



**Policy Title:** ACAOM Accreditation Procedures Policy

**Approved By:** ACAOM Executive Committee

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**Related Policies & Resources:** ACAOM Standards and Criteria for Accreditation; [ACAOM Self-Study Guide](#); [ACAOM Site Visit Manual](#); [ACAOM Commission Actions Policy](#); [ACAOM Fees and Dues Schedule](#); [ACAOM Public Disclosure Policy](#)

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

**Responsible Official:** ACAOM Executive Director

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**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.

**Table of Contents**

General Overview..... 2  
Scope of Recognition..... 2  
Multi-Purpose Institutions ..... 2  
Accreditation Procedures..... 2  
Initial Accreditation ..... 2  
Eligibility Phase: Preparing for pre-accreditation ..... 2  
Pre-accreditation Phase: Preparing for accreditation..... 3  
Accreditation Phase: Preparing for renewal of accreditation..... 3  
The Orientation Visit (Eligibility Phase)..... 4  
The Letter of Intent (Eligibility Phase)..... 4  
The Self-Study Training (Mandatory for Eligibility Phase, Optional for Other Phases)..... 4  
The Self Study Report (All Phases) ..... 4  
The Self Study Report Review (All Phases)..... 5  
The Site Visit (All Phases) ..... 5  
The Site Visit Report (All Phases) ..... 5  
Formal Institutional Response (FIR) to Site Visit Report (All Phases) ..... 5  
Commission Review (All Phases)..... 6  
Commission Actions ..... 6  
Acceptance of Accreditation Status ..... 7  
Length of Pre-accreditation ..... 7  
Length of Accreditation..... 7  
Announcement, Advertisement, and Disclosure of Pre-accreditation or Accreditation Status ..... 7  
Annual and Interim Reports ..... 7  
Annual Sustaining Accreditation Dues ..... 8

# General Overview

## Scope of Recognition

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 acupuncture or Oriental medicine (AOM) program is offered by a regionally or nationally accredited institution that also offers programs in other fields (i.e. a multi-purpose institution), the Commission may only review the AOM program(s) for purposes of “programmatic” pre-accreditation/accreditation. In such instances, ACAOM serves as a programmatic accreditor.

Should a freestanding, single-purpose school that is institutionally pre-accredited/accredited by ACAOM begin offering a program that is outside of ACAOM’s scope of accreditation by the U.S. Secretary of Education, the school becomes a multi-purpose institution and ACAOM’s role converts from being an institutional accreditor to that of programmatic accreditor.

# 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 an initial inquiry to ACAOM’s office and provide any additional information requested by ACAOM
- Step 2 - Pay the required fees/expenses and host a one-day “*Orientation Visit*”
- Step 3 - Submit a *Letter of Intent* with required additional information officially notifying the Commission of the institution/program’s commitment to pursue accreditation
- Step 4 - Complete ACAOM’s mandatory *Self-Study* training
- Step 5 - Complete a self-study, submit a *Self-Study Report* in accordance with ACAOM’s current Self-Study Guide and associated policies, and pay the required Self-Study Report Review Fee
- Step 6 - Pay for and host a comprehensive 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 - Complete a self-study; submit a *Self-Study Report* in accordance with ACAOM's current Self-Study Guide and associated policies; and pay the required Self-Study Report Review Fee
- Step 2 - Pay for and host a comprehensive site visit
- Step 3 - Submit a *Formal Institutional Response (FIR)* to the *Site Visit Report – Initial Accreditation*
- Step 4 - Undergo Commission review

## Accreditation Phase: Preparing for renewal of accreditation

- Step 1 - Complete a self-study; submit a *Self-Study Report* in accordance with ACAOM's current Self-Study Guide and associated policies; and pay the required Self-Study Report Review Fee
- Step 2 - Pay for and host a comprehensive site visit
- Step 3 - Submit a *Formal Institutional Response (FIR)* to the *Site Visit Report – Continuing Accreditation*
- Step 4 - Undergo Commission review

ACAOM currently accepts initial applications for institutional pre-accreditation/accreditation from freestanding, single-purpose institutions that have state authorization to operate and are offering an ACAOM-accreditable degree/diploma program.

ACAOM currently accepts initial applications for ACAOM programmatic pre-accreditation/accreditation from multi-purpose institutions that are institutionally accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education, have state authorization to operate and are offering an ACAOM-accreditable degree/diploma program.

ACAOM will consider applications for pre-accreditation of 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.
- E. An institution or program seeking pre-accreditation must have had students enrolled in the applicable program(s) for at least one academic year (30 weeks of instruction) prior to submitting a Self-Study Report.

### 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*, institutions/programs moving forward must submit to the Commission a *Letter of Intent* to pursue ACAOM accreditation which has been authorized by the institution's governing body. The *Letter of Intent* must be accompanied by additional information specified by ACAOM.

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

### The Self-Study Training (Mandatory for Eligibility Phase, Optional for Other Phases)

A representative or representatives of the institution/program seeking pre-accreditation must complete ACAOM's *Self-Study Training*. Training may involve workshop attendance and/or self-paced review of ACAOM's guidance documents and resources. Information regarding training options may be obtained by contacting the ACAOM office. Because there should be broad institutional/program participation in the preparation of a *Self-Study Report (SSR)*, it is recommended that a team consisting of the program's director and other key school personnel complete this training. (see [ACAOM's Self-Study Guide](#))

### The Self Study Report (All Phases)

As outlined in ACAOM's current Self-Study Guide and associated policies, the institution/program develops a *SSR* that presents a factual and complete compilation of narratives, with supporting documentation where applicable, evidencing that the program complies with each of the Commission's *Eligibility Requirements* and applicable *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*. The *SSR* must be submitted in the format and manner prescribed by the Commission, along with a 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 summer meeting in the next calendar year, or by April 1 for the Commission's winter meeting in the next calendar year.

#### CAVEATS:

1. *The Commission's acceptance of a SSR 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.*
2. *An institution or program seeking pre-accreditation must have had students enrolled in the applicable program(s) for at least one academic year (30 weeks of instruction) prior to submitting a SSR. For those seeking initial accreditation the AOM program(s) must have graduated students.*

3. *An institution or program may withdraw a SSR or notify ACAOM in writing of its decision to withdraw from ACAOM's pre-accreditation or accreditation process (either a "withdraw action"), at any time before a final decision is made by the Commission on the application for pre-accreditation/accreditation.*

### The Self Study Report Review (All Phases)

SSR's submitted to the Commission will first undergo a staff review to assess readability, navigability, and completeness. Based on the results of this initial review, Commission staff may: 1) accept the report and approve the scheduling of a comprehensive *Site Visit*, 2) require additional or clarifying information from the institution/program, or 3) reject the report if it fails to adequately document and demonstrate compliance with the Commission's *Eligibility Requirements* and *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*. Resubmission of a rejected report may result in additional review fees, delayed Commission review, and/or sanctions by the Commission.

### The Site Visit (All Phases)

Typically, a three-day comprehensive *Site Visit* is conducted by an ACAOM site visit team of qualified peer reviewers to validate the contents of the *SSR* and to assess compliance with the Commission's *Eligibility Requirements* and its *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation* for purposes of granting, granting with conditions, denying or deferring action on pre-accreditation or accreditation status. (see [ACAOM's Site Visit Manual: A guide for institutions and site visitors](#))

*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 peer reviewers prepare a written *Site Visit Report (SVR)* of their findings for the Commission. The review team chair submits a copy of the *SVR* to the ACAOM office within seven (7) calendar days of the completion of the visit. ACAOM staff will conduct an editorial review of the *SVR* and report any inconsistencies noted to the review team chair. Any editorial changes to the report are made and/or approved by the review 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)*. The *FIR* is the institution's official written communication responding to the *SVR* and it becomes part of the accreditation record for the institution/program.

The *FIR* consists of two parts:

1. Verification of factual accuracy (such as spelling of names, credentials, titles, etc.)
2. Responses to alleged substantive inaccuracies in the findings.

The *FIR* should address any alleged substantive inaccuracies in the findings of the *SVR* that the program believes do not accurately reflect the institution/program at the time of the site visit, specifically indicating the corresponding standard and/or the criterion and providing a narrative statement addressing evidence that was clearly available to the site visit team that could potentially affect the finding(s). A copy of that evidence must

be provided, and the FIR must indicate whether that evidence was included in the SSR, the on-site resources, or if it was only available by request of the team. The formal institutional response **may not exceed 25 pages** including essential documentation.

#### CAVEATS:

1. *No new information (i.e., information not available and presented at the time of the site visit), will be considered by the Commission.*
2. *No newly developed documents or procedures that the institution has implemented since the site visit will be considered by the Commission.*

### Commission Review (All Phases)

During its semi-annual 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/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/program may not have legal counsel present.

The Commission may consider written third-party testimony referencing an institution/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 act 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. No other persons may be present without the prior approval of the Commission.

During its review of the accreditation record, the Commission may not reverse site visitor findings that the institution/program was "compliant" or "compliant with further development" with ACAOM's accreditation criteria without first giving the institution/program notice and an opportunity to respond. In such instances, institutions/programs will be given fourteen (14) calendar days after receipt of written notice to submit a supplemental FIR specifically limited to addressing the proposed reversal of site visitors' findings, and a review committee of the Commission shall have up to fourteen (14) calendar days to review any supplemental FIR received and recommend corresponding Commission action.

*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.*

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 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 pre-accreditation/accreditation status has fourteen (14) calendar days from receipt of notification to accept the Commission's action and submit all relevant acceptance fees prescribed by [ACAOM's Fees and Dues Schedule](#). 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 *reconsideration procedures* and *appeal process*. ([See ACAOM Commission Actions Policy](#)).

### 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 its sole discretion, the Commission finds "good cause" (as defined in [ACAOM's Glossary](#)) exists, 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, Advertisement, and Disclosure of Pre-accreditation or Accreditation Status

A program/institution must publish its accreditation status in accordance with [ACAOM's Public Disclosure Policy](#) and guidance included in Commission *Action Letters*.

If an institution/program releases information that misrepresents or is misleading with respect to its accreditation status 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 Recognition 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
180514	Updated and revised to incorporate current references and current names of related ACAOM policies and resources, removed requirement for Self-Study training for established programs/institutions, removed Certificate of Accred. Status, non-substantive clarifying edits to text.	ACAOM Executive Director
190122	Minor revision to SSR Caveat 3 pg 5 re: Withdraw action. Addition of paragraph under <i>Commission Review</i> pg 6 re: reverse of site visit findings and institutional opportunity to submit supplemental FIR	ACAOM Executive Director