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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

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**Procedures on the
Evaluation of Overseas Branch Campuses**

This procedural statement is designed to provide the framework for the evaluation of overseas branch campuses of affiliated institutions at which credit-bearing programs are offered to non-U.S. nationals. It applies both to those institutions which have established their own instructional sites abroad and to those which offer instruction through a contractual relationship with a non-regionally accredited entity. Non-credit courses or courses offered primarily to U.S. nationals, such as semester-abroad programs, are not encompassed by this statement.

A branch campus is defined as:

Any location of an institution, other than the main campus, at which the institution offers credit for at least 50 percent of an educational program.

The Commission asks that institutions submit a report prior to the initiation of any branch campus activity and that it undergo an on site evaluation. The Commission will undertake an evaluation visit abroad when an institution has one or more overseas sites and has begun to enroll students or when it has been determined that an institution's existing programs have been substantively expanded. The Commission and the institution will jointly determine the appropriate time for an evaluation visit, usually within six months of the program's initiation. Institutions are reminded, however, that the Commission reserves the right to review overseas activities at any time circumstances warrant such a visit.

***Standards for Accreditation
and
Overseas Programming***

Accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges applies to the institution as a whole. As an institutional accrediting body, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education regards credit-granting instructional sites abroad as

integral parts of the home institution and not peripheral to it. Thus, it is the expectation of the Commission that overseas instructional sites fulfill the *Standards for Accreditation*. The application of those standards through evaluative processes, whether to the institution as a whole or to overseas locations, permits conclusions to be drawn as to the appropriateness of its educational purposes; the sufficiency of resources to accomplish those purposes; the actual accomplishment of its purposes; and its capacity to continue to accomplish its purposes.

While the Commission expects overseas programming to fulfill all the *Standards for Accreditation*, certain criteria are of particular salience to an institution offering such programs. Among them is the standard on *Programs and Instruction* which declares:

Courses and programs offered for credit off campus or through continuing education, evening or week-end divisions are consistent with the educational objectives of the institution. Such activities are integral parts of the institution and maintain the same academic standards as courses and programs offered on campus. They receive sufficient support for instructional and other needs. Students have ready access to appropriate learning resources. The institution maintains direct and sole responsibility for the academic quality of all aspects of all programs and assures adequate resources to maintain quality. On-campus faculty have a substantive role in the design and implementation of off-campus programs.

In programs and/or courses that use special delivery systems (such as computers, newspapers, television, video or audiotape) appropriate opportunities are provided for students to question and discuss course content with faculty. (4.8)

Furthermore, in keeping with *Programs and Instruction*, the Commission expects that the institution will be able to demonstrate that students completing programs or courses overseas acquire levels of knowledge, understanding, and competencies comparable to those on the home campus (4.7). Overseas programs must be compatible with institutional purposes and administered within the organizational structure of the home campus (4.10). The institution assumes responsibility for the appropriateness and integrity of such activities (4.10).

In addition, this standard also addresses those circumstances where instruction offered overseas is provided through a contractual relationship with a non-regionally accredited entity:

The institution has the responsibility for the academic elements of all instructional programs and courses for which it awards institutional credit. These responsibilities include course content and the delivery of the instructional program; selection and approval of faculty; admission, registration, and retention of students; evaluation of prior learning; and evaluation of student progress, including the awarding and recording of credit. (4.11)

The Commission has also adopted a statement which addresses in detail matters of importance and particular relevance to overseas educational activities. This document, **PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN OVERSEAS INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR NON-U.S. NATIONALS** accompanies these procedures.

Institutional Preparation for the Visit

Newly initiated branch campuses will not be automatically included in the institution's accreditation. The following procedures must be completed before a branch campus is encompassed within the scope of its accreditation by the New England Association.

Advance Notice to the Commission and Review

It is the responsibility of an institution to notify the Commission about its intention to establish a branch campus before it becomes operational and to provide a report about its plans for the new activity. The report should indicate how the proposed branch will comply with the requirements of this policy and include the following information:

1. A summary of the educational programming to be offered;
2. Provisions for faculty, library, academic technological support, and student services including advising and counseling;
3. A description of the operation, management, and physical resources at the branch campus including, if appropriate, legal authorization to conduct the activity;
4. Projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow at the branch campus;
5. Copies of contractual agreements, if any, with non-regionally accredited organizations which will recruit students and/or provide instruction or otherwise provide academic services in support of the branch campus.

The institution's plans will be reviewed by the Commission at the earliest possible date following their receipt. Should the Commission conclude that the plans for the new branch campus appear to fulfill the *Standards for Accreditation*, the projected activities will be approved and considered as encompassed within the institution's accreditation. If approval is withheld, the reasons for doing so and subsequent steps will be specified.

On Site Evaluation

As soon as possible, but within six months after it becomes operational, the Commission will undertake an on-site visit to the new branch campus. The purpose of the visit will be to assess the institution's success in implementing its plans for the new activity.

The Institution's Report

The institution should prepare a report prior to the visit which will serve as a basis for the evaluation. Such a report should respond to any concerns raised in the notification letter from the Commission in response to the institution's planning report, and include a description of current conditions, an appraisal of the way in which such conditions fulfill Commission standards, and a projection for retaining strengths and remedying deficiencies in each of the Commission's eleven standards. In addition, cognizance should be taken of the PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN OVERSEAS INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR NON-U.S. NATIONALS where appropriate.

By their nature, international programs/institutions operate in contexts somewhat different from those found on U.S. campuses, with some accommodation to local customs or conditions. With international visits there is more than the usual need to describe the context in which the program/institution operates so that the Commission can determine whether its standards are met in ways appropriate to local conditions.

The Commission asks that the following guidelines be used for the format and content of the report.

- A. Cover Page. Indicate the name and location of the institution, the name and location of any overseas programs, the date of the report's submission, and a notation that this is a report focused on the institution's overseas programs.
- B. Statement on Report Preparation. Describe briefly the process by which the report was developed and indicate the names of those involved in its preparation, both at the home campus and abroad.
- C. Institutional Overview. Provide an overview of the accredited institution as a whole, including its purpose, setting, and any special circumstances that would help the reader understand its nature and scope. The circumstances which led to the institution's developing its overseas program, if new, should be discussed here. If the overseas program has been visited previously, any major changes subsequent to that visit should be mentioned here.
- D. Review of Overseas Programs. Using the Commission's standards as a framework, the institution should indicate the way in which it fulfills each of the standards with regard to its overseas activities and how the overseas program is an integral part of the accredited institution. Particular attention should be given to the standards cited above. Further, in meeting Commission standards, the institution should be sure to:

- Describe the way in which the specific objectives of the overseas program fit the institution's overall mission and purposes and the program is integrated into its governance.
- Demonstrate that the overseas site is considered within the institution's overall planning priorities and that they govern the allocation of resources to the site.
- Demonstrate that the institution adheres to all aspects of the Commission's PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN OVERSEAS INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR NON-U.S. NATIONALS (attached).
- Indicate how the institution ensures that students use library and information resources as an integral part of their education.
- Provide examples showing that sufficient information is provided for students to make informed decisions about their education.
- Fulfill the Commission's Policy Statement on Institutional Effectiveness.

E. Summary Appraisal and Plans. Conclude the report's narrative with a summary appraisal of the institution's continuing development of its overseas program(s) and a brief description of any significant changes contemplated within the next three years.

F. Enrollment and Fiscal Data. Append to the report enrollment and fiscal data for the overseas program with projections for the next three years.

Distribution of the Institutional Report

The institution should send a copy of its report and an institutional catalog, including any overseas supplement, to each member of the visiting committee one month before the scheduled visit. At the same time, three copies of the report and three catalogs, including any overseas supplement, should also be sent to the office of the Commission.

The Evaluation Visit

A visit by Commission representatives to evaluate overseas programs will normally include one day on the home campus in New England and two full days for the evaluation of the overseas campus. The semester, but not the actual dates, will be determined by the Commission in consultation with the institution to be visited.

Arrangements for the Visit

Several months before the visit, the Commission staff selects a prospective visiting committee, usually two persons including the chairperson, and requests the comments of the chief executive officer of the institution on the proposed team before appointing its members. When the committee is complete, the institution and team members are informed, and appropriate evaluation materials, including the letter from the Commission responding to the institution's plans for the site, are sent to the team from the Commission office.

Upon receipt of the committee list, the institution contacts the chairperson to discuss the schedule for the visit, accommodations, and other arrangements. The team chair and chief executive officer of the institution establish the exact dates for the visit, at a time when classes are in session at the site. The chair is asked to communicate with the other team member in scheduling the visit and to inform the Commission of the dates for the evaluation when they are set. The team should allow for one day on the home campus and two days of evaluation on the overseas campus. Because of time differences and travel arrangements, arrangements should be made for team members to arrive one day prior to the visit and return home the day following the evaluation. The institution notifies the team directly about all other matters related to the visit and arranges to have all hotel accommodations and meals, if possible, billed directly to the institution.

In general, team members need to make travel arrangements well ahead of the departure date. Team members wishing to prolong their stays beyond the dates mentioned, or wishing to travel by any but the most direct route, are expected to pay the extra cost involved.

After the visit, the Commission forwards to the institution a statement of the committee members' out-of-pocket expenses related to their visit. Reimbursement should be made directly and promptly to the team. Costs for an on-site evaluation will be borne by the institution. If the evaluation of the overseas site is part of the comprehensive evaluation of the institution, there is no further charge. If the visit to the program overseas is separate from such a visit, however, in keeping with Association policy, the Commission office bills the institution for the focused evaluation fee, which is one-half of the annual dues.

Conduct of the Visit

Members of the team should meet with those on the home campus involved in the overseas programs. The letter from the Commission and the institution's report will guide team members in discussing the relevance of the program to the institution's mission, its integration into the structure of the home campus, and the ways in which it fulfills Commission standards and the Commission's **PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN OVERSEAS INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR NON-U.S. NATIONALS**.

Abroad, the on-site evaluation follows the customary format established by the Commission. At the discretion of the team chair and the director of the overseas program, the visit may include a meeting with the overseas location's authorizing authorities. Because of the nature of team members' responsibilities to the institution and the Commission and since the American system of accreditation is almost unique to this country, team members will find it helpful in their conversations to refer to PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN OVERSEAS INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR NON-U.S. NATIONALS and other relevant Commission material. The visit should conclude with an oral report of the team's findings to institutional representatives.

Preparation of the Team's Report

The steps in the preparation of the team's report, and the schedule for its completion, are the same as those prescribed for a comprehensive evaluation:

Fourth Week After the Visit: The chairperson sends the first draft to the other team members for their corrections and comments;

Sixth Week: The chairperson sends the corrected draft to the president of the institution for review of factual accuracy;

Seventh Week: The president sends the institution's comments to the chairperson;

Ninth Week: The chairperson sends the final report to the institution for duplication;

Tenth Week: The institution sends one copy of the report to each team member and thirty (30) copies to the Commission office. The Commission requests the institution's official response to the report.

In certain critical situations, the schedule for the report's preparation may be shortened.

The team's report has the following format:

- A. Cover Page See attached sample.
- B. Preface Page (Complete form provided by Commission office.)
- C. Introduction and Overview A brief overview of the institution, its overseas programs, and any significant changes in response to the Commission's concerns or since the last evaluation. The nature and purpose of the focused evaluation. In most cases, the purpose will be to ensure that the implementation of programs at the institution's overseas units are fulfilling the Commission's standards.

- D. Discussion of Overseas Activities The major section of the report addresses the fulfillment of the Commission's standards by the institution in relation to its overseas program(s). It describes the ways in which the institution has satisfactorily incorporated its overseas unit(s) into the institution as a whole and how the program conforms to the PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN OVERSEAS INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR NON-U.S. NATIONALS. If appropriate, this section also specifically addresses whether or not the institution has corrected areas of concern previously expressed by the Commission. In preparing its report, the team should keep in mind and respond to in its report the emphases which the institution has been asked by the Commission to address (see above, pages 3-5).
- E. Summary The report should be concluded with a list of identified strengths and concerns related to the overseas program.

Team's Recommendation to the Commission

In keeping with Commission procedures, the committee prepares a confidential recommendation based upon its findings. In developing its recommendation, the team should consider the following questions:

1. Is the implementation of the overseas program congruent with the mission of the home institution and is it a part of and under the control of that institution?
2. Does it fulfill Commission standards as well as adhere to the PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN OVERSEAS INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR NON-U.S. NATIONALS?
3. In the intervening years before the next comprehensive evaluation of the institution, should the institution submit a progress report on the overseas program? Should such a report be followed by a visit to validate its contents?

Commission Action

The team's report and recommendations are considered by the Commission at one of its two regularly scheduled meetings the semester following the visit. Both the institution and the chairperson are informed of the Commission's schedule for consideration of the report.

As part of its consideration of the institutional report and evaluation, the Commission normally asks the team chair and institutional chief executive officer to attend at the hour set aside for the report. Both will be informed of the time and place of the meeting at an early date.

After consideration of the report, the Commission will take an accreditation action. Among those possible are confirmation of the overseas site as part of the institution's accreditation, either without stipulation or stipulating the necessity for the institution to take corrective steps, or a refusal to include the site as part of the institution's accreditation. At this time, the Commission also sets the schedule for additional visits to the overseas site. Since the accreditation of the institution's home campus includes all its activities, a refusal is accompanied by suggestions for remediation which, if not followed, would result in the Commission's recommendation that the institution be placed on probation or lose its accreditation. All Commission actions are final except those dealing with:

- a. Granting or removing institutional affiliation;
- b. Placing an institution on or removing an institution from probation.

These actions are recommended to the Board of Trustees of the Association for final action.

The institution and team members are informed of the Commission's action shortly after the meeting.

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