

# Unit Accreditation and Program Approval

## June 2014

### Overview of this Report

This item provides information on the Commission's unit accreditation system as it relates to program approval. Frequently, the Commission has requested information on the benefits and challenges of a unit accreditation approach on the operations of an individual program. There have been some concerns expressed that the Commission's current accreditation system with its focus on unit accreditation may not adequately review or place sanctions on individual programs and may not have the ability to close a specific program at an institution.

This item was most recently discussed at the COA meeting in October 2012. As the Commission begins its efforts to streamline and strengthen the accreditation system, it is an appropriate time to discuss this topic once again.

### Staff Recommendation

This is an information item.

### Background

The Introduction of the adopted *Accreditation Handbook* (<http://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/accred-handbook.html>) provides some historical information about the Commission's accreditation system

Under the auspices of Senate Bills 148 (Bergeson, 1988) and 655 (Bergeson, 1993), the education community in California launched an initiative to create a professional accreditation and certification system that would contribute to excellence in California public education well into the 21st Century. The Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), the nation's oldest independent teaching standards board, has long engaged in credential program reviews. The original *Accreditation Framework*, developed by the Accreditation Advisory Council to replace program review, represented a unique, pioneering effort to advance the quality of educator preparation through the creation of an integrated accreditation *and* certification system. The Accreditation Framework of December, 2007, details the requirements of the CTC's revised accreditation system and informed this version of the *Handbook*.

The 2007 *Accreditation Framework* substantially changed the accreditation process. This handbook documents the procedures the Committee on Accreditation (COA) has put in place to implement the CTC's Accreditation System. The COA encourages both approved institutions and Board of Institutional Review (BIR) members to utilize this handbook. The COA is committed to providing full disclosure of its accreditation process to all.

The purposes of this accreditation system are

- To be accountable to the public and the educator preparation profession regarding the knowledge, skills, and abilities of educators prepared in California.
- To promote quality — both in educator preparation and in candidate performance.

- To ensure that all educator preparation programs prepare all prospective educators to support students in acquiring the knowledge and skills defined in California’s K-12 Student Academic Content Standards.
- To support all programs in focusing on continuous improvement based on the analysis of candidate competence data.

Currently, California’s Education Code §44374 (d) specifies that the COA makes a single accreditation decision for an institution and all of its educator preparation programs.

*(d) The Committee on Accreditation shall make a single decision to accredit, to accredit with stipulations, or to deny accreditation to an institution's credential programs, pursuant to Section 44373 and the accreditation framework.*

### **Approaches to Program Review and Approval and Institutional Review and Accreditation**

The Commission accredits an institution by implementing a unit accreditation system which includes a strong program review component. Accreditation by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing allows an entity to operate educator preparation programs and recommend individuals for licenses to teach or provide services in California’s public schools. There are a numerous organizations that determine accreditation for a variety of purposes. Each accrediting body has its own requirements and determines accreditation according to its own criteria. Accreditation provides entities the ability to make specific claims engage in activities or governed by the accrediting agency.

#### ***Unit Accreditation***

The six regional accrediting bodies accredit *institutions* of higher education. Accreditation of an institution by a regional accreditor indicates that the institution has a met a specified standard regarding the infrastructure of the organization, the identified student learning outcomes, and educational effectiveness. Regional accreditation allows an institution to award academic credit that are accepted at other regionally accredited institutions. Federal Title IV funding is also only available to institutions that have been regionally accredited.

Regionally accredited institutions of higher education and other entities that prepare educators fall within the purview of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. The Commission’s accreditation system includes a multipronged review. The review includes an examination of the Common Standards. The Common Standards are focused on the unit wide infrastructure that supports all credential programs. These include broad categories such as resources, leadership, unit assessment, and field experiences for all programs. In addition to a unit focus, the Commission also reviews programs against state adopted program standards for each credential area. These standards are much more focused upon identifying specific candidate opportunities to learn and practice and to demonstrate mastery of specific competencies required of beginning practitioners in particular credential areas. The review of program standards contributes to the accreditation decision for the unit. Commission accreditation allows an institution to recommend individuals for teaching or service credentials in California.

#### ***The Accreditation Process***

The Commission’s current accreditation system includes submission of data—candidate competence and program effectiveness—on a routine basis. The system includes a full review of the key assessments, course syllabi, and the program narrative, which provides a description of how the program meets the Commission’s adopted standards, once in each seven year

accreditation cycle. The information from biennial reports, program assessment and site visits inform an overall determination by the Committee on Accreditation as to the accreditation status of an institution. The COA makes one decision for the entire institution, but may place specific stipulations upon programs that are deemed to not meet the Commission's adopted standards.

*What is the benefit of unit accreditation?*

The Commission sponsored an advisory panel during 2004-2006 which studied the accreditation system and made a number of recommendations. The topic of unit accreditation and individual program accreditation was discussed at length by this advisory group. The group reviewed information from other professions in California and educator preparation in other states and countries.

The consensus recommendation from the advisory panel was to retain the Commission's unit accreditation focus but to also ensure that each approved educator preparation program is held to the Commission's adopted program standards. Numerous deans and superintendents responded to the Commission that unit accreditation provides them with the leverage they need with institutional leaders and program leadership, particularly those outside their direct span of control., to support all programs within a unit and to require all programs to meet certain expectations. They urged the Commission not to eliminate the unit accreditation approach.

However, also at that time there was a concern about strengthening the Commission's oversight of programs that were not sufficiently meeting standards. The system was changed such that the findings for each standard of each credential program would be included in the accreditation report, rather than just findings on the common standards. In addition, the program assessment review team could recommend that the site visit should include a full program review of a specific program should it not be preliminarily aligned prior to the visit.

*How does the COA address programs that are identified as not meeting standards?*

Currently, if a program is found to not be meeting one or more of the Commission's program standards, the team report states this finding. The COA may place one or more stipulations on the institution and focus the stipulation directly on a specific program. The COA can also require that the program submits routine and frequent reports, require that students be notified regarding issues, can prohibit the program from offering new credential areas, and can ultimately require that the program not enroll new candidates into the program until the identified issues are rectified to the satisfaction of the COA.

A question that has been asked is, "***Can the Commission directly close a program under the current accreditation system?***" While the Commission staff is seeking additional guidance on this question, it has not been the practice for the Commission to close a program outright, it has been the practice to place specific stipulations aimed at program improvement and monitor the progress through follow-up reports and in some cases revisits. Although rare, stipulations may include a prohibition from accepting new students until all program standards are met. This can (and does) lead to the closing of ineffective programs, because the Commission accreditation of the institution can be jeopardized if it does not deal with correcting the deficiencies identified in the stipulations.

For the purpose of this discussion the operational implications of stipulations are included in the chart on the following page:

Institution Actions Following an Accreditation Site Visit	Accreditation (✓ Indicates a possible follow-up activity)			
	Accreditation	with Stipulations	with Major Stipulations	with Probationary Stipulations
No required follow-up beyond the routine accreditation activities, i.e. Biennial Reports and Program Assessment.	✓			
Submit <i>Seventh Year Follow-up Report</i> addressing all identified area(s) of concern and/or questions.	✓			
Submit <i>Seventh Year Follow-up Report</i> addressing all stipulation(s), identified area(s) of concern and/or questions		✓	✓	✓
Provide addendum to Biennial Report and Program Assessment documents addressing all stipulation(s), identified area(s) of concern and/or questions.			✓	✓
Submit periodic Follow-up Reports (30 days, 90 days, as determined by the COA) to ensure that appropriate action is being taken in a timely manner.			✓	✓
Re-visit by CTC staff and team lead.		✓	✓	✓
Re-visit by CTC staff, team lead, and 1 or more team members.			✓	✓
Institution notifies all current and prospective candidates of the institution's accreditation status.			✓	✓
Institution is prohibited from accepting new candidates in one or more programs until the stipulations have been removed.				✓
Institution is prohibited from proposing new programs until the stipulations have been removed.				✓

One of the action options available to COA under Probationary Stipulations is to prohibit the program with identified issues from accepting new candidates until the stipulations are addressed sufficiently. One might argue that prohibiting a program from accepting new candidates is tantamount to closing a program because that program is limited to teaching out only those candidates that are currently enrolled. This option still allows, however, for the program to continue serving current candidates and the institution must either 1) improve the program by addressing the stipulations to the satisfaction of the COA or 2) close the program. The direction that is taken with respect to a particular program that has significant issues, that is, whether the program closes or is strengthened, rests with the institution and not with the Commission or COA. The question has been asked whether, the Commission should be able to close a weak program more directly through its accreditation process. as the agency responsible for oversight of educator preparation.

While the Commission's legal staff reviews whether that the COA has the authority to close a program under current state law, the COA is asked to discuss what other measures could be taken to strengthen the oversight of the Commission over weak programs. The Commission staff seeks COA discussion on this topic.

### **Next Steps**

The COA's discussion of these concepts will inform future work to strengthen the Commission's accountability system.

## Appendix A

### California Education Code §§44370-44374

**44370.** The Legislature finds and declares that the competence and performance of professional educators depends in part on the quality of their academic and professional preparation. The Legislature recognizes that standards of quality in collegiate preparation complement standards of candidate competence and performance, and that general standards and criteria regarding the overall quality of a candidate's preparation are as essential as the assessment of the candidate's competence and performance.

44371. (a) The system for accreditation of educator preparation shall do all of the following:

- (1) Concentrate on the overall quality of educator preparation in credential programs.
  - (2) Hold professional elementary, secondary, and postsecondary educators responsible for quality in the preparation of professional practitioners.
  - (3) Contribute to improvements in educator preparation and recognize excellence in preparation programs and institutions.
  - (4) Be governed by an accreditation framework that sets forth the policies of the commission regarding the accreditation of educator preparation.
- (b) The accreditation framework shall do all of the following:
- (1) Establish broad, flexible policies and standards for accreditation of educator preparation.
  - (2) Define the accreditation responsibilities, authority, and roles of the commission and the Committee on Accreditation.
  - (3) Establish an accreditation system that is efficient and cost effective.
  - (4) Require that accreditation decisions be based on sufficient, reliable evidence about the quality of educator preparation.

44372. The powers and duties of the commission regarding the accreditation system shall include the following:

- (a) Adopt and implement an accreditation framework, which sets forth the policies of the commission regarding the accreditation of educator preparation in California.
- (b) Establish and modify credential-specific standards, experimental program standards, and alternative program standards, as defined in the adopted accreditation framework.
- (c) Rule on the eligibility of an applicant for accreditation when the applying institution has not previously prepared educators for state Certification in California, pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 44227.
- (d) Appoint and reappoint the members of the Committee on Accreditation, in accordance with Section 44373, by selecting among nominees submitted by a panel of distinguished educators.
- (e) Review periodic accreditation reports by the Committee on Accreditation, and refer accreditation issues and concerns to the committee for its examination and response.
- (f) Hear and resolve appeals of accreditation decisions, pursuant to subdivision (e) of Section 44374.
- (g) Allocate resources annually for implementation of the accreditation system.

- (h) With the Committee on Accreditation, jointly design an evaluation of accreditation policies and their implementation.
- (i) Inform and advise the Legislature regarding statutory issues related to accreditation, and submit legislative recommendations, after considering the advice of the Committee on Accreditation, educational institutions, and professional organizations.

44373. (a) There is hereby established the Committee on Accreditation consisting of 12 members selected for their distinguished records of accomplishment in **education**. Six members shall be from postsecondary **education** institutions, and six shall be certificated professionals in public schools, school districts, or county offices of **education** in California. No member shall serve on the committee as a representative of any organization or institution. Membership shall be, to the maximum extent possible, balanced in terms of ethnicity, gender, and geographic regions. The committee shall include members from elementary and secondary schools, and members from public and private institutions of postsecondary **education**.

(b) The terms of committee members shall be in accordance with the accreditation framework. Appointment of the initial committee members shall be from nominees submitted by a panel of distinguished educators, who are named by a consensus of the commission and the accreditation advisory council, pursuant to Section 44371, as that section read on December 31, 1993. Appointment of subsequent committee members shall be from nominees submitted by a distinguished panel named by a consensus of the commission and the Committee on Accreditation. For each committee position to be filled by the commission, the panel shall submit two highly qualified nominees.

(c) The committee shall do, but shall not be limited to doing, all of the following:

- (1) Make decisions about the accreditation of educator preparation. The committee's decision making process shall be in accordance with the accreditation framework.
- (2) Make decisions about the initial accreditation of new programs of educator preparation in accordance with procedures established by the committee.
- (3) Determine the comparability of standards submitted by applicants with those adopted by the commission, in accordance with the accreditation framework.
- (4) Adopt guidelines for accreditation reviews, and monitor the performance of accreditation teams and other aspects of the accreditation system.
- (5) Present an annual accreditation report to the commission and respond to accreditation issues and concerns referred to the committee by the commission.

44374. (a) The accreditation framework shall include common standards that relate to aspects of program quality that are the same for all credential programs. The framework shall also include multiple options for program standards.

(b) The accreditation framework shall include provisions regarding well-trained accreditation teams whose members shall be drawn from a pool of California college and university faculty members and administrators, elementary and secondary school teachers and other certificated professionals, and local school board members. For each accreditation visit there shall be one team, whose size, composition, and expertise shall be constituted according to the accreditation framework.

- (c) An accreditation team shall present its report and recommendations to the Committee on Accreditation in accordance with the accreditation framework. The committee shall consider the accreditation team report and recommendations, and shall also consider evidence, which may be submitted by the institution, that the team demonstrated bias or acted arbitrarily or capriciously or contrary to the policies of the accreditation framework or the procedural guidelines of the committee.
- (d) **The Committee on Accreditation shall make a single decision to accredit, to accredit with stipulations, or to deny accreditation to an institution's credential programs, pursuant to Section 44373 and the accreditation framework.**
- (e) An institution has the right to appeal to the commission if the procedures or decisions of an accreditation team or the Committee on Accreditation are arbitrary, capricious, unfair, or contrary to the policies of the commission or the procedural guidelines of the committee. An institution also has the right to recommend changes in the accreditation policies of the commission, which shall be considered by the commission in consultation with the executive director and the Committee on Accreditation.
- (f) At the request of an institution, the accreditation of an **education** unit or a specific program by a national accrediting body shall substitute for state accreditation provided that the national accrediting body has satisfied the applicable conditions set forth in the accreditation framework.