



Accreditation Manual

Section I General Information

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ACEN® 2023 Accreditation Manual for Nursing Education Programs

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GENERAL INFORMATION For Nursing Education Programs

A publication of:

Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing
3390 Peachtree Road NE
Suite 1400
Atlanta, GA 30326
USA

Phone:+1 (404) 975-5000

Web: www.acenursing.org



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INTRODUCTION

MISSION

The Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) supports the interests of nursing education, nursing practice, and the public by the functions of accreditation. Accreditation is a voluntary, peer-review, self-regulatory process by which non-governmental associations recognize educational institutions or programs that have been found to meet or exceed standards and criteria for educational quality. Accreditation also assists in the further

improvement of the institutions or programs as related to resources invested, processes followed, and results achieved. The monitoring of certificate, diploma, and degree offerings is tied closely to state examination and licensing rules and to the oversight of preparation for work in the profession.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the ACEN is to provide specialized accreditation for all levels of nursing education and transition-to-practice programs.

Nursing Education Accreditation:

The ACEN is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) as a specialized accrediting agency for nursing education programs located in the United States and its territories.

The ACEN is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) for nursing education programs in the United States and its territories as well as for international nursing education programs.

The ACEN accredits all types of nursing programs, including clinical doctorate/DNP specialist certificate, master's/post-master's certificate, baccalaureate, associate, diploma, and practical nursing programs.

The ACEN accredits nursing programs in a variety of postsecondary and higher education settings, including vocational-technical schools, hospitals, professional schools, community/technical colleges, and colleges/universities.

The ACEN serves as a Title IV-HEA Gatekeeper for some practical nursing programs and hospital-based programs eligible to participate in financial aid programs administered by the USDE or other federal agencies.

Transition-to-Practice Accreditation:

The ANCC Pathway to Excellence® and Magnet® programs have determined that the ACEN Transition-to-Practice accreditation is a nationally recognized accreditation per their guidelines.

The ACEN accredits non-credit transition-to-practice programs at all levels of nursing licensure.

The ACEN accredits non-credit transition-to-practice programs offered by academic institutions (e.g., university, college, career center) and/or healthcare agencies (e.g., hospitals, long-term care).

GOALS

As the leading authority in nursing accreditation, the goal of the ACEN is to be a supportive partner in strengthening the quality of nursing education and transition-to-practice programs through:

- Supporting nursing education and transition-to-practice programs in obtaining and maintaining accreditation
- Promoting peer review
- Advocating for self-regulation
- Fostering quality, equity, access, opportunity, mobility, and preparation for practice, or transition-to-practice, at all levels of nursing preparation
- Developing standards and criteria for accreditation

RECOGNITION

The ACEN is recognized as the accrediting body for all types of nursing education by:

- United States Department of Education (USDE)
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

National, regional, and specialized accreditors that oversee federal funding eligibility must be reviewed by the USDE to ensure that the accrediting body meets specific standards established by Congress. The Secretary of Education for the USDE is charged with review of accrediting bodies and providing recognition to those accrediting agencies that meet the Secretary of Education's criteria. Students in institutions or programs accredited by a USDE-recognized agency may be eligible for federal financial aid assistance and other needed resources.

CHEA is a national and international advocate for academic quality through accreditation. The ACEN is recognized by CHEA as a programmatic accreditor for all levels of nursing education in the United States and its territories, as well as internationally, and inclusive of those programs delivered via distance education.

BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION

ACEN accreditation is a voluntary peer-review process intended to enhance quality improvement in nursing education. Accreditation benefits students, faculty, and the community.

- Student benefits:
 - Provides useful information for students' career and education decision-making
 - Enables student eligibility for funding support from federal and state agencies, and foundations
 - Facilitates transfer of credits
 - Is required for admission to many undergraduate and graduate nursing programs, as well as by some state regulatory agencies or employers
 - May be required for licensure/certification
 - May be required by employer for employment as a nurse (e.g., U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Military)
- Faculty benefits:
 - Heightens faculty members' and administrators' awareness and responsiveness to program quality
 - Offers professional development opportunity and validation
- Community benefits:
 - Assists employers seeking graduates who are competent practitioners

PHILOSOPHY OF ACCREDITATION

The ACEN accreditation program is founded on the belief that specialized accreditation contributes to the centrality of nursing for the public good and provides for the maintenance and enhancement of educational quality through continuous self-assessment, planning, and improvement. Accreditation indicates to the public and to the educational community that a nursing program has clear and appropriate educational objectives and is working to achieve these objectives. Emphasis is placed upon the entire nursing program and its compliance with established standards and criteria in the context of its mission/philosophy as well as current and future nursing practice.

Accrediting agencies share responsibility with their communities of interest for the development of accreditation standards and criteria, policies, and procedures for participation in accreditation and review of accreditation processes. The ACEN supports the continuation and strengthening of voluntary specialized accreditation by peers as a principal means of public accountability and ongoing improvement. Specialized accreditation sets standards for programs and ensures, through the self-study process and accreditation review process, the promotion of effective education and program improvement.

Standards and criteria for accreditation, materials that document compliance, policies, and procedures are based on principles widely accepted and tested in general and professional education. All those involved in the process must be aware of current developments in education and nursing. They must also be aware of the effectiveness of the current standards, criteria, policies, procedures, and the evidence of need for change. A systematic ongoing review of all components of the accreditation process is essential to ensure an up-to-date, reliable, and valid accrediting process.

THE ACEN AND THE HISTORY OF NURSING ACCREDITATION

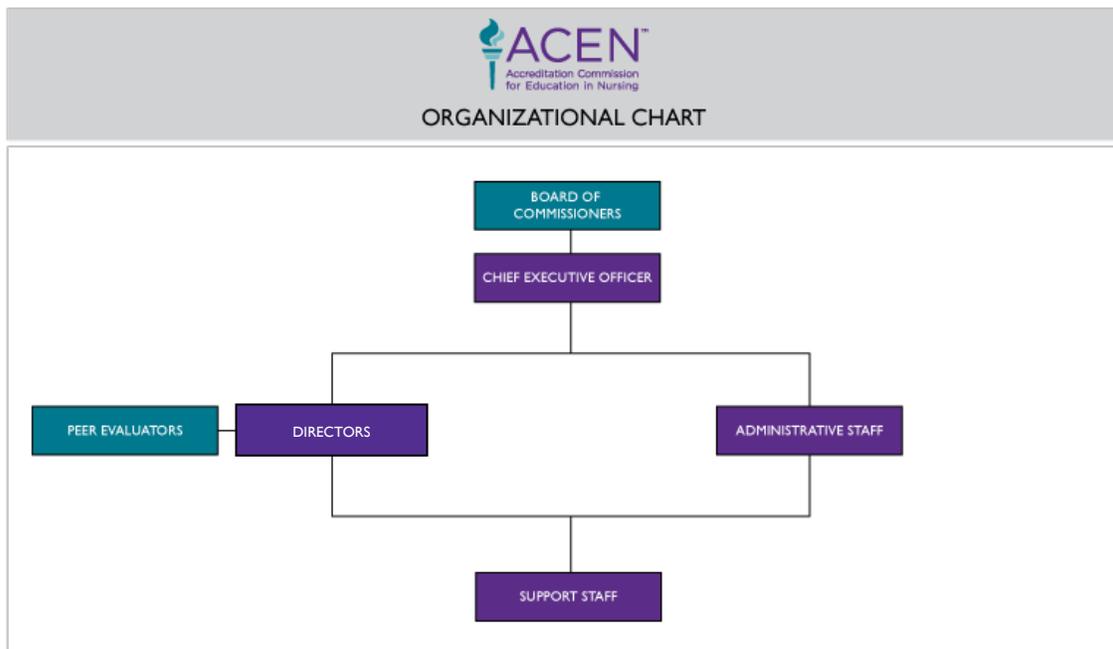
The ACEN has a long-standing history with nursing accreditation in the United States. It was the first nursing accrediting agency. Please see the ACEN website for additional information about the [history of the ACEN](#).

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Initial and continuing accreditation site visits, including domestic and international, of approximately 200-250 nursing programs per year
- Continuous monitoring of more than 1300 nursing education programs per year
- [ACEN Directory of Accredited Nursing Programs](#)
- [Continuing education and professional development:](#)
 - Forums
 - Workshops
 - Conferences
 - Webinars
- [Candidacy Mentoring Program](#)
- [Advisory Review Program](#)
- [Observer Program](#)
- [Mentoring by ACEN Directors](#)

- [ACEN Accreditation Manual](#)
 - General Information
 - Policies
 - ACEN Standards and Criteria/Glossary
 - International Supplement
- [Bridges and Signal Flame](#) (electronic newsletters)
- [Report to Constituents](#)
- ACEN website: www.acenursing.org

ACEN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



THE COMMISSION

OVERALL STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION

The ACEN is governed by a [17-member Board of Commissioners \(BOC\)](#). The Commissioners are elected by the representatives of ACEN-accredited nursing programs. The legal basis for the foundation and structure of the Commission is outlined in the [Bylaws](#) and the Articles of Incorporation. The ACEN is incorporated under the laws of the state of New York.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

- Eleven Commissioners are nurse educators representing ACEN-accredited programs, three Commissioners represent the public, and three Commissioners represent nursing service.

- Commissioners are diversified and ensure balanced representation from across identified constituencies insofar as possible.
- The BOC sets accreditation policy and makes accreditation, administrative, budget, and policy decisions.
- Decision of accreditation status is made by the Commissioners based on review of program materials including, but not limited to, the Self-Study Report/Focused Visit Report/Follow-Up Report, the Site Visit Report/Focused Site Visit Report/Follow-Up Visit Report from peer reviewers, the program's response to the site visit report, and the recommendation of the ERP.
- No current governor, current officer, or current or former employee of the NLN or its subsidiaries, or current employee of the ACEN, may serve as a Commissioner.

Names, credentials, and affiliations of [Commissioners](#) are available online.

ACEN STAFF

The ACEN staff maintain operational functions of the office and support the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the BOC, and nursing programs. Names and credentials of [staff](#) are available online.

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR ACADEMIC QUALITY OF POSTSECONDARY AND HIGHER DEGREE PROGRAMS IN NURSING



ACEN DEFINITION OF QUALITY

The core values of accreditation emphasize learning, community, responsibility, integrity, value, quality, and continuous improvement through reflection and analysis.

Peer review is a long-established and effective process that promotes institutions and academic programs embracing quality assurance and quality improvement to become stronger. The process also betters institutions and programs by setting standards of educational quality. It is used by the ACEN to help determine which programs meet or exceed established standards and criteria for educational quality in nursing education. The ACEN peer evaluators are familiar with contemporary practices in various program types and receive training from the ACEN to make informed recommendations about a program's compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria.

Quality in nursing education ensures high levels of opportunity for student learning and achievement. Accreditation is an affirmation of values central to postsecondary and higher education; this includes appropriate mission, organizational structures, processes, functions, resources aligned with core values, collegiality, and continuous improvement.

UNDERSTANDING ACEN STANDARDS AND CRITERIA IN THE EVALUATION OF NURSING EDUCATION UNITS

Each certificate, diploma, or degree has an identifiable, discrete set of specific end-of-program student learning outcomes and program outcomes. Postsecondary and higher education provide for the development of the learners' ability to think for themselves, master analytical problem-solving, apply scientific knowledge, and make value judgments within the context of the specific program type. Thus, education requires a broad academic orientation, depth and breadth of intellectual knowledge, and skills translated into competencies to fulfill the nursing's functions in all types of practice settings.

Standard – Agreed-upon expectations to measure quantity, extent, value, and educational quality.

Criteria – Statements that identify the elements that need to be examined in evaluation of a Standard.

The current version of the ACEN Standards and Criteria become effective on the date specified by the BOC. Programs scheduled for review within 12 months of the ACEN Standards and Criteria effective date may elect to use the current or former version of the ACEN Standards and Criteria.

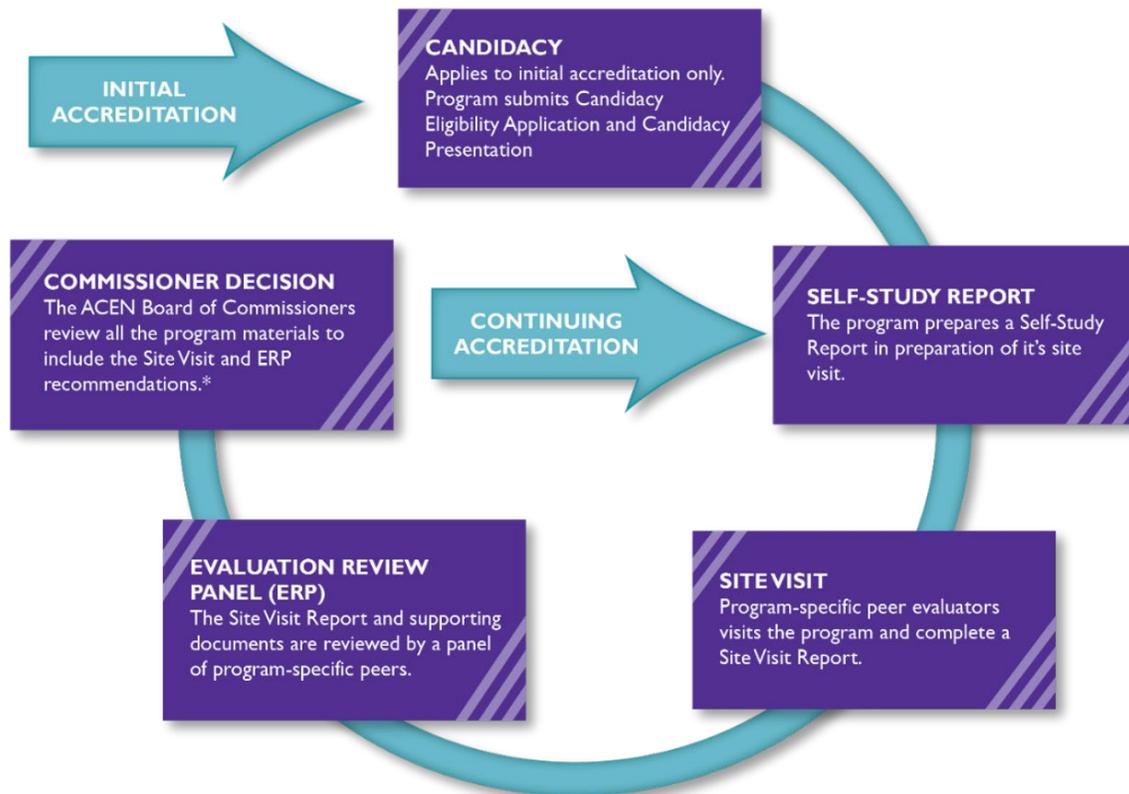
ACCREDITATION PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

ACCREDITATION CYCLES

The ACEN has two accreditation cycles annually: the *Fall Cycle: July 1 to December 31* and the *Spring Cycle: January 1 to June 30*. During each of the cycles there is about a 10-week period during which accreditation site visits are scheduled.

OVERVIEW OF THE INITIAL OR CONTINUING ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The ACEN accreditation process includes the following primary steps:



**An Appeal Committee may be convened only when initial or continuing accreditation is denied by the Board of Commissioners*

Programs seeking initial accreditation with the ACEN must start with the Candidacy process. The ACEN process for nursing programs seeking initial accreditation, after achieving Candidate status or continuing accreditation, is a comprehensive four-step process starting with the program’s self-reflection regarding its compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria as presented in its Self-Study Report. The second step is the site visit of the program resulting in the peer evaluators documenting their assessment and accreditation recommendation regarding the program’s compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria in the Site Visit Report. In the third step, a program-specific Evaluation Review Panel (ERP) examines the reports written by, and about, the program (Self-Study Report and Site Visit Report) and the program’s response to the site visit report. The panel then reaches their own independent judgement and accreditation recommendation regarding the program’s compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria. The final step is a review of the process by the ACEN BOC. While considering the peer evaluators’ judgement and accreditation recommendations, the Commissioners also reach their own independent judgement regarding the program’s compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria and make an accreditation decision.

PLANNING FOR INITIAL ACCREDITATION – CANDIDACY PROCESS

Nursing programs currently not accredited with the ACEN should contact the ACEN. Under the guidance of an ACEN Director, the nurse administrator, the program faculty, and administrative officers of the governing organization determine when the program is ready to apply for candidacy and the initial accreditation site visit. The decision should be based on an in-depth self-

study of the program in relation to the ACEN Standards and Criteria, ACEN policies, and required ACEN processes and timelines.

A nursing program seeking initial accreditation must apply for Candidacy. A nursing program offered by a single governing organization, or a nursing program offered by multiple governing organizations that have formed a consortium may be eligible for ACEN accreditation. If a consortium seeks accreditation, all governing organizations within the consortium must offer the same program type leading to an authorized degree or certificate/diploma.

1. All governing organizations within the consortium must meet approval and accreditation requirements as stated by the ACEN; see [Policy #3 Eligibility for Initial and Continuing Accreditation](#).
2. The consortial nursing program must meet approval requirements as stated by the ACEN; see [Policy #3 Eligibility for Initial and Continuing Accreditation](#).
3. The consortial nursing program must meet the ACEN definition for being a single nursing program; see [ACEN Glossary](#).

Candidate status is granted after the ACEN staff review the nursing program's Candidacy Presentation to determine the program's potential to achieve ACEN Accreditation. Programs applying for initial accreditation will be assigned an ACEN Director as their mentor once they have begun the Candidacy process. A program seeking accreditation must:

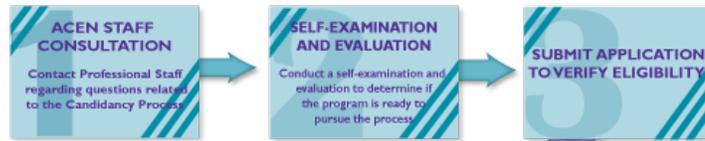
1. Complete the [Candidacy Eligibility Application](#). After eligibility has been confirmed, submit payment for the required fee. See [Schedule of Accreditation Fees for Domestic Programs](#) or the [Schedule of Accreditation Fees for International Programs](#).
2. After eligibility has been confirmed and within the designated timeframe, submit a [Candidacy Presentation](#) based upon the guidelines.

NOTE: The Candidacy process differs for international nursing programs. Information for international programs regarding the Candidacy process is available in the [Supplement of International Programs](#).

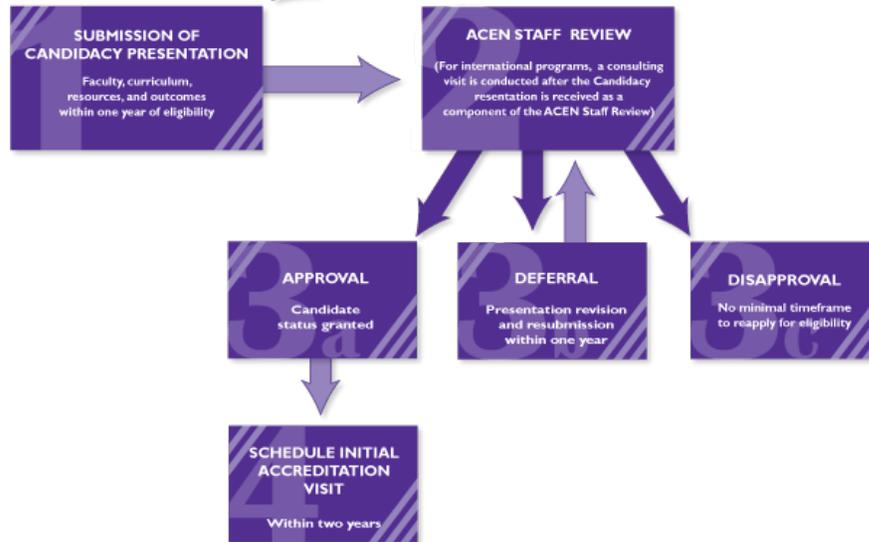
The Candidacy Presentation is reviewed by the ACEN staff. Applicants are notified if they are approved for Candidacy, are deferred, or are disapproved. Approval for Candidacy is granted when the nursing program (a) demonstrates it is currently compliant with the requirements of the Candidacy Presentation and Candidacy process or (b) demonstrates an ability to be compliant with the requirements during the Candidacy period. A program may also be deferred or disapproved. See [Policy #34 Candidacy for Governing Organization/Nursing Program Seeking Initial Accreditation](#).

An overview of the **Candidacy process**:

Eligibility Process



Candidacy Process



Programs that achieve Candidate status must publicly disclose its Candidate status. See [Policy #34 Candidacy for Governing Organization/Nursing Program Seeking Initial Accreditation](#).

If a program's Candidacy expires prior to scheduling an initial accreditation site visit, then the program must restart the candidacy process to renew its candidate status. The Candidacy process can be restarted at any time after either being disapproved, withdrawn, or when the program's Candidacy has expired.

Each governing organization/nursing program making a Candidacy Presentation to the ACEN or having already been granted Candidacy agrees to certain requirements concerning financial obligation, choice of law, jurisdiction, and venue. See [Policy #28 Litigation](#) and [Policy #38 Arbitration](#).

Programs approved for Candidacy by the ACEN must notify the ACEN of changes that occur in the program during the entire Candidacy process; eligibility for both Candidacy and Candidate status are based upon the information provided in the [Candidacy Eligibility Application](#) or the Candidacy Presentation. Changes that occur can affect the program's eligibility to pursue and/or achieve initial accreditation. See ACEN [Policy #34 Candidacy for Governing Organization/Nursing Program Seeking Initial Accreditation](#), and [Policy #3 Eligibility for Initial or Continuing Accreditation](#).

INITIAL ACCREDITATION

Once Candidacy status has been achieved, the CEO of the governing organization and the nurse administrator must authorize the scheduling/hosting of the initial accreditation site visit using the [Site Visit Request Form](#).

A nursing program may discontinue the initial accreditation process at any time. A program seeking initial accreditation can also withdraw from the process at any point prior to being reviewed by the BOC.

NOTE:

Upon granting of initial accreditation by the ACEN BOC, the effective date of initial accreditation is the date on which the nursing program was approved by the ACEN as a Candidate program that concluded in the BOC granting initial accreditation. **Accreditation is not retroactive for students who graduated prior to the program achieving a Candidate status with the ACEN. See [ACEN Policy #34](#).**

In order for the ACEN to properly discharge its responsibilities to the USDE pursuant to 34 CFR Section 602.28 and per [Policy #3 Eligibility for Initial or Continuing Accreditation](#), an applicant for candidacy must disclose and certify that neither the governing organization nor the nursing program is the subject of certain circumstances.

The program will be required to disclose and certify this information at the time that the *Official Authorization for Candidacy Process Form* is signed and again when the program applies for the initial accreditation site visit. Information submitted by the program will be kept confidential and will only be utilized by the ACEN in its report to the USDE as required. The information provided by the governing organization/nursing program will not be utilized in determining the program's candidacy or its initial accreditation with the ACEN. The achievement of a Candidate status as well as achieving initial accreditation will be based upon the program's ability to demonstrate compliance with the current ACEN Standards and Criteria.

CONTINUING ACCREDITATION

Planning for continuing accreditation is an ongoing process. A program must be visited and re-evaluated at specified intervals to ensure continuing compliance with the ACEN Standards and Criteria. The ACEN staff will notify the program of a pending visit in advance and when dates for the continuing accreditation site visit are scheduled in consultation with the nurse administrator, as the program must be in full operation during the visit.

Official authorization to conduct the ACEN accreditation process is submitted by the nurse administrator for the nursing program. The [Site Visit Request Form](#) is available on the ACEN website for the program to complete approximately 12-18 months before the visit is to take place.

If an ACEN-accredited program seeks to delay, advance, or reschedule a visit, refer to [Policy #6 Delay/Advancement of Continuing Accreditation Visit](#). If an ACEN-accredited program seeks to voluntarily withdraw from ACEN accreditation, refer to [Policy #7 Voluntary Withdrawal from ACEN Accreditation](#).

Focused Visit Reports and Follow-Up Reports

A Focused Visit Report is authorized by the ACEN BOC to review significant accreditation-related information disclosed about a program as a result of a:

- Substantive change;
- Information revealed about a program between periods of scheduled review;
- Information received from the governing organization's accrediting body related to an adverse action;
- Information received from the program's state regulatory agency for nursing related to a change in its status;
- Information revealed by a program during the ERP process;
- Information received from the USDE regarding a program's compliance responsibilities under Title IV of the Higher Education Act such as information related to a program's most recent student loan default rates, the results of financial or compliance audits, program reviews, and any other information that may be provided by the USDE.

A Follow-up Report is a report prepared by a program addressing the Standard(s) for which the nursing program was found to be in non-compliance during the program's previous review by the ACEN BOC.

ASSISTANCE FOR INITIAL OR CONTINUING EDUCATION

The ACEN Directors are available to assist programs preparing for an initial or continuing accreditation site visit. The ACEN website also provides a wide variety of online resources for programs, including, but not limited to, the *ACEN Accreditation Manual*, the *ACEN Glossary*; the Site Visit Request form, and the ACEN 2023 Guidelines. These guidelines provide details regarding preparation of the Self-Study Report and for the site visit. Additionally, if applicable, the guidelines also include details regarding preparation of a Follow-Up Report and a Follow-Up Visit. The guidelines will also include details on reporting Substantive Changes and, if applicable, preparation of the Focused Visit Report.

Continuing education is offered to provide program faculty and leaders information about the accreditation processes and details regarding the preparation of the Self-Study Report. All programs seeking initial and continuing accreditation are encouraged to participate in these offerings. See the [ACEN website](#) for additional information.

[Advisory Review](#) is an opportunity for an ACEN-accredited program to receive feedback from an assigned ACEN Director regarding ACEN Accreditation. Reviews may include, but are not limited to, a review of the accreditation process, assistance with curriculum, assistance with assessment processes, and a review of draft program documents in preparation for a continuing accreditation site visit. Examples of documents that a Director could provide feedback include a portion(s) of the Self-Study Report, faculty profile table, or systematic plan of evaluation. This is an optional resource for currently accredited programs and is not a requirement for continuing accreditation. Director feedback indicates the staff member's best judgment but does not guarantee that the BOC will determine that the program complies with the ACEN Standards and Criteria. An Advisory Review may be conducted by videoconference or in-person review. Additional information about an [Advisory Review](#) is accessible on the ACEN website, including the fee for this optional service.

[Observer Experience](#) provides a nursing program with the opportunity to send a program representative on an accreditation site visit as an observer. This typically occurs 12 months to 18 months prior to the program's upcoming accreditation site visit. The Observer Experience enables the program representative to observe every component of the site visit process, including orientation as a peer evaluator and team preparation prior to the site visit. A nursing program submits a request to have an observer on an upcoming visit to a nursing program who has consented to have an observer. The governing organization for the observer is responsible for all costs of the observer in this experience. See ACEN [Policy #32 Observer on Site Visit Team](#) as well as the website for additional information regarding [being an observer on a site visit team](#).

SELF-REVIEW AND SELF-STUDY REPORT

Any program preparing for initial or continuing accreditation must submit a Self-Study Report to demonstrate the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria. The Self-Study Report and supporting evidence must be uploaded into the ACEN repository no later than six weeks prior to the date of the initial or continuing accreditation site visit.

The process of self-study represents the combined efforts of the governing organization administrators, nursing program administrators, faculty, staff, students, and other individuals concerned with the nursing program(s). All those associated with the program(s) should participate in the self-study process. Broad participation leads to an understanding of the total program.

The Self-Study Report is a primary document used by the peer evaluators visiting the program, the peer evaluators on the ERP and the BOC to understand the nursing program.

- The report must be based on the ACEN Standards and Criteria in effect at the time of review and the most recent edition of the ACEN Accreditation Manual.
- Faculty and administrators are responsible for presenting narrative and evidence that clearly demonstrate the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria. Peer evaluators visiting the program will use the Self-Study Report in preparation for their visit to the program.

The [2023 ACEN Guidelines](#) are available to assist programs in preparing for an upcoming initial or continuing accreditation site visit.

THE INITIAL OR CONTINUING ACCREDITATION SITE VISIT

The purpose of the initial or continuing accreditation site visit is to determine the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria by clarifying, verifying, and amplifying the information (narrative/evidence) presented in the Self-Study Report. Based on findings, the peer evaluators visiting the program will make a recommendation relative to the accreditation status of the nursing program(s).

Onsite review of the program by peer evaluators is an essential part of the accreditation process. It provides the program an opportunity to demonstrate and highlight information presented in its Self-Study Report and provides for interaction among peer evaluators and stakeholders: administrators, faculty, students, staff, and the public. In addition, the initial or continuing accreditation site visit provides peer evaluators an opportunity to see the nursing program first-hand. The peer evaluators conduct an independent analysis and make professional judgments on the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria; their judgments and

accreditation recommendation are documented in the Site Visit Report. These peer evaluators verify congruence between the Self-Study Report and the actual practices of the program so that the peer evaluators on the ERP and BOC have a clear and complete understanding of the program.

Multiple Nursing Programs Within a Nursing Education Unit

The ACEN encourages [single nursing education units](#) offering more than one type of nursing program (clinical doctorate/DNP specialist certificate, master's/post-master's certificate, baccalaureate, associate, diploma, and/or practical) to request that all programs be reviewed for continuing or initial accreditation at the same time. The nursing education unit will prepare one Self-Study Report for all the programs and host one site visit for all the programs.

Focused Visits and Follow-Up Visits

A focused site visit may be authorized by the ACEN BOC to review significant accreditation-related information disclosed about a program.

A follow-up site visit may be authorized by the ACEN BOC to review significant accreditation-related information for which the nursing program was found to be in non-compliance during the program's previous review by the ACEN BOC.

Coordinated and Combined Site Visits

Coordinated Visit

Coordinated visits typically occur in conjunction with an initial or continuing accreditation visit or sometimes with a follow-up visit to cooperate with other accreditation and/or approval granting agencies. For example, an initial accreditation visit may be coordinated with a state board of nursing. The ACEN welcomes the opportunity to cooperate with other accreditation and approval-granting agencies (e.g., state regulatory agency for nursing). The goal is to increase efficiency and decrease faculty workload while maximizing outcomes. To arrange a coordinated visit, the nurse administrator initiates the process by submitting a request to the ACEN. The ACEN staff then work with the institutional/program administrators and faculty members to achieve their goal.

For a coordinated site visit, the program prepares materials separately for each agency team. The two teams share an agenda and conduct a site visit that meets each agency's requirements. However, the representative from another agency is not a member of the ACEN site visit team. The ACEN peer evaluators and the other representative may participate jointly in activities such as conferences with faculty, students, and other groups. Many of the activities of the ACEN peer evaluators and the representative will be carried out separately as the purposes of ACEN accreditation may differ from those of other accrediting/approval-granting bodies. At the conclusion of the site visit, each agency writes a report that documents the extent to which the program meets the agency's respective standards and criteria or regulations.

Combined Visit

Follow-Up and focused visits typically occur independently; however, it is possible that a follow-up or focused visit could be combined with a regular continuing site visit. For example:

- A continuing accreditation visit is combined with a follow-up visit
- A continuing accreditation visit is combined with a focused visit

The goal of combining visits is to increase efficiency and decrease faculty workload. The faculty will prepare a Self-Study Report that addresses all Standards and Criteria for the continuing

accreditation visit with an additional emphasis on the non-compliant Standard(s) for the follow-up or the type of substantive change necessitating the focused visit.

Length of the Initial or Continuing Accreditation Site Visit

The initial or continuing accreditation site visit is typically scheduled for a minimum of three days. However, the length depends on several factors, including size and complexity of the nursing program, the number of nursing program types involved, and the locations of the program(s). Correspondence from the ACEN will indicate the inclusive dates of the visit.

Assignment of Peer Evaluators on a Site Visit Team

Each initial or continuing accreditation site visit is conducted by a team of peers representing nurse educators, nurse clinicians and/or administrators with program-specific expertise. The site visit team reviewing a single program typically has three peer evaluators as the team members. Graduate programs offering advanced practice nursing options will have at least one team member with a current advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) background.

The ACEN staff will appoint the team of peer evaluators and notify the nurse administrator in advance of the visit. The nurse administrator should contact the ACEN staff in writing if a possible conflict of interest is identified with a peer evaluator. If a peer evaluator becomes ineligible or is unable to serve, another peer evaluator with comparable qualifications will be appointed.

When creating site visit teams, the ACEN staff takes into consideration assigning peer evaluators with backgrounds that are as similar as reasonably possible to the program being visited, including, but not limited to:

- Program type(s)
- Size of program(s) and governing organization
- State/Country
- Characteristics of the governing organization (public, private, religious affiliation, etc.)

Responsibilities of the Team Chairperson

A peer evaluator is eligible to be a team chairperson for an initial or continuing accreditation site visit after serving on a minimum of three teams as a peer evaluator. Eligible peer evaluators are required to complete additional training prior to chairing a visit. Team chairs assume the usual responsibilities of a team member; however, additional responsibilities include being the team spokesperson, coordinating/planning of the visit in collaboration with the nurse administrator and team members, facilitating meetings and interviews during the visit, and requesting of additional information as appropriate. The team chair is also responsible for the collating and final editing of the team's site visit report to ensure completeness and clarity, and submission of the report within one week following the site visit. The team chair must also provide any report clarifications identified by the ACEN staff after submission and may receive requests for further clarifications prior to the ERP meetings.

Responsibilities of the Team Members

Eligible peer evaluators are required to complete site visitor training prior to participating on a site visit. Team member responsibilities include reviewing program materials in the ACEN Repository, preparing a draft copy of the Site Visit Report/Follow-Up Visit Report/Focused Site Visit Report findings for assigned areas, submitting the draft to the team chair one week prior to the site visit, and making a list of findings from the Self-Study Report/Follow-Up Report that require additional verification, clarification, and/or amplification at the time of the site visit. Team

members also collaborate with the team chair and other team members in completing the meetings, interviews, and observations identified on the site visit agenda, and revises the final version of the draft report to submit to the team chair. Team members must also provide any report clarifications identified by the ACEN staff after submission and may receive requests for further clarifications prior to the ERP meetings.

Responsibilities of the Nursing Program

Programs have specific responsibilities before, during, and after the site visit including, but not limited to, providing laptop computers for the team members, if requested by the team, to use throughout the site visit. Also, if needed, access to printing minimally at the campus. The program will need to identify a workroom where the team members can work during the site visit. The program must prepare to upload the report and supporting evidence into the ACEN repository by the due date (six weeks prior to the visit), and any additional evidence requested by peer evaluators. Programs must also ensure that peer evaluators have access to confidential materials and obtaining any necessary written permissions required prior to the site visit (e.g., review of records and visits to clinical agencies). Programs for which all, or part, of the curriculum is delivered in a language other than English should make provisions for an interpreter to be present throughout the initial or continuing accreditation site visit and to make certain that **all program documents are available in English** for review by the peer evaluators. Additional specifics about preparing for the site visit will be communicated to the nurse administrator prior to the visit by the ACEN staff and resources will also be available in the [ACEN Repository](#).

Travel Arrangements

See [Travel Policy](#) for site visit arrangements for domestic programs and the [Supplement for International Programs](#) for site visit arrangements specific to international programs.

Agenda for the Initial or Continuing Accreditation Site Visit

At least six weeks prior to the scheduled initial or continuing accreditation site visit, a tentative agenda for the site visit is prepared by the nurse administrator and sent to the team. See the [ACEN 2023 Guidelines](#) for a list of required agenda items and a sample agenda for a site visit. The ACEN 2023 Guidelines also include information such as visiting [Off-Campus Instructional Sites](#) and the use of [Distance Education](#). For programs that use Distance Education, access to the courses should be provided with the Self-Study Report at least six weeks prior to the initial or continuing accreditation visit and continue throughout the visit.

THE SITE VISIT REPORT

The site visit team chair is responsible for presenting an accurate, complete, and well-organized Site Visit Report/Follow-Up Visit Report/Focused Site Visit Report to the ACEN within one week after the conclusion of the site visit. Team members review the final report prior to submission to the ACEN.

ACEN Staff Review

All Site Visit Reports/Follow-Up Visit Reports/Focused Site Visit Reports are reviewed by the ACEN staff. If questions arise, the site visit team is contacted for clarification.

A draft copy of the Site Visit Report/Follow-Up Visit Report/Focused Site Visit Report is emailed to the nurse administrator of the nursing program/nursing education unit approximately 6-8 weeks after the conclusion of the visit. The program faculty will have an opportunity to submit a

response to the findings including any errors of fact, additional information, or changes since the time of the site visit. The program's report, the Site Visit Report, and the program's response will be reviewed by the Evaluation Review Panel. The ERP also makes a recommendation about the program's compliance with the Standards and Criteria to the BOC. The onsite peer evaluators and ERP's recommendations regarding compliance with the Accreditation Standards, along with the program's report and Site Visit Report, are forwarded to the BOC for review and action. Decision options for the BOC are based on ACEN Policy #4. The dates for the ERP and BOC meetings are available on the ACEN website.

EVALUATION REVIEW PANEL

Peer evaluators who have completed three visits as a team member are eligible to become an ERP member. Eligible peer evaluators are required to complete training prior to participating in ERP. The ERP panels are composed of nurse educators, clinicians, and administrators. The role of the ERP is to continue the peer review process, conduct its own independent analysis on the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria, make an accreditation recommendation, and to ensure the consistent application of the ACEN Standards and Criteria. The Panel reviews the findings as presented in the Site Visit Report/Follow-Up Visit Report/Focused Site Visit Report compared to the Self-Study Report/Follow-Up Report/Focused Visit Report of the program(s) and the program's response. The Panel then makes its recommendation for accreditation status to the BOC. The ERP member(s) may request for additional information/clarification during their review of the materials.

The ERP also validates the work of the peer evaluators that visited the program and extends it by noting points of agreement and raising any questions where there is disagreement or a lack of clarity exists. The aim is to provide consistency in the findings for the program type. The ERP's findings and recommendation are provided to the BOC.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

The BOC has the sole authority to determine the accreditation status of programs. Composed of nurse educators, nursing clinicians/practitioners, administrators, and public members, the BOC bases its decisions on its own independent analysis and professional judgment on the extent to which the program meets the ACEN Standards and Criteria. The BOC also considers the previous peer evaluators' judgement and recommendations, as well as the consistent application of the ACEN Standards and Criteria within and across all program types. The entire BOC makes the accreditation decision at a regularly scheduled spring and fall meeting (typically in April and September). The decision is based on the program's report, the Site Visit Report, the program's response, and the ERP findings and recommendation. In cases where accreditation is denied, programs have the opportunity to present their case in an impartial hearing before an independent Appeal Committee per [Policy #10 Appeal Process and Submission and Review of New Financial Information Subsequent to Adverse Action](#).

To assist the nursing program in future planning, the nurse administrator receives a copy of the BOC's decision letter.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR SERVING AS A PEER EVALUATOR

Peer evaluators participate as site visitors (team members and team chairs) and ERP members who make recommendations to the BOC. Peer evaluators are knowledgeable about common, contemporary, and best practices within the various program types, appropriate curricula, and conventions as well as current trends in healthcare, nursing education, and/or nursing practice.

Eligibility to serve as an ACEN peer evaluator is dependent on requirements located in ACEN [Policy #1 Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest](#) and ACEN [Policy #2 Representation on the Site Visit Teams, Evaluation Review Panels, and Board of Commissioners](#). Additionally, educational and experiential requirements for becoming a Peer Evaluator are located on the [ACEN website](#).

Appeal Committee Members

Selection

Members of the Appeal Committee must have knowledge of and experience with the peer-review process.

Appointment

The Appeal Committee consists of individuals selected from a BOC-approved list of the individuals qualified to serve as members of the Appeal Committee. See [Policy #10 Appeal Process and Submission and Review of New Financial Information Subsequent to Adverse Action](#). A list of the individuals who have been appointed to the [Appeal Committee](#) is accessible on the ACEN website.

Arbitrators

Selection

The ACEN shall maintain a roster of arbitrators.

Appointment and Preparation

A list of the individuals who are [Arbitrators](#) is accessible on the ACEN website. See [Policy #38 Arbitration](#).