



PSC **Postsecondary Commission**

Accreditation Standards Fall 2023



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Postsecondary Commission: Accreditation Standards

Introduction

About the PSC Accreditation Standards

This document describes the Postsecondary Commission's ("PSC") Standards. These standards apply to institutions seeking pre-accreditation, initial accreditation, and renewal of accreditation.

These standards apply equally to all courses and programs offered by an institution and accredited by PSC, including those offered via distance education.

Scope of Accreditation

PSC accredits and pre-accredits postsecondary educational institutions based in the United States that grant degrees and/or certificates up to and including the baccalaureate level and that have as part of their mission a commitment to generate strong economic returns for their students, including institutions that offer programs via distance education.

Standards Area 1: Mission

Standard 1.1: Mission Statement

The institution has a mission statement that describes its purposes, including its educational purposes. The mission statement includes a commitment by the institution to produce strong economic returns for students. The mission statement is approved and periodically reviewed by the institution's governing board(s) and is widely communicated to relevant stakeholders.

Standards Area 2: Value-added Earnings Outcomes

Standard 2.1: Measurement of Value-added Earnings Outcomes

The institution cooperates with PSC in defining and measuring value-added earnings outcomes as follows:



- a) **Forecasting Counterfactual Earnings Outcomes.** For each cohort of entering students for which the institution sets goals for value-added earnings outcomes, per Standard 2.2 below, PSC (with the cooperation of the institution) makes a forecast of the earnings of each student in the cohort in each of the 10 years following the student's entry, in a counterfactual future in which the student does not enroll in the institution and does not pursue further postsecondary education elsewhere.

For accuracy, this counterfactual forecast takes into consideration various demographic characteristics of the student that help predict the student's earnings in a hypothetical future in which the student does not enroll in the institution and does not pursue further postsecondary education elsewhere.

- b) **Observing Actual Earnings Outcomes.** For each cohort of entering students for which the institution sets goals for value-added earnings outcomes, per Standard 2.2 below, PSC (with the cooperation of the institution and, as necessary, with the cooperation of state and federal agencies and other reliable sources of wage data) obtains, verifies, and maintains records of the actual earnings of each student in the cohort in each of the 10 years following entry.
- c) **Calculating Value-added Earnings Outcomes.** For each cohort of entering students for which the institution sets goals for value-added earnings outcomes, per Standard 2.2 below, PSC (with the cooperation of the institution) calculates the value-added earnings of each student in the cohort, in each of the 10 years following entry, as the difference between the student's forecasted counterfactual earnings in that year (per Standard 2.1(a) above) and the student's actual earnings in that year (per Standard 2.1(b) above).

Standard 2.2: Goal Setting for Value-added Earnings Outcomes

The institution sets goals for value-added earnings outcomes for cohorts of entering students, as defined by the institution.

These cohorts include, at a minimum, institution-wide cohorts of entering students and program-specific cohorts of entering students.

Institution-wide cohorts are groups of entering students who enroll in the same academic year (or, if the institution deems it more



appropriate, in the same semester, trimester, month, or other enrollment period typical for the institution).

Program-specific cohorts are groups of entering students who enroll in the same academic year (or, if the institution deems it more appropriate, in the same semester, trimester, month, or other enrollment period typical for the institution) and who enroll in the same degree or certificate program accredited by PSC.

Standard 2.3: Minimum Required Value-added Earnings Outcomes

The institution meets the following minimum required value-added earnings outcomes standard:

- a) In all institution-wide cohorts of entering students and in 80% of program-specific cohorts of entering students for which the institution sets goals for value-added earnings outcomes, per Standard 2.2 above,
- b) in at least two of the three years that occur 4, 5 and 6 years following the cohort's entry if the cohort is composed primarily of students seeking degrees or certificates that are 2 years or shorter in duration or in at least two of the three years that occur 6, 7, and 8 years following the cohort's entry if the cohort is composed primarily of students seeking degrees or certificates that are longer than 2 years in duration,
- c) at least 50% of students in each cohort have value-added earnings (per standard 2.1(c) above) that are greater than 10% of their individual total net costs of attendance.

Standard 2.4: Goal Setting and Measurement for Intermediate Outcomes that Predict Value-added Earnings Outcomes

For each cohort of entering students for which the institution sets goals for value-added earnings outcomes, per Standard 2.2 above, the institution also sets goals for and measures various intermediate student outcomes that help predict the cohort's eventual value-added earnings outcomes, including at minimum:

- Graduation rates for entrants
- Year-to-year retention rates for entrants



- Earnings outcomes for graduates in the first two years following graduation
- Pass rates on licensure and certification exams for graduates if those exams are relevant to short-term employment outcomes
- Net cost of attendance for entrants

Standards Area 3: Student Learning Objectives

Standard 3.1: Goal Setting for Student Learning Objectives

In each of its courses and programs, the institution sets objectives for student learning, including, at a minimum, goals for skill acquisition and knowledge mastery by students.

Standard 3.2: Alignment of Student Learning Objectives

The objectives for student learning that the institution sets for each of its courses and programs are derived from, and aligned with, the institution's goals for value-added earnings outcomes.

Standards Area 4: Assessment of Student Learning Objectives

Standard 4.1: Assessment of Student Learning Objectives

In each of its courses and programs, the institution has a process for assessing whether students meet the objectives that the institution sets for student learning.

Standard 4.2: Oversight of Assessment of Student Learning Objectives

The institution's process for assessing student learning objectives is designed and administered by relevant faculty, instructional staff, or administrators.

Standard 4.3: Assessment Types

The institution's process for assessing student learning objectives relies on assessments – including, depending on circumstance, summative, formative, exam-based, project-based, performance-based, portfolio-



based, or oral assessments – which are appropriate to the course, program, students, and learning objectives being assessed.

Standard 4.4: Satisfactory Academic Progress

The institution maintains a satisfactory academic progress policy that complies with Federal Student Assistance Title IV program requirements. The institution discloses this policy to students.

Standards Area 5: Curriculum Design

Standard 5.1: Alignment of Curriculum

In each of its courses and programs, the institution's curriculum is derived from, and aligned with, the institution's student learning objectives.

Standard 5.2: Oversight of Curriculum

In each of its courses and programs, the institution's curriculum is developed, periodically reviewed, and revised as needed by relevant faculty, instructional staff, or administrators.

Standard 5.3: Program Length, Credit Hours, and Clock Hours

The institution sets program lengths that are appropriate to, and consistent with, the student learning objectives of each of its programs. The institution defines its chosen academic unit of measurement, either clock hours or credit hours. The institution properly and clearly assigns academic units of measurement to each of its courses and programs.

Standard 5.4: Regular and Substantive Interaction

When a course or program is delivered via distance education, the institution has clear policies and practices that ensure and document regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty.

Standards Area 6: Faculty and Instructional Staff

Standard 6.1: Number of Faculty and Instructional Staff



In each of its courses and programs, the institution employs faculty and instructional staff who are sufficient in number for the institution to meet its student learning objectives.

Standard 6.2: Qualifications of Faculty and Instructional Staff

In each of its courses and programs, the institution employs faculty and instructional staff who have relevant and appropriate qualifications, including relevant and appropriate educational degrees, professional licenses and credentials, or practical experience.

Standards Area 7: Teaching Standards and Professional Development

Standard 7.1: Standards for Teaching Excellence

The institution has clear standards for teaching excellence which are set by relevant faculty, instructional staff, or administrators.

Standard 7.2: Professional Development for Faculty and Instructional Staff

For faculty and instructional staff, the institution has a professional development process which is informed by the institution's standards for teaching excellence and by assessment data on student learning. The process involves observation of, feedback to, and evaluation of faculty and instructional staff.

Standards Area 8: Advertising, Recruitment, and Admissions

Standard 8.1: Advertising, Recruitment, and Admissions Practices

The institution makes accurate and good-faith representations in its advertising, recruitment, and admissions practices.

Standard 8.2: Admissions Policy

The school sets and discloses a clearly defined admissions policy. It admits and rejects students based on that policy.

Standard 8.3: Qualifications of Recruitment and Admissions Staff



The institution's recruitment and admissions personnel are trained and qualified to engage in their designated activities.

Standard 8.4: Non-use of Certain Financial Incentives

The institution abides by the U.S. Department of Education's published regulations regarding incentive compensation for those involved in the recruitment and admission of students.

Standard 8.5: Transfer Credit and Credit for Prior Learning

The institution has clearly articulated and publicly disclosed policies for evaluating and accepting transfer credit from other institutions and for awarding credit for prior learning.

Standard 8.6: Verification of Student Identity

When a program or course is delivered via distance education, the institution has a policy for verifying that a student who registers for a course or program is the same as the student who engages in, and receives credit for, the course or program.

Standards Area 9: Student Services

Standard 9.1: Alignment of Student Services

The institution's portfolio of student services – including its chosen approach to academic tutoring, academic advising, career and job placement services, mental health services, and financial aid planning – is derived from, and aligned with, the institution's objectives for student learning and its goals for value-added earnings outcomes.

Standard 9.2: Adequacy of Student Services

The institution's portfolio of student services – including its chosen approach to academic tutoring, academic advising, career and job placement services, mental health services, and financial aid planning – is sufficient for the institution to meet its objectives for student learning and its goals for value-added earnings outcomes.

Standard 9.3: Access to Student Services



The institution's portfolio of student services – including its chosen approach to academic tutoring, academic advising, career and job placement services, mental health services, and financial aid planning – is appropriately available to all students, including part-time students, commuter students, and students who study via distance education.

Standard 9.4: Student Complaints

The institution maintains and publicizes clear policies for receiving, considering, and addressing in a timely manner student complaints. The institution's policies are applied consistently and fairly. The institution maintains records of written complaints and makes them available to PSC as requested.

Standard 9.5: Student Privacy

The institution maintains and adheres to clear policies to protect student privacy.

Standards Area 10: Administration

Standard 10.1: Number of Administrators

The institution employs administrators who are sufficient in number for the institution to achieve its mission and meet its objectives for student learning and its goals for value-added earnings outcomes.

Standard 10.2: Qualifications of Administrators

The institution employs administrators who have qualifications that are relevant and appropriate to their assigned roles and responsibilities, including relevant and appropriate educational degrees, professional licenses and credentials, or practical experience.

Standard 10.3: Standards for Administrative Excellence

The institution has clear standards for administrative excellence which are set by relevant faculty, instructional staff, or administrators.

Standard 10.4: Professional Development for Administrators



For administrators, the institution has a professional development process which is informed by the institution's standards for administrative excellence. The process involves observation of, feedback to, and evaluation of administrators.

Standard 10.5: Head Administrator

The institution employs an individual who carries the title of President, Chief Executive Officer, Chancellor, or a similar title which indicates the individual's status as the head administrator. This individual reports to the institution's governing board(s) and is responsible for the success of the institution.

Standards Area 11: Governance

Standard 11.1: Qualifications of Members of Governing Board(s)

The institution's governing board(s) is composed of members who have qualifications that are relevant and appropriate to their assigned roles and responsibilities, including relevant and appropriate educational degrees, professional licenses and credentials, or practical experience.

Standard 11.2: Conduct of Members of Governing Board(s)

Members of the institution's governing board(s) are responsible, at a minimum, for setting and approving the institution's mission, for hiring and evaluating the institution's head administrator, and for ensuring that the institution meets its objectives for student learning and its goals for value-added earnings outcomes.

Standards Area 12: Financial Resources and Planning

Standard 12.1: Adequacy of Financial Resources

The institution has financial resources which are sufficient for the institution to meet its objectives for student learning and its goals for value-added earnings outcomes.

Standard 12.2: Comprehensive Financial Planning

The institution's head administrator, in collaboration with relevant administrators, faculty and instructional staff, prepares and regularly



revises comprehensive financial plans for the institution. These plans are approved by the institution's governing board(s).

Standard 12.3: Audited Financial Statements

The institution's financial statements are audited by certified, independent auditors.

Standards Area 13: Facilities and Other Physical Assets

Standard 13.1: Alignment of Facilities, Technology, Equipment, and Supplies

The institution's portfolio of physical assets – including its facilities, technology, equipment, and supplies – is derived from, and aligned with, the institution's objectives for student learning.

Standard 13.2: Adequacy of Facilities, Technology, Equipment, and Supplies

The institution's portfolio of physical assets – including its facilities, technology, equipment, and supplies – is sufficient for the institution to meet its objectives for student learning.

Standards Area 14: Information Disclosure

Standard 14.1: Required Information for Students and the Public

To existing and prospective students and to the public, the institution makes available, to the extent reasonably feasible, information that can help students and the public understand and evaluate the design of the institution, the viability of the institution, and the institution's value-added earnings outcomes.

At minimum, and within the constraints of privacy laws and policies, the institution discloses annually, accurately, and in good-faith information on:

- The institution's mission and purpose(s)
- The institution's student outcomes, including at a minimum:
 - Value-added earnings outcomes for institution-wide and program-specific cohorts as defined in Standard 2.2



- Graduation rates for entrants
 - Year-to-year retention rates for entrants
 - Earnings outcomes for graduates in the first two years following graduation
 - Pass rates on licensure and certification exams for graduates if those exams are relevant to short-term employment outcomes
 - Net cost of attendance and total cost of attendance for entrants
- Admissions requirements for the institution and programs
 - Academic calendar(s) for, at minimum, the current academic year and the following academic year
 - Academic requirements and graduation requirements for all programs
 - Catalog of current programs and courses
 - Names and academic credentials of faculty, instructional staff, and administrators
 - Summary of the institution's current accreditation status with PSC and any other accrediting agency, including the disclosure of any adverse decision or sanction that the institution has received from any accrediting agency
 - A list of states in which the institution is authorized to provide instruction or award degrees or certificates
 - Any adverse decision or sanction that the institution has received from any state education agency
 - Policies related to:
 - Student conduct
 - Financial aid
 - Tuition refunds
 - Enrollment withdrawal
 - Transfer credit
 - Credit for prior learning
 - Student complaints



Standard 14.2: Methods for Information Disclosure

The institution discloses the information described in Standard 14.1 to existing and prospective students and to the public in formats and channels that allow these stakeholders to easily access and understand the information.

Channels for information disclosure include, at a minimum, the institution's website, catalogs, annual reports and other significant publications and promotional materials.

Standards Area 15: Compliance with Title IV of the Higher Education Act

Standard 15.1: General and Ongoing Compliance with Title IV of the Higher Education Act

The institution complies with all requirements of Title IV of the Higher Education Act, as amended, and its related regulations.