Criteria Changes – August 2011

A significant number of regulatory changes at the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and ACICS have taken place in the past few months. Many of the USDE regulations warrant a subsequent change in policy and/or procedure at the agency level. The *Memo-to-the-Field* is the channel via which such changes are communicated to the institutions. Moving forward, all active evaluators will receive a copy of the Memo and summarized details provided in the Newsletter to communicate how the changes will affect the on-site evaluation process. All evaluators are encouraged to review the document, participate in the AWARE Webinars if possible, and ask questions of staff to ensure understanding of these changes.

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Final Criteria

3-1-516. *Course and Program Measurement.*

USDE now requires accreditors to review each Title IV institution's policies and procedures and their application in assigning credit hours for purposes of federal financial aid. Thus, modifications to the Criteria include a requirement that institutions have written policies and procedures in place, and that course syllabi reflect assignments for outside preparation that are subsequently included in the evaluation of student learning related to the achievement of course and program objectives.

As a result, the **Glossary definition** *of* **Syllabus** has been revised to include "*...out-of-class learning activities and assignments…"*

How does this affects you:

This fall, ACICS will begin developing procedures to implement these new requirements. Questions will be added to the self-study and team report templates, institutions will be asked to upload or provide access to related documentation, evaluators will be trained in a consistent method for evaluating outside preparation (most likely based upon a sample of

syllabi and graded assignments plus information from students), and information on this process will be provided to member institutions in writing, in workshops, and through a special webinar.

3-1-413. *Transfer of Credit*

The following clause has been added to this criteria section, to avoid misrepresentation under new USDE regulation:

"*...and if applicable, a list of institutions with which the institution has established articulation agreements.*

In addition, the institution must provide notification to students as to these articulation agreements and the transferability of the credits in the programs that are offered."

How does this affects you:

The *Relations with students* specialist, during the file review process, will look for the notification to students in the event any articulation agreements exist.

3-3-302. *Assignments;* 3-4-302. *Assignments;* 3-5-302. *Assignments.*

Academic requirements for general education faculty members at the occupational and academic associate's and bachelor's degree credential levels have been revised to **re-**

move "...and shall be assigned based on their major and minor academic preparation." Additional changes were made to the occupational associate's degree language (3-3-302).

How does this affects you:

Educational Activities specialists must be cognizant of this revised language during their review of faculty qualifications. The master's degree and 18 semester credit hours will suffice; there is no emphasis on major and minor preparation since the 18 credit hours can be across all credentials earned.

3-1-513 (a). *Program Development*

Glossary definition of Independent Study

The underlined section has been added:

For independent study courses, institutions are required to develop a learning contract signed by the student and the institution that outlines the course objectives and procedures unique to this form of instruction.

How does this affects you:

Contracts for independent studies must now include signatures from the student and the institution. Hence, evaluators should include this in their review.

3-1-700. *Publications*

A new criterion section, effective October 1, 2011, has been added:

Message from the Evaluator Manager

Hello Everyone!

I trust you had a wonderful summer and that you are ready for the fall travel cycle. There are quite a few things going on at ACICS that affect our policies and procedures and as a result, also require your participation, cooperation and support.

As will be discussed in other areas of the newsletter, such changes include the practical application of new criteria, report writing guidelines, and evaluator recruitment.

The support and cooperation of the evaluators is critical to the success of many of the changes as they affect accreditation. We appreciate your patience as we implement a number of new processes and procedures and welcome your feedback and recommendations to improve.

Thank you again and have a safe and fun travel cycle!

Evaluator Classification

To comply with Department of Education regulations, we are required to classify and maintain involvement of academic and administrative individuals on all full-team visits (Branch Inclusions, Initial Grants, and New Grants). These classifications are defined as follows:

"Academic representative" is defined as someone currently or recently directly engaged in a significant manner in postsecondary teaching and/or research;

"Administrative representative" is defined as someone currently or recently directly engaged in a significant manner in postsecondary institutional or programmatic administration;

"Recently" is being interpreted as within the last five years for those evaluators that have recently changed roles.

ACICS has aligned the academic classification to the **Educational Activities** and the administrative classification to **Relations with Students** roles. This new classification **does not** affect program specialties, and evaluators also approved to evaluate programs will continue to do so.

If you believe you are qualified to serve in one of these roles based on the USDE definition, please forward a current resume and cover letter with an explanation to evaluatormanager@acics.org with Administrative or Academic Classification in the subject line.

Calling for Team Chair Applications!

A critical part of the evaluation team, the ACICS team chair is tasked with providing leadership to the independent evaluation team during an institutional evaluation for reaccreditation, branch inclusion or initial accreditation.

Applications are now being accepted and reviewed on a continuous basis until September 30th. Late applications will not be considered. Applicants will be notified, via email, of the status of their application.

Please visit http://www.acics.org/evaluators/content.aspx?id=4519 for more information and to access the application packet.

Evaluator Recruitment—Your Help

Evaluator Manager is now on LinkedIn! As part of our recruitment efforts and a focus on reaching a larger cross-section of professionals, the ACICS evaluator manager has joined the social network. If you have not yet already done so, please add (invite) us to join your professional network so that we can gain access to individuals who may be able to meet a number of critical need areas.

Further, we are asking evaluators to reach out to colleagues in their professional associations, organizations, and networks to encourage participation in the ACICS evaluator process. Share my email address, pwgilliam@acics.org and I will gladly follow up. We have an urgent need in the following areas:

Wind Turbine Technician	Occupational Therapy Assistant
Electrical Engineering Technology	Physical Therapy Assistant
Wind Energy Technology	Cardiovascular Sonography
Solar Energy Technology	Respiratory Therapy
Environmental Technology	Maintenance Technician
Renewable Energy Technology	Anesthesia Technology
Criminology And Forensic Technology	Gerontology Assistant
Public Administration	Dialysis Technology
Human Services Assistant	Diagnostic Medical Sonography

If you are not currently approved to evaluate any of the above areas but believe you have the required academic and experiential qualifications, please forward an updated resume with a note to evaluatormanager@acics.org for additional review. If you know of professionals in the above fields who would be interested in serving or would be very effective in serving, please encourage them to apply by visiting http://www.acics.org/evaluators.

Additionally, if you have contacts at professional associations and organizations who would be invaluable resources with access to experts, please introduce them to ACICS and send us an email for follow up.

ACICS wishes to thank those evaluators who are already engaged in the recruitment process or provide referrals of individuals who could add value to the program.

Jennifer Newham

Coming from the Department of Education in Florida, I am excited about the opportunity to work with postsecondary institutions on a national level. I am passionate about once again working in quality assurance and driven by the mission of ensuring quality education for students. I look forward to working with evaluators from very diverse fields. I am also enjoying the excitement of living in Washington, DC, and all that it offers.

Torri Hayslett

Education was always valued in my household growing up. My mother, a retired teacher, often reminded me that, "Only the educated are free". I often recited that saying while in college and grad school, to help me during difficult times. It was also one of the sayings I told my students when I taught classes in community and career colleges. Having worked on the school side, I look forward to working on the accreditation side, by ensuring that all students attending our member institutions gain a quality education, so they can be free too!

Report Writing Expectations

A core responsibility of the evaluator is to prepare a report by the conclusion of the evaluation visit. This report must be professionally written to reflect the observations and findings of the team based on the expertise of the evaluator and the standards of the *Accreditation Criteria*. Further, one of the areas evaluated by staff coordinators is the writing skills of each of the team members.

Because the varying levels of editorial abilities are recognized, and to eliminate confusion , a report writing guide has been developed to ensure consistency and professionalism. Evaluators are asked to disregard and discard all previously communicated documents and only refer to the *Report Writing & Editing Guide 2011—Evaluators* which has been posted to the Report Templates section of the Evaluator web page. The team report is a representation of the agency but also of each of the team members who contribute to its development. Hence, we are all accountable in ensuring quality and professionalism of the final document that is communicated to the institution.

Report Templates - August 2011

New report templates for the full team report (Branch Inclusion, Initial Grant, and New Grant), that reflect the new changes in the *Accreditation Criteria* and the addition of appropriate questions, have been uploaded to the Report Templates page on the ACICS Web site. Evaluators are responsible for downloading this version prior to each team visit to ensure that the current report is being used for the evaluation.

Evaluator Evaluations

We would all agree that constructive feedback is essential to ensure continuous personal development and learning. Additionally, to ensure quality in the review process, coordinators complete evaluations of evaluators after every cycle on the following areas:

Preparation & Timeliness
Organizational Skills
Knowledge and Familiarity with Technology
Interaction with Team
Interaction with Institution
Writing Skills
Knowledge of the Criteria
Ethics
Strength of Expertise
Adherence to Travel & Reimbursement Policies

The evaluation management team will be preparing evaluation summaries for all evaluators at the end of the year to provide summarized feedback on the above areas. These summaries will also include feedback received from institutions and team members. Finally, the purpose of the summary is for self– evaluation of professional performance and is not intended to be critical or judgmental of one's personality.

Criteria Changes - August 2011

3-1-704. *Performance Information*

Institutions shall routinely provide reliable information to the public on their performance, including student achievement as determined by the institution.

How does this affects you:

A question (7.17) has been added to Section 7 of the report template. This question will be applicable from October 1, 2011.

Distributed Enterprise—Effective date to be determined

Final action on beta-tested applications and acceptance of applications from other ACICS-accredited institutions will not be effective until additional information is reviewed and relevant sections of the *Criteria* are approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

How does this affects you?

Information and training will be communicated as needed.

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Proposed Criteria

A. PROGRAM-LEVEL STANDARDS FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

2-1-808. Interim Financial Review

2-1-809. Retention and Placement

2-1-810. Student Loan Cohort Default Rates

B. ENROLLMENT AGREEMENTS

The Council proposes to add language requiring the signature of the student and school representative on enrollment agreements.

3-1-414. *Enrollment Agreements*

C. SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS

The USDE Program Integrity regulations that went into effect July 1, 2011, included a modification to the procedures that institutions may use to place students who are not making satisfactory academic progress (SAP), into either a new status, called Financial Aid Warning, or into an existing but modified status, called Financial Aid Probation. The changes to Appendix D of the Accreditation Criteria would bring ACICS requirements for SAP into alignment with the new USDE regulations.

Appendix D, Standards of Satisfactory Progress

D. ADMISSIONS, EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS AND TRANSFER OF CREDIT POLICY FOR DOCTORAL PROGRAMS

The Council proposes to add language to mandate that independent study contracts be mutually signed by the student and institution. In addition, the transfer of credit standard has been modified to clarify the relationship between admission requirements and transfer of credit, in the case where a master's degree is required for admission.

3-7-403. Education Requirements.

3-7-603. Transfer of Credit.

On the Road with the Rookies

The Evaluator is pleased to introduce this new segment to share the perspective of the new coordinators' first experience.

Getting Started

By Justin Mack

Looking back over my first travel cycle as a coordinator, I'm filled with many wonderful memories of the remarkable people I've met, schools I've visited, and new cities I've seen. It is amazing to think about all of the experiences I've had in just my first cycle. At times it was challenging - a visit to a school that had 17 citations; flight delays and cancellations; and using a GPS system that continues to insist that you should turn right where there isn't any road to turn on. It was also rewarding to work with schools that care about their students and want to help them succeed and meet with students excited about their academ-

ic experiences. A very important learning experience was hotel choice - I reserved hotel rooms for the team at a very basic hotel near the school, but later realized as we drove up that there was a Marriott across the street from where we were staying for the next two nights.

Finally, I've learned a great deal about the accreditation process, how to conduct a thor-

ough visit, as well as the positive impact our schools are having on their communities. Thank you to all of the evaluators I've had the opportunity to work with. It was great working with you and I look forward to seeing you again. For those that I haven't met yet, I hope I will have the opportunity to work with you soon.

Articles and stories in this newsletter rely on submissions from staff and evaluators. If you wish, please share one of your "stories from the road" or article of interest with our Evaluator Management Team for possible inclusion in the next newsletter. Please send any submissions to pwgilliam@acics.org.

Evaluator Feedback

At the end of the spring 2011 cycle, evaluators were solicited to provide feedback on the evaluation management processes and critique of ACICS' performance in a number of areas. We would like to thank those of you who took the time to share your thoughts and recommendations. Below is a summary of the results and the steps being taken to address the weak areas:

Number of respondents: 157

Positive:

- Area of highest satisfaction: on-site visit management by staff and chair (83.2%)

- Greatest strength of the process: capabilities of the staff coordinators in managing the visit process and bringing consistency to the evaluation.

- Level of satisfaction with the new report templates: 93%

Negative:

- Area of most dissatisfaction: reimbursement processing (16%)

Areas in need of improvement:

⇒ Consistency in *Criteria* interpretation: a policy workday is scheduled after each cycle to bring management and staff together to discuss inconsistencies and draft guidelines to minimize them. The notes are shared with all travel staff during sched-

uled travel meetings.

⇒ Reimbursement Processing and Turnaround time: continued work with the accounting department to ensure evaluators are aware of any changes in their reimbursements and any factors that will affect processing.

⇒ Utilization of more evaluators: a policy has been put in place and is being implemented concerning the inclusion of at least one new team member on all full-team visits.

Please contact Perliter Walters-Gilliam at pwgilliam@acics.org if you wish to discuss these or any other items of concern or commendation.

Evaluator Training Workshop Participants

ACICS acknowledges the following new evaluators. These individuals attended an Evaluator Training Workshop since our last issue. Thank you.

Gerald Acevedo	Robert Doering	Laverne Lewis	Ravi Rathnam	Georgia Turner
Tanya Allen	Brenda Edwards	Andrew McCabe	Juan Ramirez	Sandra Wright
Bart Batman	Ulysser Monique Ford	Misty McGuire	Victor Ramirez	Syed Zaidi
Lynn Broniak-Hull	Christine Gialousis	Fredricka McPherson	Kerri Schewe	
Kevin Brown	Terri Gist	Geanyra Medina	April Seim	
Tracy Burke	Martha Hartgraves	Michelle Moten	Heather Shea	
Jennifer Burrell	Heather Hendee	Carlos Offutt	Daniel Synder	
Kristine Chase	Patricia Jones	Hieu Phan	Paula Strachan	
Vicki Davenport	Aurdey Kaplan	Michael Pittaro	Cheryl Truskowski	