



Policy Title: ACAOM Accreditation Procedures

Approved By: ACAOM Executive Committee

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Related Policies: ACAOM Standards and Criteria for Accreditation; Letter of Intent Form; ACAOM Guides for Preparing the Eligibility Report (Masters and/or Doctoral Programs); [ACAOM Site Visitor Policy](#); [ACAOM Commission Actions Policy](#); [ACAOM Fees and Dues Schedule](#)

References: [34 CFR Part 602](#); [20 U.S. Code § 1099\(b\)](#)

Responsible Official: ACAOM Executive Director

Policy Summary: This guidance outlines the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine's (ACAOM or Commission) procedures for an institution or program to achieve accreditation status.

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General Overview

Scope of Accreditation

The Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM or Commission) is the accrediting agency for professional non-degree and graduate degree programs throughout the United States recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for the accreditation and pre-accreditation (“candidacy”), including professional doctoral programs in the field of acupuncture and/or Oriental medicine, as well as freestanding institutions and colleges of acupuncture and/or Oriental medicine that offer such programs.

Multi-Purpose Institutions

When an accreditable acupuncture or Oriental medicine program is offered in a non-accredited institution that also offers programs in other fields, the Commission may review the acupuncture and/or Oriental medicine program. Should the program meet *ACAOM Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, the program may achieve programmatic accreditation only. Reference to ACAOM pre-accreditation/accreditation in institutional publications are subject to [ACAOM's Public Disclosure Policy](#), and shall be limited to the acupuncture and Oriental program(s) only.

Programmatic accreditation by ACAOM does not make the acupuncture and/or Oriental medicine program (or any other program) in the multi-purpose institution eligible to participate in federal Title IV financial aid programs. To be eligible to administer Title IV financial aid, the institution must also achieve institutional accreditation from a multi-purpose, institutional accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education.

If an ACAOM-accredited/pre-accredited, single-purpose, freestanding institution becomes a multi-purpose institution (i.e., also offers a program in a field other than acupuncture or Oriental medicine for which ACAOM has published *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation* or a program that is not approved by ACAOM), ACAOM's accreditation will convert to programmatic accreditation. As such, the eligibility of the institution or program for Title IV participation may be suspended by the U.S. Secretary of Education.

Accreditation Procedures

Initial Accreditation

ACAOM's initial accreditation process includes three distinct phases: eligibility, pre-accreditation, and accreditation. The processes are similar for each phase however timelines may vary. All phases are subject to timely payment of associated fees as outlined in ACAOM's *Fees and Dues Schedule*.

Eligibility Phase: Preparing for pre-accreditation

- Step 1 - Submit initial inquiry to ACAOM office
- Step 2 - Pay the required fees/expenses and host a one-day “*Orientation Visit*”
- Step 3 - Submit a *Letter of Intent* officially notifying the Commission of the institution's commitment to pursue accreditation
- Step 4 - Attend or complete *Self-Study Report–Pre-accreditation* training
- Step 5 - Complete and submit a *Self-Study Report–Pre-accreditation* and the required Self-Study Report Review Fee
- Step 6 - Pay for and host a site visit
- Step 7 - Submit a *Formal Institutional Response (FIR)* to the *Site Visit Report - Pre-accreditation*
- Step 8 - Undergo Commission review

Pre-accreditation Phase: Preparing for accreditation

- Step 1 - Attend or complete ACAOM *Self-Study Report – Initial Accreditation* training

- Step 2 - Complete and submit a *Self-Study Report – Initial Accreditation* and the required Self-Study Report Review Fee
- Step 3 - Pay for and host a site visit
- Step 4 - Submit a *Formal Institutional Response (FIR)* to the *Site Visit Report – Initial Accreditation*
- Step 5 - Undergo Commission review

Accreditation Phase: Preparing for renewal of accreditation

- Step 1 - Attend or complete *ACAOM Self-Study Report – Continuing Accreditation* training
- Step 2 - Complete and submit a *Self-Study Report – Continuing Accreditation* and the required Self-Study Report Review Fee
- Step 3 - Pay for and host a site visit
- Step 4 - Submit a *Formal Institutional Response (FIR)* to the *Site Visit Report – Continuing Accreditation*
- Step 5 - Undergo Commission review

ACAOM is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to accredit and pre-accredit, throughout the United States, professional non-degree and graduate degree programs, including professional doctoral programs, in the field of acupuncture and/or Oriental medicine, as well as freestanding institutions and colleges of acupuncture and/or Oriental medicine that offer such programs.

ACAOM currently accepts initial applications for institutional pre-accreditation/accreditation from institutions that have state authorization and are operational, offering either a Masters in Acupuncture degree/diploma or a Masters in Oriental Medicine degree/diploma.

ACAOM currently accepts initial applications for ACAOM programmatic pre-accreditation/accreditation from institutions that are institutionally accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education, have state authorization and are operational, offering either a Masters in Acupuncture degree (diploma) or a Masters in Oriental Medicine degree (diploma).

ACAOM postgraduate and professional doctoral programs are only available to institutions that have achieved initial ACAOM accreditation and are fully compliant with all Commission standards and policies. Doctoral program applications are subject to ACAOM's *Notification of Change* and *Doctoral Programs in Acupuncture and in Oriental Medicine Policy*.

ACAOM will consider applications for graduate-level programs that meet the following prerequisites:

- A. The program's purpose must be within the Commission's scope of recognition and must be pursued in an institutional setting appropriate for graduate-level education in acupuncture and/or Oriental medicine. The program must be supported by an academic, clinical, and administrative infrastructure consistent with the goals and standards of graduate-level education within the United States;
- B. The program must be an integral part of the mission of the academic department, college, school, or institution in which it resides. The program must be represented in the institution's operating budget and strategic plans in a manner designed to enable the program to achieve its goals and objectives. The program must have students in sufficient numbers, and appropriate facilities, necessary to ensure meaningful peer interaction, support and socialization;
- C. The institution in which the program is offered has formal authorization from the appropriate state agency to offer graduate-level education in Acupuncture and/or Oriental medicine or must be actively seeking the same for the proposed program(s), and must receive state authorization prior to accepting student applications;

- D. The proposed program(s) must meet the minimum required credit/hours for the applicable ACAOM program standards.

The Orientation Visit (Eligibility Phase)

The institution must request an Orientation Visit. ACAOM conducts a one-day visit to the institution to provide information about the Commission's accreditation process, relevant policies and procedures, *Eligibility Requirements*, its *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and how to prepare an appropriately documented *Self-Study Report*.

The Letter of Intent (Eligibility Phase)

Following the Orientation Visit, institution's wishing to move forward must submit to the Commission a *Letter of Intent* to pursue ACAOM accreditation which has been authorized by the institution's governance structure. The Letter of Intent must be received by the Commission's office no later than September 1 for a program to be reviewed for pre-accreditation at the Commission's next summer meeting, or by March 1 to be reviewed at the Commission's next winter meeting.

The *Letter of Intent* serves to establish eligibility status and access to ACAOM's online accreditation management system for those institutions actively seeking accreditation.

The Self-Study Report Training (All Phases)

A representative or representatives of the institution seeking pre-accreditation or accreditation must attend or complete ACAOM's *Self-Study Report Training* typically conducted by the Commission, either as part of a national acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (AOM) meeting or as a separate workshop and may include online modules. Information regarding the time and location of training options and registration instructions are published on the Commission's website, www.acaom.org, or may be obtained by contacting the ACAOM office. Because there should be broad institutional/program participation in the preparation of a *Self-Study Report*, it is recommended that a team consisting of the program's director and other key school personnel attend or complete this training.

The Self Study Report (All Phases)

The institution/program develops a *Self-Study Report* that addresses and documents compliance with each of the Commission's *Eligibility Requirements* and the program's substantive progress and action plans for meeting the Commission's applicable *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*. The institution/program submits copies of its *Self-Study Report* in a form and manner prescribed by the Commission, along with the non-refundable review fee outlined in ACAOM's *Fees and Dues Schedule*, to the ACAOM office by October 1 for consideration at the Commission's next summer meeting in the next calendar year, or by April 1 for the winter Commission meeting in the next calendar year.

Note: The Commission's acceptance of a Self-Study Report should not be construed as a measure of the institution or programs' potential for accreditation nor as assurance that pre-accreditation status will be granted.

Note: An institution or program seeking initial accreditation must have had students enrolled in the applicable program(s) for at least one academic year prior to submitting a Self-Study Report. (Eligibility Requirement 4.0.2)

Note: A program may withdraw a Self-Study Report – Pre-accreditation at any time before a final decision is made by the Commission on the application for pre-accreditation.

The Self Study Report Review (All Phases)

Commission staff will review the report and determine whether it is complete and that the institution/program appears to be in compliance with all applicable *Eligibility Requirements*. If needed, Commission staff may request additional information and/or conduct a staff visit (with applicable fee) to assist its determination. Upon determination that the institution/program appears to sufficiently meet the *Eligibility Requirements*, the Commission review of the *Self-Study Report* proceeds to assess whether the program is ready for a site visit. At a minimum, the *Self-Study Report* must present a factual and complete

compilation of narratives, with supporting documentation where applicable, evidencing that the program meets each of the Commission's *Eligibility Requirements*, and its progress and action plans for meeting the Commission's *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*.

Based on the results of this initial review, Commission staff may: 1) accept the report and approve a *Site Visit*, 2) require additional or clarifying information from the program, or 3) reject the report if it fails to adequately document and demonstrate compliance with the *Eligibility Requirements* and progress towards meeting the *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*. Resubmission of a rejected report may result in additional review fees as determined by the Commission's Executive Director.

The Site Visit (All Phases)

Typically, a three-day comprehensive *Site Visit* is conducted by an ACAOM site visit team (four qualified peer reviewers) to validate the contents of the *Self-Study Report* and to assess compliance with the Commission's *Eligibility Requirements* and the Commission's *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation* for purposes of granting, granting with conditions, denying or deferring action on Pre-accreditation or Accreditation status.

Note: The Commission may be required to, or at its discretion, notify relevant regional, state or other accreditation/higher education agencies, and other state licensing authorities that may be interested in joining the site visit.

The Site Visit Report (All Phases)

During the site visit, the team members prepare a written *Site Visit Report (SVR)* of their findings for the Commission. The team chair submits a copy of the *SVR* to the ACAOM office within seven (7.0) calendar days of the completion of the visit. ACAOM staff conduct an editorial review of the *SVR* and report any inconsistencies noted to the team chair. Any editorial changes to the report are made and/or approved by the team chair prior to staff distribution of the final *SVR* and *SVR Instruction Letter* to the institution.

Formal Institutional Response (FIR) to Site Visit Report (All Phases)

Within fourteen (14) calendar days after receipt of the *Site Visit Report (SVR)* the institution/program must submit a *Formal Institutional Response (FIR)*, its catalog, and updated financial statements (if any) in the number, form and manner prescribed by the Commission. The *FIR* should address the specific "Finding(s)" identified in the *SVR* that the institution/program believes do not accurately reflect the program at the time of the site visit. The *FIR* must clearly identify the corresponding Commission *Standard* and/or *Criterion for Accreditation* at issue with an explanation outlining the evidence available to the site visit team that could potentially influence the finding(s). No new information (i.e., information not available at the time of the site visit) will be considered by the Commission. The *FIR* may not exceed 15 pages, including referenced supporting documentation. In rare instances, and only with prior written Commission approval, the *FIR* may exceed this page limitation, but in no instance may a *FIR* exceed 25 pages.

Commission Review (All Phases)

During its biannual meetings held each summer and winter, the Commission will consider the accreditation record for those institutions/programs that have applied for pre-accreditation or accreditation. A closed hearing may be conducted for the limited purpose of clarifying the accreditation record at the request of either the Commission or the institution or program. The Chief Executive Officer or President of the institution, the Program Director, and/or other person(s) authorized to represent the program, may appear for a closed hearing. Such closed hearings are administrative (non-adversarial) in nature and, therefore, the institution or program may not have legal counsel present.

The Commission may consider written third-party testimony referencing an institution or program seeking pre-accreditation or accreditation as permitted under the U.S. Secretary of Education's *Criteria for Recognition*. Such third-party written testimony received by the Commission must also be shared with the institution/program to provide the opportunity to respond to the testimony in writing.

Once the accreditation record is complete, the Commission will meet in closed session to deliberate and take action on the application for pre-accreditation or accreditation. Only Commissioners and ACAOM staff without actual or potential conflict of interest may participate in these deliberations.

Note: The Commission may be required to, or at its discretion, notify relevant regional, state or other accreditation / higher education agencies and other state licensing authorities that may be interested in observing its deliberations.

No other persons may be present without the prior approval of the institution or program and the Commission.

Upon completing deliberations, the Commission will take official action consistent with its *Commission Actions Policy* and communicate the same through the *Commission Action Letter* to the institution or program within thirty (30) calendar days of the effective date of the action.

Commission Actions

The Commission takes official action consistent with its *Commission Actions Policy*.

The Commission considers institutional reports in conjunction with site visit reports and other information in the accreditation record to determine whether a program/institution meets ACAOM's *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*.

The Commission may conduct a review of an accredited program/institution any time, if it has evidence that the program/institution may no longer meet the Commission's *Eligibility Requirements*, or *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*. If the program/institution reports developments, changes, or conducts activities that affect the educational effectiveness of the program/institution, or its ability to meet ACAOM's *Eligibility Requirements or Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, the Commission reserves the right to review the program/institution's accredited status without regard to any previously indicated schedule.

Acceptance of Accreditation Status

An institution/program granted ACAOM accreditation status has fourteen (14) calendar days from receipt of notification to accept by submitting a one-time only, non-refundable acceptance fee (prorated for the remainder of the calendar year from the effective date of the Commission's Pre-accreditation action). Failure to accept ACAOM status by timely paying the dues will result in the lapse of status and, at the Commission's discretion, may require an institution/program to undergo the entire review process again, including a new *Self-Study Report*, review fee, and site visit. A lapse of pre-accreditation or accreditation is not subject to review or appeal.

Pre-accreditation and accreditation decisions are subject to the Commission's *appeal procedures* (See *ACAOM Commission Actions Policy*).

Certificate of Accreditation Status

The *Certificate of Pre-accreditation or Accreditation* is the document presented by the Commission in acknowledgment of an institution/program's status. The *Certificate of Pre-accreditation or Accreditation* is the property of the Commission and is to be surrendered by the institution/program upon the loss of pre-accreditation or accreditation status.

Length of Pre-accreditation

Pre-accreditation status is typically granted for a period of three (3) years, subject to the conditions outlined in the Commission's *Action Letter* granting pre-accreditation. If, in the sole discretion of the Commission, an institution/program subsequently demonstrates adequate progress in development of its Self-Study, the Commission may, upon request of the institution/program, extend pre-accreditation beyond the three-year period. Each extension shall be for a maximum of one (1) year. No more than a total of two (2) years of extensions may be granted. The maximum time an institution or program may remain in pre-accreditation status is five (5) years.

Length of Accreditation

Initial accreditation is typically granted for a period of five (5) years, subject to the conditions outlined in the Commission's *Action Letter* granting accreditation. Grants of continuing accreditation may not exceed seven (7) years, subject to the conditions outlined in the Commission's *Action Letter* granting continuing accreditation

Announcement and Advertisement of Pre-accreditation or Accreditation

A program/institution's accreditation status shall be published in accordance with ACAOM's *Public Disclosure Policy*.

The action of the Commission regarding pre-accreditation or accreditation of an institution/program shall be published. If the institution/program releases information that misrepresents or is misleading with respect to any action by the Commission regarding any action of the accreditation process, or the status of affiliation with the Commission, the Chief Executive Officer of the institution will be notified and informed that corrective action must be taken. If the misrepresentation or misleading information is not promptly corrected, the Commission may, at its discretion, release a public statement in such form and content it deems necessary to provide the correct information and may take any other action available to the Commission under applicable policies including ACAOM's *Commission Actions Policy*.

Annual and Interim Reports

Annual reports are required of all pre-accredited and accredited programs and institutions. Reports must be submitted on the date(s) designated by ACAOM and provide the requested information which includes but is not limited to, the program/institution's current reviewed financial statement, budget, catalog, and required program/institution statistics.

The Commission also seeks continuing evidence of compliance with ACAOM's *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation* to be maintained, and for this purpose, may require reports and/or site visits from accredited programs/institutions on deficiencies identified in prior Commission reviews. Such reports are due on the date specified by the Commission and must address all the issues for which clarification is sought. The Commission may require additional information of a program/institution, including reports and/or site visits, on any matter and at any time during the accreditation process.

Annual Sustaining Accreditation Dues

Accredited programs and institutions are required to pay annual sustaining dues as stated in ACAOM's *Fees and Dues Schedule*. They are due on the date designated by the Commission for each year the program/institution is in accredited status. Failure to pay sustaining dues will result in Commission action in accordance with the *Commission Actions Policy*.

Revision History

Date Revised	Summary of Revisions	Approved By
170309	Reformatted, updated and revised to incorporate current references and current names of related ACAOM policies, added Scope of Accreditation and Multi-Purpose Institutions content	ACAOM Executive Director
170518	Revisions based on changes to procedures related to addition of doctoral programs	ACAOM Executive Director
170920	Revised to reflect "calendar" days as opposed to "business" days where relevant	ACAOM Executive Director