

POLICY #1

CODE OF CONDUCT AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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