

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

"The essential purpose of the accreditation process is to provide a professional judgment as to the quality of the educational institution or program(s) offered, and to encourage continual improvement thereof."¹ Accreditation is the process by which The American Association For higher Education and Accreditation (AAHEA) grants public recognition to an educational institution which has voluntarily submitted to an evaluative comparison with established qualifications and standards and has demonstrated that it is in compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, both upon initial application and periodically hereafter. AAHEA's function is focused upon educational quality, the continuous assessment and improvement of educational practices, and assistance to institutions in the improvement of these practices within their programs. Through its support of an independent Accrediting body, the AAHEA membership promulgates and sustains the Standards for Accreditation along with policies and procedures that measure and inspire educational quality.

The four major components of this ongoing process are as follows: (1) the development and implementation of institutional and program goals and objectives that focus upon a continuing education mission; (2) a comprehensive, analytic self-evaluation review and report by the institution; (3) an on-site professional peer review to evaluate both the adequacy and accuracy of the self-evaluation and the institution's compliance with AAHEA standards; and (4) an independent review and decision by the Accrediting Body as an assessment of the institution's commitment to and compliance with AAHEA standards, policies and procedures.

Principles of Ethics for AAHEA Accredited Institutions

In support of its Standards for Accreditation, AAHEA members must uphold the following principles of professional ethics:

To provide programs of study that is educationally sound, up-to-date, of high quality and demonstrably effective.

To maintain fair, ethical, and clearly stated advertising, admission, and enrollment practices by accurately and fairly representing the institution and its services to all people.

To provide effective student services that recognizes individual differences and ensure successful student retention, graduation, and employability where applicable. Not the least of which is student support.

To demonstrate the ultimate benefit of private educational training programs through satisfied participants. To ensure proper and ethical administration of all financial aspects of the institution.

To embrace voluntary self-regulation, which is inherent to the accreditation process.

To demonstrate a commitment to the people served by the institution through local community involvement and participation when applicable.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of private educational training, thereby providing essential skills to support a productive American workforce.

To promote continuing education and training programs of the highest quality and integrity.

Definition and Scope

A continuing education program is defined as "postsecondary instruction designed to meet the educational needs and interests of adults, including the expansion of available learning opportunities for adults who are not adequately served by current educational offerings in their communities".² AAHEA accredits institutions that provide continuing education and training programs, including those institutions that are authorized to award occupational associate degrees. Further definition of the institutional characteristics as they relate to continuing education and training programs applicable to AAHEA accreditation standards can be found in AAHEA Document # - Profile of Institutional Clientele and Programs.

"Continuing education and training provides for (1) self-determined improvement and enrichment of individuals' lives; (2) concurrent education for adults who are involved in earning a living or homemaking; (3) employment-related pre-service and/or in-service education; and (4) pursuit of learning in an intentional and systematic fashion."³ Learning is the activity by which adults acquire new knowledge and skills; education is the process that facilitates such learning. While education is generally used as the broad descriptive term for these learning experiences, dependent upon the context, education is viewed as an emphasis on the theoretical and conceptual elements of learning whereas training focuses on practical applications of knowledge and skills with specific hands-on experiences.

Learning experiences associated with continuing education can thus be concentrated or protracted but are focused on adult learners, building their previous education and experience into their present and future needs. The applications of this definition for continuing education fall into one of four broad categories: to develop new job skills; provide credentials necessary to advance in one's career; qualify for licensure, relicensure and certification; or personal development through avocational pursuits. Regardless of form or dimension, the primary purpose of continuing education is to provide new knowledge, understandings, and skills for adults".⁴ It is within this context that AAHEA accredits institutions that offer continuing education programs for professional,

² Higher Education Act - PL 94-748

³ Miller, Harry, et al, NAPCAE Exchange, "Defining Adult Continuing Education", Winter/Summer 1981, Pg. 9-10

⁴ Miller, Harry, et al, NAPCAE Exchange, "Defining Adult Continuing Education", Winter/Summer 1981, Pg. 9-10

vocational, and leadership training; personal and occupational development in volunteer service or paid employment; improvement of the ability to manage personal, financial, material, and human resources; and preparation for licensing, certification, or admissions examinations.

AAHEA provides institutional accreditation for organizations whose primary function is for educational purposes and for organizations offering continuing education as a clearly identified institutional objective within the operational entity such as in-service corporate training. AAHEA accreditation can include educational institutions, which offer programs at locations other than the main headquarters under specified conditions and controls (Refer to Document #- “Approval and Review of External Locations).” AAHEA accredits continuing education and training organizations throughout the United States and abroad. Institutions that may be eligible for accreditation include:

- Trade and professional associations
- Private career schools
- Corporate training departments
- Intensive English programs (IEPs)
- Social service, volunteer and personal development organizations

Like other educational accrediting agencies, AAHEA does not grant academic credit or any other unit of educational measurement. Only educational institutions licensed or chartered to do so by federal or state governments can grant academic credit. Additionally, the transferability of academic credit between institutions is at the sole discretion of those institutions directly involved.

Eligibility

To be eligible for accreditation by AAHEA, an institution must meet the following requirements:

1. It has an identified body of individuals actively involved in a prescribed learning format and setting. Programs offered must provide a clearly interactive component of educational methodology appropriate to the subject matter and expected training outcomes.
2. It meets any and all applicable state licensing requirements.
3. It has a predominant portion of the participants involved in a continuing education experience convergent with those outlined in Document # - “Profile of Institutional Clientele and Programs.”
4. It can demonstrate continuous, ongoing, uninterrupted, and successful operation of the institution in the delivery of education and/or training programs for at least two consecutive years immediately prior to application. This requirement may be waived by the Accrediting Body upon provision of acceptable documentation to demonstrate that any interruption occurred as a result of forces of nature or civil disorder or by abrupt and unforeseeable change in law or regulation affecting the institution. At minimum, one graduating class from the longest program must have completed the education or training offered.

5. It has not had a prior accreditation withdrawn from a U. S. Department of Education recognized accrediting agency, nor has it voluntarily withdrawn under a show cause action, within one year prior to application to AAHEA.
6. It has been under the same ownership and/or control for at least two years immediately prior to application. This requirement may be waived by the Accreditation Body upon provision of acceptable documentation showing the applicant institution is owned or controlled by an educational organization with a reputable history of stable operations and by individual(s) with extensive credentials that demonstrate competent administration of an accredited institution.
7. It is an educational establishment that offers post secondary certificates, diplomas, or degrees up to the Associate's level. If the institution offers more advanced degrees, specifically at the Bachelor's degree level and above, that entity will not be eligible for accreditation. This restriction does not apply to a stand-alone department or division, such as continuing education or intensive English programs, within a higher education institution accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education.
8. It prescribes a time requirement for the education and training offered in clock hours and, if applicable, credit hours or continuing education units.
9. It agrees upon application and accreditation to abide by the AAHEA Rules, Principles of Ethics, and Standards for Accreditation, policies and procedures and to support the goals and integrity of the accreditation process.

Organization of AAHEA

AAHEA is a very old, (1870) and proud membership organization for higher education. It has worked over the years helping to set educational standards in concert with the top colleges and universities in the United States and is offering accreditation to those institutions who qualify. The accreditation membership of AAHEA consists solely of those organizations, which have been accredited by the Accrediting Body of AAHEA. The directors; approve the eligibility requirements and Standards for Accreditation, serves as peer review evaluators for on-site team examinations; and is solicited for commentary on the bylaws and major policy and procedural issues.

The Accrediting Body consists of no fewer than eleven (11) nor more than fifteen (20) directors. The director's manage the administrative and fiscal affairs of AAHEA and serves as the judicial body with final authority to interpret and apply the Standards for Accreditation in determining whether or not an applicant meets the published criteria for accreditation. The directors decide, based upon the eligibility criteria, whether it is competent to apply the AAHEA Standards to specific educational programs. The directors are responsible for submitting proposed changes in the eligibility requirements and the Standards for Accreditation, to the accreditation membership for review and approval. The directors may adopt such policies and procedures as it deems necessary with regard to the accreditation process. Five members of the Accrediting body must be from the public, unaffiliated with the AAHEA membership. Additional public and consumer representatives may be appointed to advise the directors as needed. An annual conference and other such special meetings will be held as approved by the Accreditation Body in accordance with the AAHEA Bylaws.

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Inquiry

An inquiry from an interested institution, whether initialized through telephone, correspondence, or email, is routed to the AAHEA website (www.aahea.org) which offers a comprehensive set of AAHEA documents that serve to describe and depict the accreditation standards, policies, and procedures. Once the materials are reviewed an interested party simply submits a form called, “Request for Information.”

Application

Formal application to AAHEA for initial review and consideration to determine eligibility requires the submission of AAHEA Document # - “Application for Accreditation,” which can be filled out on line and can be found on the AAHEA website. The application must include supporting documentation for the main campus and all branches, auxiliary classrooms, and classroom extensions, along with an application processing fee as outlined in AAHEA Document # – “Fee Schedule.” Acceptance of the application is not an indication or assessment of the institution's compliance with the Standards for Accreditation but simply an initial indicator of congruence with the eligibility requirements. The supporting documentation will be reviewed and analyzed in order to make a final determination for acceptance of the application.

Accreditation Workshop

Prior to the submission of the institution’s electronic Analytic Self-Evaluation Report (eASER), initial applicants should attend an Accreditation Workshop. The workshops are designed to provide an in-depth study of the AAHEA accreditation process in order to assist the institution in the preparation of the eASER, preparing for the on-site evaluation, and understanding the actions of the Accreditation. Staff members are also available for a fee, to walk all applicants through the entire process.

Electronic Analytic Self-Evaluation Report (eASER)

Following acceptance of an application, AAHEA will provide the institution a projected schedule for submission of the electronic Analytic Self-Evaluation Report (eASER) for the main campus and, if applicable, the equivalent Branch Analytic Self-Evaluation Report(s) (eBASERs). The appropriate AAHEA Document # – “Guidelines for Preparing the Electronic Analytic Self-Evaluation Report” and any Templates, applicable to the institution, that provide specific guidance in the preparation of the eASER/BASERs, all of which are explained at length in the Accreditation Workshop and available for reference/downloading at the AAHEA website.

Preliminary Evaluation Assessment Visit (Optional)

Upon acceptance of an application for initial accreditation, an institution may choose to participate in a Preliminary Evaluation Assessment Visit. The visit is conducted by an experienced AAHEA representative and is designed to assist an institution in its final preparations prior to the full on-site team evaluation and consideration by the Accrediting body. Institutions interested in participating in this visit, must submit AAHEA Document # – “Request for Preliminary Evaluation Assessment Visit” and the on-site visit fee. As mentioned above, staff members are also available for a fee, to walk all applicants through the entire accreditation process.

Submission of eASER/BASER, Request for On-Site Visit, and Fees

Based on the projected Accreditation Body review cycle schedule, two copies of the main campus eASER and, as applicable, branch campus eBASER(s) are submitted to the AAHEA office. The on-site visit fee and a completed Document # – “Request for On-site Examination Team” must accompany the institution’s submittal of the eASER/BASERs. The on-site examination fees are outlined in AAHEA Document # – “Fee Schedule.” Once the visit arrangements have been finalized by AAHEA, the institution will provide additional copies directly to the team member(s) in accordance with AAHEA Document # eASER Attachment 2 – eASER/BASER Routing Procedures.

AAHEA Review of eASER/BASER and Scheduling of On-site Team Visit

After the eASER has been received, the assigned Accreditation Representative will contact the institution to set a date for the on-site visit(s) and will forward specific information regarding the visit and team members when final arrangements have been made.

On-Site Examination Visit

The on-site examination team will conduct a review using the institution's self-analysis (eASER/BASERs) to server as the framework for the team to evaluate operational activities/results in the context of AAHEA’s standards, policies and procedures. The policies and procedures that guide the selection and activities of the on-site examination teams are outlined in AAHEA Documents # – “Guidelines for On-site Evaluation Teams” and # – “Affirmation of Professionalism and Ethics.” The team will present a brief oral review at the end of the on-site visit. Except for financial statements, which are reviewed separately by AAHEA, items must be made available to the on-site examination team in accordance with the Information Checklist for AAHEA On-Site Examination Visit that is provided prior to the visit.

On-Site Examination Team Report and Institutional Response

Within 45 calendar days from the date of the on-site examination team visit, a written report will be sent to the applicant institution, providing an opportunity to respond and to submit additional documentation, clarification of, and/or new information pertinent to, factors existent at the time of the visit. The

institution will be given 14 calendar days to submit its response to the On-Site Examination Team Report(s) for consideration by the AAHEA Accrediting Body. The eASER/BASER(s), team report(s), and other supplementary reports are treated as confidential materials and are not shared with other AAHEA members, the press, or the public. These materials may however be subject to review by appropriate state and federal agencies or courts of law in accordance with statutes and regulations.

Accrediting Commission Deliberation and Action

The Application for Accreditation, the eASER/BASERs, the On-Site Examination Team Report(s), the institution's response(s) to the team report(s), the financial statements, and any other information that might have a bearing on accreditation will be made available to the Accrediting Body for deliberation and action. AAHEA Document # - "Policies and Practices of the Accrediting Body" outlines the actions that may be taken.

Notification of Commission Action to the Institution

The institution will be notified in writing within 30 calendar days of the action taken by AAHEA regarding the institution's application for accreditation.

Time Schedule

While there is no fixed, definitive timeframe for completing the accreditation review process, twelve (12) months is considered a reasonable estimate for an institution committed to a serious investment of the necessary effort and resources. An initial application expires one year from the date of receipt at AAHEA, unless officially accepted along with the subsequent receipt of an eASER/BASER, request for on-site visit and fees within that timeframe. Applicants scheduled for an on-site evaluation during a specified review cycle (March, July, or November) are required to timely submit the appropriate documentation and fees. AAHEA's workload and logistical factors may necessitate the rescheduling of the visit(s) for a subsequent review cycle or another time that may be more appropriate.

General Policies

1. Accreditation is a voluntary, self-regulatory process, conducted on the basis of published standards, policies and procedures, and judged by an independent body of knowledgeable peers. The burden of proof for meeting the accreditation standards rests on the institution, which must show that the administrative oversight, curricula, and educational methodologies used produce significant and beneficial outcomes. The institution's educational mission, goals and objectives must be demonstrated through successful outcomes realized by students, and employers, if applicable, as they relate to competency factors.
2. Each institution is evaluated and considered for accreditation on the basis of its established objectives for meeting the education and training requirements of its clients and employers. Each program is evaluated within its own context and not in comparison with other programs.

3. Applications will be accepted by AAHEA in new fields of study upon a determination that sufficient expertise is available to effectively evaluate the program(s).
4. The Accrediting Body serves to validate and improve educational quality; it does not function as a standardizing board.
5. Applicant institutions are reviewed and judged as a whole. Minor remediable weaknesses may be offset by major significant strengths; however, a major weakness in any area may prevent accreditation despite strengths in other areas.
6. Accreditation can be granted for a minimum of one year but cannot exceed five years. Following the initial grant of accreditation, institutions will be required to apply for reaccreditation by completing the full process, including an application, eASER/BASER(s), and on-site reexamination(s) prior to the expiration date cited in their letter of accreditation from AAHEA. Reaccreditation applicants should refer to AAHEA Document # – “Steps to Follow for Reaccreditation.” AAHEA reserves the right to require an on-site examination at any time it determines that circumstances warrant such action.
7. An organization which administers and controls all aspects of its programs from a centralized headquarters is accredited as a single entity. Program delivery sites which are decentralized with some parts under uniform administrative control and other parts under local control are required to be accredited as separate entities.
8. The AAHEA Standards for Accreditation are under constant monitoring and review by the Accrediting Body of AAHEA and periodically, at intervals no greater than every five years, are submitted to the accreditation membership and to other interested parties for review and comment.
9. A publicly available directory of AAHEA accredited institutions is available on AAHEA’s website at www.aahea.org. The directory includes the name, address, telephone and facsimile numbers, and a listing of the programs/courses offered in addition to the designation of the year in which each institution is scheduled for reevaluation or expiration of its accredited status. Branches, auxiliary classrooms and classroom extensions are listed directly following each corporate/main campus-designated listing.
10. AAHEA accredits institutions offering classroom instruction for courses and programs offered at the certificate, diploma, and associate degree levels. Such courses and programs may also be offered via interactive distance learning. Institution’s offering associate degree programs should refer to AAHEA Document # .OAD – “Occupational Associate Degrees” (Template to Guidelines for Preparing an Analytic Self-Evaluation Report). Institutions offering courses or programs in an Interactive Distance Learning (IDL) mode should refer to AAHEA Document #. IDL – “Interactive Distance Learning” (Template to Guidelines for Preparing an Analytic Self-Evaluation Report).