

This page contains the following documents:

[Memorandum from the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions](#)

[Proposed Interregional Policies on the Accreditation of Institutions Operating Across Regions](#)

[Proposed Policy Statement on the Evaluation of Institutions Operating Interregionally](#)

[Proposed Policy Statement on Separately Accreditable Institutions](#)

Memorandum

To: Regionally Accredited Institutions of Higher Education and Interested Others
From: The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions
Date: September 27, 1999
Re: Proposed Policies on the Accreditation of Institutions Operating Interregionally

Institutions operating interregionally have posed persistent challenges to regional accreditation. Accredited in their entirety by the regional commission where the home campus is located, their instructional sites in other regions frequently operate in competition with neighboring institutions which must fulfill the standards of the local accrediting commission in the host region. Significant differences in standards and their application are often perceived to exist between the two regional commissions raising questions about the relative quality of the branch campuses, matters of equity, and the effectiveness of regional accreditation.

This situation is, of course, an inherent consequence of our decentralized accreditation structure. However, the challenges of accrediting institutions operating interregionally have increased in recent years with development of new institutions with missions that are national in scope, and by the continuing expansion of programming across regional boundaries by more traditional providers. As a result, differences among the regional commissions have become the object of critical attention and demands for equal treatment have increased. In response, the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (CRAC), which is comprised of representatives from each of the eight higher education regional

accrediting commissions, has developed the attached proposed policies for the consideration of each member commission. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) assisted with this effort. The policies are designed to encompass only those instructional activities which are physically present in another region; operate with appropriate state authorization; and provide the equivalent to 50% or more of a degree program. Not encompassed by these policies is programming offered through distance education. The regional commissions recognize that distance education and other forms of mediated instruction pose serious issues for accreditation which deserve immediate attention, but believe that they should be dealt with separately.

Based upon the principle that a regional commission has a legitimate interest in assuring the quality of institutions from other regions operating within its jurisdiction, the policies speak to two circumstances in separate statements. The first covers branch campuses under the direct control of the home college or university. Here the policy provides for joint evaluations by the home and host regions, with local accreditation standards being applied together with those of the home region. It is understood that the home region will continue to be solely responsible for final accrediting action. The second acknowledges that some out-of-region instructional sites have become in effect free-standing institutions. For those entities, as defined in the second policy statement, CRAC proposes that accreditation by the local regional commission be mandated. It should be noted that the first three years' implementation of the policy statements is viewed as a time of experimentation and learning, with a basic review of their effectiveness by CRAC in the year 2003.

In providing for the substantive input of one region into the processes of another, these policies represent a departure from past practice. However, CRAC believes they are an appropriate and justifiable response to the well-founded criticisms of the current arrangement, the logic of which leads to a more national approach to quality assurance. Furthermore, it is expected that their application over time will lead to a greater appreciation and confidence in the work of all the regional commission as they seek to evaluate the off-campus activities of member colleges and universities.

In the months ahead, each of the regional commissions will be considering these proposed policies for adoption. As a part of that process the views of affiliated colleges and universities will be sought prior to commission action on the policies.

[Return to Top of Page](#)

PROPOSED

INTERREGIONAL POLICIES ON THE ACCREDITATION OF INSTITUTIONS OPERATING ACROSS REGIONS

Preamble

The purpose of these policies is to establish and define the respective roles of the regional higher education accrediting commissions in assuring quality and encouraging the improvement of affiliated institutions operating interregionally. Developed by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (CRAC), they are designed to address concerns arising from differences that may exist among regional commission criteria and their application in off-campus operations. The interregional policies encompass only those colleges and universities which have physical presence, appropriate state authorization, and offer instruction equivalent to 50% or more of a degree program in another (host) region(s) than their home region where they hold accreditation. Once adopted, however modified, these policies will encompass all regionally accredited institutions and will establish a common framework for the evaluation of institutions operating interregionally.

These policies are based upon the following fundamental premises:

- The home region should be demonstrably accountable for its accreditation decisions affecting institutions operating in host regions.
- The host region has a legitimate interest in the quality of institutions from other regions operating within its jurisdiction.
- The home and host regions, while honoring these policies and the procedures designed to implement them, have flexibility in defining the host region's role in the evaluation of instructional sites operating in its region.
- The eight regional commissions, building on their commonality of tradition and long-standing mutual respect, will work cooperatively, together with affected institutions, to implement these policies toward the fulfillment of their quality assurance responsibilities in the review of transregional programming while honoring institutional autonomy and integrity.

These policies represent a departure from past practice. Their continued efficacy rests upon the commitment of the involved commissions to assess their effectiveness and otherwise determine their impact on their member institutions, making modifications as are necessary. For that reason, CRAC has recommended that these policies be implemented on a three-year (2000-2003) pilot basis. While it is expected that once in force the policies will materially affect the evaluation of institutions operating across regional boundaries, it is also understood that first experiences will likely result in the need for corrections and adjustments in their content. For that reason, CRAC is committed to undertake in 2003 a basic review of the effectiveness of the policies in achieving their purposes.

[Return to Top of Page](#)

PROPOSED

POLICY STATEMENT ON THE EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONS OPERATING INTERREGIONALLY

To preserve the values and practices of peer review and regional accreditation, the evaluation of institutions that deliver education at a physical site(s) in another region(s) will be undertaken with the participation of the host regional accrediting commission(s). This will include the joint (home/host) review of off-campus sites in a host region against the accreditation standards of that region.

Procedures for the evaluation of colleges and universities operating interregionally will honor these basic principles:

- The mission of the institution will be respected throughout the evaluation process.
- The design and implementation of the strategy fashioned to evaluate its host region instructional sites will be developed collaboratively by the participating regional commission together with the affected institution.
- The home region's evaluation processes will serve as the basis for the joint evaluations and the home region will take the leadership role in initiating and overseeing the process.
- The home region will be solely responsible for final accrediting actions, but will respond to issues brought to its attention by the host commission as identified through its involvement in the institutional review.
- Host commission participation in an interregional accrediting process shall not constitute accreditation of the institution by that commission.
- The host region retains the discretion to determine its involvement in the evaluation of institutions operating interregionally.

Exchanging Information

To assure that each commission is adequately apprized of the instructional activities of out-of-region institutions in its region, the following information will be exchanged as specified:

1.

Annually, each commission will notify the other affected commissions of any of its institutions operating interregionally. The information provided will include: location(s), levels of degree offerings, and number of students enrolled. It is understood here as elsewhere, that notice need only be provided regarding those locations where 50% or more of a degree program are offered.

2.

Each commission will notify other relevant commissions when one of its institutions intends to establish a new out-of-region instructional site. In such cases, the home commission in consultation with the host region together with the institution, will determine if the new site(s) constitute a substantive change and thus be subject to review under the interregional accrediting processes.

Procedures for the Interregional Accrediting Process

Notice to Host Region of Planned Evaluations

The home region will provide timely notice to the host region(s) of:

1.

scheduled comprehensive evaluations of institutions with instructional sites in the host region;

2.

any focused visits which include the review of sites in the host region or includes issues related to off-campus programming;

3.

any other evaluations of new sites in the host region.

Procedures for Evaluations

1.

Standards to be applied. The standards of both the home and host region will be applied at host region sites using a "home standards plus" model. That is, the standards of the home region will be used as the basis for the evaluation as supplemented by any criteria of the host region identified in the design process for the evaluation.

2.

Evaluation protocol. Well in advance of the comprehensive visit, the home and host commissions, in consultation with the institution, will develop a protocol for the evaluation of host region sites to include: 1) the scope of the review; 2) which sites are to be reviewed, with the final decision remaining with the home region; 3) the content of the self-study report(s) for the sites to be visited with particular attention to how identified host region standards are to be addressed; and 4) any other matters of agreement relevant to the evaluation, including issues of possible public disclosure.

3.

Site team composition. The size and composition of the team visiting host region sites will be jointly determined, with the host region being afforded the opportunity to appoint up to 50% of the team's membership. The host region may appoint a vice or co-chair as agreed upon by the home region. Teams will otherwise be appointed in keeping with home region procedures. It is understood that the host region's conflict of interest policy will apply for the team members it appoints.

4.

Costs. The costs for the evaluation of host region sites will be billed in keeping with the home region's policies. The home region will otherwise administer reimbursement of evaluator expense also in keeping with its policies

Procedures for Evaluation Reports

1.

A single evaluation report will be prepared for each of the sites visited within the host region, as agreed upon by the commissions involved.

2.

The evaluation report will include a review of the site under the home region's standards, and as appropriate, findings regarding the host region's standards as previously identified and any topics included in the evaluation under prior agreement. Recommendations to the home region can be made by both home and host sub-groups on the team.

3.

Site team reports are provided to the host region by the home region upon receipt. In cases of comprehensive evaluations, the home region's institutional evaluation report is also forwarded to the host region.

4.

The host region is responsible for establishing processes for the timely review of site-specific evaluation reports prior to their being considered by the home regional commission so as to provide any comments it believes should be taken into consideration as the institution's case is reviewed.

5.

The policy of confidentiality for team recommendations of the home region will apply.

Procedures for Decisions and Notification

1.

The home region's decision-making processes will ensure that the institution has the opportunity to respond to the team report and any comments from the host region before a final decision is made.

2.

The home region takes the final accrediting action and is responsible for providing notification of that action to all relevant parties, including the host region.

3.

When the final action differs from the recommendation and comments of the host region, if any, a rationale for the action will be sent upon request by the home to the host region.

4.

The home region is responsible for addressing any misrepresentation of the interregional evaluation on the institution's accreditation status.

[Return to Top of Page](#)

PROPOSED

POLICY STATEMENT ON SEPARATELY ACCREDITABLE INSTITUTIONS

In an effort to be consistent and equitable to all institutions, the following criteria for identifying separately accreditable institutions will be applied by each of the regional accrediting commissions.

An instructional site located in a region other than that of its home campus must seek separate accreditation in the region it exists if it functions independent of operational control of the parent college or university. An instructional site will be deemed operationally independent and accreditable by the host region when it meets these criteria:

The instructional site:

1. has, under board policy, substantial financial and administrative independence from the home institution including matters related to personnel;
2. has a full time chief administrative officer;
3. is empowered, under board policy, to initiate and sustain its own academic programs;
4. has degree-granting authority in the state or jurisdiction in which it is located.

Each regional commission, upon the adoption of this policy, will determine if any of its affiliated institutions have instructional sites that appear to be separately accreditable. Following consultation with the host commission and the institution, and upon learning from

the host region the site's potential to meet its eligibility requirements, the home region will make the determination as to the status of such sites that meet these criteria. The host region agrees to take deliberate steps toward reviewing any instructional sites identified as operationally independent in keeping with its policies and procedures for applying institutions. An institution identified as separately accreditable will continue to be included in the accreditation of the parent college or university until it achieves separate accreditation.

Off-campus instructional sites, regardless of location, not found to be operationally independent are included in the accreditation of the home campus. The operational independence of such sites is periodically reviewed under this policy.

[Return to Top of Page](#)

[Close Window](#)