

Refinements to Stage V of the Initial Institutional Approval Process

Overview

This item presents, for Committee approval, recommendations to the Commission regarding potential modifications to Stage V of the Initial Institutional Approval (IIA) process. Stage V is the final stage of the IIA process. The preceding stages include, among other requirements, an orientation to the Commission's accreditation system, submission of evidence that demonstrates full alignment to Preconditions, and submission of evidence and narrative, as specified, that demonstrates how the institution intends to operate in alignment to Common Standards and relevant Program Standards.

Recommendation

That the Committee on Accreditation approve these recommendations so that staff may present them to the Commission for adoption.

Background

After operating an approved program or programs under a provisional approval period of 2-4 years (Stage IV), institutions host a provisional site visit in Stage V. These site visits proceed in the same manner as those for fully approved institutions in the seven color cohorts. A Commission consultant or consultants and team of peer reviewers from the Commission's Board of Institutional Review interview program constituents and review evidence to determine the program's alignment to all applicable standards and Preconditions. The team lead then presents to the COA the team's findings on standards, an accreditation recommendation, and stipulations related to standards found to be less than fully met. After reviewing the team's report and pursuing any questions or concerns with institutional and program leadership and/or the team lead during a scheduled COA meeting, the COA may accept or modify the team's accreditation recommendation and/or any stipulation. Institutions that receive an accreditation status that includes stipulations may have a variety of requirements placed on them by the Committee including submission of scheduled follow-up reports and/or a focused revisit. These follow-up reports also come before the COA for their review so that they may ensure the institution is moving toward full alignment with the Commission's adopted standards. As part of its work as the Commission's appointed accrediting body, the COA reviews 30 or more accreditation site visit reports – including for provisional site visits in Stage V – each academic year.

As the Commission's adopted procedures for Stage V currently stand, the next step in the Stage V process following a provisional site visit is for Commission staff to present the provisional site visit report and the COA's final accreditation decision to the Commission, at which time the Commission may take one of four actions:

- 1) Grant full approval to the institution as an accredited program sponsor;
- 2) Grant full approval to the institution as an accredited program sponsor and remand the institution back to the COA to address stipulations that have been placed on it;
- 3) Hold the institution in provisional status for a year while it addresses stipulations; or,

- 4) Deny approval to the institution at which point the institution would need to develop a teach-out plan for current candidates, as overseen by Commission staff, and discontinue any further enrollment.

The five stage IIA process is still relatively new to the Commission and COA, having been adopted by the Commission in 2016. Since its inception, just seven institutions have proceeded to the provisional site visit phase of Stage V and, of those, four have come before the COA and Commission; the remainder are scheduled for upcoming meetings. As staff continues to work within and implement the IIA process, it is continually evaluating for areas of potential streamlining and/or modification that may benefit the Commission, the COA, staff, and the institutions moving through the process. At the August and October 2021 COA meetings, staff presented possible refinements for Stage V of the process for Committee consideration and input. This agenda item attempts to put these refinements in final form for COA review and feedback so that staff may then present them to the Commission. The Commission will need to formally adopt these refinements for them to be implemented.

With its historic expertise and vast experience, the Committee is well prepared to provide additional support to the Commission and institutions in Stage V of the IIA process by retaining institutions under its purview in certain circumstances following provisional site visits. Currently, all institutions in Stage V move forward to the Commission regardless of the outcome of the accreditation site visit. The proposal outlined in this item would require differentiation such that, based on level of stipulations (number and/or severity), the COA would determine at what point an institution should be sent to the Commission, as follows:

Institutions that receive *Accreditation* or *Denial of Accreditation* following a provisional site visit will be moved to the Commission at the next meeting following the COA's decision.

Institutions that receive *Accreditation with Stipulations* following a provisional site visit are proposed to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Depending on the number and/or severity of the stipulations placed on the institution, the COA could determine whether to put the institution forward to the Commission or retain it under the purview of the COA to provide oversight and guidance while the institution addresses the stipulations. Any institution retained under the purview of the COA to address stipulations is proposed to be held for a period of not more than one year, possibly less, beginning from the time of the institution's appearance before the COA and the COA's determination of an accreditation status.

Institutions that receive *Accreditation with Major Stipulations* or *Accreditation with Probationary Stipulations* are proposed to automatically be retained under the purview of the COA to provide oversight and guidance while the institution addresses the stipulations. Under this proposal, the institution will remain with the COA for a period of not more than one year, possibly less, beginning from the time of the institution's appearance before the COA and the COA's determination of an accreditation status.

All institutions retained under the purview of the COA to address stipulations could be required to submit regular follow-up reports to the COA providing evidence that appropriate actions are being taken to address the stipulations in a timely manner. Staff proposes that these reports shall be at least quarterly but may be more frequent, as determined by the COA.

Institutions retained under the purview of the COA to address stipulations are proposed to remain in provisional status and not be permitted to proposed new programs.

All institutions retained under the purview of the COA to address stipulations are proposed to be moved to the Commission at the next meeting following either the COA’s decision to lift the stipulations or at the end of the year, regardless of the institution’s status at that time.

The following table illustrates the proposed modifications:

Accreditation Decision	Move to the Commission	Follow-up Reports to the COA	Permit New Programs?
Accreditation	Yes	N/A	Yes
Accreditation with Stipulations	Possibly	If retained by COA	No, if retained by the COA
Accreditation with Major Stipulations	No	Yes	No
Accreditation with Probationary Stipulations	No	Yes	No
Denial of Accreditation	Yes	N/A	No

Next Steps

If the COA agrees to these changes, staff will present an agenda item with these modifications to Stage V of the IIA process to the Commission. Should the Commission vote to adopt these or an amended version of these modifications to Stage V of the IIA process, staff will update all Initial Institutional Approval materials and the Accreditation Handbook and present them to the COA at a future meeting.