORY AGENCY FOR NURSING APPROVAL**

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If a nursing program has a change in its approval status with the state regulatory agency for nursing, the administrator of the program shall immediately submit to the ACEN a report explaining the reasons for the decision, a copy of the letter received from the state regulatory agency for nursing, and a report of plans to correct the situation. The Commission will determine appropriate follow-up actions after review of the submitted materials. The accreditation status of the nursing program may be changed. See ACEN Policy #19.

[Policy #17 History](#)  
Revised July 2015

## **POLICY #18**

### **ACCREDITATION STATUS OF THE GOVERNING ORGANIZATION**

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The governing organization offering an ACEN-accredited nursing program must be accredited by an appropriate agency. If the institutional accrediting agency revokes its accreditation of the governing organization, the nurse administrator shall immediately submit to the ACEN a report explaining the reasons for the decision, the effect of the decision on the program, and plans made by the governing organization to become fully reinstated. The Commission will determine appropriate follow-up actions following review of the submitted materials. See ACEN Policy #19.

[Policy #18 History](#)  
Revised July 2015

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## **POLICY #19**

### **FOCUSED VISIT**

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The Commission may determine a focused visit is warranted in order to review significant accreditation-related information disclosed about a program as a result of:

1. A substantive change;
2. Information revealed about a program between periods of scheduled review;
3. Information received from the governing organization's accrediting body related to an adverse action;
4. Information received from the program's state regulatory agency for nursing related to a change in its status;
5. Information revealed by a program during the Evaluation Review Panel process;
6. Information received from the U.S. Department of Education regarding a program's compliance responsibilities under Title IV of the Higher Education Act such as information related to a program's most recent student loan default rates, the results of financial or compliance audits, program reviews, and any other information that may be provided by the U.S. Department of Education.

The Accreditation Standard(s) pertinent to the reason for the focused visit will be reviewed. Professional staff will determine the Accreditation Standard(s) and Criteria to be reviewed. The nursing program must prepare a Focused Visit Report based on the Accreditation Standard(s) and Criteria identified and submit the Report to the site visitors and ACEN six (6) weeks before the site visit; the Focused Visit Report is the foundation for review of compliance with the identified Accreditation Standard(s) and Criteria. Guidelines for creating the Focused Visit Report are available on the ACEN website. The focused visit is typically one (1) to two (2) day(s) in length. The ACEN reserves the right to have a professional staff member accompany site visitors as an observer on the focused visit to offer guidance. The nursing program is responsible for all costs of the visit.

Following the focused visit, the Focused Site Visit Report will be reviewed by the Board of Commissioners at a regularly scheduled meeting. Based on the Focused Site Visit Report, the Board of Commissioners may take the following actions:

1. Affirm the program's accreditation status and date of the next scheduled visit; no further information is requested.
2. Change the date of the program's next scheduled visit to a date earlier than previously scheduled. This is not an appealable action.
3. Change the program's accreditation status to one (1) of the following statuses.
  - a. Continuing accreditation with conditions when the program is found to be in non-compliance with one (1) or two (2) Accreditation Standards; Follow-Up Report required; site visit may or may not be required. This is not an appealable action.

- b. Continuing accreditation with warning when the program is found to be in non-compliance with three (3) or more Accreditation Standards; Follow-Up Report required; site visit required. This is not an appealable action.
  - c. Continuing accreditation for good cause when a program is found to be in non-compliance with **any** Accreditation Standards, is at the conclusion of its maximum monitoring period, and the program can make its case for good cause; Follow-Up Report required; site visit required. This is not an appealable action. See ACEN Policy #4.
4. Deny continuing accreditation and remove the program from the listings of accredited programs. This is an appealable action. See ACEN Policy #10.

The maximum period for the status of continuing accreditation with conditions or continuing accreditation with warning for master's, baccalaureate, associate, and diploma programs to be monitored is two (2) years from the Commission's determination of this accreditation status. The maximum period for the status of continuing accreditation with conditions or continuing accreditation with warning for practical nursing programs is 18 months from the Board of Commissioner's original action.

The maximum period for the status of good cause for master's, baccalaureate, associate, and diploma programs to be monitored is two (2) years from the Commission's determination of this accreditation status. The maximum period for the status of good cause for practical nursing programs is 18 months from the Board of Commissioner's original action.

Policy #19 History  
Revised July 2015

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## **POLICY #20**

# **COMPLAINTS AGAINST AN ACCREDITED PROGRAM**

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The ACEN will only act upon substantiated complaints against an accredited program that indicate:

1. A governing organization's and/or nursing program's non-compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria;
2. A governing organization's and/or nursing program's non-compliance with ACEN policy; and/or
3. A governing organization's and/or nursing program's non-compliance with its own published policy as said policy relates to the ACEN Standards and Criteria.

The ACEN will not interpose itself as a reviewing authority in individual matters such as, but not limited to, admission; grades; granting or transferability of credits; application of academic policies; fees or other financial matters; disciplinary matters; contractual rights and obligations; personnel decisions; or similar matters. The ACEN will also not seek any type of compensation, damages, re-admission, or other redress on an individual's behalf. The ACEN will not respond to or take action upon any complaint that is defamatory, hostile, or profane. In addition, the ACEN will not involve itself in collective bargaining disputes. The ACEN does not accept complaints about individuals.

In addition, the ACEN may act upon concerns from a recognized state or federal agency.

An individual interested in submitting information regarding a nursing program to be considered during an upcoming initial or continuing accreditation review should follow ACEN Policy #8 Opportunities for Third-Party Comments on Programs Scheduled for Evaluation. The ACEN reserves the right to review and act upon incoming complaints or third-party comments under either ACEN Policy #8 or Policy #20 as appropriate to the circumstance.

Records of individual complaints will be maintained by the ACEN for eight (8) years. If a number of individual complaints suggest a pattern of concern not evident from any single complaint, the ACEN may renew its consideration of a matter for whatever action may be appropriate.

The ACEN expects an individual to attempt to resolve an issue through the governing organization's and/or nursing program's own published grievance policy/procedures (if applicable) before submitting a complaint to the ACEN. Therefore, an individual must use all available grievance and means of appeal within the governing organization and/or nursing education unit before filing a complaint with the ACEN. The ACEN will not consider a complaint while institutional proceedings or litigation appertaining thereto are ongoing. However, if the ACEN determines that the complainant raises issues so immediate that a delay may jeopardize the nursing program's accreditation status or cause harm to nursing students, the ACEN may, at its discretion, choose to proceed with its review.

The ACEN will not review or act upon a complaint to which the governing organization's and/or nursing program's published grievance policy/procedures apply if it is formally filed with the ACEN more than one (1) year after the completion of the policy/procedures. The ACEN will not review or act upon a complaint to which such policies/procedures do not apply if it is formally filed with the ACEN more than one (1) year after the circumstances leading to the complaint.



## **SUBMITTING A COMPLAINT**

1. The complaint must be presented to the ACEN as a written, signed, and dated statement with supporting documentation. The ACEN will not review or act upon complaints that are not presented in writing.
2. All complaints must be submitted using the ACEN's official Complaint Form, which must be completed in its entirety. The ACEN's official Complaint Form is available at [[www.acenursing.com/forms/ACENComplaintForm.docx](http://www.acenursing.com/forms/ACENComplaintForm.docx)]. Complaints submitted without the official Complaint Form, completed in its entirety, will not be reviewed or acted upon.
3. The completed Complaint Form and the required supporting documentation must be submitted to the ACEN via the United States Postal Service or an express carrier (e.g., UPS, FedEx, DHL, etc.).
4. The completed Complaint Form and the required supporting documentation may be submitted to the ACEN in paper format or using a USB storage device.
5. The ACEN will not review or act upon anonymous complaints, nor will it review or act upon complaints submitted by an individual or agency on behalf of another individual. For example, the ACEN will not review or act upon a complaint from a parent, spouse, child, sibling, co-worker, or friend of a complainant, or from an attorney.
6. The ACEN must be the original intended recipient of the complaint and will not review or act upon complaints that are forwarded to the ACEN.
7. The ACEN will not accept or discuss complaints via telephone.
8. All written materials, including the submitted Complaint Form, the required supporting documentation, and any other printed materials, must be presented in English.

Each governing organization and nursing education unit is required to have in place written student complaint policies and procedures that are reasonable, fairly administered, and well publicized. The ACEN also requires, in accordance with federal regulations, that each governing organization and nursing education unit maintain a record of complaints received. This record must be available to the ACEN upon request. The record(s) for the nursing program will be examined by the ACEN as part of the program's initial or continuing accreditation review.

## **ACEN PROCEDURE FOR PROCESSING COMPLAINTS**

1. The ACEN will acknowledge a complaint within 15 business days of its receipt.
2. Within 60 business days after acknowledging receipt of the complaint, the ACEN staff will review the complaint and determine whether:
  - a. it is related to the program's accreditation status,
  - b. it is within the scope of ACEN policy, and/or
  - c. it demonstrates the governing organization's and/or nursing program's non-compliance with:
    - i. the ACEN Standards and Criteria,
    - ii. an ACEN policy, and/or

- iii. the governing organization's and/or nursing program's own published policy as said policy relates to the ACEN Standards and Criteria, and
      - d. there is adequate evidence in support of the allegations made in the complaint.
3. If the complaint does not have sufficient substance to warrant further review, the ACEN will communicate this to the complainant, in writing, within 15 business days of reaching this conclusion.
4. If the complaint has sufficient substance to warrant further review, the ACEN will make every effort to expedite its review; however, the time required to conduct its review may vary considerably depending on the circumstances and nature of the complaint.
5. When a complaint is reviewed further, a copy of the complaint will be forwarded to the nurse administrator of the nursing program, who will be asked to respond to the ACEN within 20 business days. Upon receipt of a response from the nurse administrator, the ACEN reserves the right to request additional materials, as needed, from the complainant and/or nurse administrator.
6. If there is insufficient evidence of non-compliance, the complaint will not be processed further. The decision of the ACEN Chief Executive Officer is final, and the complainant and nurse administrator will be notified of this outcome.
7. If there appears to be sufficient evidence of non-compliance or if the ACEN staff are unable to determine compliance, the following actions may be taken by the ACEN Chief Executive Officer (the complainant and nurse administrator will be notified of this outcome):
  - a. The complaint may be forwarded directly to the ACEN Board of Commissioners for review and action.
  - b. A Focused Visit to evaluate the governing organization/nursing program may be authorized. The Focused Visit Team will examine documents and interview institutional personnel to analyze and make a judgment regarding compliance, after which they will prepare a Focused Site Visit Report. This Report will be forwarded to the ACEN Board of Commissioners for review and action at the next meeting of the Board. Following that meeting, the complainant and nurse administrator will be notified of the Board's decision.
  - c. The complaint allegations may be reviewed as part of an upcoming scheduled visit to the nursing program. The site visitors will examine documents and interview institutional personnel to analyze and make a judgment regarding compliance, after which they will prepare a Site Visit Report. This Report will be forwarded to the ACEN Board of Commissioners for review and action at the next meeting of the Board. Following that meeting, the complainant and nurse administrator will be notified of the decision of the Board.

For items 7a, 7b, or 7c above, the decision of the ACEN Board of Commissioners is final unless appealable as delineated in ACEN Policy #10 Appeal Process and Submission and Review of New Financial Information Subsequent to Adverse Action.

## **POLICY #21**

# **COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE ACCREDITATION COMMISSION FOR EDUCATION IN NURSING**

The Executive Committee of the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing receives complaints made against the ACEN staff, Commissioners, appeal panels, or peer evaluators with respect to monitoring of a program's compliance with ACEN Standards and Criteria or adherence to accreditation procedures.

When such a complaint is received, the Executive Committee, operating under the Conflict of Interest Policy, appoints a special committee to investigate the complaint in a timely, fair, and equitable manner. Commissioners shall not participate in any capacity on the special committee.

<b>PROCEDURE</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>
The complaint is presented to the ACEN as a written, signed, and dated statement.	
All written complaints received regarding monitoring of a program's compliance with ACEN Standards and Criteria or adherence to accreditation procedures shall be forwarded to the Chair of the Commission.	Within 10 business days of receipt
The Chair will review the complaint and may request, as necessary, additional information from the complainant or the ACEN staff.	Within 10 business days of the Chair's receipt
The Chair will appoint a special committee of three persons composed of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One (1) representative from nursing education;</li> <li>• One (1) representative from nursing service; and</li> <li>• One (1) public member.</li> </ul>	Within 14 business days of the Chair's receipt and following the 10-day review period
The special committee presents its findings to the Commission for action.	At the next scheduled meeting
The special committee presentation is to be referred to a subsequent Commission meeting if the next scheduled meeting does not allow a 30-day review period by the special committee.	The Board of Commissioners can (a) affirm that policies and procedures have been applied appropriately and/or (b) recommend changes to be made.
The complainant will be notified of action taken by the Commission.	Within 30 business days of the Commission meeting

Policy #21 History  
Revised April 2014  
Edited October 2016

## **POLICY #22**

# **PROGRAM ACCREDITATION STATUS IN RELATION TO STATE AND OTHER ACCREDITING AGENCY ACTIONS**

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1. The ACEN accredits only those nursing programs in institutions that are legally authorized under applicable state law to provide a program of education beyond the secondary level and have institutional accreditation.
2. The ACEN does not grant initial accreditation status to a nursing program when the governing organization in which the program resides:
  - a. Has been denied accreditation, been placed on probationary status or equivalent, or had its accreditation revoked by a recognized accrediting agency.
  - b. Has had its legal authority to provide postsecondary education suspended, revoked, or terminated by a state agency.
3. The ACEN may not grant continuing accreditation status to a nursing program when the governing organization is:
  - a. Subject to an adverse action by a recognized institutional accrediting agency that may result in the suspension, revocation, or termination of its accreditation.
  - b. Subject to an adverse action by a state agency that may result in the suspension, revocation, or termination of the governing organization's legal authority to provide postsecondary education.
  - c. Threatened by loss of accreditation, and due process procedures required by the action have not been completed.
  - d. Threatened by suspension, revocation, or termination by a state agency of the governing organization's legal authority to provide postsecondary education, and due process procedures required by the action have not been completed.
4. When a nursing program is being reviewed for continuing accreditation during a period when the governing organization is subject to an adverse action by an institutional accrediting agency or state agency, the Board of Commissioners will determine what action should be taken.
5. The ACEN may not grant initial or continuing accreditation status to a nursing program during a period in which the nursing education unit:
  - a. Is the subject of an adverse action by a state agency that may result in the suspension, revocation, or termination of approval.
  - b. Has been notified of a threatened loss of approval, and due process procedures required by the action have not been completed.

- c. Has been denied approval, placed on public probationary status or equivalent, or had its approval revoked by a state agency.
  - d. Had its legal authority to provide nursing education suspended, revoked, or terminated by a state agency.
6. When a nursing program is being reviewed for initial or continuing accreditation status during a period when the nursing education unit is subject to an adverse action by a state agency, the Board of Commissioners will determine what action should be taken. See ACEN Policy #19.
7. If the ACEN grants initial or continuing accreditation to a nursing program notwithstanding the actions of a recognized institutional accrediting agency or a state agency, the ACEN will provide within 30 calendar days of the decision an explanation to the Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education as to why it granted accreditation and why the action of the other agency does not preclude the ACEN's granting of accreditation.
8. If the ACEN is notified that the governing organization of an ACEN-accredited nursing program has received an adverse action or been placed on probationary status or equivalent by a recognized institutional accrediting agency or state agency, the ACEN will promptly review the program to determine what action should be taken. See ACEN Policy #19.
9. If the ACEN is notified that an ACEN-accredited nursing program has received an adverse action or been placed on probationary status or equivalent by a state agency, the ACEN will promptly review the program to determine what action should be taken. See ACEN Policy #19.

Policy #22 History  
Revised July 2015

## **POLICY #23**

### **PUBLIC NOTICE OF PROPOSED NEW OR REVISED STANDARDS AND CRITERIA**

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The ACEN Accreditation Standards and Criteria are developed, reviewed, and revised periodically by means of procedures that involve continuous input from accredited schools (by program type) and identified communities of interest. The ACEN ensures the circulation of proposed revisions to the Accreditation Standards and Criteria and the opportunity for comment from interested parties.

Policy #23 History  
Revised April 2014

## **POLICY #24**

# **ASSESSMENT OF THE ADEQUACY OF STANDARDS AND CRITERIA, ACEN PROCESS, AND PRACTICES**

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The ACEN maintains an ongoing systematic review designed to ensure that (1) the Standards and Criteria are valid and reliable indicators of the educational quality provided by accredited programs and are relevant to the educational needs of students; (2) ACEN processes are reliable and assess knowledge and consistency of observations, applications, decisions, and perceptions; and (3) there are broad communications and consultations across constituencies.

The findings from the ongoing review are used for development, maintenance, and revision of the ACEN Accreditation Standards and Criteria, processes, and practices. Evidence to support ongoing systematic review appears in Commission minutes, annual reports, the ACEN Report to Constituents, on the ACEN website, and at the ACEN Forums.

### **THE PROCESS OF REVIEW**

The process of review:

- Is comprehensive;
- Occurs at regular intervals;
- Examines each Standard and its accompanying Criteria as a whole;
- Involves all relevant constituencies in the review;
- Affords relevant constituencies a meaningful opportunity to provide input into the review; and
- Requires that needed changes be made promptly to improve the ACEN's effectiveness and efficiency and the consumer friendliness of ACEN products and services.

### **ASPECTS OF THE REVIEW**

A full review of the ACEN Accreditation Standards and Criteria occurs every five (5) years. The process consists of:

- Review of ongoing data analysis;
- Review of literature for trends in evaluation, nursing practice, and nursing education;
- Review of U.S. Department of Education Regulations;
- Distribution of draft versions to constituencies for comment;
- Review of comments and revision of drafts;
- Distribution of the revised drafts for comment;
- Review of comments and revision of drafts as needed; and
- Commission adoption of revised Standards and Criteria.

## **RELIABILITY OF ACEN PROCESSES**

Reliability is ensured by:

- Analysis of internal consistency and reliability of the accreditation status recommendations/decisions across the three (3) levels of review by and among all program types per accreditation review cycle and trended over time;
- Identification of strengths and areas needing development by Criterion across the three (3) levels of review by and among all program types per accreditation review cycle and trended over time; and
- Analysis of the perceived effectiveness of the planning and conduct of the accreditation site visit by the nursing program and the site visit teams by program type per accreditation review cycle and trended over time.

## **COMMUNICATION AND BROAD CONSULTATION PRACTICES**

Communication is ensured by:

- Solicitation of comments on proposed new or revised policies from all interested parties;
- Distribution of the Annual Report findings in the Report to Constituents and on the ACEN website as aggregated data trended over time; and
- Broad consultation across constituencies.

## **PLANNED USE OF DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis is used to:

- Maintain validity and relevance of the ACEN Standards and Criteria;
- Maintain reliability of the ACEN accreditation processes and practices;
- Continue to identify and disseminate information in appropriate arenas regarding specific education needs of programs and peer evaluators as groups;
- Continue to identify and disseminate information in appropriate arenas regarding specific developmental needs of individual programs and peer evaluators; and
- Continue to identify and disseminate information in appropriate arenas regarding areas in which change needs to be facilitated.

## **EVALUATION OF THE SITE VISIT**

For each site visit, the nursing program, team chair, and team members have an evaluation form to complete. The information is used to:

- Improve the quality of the accreditation process; and
- Identify potential team chairs.

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

All accredited programs are required to submit an Annual Report.

The Annual Report will request, at a minimum, the following information:

- Enrollment figures;
- Graduation figures;
- Faculty numbers and credentials;
- Substantive change information;
- Complaints against the program;
- Job placement rates; and
- Licensure and certification examination pass rates

The ACEN staff will review the information to ensure that programs continue to comply with policies and reporting requirements. Significant changes will be referred to the ACEN Board of Commissioners and action may be taken as appropriate. Failure to submit the Annual Report could result in the ACEN Board of Commissioners taking appropriate action, including potentially altering the program's accreditation status.

Data will be compiled by the individual programs for monitoring purposes and reported in aggregate form, trended over time.

Programs with Title IV-HEA responsibilities must also submit information regarding compliance with their Title IV responsibilities and the result of financial or compliance audits.

Policy #24 History  
Revised November 2015  
Edited October 2016



## **POLICY #25**

### **TRANSFER OF CREDIT**

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At its discretion, a governing organization and/or nursing program may accept transfer credit for a course or courses completed in other postsecondary governing organizations when comparable in scope and content to the governing organization and/or nursing program's own coursework. The acceptance of credit for transfer is primarily based on the competencies achieved by the student in previously completed coursework and whether the competencies reasonably align with the coursework and the nursing program into which the credit is to be transferred.

Accreditation of the governing organization and/or nursing program from which the student is seeking to transfer credits may be a consideration for credit transfer decisions; however, accreditation of the governing organization and/or nursing program from which the student is seeking to transfer credits may not be the sole basis for accepting or denying credit for transfer nor should it be represented as a requirement of the ACEN.

In evaluating credit earned by students for transfer, a governing organization and/or nursing program must adhere to the following:

- Have established appropriate criteria for the acceptance of transfer credits including, at a minimum, the currency, comparability, relevancy to degree and/or nursing program, calculation of credit (e.g., clock hours to semester or quarter hours), and grade earned for the course or courses to be transferred.
- Apply a systematic, consistent process for determining whether to accept credit earned at other governing organizations.
- Document in the permanent student record the basis on which the transfer credit was accepted and identification of the governing organization from which the credit was transferred.
- Publicly disclose a list of the institutions with which the governing organization has established articulation agreements.

The governing organization and/or nursing program must publish its transfer-of-credit policy, including clear communication of the criteria and process for evaluating and accepting credit for transfer earned at other governing organizations, in all documents (paper and electronic) that serve to inform the public.

Policy #25 History  
Revised April 2014  
Revised March 2016

## **POLICY #26**

# **PROFESSIONAL STAFF RELATIONSHIP TO THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND EVALUATION REVIEW PANEL**

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Professional staff members of the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) are expected to advise and inform the Evaluation Review Panel and Board of Commissioners on matters relative to a nursing program. They should offer advice or provide information at their own initiative or at the request of the Evaluation Review Panel and Board of Commissioners. Such advice and information do not supplant the peer review process, but rather provide additional insight in reaching an informed judgment.

### **PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES**

1. In order to maintain the strength and consistency of the process, professional staff members provide information and advice as appropriate when assisting the Evaluation Review Panel in making a recommendation on the accreditation status of a nursing program and Board of Commissioners in making a decision on the accreditation status of a program. Particularly germane is historical information on similarly situated nursing programs and procedural and substantive advice on how the ACEN policies and Accreditation Standards and Criteria have been interpreted and could be applied to a program's case, including possible action and follow-up. This information is presented orally during the Evaluation Review Panel's and Board of Commissioner's discussion.
2. The professional staff role in the deliberations is an active role. Professional staff members provide information and advice, which may include evidence and evidence-based professional opinions on a nursing program's patterns, progress, and suggested action.
3. The professional staff's role in the process may not supplant the peer review and decision process.

Policy #26 History  
Developed July 2015

## **POLICY #27**

### **FEES AND EXPENSES**

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It is the obligation of every accredited program to pay all ACEN fees and expenses when due. Failure to pay ACEN fees and expenses when due shall be deemed a voluntary withdrawal from accreditation pursuant to ACEN Policy #7 Voluntary Withdrawal from ACEN Accreditation.

A billing statement for annual ACEN accreditation fees shall be issued annually to every accredited program, and fees are payable upon receipt.

A billing statement of fees and expenses incurred by ACEN in carrying out its accreditation functions shall be issued and fees are payable upon receipt.

A schedule of current fees and expenses is available at <http://www.acenursing.org/resources-for-nursing-programs/>.

Policy #27 History  
Developed March 2016

## **POLICY #28 LITIGATION**

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### **COSTS OF COMPLIANCE WITH THIRD-PARTY DISCOVERY REQUESTS**

The costs of compliance with third-party discovery requests made on ACEN with regard to accredited programs can be high and cannot be reasonably anticipated for budgeting purposes. To defray these costs in part, where reimbursement for the expense of producing the documents is not provided by the party serving the subpoena or document request, ACEN may charge the accredited program with the costs of production, including the costs of copying and delivering the documents and attorney's fees incurred in compliance with the subpoena or request.

### **INSTITUTIONAL FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS FOLLOWING LITIGATION**

Any accredited program that takes legal action against ACEN regarding an accreditation decision and withdraws its case or loses its case is responsible for assuming all costs incurred by ACEN while defending its decision, including attorney's fees. These costs must be paid in full within forty-five (45) calendar days following the program's receipt of the ACEN invoice, unless other arrangements are approved by the Executive Committee acting on behalf of the Board of Commissioners.

### **CHOICE OF LAW, JURISDICTION, AND VENUE**

As a condition of ACEN accreditation, each program acknowledges that all agreements created by the ACEN granting such status shall be deemed to have been entered into in Fulton County, Georgia, and shall be interpreted in accordance with the laws of the State of Georgia. Further, each program agrees that jurisdiction and venue for any action which might arise from any accreditation agreement between the program and ACEN, regardless of which party shall initiate the action, shall be exclusively in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Georgia or the state courts of Fulton County, Georgia, whichever of these courts shall have proper subject matter jurisdiction.

Policy #28 History  
Developed March 2016

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## **POLICY #29**

# **ADVERTISING AND RECRUITMENT OF STUDENTS**

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### **ADVERTISING, PUBLICATIONS, PROMOTIONAL LITERATURE**

The governing organization/nursing program ensures in institutional and programmatic publications that:

1. The nursing program and institutional/programmatic services offered to facilitate student success are the primary emphasis of all advertisements, publications, promotional literature, and recruitment activities.
2. All statements and representations are clear, factually accurate, and current. Supporting information is kept on file and readily available for review.
3. The publications are freely accessible (e.g., website, physical copy) and accurately depict the current:
  - a. institutional and nursing program purpose and goals
  - b. admission requirements and procedures for all nursing students
  - c. transfer of credit policy
  - d. academic calendar
  - e. tuition, fees, and other nursing program costs, including any fees associated with verification of student identity related to distance education
  - f. refund of costs policy and procedures
  - g. financial aid opportunities and requirements
  - h. grading system and related policies
  - i. curriculum for the nursing program, including all program options, with required course sequence, normal length of time required to complete the curriculum, and the frequency of which each course is offered
  - j. general education requirements
  - k. completion requirements for the nursing program, including all program options
  - l. end-of-program student learning outcomes and program outcomes
  - m. student conduct rules
  - n. student grievance policy and procedures
  - o. institutional/programmatic facilities and services readily available for educational use, including alternative methods of delivery
  - p. career opportunities
  - q. national and/or state legal requirements for eligibility for licensure or entry into the nursing profession
  - r. student achievement data that is consistent with ACEN Accreditation Standard 6 Outcomes regarding graduates' success on the licensure and/or certification examination, students' completion of the nursing program, and graduates obtaining a job, as well as additional student achievement data as the governing organization/nursing program considers appropriate to demonstrate the extent to which graduates are adequately prepared

All student achievement data reported/published for any purpose is expected to reflect an accurate and verifiable portrayal of a nursing program's performance, which is subject to review for integrity, accuracy, and completeness. The ACEN reserves the right to request that a governing organization/nursing program provide verification by an external source of a nursing

program's student achievement data that the ACEN relies on, in part, in making an accreditation decision. The governing organization/nursing program is responsible for any cost related to verification by an external sources of a nursing program's student achievement data.

## **STUDENT RECRUITMENT FOR ADMISSIONS**

1. Student recruitment is conducted by well-qualified admissions officers and trained volunteers whose credentials, purpose, and position or affiliation with the governing organization is clearly specified.
2. Independent contractors or agents used by the governing organization for recruiting purposes are governed by the same principles as institutional employees.
3. Institutions follow federal guidelines regarding compensation for student recruitment and admission activities.
4. Institutions do not engage in the following practices:
  - a. assuring employment unless employment arrangements have been made and can be verified
  - b. misrepresenting job placement and employment opportunities for graduates
  - c. misrepresenting program costs
  - d. disparaging comparisons of secondary or postsecondary institutions
  - e. misrepresenting abilities required to complete intended program
  - f. offering money or inducements other than educational services of the governing organization in exchange for student enrollment (except for awards of privately endowed restricted funds, grants or scholarships are to be offered only on the basis of specific criteria related to merit or financial need)

Policy #29 History  
Developed March 2016  
Revised October 2016  
Edited March 2018

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## **POLICY #30**

### **AGREEMENT FOR EDUCATION-RELATED COMPONENT FROM AN EXTERNAL SOURCE**

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As governing organizations/nursing programs seek ways to provide a quality education to students, the governing organization/nursing program may find that it is practical or efficient to engage an external source to develop and/or deliver a component(s) of the ACEN-accredited nursing program. The component(s) of the ACEN-accredited nursing program developed and/or delivered from an external source include(s) traditional instructional delivery methods, hybrid instructional delivery methods, and distance education instructional delivery methods.

An education-related component from an external source includes, but is not limited to:

1. Engaging another college/university to teach that institution's nursing and/or non-nursing component to the governing organization's students enrolled in its ACEN-accredited nursing program.

Examples include (a) "College Z" contracting with "College X" for "College X" to teach "College X's" general education courses to students enrolled in "College Z's" ACEN-accredited nursing program or (b) "College Z" contracting with a "College Y" for "College Y" to teach "College Y's" laboratory component to students enrolled in "College Z's" ACEN-accredited nursing program.

2. Participating in a consortium to teach any nursing and/or non-nursing component that is required for the governing organization's ACEN-accredited nursing program.

Examples include multiple nursing programs sharing courses and/or faculty to teach nursing and/or non-nursing courses to students enrolled in their nursing programs.

3. Engaging another college/university to provide any nursing and/or non-nursing faculty to teach any nursing and/or non-nursing component for the governing organization's ACEN-accredited nursing program.

Examples include (a) "College Z" contracting with "College X" for "College X's" faculty to teach "College Z's" general education courses to students enrolled in "College Z's" ACEN-accredited nursing program or (b) "College Z" contracting with "College Y" for "College Y's" faculty to teach "College Z's" laboratory component to students enrolled in "College Z's" ACEN-accredited nursing program.

A governing organization/nursing program accredited by the ACEN is responsible for all activities carried out under its name. All ACEN Accreditation Standards, policies, and procedures apply to any agreement with an external source for an education-related component(s). The governing organization/nursing program should be especially mindful of ACEN Policy #14 Reporting Substantive Changes, Policy #15 Distance Education, Policy #20 Complaints Against an Accredited Program, and Policy #25 Transfer of Credit.

The following are required for a governing organization and its ACEN-accredited nursing program entering into an agreement with an external source to provide an education-related component(s), whether the external source holds or does not hold institutional and/or programmatic accreditation:

1. The primary purpose of the component(s) is educational.
2. The governing organization/nursing program is responsible for the accuracy of all advertising, recruiting, and promotional materials.
3. The governing organization is responsible for ensuring that all legal requirements for federal and state student financial aid programs used by students are met.
4. The governing organization/nursing program is responsible for informing the external source that the agreement does not imply or extend ACEN accreditation to the external source.
5. Every component must be consistent with the governing organization's/nursing program's mission and objectives as they were at the time of the last evaluation conducted by ACEN.
6. Every education-related component must be consistent with the nursing program's published curriculum/program options, end-of-program student learning outcomes, and program outcomes.
7. If the education-related component involves a credit-bearing course(s)/content offered by the external source, then the value and level of credit must be determined by the governing organization/nursing program in accordance with the governing organization's/nursing program's established procedures, and under the usual mechanism of review. Evidence that the established governing organization's policies/procedures were followed must be available.
8. The governing organization/nursing program follows all established shared governance policies/procedures for approval of education-related components. Evidence that the established governing organization's policies/procedures were followed must be available.
9. The governing organization/nursing program follows all ACEN policies/procedures for approval of education-related components. Evidence that the ACEN policies/procedures were followed must be available.
10. While the governing organization's personnel may or may not teach the education-related component(s), the nursing faculty and appropriate governing organization representatives must retain overall accountability and control of the integrity, rigor, and currency of the nursing and non-nursing education-related component(s).
11. The governing organization/nursing program must ensure ongoing collaboration between the nursing faculty, appropriate governing organization representatives, and the external source to safeguard the integrity, rigor, and currency of the nursing curriculum. Evidence of collaboration, including periodic and adequate review of work performed by the external source, must be available.
12. The governing organization/nursing program is ultimately responsible for all aspects of its ACEN-accredited nursing program, including but not limited to:



- a. Students' successful achievement of end-of-program student learning outcomes and program outcomes;
- b. Admissions to the nursing program;
- c. Review and approval of all nursing and non-nursing education-related component(s);
- d. Review and approval of the appointment/selection of all nursing and non-nursing faculty, whether or not the faculty member is employed by the governing organization of the ACEN-accredited nursing program;
- e. Quality of resources and services (e.g., library/information, technical support, student support, IT infrastructure, etc.);
- f. Student and faculty access to resources and services (e.g., library/information, technical support, student support, IT infrastructure, etc.);
- g. All credits that appear on the governing organization's transcript; and
- h. Ensuring the privacy of students and the security of students' records.

There must be a written agreement between the governing organization/nursing program and external source that is executed by duly designated officer(s) of the governing organization/nursing program and appropriate counterparts from the external source.

The agreement clearly establishes and defines:

1. The scope and nature of the work to be performed by each party;
2. A mechanism to account for the scope and nature of the work provided by each party;
3. The period of the agreement and the conditions under which any possible renewal, renegotiation, or termination could take place;
4. Appropriate protection for enrolled students in the event that the agreement is terminated or renegotiated;
5. Appropriate avenue(s) for addressing perceived breaches of the agreement;
6. How appropriate representatives from both parties will periodically review the success of the agreement;
7. The compensation and other considerations for the education-related component provided by both parties;
8. How necessary student and faculty support services and resources will be assured;
9. How student and faculty access to support services and resources will be assured;
10. The procedure for a student grievance regarding any aspect of the education-related component;

11. The governing organization's awarding of credit for the education-related component(s), if appropriate; and
12. How outcomes assessment will be conducted on the education-related component(s), if appropriate;

The agreement is:

1. Submitted to federal and/or state agencies for approval when required;
2. Submitted to the ACEN for approval when required as specified in ACEN Policy #14 Reporting Substantive Changes; and
3. Available on request to the ACEN and peer evaluators acting on its behalf.

Policy #30 History  
Developed March 2016

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## **POLICY #31 INTEGRITY**

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A governing organization and/or nursing program shall demonstrate honesty and integrity in all disclosures to the ACEN and its representatives, students, and the public. A governing organization/nursing program in disclosing any information to the ACEN and its representatives, students, and the public shall:

1. Disclose all voluntary, required, or requested information in a timely manner;
2. Fully, accurately, and straightforwardly disclose all voluntary, required, or requested information, including data, whether complimentary or otherwise; and
3. Comply with all of the ACEN's requirements, policies, guidelines, decisions, and requests.

The ACEN accredits selected types of governing organizations and all types of nursing programs, not individuals. Therefore, any individual who reports to the ACEN on behalf of a governing organization/nursing program, either by virtue of his or her office or as delegated by the chief executive officer of the governing organization, obligates the governing organization and nursing program in all matters regarding integrity. Additionally, in order to comply with the requirements for honesty and integrity, appropriate representatives (e.g., nurse administrator, chief executive officer, etc.) of the governing organization are obligated to review and ensure the honesty and integrity of information disclosed.

With due regard for confidentiality, a governing organization/nursing program applying for candidacy or seeking initial or continuing accreditation shall provide ACEN and its representatives with unrestricted access to all aspects of its operations, including information about the governing organization's/nursing program's affairs, including, but not limited to, reports of other accrediting, licensing, and auditing agencies.

If the ACEN has reason to believe that a governing organization/nursing program has breached this policy, the ACEN will conduct an investigation and issue a report of its findings. The investigation will utilize an appropriate process. The governing organization/nursing program will have the opportunity to respond to any alleged breach prior to the ACEN imposing a sanction.

Presenting false, distorted, or incomplete information of any type, either through intent or through failure to exercise care and diligence, is considered a breach of this policy. Failure to respond appropriately to the ACEN decisions and requests in a timely manner, or to make complete, accurate, and honest disclosure, is sufficient reason, in and of itself, for the ACEN to impose a sanction.

Verified breaches may adversely affect the governing organization's/nursing program's accreditation status with the ACEN. Depending on the seriousness of the breach, sanctions by the Board of Commissioners may result in a letter of censure, being placed on warning, being denied continuing accreditation and being removed from the listing of accredited nursing programs, or being denied initial accreditation. Only the decisions by the ACEN Board of Commissioners to deny continuing accreditation and remove a governing organization/nursing program from the listing of accredited programs or to deny initial accreditation are appealable actions.

## **POLICY #32**

### **OBSERVER ON SITE VISIT TEAM**

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A nursing program beginning its initial or reaccreditation review process may designate one (1) person who is to be allowed to accompany a site visit team to observe and learn from site visit team activities and from the review process experience of persons at the host nursing program.

1. A site visit team may have only one (1) observer and that observer may not have any conflict of interest as defined by ACEN Policy #1 Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest.
2. All host programs must agree to have an observer accompany the site visit team.
3. The ACEN cannot guarantee that all requests can be honored due to the variability in the number of scheduled site visits.
4. Requests to have an observer accompany the site visit team will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis; programs that agree to host an observer will receive priority.
5. All requests must be submitted to the ACEN staff member assigned to manage the observer process.

### **CONDITIONS AND POLICIES**

1. All observers are under the same obligation as site visit team members regarding the maintenance of confidentiality of the governing organization/nursing program information, materials, and committee discussions and proceedings. See ACEN Policy #1 Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest.
2. Every effort will be made to ensure that the observer receives from the nursing program, in advance of the visit, the same information and materials that site visit team members receive from the nursing program.
3. Every effort will be made to ensure that the observer is included in all ACEN pre-site visit conferences.
4. The observer is expected to make his/her own travel arrangements and to inform the host nursing program and site visit team chair regarding those arrangements. It is customary for the host nursing program to arrange to meet committee members at the pre-arranged airport, train station, or bus station, and transport site visit team members to the place of lodging. It will normally be possible to include observers in these arrangements.
5. Reservations for hotel rooms are customarily made by the host nursing program. The ACEN staff, in communicating with the host nursing program about the observer, will request that the host nursing program make a reservation for the observer as well. If the observer elects to make other arrangements for housing, the ACEN and the host nursing program must be informed of that fact. It is recommended that the observer stay at the same place of lodging as the site visit team so as to facilitate prompt attendance at all committee meetings, make most effective use of local travel arrangements, and maximize interaction with the site visit team members.

6. Neither the ACEN nor the host nursing program is responsible for any expenses (e.g., travel, lodging, meal, etc.) incurred by the observer in connection with observing the site visit team process. All expenses must be borne by the observer and/or the observer's governing organization/nursing program.
7. The observer is expected to arrive in time for the organizational meeting on the first day of the site visit and remain for the duration of the visit as well as be punctual for all committee activities scheduled by the site visit team chair.
8. Observers should not be assigned any responsibility for data gathering, evaluation, or writing of the Site Visit Report. The extent of verbal participation by the observer in executive sessions of the site visit team is at the discretion of the site visit team chair.
9. Site visit team members have a full agenda and limited time in which to carry out their responsibilities. It is anticipated that there will be numerous opportunities for the observer to interact with site visit team members as they fulfill their responsibilities; however, the observer must be flexible.
10. If the observer arranges to accompany a site visit team member on an interview, the observer should behave in a discreet manner so as not to interfere in any way with the site visit team member's ability to meet his/her responsibilities as a peer evaluator.

Policy #32 History  
Developed October 2016

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## **POLICY #33**

### **FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

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*(Applies to only governing organizations/nursing programs for which the ACEN serves in a Title IV financial aid gatekeeper capacity.)*

#### **FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

The governing organization/nursing program is responsible for ensuring that it has, and maintains, the fiscal resources and financial stability necessary to provide a quality education to its students. This responsibility includes the appropriate management of Federal Title IV programs. The governing organization/nursing program shall provide evidence of compliance to the ACEN as outlined below. Where the governing organization/nursing program is a component of a larger system, information and evidence shall be for the organizational unit having direct responsibility and control over the nursing program and not the larger system.

#### **REQUIRED INFORMATION FOR INITIAL ACCREDITATION OF A NURSING PROGRAM**

##### **A. Administrative Capacity**

Properly credentialed and qualified administrative leadership and managerial personnel contribute to maintaining the fiscal resources and financial stability that are essential to the achievement of the current end-of-program student learning and program outcomes of the nursing program. The governing organization/nursing program shall provide current evidence that personnel holding key leadership positions responsible for financial management, including financial aid, are qualified to carry out their responsibilities.

The governing organization/nursing program shall provide the following for the individuals directly employed by the governing organization/nursing program and/or third-party service provider contracted by the governing organization/nursing program to conduct financial aid services:

1. Current organizational charts of the financial management and financial aid units for the governing organization/nursing program and/or third-party service provider that identify the individuals appointed to administrative and managerial leadership positions.
2. Current résumés and years of service with the governing organization/nursing program and/or third-party service provider for each of these individuals.
3. Explanation of any non-traditional qualifications used by the governing organization/nursing program and/or third-party service provider to select and appoint these individuals, if relevant.
4. Overview of the current responsibilities and services provided by third-party service providers, if relevant (provide a copy of third-party service contract(s)).

##### **B. Planning and Budget Development**

The effective allocation and use of resources, both financial and human, must be based on a sound nursing program planning process to accomplish the mission of a quality nursing program. The governing organization's/nursing program's planning process, as well as the budget development process, should be inclusive.

The governing organization/nursing program shall provide current evidence that its operational and capital budget development process is based on sound nursing program planning and that the budget is properly approved. The required evidence from the governing organization/nursing program shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Overview of the governing organization's/nursing program's current planning process including evidence of objectives, tasks, intended outcomes, and use of results.
2. Explanation of how planning for the nursing program currently integrates with the governing organization's/nursing program's budget development process.
3. Overview of the governing organization's/nursing program's current budget development process.
4. Explanation of the governing organization's/nursing program's current process for prioritizing budget requests in the context of the plans for the nursing program and available funds.
5. A copy of the governing organization's/nursing program's current budget and documentation of its approval.

C. Funding Sources and Financial Stability

Financial stability is predicated on a steady stream of revenue that is properly managed with a focus on sustaining the governing organization's/nursing program's long-term ability to accomplish its current mission.

The governing organization/nursing program shall provide evidence of sufficient resources and financial stability to include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Identification of all sources of operating revenues for the three (3) most recent fiscal years and a corresponding three-year history of the amount of funding these sources generated for the governing organization/nursing program.
2. Explanation of any fluctuations in past revenues and expected future revenues for the governing organization/nursing program.
3. Three-year budget history, including end-of-year results (budget vs. actuals) for the governing organization/nursing program.
4. Identification of any condition or event specific to the governing organization/nursing program that could affect the current or future ability to continue on-going nursing program operations.
5. Specific measures implemented and/or being implemented to ensure long-term financial stability of the governing organization/nursing program.

D. Financial Management Procedures and Internal Controls

Long-term financial stability and fulfillment of fiduciary responsibilities require that an organization have in place the proper financial management and reporting systems. Financial management includes having sufficient staff to ensure the separation of duties to achieve a proper level of internal controls; a system of record keeping and reporting supported by policies and procedures; and a process of regular review by senior management and the governing board.

The governing organization/nursing program shall provide evidence of a system of financial management and internal controls to include but not be limited to the following:

1. Description of the governing organization's/nursing program's current system of internal controls including the separation of duties relative to the awarding and disbursement of financial aid funds.
2. Copies of current relevant policies and procedures.
3. Description of the governing organization's/nursing program's current Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system for recording and reporting financial activity.
4. Current examples and evidence of management reporting, analysis, and review.

E. Audits and Financial Statements

Audits performed in accordance with Generally Accepted Auditing Standards (GAAS)/Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS) provide for the assessment of financial stability and a review of internal controls. Regular external audits conducted by an independent certified public accountant or appropriate governmental auditing agency are an essential component of financial management.

The governing organization/nursing program shall provide the following:

1. Audited financial statements for the governing organization (see [ACEN Glossary](#)) including management letters for the three (3) most recent fiscal years available prepared in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) by an independent certified public accountant or appropriate governmental auditing agency. If the governing organization/nursing program operates branch campuses (see [ACEN Glossary](#)), audited financial statements shall be submitted for each branch campus seeking initial accreditation.
2. The governing organization's/nursing program's response to and resolution of audit findings in the audits provided, if relevant.

F. Federal Requirements

A governing organization/nursing program offering Title IV financial aid for which the ACEN serves in a gatekeeper capacity shall provide evidence of authorization and compliance with program responsibilities; including, when a third-party service provider is used, evidence of authorization and compliance with program responsibilities for the third-party service provider. ACEN requires that the governing organization/nursing program submit current evidence of its current Program Participation Agreement (PPA) and all relevant correspondence from and to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE); including, when a third-party service provider is used, all relevant correspondence from and to the USDE and a third-party service provider related to the governing organization/nursing program. Additionally, the governing organization/nursing program and/or third-party service provider shall provide the following:

1. Federal award audits in conformance with Title 2 U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, Part 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards for the past three (3) fiscal years including management letters prepared by an independent certified public accountant or appropriate governmental auditing agency for the governing organization/nursing program and/or a third-party service provider as it relates to those services provided to the governing organization/nursing program.
2. Governing organization's/nursing program's and/or third-party service provider's response to and resolution of audit findings in the audits provided, if relevant.



3. Non-public governing organizations: Current composite score calculation based on the prior fiscal year's audited financial statements in accordance with the USDE Federal Student Aid Handbook, using the financial ratios worksheet available from the Information for Financial Aid Professionals (IFAP) Quality Assurance Program website.

Where the composite score is less than 1.5, provide evidence of compliance with any cash monitoring requirements that have been placed on the governing organization/nursing program and, if applicable, evidence of a posted letter of credit, if so required. See [ACEN Policy #14 Substantive Changes](#). Provide copies of all correspondence between the governing organization/nursing program and the USDE since the nursing program's last submitted the ACEN annual report.

4. Attestation by the governing organization/nursing program that no financial actions have been taken to manipulate the composite score formula results.
5. Final loan default rates for the past three (3) years for the governing organization/nursing program. If the final rate for the third year has not been issued, it is acceptable to provide the preliminary default rate.
6. Current evidence of default management plans and procedures for the governing organization/nursing program and/or third-party service provider.
7. Current evidence of cash monitoring and other participation requirements, if applicable, for the governing organization/nursing program and/or third-party service provider.

## **REQUIRED INFORMATION AT THE TIME OF SUBMITTING THE ACEN ANNUAL REPORT**

The governing organization/nursing program shall report, at the time of the ACEN Annual Report, the sufficiency of its financial resources and its compliance with Title IV requirements in accordance with [Policy #24 Assessment of Adequacy of Standards and Criteria, ACEN Process, and Practices](#).

The governing organization/nursing program shall provide the following information annually at the time the nursing program submits its Annual Report to the ACEN:

1. Identification of all the governing organization's/nursing program's operating revenue sources for the reporting year and an explanation for any changes from the previous year (e.g., changes in external funding, tuition increases, changes in enrollments, etc.)
2. A copy of the governing organization's/nursing program's approved operating budget for the reporting year and an explanation of any substantive variances between end-of-year budget and actual expenditures.
3. A copy of the governing organization's/nursing program's audited financial statements for the reporting year or most recent audited financial statements available and an explanation of actions taken to resolve audit findings in the audit provided, if relevant.
4. A copy of the governing organization's/nursing program's and/or third-party service provider's federal award audit for the reporting year and an explanation of actions taken to resolve audit findings, if relevant.
5. A copy of the U.S. Department of Education's calculated preliminary default rate (final if available) for the governing organization/nursing program received during the reporting year.
6. Non-public governing organizations: Current composite score calculation based on the reporting fiscal year's audited financial statements in accordance with U.S Department of Education, Federal Student Aid Handbook, using the financial ratios worksheet available

from the Information for Financial Aid Professionals (IFAP) Quality Assurance Program website.

Where the composite score is less than 1.5, provide evidence of compliance with any cash monitoring requirements that have been placed on the governing organization/nursing program and, if applicable, evidence of a posted letter of credit if so required. See [ACEN Policy #14 Substantive Changes](#). Provide copies of all correspondence between the governing organization/nursing program and the USDE since the nursing program's last submitted ACEN annual report.

7. Attestation by the governing organization/nursing program that no financial actions have been taken to manipulate the composite score formula results.

## **INTERMITTENT REPORTING AT TIME OF OCCURRENCE**

### **ACTIONS AFFECTING THE GOVERNING ORGANIZATION/NURSING PROGRAM**

The governing organization/nursing program shall immediately disclose to the ACEN any actions or recommendations of other accrediting agencies related to or involving, administrative capacity, planning and budgeting, funding resources or financial stability, financial management or internal controls, audits, or federal requirements. The nurse administrator shall provide a copy of the other accrediting agency's report and an explanation for any recommendations and plans to correct the situation. See [ACEN Policy #14 Substantive Changes](#). The accreditation status of the nursing program may be changed. See [ACEN Policy #4 Types of Commission Actions on Applications for Accreditation](#) and [Policy #19 Focused Visit](#).

If a governing organization/nursing program has a change in its financial status impacting its financial stability, the nurse administrator of the nursing program shall immediately submit to the ACEN a report explaining the reasons for the change and plans to correct the situation. The report shall identify all of the governing organization's/nursing program's current revenue sources including those that have changed and an explanation for the changes (e.g., changes in external funding, tuition increases, changes in enrollments, etc.) The Commission will determine appropriate follow-up actions after review of the submitted materials. The accreditation status of the nursing program may be changed. See [ACEN Policy #4 Types of Commission Actions on Applications for Accreditation](#) and [Policy #19 Focused Visit](#).

If a governing organization's/nursing program's and/or third-party service provider's status as a grantor and/or administrator of Title IV financial aid programs changes at any point, the nurse administrator of the nursing program shall immediately submit to the ACEN a report explaining the reasons for the change and plans to correct the situation. The report shall include copies of all communications from and to the USDE that relate to the change in status. The Commission will determine appropriate follow-up actions after review of the submitted materials. The accreditation status of the nursing program may be changed. See [ACEN Policy #4 Types of Commission Actions on Applications for Accreditation](#) and [Policy #19 Focused Visit](#).

The governing organization/nursing program shall immediately disclose to the ACEN any other actions or events related to financial resources not previously addressed in this policy that have or will impact the ability of the governing organization/nursing program to accomplish its mission of a quality nursing program. The Commission will determine appropriate follow-up actions after review of the submitted materials. The accreditation status of the nursing program may be

changed. See [ACEN Policy #4 Types of Commission Actions on Applications for Accreditation](#) and [Policy #19 Focused Visit](#).

Policy #33 History  
Developed October 2017