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Introduction and General Information

About this Manual
(revised/validated 02/2024)

The purpose of this Manual is to provide clarity and transparency to the Policies and Procedures associated with the functioning of the Accreditation Council on Education (ACOE). This manual replaces previous versions of Accreditation Manuals specific to each program type within the scope of the ACOE. The version history of the prior Accreditation Manuals is retained within this Manual.

For purposes of this document, the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education will be the "ACOE" or the "Council."

Words/Acronyms in italics are defined in the Glossary. The Glossary is published on the ACOE website, www.theACOE.org.

In the footer of each page, a hyperlink leading back to the top of the document is provided.

Role of Accreditation
(revised/validated 02/2024)

Accreditation is a system for recognizing that educational institutions and programs affiliated with those institutions have attained a level of educational effectiveness, integrity, and quality which entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and public they serve. In most countries, the establishment and maintenance of educational standards is the responsibility of a central government bureau. However, the American system of voluntary non-governmental evaluation, called accreditation, has evolved to promote educational quality.

Although accreditation is a voluntary process, accrediting decisions are used as consideration in many formal actions -- by governmental funding agencies, state licensing boards, scholarship commissions, foundations, and potential students. Accreditation at the postsecondary and professional level performs several important functions, including the encouragement of efforts to increase educational effectiveness. The accrediting process requires an educational institution and/or program to conduct a self-study to determine whether its mission and goals are being achieved; to consider the expert recommendations and suggestions of an impartial evaluation visit team comprised of members with appropriate expertise which evaluates the entity based on its ability to meet predetermined standards; and to plan and execute internal actions to address the recommendations of the accrediting body. Those programs meeting the criteria are publicly designated. Since accreditation status is reviewed on a periodic basis, accredited institutions and professional programs are required to maintain continuous self-study and improvement mechanisms.

Two forms of accreditation are recognized in the U.S. -- institutional and specialized accreditation. Institutional accrediting bodies recognize the entire institution rather than individual programs. Specialized accreditation of professional and occupational programs is granted by councils or commissions on accreditation set up by national professional organizations in such fields as dentistry, optometry, medicine, engineering, and law. Each specialized accreditation group defines its own eligibility criteria for accreditation and operating procedures. A major rationale for specialized
accreditation activities is to provide quality assurance concerning educational preparation of members of the profession or occupation.

**History and Composition of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education**  
(revised/validated 02/2024)

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE), formerly known as the Council on Optometric Education, was established in 1934 by the House of Delegates of the American Optometric Association (AOA). The Council is comprised of thirteen members, eleven of whom are members of the AOA, and two public members. With respect to members of the Council who are members of the AOA:

- Four (4) are optometrists of outstanding professional experience, who are not affiliated with any school or college of optometry and who are not members of any state board of optometric examiners;
- Two (2) are current members of an Active Member Board of the Association of Regulatory Boards of Optometry (ARBO) or served on the ARBO Board of Directors within the preceding twelve (12) months at the time of their initial appointment;
- Four (4) are optometrists associated with optometric educational programs with an accreditation status from the ACOE, with two of the four having expertise in optometric residency education;
- One (1) is an optometric technician and/or a person involved in optometric technician education.

The two (2) public members of the Council are individuals who are not educators in or members of the profession of optometry. A public member of the Council also is not:

- An employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to, a program that holds either an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval from the Council or has applied for accreditation;
- a member of any trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with the Council; or
- a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in the above two parts of this definition.

Current members of the AOA Board of Trustees and chief executive officers of professional optometric degree programs, including those holding an accreditation status, Preliminary Approval, and those associated with proposed programs prior to Preliminary Approval, are prohibited from serving as members of the Council.

Each year, the status of appointment and reappointment needs for the upcoming year is evaluated by the ACOE Chair. When appropriate, the Chair may organize an ad hoc committee responsible for screening potential candidates. Public member candidates attest to meeting the definition of a public member as a precondition of being considered for appointment.

The process associated with ACOE member appointments is specified in Article V, Section 1 of the AOA Bylaws. ACOE members are appointed by the president of the AOA with advice and consent of the AOA Board of Trustees. In the event of a vacancy, the president with the consent of the AOA Board of Trustees shall appoint a successor to complete the unexpired portion of the term of office.
ACOE Committee Structure
(revised/validated 02/2024)

The ACOE establishes Committees to allow it to function efficiently and to obtain input from stakeholders from the broader educational and practice community. Committees serve in an advisory capacity to the ACOE. The Committees study various topics, conduct preliminary reviews, and develop recommendations for Council consideration.

The Chair of the ACOE appoints committee members and is an ex officio member of all Committees.

- **ACOE Executive Committee** - This Committee is comprised of the ACOE Chair, Vice Chair, and Director (non-voting). The Executive Committee functions in the interim between ACOE meetings to assure the effective functioning of the Council. The Executive Committee communicates the Council’s priorities and needs to the AOA Board of Trustees, communicates with other stakeholder groups within the profession, and supports other activities including, but not limited to reviews of submitted complaints.

- **Professional Optometric Degree (POD) Program Committee** - The POD Committee advises the Council on Standards, policies, and procedures related to professional doctor of optometry programs. The POD Committee does not review specific programs; rather, it reviews the ACOE’s policies, Standards, and procedures pertaining to all programs and makes recommendations for ACOE consideration.

- **Optometric Residency Program Committee** - The Optometric Residency Committee (aka the Residency Committee) advises the Council on Standards, policies, and procedures related to optometric residency programs. The Optometric Residency Committee reviews annual reports and progress reports submitted by the individual programs and makes recommendations for Council consideration. The Optometric Residency Committee may also review substantive change requests submitted by the individual programs and make recommendations for Council consideration.

- **Optometric Technician Program Committee** - The Optometric Technician Program Committee (aka the Technician Committee) advises the Council on Standards, policies, and procedures related to optometric technician programs. Similar to the Residency Committee, the Technician Committee reviews annual reports and progress reports submitted by the individual programs and makes recommendations for Council consideration.

- **Leadership and Professional Development (LPD) Committee** - The LPD Committee supports the training curriculum for members and staff of the ACOE. The LPD Committee develops and works with the staff on planning and implementing training programs for ACOE senior consultants (aka team chairs for optometric residency program evaluation visits) and ACOE consultants (evaluation visitors for all types of programs) and develops tools and templates for evaluation visits.

- **Planning Committee** - The Planning Committee is focused on four key areas: (1) periodically review and recommend updates to the Council’s mission, goals, and objectives; (2) assess performance relative to the Council’s mission, goals, and objectives; (3) advise the Council regarding future operations and direction; and (4) evaluate and develop a multi-year financial plan. Examples of recommendations which may originate in the Planning Committee include changes to ACOE fees, Council or staff size, or changes to the composition of the ACOE, among others.

- **Quality Improvement (QI) Committee** - The QI Committee is comprised of the chairs of the three program-specific committees of the Council. The Committee follows a plan adopted by ACOE for the “Assessment and Enhancement of the Relevancy, Validity and Reliability of ACOE Functions.” The Committee reviews compiled results of visit evaluations conducted over the
course of each year, evaluations of ACOE training programs, and a compiled report of the recommendations issued associated with the various accreditation Standards. The Committee serves a critical function in supporting consistency in interpretation of and assessments of compliance to the ACOE’s accreditation Standards. The Committee develops recommendations for Council consideration as to whether corrective actions or enhancements to Council Standards, policies, and/or procedures are needed.

- **Compliance Committee** - The Compliance Committee works with ACOE staff to monitor ACOE policies and procedures and supports the ACOE’s ongoing compliance with United States Department of Education (USDE) and Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) requirements.

- **Residency Review Committee** - The Residency Review Committee is led by the Chair of the Optometric Residency Program Committee and includes at least two other Council members with optometric residency program experience. The Vice Chair and/or the Chair of the Council also participate when needed due to conflicts of interest. The Residency Review Committee is charged with evaluating and acting on concerns related to optometric residency programs and is empowered to accept substantive change requests from optometric residency programs, avoiding the need to wait for the Optometric Residency Program Committee and/or the full Council to convene.

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**Mission, Goals, and Objectives**
(adopted 06/26/2021)

**Mission**

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education serves the public and the profession of optometry by establishing, maintaining, and applying standards to ensure the academic quality and continuous improvement of optometric education that reflect the contemporary practice of optometry. The scope of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education encompasses professional optometric degree, optometric residency, and optometric technician programs.

**Goal 1**

To protect and inform the public, the optometric profession, and the other communities of interest by ensuring a robust and transparent accreditation program.

**Objectives**

1. Ensure policies, processes, and expectations are fair, appropriate, and clearly communicated;
2. Ensure qualified and unbiased professional peers and public representatives conduct accreditation reviews and make accreditation decisions;
3. Provide for integrity and transparency with respect to Accreditation decisions including decision rationale; and
4. Effectively monitor programs between evaluation reviews to assure continued compliance.

**Goal 2**

To serve as a role model within the optometric profession with respect to application of innovation, the importance of continuous improvement, and the value of external validation.

**Objectives**

1. Continuously seek cost-effective ways to deliver the services of the Council;
2. Implement measures that reduce administrative burden associated with the accreditation process;
3. Employ a continuous process of self-assessment and self-improvement; and

**Goal 3**

To recognize trends and evolve in alignment with the contemporary practice of optometry and higher education.

**Objectives**

1. Ensure open lines of communication between the Council and stakeholders within the profession;
2. Actively engage with the communities of interest to inform and implement accreditation *standards* that remain relevant and contemporary; and
3. Keep the optometric community informed of current trends and developments in specialized accreditation.

**Recognition by USDE and CHEA**

The ACOE is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE). The ACOE’s scope of recognition by the USDE is as follows:

The accreditation in the United States of professional optometric degree programs and optometric residency programs, and for the *preaccreditation* category of Preliminary Approval for professional optometric degree programs.

ACOE accreditation enables higher education programs to establish eligibility for federal programs under the Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP) for Health Professional Schools and Graduate Schools, funded through the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Title VII Public Health Service Act, and to participate in the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration education and training program for optometry residency programs. All the U.S. programs that the ACOE accredits are located within, or affiliated with, educational institutions which are accredited by a USDE recognized institutional accrediting agency that serves as a gatekeeper for Title IV funds.

In connection with its statutory duty to determine programmatic eligibility for federal aid funds, the USDE conducts a program of evaluation, review, and recognition of accrediting bodies to ensure that their actions are valid and reliable indicators of the quality of the educational programs offered by the accredited institutions and/or programs. Educational programs that are accredited by USDE recognized accrediting agencies are eligible for federal funds, provided certain other requirements are met.

The ACOE is also recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), a private, nonprofit national organization that coordinates accreditation activity in the United States. CHEA recognition signifies that the ACOE and other recognized accrediting agencies have met CHEA’s standards for recognition. The scope of ACOE’s recognition by CHEA is as follows:

Professional optometric degree programs (doctoral level) in the United States and Canada.

The activities and policies of the ACOE are regularly reviewed by the USDE and CHEA to ascertain whether the ACOE conducts a valid and reliable accreditation process. These external reviews help to ensure that the ACOE is conducting its accreditation activities in a reliable manner that is responsive to public concerns.
General Policies and Procedures

Policy on Policies

**POLICY**
The ACOE maintains, reviews, and updates Policies and Procedures (P&Ps) associated with its functions.

The ACOE’s P&Ps are the purview of the Compliance Committee and are reviewed for update or validation at least annually.

The Compliance Committee makes recommendations to the Council based upon its review which may include a referral of the P&P:

- to another ACOE Committee for review and recommendation before bringing to Council for consideration;
- to the Council for discussion and determination of next steps, which must include distribution to the communities of interest in a call for comments in the case of proposed material changes; or
- to the Council for consideration as part of a consent calendar for validation of existing P&Ps (no/non-material changes).

**SCOPE**
☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**
None

**PROCEDURE**

*New or Revised P&P*
An issue or concern may arise that warrants consideration of a new or revised P&P. The ACOE Director will consult with the ACOE Chair regarding urgency of consideration, e.g.,

- whether the issue or concern can be added to the agenda of the Compliance Committee’s annual meeting; or
- whether the issue or concern warrants an ad hoc Compliance Committee meeting.

The ACOE staff will perform research and propose a draft version of the new or revised P&P.

The Compliance Committee will review the new or revised P&P and make a recommendation to the Council based on its review.

The Council will consider the new or revised P&P, make any changes it deems warranted, and upon acceptance, will distribute the P&P to the communities of interest in a call for comments in the case of a new or materially revised P&P.

Upon assimilation of the results of the call for comments, the ACOE will review comments received, make any changes it deems warranted, and make its determination regarding adoption of the P&P.

The Council may proceed with adopting a P&P with non-material revisions without the need to distribute the P&P to the communities of interest in a call for comments.

**Annual Review Process**
The Compliance Committee will review the full contents of the “ACOE Policy and Procedure Manual” and make recommendations associated with proposed revisions and/or revalidation of content.

The Council will consider Compliance Committee’s recommendations in its next regularly scheduled meeting. For any proposed revisions of a material nature, if accepted by Council, revisions will be distributed to the communities of interest in a call for comments.

For P&Ps recommended for validation (no changes/non-material changes), the Council will make its determination as to whether to adopt the validated P&Ps.

Upon assimilation of results from the call for comments, the ACOE will review comments received, make any changes it deems warranted, and make its determination regarding adoption of the P&Ps.

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<th>FORMS/ATTACHMENTS</th>
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<td>DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION</td>
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**Ethics and Integrity**

**POLICY**

The ACOE recognizes that the public has entrusted educational programs, as well as accrediting bodies, with the critical responsibilities of upholding the values of higher education and contributing to the public good. Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective optometric education programs. The basic covenants of ethics and integrity serve as the foundation of a relationship in which all parties agree to deal honestly, ethically, and openly with their constituencies and one another.

The ACOE expects programs to operate with integrity in all matters, and to provide accurate, unambiguous information to the Council and to stakeholders. Plagiarism and failure to report honestly by presenting false information or by omission of essential information, whether by intention or not, constitutes a breach of integrity. Violation of principles of integrity and other forms of ethical misconduct may negatively affect an educational program’s accreditation status, Preliminary Approval status, or may result in the termination of a program’s application.

Allegations of non-compliance with this Policy submitted in the context of a complaint are addressed following the process outlined in the ACOE Policy and Procedure “Complaints Against Programs Related to ACOE Standards, Policies, and/or Procedures.”

**SCOPE**

☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**

References ACOE Policies & Procedures “Reconsiderations” and “Appeals”

**PROCEDURE**

Council and staff members
• At least annually, all Council and staff members will sign a form attesting adherence to the Council’s “Ethics and Integrity” Policy.

Committee members
• At least every two (2) years, Committee members serving on Committees that include the evaluation of individual programs in their scope will sign an attestation affirming their understanding of and willingness to comply with the ACOE’s “Ethics and Integrity” Policy. For new Committee members, this attestation will be completed prior to members’ participation in review of individual programs.

Consultants
• Upon completion of ACOE’s Consultant Training Program, consultants will sign an attestation affirming their understanding of and willingness to comply with ACOE’s “Ethics and Integrity” Policy.

Evaluation Visit Team Members
• At the time of assignment of evaluation visit team members, an ACOE staff member will review records to assess whether an attestation certifying adherence to the Council’s “Ethics and Integrity” Policy has been completed within two (2) years in advance of the projected evaluation visit date.

  o If so, then no other action is taken.
  o If not, then the attestation is provided to, completed by, and collected from the relevant team member(s).

Upon becoming aware of a potential violation of this Policy, the ACOE will evaluate the potential violation and make a determination as to whether the potential violation warrants additional scrutiny.

When the Council deems additional scrutiny is warranted, the ACOE Chair, or Vice Chair in the case of a conflict of interest, will document the concern(s) on behalf of the Council in a letter to the program and offer the program the opportunity to provide a response. The response will generally be due to be submitted 60 days in advance of the Council’s next regularly scheduled meeting.

The program may request to appear in front of Council to provide its response verbally and address any questions Council may have.

The program may be requested by Council to attend an upcoming meeting to respond to any questions that Council may have.

Following review of the program’s response, both written and verbal (if applicable), the Council will make its determination as to whether the program has violated this Policy or whether more information is needed and will take action. Possible actions include (1) withdraw or lower accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status; (2) for programs that have not been granted Preliminary Approval or an accreditation status, terminate the application; (3) require the program to submit a progress report or undergo an interim evaluation visit; or (4) dismiss the allegation of policy violation.

The Council will provide notification to the program of its determination within 30 days of its meeting.

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS
Certification of Adherence to Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality, and Ethics and Integrity Policies and Disclosure of Potential Conflict of Interest

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION
06/26/2021 (initial approval); 06/18/2022; 06/24/2023; 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)
Conflicts of Interest

**POLICY**
The ACOE ensures the integrity of its accreditation-related processes, including but not limited to evaluation visits, discussions, and decisions regarding accreditation status, Preliminary Approval, and those associated with proposed programs prior to Preliminary Approval.

The actions and decisions of ACOE members, consultants, evaluation visit team members, volunteers participating on one or more of ACOE’s standing Committees, and members of the ACOE staff remain free from the appearance of impropriety, including that of any potential undue pressure from any program the Council recognizes or any other entity within the optometric profession.

- No member or representative of the ACOE participates in accreditation-related reviews and/or decisions in which the member has a pecuniary, professional, or personal interest that may be impacted by the outcome of the decision.
- No ACOE member acts as a paid or unpaid external consultant on ACOE accreditation matters to any program accredited by or seeking accreditation from the ACOE. This prohibition of serving as a paid or unpaid external consultant extends for a period of two (2) years after completing service on the ACOE.

**SCOPE**
☑️ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☑️ Optometric Residency Programs
☑️ Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**
The following are examples indicating the potential for a conflict of interest, but are not all-inclusive:

1. a close personal, professional or financial interest, or other special relationship (including those of a negative nature), in any program or sponsoring institution in question;
2. an employee or consultant to an entity, other than the sponsoring institution of the program under review or other consideration, which provides all or a significant portion of the institution’s funding (e.g., a state department of education or a federal or private agency providing significant grants or research funding);
3. a current or former student or graduate, or parent, child, spouse, or sibling of a current or former student or graduate of the sponsoring institution in question;
4. a current or former candidate for a paid position within the past five (5) years with the entity in question;
5. a position, whether paid or voluntary, current or former, with or relating to the sponsoring institution or program in question; this includes positions as a consultant, advisor, or faculty member (including clinical or adjunct) (the likelihood of conflict should be carefully examined in relation to the duration and nature of the relationship); and/or
6. a residence and/or place of employment in the same state or in close proximity to the sponsoring institution or program in question should be carefully examined for the likelihood of conflict.

The following additional guidance is applicable to optometric residency programs

1. If the program being discussed is one that is directly sponsored by or affiliated with the Committee/Council member’s employer, that member must declare a conflict of interest and exit the meeting. For example, the director of residency programs at Acme College of
Optometry should leave the room for discussion of any optometric residency programs affiliated with Acme College of Optometry. However, the residency program supervisor at Anytown VA would not have to leave the room for discussion of any VA program, just for discussion of the Anytown program and any other program with the same affiliate.

2. If it has been three (3) or more years since the Committee/Council member was an adjunct faculty member, then that member is no longer required to declare a conflict of interest.

**PROCEDURE**

**Prevention**

Council and staff members.

- On an annual basis, Council and staff members will disclose potential conflicts of interest and sign an attestation affirming their understanding of and willingness to comply with the ACOE’s “Conflicts of Interest” Policy. For new Council members, this disclosure/attestation will be completed prior to members’ participation in accreditation-related decisions.

- By signing the attestation, Council and staff members will be committing to notify the Council staff should additional possible conflicts arise during their term of service.

- During each Council meeting, the Chair will remind members of ACOE’s “Conflicts of Interest” Policy and the policy statement will be documented or provided via hyperlink on the agenda itself.

- Council and staff members will recuse themselves from discussions and Council members will not participate in decision-making associated with accreditation-related decisions for which a potential conflict of interest exists.

Committee members

- At least every two (2) years, Committee members serving on Committees that include the evaluation of individual programs in their scope will disclose potential conflicts of interest and sign an attestation affirming their understanding of and willingness to comply with ACOE’s “Conflicts of Interest” Policy. For new Committee members, this disclosure/attestation will be completed prior to members’ participation in review of individual programs.

- By signing the attestation, Committee members will be committing to notify the Council staff should additional possible conflicts arise during their term of service.

- During each Committee meeting where individual programs are being discussed, the Chair will remind members of ACOE’s “Conflicts of Interest” Policy and the policy statement will be documented or provided via hyperlink on the agenda itself.

- Committee members will recuse themselves from discussion and decision-making associated with accreditation-related recommendations for which a potential conflict of interest exists.

**Consultants**

- Upon completion of ACOE’s Consultant Training Program, consultants will disclose potential conflicts of interest and sign an attestation affirming their understanding of and willingness to comply with ACOE’s “Conflicts of Interest” Policy.

- By signing the attestation, consultants will be committing to notify the Council staff should additional possible conflicts arise during their term of service.

**Evaluation Visit Team members**

- As consultants are being considered for assignment on an evaluation team, both the consultant and the program will be asked whether a potential conflict of interest exists. Only upon confirmation of absence of conflict of interest will a consultant be assigned to a given evaluation visit team.
In addition, when the consultant’s signed disclosure/attestation form was completed two (2) or more years prior to the date of the planned evaluation visit, the consultant will be required to update and execute a new form.

Resolution

The ACOE Director will be notified when uncertainty exists as to whether a situation may represent a possible conflict of interest.

The Director will advise as to whether the situation legitimately constitutes real or perceived conflict of interest based on review of the Policy and the associated Guidelines. The Director may seek additional context when performing this review.

In cases where interpretation of the Policy and the associated Guidelines is not sufficiently clear, the Director will engage the Chair of the Council (or Vice Chair if the potential conflict of interest involves the Chair) in the decision.

The Chair of the Council (or Vice Chair if the potential conflict of interest involves the Chair) may choose to engage other members of the Council in making the determination and is empowered to make the final determination to resolve any questions regarding real or perceived conflicts.

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS

Certification of Adherence to Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality, and Ethics and Integrity Policies and Disclosure of Potential Conflict of Interest

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION

See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 06/18/2022; 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)

Non-Discrimination

POLICY

The ACOE does not practice, condone, or perpetuate discrimination on the basis of age, gender identity, religion, race, creed, national origin, or disability.

The Council urges each program to pursue policies encouraging the inclusion of underrepresented and disadvantaged students/residents, faculty, staff, and administrators.

SCOPE

☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

GUIDELINES

Reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Complaints Not Related to Accreditation Decisions”

PROCEDURE

None

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS

None

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION

See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)
Document Retention

**POLICY**

The ACOE maintains complete and accurate records including, but not limited to the following:

- its last two (2) full accreditation or preaccreditation reviews of each program, including
  - the draft and final accreditation reports,
  - the program’s responses to draft accreditation reports,
  - progress reports, if any,
  - reports of interim *evaluation visits* conducted by the ACOE between and since the last two full accreditation or *preaccreditation* reviews, and
  - copies of the program’s self-studies associated with full accreditation or *preaccreditation* reviews;

- all decision letters issued by the ACOE regarding the accreditation and *preaccreditation* of any program and regarding any substantive changes;

- records of any complaints filed in accordance with ACOE Policies and Procedures “Complaints Against Programs Related to ACOE Standards, Policies, and/or Procedures” and “Complaints Not Related to Accreditation Decisions” as well as the resolution of the complaints; and

- minutes of ACOE meetings that contain records of all ACOE actions and related correspondence.

All electronic records are stored on a secured server protected by firewall and accessible only to the ACOE staff. The electronic records are backed up daily and with the back-ups stored in a secure off-site location.

All hardcopy records are stored in its access-controlled office under lock and key.

**SCOPE**

- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**

None

**PROCEDURE**

None

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**

None

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**

Adopted June 9, 1997; Updated 2001, 2006, 2012; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)

Confidentiality of Accreditation Reports and Council/Committee Proceedings

**POLICY**

Accreditation reports are confidential and are not disclosed except to the program involved.
Council and staff members, Committee members, evaluation visit team members, and consultants are not authorized under any circumstances to disclose information obtained associated with evaluation visits or with Council or Committee meetings or activities.

- Records associated with Council/Committee meetings or activities, including meeting materials and results of deliberations, are considered confidential and may be shared only with Council/Committee members and the ACOE staff.
- The extent to which publicity is given to accreditation reports is determined by the chief executive officer of the educational program.
- Following the Council’s approval of the formal accreditation report, evaluation visit team members destroy their copy of the pre-evaluation materials and other documents relating to the evaluation visit.

When a program so conducts its affairs that they may become a matter of public concern, the Council may find it necessary to issue public comments to correct inaccurate or misleading information. Such inaccurate or misleading information may pertain to the accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status of the program, the contents of accreditation reports, and/or the ACOE’s accreditation-related actions with respect to the program. When the Council is thus forced to make its actions public, it cannot avoid the necessity of explaining, to whatever extent it deems necessary and appropriate, the basis for its action. This may result in some departure from the usual confidential character of the Council’s relations with a program.

SCOPE
☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

GUIDELINES
The Council expects the chief executive officers of optometric educational programs to make the Council’s accreditation reports available to faculty members, members of the governing board, and others directly concerned.

PROCEDURE
Council and staff members

- At least annually, all Council and staff members will sign a form attesting adherence to the Council’s “Confidentiality of Accreditation Reports and Council/Committee Proceedings” Policy.
- During each Council meeting, the Chair will remind attendees of the ACOE’s “Confidentiality of Accreditation Reports and Council/Committee Proceedings” Policy and the policy statement will be documented or provided via hyperlink on the agenda itself.

Committee members

- At least every two (2) years, Committee members serving on Committees that include the evaluation of individual programs in their scope will sign an attestation affirming their understanding of and willingness to comply with the ACOE’s “Confidentiality of Accreditation Reports and Council/Committee Proceedings” Policy. For new Committee members, this attestation will be completed prior to members’ participation in review of individual programs.
- During each Committee meeting where individual programs are being discussed, the Committee Chair will remind attendees of the ACOE’s “Confidentiality of Accreditation
Reports and Council/Committee Proceedings’ Policy and the policy statement will be documented or provided via hyperlink on the agenda itself.

**Consultants**
- Upon completion of the ACOE’s Consultant Training Program, consultants will sign an attestation affirming their understanding of and willingness to comply with ACOE’s “Confidentiality of Accreditation Reports and Council/Committee Proceedings” Policy.

**Evaluation Visit Team Members**
- At the time of assignment of evaluation visit team members, an ACOE staff member will review records to assess whether an attestation certifying adherence to the Council’s “Confidentiality of Accreditation Reports and Council/Committee Proceedings” Policy has been completed within two (2) years in advance of the projected evaluation visit date.
  - If so, then no other action will be taken.
  - If not, then the attestation will be provided to, completed by, and collected from the relevant team member(s).

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**
Certification of Adherence to Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality, and Ethics and Integrity Policies and Disclosure of Potential Conflict of Interest

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 06/18/2022; 06/24/2023; 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)

**Confidentiality of Protected Health Information (PHI)**

**POLICY**
Protected Health Information (PHI) may not be used by the Council or members of evaluation visit teams for any purpose other than for evaluation of the program for an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval.

When requested by a program that is a HIPAA Covered Entity, the Council enters into the ACOE form of Business Associate Agreement (“BAA”), or its equivalent, permitting the Council to receive PHI from the program in the course of evaluating the program for an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval.

Programs may not include any PHI in any correspondence or materials submitted to the ACOE, including but not limited to the self-study and related materials.

- PHI that is included in any materials submitted to the Council is destroyed.
- Programs may be required to resubmit materials when the originally submitted materials are destroyed because they contain PHI.
- The program is responsible for any resulting missed deadlines.

Evaluation visitors may be exposed to PHI during evaluation visits to programs, for example during a visit to a clinic where patients are receiving care.

- Evaluation visitors may not take copies of any PHI with them from the evaluation visit and maintain the confidentiality of all PHI to which they are exposed during the evaluation visit.
• PHI is not shared with any individuals other than Council members, evaluation visitors, and Council staff that have a need to know the information to fulfill their official duties in connection with evaluating the program for an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval.

Individual evaluation visitors do not sign separate confidentiality forms associated with an evaluation visit.

• Confidentiality obligations exist between the Council and the program with evaluation visitors acting as agents for the limited purpose of conducting the evaluation visit.
• These obligations are covered by this Policy and the terms of the BAA or other confidentiality agreement entered into between the Council and the program, if any.

**Scope**

- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**Guidelines**

None

**Procedure**

Council and staff members

- At least annually, all Council and staff members sign a form attesting adherence to the Council’s “Confidentiality of Protected Health Information (PHI)” Policy. At least annually, all Council and staff members complete the ACOE’s HIPAA training.

Committee members

- At least every two (2) years, Committee members serving on Committees that include the evaluation of individual programs in their scope will sign an attestation affirming their understanding of and willingness to comply with the ACOE’s “Confidentiality of Protected Health Information (PHI)” Policy. For new Committee members, this attestation will be completed prior to members’ participation in review of individual programs.

**Consultants**

- Upon completion of ACOE’s Consultant Training Program, consultants will sign an attestation affirming their understanding of and willingness to comply with ACOE’s “Confidentiality of Accreditation Reports and Council/Committee Proceedings” Policy and complete the ACOE’s HIPAA training.

**Evaluation Visit Team Members**

- At the time of assignment of evaluation visit team members, an ACOE staff member will review records to assess whether HIPAA training and the attestation certifying adherence to the ACOE’s “Confidentiality of Protected Health Information (PHI)” Policy has been completed within two (2) years in advance of the projected evaluation visit date.
  - If so, then no other action will be taken.
  - If not, then the attestation and/or HIPAA training module will be provided to, completed by, and collected from the relevant team member(s).

**Forms/Attachments**
Public Disclosure of Accreditation Information by the ACOE

POLICY

The ACOE publishes on its website (www.theACOE.org) written information providing transparency to its accreditation Standards, policies, procedures, information about programs’ accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status and outcomes, as applicable, its decision-makers, and principal administrative staff. Specifically, the ACOE publishes the following:

- Accreditation Standards noting dates of most recent review/revision, including the following:
  - Professional Optometric Degree Standards;
  - Standards for professional optometric degree programs seeking Preliminary Approval preaccreditation status;
  - Optometric Residency Standards; and
  - Optometric Technician Standards.
- The ACOE Policy and Procedure Manual. P&Ps include records of review/revision history.
- Directories of accredited programs. For each program, the applicable accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status and the year the ACOE will next review it for an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval is listed. The directory is updated following each ACOE meeting, and when major changes occur.
- Directory of professional optometric degree programs holding Stage One designation or Stage Two designation. The directory is updated following each ACOE meeting, and when major changes occur.
- Information regarding student achievement associated with each professional optometric degree program holding an accreditation status. This information is provided through a series of published hyperlinks to programs’ websites.
- Notice of programs with Accredited with Conditions status.
- Notice of programs from which the Council has withdrawn accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status over the past eight (8) years.
- Accreditation decisions, including the basis for any final decisions. The information includes:
  - the type of program (professional optometric degree, optometric residency, or optometric technician);
  - the program’s sponsor, and in the case of an optometric residency program not sponsored by a school or college of optometry, the name of the affiliated optometric school or college;
  - accreditation status, Preliminary Approval status, Stage One designation, Stage Two designation, or other action;
  - the year of the next currently scheduled evaluation visit; and
  - the Council’s summary of compliance with the Standards, which specifies the Council’s basis for any final decision.
    - Updates to the summary of compliance are published when the ACOE determines that the program has come into compliance with the Standards.
• A list of the names, academic credentials, member type, and current term expiration of each member of ACOE’s policy and decision-making body and the name of ACOE’s principal administrative staff member.
  o ACOE staff and Council member resumes or curricula vitae are on file with the ACOE Director and summaries of academic and professional qualifications, and relevant employment and organizational affiliations of its members may be obtained upon request.

The Council produces an annual report which it submits to the AOA House of Delegates listing its accreditation decisions, the names of the programs which are removed from the directory of accredited programs, and reasons for removal.

Any inquiries to ACOE can be submitted via email to accredit@theacoe.org.

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**SCOPE**

☑ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☑ Optometric Residency Programs
☑ Optometric Technician Programs

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**GUIDELINES**

None

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**PROCEDURE**

None

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**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**

None

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**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**

See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 06/21/2024

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Program Disclosure of Accreditation Status or Preliminary Approval Status

**POLICY**

When a program is required or elects to publish its ACOE accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status, the published status is accurate.

Publication of ACOE accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status includes the name of the ACOE and the ACOE’s contact information.

• Acceptable versions of the name of the ACOE include
  o Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, or
  o ACOE
• Acceptable versions of ACOE contact information include two (2) or more of the following information elements:
  o Hyperlink to the ACOE website (e.g., ACOE or www.theacoe.org)
  o U.S. Postal Service address - Accreditation Council on Optometric Education, 243 N. Lindbergh Blvd., Suite 301, St. Louis, MO 63141.
  o E-mail address – accredit@theacoe.org
  o Phone number - 1-800-365-2219
Statements regarding **accreditation status** do not infer or imply that accreditation is guaranteed for a specified period of time as accreditation is subject to continuous review and monitoring. An example of an inappropriate statement is:

Program Y is accredited by the **ACOE** until [month-year of next site visit].

Programs may include the date [month-year] of the next scheduled full **evaluation visit** in a *published* statement.

Statements regarding **accreditation status** do not infer or imply varying degrees of accreditation or that partial accreditation exists. An example of an inappropriate statement is:

Program Y is fully accredited by the **ACOE**.

When an **affiliate** references the **accreditation status** of affiliated optometric residency programs, it is presented accurately for each optometric residency program.

In the event the **ACOE** issues digital badges to programs associated with their **accreditation status** or/or **Preliminary Approval** status as a means to enable the public to verify the program’s status with the ACOE, programs **publish** the digital badge to a prominent location on their websites.

Professional optometric degree programs holding the **Preliminary Approval** status **publish** the following ACOE-specified disclosure language to a prominent location on the program’s public website and in any printed materials for as long as the program remains in **Preliminary Approval** status. (reference **ACOE** Policy and Procedure “Administrative Notice”).

The Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE) has granted [Name of Program] the preaccreditation status of Preliminary Approval. Preliminary Approval status signifies satisfactory progress toward accreditation. Achieving Preliminary Approval status is not a guarantee that the ACOE will grant [Name of Program] an accreditation status. Participants who graduate from a program in Preliminary Approval status are not deemed to have completed an accredited program. For more information, see the ACOE’s website at [www.theACOE.org](http://www.theACOE.org).

Programs which have not yet been granted an **accreditation status** or **Preliminary Approval** status are prohibited from **publishing** any statement implying an **accreditation status** or **Preliminary Approval** have been achieved or that achievement is a certainty (reference **ACOE** Policy and Procedure “Administrative Notice”).

When a program’s **accreditation status** or **Preliminary Approval** status change becomes final, unless otherwise specified (reference **ACOE** Policy and Procedure “Required Notifications and Timing”), the program **publishes** the updated status within thirty (30) days of the ACOE’s notification.

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NOTE – *italicized* words/acronyms are included in the **Glossary** [posted at [www.theacoe.org](http://www.theacoe.org)]
Complaints About the ACOE Not Related to Accreditation Decisions

**Policy**
The ACOE ensures an unbiased, timely, and equitable review of any complaints against itself not related to decisions regarding accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status and takes follow-up action, as appropriate, based on the results of its review.

Complaints are submitted in writing, identified as a complaint, signed by the complainant(s), and submitted independent of any other documentation submitted to the ACOE.

The ACOE staff provides feedback to a complainant(s) in the event a complaint is not submitted correctly and assists a complainant(s) regarding appropriate interpretation of the ACOE Standards, policies, and procedures and the relevance of the complaint upon request.

The Council only considers concerns related to matters where the alleged event(s) occurred no more than one (1) year prior to submission of the complaint. An exception to the one (1) year limitation may be made at the discretion of the designated Council members performing initial evaluation of the complaint.

The ACOE maintains the confidentiality of the information and documents submitted to it, except to the extent it deems necessary and appropriate to conduct a thorough inquiry.

**Scope**
- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**Guidelines**
For disputes related to accreditation status and/or Preliminary Approval status decisions, refer to ACOE Policies and Procedures “Reconsiderations” and “Appeals of Accreditation Decisions.”

For complaints against a program related to ACOE Standards, policies, and/or procedures, refer to the ACOE policy “Complaints Against a Program Related to ACOE Standards, Policies, and/or Procedures.”

**Procedure**
An individual or group desiring to file a complaint about the ACOE will submit the complaint either via email addressed to accredit@theacoe.org or via U.S. Postal Service addressed to the ACOE Director, 243 N. Lindbergh Blvd., Suite 301, St. Louis. MO 63141.

The complaint will include all information the complainant(s) wishes to be considered, identify the specific matters complained of, set forth in detail the facts and reasons claimed to support the allegations, and include pertinent documents in the possession of the complainant(s) relating to the complaint.

Upon receipt of a written complaint, the ACOE Chair and one public member who is not implicated in the complaint will evaluate the validity of the complaint and assess its applicability to this Policy. When the complaint involves the Council Chair, the Vice Chair will replace the Chair in the evaluation. In the event the complaint involves one of the public members of Council, the other public member will participate in the evaluation. In the case of disagreement regarding the validity and/or applicability of the complaint, the ACOE Director will engage another member of Council in the evaluation process. This determination will be made within thirty (30) days of receipt of the written complaint.
complaint and the complainant(s) notified. In cases where it is determined that no investigation is warranted, the complainant(s) will be so informed.

Once the written complaint is determined to be valid and in the scope of this Policy, the ACOE will have forty-five (45) days to conduct an investigation of the allegation(s) in the complaint where warranted. The Chair of the ACOE, or in the case the complaint concerns the Chair, the Vice Chair will appoint an individual or a committee to conduct the inquiry into the allegation(s) of the complaint.

The investigation may include, without limitation, interviews with person(s) having information regarding the allegation(s) and a review of materials relevant to the complaint. Any individual with information regarding the allegation(s) may also be asked to provide documents and comments relating to the complaint.

Following the investigation, the individual or committee will prepare a written report to the ACOE stating the findings of the investigation. The person(s) filing the complaint will be provided with a copy of the written report and will be provided with an opportunity to submit written comments to the ACOE on the investigation report. Any written comments will be submitted to the ACOE Director within thirty (30) days following receipt of the report.

Following review of the findings and additional written comments, if any, the Council at a regularly scheduled business meeting will make a determination of disposition with respect to the allegation(s) of the complaint.

Within fifteen (15) business days following the decision, a written report will be prepared specifying factual findings of the ACOE and the actions, if any, that the ACOE will take with respect to the complaint, including but not limited to dismissing the complaint, making modifications to comply with its established accreditation policies and/or procedures, revising/developing policies and/or procedures appropriate to reflect accepted accreditation practice, or performing other remedial action. The complainant(s) will be provided with notification of the ACOE’s decision.

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**
None

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 06/18/2022; 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 06/21/2024

**ACOE Consultant Pool**

**POLICY**
The ACOE maintains a pool of qualified individuals to serve as consultants and senior consultants (aka team chairs).

Optometrists and non-optometrists invited to serve as consultants meet the ACOE’s specified qualifications and requirements.

Optometrist consultants have

- a doctoral degree with at least five (5) years of clinical or academic experience, or
- a doctor of optometry degree, completed an ACOE-accredited optometric residency program, and attained at least (1) one year of professional experience.

Optometrist consultants meet the definition of either a practitioner or an educator and are members of the AOA at the time of consultant training (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Training”). When
an optometrist consultant simultaneously serves as an educator and a practitioner, the role where the optometrist spends a majority of their time is used as the consultant’s designation.

Optometrist consultants agree to be willing to participate in up to two (2) evaluation visits per year.

Optometrist consultants who have fully retired from their role as a practitioner or as an educator or who have otherwise left the profession may retain their status as a consultant for up to three (3) additional years and remain in the category (either practitioner or educator) they were designated at the time they left the profession.

The ACOE maintains a list of non-optometric consultants. Non-optometrist consultants have experience in the higher education community and meet the definition of public members.

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**SCOPE**

- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**

None

**PROCEDURE**

New optometrist consultants

At least once per year, the Council will seek nominations of qualified individuals from administrators and faculty at the programs holding an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval, Council members, consultants, and other stakeholders. Individuals may self-nominate.

Nominated individuals will be contacted and requested to submit their curricula vitae.

The ACOE staff will review the curricula vitae and AOA membership status of nominated individuals. Individuals deemed to meet the ACOE’s specified qualifications and requirements will be invited to undergo the training (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Training”).

Senior consultants

Council members and other senior consultants will recommend current consultants to serve as senior consultants. Consultants will undergo additional training before serving in the role of team chair for optometric residency program evaluation visits (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Training”).

Consultant Information Updates

The ACOE staff will contact new consultants and at least once per year thereafter the ACOE staff will contact existing consultants to secure current information including:

- to query the consultant’s desire to continue to serve as a consultant;
- to validate the consultant’s designation as practitioner or educator;
- to determine whether retirement has occurred or is imminent; and
- to secure other updates with respect to contact information, areas of expertise, and experience.

The ACOE staff will record the information in its database.

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**

ACOE Consultant Information Form, ACOE Consultant Information Update Form

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**
Training

POLICY
The Leadership and Professional Development (LPD) Committee is charged with ensuring current and relevant training materials are in place for ACOE members, staff members, consultants, and appeals panel members and that training is delivered timely and as needed.

SCOPE
☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

GUIDELINES
None

PROCEDURE
Annual Orientation for ACOE and staff members
ACOE and staff members will complete annual orientation training on the Standards, policies, and procedures of the ACOE, hosted by the LPD Committee.

The orientation session will be held following the annual ACOE member appointments/reappointments, and all ACOE and staff members participate in each session.

When a staff or Council member is unable to attend all or some of the annual orientation, the staff or Council member will view a recorded version of the training. When a recorded version of the training is not available, the ACOE Director will deliver the training to the staff or Council member.

Feedback will be solicited from training session participants and reviewed for continuous process improvement.

Evaluation visit team members
At least annually, prospective consultants will complete a formal training program to prepare to serve as evaluation visit team members.

Upon being accepted for participation in the ACOE’s consultant training program, the prospective consultant will be provided information and materials pertaining to the training program. Materials provided will include information about accreditation, ACOE Standards, policies, procedures, and guidance for conducting an evaluation visit.

Prospective consultants will complete assigned prework prior to participating in the in-person portion of the training.

The in-person portion of the consultant training program curriculum will include an interactive training session led by the LPD Committee Chair and be delivered by faculty members who are LPD Committee members, ACOE members, and/or experienced ACOE consultants or senior consultants (aka team chairs).

Following completion of the in-person portion of consultant training, attendees will complete post-session assignments, including a writing assignment and quiz.

The completed writing assignment and quiz will be graded, and feedback will be provided to the newly trained consultant. An ACOE staff member will update the ACOE database to reflect completion.
of consultant training requirements and the new consultant’s status will be updated to reflect that they are deemed active consultants, eligible to conduct on site evaluation visits.

Upon being invited to participate in an evaluation visit, an ACOE staff member will provide ACOE training resources to the non-optometrist consultant. In addition, the evaluation visit team chair, an ACOE member, will provide mentorship to all evaluation visit team members, including to the non-optometrist evaluation visit team member.

For evaluation visits where an ACOE member is assigned to serve as liaison to the evaluation visit team, this individual will provide mentorship as needed to evaluation visit team members.

Feedback will be solicited from training session participants and reviewed for continuous process improvement.

**Evaluation visit team chairs**

Consultants will undergo additional training before serving in the role of team chair for optometric residency program evaluation visits.

Prospective team chairs will be provided pre-training reading assignments and come to the in-person training prepared to participate in an interactive session.

The training session will be led by the LPD Committee Chair and faculty members including ACOE members, LPD Committee members, and/or experienced ACOE consultants or senior consultants (aka team chairs) will conduct an in-person workshop to train consultants to serve as senior consultants/team chairs for optometric residency program evaluation visits and optometric technician program evaluation visits, as needed.

Training materials will provide an in-depth focus on the attributes needed to effectively chair an optometric residency program evaluation visit, such as leading the visit, managing the evaluation visit timeline, and analyzing the self-study.

Following completion of the training, an ACOE staff member will update the ACOE database to reflect completion of team chair training requirements and the new senior consultant’s status will be updated to reflect that they are deemed senior consultants, eligible to serve as a team chair for evaluation visits.

Feedback will be solicited from workshop participants and reviewed for continuous process improvement.

**Appeals panel members**

As appeals panel members and alternates are selected, their ACOE training status will be evaluated. When needed, an ACOE staff member will coordinate with the LPD Committee Chair to ensure ad hoc and/or refresher training is provided prior to appeals panel engagement and decision-making.

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</tr>
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Policies Related to Accreditation of Programs

Accreditation Standards

POLICY
The ACOE relies upon clear Standards that are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that an award of an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval by the ACOE is a reliable indicator of the quality of education provided by the programs it accredits. The ACOE bases its accreditation decisions on compliance with its Standards.

The ACOE’s Standards respect the stated mission of the program and its sponsoring institution, including religious mission, and ensure that the education or training offered by the program, including any offered through distance education, correspondence courses, or direct assessment education is of sufficient quality to achieve its stated objective for the duration of any accreditation or preaccreditation period.

The ACOE’s Standards for accreditation and preaccreditation set forth clear expectations for the programs it accredits with respect to:

- success with respect to student achievement in relation to the program’s mission, including, as appropriate, consideration of State licensing examinations, course completion, and job placement rates;
- curricula;
- faculty;
- facilities, equipment, and supplies;
- fiscal and administrative capacity as appropriate to the specified scale of operations;
- student support services;
- recruiting and admissions practices, academic calendars, catalogs, publications, grading, and advertising; and
- records of student complaints received by, or available to, the ACOE.

The ACOE’s “Standards for professional optometric degree programs seeking preliminary approval preaccreditation status” are appropriately related to the ACOE’s “Professional Optometric Degree Standards.”

SCOPE
☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

GUIDELINES
None

PROCEDURE
As the ACOE considers additions to and/or revisions of its Standards, the review will include validation of continued compliance with this Policy (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Revision of Accreditation Standards”).

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS
ACOE Standards of Accreditation are posted on its website (www.theACOE.org )

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION
Self-Studies

Policy

The self-study is a required component in the ACOE accreditation process.

The primary purpose of the self-study is for the program to assess itself and document the quality of its education and its success in meeting its mission, goals, and objectives, with an emphasis on outcomes.

The self-study specifies areas of concern and areas of strength, highlights opportunities for improvement, and delineates plans for making those improvements.

The self-study orients the evaluation visit team to the program, describing the entity being evaluated as to its resources, the constituents it serves and who serve it, its mission, goals, and objectives, the degree to which the mission, goals, and objectives are being met, its physical plant, and other factors.

The format of the self-study is a report presented on a Standard-by-Standard basis. Through narrative and submission of exhibits/examples of evidence, the program provides both a written description of how it complies with each Standard and supporting evidence demonstrating compliance.

The ACOE Standards list examples of evidence to assist programs. The program has the discretion to choose the evidentiary documentation that best illustrates its method of compliance with each Standard; a program may choose to provide some, all, or none of the examples of evidence as long as it provides evidence to demonstrate compliance.

Specific to optometric residency programs, programs submit their final self-studies with appendices using the ACOE template.

Unless otherwise specified, the self-study is due two (2) months in advance of the scheduled evaluation visit. For interim evaluation visits, the self-study is due at least one (1) month in advance of the scheduled evaluation visit (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Administrative Notice”). Upon request, the ACOE may honor requests to extend the due date of the self-study. The ACOE staff members are empowered to make these determinations.

Scope

- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

Guidelines

The following guidelines are provided to help programs foster the constructive attitudes and participation essential for a productive self-study. Programs are encouraged to:

1. leverage the self-study process as a means to foster a culture of self-assessment and continuous improvement - the self-study process should be an ongoing activity;

2. ensure adequate human, technical, and financial resources are allocated to the self-study process - allow plenty of time for self-study completion;
3. promote engagement in the self-study process such that all appropriate constituencies are involved - the quality of the self-study will be improved by focusing on the inter-relationships between various activities to the stated goals and objectives;

4. undertake the self-study process with an openness and willingness to identify opportunities for improvement rather than a means to assign blame - where opportunities for improvement are identified, clearly articulate corrective and preventive actions; and

5. identify and celebrate the accomplishments and positive elements of the program relating to its mission, goals, and objectives. While mission and goal statements articulate the desired outcomes, statements of objectives should serve as specific means to accomplish its desired outcomes as well as criteria by which to assess the degree to which the mission has been achieved.

**PROCEDURE**

The self-study process should be initiated at least twelve (12) months before the scheduled evaluation visit.

The program should adopt a timetable for development of its self-study that starts with the appointment of a self-study committee, includes each step in the process, and ends with the date the self-study is to be sent to the ACOE.

The program will evaluate whether and how it complies with each Standard and determine the evidence that will best demonstrate compliance.

The program will develop a concise narrative associated with each Standard that describes how the program complies with the Standard and helps the evaluation visit team members to understand the relevance and applicability of the provided evidence.

The program will gather and attach relevant evidence – generally, policies, procedures, and/or records – that will support the veracity of the concise narrative and demonstrate Standard compliance. The program will specify where (e.g., page number, section name) within the evidentiary documents the responsive text/information resides. The self-study narrative should not duplicate the content included in the evidence.

When the program identifies a gap or area of vulnerability associated with its compliance and/or the effectiveness of the program, it will include within the self-study its analysis of the concern and its delineated plan for remediating the gap or area of vulnerability.

In the event the program deems its performance relative to a given Standard an area of strength, it will address that within the self-study narrative.

Upon completion of the self-study narrative and compilation of the evidence, programs should perform a holistic review of the information to ensure the absence of gaps, to avoid unnecessary redundancy, to ensure the self-study meets the requirements specified in this Policy, and to ensure that the information is clearly presented and easy to navigate.

The self-study and related documents will be submitted electronically to the ACOE staff by the due date.

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**

ACOE Residency Self-Study Working DRAFT Template 2017 Standards

ACOE Residency FINAL Version Self-Study 2017 Standards

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**
Composition and Selection of the Evaluation Visit Team

**Policy**

_Evaluation visit_ team members and chairs are selected from a pool of trained _consultants_ and Council members. _ACOE evaluation visit_ teams include at least one _educator_ and one _practitioner_.

- An _evaluation visit_ team for a professional optometric degree program generally consists of four to five (4-5) team members, at least one (1) of whom is a Council member and serves as team chair. A member of Council staff typically accompanies the team to serve as a resource and provide support to the team.
- An _evaluation visit_ team which visits an optometric residency program generally consists of two (2) team members and is supported by a Council member _liaison_. Typically, both team members are _consultants_, one designated as team chair.
- An _evaluation visit_ team which visits an optometric technician program generally consists of two to three (2-3) team members, at least one of whom is a Council member (a Council member _liaison_ may be assigned when an appropriately qualified Council member is not available). A member of Council staff may accompany the team to serve as a resource and provide support to the team.

The presence of one (1) or more Council member(s) as either _evaluation visit_ team member(s) or as a _liaison_ assigned to an _evaluation visit_ team serves as a control against inconsistent application of the _ACOE’s Standards_.

**Scope**

☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

**Guidelines**

None

**Procedure**

The _ACOE_ staff will use the _educator_ or _practitioner_ classification listed in the _ACOE_ database to ensure that each team meets _evaluation visit_ team composition requirements.

When developing proposed _evaluation visit_ teams, the _ACOE_ staff may consult with program leadership to obtain advice concerning perceived needs.

The _ACOE_ staff member will also evaluate areas of expertise and disclosed conflicts of interest when selecting _consultants_ and/or Council members to invite for _evaluation visit_ team participation.

The _ACOE_ staff member will forward the names and summary biographical information related to each of the proposed _evaluation visit_ team members to the program being evaluated.

The program will confirm whether it perceives any conflicts of interest with any members of the _evaluation visit_ team. When potential conflicts or concerns are identified, the _ACOE_ staff member will ensure the potential conflicts or concerns are evaluated per the _ACOE_ P&P “Conflicts of Interest” and based on the outcome of the review, may forward to the program for its review alternate proposed _evaluation visit_ team member(s) ensuring compliance with _evaluation visit_ team composition.
requirements. The process repeats until a slate of proposed evaluation visit team members absent conflicts is interest is identified.

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS
None

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)

The Role of the Liaison Associated with Review of Programs

POLICY
For each evaluation visit where a member of the Council is not on the team, a member of the Council is designated as a "liaison" to the evaluation visit team.

The liaison Council member serves as an advisor to the evaluation visit team and communicates the evaluation visit team’s findings and presents the draft accreditation report to the Council.

A liaison may be assigned in the case of an evaluation visit to an optometric technician program in cases where the ACOE member is unable to participate.

SCOPE
☐ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

GUIDELINES
None

PROCEDURE
In conjunction with proposal and selection of evaluation visit team members, the ACOE staff member will solicit and secure consent from a Council member who does not have a conflict of interest with the program to serve as the liaison to the evaluation visit team.

Prior to the evaluation visit, the liaison Council member will

- critically read the self-study and associated attachments;
- consult with the team chair regarding areas of strength, areas of concern, areas of focus for the evaluation visit team, and strategies to be employed during the evaluation visit;
- respond to questions from the evaluation visit team, with support from the ACOE staff, as needed; and
- provide contact information to ensure the evaluation visit team is able to access the liaison for counsel the day before and during the evaluation visit.

During the evaluation visit, the liaison Council member will

- remain accessible to the evaluation visit team to address any concerns or questions.

Following the evaluation visit, the liaison Council member will

- serve as the initial reviewer of the evaluation visit team’s draft accreditation report; this includes additional review of the self-study and associated attachments, and all pertinent correspondence;
- ensure the draft accreditation report sufficiently addresses all Standards;
• strive to ensure consistency in treatment across programs;
• following receipt of the response to factual accuracy from the program, consult with the team chair to make the appropriate changes to the accreditation report after discussing the suggested edits with ACOE staff; and
• present the draft accreditation report to the Council for its consideration.

Professional Optometric Degree Programs Seeking Accreditation

POLICY
The ACOE provides a pathway for professional optometric degree programs to achieve accreditation. The pathway requires professional optometric degree programs to meet specified requirements to be granted each of four classifications.

• Stage One designation;
• Stage Two designation;
• Preliminary Approval; and
• Accredited with Conditions or Accredited.

Council evaluation and approval is required for each professional optometric degree program to be granted each of the classifications on the pathway to accreditation.

Neither Stage One designation nor Stage Two designation provide any rights or privileges of accreditation, and neither is a formal preaccreditation classification.

The purpose of evaluating professional optometric degree programs using the processes associated with Stage One designation and Stage Two designation is to ensure only professional optometric degree programs with a high likelihood of successfully attaining an accreditation status are granted Preliminary Approval and allowed to enroll students. The processes to achieve Stage One designation and Stage Two designation (a) ensure professional optometric degree programs assess the feasibility and potential viability of a new program, (b) enable professional optometric degree programs to receive feedback and information from the Council regarding requirements for compliance with Standards, and (c) ensure professional optometric degree programs understand the ACOE Standards and are prepared to take steps necessary to comply.

In the event a professional optometric degree program’s application for either Stage One designation or Stage Two designation is not granted by the Council, any subsequent application for either Stage One designation or Stage Two designation will not be considered by the Council until at least six (6) months have elapsed following the meeting at which the prior application was considered. The Council has discretion to grant exceptions to the six (6) month requirement.

A professional optometric degree program’s application will expire when it does not achieve Stage One designation within two (2) years of the date the application is accepted.

Professional optometric degree programs may remain in Stage One designation for up to (3) three years while working on the requirements for Stage Two designation.
Professional optometric degree programs may remain in *Stage Two designation* for up to (2) two years.

Professional optometric degree programs may voluntarily withdraw from *Stage One designation* or *Stage Two designation* at any time. If the proposed program withdraws or if its status expires, it may not reapply for *Stage One designation* for at least (2) two years from the date of the withdrawal or expiration.

Prior to being granted *Preliminary Approval*, professional optometric degree programs will demonstrate a sufficiently robust *teach-out plan* is in place.

Professional optometric degree programs will not recruit or enroll students prior to *Preliminary Approval* being granted.

- If a professional optometric degree program recruits students without having been granted *Preliminary Approval*, then the application may be terminated by the Council.
- If a professional optometric degree program enrolls a student without having been granted *Preliminary Approval*, that student upon graduation cannot not be considered as having graduated from a program holding an *accreditation status*.

The ACOE re-evaluates professional optometric degree programs in *Preliminary Approval* status annually during the first three academic years of the program.

Professional optometric degree programs may remain in *Preliminary Approval* status for no more than five (5) years before a final accrediting action is made.

When the ACOE denies an *accreditation status* from a program it has *preaccredited* or when the ACOE withdraws a professional optometric degree program’s *Preliminary Approval* status, the Council may maintain the program’s *Preliminary Approval* status for currently enrolled students until the professional optometric degree program has had a reasonable time to complete the activities in the program’s closure plan to assist students in transferring or completing their programs, but for no more than 120 days unless approved by the ACOE for good cause (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “*Teach-out Process*”).

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**Scope**

- ☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- ☐ Optometric Residency Programs
- ☐ Optometric Technician Programs

**Guidelines**

The ACOE staff is available to interested institutions to advise on basic information regarding procedures and *Standards*. Inquiries about the potential accreditation of a professional optometric degree program should be directed to the ACOE staff at [accredit@theacoe.org](mailto:acredit@theacoe.org).

**Procedure**

*Process to Achieve Stage One Designation*

For a professional optometric degree program to be considered for *Stage One designation*, the sponsoring institution will submit an application for *Stage One designation*. An application for *Stage One designation* will include:

1. A formal letter of intent from the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution. The letter of intent will
   a. demonstrate that the institution sponsoring the proposed program is devoted primarily to education; and
b. include an affirmative statement of commitment to the access and availability of sufficient funding for the development of the program.

2. A documented needs assessment. Information sources must be cited and the needs assessment will include, but not be limited to:
   a. a clear and concise articulation of current gaps and/or unmet needs related to the practice of optometry;
   b. the anticipated mission and goals of a new program that tie back to the gaps and unmet needs;
   c. a quantitative and qualitative justification of the existence of gaps and/or unmet needs, which should include, but not be limited to:
      i. regional and national data on current workforce needs and workforce needs five (5) – seven (7) years out;
      ii. data on annual graduate numbers from other programs, both within the region and nationally;
      iii. current and projected demographics of local and regional area that impact optometric practice; and
      iv. current and projected legislative environment within the region.
   d. a demonstration of support from local and/or regional practitioners and state association(s).

3. A documented feasibility study of the professional optometric degree program that addresses:
   a. students;
      i. Describe anticipated class size and total enrollment projections; discuss analyses performed, including key underlying assumptions made, to derive those values.
      ii. Discuss anticipated recruitment strategies and articulate aspects of the strategy that are compelling. Articulate the program’s value proposition to prospective students.
      iii. Discuss anticipated actions to maximize the pool of qualified applicants.
   b. faculty; and
      i. Describe anticipated estimated faculty size and discuss analyses performed, including key underlying assumptions made, to derive those values.
         1. If the proposed program anticipates sharing faculty with other programs within the sponsoring institution or with another institution, describe how this factors into the anticipated estimated faculty size.
      ii. Discuss anticipated recruitment and retention strategies and articulate aspects of the strategy that are compelling. Articulate the proposed program’s value proposition to prospective faculty.
   c. resources
      i. Provide evidence supporting the existence of an appropriate patient base to facilitate sufficient supervised clinical experiences to meet the intent of its mission and goals.
      ii. Discuss plans to ensure the program will have access to appropriate technological resources and physical facilities to meet the intent of its mission and goals.

4. A completed risk assessment associated with the feasibility study.
For each of the areas within the feasibility study, students, faculty, and resources, assess and articulate risks associated with program’s plans.

b. For each risk, describe potential mitigation strategies.

The program will pay the non-refundable, non-transferable application fee within thirty (30) days of application submission. The application will be terminated when the application fee payment is not received within thirty (30) days of application submission. The application fee amount is published on the ACOE website and may also be obtained by contacting a member of the ACOE staff.

At its next scheduled designated meeting that occurs at least 60 days following receipt of the application, the ACOE will review the program’s application for Stage One designation. The Council will evaluate whether the application for Stage One designation is complete and sufficiently developed.

If the application fee has been received and the application for Stage One designation is determined to be complete and sufficiently developed, then the Council will grant the program Stage One designation.

If the Council determines the application for Stage One designation is incomplete and/or insufficiently developed, then the ACOE will not grant the program Stage One designation.

The ACOE will issue notification to the program of the Council’s determination within thirty (30) days of the meeting. Notification to the program will include areas within the application considered incomplete and/or insufficiently developed and provide information on eligibility and requirements to submit to Council for reconsideration during a future meeting.

Process to Achieve Stage Two Designation

Following the granting of Stage One designation, the proposed program will submit documentation for consideration of being deemed eligible for Stage Two designation consideration. Documentation required to demonstrate eligibility will include evidence:

1. demonstrating the proposed program is part of an institution that possesses an accreditation or preaccreditation status from a USDE recognized institutional accrediting agency;
2. that the institutional accreditor has granted approval for the institution to offer a doctor of optometry program;
3. that the institution has employed both a chief executive officer and a separate chief academic officer of the proposed program for at least six months; and
4. that the institution is authorized by applicable law to confer the doctor of optometry degree upon its graduates in recognition of their successful completion of a four academic year or equivalent professional program of study in optometry.

Within 15 business days of the submission of evidence of eligibility, the ACOE Director, in consultation with the ACOE Chair, will assess whether eligibility criteria are met and notify the proposed program of the outcome of its review.

Upon notification the program has met the eligibility requirements for Stage Two designation consideration, the program will submit a self-study report and associated appendices according to the requirements outlined in ACOE’s “Self-Study” Policy and Procedure and the ACOE “Standards for professional optometric degree programs seeking preliminary approval preaccreditation status,” published on the ACOE’s website (www.theACOE.org). The self-study submission will include pro forma financial statements associated with the development of the professional optometric degree program.
The ACOE will review the program’s self-study and associated appendices at its next scheduled designated meeting that occurs at least 60 days following receipt of the program’s self-study and associated appendices to determine whether basic planning and development have progressed to a degree that warrant an on-site evaluation visit as required prior to the consideration of Preliminary Approval.

If the ACOE determines the program’s planning and development demonstrates a level of compliance with the Standards sufficient to warrant an on-site evaluation visit, then the ACOE will grant the program Stage Two designation.

If the ACOE discerns deficiencies or weaknesses in the program such that its level of compliance with the Standards is not sufficient to warrant an on-site evaluation visit, then the Council will postpone an on-site evaluation visitation until the self-study and associated appendices have been further developed and the deficiencies addressed.

**Process to Achieve Preliminary Approval**

Following the granting of Stage Two designation, an ACOE staff member will coordinate with the program to schedule an on-site evaluation visit to the program. The visit will typically take place approximately six (6) months after Stage Two designation is granted.

The program will submit an updated self-study, associated appendices (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Self-Studies”), and a teach-out plan by the specified due date.

An evaluation visit team (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Composition and Selection of the Evaluation Visit Team”) will conduct a formal on-site evaluation visit and complete a draft accreditation report (refer to ACOE Policies and Procedures “Site Evaluation Visit” and “Factual Accuracy Review”). Upon completion, the draft accreditation report will be submitted to the Council for its review at its next regularly scheduled meeting (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Council Review of Draft Evaluation Accreditation Reports and Subsequent Decisions”).

Upon the granting of Preliminary Approval, the program will publish the following disclosure language to a prominent location on the program’s public website and in any printed materials:

**Process to Achieve an Accreditation Status**

Once a program is granted Preliminary Approval, the program has approval to begin student recruitment, selection, and admissions, and to begin offering the program.

The Council will review the program with the Preliminary Approval classification annually during each academic year of the program through written reports and/or evaluation visits as deemed necessary by the Council.

The Council will conduct a final on-site evaluation visit to the program for the consideration of an accreditation status during the academic year in which the first class is expected to graduate (refer to ACOE Policies and Procedures “Self-Studies”, “Composition and Selection of the Evaluation Visit Team”, “Site Evaluation Visit” and “Factual Accuracy Review”).

When the Council awards Preliminary Approval to a program or at any time during the Council’s monitoring of a program holding Preliminary Approval status, the ACOE will issue recommendation(s) or specify condition(s) for monitoring, as warranted, which will be required to be addressed to maintain the Preliminary Approval status.

After an evaluation visit team conducts a formal on-site evaluation visit, the draft accreditation report will be submitted to the Council for its review (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Council Review of Draft Accreditation Reports and Subsequent Decisions”).
Optometric Residency Programs Seeking Accreditation

Policy
The ACOE provides a pathway for optometric residency programs to achieve accreditation.

Council evaluation and approval is required for each optometric residency program to be granted an accreditation status.

An optometric residency program’s application will expire when it does not achieve an accreditation status within three (3) years of the date the application is accepted.

Scope
☐ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☐ Optometric Technician Programs

Guidelines
The ACOE staff is available to interested institutions to advise on basic information regarding procedures and Standards. Inquiries about the potential accreditation of an optometric residency program should be directed to the ACOE staff at accredit@theacoe.org.

Procedure
For an optometric residency program to be eligible for review for an accreditation status by the ACOE, the chief executive officer of the affiliated school or college of optometry will submit a formal letter of application. The formal letter of application will affirm that the optometric residency program

1. is sponsored by or affiliated with an accredited school or college of optometry, and
2. has appointed a program supervisor.

The program will pay the non-refundable, non-transferable application fee within thirty (30) days of application submission. Applications will be terminated when payment is not received within thirty (30) days of application submission. The application fee amount is published on the ACOE website and may also be obtained by contacting a member of the ACOE staff.

Following acceptance of the letter of application and payment of the application fee, an ACOE staff member will coordinate with the program to schedule an on-site evaluation visit to the program.

The program will submit a self-study and associated appendices by the specified due date (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Self-Studies”).

If the self-study report is deemed unacceptable or indicates significant deficiencies or weaknesses in the program, then the Chair of the ACOE (or his/her delegate) may postpone an on-site evaluation visit until the problems have been corrected.
After an evaluation visit team (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Composition and Selection of the Evaluation Visit Team”) conducts a formal on-site evaluation visit, the team’s draft accreditation report will be submitted to the Council for its review (refer to ACOE Policies and Procedures “Site Evaluation Visit” and “Factual Accuracy Review”).

If the program is found to meet the Council’s Standards, then the Council will grant an appropriate accreditation status (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Council Review of Draft Evaluation Accreditation Reports and Subsequent Decisions”).

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS
ACOE Standards for optometric residency programs are posted on its website (www.theACOE.org)

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 06/21/2024

Optometric Technician Programs Seeking Accreditation

POLICY
The ACOE provides a pathway for optometric technician programs to achieve accreditation.

Council evaluation and approval is required for each optometric technician program to be granted an accreditation status.

An optometric technician program’s application will expire when it does not achieve an accreditation status within two (2) years of the date the application is accepted.

SCOPE
☐ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☐ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

GUIDELINES
The ACOE staff is available to interested institutions to advise on basic information regarding procedures and Standards. Inquiries about the potential accreditation of an optometric technician program should be directed to the ACOE staff at accredit@theacoe.org.

PROCEDURE
For an optometric technician program to be eligible for review for an accreditation status by the ACOE, the chief executive officer of the institution sponsoring the program will submit a formal letter of application. The formal letter of application will affirm that

1. the institution sponsoring the optometric technician program is accredited by a USDE recognized institutional accrediting agency;
2. the institution sponsoring the optometric technician program is legally authorized to confer either the associate degree or a diploma/certificate of completion in recognition of the successful completion of the optometric technician program;
3. the optometric technician program is or will be a minimum of one academic year in length, or its equivalent; and
4. a director or other chief administrative officer for the program is employed.
In addition, the sponsoring institution will provide evidence of its legal authorization to confer either the associate degree or a diploma/certificate of completion in recognition of the successful completion of the optometric technician program.

The program will pay the non-refundable, non-transferable application fee within thirty (30) days of application submission. Applications will be terminated when payment is not received within thirty (30) days of application submission. The application fee amount is published on the ACOE website and may also be obtained by contacting a member of the ACOE staff.

Following acceptance of the letter of application and payment of the application fee, an ACOE staff member will coordinate with the program to schedule an on-site evaluation visit to the program.

The program will submit a self-study and associated appendices by the specified due date (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Self-Studies”). The self-study report will be reviewed by the Chair of the ACOE (or the Chair may delegate to one or more Council members) to determine whether basic planning and development have progressed to a degree that would warrant an on-site evaluation visit as required prior to the consideration of an accreditation status.

If the self-study report is deemed unacceptable or indicates significant deficiencies or weaknesses in the program, then the Chair of the ACOE (or his/her delegate) may postpone an on-site evaluation visit until the problems have been corrected.

After an evaluation visit team (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Composition and Selection of the Evaluation Visit Team”) conducts a formal on-site evaluation visitation, the team’s draft accreditation report will be submitted to the Council for its review (refer to ACOE Policies and Procedures “Site Evaluation Visit” and “Factual Accuracy Review”).

If the program is found to meet the Council’s Standards, then the Council will grant an appropriate accreditation status (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Council Review of Draft Evaluation Accreditation Reports and Subsequent Decisions”).

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**Forms/Attachments**

ACOE Standards for optometric technician programs are posted on its website (www.theACOE.org).

**Dates of Revision/Validation**

See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 06/21/2024

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**Third-Party Comments**

**Policy**

The ACOE accepts and reviews third-party comments concerning a program’s qualifications for an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval.

The ACOE publishes on its website information regarding its acceptance of and process to submit third-party comments and directs interested parties to reference the “ACOE Policy and Procedure Manual.”

Third party comments are submitted in writing, identified as a third-party comment, signed by the submitter(s), submitted independent of any other documentation submitted to the ACOE, and address substantive matters relating to the ACOE Standards, policies, and/or procedures.

Comments received no less than thirty (30) days prior to the program’s scheduled evaluation visit date are provided to the evaluation visit team. In cases where the exact date(s) of the evaluation visit is not yet determined, comments received by no later than the first day of the month preceding the...
month of the scheduled evaluation visit are accepted. In cases where the comments are received six (6) or more months prior to the scheduled evaluation visit, the comments are reviewed by the Council at its next regular business meeting.

Upon request and if possible, the Council withholds or protects the identity of the submitter(s) of a third-party comment in all correspondence with the program.

**SCOPE**
- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**
None

**PROCEDURE**
The Council publishes the dates of upcoming evaluation visits on its public website (www.theACOE.org).

Parties interested in providing comments will submit them via email to accredit@theacoe.org or via U.S. Postal Service addressed to the ACOE Director, 243 N. Lindbergh Blvd., Suite 301, St. Louis. MO 63141.

The comments will include all information the submitter(s) requests the Council take into consideration and may include the submission of supplemental documents. The submitter(s) will specify whether they request the ACOE withhold or protect their identity in correspondence with the program.

An ACOE staff member will forward the comments to the program and invite the program to provide a response.

When the comment is received by the ACOE six (6) or more months prior to the scheduled evaluation visit, the ACOE staff member will communicate the date by which the program’s written response is to be submitted for it to be considered by the Council in the Council’s next regularly scheduled business meeting.

When the comment is received by the ACOE less than six (6) months and more than thirty (30) days prior to the program’s scheduled evaluation visit, the ACOE staff member will forward the comment to the evaluation visit team and direct the program that a response may be provided verbally or in writing during the evaluation visit or submitted with the program’s factual accuracy review response. The comment and any response from the program will be provided to the Council in conjunction with the draft accreditation report.

The Council will take appropriate action following its review of the comments and any response from the program.

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**
None

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 06/21/2024
Complaints Against Programs Related to ACOE Standards, Policies, and/or Procedures

**Policy**

The ACOE accepts and reviews in a timely, fair, and equitable manner any complaint it receives against a program holding an accreditation status that is related to the ACOE’s Standards, policies, and/or procedures.

The ACOE publishes on its website information regarding its acceptance of and process to submit complaints and directs interested parties to reference the ACOE Policy and Procedure Manual.

The Council does not intervene on behalf of individuals or act as a court of appeal for individuals in any matters.

Complaints are submitted in writing, identified as a complaint, signed by the complainant(s), submitted independent of any other documentation submitted to the ACOE, specify the Standards, Policies, and/or Procedures associated with the complainant’s allegation(s) of noncompliance, include an explanation articulating why the complainant(s) alleges the program is not in compliance with each specific Standard, Policy, and/or Procedure cited, and include evidence supporting the allegations.

The ACOE staff provides feedback to a complainant(s) in the event a complaint is not submitted correctly and assists a complainant(s) regarding appropriate interpretation of the ACOE Standards, policies, and procedures and the relevance of the complaint upon request.

The Council only considers concerns related to matters where the alleged event(s) occurred within no more than one (1) year prior to the date of submission of the complaint. Concerns received that do not relate to ACOE’s Standards of accreditation or ACOE policies and/or procedures, do not relate to event(s) within the past one (1) year, or that do not have sufficient documentation to warrant an investigation are disposed of in an appropriate manner at the discretion of the ACOE Executive Committee and one of the Council’s public members (the ‘complaint review committee’). An exception to the one (1) year limitation may be made at the discretion of the complaint review committee.

A complainant cannot withdraw a complaint once submitted.

Upon request and if possible, the Council withholds or protects the identity of the complainant(s) in all correspondence with the program.

The ACOE provides the program with sufficient opportunity to respond to the complaint deemed as having met the criteria specified in this Policy prior to making a decision regarding a complaint.

The ACOE takes follow-up action including enforcement action, if necessary, based on the results of its review.

Records of complaints deemed as having met the criteria specified in this Policy pertaining to a program being reviewed that have been received since the program’s previous evaluation visit are provided to the evaluation visit team.

The costs related to the complaint process are divided equally between the Council and the program.

**Scope**

☐ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☐ Optometric Residency Programs
☐ Optometric Technician Programs

**Guidelines**

None
**PROCEDURE**

An individual or group desiring to file a complaint about a program with the ACOE will submit the complaint via either the ACOE’s online complaint form (https://theacoe.org/upcoming-site-visits-complaints-and-comments?so=y) or email to accredit@theacoe.org.

The complaint will include all information the complainant(s) wishes to be considered, identify the specific matters complained of, set forth in detail the facts and reasons claimed to support the allegations, and include pertinent documents in the possession of the complainant(s) relating to the complaint.

The ACOE Executive Committee and one of the public members (the ‘complaint review committee’) will convene to evaluate the submitted complaint and determine whether it meets the criteria specified within this Policy. When it is determined that no investigation is warranted, the complainant shall be so informed.

Upon determination that the complaint meets the criteria specified within this Policy, and within twenty (20) business days of receipt of the complaint, the Chair of the Council will forward a copy of the complaint to the chief executive officer of the program for response. When the name of the complainant is being withheld/protected, the Director will summarize the complaint or redact identifying information prior to forwarding to the program.

The program will have twenty (20) business-days to respond to the complaint and to provide all information it would like considered. The Chair of the Council may grant an extension of time to respond to the complaint if warranted. A request for delay must be submitted in writing within the twenty (20) business-day period referenced above.

If an evaluation visit is scheduled to begin within ninety (90) days of the receipt of the complaint, then the Chair of the Council will refer the complaint to the chair of the evaluation visit team visiting the program for investigation during the regular course of the evaluation visit process.

When timing permits, the program’s response will be provided to the chair of evaluation visit team to consider in conjunction with the investigation during the evaluation visit. Following the investigation, the chair of the evaluation visit team will provide a written response to the complaint review committee articulating the evaluation visit team’s findings relative to the complaint. When the evaluation visit team’s investigation results in a proposed recommendation(s) and/or suggestion(s), the recommendation(s) and/or suggestion(s) will be incorporated into the draft accreditation report prior to being provided to the program for its review for factual accuracy and presented to Council.

When the program’s response is received after the evaluation visit has concluded and prior to the Council’s consideration of the draft accreditation report, the chair of the evaluation visit team will be given the opportunity to amend the written response provided to the complaint review committee articulating the evaluation visit team’s findings relative to the complaint.

The evaluation visit team’s investigation, documented analysis, conclusions, and the draft accreditation report will be presented to Council for action (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Council Review of Draft Accreditation Reports and Subsequent Decisions”).

When the complaint is not referred to the chair of the next evaluation visit team, the complaint review committee will evaluate the program’s response and render the committee’s determination of next steps within thirty (30) business days of receipt of the program’s response.

If the complaint review committee determines the response received from the program satisfactorily demonstrates that the program is in compliance with the ACOE Standards, policies, and/or
procedures alleged to have been violated, then the complaint review committee may dismiss the complaint and inform the program and the complainant(s).

If the complaint review committee determines the complainant’s allegations appear to be substantial and tend to suggest lack of compliance with one or more ACOE Standards, policies, and/or procedures, then the Chair of the Council will appoint two (2) members of the Council who have no conflicting relationship with the program in question, including one public member, who will investigate the complaint. The public member will preside and direct the investigation. The program and the complainant(s) will be notified of the initiation of an investigation.

If upon review of the response from the program the complaint review committee determines that input from the Council is warranted, it may opt to refer the matter to the Council as a whole for its consideration. The Council may either dismiss the complaint or direct the Chair of the Council to appoint an investigative team. The program and the complainant(s) will be notified of the outcome of the Council’s action.

The investigation may, but need not necessarily include a visit to the program against which the complaint was filed and may involve such hearings as deemed appropriate. This two-member investigative team shall have access to any and all information relevant to its inquiry.

Upon completion of the investigation, the chair of the investigative team shall present the team’s investigation, documented analysis, and conclusions to the Council at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

The Council will take appropriate action, including but not limited to dismissing the complaint, requiring an interim evaluation visit, scheduling a full evaluation visit, or other appropriate corrective action to bring the program into compliance with the accreditation Standard(s), policies, and/or procedures in question.

The complainant(s) and the program will be informed of the results of the investigation within thirty (30) business days of a decision.

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS
None

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 06/18/2022; 06/24/2023; 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)

Site Evaluation Visit

POLICY
The ACOE conducts at least one (1) on-site review of the program during which it obtains sufficient information to determine whether the program complies with the ACOE’s Standards.

Upon notification from ACOE staff regarding the scheduling of an evaluation visit, programs are responsive and cooperate in good faith with the ACOE staff in the establishment of evaluation visit date(s) (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Administrative Notice”).

The evaluation visit team conducts its analysis of the self-study, supporting documentation, and any other information substantiated by the team from other sources to determine whether the program complies with the ACOE’s Standards. In addition to the self-study and supporting documentation, team members are provided the previous accreditation report, the program’s most recent annual report and the Council’s response, and a record of any complaints or third-party comments received
by the ACOE (refer to ACOE Policies and Procedures “Complaints Against Programs Related to ACOE Standards, Policies, or Procedures” and “Third-Party Comments”) since the most recent evaluation visit, along with the resolution of the complaint(s). Evaluation visit team members familiarize themselves with these materials prior to the evaluation visit and request any additional needed materials as soon as the need is identified.

Programs cooperate with the evaluation visit team before and during the evaluation visit by notifying the faculty and students of the scheduling of open meetings with faculty and students, if applicable, and providing the evaluation visit team with information, additional materials, and access to all applicable facilities and to administrators, faculty, staff, and students/residents when requested (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Administrative Notice”).

The output of the evaluation visit is the draft accreditation report. The draft accreditation report reflects the evaluation visit team’s best efforts to provide an accurate portrayal and assessment of the program, incorporates input from the program (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Factual Accuracy Review”), and provides the basis upon which the Council makes an accreditation decision. Draft accreditation report completion typically takes two (2) or more months following the on-site evaluation visit before being ready to be presented to the Council.

The ACOE welcomes the participation in evaluation visits of institutional accrediting agency representatives, as applicable. At the request of the program being evaluated, the Council invites the institutional accrediting agency to appoint a representative to accompany the team during the entire course of the visit. Representatives of institutional accrediting agencies advise and consult with the evaluation visit team and participate fully in all team activities.

The Council welcomes interagency cooperation and supports conducting joint evaluation visits with institutional accrediting agencies and other specialized accrediting groups.

At the request of the program being evaluated and when it is deemed advisable by the Council, the Council is willing to conduct a joint evaluation visit or coordinate the date of the on-site evaluation visit with the visitation of the institutional accrediting agency, or another accrediting agency.

The ACOE also welcomes the participation in evaluation visits to professional optometric degree programs of a representative of the applicable state board of examiners in optometry. With the concurrence of the dean or president of the professional optometric degree program being evaluated, the Council may invite one state board of optometry to appoint a representative to serve as an observer with the right to participate in team activities, except closed team sessions.

A staff representative(s) of the USDE may also attend an evaluation visit to observe a Council evaluation visit team(s). The USDE representative(s) is present as an observer(s) of the process.

**Scope**
- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**Guidelines**
The length of an evaluation visit may vary depending on the complexity of the program. Evaluation visits to
- professional optometric degree programs are usually scheduled for 2-1/2 to 3 days;
- optometric residency programs are usually scheduled for 1 day; and
- optometric technician programs are usually scheduled for 1-1/2 to 2 days.
Program administrators are requested to provide the ACOE staff with suggestions for lodging and ground transportation.

During an on-site evaluation visit, the program must provide the evaluation visit team with a secure conference room for team meetings and individual assignments. The evaluation visit team must be able to lock the room since it may contain confidential materials.

The program is asked to have any additional relevant documents that could not be provided prior to the visit available and accessible for the team’s inspection.

Programs should not extend, and evaluation visit team members should not accept social invitations from host administrators or faculty.

Programs should not offer, and evaluation visit team members should not accept, gifts from the program.

Programs should plan to provide the evaluation visit team members lunch on the day(s) of the visit.

Evaluation visit team members must participate throughout the duration of the visit. Late arrival or early departure is a significant breach of etiquette that adversely affects the rapport and competence of the team and reduces its efficiency and effectiveness.

Evaluation visit team members are expected to participate actively in conference discussions during the evaluation visit, but they are cautioned to refrain from expressing their own personal opinions regarding teaching methodology or practice technique. Comparisons to the team member’s own or other programs should be avoided.

Although evaluation visit team members may discuss general observations during the exit briefing, evaluation visit team members must not express personal or team opinions regarding the Council’s determination.

**PROCEDURE**

The chair of the evaluation visit team and/or a member of the ACOE staff will consult with the program to develop the evaluation visit schedule.

A typical evaluation visit schedule will include:

- **An evaluation visit** team meeting to be held prior to the initiation of the visit. Items addressed in this session will generally include:
  - Review of the agenda;
  - Review of protocols for evaluation visit team members;
  - Identification of areas needing clarification with the program; and
  - Discussion of the materials provided as they relate to the Standards of the ACOE.

- **An entrance interview** with the program leadership, university representatives (as applicable), and others who may be designated by the program:

- **A tour of the physical plant** which may include:
  - For professional optometric degree programs, teaching facilities and external clinical sites;
  - For optometric residency programs, clinical sites, offices, library, and external clinical sites when feasible; and
  - For optometric technician programs, teaching facilities and external clinical sites, when feasible.

- **Conferences with the following individuals:**
  - For professional optometric degree programs, the president and/or the dean, chief academic officer (if other than the president or dean), admissions officer, student
affairs officer, financial officer, department chairs, director of externships, students, student representatives, faculty, alumni, librarian, selected standing committees, the chief administrative officer of the parent institution or appointed representative;
  o For optometric residency programs, the residency supervisor and residency director from the affiliated school or college, resident(s), program faculty, and additional program administrators or other individuals associated with the program per request of the team; and
  o For optometric technician programs, the president and/or the dean of the institution sponsoring the program, the program director, admissions and student affairs officer, department chairs, students, faculty, librarian, and selected standing committees.

- An open meeting with students/resident(s) (no faculty or administrators present)
  o to provide the team with input on student/resident perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the program.
- An open meeting with the faculty (no administrators present)
  o to allow the faculty members to engage in direct discussion with the evaluation visit team.
- An evaluation visit team meeting held near the end of the visit:
  o to allow the team to formulate its impressions and prepare a presentation of its findings for the exit briefing.
- At the discretion of the team chair, meetings with individual faculty members, students, residents, and administrators
- An exit briefing to provide:
  o leaders of the program and others he or she may designate with insight into the findings of the team and
  o an opportunity for the program to comment.

Evaluation visit team members will conduct interviews, facilitate open meetings with administrators, faculty, staff, and students/resident(s), and review materials including policies, procedures, handbooks, websites, brochures, and other records.

The evaluation visit team will assimilate the information gathered to assess the veracity of the material presented in the self-study and evaluate the program’s compliance with the ACOE Standards.

Where potential inconsistencies are uncovered, the evaluation visit team may request additional information and/or conduct additional interviews to evaluate whether the inconsistency may reflect potential noncompliance with a Standard(s).

Following the evaluation visit, each evaluation visit team member will complete a written narrative on the evaluation visit team’s member’s assigned section(s) addressing each of the Standards including strengths and concerns, which may potentially be deemed noncompliant with one of more Standards. Evaluation visit team members will strive to submit narratives to the team chair within two (2) weeks following the evaluation visit.

The evaluation visit team chair will ensure all sections of the draft accreditation report are assembled and will edit the document to support consistency. An ACOE staff member will assist the evaluation visit team chair in preparing the draft accreditation report.

Leveraging input from the evaluation visit team members, the team chair will finalize the draft accreditation report in anticipation of the program’s factual accuracy review (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Factual Accuracy Review”) and propose suggestions for program enhancement and recommendations.
Factual Accuracy Review

**POLICY**

The ACOE employs the factual accuracy review process to ensure that the information upon which the ACOE relies for making accrediting decisions is accurate.

The factual accuracy review allows the program the opportunity to provide a written response to correct any factual misrepresentations in the body of the draft accreditation report.

At least one member of Council is directly involved in reviewing the program’s response to the factual accuracy review and modifying the draft accreditation report, as appropriate.

The draft accreditation report reflects conditions at the time of the evaluation visit; when the program reports that it has made or is in process of making changes since the evaluation visit, those changes are not incorporated into the draft accreditation report.

The team chair, in collaboration with the liaison Council member, if applicable, is empowered to determine whether and what modifications are made to the draft accreditation report following review of the response from the program.

**SCOPE**

☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**

None

**PROCEDURE**

An ACOE staff member will coordinate with the evaluation visit team chair and the liaison Council member, as applicable, to prepare the draft accreditation report for factual accuracy review.

The ACOE staff member, on behalf of the evaluation visit team chair, transmits the draft accreditation report to the program for its review for factual accuracy. The draft report submitted to the program does not include the team’s proposed recommendations, suggestions, or statements regarding accreditation status.

In reviewing the draft accreditation report, the program is directed to limit its response issues of fact.

The program may challenge the factual accuracy of any aspect of the draft accreditation report by submitting additional written information and/or proposed mark-ups to the draft accreditation report to the ACOE staff member, who will share the response with the evaluation visit team chair and the liaison Council member, if applicable.

The evaluation visit team chair, in concert with the liaison Council member, if applicable, will modify the draft accreditation report based if warranted, based on information and/or comments submitted by the program and/or sponsoring institution.

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**
Council Review of Draft Accreditation Reports and Subsequent Decisions

POLICY
The Council conducts its own analysis of the draft accreditation report, which incorporates the program's factual accuracy response (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Factual Accuracy Review”), and any other information available to the Council from other sources to determine whether the program complies with the Council’s Standards.

The Council evaluates whether the program:

- maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate in light of the degrees or certificates awarded;
- is successful in achieving its stated objectives; and
- maintains requirements that at least conform to commonly accepted academic standards, or the equivalent.

The ACOE may decide to grant, continue, modify, or withdraw one of the following statuses to a program following adoption of the accreditation report. A description of these statuses is posted on ACOE’s website (www.theACOE.org).

- Accredited;
- Accredited with Conditions; or
- Preliminary Approval

SCOPE
☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

GUIDELINES
None

PROCEDURE
Following receipt of the response to factual accuracy from the program and any applicable updates (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Factual Accuracy Review”), the draft accreditation report with draft recommendations and suggestions will be submitted to the Council for consideration at the Council’s next regular business meeting.

The draft accreditation report will be reviewed by all ACOE members prior to the Council’s consideration of the report.

If any unresolved conflicts exist with the program related to factual accuracy or other reason(s), then the Council may defer action on the draft accreditation report.

All draft accreditation reports will be reviewed by the Council in sessions restricted to Council and ACOE staff members. Consultants may be invited when the Council Chair deems appropriate and are not expected to attend Council meetings unless they are specifically invited by the Council Chair.
At the Council meeting, the evaluation visit team chair or liaison Council member will present the draft accreditation report to the Council for its action. The Council will ensure the report includes commentary regarding the program’s compliance with each of the Standards as well as discussion of the program’s strengths and weaknesses. The Council will further assure the draft accreditation report addresses the program’s performance with respect to student achievement.

The Council will consider the draft accreditation report and take action on the acceptance of the body of the report, on adoption of recommendations that relate to the Standards, and on adoption of suggestions for program enhancement.

Following adoption of the recommendations and suggestions, the Council will determine the level of compliance with each of the Standard groupings—met, met in part, or not met.

For each Standard grouping which is not met or is met in part, the Council will specify the reason(s) the Standard grouping is not considered fully met.

For each individual Standard that is not fully met, a corresponding recommendation is provided that must be met by the program to address the concern and to come into compliance with the Standard.

The Council will then take action on granting, continuing, modifying, or withdrawing an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval.

Following action on accreditation, the final accreditation report will be forwarded to the sponsoring institution with a notification letter detailing the Council’s actions (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Required Notifications and Timing”).

**Accreditation Cycle**

**Policy**

Programs hold an accreditation status for periods of time generally no longer than eight (8) years.

Depending on the outcomes of annual reports, progress reports, interim evaluation visits, substantive changes, and other significant events affecting a program, the Council may decide to schedule a full on-site evaluation visit before the original eight (8) year accreditation period is complete.

The Council may deviate from the eight (8) year accreditation cycle under select circumstances, which may include but are not limited to instances where an optometric residency program does not have an enrolled resident, a program has submitted notification of its withdrawal from accreditation, the availability of Council members to serve as evaluation visit team members impacts scheduling, or the rescheduling of visits is warranted to more efficiently balance staff and Council member workload across the year.

When an evaluation visit is rescheduled for a later date(s) within the same calendar year, the Council considers the rescheduled evaluation visit to comply with the eight (8) year accreditation length.

The effective date of an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval is measured from the date of the most recent on-site evaluation visit. When establishing the effective date of accreditation, the date will never precede:
• an earlier denial by the ACOE of accreditation status or Preliminary Approval to the program; or
• any formal approval by the ACOE of the program for consideration in the ACOE’s accreditation process.

SCOPE
☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

GUIDELINES
Since ACOE accreditation status is subject to continual review, a phrase such as "accreditation has been continued for an eight-year period" is not appropriate.

PROCEDURE
In cases where the Council decides to shorten the accreditation length due to concerns about the program as a result of outcomes of annual reports, progress reports, interim evaluation visits, substantive changes, and/or other significant events affecting a program, the Council will include in the program’s notification letter the date(s) of the rescheduled full evaluation visit.

In the event the ACOE staff identifies a need to modify or cancel the scheduling of an evaluation visit due to the lack of an enrolled resident, a program’s voluntary withdrawal from accreditation, or to change the evaluation visit date(s) to later within the same calendar year, the ACOE staff will coordinate directly with the program to reschedule the evaluation visit dates, as appropriate.

In the event the ACOE staff identifies a need to modify the scheduling of an evaluation visit for other reason(s), the ACOE staff will consult with the ACOE Chair for concurrence and issue notification to the impacted program(s). In the event an evaluation visit will be rescheduled for sooner than the original eight (8) year accreditation period, the ACOE staff will ensure that no program’s evaluation visit is rescheduled for a date (month-year) that is less than two (2) years from the date the program is notified of the rescheduled evaluation visit.

An ACOE staff member will update the schedule of evaluation visits posted on the ACOE website.

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS
None

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 06/18/2022; 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 06/21/2024

Renewal of Accreditation and Reevaluation of Preliminary Approval

POLICY
Programs which hold an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval are reevaluated on regularly established intervals. Normally, the month and year of the next on-site evaluation visit is scheduled by the Council at the time it grants or continues an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval.

In extenuating circumstances and upon request, the ACOE will consider granting a delay to the program in the scheduling of its on-site evaluation visit (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Accreditation Length”).

SCOPE
GUIDELINES

Programs should provide ACOE staff with guidance as to dates the program cannot accommodate an on-site evaluation visit. On-site evaluation visits should not be scheduled for timeframes where students/residents, faculty members, and/or key administrators are not available to participate in the evaluation visit.

If the program wishes the Council to conduct evaluation of more than one program during the same time frame, then the program should plan on having the later-scheduled program evaluation visit conducted on an accelerated basis rather than delaying the earlier-scheduled on-site evaluation visit.

PROCEDURE

Scheduling renewal of accreditation

The Council will communicate the date (month-year) of the program’s next scheduled on-site evaluation visit in its accreditation notification letter.

Generally, twelve (12) months in advance of the scheduled on-site evaluation visit, an ACOE staff member will contact the program to remind it of the upcoming visit.

Generally, four (4) to seven (7) months in advance of the scheduled on-site evaluation visit, an ACOE staff member will contact the program to begin the process of identifying the evaluation visit team and scheduling specific dates for the evaluation visit (reference ACOE Policies and Procedures “Composition and Selection of the Evaluation Visit Team” and “Site Evaluation Visit”).

Program-requested delays

The program will submit a written request in a reasonable amount of time prior to the scheduled evaluation visit. The request will include:

1. the reason for the requested delay;
2. a report of the program’s progress to date on outstanding recommendations, if applicable; and
3. other supporting documentation for the request.

The Council Chair will consider program’s request and may consult with the Director and Council Vice Chair when determining whether the requested extension will be granted (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Accreditation Length”).

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS

“Professional Optometric Degree Standards”, “Optometric residency standards”, and “Optometric Technician Standards” are posted on the ACOE website (www.theACOE.org).

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION

See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)
A program which has voluntarily withdrawn from an accreditation status, allowed its accreditation status to expire, or which has had its accreditation status withdrawn by the ACOE, may reapply for accreditation.

A professional optometric degree program that loses its accreditation status is not moved to Preliminary Approval status.

**SCOPE**
- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**
None

**PROCEDURE**

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**
None

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)

**Revision of Accreditation Standards**

**POLICY**
The ACOE maintains a comprehensive systematic program of review that involves all relevant constituencies and that demonstrates that its Standards are adequate to evaluate the quality of the education or training provided by the programs it accredits and relevant to the educational or training needs of students.

The formal comprehensive Standards review process associated with professional optometric degree programs and optometric residency programs is initiated no less frequently than five (5) years since the most recent effective date of the Standards.

The formal comprehensive Standards review process associated with optometric technician programs is initiated no less frequently than ten (10) years since the most recent effective date of the Standards.

The Council may review, revise, delete, or add individual Standards at any time it deems appropriate. If, through its system of review, the Council determines that it needs to change one or more individual Standards, or the Standards as a whole, then the ACOE shall initiate the revision process within twelve (12) months of determining that a change is necessary and complete that revision process in a reasonable period of time.

**SCOPE**
- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
Optometric Technician Programs

GUIDELINES
None

PROCEDURE
Formal comprehensive review process
The ACOE will issue a survey inviting all interested members of the communities of interest to provide input regarding the criticality and clarity of the current Standards, to identify gaps, and to provide comments.

The Council may engage one or more of the ACOE Committees to evaluate the survey results and develop recommendation(s) to the Council related to potential change(s).

The Council will consider results of the survey and any other input received and propose changes to the Standards, ensuring continued compliance with ACOE Policy and Procedure “Accreditation Standards.”

The Council will circulate the draft Standards to programs holding an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval, the state boards of optometry, the USDE, other stakeholders within the profession, and other interested parties inviting comments from the relevant constituencies. The public is also invited to comment via posting on the ACOE’s website. The comment period will be a minimum of thirty (30) days.

Following review of comments on Standards, the Council may elect to recirculate a revised draft for additional comments.

When the comment solicitation and review process is complete, the Council will take action to adopt the Standards and establish the effective date.

The ACOE will publish the revised Standards in a timeframe that reasonably allows programs to come into compliance by the effective date.

Revision of Standards outside formal review process
The Council may receive a request or may become aware via other means of the need to change one or more Standards.

The Council may engage one or more of the ACOE Committees to evaluate and develop recommendation(s) to the Council related to the potential change(s).

The Council will review the recommendations and develop proposed change(s), ensuring continued compliance with ACOE Policy and Procedure “Accreditation Standards.”

The Council will circulate the contemplated change(s) to programs holding an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval, the state boards of optometry, the USDE, other stakeholders within the profession, and other interested parties inviting comments from the relevant constituencies. The comment period will be a minimum of thirty (30) days.

Following review of comments on Standards, the Council may elect to recirculate a revised draft for additional comments.

When the comment solicitation and review process is complete, the Council will take action to adopt the Standards and establish the effective date.

The ACOE will publish the revised Standards in a timeframe that reasonably allows programs to come into compliance by the effective date.
FORMS/ATTACHMENTS
None

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 06/18/2022; 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 10/28/2023; 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)
Ongoing Monitoring

The Annual Report

Policy

The ACOE requires annual reports of programs as a mechanism to monitor each program’s continued compliance with the ACOE Standards and to identify concerns that may impact the program’s strengths and stability.

Annual reports are required from programs holding an accreditation status. Optometric residency programs do not submit an annual report in the event the program has or will undergo a full evaluation visit within the same academic year. Professional optometric degree programs submit an abbreviated annual report in the event the program has or will undergo a full evaluation visit within the same academic year.

The annual report provides the Council with the following information:

- Progress on efforts to address unmet recommendations (if any) to bring the program into compliance with the ACOE Standards;
- Information regarding the program’s continuing compliance with the ACOE Standards;
  - Professional optometric degree programs are required to report on:
    - Student outcome results and publication in the ACOE-specified format [When required, guidance on the ACOE-specified format is published on the ACOE website];
    - The program’s ongoing, systematic process of planning and self-study, including the program’s assessment of student achievement, curriculum effectiveness, and its mission, goals, and objectives;
    - Curriculum oversight and changes;
    - Research and scholarly activities;
    - Governance, institutional accreditation, and administration;
    - Financial status, challenges, and plans;
    - Changes in faculty;
    - Student matriculation, enrollment, and attrition;
    - Changes in facilities, equipment, and resources;
    - Changes in clinic management and patient care policies;
    - Public disclosure of accreditation status;
    - Program participation in federal programs for which ACOE accreditation is required for eligibility; and
    - Significant problems or concerns facing the program and related strategies.
  - Optometric Residency Programs are required to report on:
    - Resident outcomes;
    - The program’s annual review of its attainment of program mission, goals, and objectives;
    - Residents enrolled and applications received;
    - Anticipated substantive changes including mission, sponsor-affiliate, number of residents, curriculum, program funding, program supervision, size of faculty, and/or new external rotation; and
    - Public disclosure of accreditation status.
  - Optometric Technician Programs are required to report:
- Notification of significant developments at the program including change in the program director and/or key faculty;
- An overview of the state of affairs at the program;
- Plans for the coming year;
- A summary of outcome assessments made during the previous year;
- Enrollment figures for the present year and projections for enrollment for the future year;
- Job placement information from most recent graduating classes; and
- Outcomes data including student results on national certification examinations.

**SCOPE**

- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**

None

**PROCEDURE**

Each program will submit its annual report to the Council by its due date (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Administrative Notice”):

- by May 1 of each year for professional optometric degree programs
- by September 1 of each year for optometric residency programs
- by September 30 of each year for optometric technician programs

The Optometric Residency Program Committee will review annual reports from optometric residency programs, draft findings, prepare a consent calendar, as appropriate, and refer specific reports to the Council for its consideration.

The Optometric Technician Program Committee will review annual reports from optometric technician programs, draft findings, prepare a consent calendar, as appropriate, and refer specific reports to the Council for its consideration.

The Council will review the annual reports at its next scheduled business meeting. Representatives of the program may request or may be requested to meet with the Council at its meeting to explain or elaborate on their annual report.

Each program will be notified following the Council meeting whether its report is accepted, whether it satisfied outstanding recommendation(s), if applicable, and/or whether additional/other action is required.

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**

- Professional Optometric Degree Program Annual Report Template
- Optometric Residency Program Annual Report Template
- Optometric Technician Program Annual Report Template

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**

See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 06/18/2022; 06/24/2023; 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)
The Progress Report

**POLICY**
The ACOE requires progress reports of programs as a mechanism to monitor the program’s progress in addressing recommendations and other identified concerns.

Progress reports may be required of programs holding any of the following ACOE statuses: Accredited, Accredited with Conditions, Preliminary Approval, Stage Two designation, or Stage One designation.

**SCOPE**
- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**
In preparing the progress report, the program must focus on the specific area(s) requested by the Council including progress made on each unmet recommendation. The program should describe in detail its accomplishments toward implementing the specific recommendation or addressing the area of concern. Other areas identified by the program may also be included in the report.

As applicable, the Council expects that progress reports will include the observations of department chairs and program directors who are directly responsible for the areas covered by the particular recommendation(s).

**PROCEDURE**
Determination of need for the progress report will be made by the Council when it reviews the program’s accreditation report, annual report, progress report, substantive change request, or upon the Council becoming aware of a concern that may impact the program’s strengths and stability.

The Council will specify a due date when the progress report is required (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Administrative Notice”).

Following receipt of the progress report from the program, the Council will review it at its next regularly scheduled business meeting. Progress reports from optometric residency programs may initially be reviewed by the Optometric Residency Program Committee.

When the progress reported is satisfactory, the program will be notified that unmet recommendation(s) are considered met or that the concern that prompted the progress report has been sufficiently addressed. A program with the status of Accredited with Conditions may have its accreditation status raised to a status of Accredited.

When the progress reported is unsatisfactory, the Council may require another progress report, it may require a representative of the program to appear before it, or it may schedule an interim evaluation visit (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Interim Evaluation Visits”).

When a program is unable to demonstrate it has come into compliance with the Standards by the deadline for compliance, the Council will take action in accordance with ACOE Policy and Procedure “Timeframe for Compliance with Standards.”

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**
None

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)
The Annual Survey

**Policy**

The annual survey is a questionnaire conducted by the *ASCO* that is distributed to each school or college of optometry at the beginning of each academic year. The survey requires programs to submit detailed information on enrollment, admissions, curriculum, faculty, library, and finances. The *ASCO* publishes information on its website.

The *ACOE* publishes on its website hyperlinks to information and data regarding schools and colleges of optometry published by the *ASCO*.

**Scope**

- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**Guidelines**

None

**Procedure**

None

**Forms/Attachments**

None

**Dates of Revision/Validation**

See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)

**Substantive Changes**

**Policy**

*Substantive changes* associated with programs holding an *accreditation status* are submitted to the Council in writing for approval.

Any program which contemplates a *substantive change* requests and receives approval from the *ACOE* prior to formal adoption of the change. When a *substantive change* that was not contemplated occurs, the program reports the change to the Council within thirty (30) days of the change.

The *ACOE* delegates authority for review and approval of *substantive changes* submitted by optometric residency programs to the Residency Review Committee. A record of *substantive changes* approved by the Residency Review Committee is presented to the Council for its acceptance.

A *substantive change* that involves a change in program leadership (i.e., to the chief executive and/or chief academic officer of a professional optometric degree program or to the program supervisor/coordinate of an optometric residency program), including the appointment of interim or acting program leadership, is not subject to the Council’s advance approval prior to appointment and is submitted to the Council within thirty (30) days of the change.

When a *substantive change* involves the offering of *alternate pathway(s)*, the program demonstrates that both the *alternate pathway(s)* and the originally accredited pathway comply with the *ACOE*.
Standards of accreditation for the program to maintain its accreditation status. The program submits a teach-out plan for the alternate pathway in conjunction with its substantive change request.

Programs are not permitted to make any statements implying Council approval of a substantive change request is a certainty.

The Council acknowledges that some anticipated substantive changes involving merger/acquisition activity and/or other ownership changes between institutions or entities can be highly complex in nature. The Council expects programs to notify the ACOE at least one (1) year prior to the merger/acquisition taking effect, when possible, regardless of whether the program is able to articulate anticipated changes to the program.

Failure to comply with this policy may result in the scheduling of an interim evaluation visit, or in extreme cases, the lowering or withdrawal of the program’s accreditation status after due notice and an opportunity for a hearing.

**SCOPE**

☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**

By "substantive change," the ACOE means new policies or practices that relate to the program holding an accreditation status that affect:

- the program’s mission, goals, and objectives;
- the organizational relationship of the program, school, or college with the parent institution;
- the scope, length, content, and/or mode of delivery of the program, including whether the change applies to all students in a cohort, a subset of students in a cohort, or to a new cohort being separately defined;
- changes with the parent institution or ownership entity that may result in changes to the program; and/or
- resources available to the program needed to fulfill its mission, goals, and objectives.

The following are examples of changes that the Council considers substantive changes. These lists are not all inclusive, and the Council reserves the right to exercise its judgment to determine whether a change is substantive.

- Examples associated with a professional optometric degree program
  - Changes to the established mission or goals of the program;
  - The institution of a process to award transfer credit for the purpose of providing international students with advanced standing;
  - The establishment of an alternate pathway;
  - An affiliation, merger, or acquisition between the parent institution and another institution;
  - Plans for joint delivery of a program;
  - A change in the controlling interest of any affiliated clinical site (does not include externship sites);
  - Sponsorship of an international professional optometric degree program;
  - Increases or decreases in student enrollment of 5% or more from the prior academic year;
  - Increases or decreases in faculty FTE of 5% or more from the prior academic year;
- Substantial change in financial resources including changes in any of revenues, expenses, or revenues less expenses of 5% or more from the prior academic year;
- Use of distance education that represents a substantial portion of the curriculum (operationally defined as 25% or more of the credit hours of the accredited curriculum). When 50% or more of a course is delivered by distance education, credit hours associated with that course are considered to be distance education.

- Examples associated with an optometric residency program
  - Changes to the established mission and goals of the program;
  - Changes in area(s) of emphasis;
  - Changes in the organizational relationship with the sponsor or with the affiliated school or college of optometry that affects the residency program;
  - Changes in sponsor ownership;
  - Increase in number of residents;
  - Material reduction or loss in program funding;
  - Changes in program supervisor/coordinator;
  - Reduction in the size of the residency faculty, other than supervisor/coordinator; and
  - Development of a new external rotation.

- Examples associated with an optometric technician program
  - Changes to the established mission or goals of the program;
  - The institution of educational policies which allow for awarding transfer credit to significant numbers of students in the program for the purpose of providing them with advanced standing;
  - The establishment of an alternate pathway;
  - An affiliation, merger, or acquisition between the parent institution and another institution;
  - Plans for joint delivery of a program;
  - Substantial increases or decreases in enrollment;
  - Substantial increases or decreases in faculty; and
  - Substantial change in financial resources.

For changes resulting from actions of states and other accrediting groups, refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Consideration of Actions of States and Other Accrediting Groups.”

**PROCEDURE**

Contemplated substantive changes

Prior to submission of a contemplated substantive change, the program will complete due diligence associated with potential regulatory or institutional accrediting body implications and take necessary action, as appropriate.

When the contemplated substantive change relates to merger/acquisition activity and/or ownership changes affecting the parent institution, the program’s notification to the ACOE will minimally include:

- the anticipated effective date of the change;
- the names and addresses of the institutions involved in the merger/acquisition, as appropriate, and whether any name changes are expected as a result;
- the status of the institutional accrediting body’s review and approval;
- the status of the degree granting authority(ies) review and approval;
- the plans for continuity of the ACOE-accredited program at each institution, as applicable.
The program will evaluate the impact(s) of the contemplated *substantive change* on the program’s compliance with each of the *ACOE Standards*. The program will develop a narrative addressing its plans to ensure it remains in compliance with each of the *ACOE Standards*. Where a contemplated *substantive change* will not impact the program’s compliance with a given *Standard*, the program will note this.

In a written submission to the *ACOE*, the program will formally request Council approval of the anticipated *substantive change*. Documentation will include the rationale for the change along with an assessment against each applicable *ACOE Standard* evaluating impact and provide an explanation as to how the program will ensure it remains in compliance with each *Standard*. The submission will include the results of the program’s due diligence associated with potential regulatory or *institutional accrediting body* implications and the status and/or outcomes of actions taken.

When the contemplated *substantive change* relates to *distance education* the program will provide to Council evidence of authorization from its USDE recognized *institutional accrediting agency*, as applicable.

When the contemplated *substantive change* relates to merger/acquisition activity or an ownership change affecting the parent institution, the program may need to submit multiple contemplated *substantive change* requests as the institution’s integration planning proceeds. In cases where two (2) or more institutions merging offer programs holding an *accreditation status* or *Preliminary Approval* from the *ACOE*, the program will notify the *ACOE* whether the programs will remain separate, merge, or whether one will close. In the event of a program closure, the program will follow the steps outlined in the *ACOE Policy and Procedure “Teach-Out Process.”* In the event programs merge, the *ACOE* will plan and conduct a comprehensive accreditation review and a new accreditation cycle may be determined upon that review.

Upon receipt of the contemplated *substantive change* from a professional optometric degree program or an optometric technician program, the *ACOE* staff member will inform the program of the date range of the *ACOE* meeting during which the contemplated *substantive change* will be reviewed. Generally, for contemplated *substantive changes* to be considered at the Council’s next regularly scheduled business meeting, the program will be expected to submit the contemplated substantive change 45 or more days in advance of the meeting.

Upon receipt of the contemplated *substantive change* from an optometric residency program, the *ACOE* staff member will acknowledge receipt and facilitate review by the Residency Review Committee.

The *ACOE* will consider the contemplated *substantive change* and take action, including whether the contemplated *substantive change* is accepted and/or whether additional/other action is required, which may include submission of a progress report, submission of a full or abbreviated self-study, or hosting an interim or full *evaluation visit*. The *ACOE* will provide notification to the program of the results of its assessment, including whether any follow-up steps are required.

*Substantive changes* that were not contemplated

The program will consult with *ACOE* staff when a change occurs and the program is uncertain whether the change should be considered a *substantive change*.

The program will complete due diligence associated with potential regulatory or *institutional accrediting body* implications and take necessary action, as appropriate.

The program will evaluate the impact(s) of the *substantive change* on the program’s compliance with each of the applicable *ACOE Standards*. The program will develop a narrative addressing its efforts to
ensure it remains in compliance with each of the ACOE Standards. Where a substantive change does not impact the program’s compliance with a given Standard, the program will note this.

The program will report the substantive change to the ACOE in writing. Documentation will include the factors precipitating the change and address how the program will continue to meet each applicable accreditation Standard. The submission will include the results of the program’s due diligence associated with potential regulatory or institutional accrediting body implications and the status and/or outcomes of actions taken.

Upon receipt of the substantive change from a professional optometric degree program or an optometric technician program, a member of the ACOE staff will acknowledge receipt of the substantive change and inform the program of the date range of the ACOE meeting the substantive change will be reviewed.

Upon receipt of the substantive change from an optometric residency program, the ACOE staff member will acknowledge receipt and facilitate review by the Residency Review Committee.

The ACOE will consider the substantive change and take action, including whether the substantive change is accepted and/or whether additional/other action is required, which may include submission of a progress report, submission of a full or abbreviated self-study, or hosting an interim or full evaluation visit. The ACOE will provide notification to the program of the results of its assessment, including whether any follow-up steps are required.

**Forms/Attachments**
None

**Dates of Revision/Validation**
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021, 10/15/2022, 06/24/2023; 06/21/2024

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**Interim Evaluation Visits**

**Policy**

The ACOE may elect to conduct an interim evaluation visit to a program between full on-site evaluation visits to assess concerns with a program’s compliance with ACOE Standards.

Interim evaluation visits typically address a specific and pre-defined area(s) of concern. An interim evaluation visit for the purpose of addressing issues broader in scope may be considered at the discretion of the Council.

An interim evaluation visit may be conducted in person or remotely at the discretion of Council.

Upon notification from ACOE staff regarding the scheduling of an interim evaluation visit, programs are responsive and cooperate in good faith in the establishment of interim evaluation visit date(s) (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Administrative Notice”).

Programs cooperate with the evaluation visit team before and during the interim evaluation visit by notifying the faculty and students of the scheduling of open meetings with faculty and students, if applicable, and providing the evaluation visit team with information, additional materials, and access to all applicable facilities and to administrators, faculty, staff, and students/residents when requested (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Administrative Notice”).

The program’s self-study will be limited to the area(s) being evaluated during the interim evaluation visit and submitted by the specified due date (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Self-Studies”).
The output of the interim *evaluation visit* is the draft accreditation report. The draft accreditation report reflects the *evaluation visit* team’s best efforts to provide an accurate portrayal and assessment of the program, incorporates input from the program (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Factual Accuracy Review”), and provides the basis upon which the Council makes an accreditation decision. Draft accreditation report completion typically takes two (2) or more months following the on-site interim *evaluation visit* before being ready to be presented to the Council.

**SCOPE**
- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**
Interim *evaluation visits* may be initiated by the Council or at the request of the program as a result of:

1. concerns identified in an accreditation report;
2. a lack of progress by the program to address concerns identified in an on-site *evaluation visit*, an interim *evaluation visit*, a progress report, or an annual report;
3. a substantive change;
4. a change in leadership of the program; or
5. other concerns which come to the attention of the Council.

Program administrators are requested to provide the ACOE staff with suggestions for lodging and ground transportation for on-site visits.

During an on-site interim *evaluation visit*, the program must provide the *evaluation visit* team with a secure conference room for team meetings and individual assignments. The *evaluation visit* team must be able to lock the room since it may contain confidential materials.

The program is asked to have any additional relevant documents that could not be provided prior to the visit available and accessible for the team’s inspection.

Programs should not extend, and *evaluation visit* team members should not accept social invitations from host administrators or faculty.

Programs should not offer, and *evaluation visit* team members should not accept, gifts from the program.

Programs should plan to provide the *evaluation visit* team members lunch on the day(s) of an on-site visit.

*Evaluation visit* team members must participate throughout the duration of the visit. Late arrival or early departure is a significant breach of etiquette that adversely affects the rapport and competence of the team and reduces its efficiency and effectiveness.

*Evaluation visit* team members are expected to participate actively in conference discussions during the interim *evaluation visit*, but they are cautioned to refrain from expressing their own personal opinions regarding teaching methodology or practice technique. Comparisons to the team member’s own or other programs should be avoided.

**PROCEDURE**
Interim *evaluation visit* teams will generally be composed of two (2) to three (3) evaluators. For professional optometric degree and optometric technician programs, at least one (1) of the evaluators will be a member of the ACOE.
The length of the interim evaluation visit will vary depending on the scope of the visit. The ACOE Chair, interim evaluation visit chair, or a Council staff member will consult with the chief executive officer, coordinator/supervisor, or program director to establish the length and agenda for the visit.

The evaluation visit team will be directed to limit the focus of its review to the Standards defined in the scope of the visit. The evaluation visit team will be instructed that it may forward proposed recommendations and/or suggestions associated with Standards that are not in the scope of the visit should they arise.

Evaluation visit team members will conduct interviews, facilitate open meetings with administrators, faculty, staff, and students/resident(s), and review materials including policies, procedures, handbooks, websites, brochures, and other records, as applicable to the scope of the interim evaluation visit.

The evaluation visit team will assimilate the information gathered to assess the veracity of the material presented in the self-study and evaluate the program’s compliance with the ACOE Standards.

Where potential inconsistencies are uncovered, the evaluation visit team may request additional information and/or conduct additional interviews to evaluate whether the inconsistency may reflect potential noncompliance with a Standard(s).

Following the interim evaluation visit, each evaluation visit team member will complete a written narrative on the evaluation visit team’s member’s assigned section(s) addressing each of the Standards including strengths and concerns, which may potentially be deemed noncompliant with one of more Standards. Evaluation visit team members will strive to submit narratives to the team chair within two (2) weeks following the interim evaluation visit.

The evaluation visit team chair will ensure all sections of the draft accreditation report are assembled and will edit the document to support consistency. An ACOE staff member will assist the evaluation visit team chair in preparing the draft accreditation report.

Leveraging input from the evaluation visit team members, the team chair will finalize the draft accreditation report in anticipation of the program’s factual accuracy review (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Factual Accuracy Review”) and propose suggestions for program enhancement and recommendations.

The Council will review the draft accreditation report and take action. The interim evaluation visit may result in:

- Additions to and/or deletions from the list of recommendations;
- Confirmation of the scheduling of the full on-site evaluation visit at the previously determined time;
- The scheduling of a full on-site evaluation visit on an accelerated schedule based on continuing concerns resulting from the interim evaluation visit;
- A continued accreditation status;
- A lowered accreditation status; and/or
- Withdrawal of accreditation status.

The program will be notified within thirty (30) days of the Council meeting the results of the Council’s review.

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**
None

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**
Consideration of Actions of States and Other Accrediting Groups

**POLICY**
The ACOE does not grant or continue *accreditation status* or *Preliminary Approval* if the parent institution of a program that has submitted an application or holds *Stage One designation*, *Stage Two designation*, *an accreditation status*, or *Preliminary Approval* is the subject of—

1. a pending or final action brought by a State agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education in the State;
2. a decision by a *recognized agency* to deny accreditation or *preaccreditation*;
3. a pending or final action brought by a *recognized accrediting agency* to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution's accreditation or *preaccreditation*; and/or
4. probation or an equivalent status imposed by a *recognized agency*.

Programs that have submitted an application or hold *Stage One designation*, *Stage Two designation*, *an accreditation status*, or *Preliminary Approval* are required to notify the ACOE in the event any of the above four actions occur.

When the ACOE learns that a program to which it has granted or continued an *accreditation status* or *Preliminary Approval* is the subject of an *adverse action* by another *recognized accrediting agency*, has been placed on probation or an equivalent status by another *recognized accrediting agency*, or is the subject of pending or final action brought by a State agency regarding its legal authority, the ACOE promptly reviews the program to determine whether the ACOE should also take *adverse action* or lower the program's *accreditation status* to *Accredited with Conditions*. The Council provides the program with due notice of its intended review.

When the ACOE grants or continues an *accreditation status* or *Preliminary Approval* to a program notwithstanding the actions described in this policy, the Council provides to the Secretary of the USDE within thirty (30) days of ACOE action, a thorough explanation, consistent with the ACOE’s *Standards*, why the previous action by a *recognized accrediting agency* or the State does not preclude ACOE’s grant of an *accreditation status* or *Preliminary Approval*.

**SCOPE**
☑ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☑ Optometric Residency Programs
☑ Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**
None

**PROCEDURE**
In conjunction with *evaluation visit* reviews of professional optometric degree and optometric technician programs, the ACOE will ensure the program’s accreditation status from a *USDE recognized institutional accrediting agency* is verified via primary source verification and the status from the primary source aligns with that reported by the program.

*ACOE* staff will routinely review the notifications of actions received from other *USDE* recognized accrediting agencies to determine whether any of the of the actions described in this Policy have been
taken associated with programs holding an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval from the ACOE.

Upon becoming aware of an action taken against a program with an accreditation status or Preliminary approval in scope of this Policy, the ACOE Director will convene a meeting of the ACOE Executive Committee.

The ACOE Executive Committee will assess the nature and gravity of the action taken and determine how the Council will proceed with its review of the impacted program, which may include an interim evaluation visit or monitoring reports. The ACOE Executive Committee may convene the full Council if it deems the situation warrants.

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS

None

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION

See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 06/18/2022; 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)
Other Policies Related to Accreditation

Timeframe for Compliance with Standards

**Policy**

In the event the Council determines that a program is not in compliance with any of the Council’s Standards, the Council provides a written notice to the program requiring that such program take prompt action within a timeline measured from the date of the Council’s decision that is reasonable based on the nature of the finding and the stated mission, goals, and objectives of the program. The timeline may include intermediate checkpoints and does not exceed the lesser of four (4) years or 150% of the length of the program.

The Council evaluates and approves or disapproves the monitoring or compliance reports it requires, provides ongoing monitoring, if warranted, and evaluates a program’s progress in resolving the finding of noncompliance.

The Council may grant good cause extensions in cases it deems this action to be warranted. Good cause extensions are granted only in situations where the program has made substantial, but not complete, progress toward compliance with the ACOE Standard(s), where a limited amount of time is needed to reach full compliance, and where all reasonable alternatives for achieving compliance within an appropriate timeframe have been exhausted.

The ACOE may grant no more than one (1) extension to the deadline for compliance. Typically, the deadline for compliance is extended for no more than six (6) months.

In cases where the Standard with which the program is out of compliance relates to outcomes of the program, the deadline for compliance may be extended to allow the program to complete documentation of outcomes (such as completion rate and Board scores).

**Scope**

- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**Guidelines**

None

**Procedure**

When the Council deems a program to be non-compliant with one or more ACOE Standards, the Council’s written notification to the program will include for each individual Standard that is not fully met, a corresponding recommendation (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Council Review of Draft Accreditation Reports and Subsequent Decisions”). The notification specifies:

- the timeframe available to the program for remediation;
- the mechanism for reporting remediation to the Council; and
- the due date for submission.

Typical mechanisms for reporting will include progress reports, updates as part of a program’s annual report, and/or an accreditation report associated with an interim evaluation visit.

Upon review of the program’s actions to remediate the noncompliant Standard(s), the Council will determine whether the response is acceptable and will develop and distribute a written notification to the program apprising it of the Council’s determination. The written notification may include:
• a determination of compliance;
• a determination of continued noncompliance and consequences, which may include prompt adverse action (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Adverse Actions and Program-Initiated Withdrawals”);
• determination of need for continued ongoing monitoring; and/or
• a grant of a good cause extension.

Adverse Actions and Program-Initiated Withdrawals

POLICY
An accreditation status or Preliminary Approval will be withheld from programs which the Council judges to be substantially not in compliance with the Standards of the ACOE.

In the event a program holding an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status does not bring itself into compliance with the applicable ACOE Standard(s) in alignment with the “Timeframe for Compliance with Standards” Policy and Procedure, the Council initiates adverse action against the program.

The Council reserves the right to take immediate adverse action against a program when the ACOE determines such action is necessary, pursuant to USDE 602.20(b). The Council may maintain the program’s accreditation status or Preliminary Approval until the program has had reasonable time to teach-out the remainder of the program or to fulfill the obligations of any teach-out agreement to assist students in transferring or completing their programs (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Teach-Out Process”).

When the Council signifies its desire to conduct an interim or full evaluation visit to a program holding an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval, a failure by that program to accommodate an evaluation visit may be interpreted as a lack of interest in continuing the program’s accreditation status or Preliminary Approval from the Council and may result in the Council initiating adverse action against the program.

When the Council denies or withdraws an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval, the program is notified of its right request reconsideration and/or appeal the decision as outlined in ACOE’s “Reconsiderations” and “Appeals of Accreditation Decisions” Policies and Procedures prior to the decision becoming final.

A program may withdraw from accreditation status or Preliminary Approval at any time prior to a decision by Council to initiate adverse action or to lower its accreditation status to Accredited with Conditions (refer to ACOE Policy and Procedure “Teach-Out Process”).

SCOPE
☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

GUIDELINES
PROCEDURE

ACOE-initiated adverse actions

Upon initiating an adverse action, the ACOE will provide notice to the program and other applicable constituencies in alignment with ACOE Policy and Procedure “Required Notifications and Timing.”

Upon an initiated adverse action becoming a final adverse action, the ACOE will provide notice to the program and other applicable constituencies in alignment with ACOE Policy and Procedure “Required Notifications and Timing.”

The program that no longer holds an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval will be removed from the listing upon the Council’s next update to its directory of accredited programs.

Program-initiated withdrawals

In the event a program wishes to withdraw from an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval,

- for a professional optometric degree program, the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution and the program’s chief executive officer,
- for an optometric technician program, the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution and the program director,
- for an optometric residency program, the chief executive officer of the affiliated school or college of optometry

will submit written notice of the intention to withdraw including the effective date of the withdrawal to the Director of the ACOE via email (accredit@theacoe.org).

In the event the program withdrawing from an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval will cease operations, it will submit documentation and follow the process specified in the ACOE Policy and Procedure “Teach-Out Process”. Optometric residency programs that request voluntary withdrawal from accreditation status will confirm that no residents will be enrolled as of the effective date of the withdrawal; if this cannot be confirmed, the optometric residency program will submit documentation addressing how it assures no resident harm will result from the program withdrawal.

The ACOE will provide notice to applicable constituencies in alignment with ACOE Policy and Procedure “Required Notifications and Timing.”

The program that has voluntarily withdrawn from an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval will be removed from the listing upon the Council’s next update to the directory of accredited programs.

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS

None

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION

See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 06/18/2022; 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 06/21/2024

Teach-Out Process

POLICY

When a program voluntarily withdraws from its accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status, allows its accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status to expire, has its accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status withdrawn by the ACOE, or is otherwise anticipated to cease operations, it develops a closure plan where it either remains open until all enrolled students have completed the
program or it reaches agreement(s) with another ACOE-accredited program(s) to teach-out the remainder of the program.

As specified in ACOE Policy and Procedure “Adverse Actions and Program-Initiated Withdrawals” the Council may maintain the program's accreditation status or Preliminary Approval until the program has had reasonable time to teach-out the remainder of the program or to fulfill the obligations of any teach-out agreement to assist students in transferring or completing their programs.

The ACOE approves the program’s closure plan and any associated teach-out agreements.

Programs under a closure plan continue to comply with ACOE Standards, policies, and processes for the duration of the teach-out period unless afforded situation-specific exceptions.

A program undergoing a teach-out process complies with applicable requirements for teach-out agreements in effect for the sponsoring institution.

### Scope

- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

### Guidelines

None

### Procedure

The program will make provisions to assure that all currently enrolled students are provided all the instruction promised by the program and submit a closure plan to the ACOE for approval.

The closure plan will specify actions to be taken, the responsible parties who will take those actions, the timeframe within which the actions will be taken, address all items specified in a teach-out plan, and include the following information:

1. date the program will close;
2. information on why the program is closing, as applicable;
3. list of students currently enrolled in the program; and
4. list of curricular requirements that each enrolled student must complete for graduation/program completion and date of expected completion.

The ACOE will evaluate the closure plan to ensure that it provides for the equitable treatment of students under the ACOE's criteria, specifies additional charges, if any, and provides for notification to the students of any additional charges.

As soon as is reasonably practical, most likely at the Council’s next regular business meeting, the Council will review the program’s closure plan. Representative(s) of the program may be requested to attend the meeting to address questions the Council may have.

Following the Council’s meeting, the program will be notified of the Council’s assessment of the closure plan along with any additional requirements the Council may impose on the program during the teach-out period.

The ACOE may require the program to enter into one or more teach-out agreements as part of its closure plan.

The teach-out agreement(s) and copies of all notifications from the program to students related to the program’s closure and the students’ ability to complete their course of study will be submitted to the ACOE for review and approval.
As soon as is reasonably practical, most likely at the Council’s next regular meeting, the Council will review the program’s teach-out agreement(s). Representative(s) of the program may be requested to attend the meeting to address questions the Council may have.

The program will be required to maintain its regular review cycle during the teach out period. When a program’s self-study for reaccreditation is due prior to the program’s voluntary closing, the program may submit a progress or closure report in lieu of a submitting self-study and hosting an evaluation visit provided that the program closes within four (4) years of notifying the ACOE.

After the program submits its plan for closure, it must comply with requirements for maintaining its accreditation status or Preliminary Approval, i.e., payment of fees and submission of annual reports, until such time as it closes.

A program operating under a closure plan will provide an update at least annually, or more frequently at the discretion of the ACOE, regarding the status of the program’s closure, including description of adequacy of resources and update on remaining students’ progression through the program.

**Forms/Attachments**

None

**Dates of Revision/Validation**

06/18/2022 (initial version); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)

**Required Notifications and Timing**

**Policy**

**Accreditation-Related Decisions**

Within thirty (30) days of the Council meeting at which the accreditation-related decision was made, the ACOE sends a notification letter to the highest-ranking officer of the sponsoring institution regarding the program’s accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status.

The letter includes whether and what specific accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status has been determined, the length of time until the next scheduled evaluation visit, a copy of the evaluation report that was the basis for the Council’s decision, and recommendations and suggestions for program enhancement (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Council Review of Accreditation Reports and Subsequent Decisions”).

The notification letter includes a statement regarding the program’s compliance with the Standards, including any findings of noncompliance, and the program’s expected timeframe for coming into compliance with any unmet Standards (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Timeframe for Compliance with Standards”).

If applicable, the letter also contains a statement regarding procedures for requesting reconsideration and/or appeal of the Council’s accreditation decision (reference ACOE’s Policies and Procedures “Reconsiderations” and “Appeals of Accreditation Decisions”). The letter specifies that any action subject to reconsideration and/or appeal rights will become final upon exhaustion or expiration of reconsideration and/or appeal rights. All final adverse actions taken are subject to the arbitration requirements in 20 U.S.C. 1099b(e).

The notification letter delineates any change in and the reasons for the change in accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status and, as applicable, the letter specifies the timelines for interim
evaluation visits and/or progress reports (refer to ACOE Policies and Procedures “Interim Evaluation Visits” and “Progress Reports”).

(1) In the case the program is notified of the ACOE’s decision to grant or continue the accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status of a program, no later than thirty (30) days after it makes the decision, the ACOE notifies:

- the Secretary of the USDE;
- the appropriate State optometry licensing agency(ies), as applicable;
- the appropriate accrediting agency(ies); and
- the public.

(2) In the case the program is notified of the ACOE’s final decision of a probation or equivalent status or of an initiated adverse action, the program is required to disclose such an action within seven (7) business days of receipt to all current and prospective students and/or residents.

At the same time the program is notified of the ACOE’s final decision of a probation or equivalent status or of an initiated adverse action, the ACOE provides notification of its decision to:

- the Secretary of the USDE;
- the appropriate State optometry licensing agency(ies), as applicable; and
- the appropriate accrediting agency(ies).

The ACOE provides written notice to the public of such decisions within one (1) business day of its notice to the program.

(3) In the case the program is notified of the ACOE’s final decision to deny or withdraw the accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status of a program, the program is required to disclose such action within seven (7) business days of receipt to all current and prospective students and/or residents. The notice from the ACOE provides the program the option to submit any brief comments that would be made available to the public not later than a specified date that is within fifty (50) days after such final decision is made. The Council reserves the right to ensure that such comments are accurate and not defamatory.

At the same time the program is notified, but not later than thirty (30) days after the Council decision to deny or withdraw the accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status of a program becomes final, the ACOE provides notification of its decision to:

- the Secretary of the USDE;
- the appropriate State optometry licensing agency(ies); and
- the appropriate accrediting agency(ies).

The ACOE provides written notice to the public of such decisions within one (1) business day of its notice to the program.

No later than sixty (60) days after the date the decision to deny or withdraw the accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status of a program becomes final, a brief statement summarizing the reasons for the ACOE’s decision and the official comments that the affected program may wish to make with regard to that decision, or evidence that the affected program has been offered the opportunity to provide official comment is made available to:

- the Secretary of the USDE;
- the appropriate State optometry licensing agency(ies), as applicable; and
The ACOE, upon request, shares with other appropriate recognized accrediting agencies and recognized State approval agencies information about the accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status of a program and any adverse actions it has taken against the program.

Accreditation-Related Actions Associated with Withdrawals and Expirations
In the event a program decides to withdraw voluntarily from an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status, or lets its accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status lapse, with no program-requested extension submitted and granted by the ACOE, within ten (10) business days of receipt of notification or the date accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status lapses, the ACOE notifies:

- the Secretary of the USDE,
- the appropriate State optometry licensing agency(ies), as applicable,
- the appropriate accrediting agencies, and,
- the public (upon request).

Other Required Notifications to the USDE
The ACOE submits the following information to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, either as a matter of course or upon request:

1. a copy of the ACOE annual report;
2. a copy, updated at least annually, of each directory of accredited programs;
3. a summary of the ACOE’s major accrediting activities during the previous year (an annual data summary), if requested by the Secretary to carry out the Secretary’s responsibilities in specific federal legislation and regulation;
4. any proposed change in the ACOE’s policies, procedures, or accreditation Standards that might alter the ACOE’s scope of recognition by the Secretary of Education or compliance with the criteria for recognition;
5. any change to the ACOE’s geographic area of accrediting activities, along with public notification on the ACOE’s website; and
6. while the ACOE is not responsible for enforcing USDE regulations relating to federal student financial aid programs, it notifies the Department if it identifies any instances of noncompliance with relevant requirements.

**SCOPE**
- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**
When a professional optometric degree program is part of a university system, the notification letter and accompanying documents will be addressed to the chancellor, provost, or the local campus president as appropriate. Concurrently, a copy of the notification letter and accompanying documents will be sent to the school’s or college’s dean or president.

For optometric residency programs, a copy of the notification letter and accompanying documents will be sent to the program coordinator/supervisor and director of residency programs at the affiliated school or college.

When an optometric technician program is part of a university or community college, the notification letter and accompanying documents will be addressed to the chancellor, provost, or the local campus president.
president as appropriate. Concurrently, a copy of the notification letter and accompanying documents will be sent to the program director and the dean of the school or college where the program resides.

PROCEDURE
Notifications and accompanying documents will be sent to associated programs via email and/or U.S. Postal Service.

Notifications to the USDE, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, and the appropriate accrediting agencies will be sent via email. As applicable, the Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs will be updated to reflect the Council’s decision.

Notifications to the public will be made via the ACOE’s website (www.theACOE.org). The website posting includes the date the notification is posted.

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS
None

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)

Program Interruption

POLICY
The ACOE acknowledges that interruption of an educational program with an accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status due to unforeseen circumstances is a potentially serious problem. An interruption could be any natural or manmade incident beyond the program’s control that impacts the program’s ability to operate as planned or remain in compliance with the ACOE Standards and may compromise the quality and effectiveness of education. The program notifies the ACOE in writing of any such disruption.

The ACOE may permit the program to be out of compliance for a period of time to be determined by the Council, not to exceed three (3) years, unless the Council determines good cause to extend the period of time.

The program’s written notification of the disruption must demonstrate that the period of noncompliance will not:

- contribute to the cost of the program to the student without the students’ consent;
- create any unreasonable hardships on, or harm to, students/residents; or
- compromise the program’s academic quality.

SCOPE
☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs

GUIDELINES
None

PROCEDURE
The program identifies an interruption that may compromise the quality and effectiveness of education.
The program will submit, in writing, a description of the nature of the disruption and anticipated duration. The notification will include the program’s comprehensive plan for how the loss of its clinical and/or didactic components will be addressed along with its affirmation the disruption meets the requirements specified in this Policy.

Programs accepting educational responsibility for displaced students and/or residents will submit their plans to deal with any substantive change.

The Council will evaluate the program’s interruption notification and assess whether the plan put forth will reasonably enable the program to achieve compliance with the Standard(s), policy(ies), and/or procedure(s) within the time allotted. Based on this assessment, the Council may grant a period of noncompliance.

The program will be notified within thirty (30) days of the Council’s decision whether and for how long a period of noncompliance has been granted. The program will also be notified of the Council’s requirements related to ongoing monitoring of the disruption and actions needed to demonstrate that the disruption has not:

- contributed to the cost of the program to the student without the students’ consent;
- created any unreasonable hardships on, or harm to, students/residents; or
- compromised the program’s academic quality.

Residency Program Inactivity or Deficiency

**Policy**

In the course of reviewing an optometric residency program, the ACOE may withdraw the program’s accreditation status under the following circumstances:

1) the program has been without at least one resident for two (2) or more consecutive years; and/or
2) the program has incurred a major loss of resources, e.g., faculty, facilities, or funding, without reasonable expectation of rapid replacement; and/or
3) the program is no longer sponsored by or affiliated with a professional optometric degree program holding an accreditation status.

**Scope**

- [ ] Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- ✔ Optometric Residency Programs
- [ ] Optometric Technician Programs

**Guidelines**

None

**Procedure**
Initiated adverse actions associated with this policy will typically be the result of a recommendation of the Optometric Residency Program Committee.

In the Council’s next regular business meeting, the Council will make its determination as to whether it formally approves an initiated adverse action.

The ACOE will provide notice to the program and other applicable constituencies in alignment with ACOE Policy and Procedure “Required Notifications and Timing.”

Upon an initiated adverse action becoming a final adverse action, the ACOE will provide notice to the program and other applicable constituencies in alignment with ACOE Policy and Procedure “Required Notifications and Timing.”

The program that no longer holds an accreditation status will be removed from the listing upon the Council’s next update to its directory of accredited programs.

Evaluated “On the Campus” Residencies

Policy
When more than one optometric residency program is on-site at a school or college of optometry, the school or college can structure the residencies as individual programs, or where appropriate, under an “umbrella” arrangement.

An “umbrella” optometric residency program is an entity which the school or college identifies as a single optometric residency program, with more than one area of emphasis. Each of these emphasis areas provides for at least one (1) residency position. An umbrella optometric residency program meets all of the following conditions:

- education and training for all residents occur on the school’s or college’s campus a majority of the time;
- the program includes a core didactic and clinical curriculum common to all emphasis areas;
- an identifiable portion of the didactic and clinical curriculum is tailored to each area of emphasis;
- a resident’s curriculum has no more than two emphasis areas; and
- the self-study includes individualized sections as appropriate for each emphasis area.

The terms of accreditation of an umbrella optometric residency program is determined by the least favorable status of any of its areas of emphasis/components, as determined by the ACOE. All the ACOE’s policies and procedures relating to non-umbrella programs apply to umbrella programs.

Scope
[ ☐ ] Professional Optometric Degree Programs
[ ☑ ] Optometric Residency Programs
[ ☐ ] Optometric Technician Programs

NOTE – italicized words/acronyms are included in the Glossary [posted at www.theacoe.org ]
GUIDELINES
In the umbrella program’s annual report, the program should provide information on which of the emphasis areas are filled and which are unfilled.

PROCEDURE
When a school or college desires to alter the composition of existing areas of emphasis or plans to add one or more areas of emphasis, the school or college will submit a letter addressing the proposed change or addition to the ACOE for its consideration.

The request will be considered by the Residency Review Committee and if accepted, an ACOE staff member will notify the school or college. The Residency Review Committee may refer the matter to the Council when it deems warranted.

The dean or president may request that the individual programs be visited as a group, with some economy of effort resulting from providing one set of materials applicable to all programs.

FORMS/ATTACHMENTS
None

DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION
See Historical Revision History; 06/18/2022; 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)

Administrative Notice

POLICY
A program may be placed on administrative notice by the ACOE Executive Committee when the program does not comply with one or more of the following requirements for maintaining its ACOE status. Applicable ACOE statuses include Stage One designation, Stage Two designation, Preliminary Approval, Accredited, and Accredited with Conditions.

1. Submission of a complete self-study (which includes abbreviated self-studies), progress report, or annual report (which includes abbreviated annual reports) by the scheduled due date (reference ACOE Policies and Procedures “Self-Studies”, “The Annual Report”, and “The Progress Report”);
2. Scheduling of site visit dates within a reasonable time frame upon notice from ACOE staff (reference ACOE Policies and Procedures “Site Evaluation Visit” and “Interim Evaluation Visits”);
3. Timely submission of any other requested materials required by the ACOE to support the accreditation process (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Site Evaluation Visit” and “Interim Evaluation Visits”);
4. Payment of applicable fees, including accreditation fees, administrative fees, and evaluation visit fees by the third notice (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Financing the Accreditation Process”);
5. Accurate, complete, and appropriate disclosure of a program’s accreditation status in cases where a program chooses to disclose such information (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Program Disclosure of Accreditation Status or Preliminary Approval Status”);
6. Avoiding making any statement implying Preliminary Approval or an accreditation status is achieved or imminent prior to the ACOE granting that status (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Program Disclosure of Accreditation Status or Preliminary Approval Status”); and/or
7. Prominently publishing the ACOE’s required disclosure language by programs holding Preliminary Approval status (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Program Disclosure of Accreditation Status or Preliminary Approval Status”).

When a program is placed on administrative notice by the ACOE Executive Committee, the program’s listing on the ACOE’s directory of accredited programs will not include information disclosing that the program is on administrative notice.

Following Council review and action, if the program remains on administrative notice, then the program’s listing on the ACOE’s directory of accredited programs will include information disclosing that it is on administrative notice.

Administrative notice is not subject to reconsideration or appeal.

### SCOPE
- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

### GUIDELINES
None

### PROCEDURE

When a program fails to comply with one or more of the criteria for administrative notice, the ACOE Executive Committee will convene to determine whether the program’s non-compliance or lack of payment warrants a determination of administrative notice.

The program will be notified that it has been placed on administrative notice and provided a timeframe within which to rectify the non-compliance or non-payment. The ACOE Executive Committee will consider reasonable requests to extend the timeframe.

When the program submits acceptable documentation demonstrating the non-compliance has been rectified or has paid its outstanding bill, the ACOE Executive Committee will remove the program from administrative notice and will notify the program.

When the program does not submit acceptable documentation demonstrating the non-compliance has been rectified, fails to pay its outstanding bill, or fails to submit and/or justify a reasonable request for an extension within the specified timeframe, the matter will be referred to the Council at its next regularly scheduled business meeting.

The Council will take action. The Council may:

1. remove the program from administrative notice;
2. require the program to submit a progress report or undergo an interim evaluation visit; the program remains on administrative notice;
3. if the program holds an accreditation status,
   a. lower the program’s accreditation status; the program remains on administrative notice; or
   b. withdraw the program’s accreditation status;
4. withdraw the program’s Preliminary Approval status if the program holds Preliminary Approval status; and/or
5. terminate the program’s application if the program does not hold Preliminary Approval or an accreditation status.
The program will be notified of the Council’s action no later than thirty (30) days after it makes the decision.

As applicable, following Council review and action, if the program remains on administrative notice, then the program’s listing on the ACOE’s directory of accredited programs will be updated to reflect that it is on administrative notice.

Upon the administrative notice being lifted, as applicable, the program’s listing on the ACOE’s directory of accredited programs will be updated to remove the reference to administrative notice.

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**
None

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**
06/24/2023 (initial approval); 02/24/2024 (no/non-substantive changes)

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**Financing the Accreditation Process**

**POLICY**
The ACOE maintains adequate administrative staff and financial resources to carry out its accrediting responsibilities.

Sources of funds are as follows:

- The ACOE is predominantly funded through application fees, annual accreditation fees, and annual administrative fees.
  - application fees are charged to programs initiating the pathway to accreditation;
  - accreditation fees are charged annually to programs in an accreditation status; and
  - administrative fees are charged annually to professional optometric degree programs in *Stage One designation*, *Stage Two designation*, or *Preliminary Approval*.
- Costs associated with *evaluation visits* are the responsibility of the program. Following the *evaluation visit*, programs are billed for the expenses of evaluators, *consultants*, and Council staff.
- The AOA provides access to financial support to the ACOE up to a pre-defined threshold in reserve funding.
- The ACOE may also receive financial support from the ARBO, if available.

Current fees are *published* on the ACOE website.

Periodically the Planning Committee assesses funding to assure the ongoing viability and effectiveness of the Council.

**SCOPE**
- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**
None

**PROCEDURE**
Invoices will be sent in October, and payment will be due to the ACOE by January 1 of each year associated with annual fees.
Programs will be invoiced following evaluation visits; programs are expected to pay evaluation visit fees for which they are billed within sixty (60) days of receiving an invoice.

Programs which do not pay their accreditation or administrative fees by January 15 or their evaluation visit fees within sixty (60) days of receiving the invoice will be sent a second notice regarding the non-payment.

Programs which do not pay their accreditation or administrative fees by February 15 or their evaluation visit fees within ninety (90) days of receiving the invoice will be sent a third notice regarding the non-payment and may be placed on administrative notice (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Administrative Notice”).

Reconsiderations

Policy
A program desiring the Council to reconsider an initiated adverse action or determination of the status of Accredited with Conditions submits to the Council, in writing, a petition for reconsideration in compliance with this Policy within thirty (30) days following the program’s receipt of notification of the initiated adverse action or determination of Accredited with Conditions.

If the written petition is not received within thirty (30) days following the program’s receipt of notification of the initiated adverse action or determination of Accredited with Conditions, the adverse action or determination of Accredited with Conditions becomes final.

A petition for reconsideration alleges one or more of the following and is accompanied by documentation providing evidence in support of the program’s allegation(s):

- the facts upon which the Council decision was based no longer exist or have changed significantly;
- the Council’s ruling is clearly erroneous based on its construction of the facts;
- the Council’s ruling is clearly erroneous based on its interpretation or application of the “ACOE Policy and Procedure Manual” and/or accreditation Standards;
- any combination of the above.

A program may seek in a petition for reconsideration a review of new financial information provided that:

- the financial information was unavailable to the sponsoring institution or program until after the initiated adverse action or determination of the status of Accredited with Conditions was made;
- the financial information is significant and bears materially on any financial deficiencies identified by the Council; and
- the only remaining deficiency cited by the Council in support of a final adverse action or a final decision of Accredited with Conditions is the sponsoring institution’s or program’s failure to meet Council Standard(s) pertaining to finances.
A program may seek the review of new financial information described above only once and any determination by the ACOE made with respect to that review does not provide a basis for an appeal.

The ACOE does not change the program’s accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status pending disposition of a petition for reconsideration.

**SCOPE**
- Professional Optometric Degree Programs
- Optometric Residency Programs
- Optometric Technician Programs

**GUIDELINES**
None

**PROCEDURE**
In the event a program wishes to petition for reconsideration, the chief executive officer of the professional optometric degree program, the program director of an optometric technician program, or in the case of an optometric residency program, the chief executive officer of the affiliated school of optometry will submit written notice of the petition for reconsideration to the ACOE Director and include all information the program would like the Council to take into consideration.

The ACOE Director will acknowledge receipt of the petition and communicate the dates of the Council meeting where the petition for reconsideration will be considered. The ACOE Director will validate that the program’s accreditation status or Preliminary Approval remains unchanged pending the outcome of the reconsideration decision and exhaustion of appeal rights, as applicable.

The petition for reconsideration along with all supporting documentation will be made available to Council members for review. The Council may request the program provide an oral presentation in support of its petition. If the program wishes to provide an oral presentation in support of its petition for reconsideration, it must request to do so prior to Council consideration of its petition.

At its next regularly scheduled business meeting, generally not less sixty (60) days from receipt of the petition, the Council will consider the program’s petition and any oral presentation which the program may make.

If the problems or deficiencies that precipitated the initiated adverse action or determination of Accredited with Conditions have been corrected, or if upon further consideration and evaluation the Council agrees that some error of construction, interpretation, or application has occurred, the Council will take appropriate action.

The ACOE will notify the program in writing the result of its consideration of the program’s petition for reconsideration. The notification will include the program’s right of appeal along with the procedures associated with requesting an appeal, if applicable.

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**
None

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023 (no/non-substantive changes); 06/21/2024

Appeals of Accreditation Decisions

**POLICY**
The program may elect to appeal an accreditation decision made by the Council to an ad hoc appeals panel in either of the two scenarios:

- if, following reconsideration, the Council affirms its prior adverse action or determination of Accredited with Conditions; or
- if, following an initiated adverse action or determination of Accredited with Conditions, the program may bypass submission of a petition for reconsideration and directly file an appeal if the program has evidence to assert one or more of the following:
  - the Council’s decision-making was arbitrary, capricious, or not supported by evidence provided in the record, and/or
  - the procedures used by the ACOE were contrary to the ACOE’s Standards, policies, and/or procedures, and that procedural error prejudiced ACOE’s consideration.

The program submits its written notice of appeal to the ACOE Director within thirty (30) days of receipt of notice of the Council’s action upon reconsideration or the program’s receipt of notification of the initiated adverse action or determination of Accredited with Conditions.

If the written notice of appeal is not received within thirty (30) days, then the initiated adverse action or determination of Accredited with Conditions becomes final.

A request for appeal alleges one or more of the following and is accompanied by documentation providing evidence in support of the program’s allegation(s):

- the Council’s ruling is clearly erroneous based on its construction of the facts;
- the Council’s ruling is clearly erroneous based on its interpretation or application of the “ACOE Policy and Procedure Manual” and/or accreditation Standards;
- the Council’s decision was arbitrary, capricious, or not supported by substantial evidence in the record on which it took action;
- the procedures used by ACOE to reach its decision were contrary to ACOE’s Standards or other established policies and practices and that procedural error prejudiced ACOE’s consideration; and/or
- more than one of the above occurred.

The purpose of the appeals panel is not to evaluate the educational program; rather, the appeals panel evaluates the merit of the appeal. The program has the burden of demonstrating that the decision of the Council was not supported by the record or was otherwise erroneous. The burden of proof remains with the program at all times.

The appeals panel

- does not include current members of the ACOE;
- is subject to ACOE’s Policy and Procedure “Conflicts of Interest;” and
- does not serve solely in an advisory or procedural role but has and uses its authority to affirm, amend, or to remand the matter to the Council for further consideration.

The ACOE does not change the program’s accreditation status or Preliminary Approval status until the period for filing an appeal ends or pending disposition of a submitted appeal.

The cost related to appeal procedures shall be underwritten by the program and the Council on a shared basis.

**SCOPE**

☒ Professional Optometric Degree Programs
☒ Optometric Residency Programs
☒ Optometric Technician Programs
GUIDELINES
None

PROCEDURE
In the event a program wishes to file an appeal, the chief executive officer of the professional optometric degree program, the program director of an optometric technician program, or in the case of an optometric residency program, the chief executive officer of the affiliated school or college of optometry will submit a written notice of appeal to the ACOE Director. This notice of appeal shall include a brief statement of the grounds for appeal setting forth the arguments the program intends to present to the appeals panel for why it believes the Council’s decision was in error. The notice of appeal shall also identify the program representatives, which may include legal counsel, who will be present at the appeal hearing.

The ACOE Director will acknowledge receipt of the notice of appeal. The ACOE Director will validate that the program’s accreditation status or Preliminary Approval remains unchanged pending the outcome of the appeal.

Within thirty (30) days of receipt of the notice of appeal, the Executive Committee shall nominate three (3) persons to serve on the appeals panel and designate six (6) alternates. The nominees and alternates will be selected from the ACOE consultant pool, will not include any current member of the ACOE, and will not have an affiliation with the program filing the appeal or with the accreditation process relating to that program.

The appeals panel will be composed of an educator, practitioner, and a non-optometrist public member. Of the six (6) alternates selected, two (2) will be educators, two (2) will be practitioners, and two (2) will be non-optometrist public members.

The names of the three (3) nominated appeals panel members and six (6) alternates shall be forwarded to the program representative filing the appeal within seven (7) business days following receipt of the notice of appeal. Within 14 days of receipt of the list of eligible appeals panel members, the program shall have the opportunity to present any objections regarding the composition of the appeals panel, together with a statement of the reasons for its objections, including any assertions of conflict of interest (reference ACOE Policy and Procedure “Conflicts of Interest”).

The Director of the ACOE will determine the availability and willingness to serve of each of the nominees and alternates, as needed, and notify the program of the names of the three (3) appeals panel members upon appointment. One (1) of the three (3) appeals panel members will be appointed chair of the appeals panel. Each member of the appeals panel will be provided appropriate training on the ACOE Standards, policies, and procedures.

The appeal hearing will be held within 60 days (but not earlier than 45 days) after the appeals panel has been appointed.

Within 14 days of appointment of the appeals panel, the appellant program and Council Chair will be notified by the ACOE Director of the date, time, and place of the hearing. If a designated appeals panel member withdraws or is removed by the ACOE, the Executive Committee shall appoint a replacement. Any change in the hearing schedule must be approved in advance by the Council Chair and occur on a date which is mutually acceptable to the program, the appeals panel, and the Council.

Within 14 days from the date the program receives notice of the appeal hearing, the appeals panel members and the appellant program shall receive from the ACOE Director the record of the
accreditation proceedings. The “Record of the Accreditation Proceedings” shall include the following as applicable to the appeal (from the accreditation cycle in question):

1. correspondence between the Council and the program related to the accreditation decision;
2. self-study report;
3. accreditation report;
4. program’s factual accuracy response to the draft accreditation report;
5. progress report(s) submitted by the program, if any; and
6. the program’s grounds for appeal statement included in its notice of appeal

Within thirty (30) days from the date the program receives notice of the appeal hearing, the program will submit one (1) electronic version of its “Statement of Grounds for Appeal” to the ACOE Director, which will set forth the program’s arguments and include evidence in support of its appeal. Only evidence that is part of the “Record of Accreditation Proceedings” and was considered by the Council in reaching the accreditation decision on appeal may be included in the grounds for appeal or introduced or referred to during the appeal hearing, including revised data or program descriptions that were not reviewed initially by the Council.

Upon receipt, the “Statement of Grounds for Appeal” shall be distributed to the appeals panel and to the Council Chair and maintained on file with the ACOE staff. Upon receiving the “Statement of Grounds for Appeal,” the ACOE Director will acknowledge receipt in writing to the individual who filed the appeal and copy the Council Chair.

The appeal hearing shall be professionally audio recorded. Either party may, at its expense, require such recordings be transcribed. No other recording will be permitted.

Legal counsel for the program and/or ACOE may be present. Because the hearing is an administrative mechanism for peer review rather than an adversarial proceeding, no provision for cross-examination of the representatives(s) of the ACOE or of the program will be entertained.

The appeal hearing shall commence by the chair of the appeals panel calling the hearing to order. All procedural requests or challenges, including the appropriateness of evidence to be heard, shall be decided by the chair of the appeals panel, in consultation with the other members of the appeals panel.

The appellant program will be permitted to make an oral statement of no more than 45 minutes in length in support of the appeal and answer any questions from the appeals panel. The presentation must not raise issues that were not addressed in the “Statement of Grounds for Appeal.”

The Council Chair shall designate a representative of the ACOE to appear before the appeals panel. The ACOE representative may make an oral statement of no more than 45 minutes in length in support of the decision under appeal and answer any questions from the appeals panel.

The chair of the appeals panel may recess the hearing at any time for discussion among the appeals panel members in executive session.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the chair of the appeals panel will provide an opportunity for a closing statement by the program, followed by a closing statement by the ACOE, of no more than five (5) minutes from each party.

The chair of the appeals panel will inform the participants of the timetable of remaining steps in the process.
The chair of the appeals panel will adjourn the hearing, and the appeals panel will deliberate in executive session. The appeals panel members shall decide on the issues presented in the appeal. The appeals panel shall issue its findings and decision as follows:

- Each area of concern or cited area of noncompliance will be considered separately and the appeals panel will determine whether each concern or area of noncompliance is supported by substantial evidence.
- The appeals panel will determine whether those concerns or areas of noncompliance supported by substantial evidence are sufficient to support the accreditation decision of the Council.
- The appeals panel will determine whether the procedures used to reach the accreditation action were in error and/or whether procedural error prejudiced the Council’s decision.

The appeals panel will prepare its report detailing its findings and will issue a decision to affirm, amend, or remand the accreditation action of the Council. The findings and decision of the appeals panel shall be submitted by its chair to the ACOE Director within ten (10) business days of the appeal hearing. The ACOE Director will then send a copy of the final report to the Council Chair and to the individual who filed the appeal.

When the appeals panel affirms the action of the Council, the decision of the Council becomes final and effective on the date of the appeals panel decision and is not subject to further appeal.

When the appeals panel amends or remands the accreditation action of the Council, the Council will schedule and conduct a special session to review the decision of the appeals panel and implement the specific issues detailed in the appeals panel report. These decisions will be final and not subject to further appeal. The ACOE will notify appropriate parties in alignment with ACOE Policy and Procedure “Required Notifications and Timing.”

**FORMS/ATTACHMENTS**
None

**DATES OF REVISION/VALIDATION**
See Historical Revision History; 06/26/2021; 02/27/2022 (no/non-substantive changes); 02/25/2023; 06/21/2024
Historical Revision History

Accreditation Manual Revision History, prior to adoption of the consolidated ACOE Policy and Procedure Manual

Accreditation Manual: Professional Optometric Degree Programs
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- October 23-25, 1998
- October 11-13, 2002
- June 20-27, 2007
- October 12-14, 2007
- October 22-24, 2010
- June 26-29, 2013
- February 7-9, 2014
- October 12-14, 2018

Accreditation Manual: Optometric Residency Programs
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- June 27-30, 2001
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- June 24-27, 2009
- October 22-24, 2010
- February 17-19, 2012
- June 24-26, 2015
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Accreditation Manual: Optometric Technician Programs
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- June 27-30, 2001
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- February 3-5, 2006
- June 24-27, 2009
- October 22-24, 2010
- February 7-9, 2014
- October 12-14, 2018