



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

OFFICE OF POSTSECONDARY
EDUCATION WASHINGTON,
D.C. 20202

February 22, 2022

Subject: Updates to the Accreditation Handbook, Documentation of Evidence in Accreditation
Recognition Reviews

Summary: This letter provides an update on changes to the Accreditation Handbook which provides guidelines to federally recognized accrediting agencies on the recognition criteria and evidence required to document compliance with federal regulations.

Dear Recognized Accrediting Agencies,

The decision to enroll in college is one of the largest financial investments that students and families may make in their future. For these students, accreditation acts as a safety seal of approval and marker of quality, signaling that their investment is a worthwhile endeavor. Accreditation has been central to efforts to set baseline standards and promote continuous improvement in how well colleges and universities serve students across a diverse array of institutions and educational programs. This critical role serves as an important protection for students and taxpayers, assuring the quality of our higher education system based on data and evidence. The Department's role of determining the federal recognition of accrediting agencies, through a rigorous review process that ensures that agencies meet federal recognition criteria, aids in legitimizing an agency's accreditation decisions.

In July 2020, new regulations guiding accreditation went into effect, along with new procedures and criteria for recognizing accrediting agencies. The updates to the Accreditation Handbook announced today are intended to update the evidence required from agencies as they continue to implement and demonstrate compliance with the new regulations and to ensure they are effectively holding institutions and programs to high standards. These updates are also intended to provide additional clarity to accrediting agencies on the documentation required to demonstrate compliance with the regulations.

These changes include updating the documentation required to demonstrate an agency's student achievement standards; documenting actions taken against institutions or programs that do not meet agency standards; and assessing whether agencies have adequate staff and financial resources in compliance with applicable regulations, among other areas.

The Department looks forward to continuing to work with accrediting agencies to assure the quality of institutions and programs in the best interest of students.

Sincerely,

/S/

Michelle Asha Cooper , Ph.D.
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Higher Education Programs
Delegated the Authority to Perform the
Functions and Duties of the Assistant Secretary
Office of Postsecondary Education